

Can We Believe in the Resurrection?

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] great that you could join us tonight on what is a very, very important topic. Hopefully you've got an outline in front of you or in your bulletins that will be helpful. Just by the way, for those who haven't seen any of that, that clip was from The Christ Files by John Dixon. When someone does something so well, there's no point in reinventing the wheel, but it's worth getting a copy of and having a look at. It'll be good. How about I pray for us, and then we'll get into it. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for the events that your word describes in history, and we thank you that there is evidence to support those events. And most importantly, Father, we thank you that these events make all the difference in the world. And so far, we pray that you would be with us tonight as we consider the evidence and the best explanation for it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, the video clip showed us a few things, didn't it? There are real historians, and there are not so real historians. We also saw that the job of the historian is to follow the evidence. The earlier the evidence, the more reliable it is. And so with all that in mind, let me make two introductory comments. First, whenever we hear reports, we often make judgments based on what we already believe. So in this room tonight, there will be some who do not believe Jesus rose from the dead because they do not believe in God. But there will be others in this room tonight who do believe Jesus rose from the dead because they do believe in God. But what that means is we're making what's called a priori judgments. That is, we're making a judgment based on what we believe prior to considering the facts. It's kind of like judging a book by its cover without reading the book. Now, for some things in life, that's a reasonable thing to do.

But when it comes to events that are hard to explain or contentious, we must do what historians do and law court judges do. That is, we must consider the event based on the evidence rather than our prior belief or conviction. That's what we saw in the video. The historian's job is to offer the best explanation then for that event based on the evidence rather than their prior belief. The judge's job is to consider the truthfulness of an event based on the evidence rather than a prior belief.

And so that's what I'm going to ask you to do tonight, to consider the evidence regardless of what you believe about God. Second, I'm going to be using the Bible to show you evidence.

Now, immediately, you might think, hang on, you're using the Bible for evidence for the resurrection? You can't do that. The Bible writers believe the resurrection. They're biased. You have to use people who don't believe because they are not biased. Really?

[3 : 1 0] Everyone is biased either towards what they believe or what they don't believe. And so every text is biased. Now, historians know this. So they have to approach every text and consider what evidence it gives. Professional historians have no problem using the Bible.

They may not believe what the Bible says, but they do believe there are parts of it which provide evidence just like any other written text. In fact, even scholars who are atheists will use the Bible and treat it as they would any other text. And so again, that's what we're going to do in part tonight.

We want to look at the evidence wherever it may be and consider the best possible explanation for it based on the evidence rather than our prior belief. So what evidence do we have? Well, we have some strong evidence actually, which is point one on the outline.

And here I want to highlight a few exhibits, as it were. So exhibit A is a creed that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15. So if you've got your Bibles there, please turn to 1 Corinthians 15, which in the Pew Bibles is page 1139.

Page 11, sorry, 1399. No, no, 1139. Yeah. Yeah, I was right. Yeah. Happens occasionally. All right.

[4 : 24] So Paul writes this from verse number one. He says, now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you have received and on which you have taken your stand.

By this gospel, you are saved. So immediately we realize that what we're looking at tonight is of great significance, don't we? If you hold firmly to the word I preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain.

Verse three. For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance. And here's the creed that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the 12.

And after that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. And then Paul adds this to the creed, I think, verse eight.

And last of all, he appeared to me also as one abnormally born. Now, virtually every scholar believes that verses three to seven is a creed or a summary statement that was passed on to Paul orally.

[5 : 36] Now, you might want to ask me why in question time. But if I can have the next slide. One reason, very clearly, when you set it out like this, I know it's a bit hard to see, but immediately there's parallelism. You can see the lines that kind of match up and so on.

And there was parallelism in creeds because it was a helpful way to remember. And so you could pass it on by speech to another person because of the parallelism. That's just one reason. But you can ask me more about it later.

But this creed had to exist before Paul came to Corinth because it says in verse number three that this is what he passed on to them when he visited. So he had to have it before he came, didn't he?

In order to pass it on to them. Now, we know that Paul came to Corinth around 50 AD. So this creed had to exist before 50 AD. So on the next slide, we have Jesus crucified and claimed to have risen around 30 AD.

And we have Paul arriving in Corinth in 50 AD. And so the creed exists somewhere in between. Now, why is this good evidence? Well, because it is very close to the events themselves.

[6 : 40] But we can actually get even closer. Many scholars believe Paul was converted around 31 to 33 AD. Again, on the slide. He went out to do missionary work for three years. And then after that, he went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and James, who were also singled out in the creed.

And so most scholars, both Christian and non-Christian actually, believe that he learnt the creed at this point. However, other scholars think it was even earlier. In fact, some scholars believe it was when he was converted on the road to Damascus, he went in and saw the priest Ananias.

And that's where he learnt the creed. In fact, on the next slide is a scholar called Gerd Ludman, I think it is. Now, he's an atheist and he writes a book to persuade people to give up Christianity and join atheism.

And even he is willing to say about this creed that it is within the first two years after the crucifixion of Jesus. So it's early. This is very early testimony accepted by an atheist scholar, the real type of historians.

This is what the first witnesses saw. In fact, Paul says in verse number six that many of these eyewitnesses are still living. And so the implication is you can always talk with them and check to see if this is what actually happened.

[7 : 57] So just like early eyewitnesses, testimony in law courts are considered strong evidence, so too is this for historians. In fact, one other scholar said this is the kind of data that historians of antiquity drool over.

It's a gold nugget. Of course, what many non-Christian scholars like Ludman would then argue is his resurrection appearances were, well, they were probably hallucinations or something like that.

Now, we'll come to that later. But however you explain it, virtually no critical scholar doubts the genuine testimony here in 1 Corinthians 15. And I need to say virtually no scholar because there are always fringe scholars who are a bit radical.

So a fringe scholar, there's one scholar who does not believe that the Holocaust that happened in Nazi Germany, one scholar says it didn't happen. Okay? So you get the fringe guys. So I have to say virtually no scholar disagrees that this is early testimony.

You get a few special ones. However you explain it, it's genuine testament. They explain it differently, but they cannot reject it.

[9 : 03] So that's exhibit A. Exhibit B is that this creed mentions multiple appearances, doesn't it? You have appearances to Peter, James, the 12, the 500 at the one time, many of whom are still living. That's just the appearances listed in this creed. Then you have the other ones listed in the Gospels, which are themselves considered to be good sources of evidence.

So if you doubted one person, you could always ask another and another and another to see if it's true. If someone you knew said, I saw the king, that is Elvis Presley, walking down Doncaster Road, you'd probably think they were trying to trick you or off the medication or whatever it is.

But if a second person you knew said that they were convinced they'd seen the king, and then a third person and then a fourth person and then 500 at one time, you'd start to wonder, what's going on? Could the king really be back?

Same for the resurrection. You see, the fact that there were multiple appearances means there were lots of eyewitnesses to this resurrection at different times. This is strong evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

[10 : 09] That's exhibit B. Exhibit C on your outline is that Jesus was truly crucified. Now, you might not think this is necessary to include, but to have a real resurrection, you need a real crucifixion, don't you?

And there is one explanation for the resurrection which says that Jesus kind of fainted on the cross, and then after a few days of rest in a quiet, solitary tomb, he felt better and came out.

Now, again, no real historian takes this too seriously, so we're not going to spend a lot of time on it. Again, feel free to ask me about more evidence about his crucifixion later. But historians are pretty certain that Jesus didn't faint and then feel better.

He was truly crucified. That's exhibit C. Well, exhibit D is probably another big one, and that is that the disciples truly believed that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to them.

And not only did they claim it in the creed, they also lived in light of it. How? Well, first they changed their Jewish belief system. In our Old Testament reading from Daniel chapter 12, it spoke about a resurrection of everyone, some to everlasting life, some to everlasting death.

[11 : 14] See, the Jews believed in a resurrection, except it was just the resurrection of everyone on the last day, a general resurrection on the last day. That's what the Jews believed. Yet now, these Jewish disciples believe in resurrection of Jesus before the last day.

That was a change. Another change was the day they met from church from Saturday to Sunday, because that's when Jesus was raised. But perhaps the biggest change, though, for these Jewish disciples was they went from worshipping God alone to worshipping Jesus as God as well.

On the next slide, a Roman governor called Pliny writes in about 110 A.D. He says, they, that is the Christians, he's been persecuting Christians, and he says, they maintained, however, that the amount of their fault or error had been this, that it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as a God.

And so we have early evidence to say that the Christians, the early Jewish Christians worshipped Jesus as a God. Now, this is a huge change. You see, we need to remember that for the Jews, these beliefs and social structures were incredibly important to them.

It's what allowed them to remain Jewish and keep their identity down through the ages as the Assyrians disappeared from history, the Babylonians disappeared from history. In fact, these kind of beliefs were bred into them from birth.

[12 : 40] It was a huge deal for them. So for these first disciples who were Jews since birth, it must have required something even greater for them to change their beliefs and customs.

And they say that something was the resurrection of Jesus. Now, I grew up in Sydney and I grew up with rugby league. Don't hold that up against me.

Yeah, thanks. I heard that all. It was bred into me. Okay, we went for the Dragons and I lived about 100 metres from their home stadium. And so when you spoke about footy, that's what I thought of.

Oh, no. But then, the good news is, then something big happened. We moved states. And so now when we hear footy, I think AFL, which I really enjoy watching.

Though sadly, my son has chosen to go for Collingwood. Brings a tear to my eye every time. But for me to change something that I'd always known, that I'd grown up with, something big had to happen to me.

[13 : 39] For me, it was moving states. Well, magnify that a hundredfold and you'll start to get an idea of how big a deal it was for the disciples. To go from worshipping God alone to worshipping Jesus as God the Son in Trinity.

For that to happen, something massive must have happened to them. And again, they say it was seeing the risen Jesus. But they don't only change their beliefs, they also change their lives. They went from fearful to fearless.

Now, people don't doubt that after Jesus' crucifixion, his disciples were in hiding. And we know this from John's Gospel. So on the next slide, John, who was an eyewitness, said, On the evening of the first day of the week, Sunday, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.

Now, whether you believe Jesus actually appeared or not, it's still reasonable to conclude that the disciples were afraid. Their leader had just been arrested, killed. And so it's no surprise that they were locked in a room for fear of the Jewish authorities who had killed their leader.

But then later on in Acts, we have the disciples arguing with the same Jewish authorities. So Acts chapter 5 on the next slide, it says, Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish authorities, to be questioned by the high priest.

[14 : 57] We gave you strict instructions or orders not to teach in this name, the name of Jesus, he said. But you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood. Peter and the other apostles replied, See, the disciples tell off, basically, the very authorities that had Jesus killed.

What gave them such boldness and confidence? They say it was being a witness to Jesus. More than that, they even suffered and died for their belief in Jesus as the risen Lord.

We have other documents written by early church leaders, which speak about the sufferings of Peter and Paul and so on. So one church leader called Tertullian writes this in about 190 AD on the next slide.

He says, That Paul is beheaded has been written in their own blood. And if a heretic wishes his confidence to rest upon a public record, the archives of the empire will speak, as would the stones of Jerusalem.

We read the lives of the Caesars. That's the historical document he's referring to. Paul is beheaded.

[16 : 33] Peter is hung on a cross. And interestingly, Tertullian says, What's more, the deaths of early Christians are also recorded in other ancient writings.

Most are Christians, though not all of them. The point is, Jesus' followers suffered and even died for their belief in a risen Jesus. Now again, you may not believe Jesus actually rose from the dead, but you cannot say that they didn't believe.

It's clear they did, isn't it? Gary Hinks believes that the Western Bulldogs are the best footy team ever. Here he is. Well, I'll come to that in a second.

He went to every game of theirs for 33 years. Over 750 games, he travelled to see them play. And the news report said it cost him over \$200,000 to do this, not to mention the time and travel and so on.

Why? Why did he do this? Well, because he believes the dogs are the best. You see, if you really believe something, then it will affect the way you live. And for the disciples, it affected them, the way they lived and even the way they died.

[17 : 46] Again, on the next slide, the scholar and atheist, Gerd Ludman, writes, it may be taken as, get this, historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ.

Or take, on the next slide, the Jewish non-Christian scholar, Paula Fredrickson, she says, the disciples' conviction that they had seen the risen Christ is part of the historical bedrock, facts known past doubting.

Now, of course, just because you're willing to live and die for something doesn't mean you're right. I mean, the Western Bulldogs are not the best team. That would be the Blues. I mean, the Hawks, sorry.

What's more seriously, though, suicide bombers believe what they're doing is right, don't they? But, of course, they're not. But, again, I'm not suggesting that the disciples' change of life proves the resurrection.

It doesn't prove the resurrection, but it does prove that they believed in it. And you have to account for that strong piece of evidence in your explanation of the facts.

[18 : 58] What's more, they base their lives on what they saw rather than on what they were told by someone else, which means they had to be pretty sure of what they saw, doesn't it? They could not trust the person who told them, no.

They had to trust the appearance they saw. So it must have been a pretty real appearance for them to change like that. Well, there's the four exhibits which give us some strong evidence for the resurrection.

But there's also some supporting evidence, which is point two. Now, we don't have time to go through all this. So if you just look at your outline, let me just quickly fire through them very quickly. And so the first one there is the empty tomb, which there's actually good evidence for the empty tomb.

And the empty tomb requires an explanation. Next, you also have the conversion of the apostle Paul from persecutor to preacher. As he points out in verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 15.

Now, you don't join something you hate except for a good reason. And you don't die for something you hate except for a very good reason. And again, he says it was seeing Jesus risen from the dead.

[20 : 06] And there's also the conversion of James, Jesus' brother who went from cynic to leader of the church in Jerusalem. And who seems to have also died for his faith as well.

We'll come back to exhibit H, I think it is, a little later on. So there's the evidence that we have. Now, what's the best explanation of this evidence? How do we account for all this? Point three.

Well, people have come up with all sorts of explanations. Some are better than others. The first is that the resurrection is a myth that grew up over time or a legend. The problem here is that there was little to no time for it to grow up.

Even scholars who are atheists, as we've seen, believe that this oral creed in 1 Corinthians 15 happened within a couple of years of Jesus' crucifixion. And so from very early on, the resurrection was part of what the disciples testified to.

It didn't come up later. It didn't grow up as myth or legend. Well, perhaps then, if it was from the start, well, maybe they'd lied from the start. But let me ask you, would you suffer greatly and die for something you made up?

[21 : 14] At the point of being beheaded, if I was poor, I'd be saying, sorry, guys, I'm just tricking you. Let me go and get the body. It's out the back in the shed. I'll bring it out here. Let you see it.

It's just all a big joke. Ha ha. That's what I'd do. But they didn't. See, the problem with any kind of fraud theory is the change in the lives of the disciples.

They believed what they were writing was history, factual. They went to their graves for it. Well, perhaps then it was all a hallucination that they believed.

They were grief-stricken after all. Now, a hallucination is false perception that can be brought on by stress or fatigue or grief. So it might explain the disciples seeing Jesus alive.

The problem is hallucinations are personal things. A clinical psychologist tell us that by their nature, they cannot be seen by other people at the same time since they arise out of each individual person's mind.

[22 : 16] Yet multiple people claim to have seen the same thing at different times, that Jesus was risen. More than that, it doesn't explain Paul's conversion. He wasn't grief-stricken at Jesus' death.

He would have been quite happy about it. So how does that explain that? The other problem, of course, is the empty tomb and hallucination does not explain a missing body. Well, maybe it was a delusion then, which is false belief.

Maybe the disciples all talked themselves into it or perhaps were deluded by another false leader. Kind of like you see in America, where you've heard of those cult groups where the leader kind of deludes the group and they all commit mass suicide at the same time.

I'm sure you've heard of those situations. Maybe it was like that. Now, this solves the problem of appearances to multiple people, but again, it does not account for the conversion of Paul. There's no way he would have fallen for something.

He hated the church. Nor does it account for the conversion of James. He thought his brother was an idiot. There's no way he's going to convert, own false belief, fall for that. He wouldn't be that naive.

[23 : 18] Nor does it again account for the empty tomb. Well, maybe it was a combination of theories then. Maybe they were deluded and someone stole the body and Paul had a hallucination and so did James as well.

The problem is each theory has to hold true for the whole combination to work. And so what evidence is there that Paul was under so much stress, so much so that he hallucinated his enemy, his arch enemy becoming his sovereign Lord?

How would you explain that? There is no evidence for that. If that part of the theory fails, then the whole combination of the theory fails. And so you just have to keep changing around until you get one that thinks that you think works.

But then you're no longer trying to explain the evidence. You're actually looking for something that matches your prior beliefs. You say, I don't believe in God and so resurrection is not possible. So what theories can I use to try and get around this?

I'll have a bit of this one, a bit of this one, a bit of that one. And you come up with some ad hoc theory, which is even less plausible actually than the existence of God. Or perhaps you say, we don't know what happened.

[24 : 22] We just don't know. The problem is it ignores what we do know, the evidence. It rejects the conclusion of resurrection, but does not deal with the huge amount of evidence that we have in historical terms.

That's got to count for something. You've got to do something with it. Ignoring it is not an explanation. Or perhaps you say, science cannot test it, so I will not believe it. But if that was the case, then you have to reject most of history because a lot of history cannot be repeated or tested in a scientific way.

We cannot go back to the dinosaur era and test things. We have to look at the evidence. That's the nature of many historical events. Or finally you say, well, resurrection simply does not happen.

But again, this does not deal with the evidence. It's just simply a denial of the evidence. You've got to explain it somehow, you see. What's more, it doesn't allow for the possibility that maybe, maybe it was the result of some supernatural being.

See, we even have some supporting evidence that points in this direction. Exhibit H. After all, Jesus was no ordinary person. In fact, Josephus, these are his works. He's a Jewish historian.

[25 : 33] He lived just after Jesus' time. This is what he says on the slide. He's not a Christian. He hated the Christians. He said this, Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a wise, a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works.

A same phrase to refer to miracles elsewhere. A teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. And he drew over to him both many Jews and many of the Gentiles. And now this passage comes from a text that some historians dispute.

I need to tell you that. But the phrase about Jesus doing wonderful works is agreed as authentic. Josephus, born 37 AD, grew up just after the time of Jesus, the time of the early church.

He would have done his homework and checked out the witnesses. And even he has to admit that Jesus was no ordinary man. And so we have some supporting evidence here that perhaps the supernatural does exist.

After all, people today, lots of people have had near-death experiences that cannot be explained apart from something supernatural. Now, admittedly, what caused the resurrection is beyond the scope of the historian.

[26 : 40] But it does point us to the existence of a supernatural God. Either way, the historian is to offer the best explanation of the evidence we have. And the best explanation is that Jesus rose from the dead.

It fits all the evidence the best. In fact, on the slide, let me just have a couple of quotes and then I'll finish with a story. On the slide, we've got a Jewish historian called Pincus Lapid.

Great name. He's since passed though, but he never became a Christian. He writes this. He says, If the defeated and depressed group of disciples overnight could change into a victorious movement of faith based only on auto-suggestion or self-deception like hallucinations without a fundamental faith experience, get this, then this would be a much greater miracle than the resurrection itself.

Do you see that? Non-Christian writing this. In purely logical terms, the resurrection of Jesus is the lesser of two evils for all who seek a rational explanation. In other words, if what happened was based on myth, lie, hallucination, then what happened is more of a miracle than the resurrection itself.

It's the lesser of two evils. That is, it's the lesser irrational choice, resurrection. Or take Sir Edward Clarke, a British High Court judge, after conducting a thorough analysis of the legal evidence for the resurrection.

[28 : 01] This is some time ago. He passed away in 1931, so it's a bit old. This is what he said. He says, to me, the evidence is conclusive. And over and over again in the High Court, I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling.

Now, either that's really compelling for the resurrection or it's really worrying for the British Court. These people are not unstable, crazy kids. They are well-educated, sane men.

Or closer to home. On the next slide, the Honourable Mr Justice, Peter Young, now retired. He was a Supreme Court judge in New South Wales. And he said this in relation to the evidence for the resurrection and burden of proof. He said, my analysis is that the resurrection passes the test.

It is important that this be said and accepted 2006. And he's right. It is important because the resurrection makes an eternity of difference. On the final slide, this is Gary Habermas.

He was a man who spent 10 years searching for something that made sense of life. He almost became a Buddhist, but then after researching the evidence for the resurrection, became a Christian. Then sometime years later in 1995, his wife Debbie, Debbie got stomach cancer and died.

[29 : 09] He said, watching her die was the worst time of his life. But a university graduate of his rang and asked him, where would you be today if it weren't for the resurrection of Jesus?

And Gary said that he realized in a very personal way that the resurrection of Jesus makes all the difference in the world. Let me finish with 1 Corinthians where we started.

Have a look in your Bibles at 1 Corinthians 15. Verse number 17 on the right-hand side of the page there. Paul writes, If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins.

Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ, like Debbie, are lost. And if only for this life we have hope in Christ, set a hope for the life to come, then we are to be pitied more than all people.

But, verse number 20, But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. So our faith is not futile. What we believe is worthwhile. Flick over the page.

[30 : 16] Verse number 55. He says, Verse number 55, Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is because of Christ's death and resurrection that we have hope.