

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Often I'm asked the question, *"If Christ's resurrection is so essential to the Christian message why is there so little evidence?"*

Causes of doubt

We need to briefly look at the question of doubt, there may be plenty of evidence yet people still doubt.

What are the reasons for this?

Thomas of the New Testament is a well-known character because of his doubt in what he was told by the other disciples about Christ's resurrection.

Thomas was a likeable person, he was absolutely *"down to earth"* sort of character, very practical, and honest about his doubts.

John 20:24-25 [NIV] *"Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.'"*

Thomas needed physical proof of Christ's resurrection.

Thomas had several problems.

John 11:16 [NIV] *"Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'"*

A pessimistic attitude of mind.

Many have held back from real faith for the same reason.

One part of them wants to believe, another part says *"what about my present friends?"* *"What about my marriage?"* *"What about my career?"*

Hindered from a true faith by fear or sheer pessimism.

John 20:25 [NIV] *"So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.'"*

"Unless..." **Thomas was a sceptic.**

We say *"When I see, I will believe"* but *"unless I see I will not believe."* *"I don't understand it and the others may be wrong."*

Logically this is true.

But if a person waits until they understand all there is to know about the Christian message, that person will never resolve their doubts.

Thomas was disillusioned, he had pinned his hopes and staked his life on Jesus Christ, and now Christ was dead.

Many are disillusioned by what they have seen of Christian faith in the past.

“I don’t go to church, well you meet some strange people there. Church seems to attract them.”

“My doubts are increased by the difficulty I have to recognise a professing Christian by his behaviour.”

“What is particularly depressing is some of the most unselfish and honourable people I know have no religion in their lives, and certainly never go to church except for a social function.”

With true Christianity love comes first, understanding will then follow.

Humans say *“when I understand then I will believe.”*

God says *“believe and then you will begin to understand.”*

Here is one most important distinction we need to bare in mind.

Religion and true Christianity are not necessarily the same thing.

Neither are nominal Christians and committed Christians to be thought of in the same way.

The visible congregation and the invisible church are likely to be different.

Matthew 13:24-30 [King James] *“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed **tares among the wheat**, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. **Let both grow together until the harvest:** and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”*

Tares and wheat are very difficult to distinguish until the fruit begins to appear.

Unfortunately many looking at the Christian church cannot distinguish the wheat from the tares.

Much of *“church life”* is a travesty of the teaching of Christ, full of formality, snobbery and hypocrisy.

Introspective, petty-minded and often ignoring the real needs of society.

Another cause of unbelief is superficial judgement.

In a world driven by science and humanism, such things as love, team spirit and trust are ignored because they cannot be proved logically or by science.

The fact is God is a person and He must be known as a person in a dynamic, experiential way.

We can only believe in Christ’s resurrection through coming to know the resurrected Christ in an intimate personal way.

Fact or fancy?

God had given the first Christians overwhelming proof that Jesus Christ was Who He claimed to be, the Son of God.

Christ's teaching was unsurpassed.

Christ's character was a miracle.

But God set the seal on this by raising Christ from the dead.

Then all knew this to be true, the evidence was indisputable.

One question before we proceed.

How important is it to believe in a literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?

For some this is an immense supernatural barrier.

Why introduce the very things which might prove to be a stumbling block to the rationalist and scientist?

Paul knew the answer to these questions.

1 Corinthians 15:14-19 [NIV] *“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. **But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.** For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. **And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.**”*

What then is the evidence?

First remember that the New Testament records were written by people whose honesty and integrity stand out a mile.

They risked their lives by proclaiming the truth of Christ's resurrection.

They gave this message with great boldness, before the very city crowds who a few weeks before had murdered their Master, Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:36 [NIV] *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, **whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.**”*

Acts 5:30 [NIV] *“The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead, **whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.**”*

Naturally they suffered for this boldness.

They were imprisoned and beaten, Stephen was murdered, James was killed by the sword.

Hebrews 11:35-40 [NIV] *“Women received back their dead, raised to life again. **Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated, the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.**”*

Would so many people face such persecution if the context of their message had been a stupendous hoax?

Let us now look at the facts

The empty tomb

Without a doubt the disciples had been crushed by the shattering events of the crucifixion. Jesus their Master was dead, buried, finished and gone.

The gospel records make it perfectly clear that when the disciples heard the astonishing news that the tomb was empty and Jesus alive they would **not** believe it.

Luke 24:11 [NIV] *“But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”*

Nevertheless the fact still remains the tomb was empty, and it soon became common knowledge.

Luke 24:12 [NIV] *“Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw **the strips of linen lying by themselves**, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.”*

Further the first disciples saw the **linen cloths** which had been wrapped round the body **lying there, undisturbed, but no body.**

Was the body stolen?

By the Jewish or Roman or authorities.

What motive would they have had? They had sealed the tomb and set a guard on it to prevent it being stolen [**Matthew 27:62-65**].

Tomb robbers

They were common enough at the time, but what thief would take the body then deliberately and carefully refold the grave clothes and leave behind a hundred pounds of precious spices, by far the most valuable possession of the whole tomb.

Jesus never died

Jesus simply fainted according to this theory, recovered in the cool restfulness of the tomb and escaped from it to show Himself as a *“risen”* Lord and Master.

Is that really possible?

Can we possibly believe that a man who staggered on His way to Calvary as a result of a scourging, hung nailed to the cross for six hours, lost consciousness and then placed in a tomb for three days without food or medical attention, could then revive?

Can we accept that in this desperate condition He could escape from His grave-cloths and roll back the heavy stone which three women feared was beyond their strength to move? [**Mark 16:1-3**]

None of these theories do justice to the plain facts.

Resurrection and appearances

Christ after His resurrection showed Himself to the disciples on at least ten occasions, scattered over a period of six weeks.

A critic may say, if he likes, that all the disciples were in a highly emotional state, easy prey to some form of hallucination.

A materialist like Thomas? An intelligent doctor like Luke?

Down to earth tough fishermen like Andrew, Peter, James and John?

A brilliant scholar like Paul? [**1 Corinthians 15:8**]

1 Corinthians 15:1-7 [NIV] *“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. **For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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 Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred 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,**”*

Also to over 500 at one time who were still alive.

This would be a monstrous misinterpretation of historical facts, to not accept such proof.

Any lawyer would accept the evidence of the resurrection unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to the facts that they were able to substantiate.

The witness of the Holy Spirit

John 14:15-18 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he **will give you another Counsellor** to be with you for ever, the **Spirit of truth**. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; **I will come to you.**”*

Christ before His crucifixion told the disciples that He would **not** leave them alone and helpless.

Luke 24:45-49 [NIV] *“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. **I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.**”*

He told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until this promise was fulfilled.

John 20:19-22 [NIV] *“On the evening of that first day of the week, 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!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” **And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.**”*

The disciples were at that moment full of fear without the slightest wish to witness for Jesus. They had no leader, no inspiration, no security, nothing!

Never before had they been so absolutely overwhelmed by the feeling of helplessness.

But something happened that changed all of this.

Acts 2:1-6 [NIV] *“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.*

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language."

The Holy Spirit came and He filled them with power and boldness and the crowds who had a few weeks before cried out for Christ to be crucified were brought by the power of the Holy Spirit to repentance.

Acts 2:37-41 [NIV] *"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." **Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.**"*

3,000 of them in one day.

Acts 2:46-47 [NIV] *"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**"*

More added every day.

Acts 4:4 [NIV] *"But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to **about five thousand.**"*

At least another 2,000 people baptised.

But the opposition grew, the disciples were threatened and beaten, one was killed, then another.

But they continued to testify that Jesus was alive as the Holy Spirit empowered them.

Acts 17:6 [King James] *"And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, **These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;**"*

Even the disciples' enemies had to admit the powerful influence they had on so many people.

What explanation is there for historical facts such as these, the birth and growth of the Christian church?

Take the example of Peter, a craven coward when Jesus was arrested, but a little later frightened of nothing and no-one.

Sometimes the accusation is made that Christians are always appealing to the past. Events that happened over 2,000 years ago.

Christians can do this because unlike nearly all other philosophies and religions, Christianity is rooted in historical facts.

However, there is plenty of evidence today

From university professors to drug addicts, from top class scientists to simple country folk, they all give evidence of Jesus Christ in their lives and experience.

There is one way in which we all can be convinced of the resurrection of Christ.

In a humble attitude of repentance and submission. Ask Jesus Christ to come into your life and direct it.

This is the most conclusive evidence of the risen Christ you can ever have. I know this from personal experience.

Since Christ is risen from the dead, His teaching is true, there is life after death, there is a judgement to come for all of us, there is the offer of eternal life in God's presence, and there is a second and eternal death.

No-one can keep Jesus Christ at a distance for ever.

Romans 14:10-12 [NIV] *"You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'Every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God."*

One day we will all meet Christ face to face whether we like it or not, whether we believe it or not.

Matthew 7:21-23 [NIV] *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

On that day of Judgement will we be recognised by Christ as a friend and brother or will He say *"I never knew you, away from me, you evil-doers."*

The choice we make now will decide what Jesus Christ will say to us on that judgement day.