

"God Raised Him Up"

Did God raise Jesus from the dead? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're exploring some reasons to believe that God raised up the body of Jesus from the dead. So stay tuned.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. Searching for the Lord's way is a search for the truth. We want to know what God says about every matter. We also want to give sufficient reasons for believing what God says in the Bible is true. We're not here to spread half-truths, legends, or myths. And this month we're taking a close look at the historical evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our faith is not a leap in the dark but rests on strong evidence. It's only right that we provide reasons to believe and to become a Christian. Just as our Father in heaven desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2, verses 3 and 4), and we think that way too. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Many people reject the idea of a resurrection, because they deny a miracle can happen. Obviously, evidence for a miracle is more demanding than for normal events like the crucifixion of Jesus. Can miracles happen? Many who deny miracles are the same people who believe the universe, life, and consciousness of human beings just popped into existence and they don't know how. Now no amount of science or experimentation can tell us how or why it happened. Science cannot explain how one-celled animals became multi-cellular, how cold-blooded animals became warm-blooded, how spineless creatures developed backbones, how fish developed the ability to breathe underwater, how other animals developed lungs, or how birds developed the ability to fly.

It takes more faith to believe that everything we know came from nothing than it does to believe God raised Jesus from the dead. Just because we don't know how something happened does not mean we must deny it, that it happened or to deny that a miracle could happen.

Now we offer this study free on the resurrection. If you'd like a printed copy of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

Larry Owsley will now lead the Edmond church in song, we'll read from Matthew 28:1 through 7, and explore the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 28, the first 7 verses. "Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.'" Here is one of the early instances of Jesus, and how He has risen from the dead. We learn this from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And oh, how it encourages our hearts. Let's devote ourselves to the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray together. "Father, we're thankful for these ancient stories of truth, these ancient Biblical accounts of eye witnesses, that help us to understand that Your son Jesus truly did arise from the dead. Help us to listen to Him, to serve Him, to obey Him and to love Him. In Jesus name, Amen."

Some people say that Jesus never existed, but this view ignores the historical record both inside and outside the New Testament. Several Romans spoke of Jesus in the first two centuries: Tacitus, Suetonius, Lucian, Pliny the Younger, the Emperor Trajan, and the Emperor Hadrian. Jewish writers Josephus and Mara Bar Serapion also mention Jesus. Historian and scholar Gary Habermas in *The Historical Jesus* presents a significant case for believing Jesus actually existed from resources beyond the twenty-seven documents of the New Testament:

"We have examined a total," he says, "of 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus, which include 19 early creedal, four archaeological, 17 non-Christian, and five non-New Testament Christian sources. And from this data we have enumerated 129 reported facts concerning the life, person, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, plus the disciples' earliest message."

Habermas adds: "Much of ancient history is based on many fewer sources that are much later than the events that they record.... While some believe that we know almost nothing about Jesus from ancient, non-New Testament sources, this is plainly not the case. Not only are there many such sources, but Jesus is one of the persons of ancient history concerning whom we have a significant amount of quality data. He is one of the most mentioned and most substantiated lives in ancient times." Well, suggesting then, that Jesus was a mythical person and invented by people in later centuries ignores the evidence of the eyewitnesses of the New Testament and the circumstantial evidence that rests from His life.

The philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig in his excellent book, *The Son Rises*, said, "If it can be shown that the tomb of Jesus was found empty, that He did appear to His disciples and others after His death, and that the origin of the Christian faith cannot be explained adequately apart from His historical resurrection, then if there is no plausible natural explanation for these facts, one is amply justified in concluding Jesus really did rise from the dead." Well, here are some reasons that we want to suggest to you to believe.

First, the idea that Jesus would rise from the dead was not such a strange idea to Jews who believed in prophecy. The Old Testament actually predicts the resurrection of Jesus Christ. David, a thousand years before Jesus, said in Psalm 16, verse 10, "For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." Peter quotes this very verse in Acts 2, verse 27 and Paul does so in Acts 13:35. Even more impressive is the numerous times that Jesus predicted His resurrection.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:21, it says, "From that time on Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Now He gets more specific in Matthew 20, verses 18 and 19, he said, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up."

Now to predict that you will die is not unusual, but to predict that you will rise again from the tomb and predict on which day is beyond bold. If Jesus failed to rise again when He said He would, then Jesus would be a false prophet. Moses revealed the test of a prophet. Now Moses said in Deuteronomy 18:22, that "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously.

You need not be afraid of him.” Now Jesus dared to speak about His resurrection. If He didn’t know this truly would happen, we would think of Him as a liar or crazy. His disciples wouldn’t have followed Him, if Jesus had failed to rise again on the third day as He predicted. There would be no Christianity and no church, if Jesus had failed to rise. But Jesus did rise! If He spoke the truth about the resurrection, we can believe everything He says is really true!

The Lord Jesus said that He would rise on the third day. He makes this specific in Matthew 12 and verse 40, “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Now if Jesus died on Friday afternoon and rose Sunday morning, that’s only 37 hours in the tomb; but in Jewish thinking, we need to understand it a little different. Now, three days and three nights, in our thinking, would be 72 hours. If you measure time the way that we do today, and of course this seems strange; but first century Jews measured time differently. Their days began at sundown not midnight, and they counted a part of a day as if it were the whole day. So, Friday up to sunset was day one, Saturday from sunset to sunset was day two, and sunset to sunrise on Sunday was day three. The Jews never questioned this; only in later centuries did those who counted time differently question the three days.

Second, Jesus’ suffering reveals that He actually died. Jesus endured more than one beating in addition to enduring a scourging. Now scourging was often enough to kill a person. Scourging left the victim so badly beaten that he wouldn’t have enough strength to fight back at the crucifixion. Scourging was a severe beating that left the shoulders, back, and legs bleeding profusely. Some of the cuts and wounds were deep enough to expose a bone. Scourging left Jesus so weak, the Romans had to press a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, to carry His cross up to Golgotha.

Crucifixion involved nailing the hands of Jesus to a cross, lifting the cross so that he was hanging by the nails and perhaps by a large peg on the cross for him to sit upon to help bear the weight. The crucified person was left there to die of exhaustion. Breathing in and out was difficult, because one had to lift himself up on the nails to catch a breath. Pressure on the heart after all the bleeding created tremendous stress and a buildup of fluid around the heart. The heart of Jesus gave out.

When the soldiers came around to break the legs of the three crucified men to speed up their deaths, they found Jesus was already dead. Roman soldiers were experts when it came to executions. John 19:33 to 34 says, “but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they didn’t break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.”

The eyewitness testimony of blood and water coming out is conclusive post-mortem evidence that Jesus died by heart failure due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid. The wrapping of the body by Joseph of Arimathea in linen cloths with a lot of myrrh and aloe would seal the body up from the air. Beatings, scourging, crucifixion, the heart pierced with a spear, and the linen wrappings assure one that Jesus truly died. The fact that the priests and scribes asked Pilate for a guard (in Matthew 27:62 to 66) meant the enemies of Jesus knew that He was dead.

Third, the women who came to the tomb found it empty. That the tomb was empty three days after the death of Jesus is unquestioned by most critical scholars. You’ll recall that a very large stone covered the entrance to the tomb, and a group of soldiers were guarding the tomb, and the governor’s seal was fixed to the stone. Now how the tomb became empty is no small matter. The New Testament says that angels came and rolled away the stone, frightened the guards, and spoke to the women who came to anoint His body.

The Jews who asked for Pilate for a guard knew that Jesus could work miracles. They knew that He had raised Lazarus from the dead just days before according to John 11:47 to 48. They thought that sealing the tomb and placing guards would demoralize the disciples and end any support for Jesus Christ, but the tomb was empty, and on the third day He was raised, just as He prophesied.

Fourth, when the women arrived at the tomb, they were surprised to find the stone away from the entrance, and the angel sitting on top of it. "His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell the disciples that he has risen from the dead.'" The women heard the angel and looked into the tomb for themselves. Jesus wasn't there.

We must wonder if the guards heard what the angel said to the women. The guards saw the angel move the stone and later reported to the Jews "all that had happened" up to that point (in Matthew 28, verse 11). This is why the Jews began a rumor that the disciples came and stole the body, while the soldiers were sleeping, which is a false idea from the beginning. The Jews had to bribe the soldiers to keep them from telling the truth about what they saw and heard. Of course, the penalty for soldiers sleeping on watch was very, very severe.

Fifth, when Simon Peter and John heard Mary Magdalene's report, they wanted to see the tomb for themselves. John 20, verses 4 to 8 says, that "The two (Peter and John) were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he didn't go in. And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed."

If the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, why would they unwrap Him in the presence of the guards? Why would they leave the linen wrappings and fold up the face-cloth? Because the guards were soldiers charged with making sure no one tampered with the tomb, time would be precious! They couldn't afford to waste time moving the stone, unwrapping the body, folding the face cloth and getting away undetected. Pilate would severely punish the guards if they failed in their duty to guard the tomb from the disciples. Sleeping on duty could mean death! Do you really think the disciples would have frightened the guards? No, the angel in dazzling apparel moving the very large stone out of the way of the tomb caused them to tremble and become like dead men!

You ask, why are we discussing this? Well the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the most important events in history. They affect every aspect of your life. They touch on your heart, your attitudes, your morals, and your destiny. Nothing, nothing, is more valuable than examining the evidence for these events. Jesus is the risen Lord of all creation, and the evidences for His resurrection show these things are not some leap in the dark. John 20, verses 30 and 31 says, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

Let us pray. "Oh Father, help us to have faith in the record that you have left for us in the New Testament, and those eyewitnesses who taught about Jesus, His death burial and resurrection from the dead. And Father help us to love and to serve You always. In Jesus name, Amen."

The apostle Thomas wasn't present the first time that Jesus appeared to the disciples, and he said he wouldn't believe until he saw for himself. He said, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20 and verse 25). Eight days later Jesus responded to Thomas' request. He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus didn't avoid Thomas' challenges. He wanted the disciples to be fully convinced of His resurrection and of His deity. If Jesus had not presented a living, active body to the disciples, He couldn't have convinced them that He was raised from the dead. Jesus "presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1, verse 3).

Now, if Jesus rose from the dead as He said, He is a true prophet; and we should listen to Him. Since He arose, His words carry God's authority! We should believe in Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. We should turn from sin to righteousness in repentance, just as He demands. We should confess His name and be baptized into His death, to be buried, and be raised with Him to walk in newness of life (Romans 6, verses 3 to 4) and we need to enjoy by being baptized, our sins being washed away (Acts 22, verse 16). Now if you're not yet a Christian, I hope you'll become one today!

We hope today's study about the resurrection has strengthened your faith in Jesus Christ. If you live in the United States and you want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that in your area. You can also watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Go in to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry", and subscribe to it and like it. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Don't worry, we're not asking for money, or begging for anything. We're here to help you get to heaven.

Focus your heart on God today by worshiping at church. Oh everybody needs a church family. And there's probably a church of Christ in your area. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. As always we say, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.