

Jesus Is Alive Understanding 1.5

Visit any cemetery and you'll see that the psalmist is right when he asks, "What man can live and never see death?" (Psalm 89.48). Just like us, none of the people represented by the grave markers could do a thing to stop death. There was no doctor, no medicine, no therapy, no workout, no diet, no amount of meditation - nothing could stop death.

Death doesn't care who you are or how much money you have. It comes for all of us. Even religious leaders like Krishna, Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed and Jesus, they all died.

The New Testament, as opposed to all the others, claims that their leader, Jesus, is no longer dead. Yes, Jesus died an excruciating death on the cross, but his body was resurrected on the third day. Jesus is alive today.

Matthew 28:1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. **2** And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. **4** And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. **5** But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

No other world religion makes a claim like that. All their leaders are still dead. But to the Christian, if Jesus is not alive right now, Christianity is a waste of time.

1 Corinthians 15:17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Other religions follow the teachings and philosophies of their founders. A follower of Jesus not only obeys what Jesus commands, but is also, by faith, in an active, vital, real relationship with the living Jesus.

Philippians 3:10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

The question is this: Does the evidence support the claim that Jesus is alive today?

The short answer is, "Yes." There is substantial evidence to support the claim that Jesus is resurrected. Let's look at a few reasons to believe Jesus is alive right now:

First - **Where's the body?** Jesus' enemies knew he had predicted His resurrection. They were so worried about it after his death on the cross that they sealed Jesus' tomb with a huge stone and posted Roman guards to make sure that no one stole the body. After the resurrection of Jesus, these guys paid off the guards to lie and say that his disciples had stolen his body. But no body was ever produced.

Matthew 27:62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate **63** and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' **64** Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." **65** Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." **66** So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Second – **What about the Roman Guard?** These guards were trained killers. Not only that, they also knew their lives depended on their success. If the body was missing or stolen, they themselves would be executed. How did these trained Roman Soldiers lose the body? Who overcame them? A bunch of Galilean fishermen would certainly not be up to the task of overcoming Roman soldiers.

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Please note: these soldiers are recorded as telling the Chief Priests all that happened. That means whoever disabled them, didn't kill them. Um ... render a group of trained killers defenseless without hurting any of them. How did that happen? The best and most plausible explanation is to believe what Scripture says. Jesus arose from the dead and these guards were disabled by the power of God.

Matthew 28:11 While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. **12** And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers **13** and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' **14** And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." **15** So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

THE GRAVE CLOTHES --

Significantly, the grave clothes were undisturbed (Lk. 24.12; Jn. 20.6f).

John 20:5 And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, **7** and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

Now if the disciples or grave robbers **had** been able to disable the Roman guards and move the stone away, do you really think they would have taken the time to take the grave clothes off the body and place them neatly where the body had lain? No way. Thieves don't generally clean up before they leave. The more likely explanation is that Jesus material body rose through the cloth and, therefore, left the cloth laying exactly where it was when he was laid in the tomb.

So somebody says, "The disciples stole the body, made up the story. Things got out of control. Christianity is founded on nothing but lies. Let's look at few things:

First, anyone making up a resurrection story in 1st century Palestine would be crazy to make women the ones who discover the empty tomb and announce the resurrection.

John 20:15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." **16** Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). **17** Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" **18** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

Women counted for little in both Jewish and Graeco-Roman circles in those days. They were treated like goods and chattel; they could be sold; they could not bear witness in a court of law.

If the story of the resurrection is fabricated, no fiction writer in their right mind would have chosen women to be the first witnesses.

But if the women were telling the truth about what they saw and who they met on that first Easter Sunday, the truth of the risen Jesus would spread like wildfire throughout the known world – which is exactly what happened.

Another evidence of the resurrection – what about the 500 witnesses?

1 Corinthians 15:6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

So approximately 500 people are able to testify that the risen Jesus appeared to the whole group. Do you know how unlikely it is that a group of 500 has the same hallucination at the same time? It's unheard of.

It's much more plausible to believe the risen Christ appeared to hundreds than to believe hundreds had a simultaneous mass delusion.

And what about Paul's conversion?

He went from one who delighted in the death of the Christian movement to one who proclaimed Christ with unparalleled veracity. What could possibly turn a Christ hater – one who actively sought to harm followers of Jesus – into a person who was willing to face death over and over to tell others that Jesus is the Christ?

Acts 9:1 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest **2** and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Philippians 3:8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— **10** that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11** that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Would an educated lawyer like Paul alter his whole life's direction over a mere conjecture or theory? No!
He met Jesus. Paul knew Jesus was alive. The resurrected Christ changed Paul's purpose and his life.

And lastly today, let's talk about Jews and their **worship**. First century Jewish people had been trained all their lives to only worship the one true God.

Deuteronomy 6:13 It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. **14** You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— **15** for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God— lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

What was it that made them turn from these long-held beliefs? What caused them to worship Jesus? Judaism never worshipped Moses or Abraham or David or Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel – to do so would be considered blasphemous. But in the first century we see thousands upon thousands of Jewish people – devout Jewish people – worship Jesus.

Acts 2:41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 4:4 But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

The only plausible explanation is the fact they had met the risen Christ and were following Jesus, worshipping Jesus, because they knew he conquered death by being risen from the dead.

We could list the disciple's transformation or the church or the day of worship being moved to Sunday or the writing of the New Testament or how the early Christians showed no interest in Jesus' burial site. In the interest of time, we'll leave these to your own study. Just know that if you follow Jesus, you are not simply following teachings or philosophies, you're following the risen, living Christ.

John 14:21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, **26** and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

The Lord has made a way for any who follow the evidence and believe the truth to have relationship with Him. Receive Jesus and repent from sin – follow the living Lord day by day. He is willing to forgive us, transform us, and use us to further his kingdom if we are willing to meet him on his terms – by faith!

Study Guide Questions:

- 1) What is the one claim Christianity makes that no other world religion makes?
- 2) Why did the Jewish leadership place armed Roman guards at the tomb of Jesus?
- 3) How were the Roman guards disabled?
- 4) Why would it be a bad idea to use women as witnesses if you were making up a story about Jesus' resurrection?
- 5) Six of the seven reasons to believe Jesus is alive in this lesson are Bible based. First century Jews worshipping Jesus, however, is verified by historians outside the Bible. What caused Jews in the first century to worship Jesus?