

**Text:** Various

**Title:** Historical Case for the Resurrection

**Truth:** According to historical research principles coupled with Christian presuppositions, it is sound to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

**Date/Location:** Sunday April 20, 2025 at FBC

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## Introduction

I am indebted to William Lane Craig for this outline drawn from his debate against Richard Carrier. He does not make an existential case for the risen Jesus, though most Christians do have an experience of knowing the Lord. Very few dig into the historical case for the resurrection.

## I. Presuppositions

God exists and has revealed Himself in the Protestant Scripture.

I am not going to “prove” these propositions, nor all of the data that comes down to us through historical documents about Jesus. There is a large amount of such information.

## II. Four Historical Facts

There are four historical facts relative to the resurrection:

1. Jesus’s burial.
2. The empty tomb.
3. Post-mortem appearances (or “experiences”)
4. Jesus’s disciples came to sincerely believe that Jesus rose from the dead. They subsequently had a decades-long ministry which resulted in the over-turning of the world’s religious systems.

These facts are accepted by most NT historians.

1. Burial. He was buried by Joseph of Arimathea. The account is multiply attested by eyewitnesses. Mark. Paul. Matthew, John, Luke. We have 5 independent sources.

Joseph of Arimathea unlikely to be a Christian invention. Why would Christians make up a story like this?

## 2. Empty tomb. Wide margin of scholars hold to this fact.

The historicity of the burial account supports the empty tomb story. This is because it was well-known that Jesus was buried, and where he was buried. That tomb had to be empty else Christianity would never have arisen because people could go just show the full tomb!

Empty tomb is multiply attested by early sources, just like the burial, including Acts, 1 Corinthians, gospels. Four independent sources.

Culturally, it is unlikely that women would be used as witnesses if the NT were a clever forgery telling a false story. This points away from the story being a legend.

Simple and unembellished account, esp. Mark. This does not smack of a literary creation.

Matt 28 – the story was not that the tomb was full, or that the disciples were crazy. The Jewish response was an explanation of why the body was MISSING.

An opposing claim is that Paul did not believe a resurrection body, but a spiritual body. Therefore he did not believe in the resurrection of Christ from the grave. This is a very bad misreading of 1 Cor. 15. The change that comes over us in resurrection/glorification is a change, not exchange.

## 3. Post-mortem appearances/experiences. Universally acknowledged today.

Paul's list of resurrection witnesses. Hard to get around this, esp. with Paul as an eyewitness *before* he was a Christian.

Paul believes a real resurrection, with no body left behind in the tomb. He should focus on Paul recognizing that Jesus is alive.

Multiple attestation of the appearances again in the gospels. This is historically very strong evidence.

## 4. The disciples came to sincerely believe Jesus rose from the dead. What was the origin of this changed belief? They suddenly changed their belief from a dead Savior to a living one in a single day. They

were willing to die for that belief. They suffered inordinate hardships because of it. They left and/or did not return to their previous occupations as fishermen or tax collectors or whatever they did. How did they come to this new belief? It is impossible to explain Christianity apart from this change in their belief.

### III. The Adequate Historical Explanation of These Facts

The four facts above must be explained by an adequate historical hypothesis. **“The best explanation of those facts is that God raised Jesus from the dead.”** It is the most likely, with the least problems.

What is the best explanation for the empty tomb. He uses C. B. McCullough’s six tests for determining the best explanation for given historical facts. The idea above passes

1. Explanatory scope – explains all four facts above.
2. Power. This “hypothesis” explains each fact well.
3. Plausibility. It fits with everything else we know about the Lord. His resurrection as divine confirmation of his claims.
4. Not ad hoc or contrived. It requires only one additional hypothesis that God exists, which we do believe and most people acknowledge.
5. It correlates with other accepted beliefs. The hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead does not run counter to the well-accepted belief that people do not naturally rise from the dead. You may have heard people reject the resurrection of Jesus doctrine because they say, “Dead people do not rise from the dead.” That is true if you fill in a big assumption/blank that they have left out: dead people do not *naturally* rise from the dead. But what we are saying here is not that a simply natural person rose naturally from the dead. We are saying that a supernatural person Jesus was raised by a supernatural person God by means of a supernatural miracle. That is entirely different than a natural resurrection happening on its own.
6. It fits better than any other hypothesis. This hypothesis outstrips other theories in meeting conditions #1-5 above. No naturalistic

hypothesis rises to this level of thoroughly meeting historical criteria.

## **Conclusion**

We conclude that God raised Jesus from the dead is the best historical explanation for the facts of Jesus's burial, empty tomb, post-mortem appearances, and the origin of the disciples' belief in the resurrection.

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