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Living Fearlessly

“O death, where *is thy sting?* O grave, where *is thy victory?* The sting of death *is sin;* and the strength of sin *is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 15:55–57).

To control a five tonne elephant and keep it from running away, the trainer controls its thinking. When a baby is trained, a rope is tied around its leg and attached to a wooden post secured in the ground. Not being very strong, the baby pulls at the rope, without being able to break it or pull up the post. Eventually it gives up, and from that point on it believes that whenever its foot is secured, it is impossible to get away. Even when it is fully grown, it remembers the struggle, and this is one reason why it’s said, “elephants never forget.”

And we are like that too. Our thinking limits us, just as an elephant’s does. Usually it’s because of fear. The truth is fear can steal your dreams. You may be afraid of failure. You may be afraid of rejection. You may not want to make a fool of yourself. You may be afraid of trying because you believe you can’t succeed. If you give in to these thoughts and believe that you can’t achieve your dream, you’ll be right – and therefore unable to achieve your dream. Often what we fear has no connection to reality.

But here is the good news. Through His life, suffering, death, and resurrection, Christ has conquered sin, death, the devil, the world for us. “Death is conquered, man is free, Christ has won the victory!” May we ever through the power of Christ’s resurrection overcome fear, trusting with Paul, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me!”

Did the Resurrection really happen?

A central question to the Christian faith is, “Did Jesus rise from the dead?” The Christian needs to be fully convinced of the Resurrection, as Paul says, 1 Corinthians 15:14: “**And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain... ye are yet in your sins.**” Believers must be able to defend this truth, because our faith depends upon the reality of the Lord physically rising from the dead. According to Romans 10:9, belief in the Resurrection of Jesus is necessary for salvation, “**that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.**”

The Resurrection reveals that God placed His “seal of approval” on Jesus and His work. Jesus foretold that He would rise from the dead (John 2:19), “**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**” Without a real physical resurrection, we have no hope.

So is there a way we can really know that Christ rose from the dead? How can we assess the claim that someone was dead for three days and then was raised back to life? As with all historical events, we must rely upon eyewitness testimony. With Christ's Resurrection, God made sure there were a number of eyewitnesses whose testimonies were recorded in the New Testament. Even before the testimonies of these people were written down, the news of the Resurrection spread like wildfire and changed the world forever.

Historical Sources

Unlike many world religions, Christianity's origins are not shrouded in an unwitnessed, mythical past. The Christian faith centres on the person and work of Jesus Christ. His life and miracles were witnessed by thousands, and His sacrificial death on the Cross was also a public spectacle. Three days later, God raised His Son from the dead, and over the next forty days, Jesus appeared to hundreds of individuals.

For the Christian the primary source of information about Christ and His life and death is the Bible itself. The primary purpose of the Bible is to instruct us how to be saved through Jesus Christ. The Bible is more than just a religious book, it is also a book of history – the true history of the world.

Sceptics often object to the use of the Bible as a source of information, claiming that the Bible is full of errors or contradictions. However, they are required to bring proof, in which they fail. These allegations can be dealt with by a proper exegesis and understanding of the texts in question.

The greatest proof of the Resurrection available today is the Bible, which consists of historical documents inspired by God Himself (2 Timothy 3:16), "**All scripture is given by inspiration of God.**" His infallible Word tells us in no uncertain terms that Jesus rose from the dead (Matthew 28:6), "**He is not here: for He is risen, as He said.**" As such, we can have complete confidence in this fact.

If someone rejects the Bible's authority, that person must still contend with the fact that multiple, reliable historical documents make these amazing claims. The authenticity of the Bible is backed up on many occasions by secular history. And based on evidence within the Bible itself, there is no reason to reject those claims. Even most secular historians have come to accept the evidence used in defence of Christ's Resurrection, though they strive to reach a different conclusion about its significance.

The reliability of the Bible as a historical document has been demonstrated over and over. Historians and archaeologists continually affirm the accuracy of the Bible in matters of history. Further, the number of ancient manuscripts of the Bible far exceeds that of other ancient documents. Thus, if we can gain knowledge about ancient events from sources for which there are relatively few manuscripts, then why should we not use a source for which there is far greater documentation?

Beyond the Bible, we can find information from several other sources. The non-Christian writers Josephus, Lucian, and Tacitus, among others, wrote of Christ's Crucifixion and the early days of Christianity. Much can be learned from investigating the works of these men.

Did Christ Really Die?

Given all that happened to Him, it is inconceivable that Christ could have survived the Crucifixion (although some have tried to deny this). The historical events of the Crucifixion have been studied closely by physicians, and the conclusion is always that Christ did, indeed, die from this process.

The Roman historian Tacitus, writing in the late first century, records this. "Consequently, to get rid of the report, (that he had burned the city of Rome), Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite punishments on a class hated for their disgraceful acts, called Christians by the populace. Christ, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus." The pagan Romans themselves knew Christ had died. Any believable report to the contrary would surely have surfaced by the time of Tacitus's writings, but there was none.

Even with the evidence noted, some have suggested that Jesus did not die on the Cross but merely passed out or slipped into a coma-like state and was subsequently taken down from the Cross while alive. This is known as the “swoon theory.”

The swoon theory is implausible for several reasons. First, it is unlikely that anyone could have survived all that Christ endured. Second, the Roman soldiers were experts executioners. It is unreasonable to suggest they could not determine if a victim were dead. After all, their job was to kill the person, and they performed this duty on a regular basis and with great efficiency.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, someone who had endured such horrific punishment and survived would be incapacitated for an extended period of time. If Jesus had only passed out on the Cross, He would not have been physically capable of moving the stone that sealed the tomb. Further, when He appeared to His disciples, His physical appearance would have been that of a person severely injured and in great pain rather than the mighty death conqueror. Seeing Christ in that state would not have inspired the disciples to preach with the boldness that cost them their lives.

1. The Empty Tomb

The fact that Christ’s body was no longer in the tomb is also consistent with the Bible’s claim that He rose. Even the soldiers assigned to guard the tomb and the chief priests admitted it was empty, leading the Jews to concoct a lie that the body was stolen (Matthew 28:11–15). A marble tablet, now in France’s National Library, indicates that the news of the stolen body had reached all the way to the Roman emperor (presumably Claudius) within about a decade of the Resurrection. This tablet, discovered in the late 1870s and dubbed “The Nazareth Inscription,” prescribed a death sentence on anyone caught moving bodies from a tomb. It did not describe typical grave robbers who stole valuables, but against body-stealers. The inscription specifically mentions sepulcher-sealing stones, which were used only in Israel.



The only event in Israel that could reasonably explain such a decree is the lie concocted by the Jewish leaders. Thus, this tablet corroborates Matthew’s account of these events.

The empty tomb is crucial to the claim that Christ rose physically. If the body of Jesus were still in the tomb, then the Resurrection is disproven from the start. The evidence from Scripture is that no one disputed the empty tomb. Some merely desired to suppress the knowledge of it.

There is no historical documentation that even suggests that a body could be produced.

The best argument raised by those who opposed Christ was that His body was stolen by His disciples while the soldiers guarding the tomb were asleep. What folly is such a suggestion! First of all, immediately after the Crucifixion we find the disciples fearful and cowering. It is unrealistic to expect them to be able to evade or overpower the Roman guards at the tomb, break the seal, roll away the stone, and steal the corpse of Jesus. Further, what would be their motive for such a brazen act? The Bible describes that the disciples cowered in fear because they did not yet even grasp the fact that the Messiah must die and rise from the dead, even though Jesus had foretold His Resurrection (Luke 18:33).

And why would they steal the body and then give up everything, endure suffering, and be prepared to die for something they knew was a fraud, for no profit to themselves?

Perhaps the strongest argument against the disciples stealing the body is their bold witness after the Resurrection. These men were willing to die for their faith in their risen Lord. At no time did any of the disciples deny Christ even in the midst of their terrible trials and ordeals. If they had stolen the body, would they really be willing to die to conceal this act? Many people in history have willingly died for beliefs based on the testimony of others, but the disciples willingly suffered and most of them died because of something they had witnessed with their own eyes.

Lastly, one of the most compelling evidences for the empty tomb was the action of the chief priests and elders when told of the empty tomb. They were unable to produce the body or even attempt an extensive

search for it. They merely told the soldiers to say that the disciples had stolen the body: **“When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, ‘Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.’”** (Matthew 28:12–13). Notice that even the best argument of the day contradicts itself. How could the soldiers know who stole the body if they were asleep when the alleged theft occurred?

Roman soldiers were also punished by death if caught sleeping on duty. This admission on their part would otherwise have sealed their own death sentence. So it is highly unlikely they would have been sleeping on duty.

2. Eyewitness of the Disciples

Do the reports of the disciples really stand as evidence for a bodily resurrection? As historical accounts they are credible and reliable, indicating the disciples encountered the physically risen Lord. The later behaviour of these men shows that the only reasonable conclusion is that they believed they had encountered the physically resurrected Christ.

After Jesus was crucified, these men were very afraid, hiding from the Jews and fearing for their own safety. What would cause them to suddenly become bold in their witness, preaching fearlessly, even at the risk of torture and death? History records that most of the disciples were ultimately martyred for their faith. The only plausible reason for this is that they truly had encountered the risen Messiah.

Those who question or deny the Resurrection cannot explain the change in these men. If Christ had merely passed out on the Cross, would an encounter with a horribly injured man be enough to embolden the disciples to become great men of God? If the tomb were empty because the disciples had stolen the body, would the disciples be willing to die for a lie? Would not at least one of them expose the lie to save his own skin? What would the religious leaders of the day have given to put down the followers of Christ? No, the only answer is that the disciples knew that Jesus had died and that they had seen Him alive again.

3. Fearful to Fearless

Christ’s appearances to His original disciples led to another evidence for the Resurrection – the transformed lives of these frightened men. When Jesus was arrested, they fled for their lives. Yet less than two months later, they boldly proclaimed the Resurrection in front of thousands of Jews (Acts 2:23).

Peter was imprisoned multiple times, yet he continued preaching about the risen Lord until his martyrdom. According to tradition, all the disciples except John were martyred. The only reasonable explanation for this transformation is precisely what the Bible teaches – they knew Jesus had died but saw Him alive again (and were filled with the Holy Spirit).

It could be argued that many people have been willing to die for a cause. Further, the objection is raised that fanatics of all types have been willing to die for their particular beliefs. This is true, but the real issue is not whether the person willing to die believes their faith to be true, but whether they know it is true or false. The disciples were in a position to know whether the Resurrection actually occurred. If they had perpetrated a hoax, they would not have been willing to suffer and die for their fraud. Their sacrifice indicates that they actually believed the Resurrection was real.

Some have tried to explain the post-Resurrection accounts by suggesting that the disciples had a hallucination. Again, this type of theory fails for multiple reasons. For one, hallucinations occur in individuals, not in groups of ten men, who would not have had exactly the same hallucination at the same time and on multiple occasions. Furthermore, the group of 500 certainly would not have had a “group vision.” Also, the empty tomb cannot be accounted for by the hallucination theory since so many people had viewed it.

4. Hostile witnesses

i. **Witness of Paul**

The Lord's appearances to Paul are especially relevant to historians.

While the testimony of the disciples is compelling, the conversion of the Apostle Paul would seem to be even more so. Saul of Tarsus, later called Paul, greatly persecuted the early church, persecuting and imprisoning the faithful.

Here was a man with no sympathy for the early church that he persecuted and imprisoned. He had no love for Christ and certainly no reason to fabricate an account of meeting the resurrected Christ. On the road to Damascus, Paul believed that he had, indeed, met the Savior. As a result of that encounter, Paul was transformed from the greatest persecutor of the early church to a man who suffered greatly for the cause of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:22–29).

ii. **The Writings of Josephus**

Josephus was a first century Jewish military leader-turned-historian when captured by the Romans. His works have provided much eyewitness information about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Further, his writings have given us some insight into the early days of Christianity, including an extra-biblical account of Christ:

“Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”

Incidentally, we can consider Josephus a “hostile witness” since he was not a Christian.

5. The Continued Existence of the Church

Philip Schaff, a Church History writer, stated, “The Christian church rests on the resurrection of its Founder. Without this fact the church could never have been born, or if born, it would soon have died a natural death.” Due to the remarkable circumstances in first-century Jerusalem, Christianity would have never been able to get started if Jesus had not risen from the dead.

Consider the words of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34-38):

“Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to naught. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” Even if they had the courage to preach without having seen the risen Lord, what message would they have proclaimed? They certainly could not repeatedly claim to have been eyewitnesses of His Resurrection, as they did (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31). Without this bold proclamation of the Resurrection, and if His body was rotting in the grave, people would not be converted and the memory of Jesus and His disciples would quickly fade. In fact, it may be safely said that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, very few people living today, if any, would have ever heard of Him.

i. Undivided Testimony of New Testament

As could be expected, the New Testament writers were undivided in their proclamation that Jesus rose from the dead. The Resurrection is explicitly mentioned in every New Testament book except for the short letters of Philemon, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude. Yet even these letters presume the truth of the Resurrection since Jesus is portrayed as living and active. So from the penning of the earliest New Testament book to the final one, the Resurrection of Jesus is consistently viewed as central to Christian teaching.

The reality of the Resurrection was central to the message the apostles preached. The book of Acts, almost universally recognized as reliable history of the period, claims that these men spoke about the Resurrection repeatedly (Acts 2:23–24, 3:14–15, 4:10–12, 4:33, 5:30–31, etc.). So, contrary to the claims of many skeptics, the Resurrection was not some doctrine dreamed up over decades or centuries by power-hungry church leaders (eg. the papacy). Even modern secular scholars acknowledge that the Resurrection was the very heart of the church’s message from the start.

ii. Changed Hearts in Later Generations

Ephesians 3:17: “**that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,**” explains that Christ dwells in the hearts of believers. Christians throughout history have testified to the significant changes that the risen Saviour has worked in their lives. Unbelievers may scoff at such subjective evidence, but genuine believers know beyond any shadow of a doubt that their Lord is alive and well because they have experienced His work in their lives. According to Scripture, the Holy Spirit’s testimony in our hearts is an evidence too, (Romans 8:16), “**The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.**” Sceptics have no legitimate basis to reject this evidence out-of-hand.

The Resurrection is not a mythical invention. Instead, by raising Jesus from the dead, God gave assurance to all people that the apostles’ message was true (Acts 17:31). He then ensured that this crucial miracle was confirmed by many infallible proofs. The efforts of sceptics to scrutinize the Bible’s historical reliability ultimately reinforce our confidence in its authenticity. The early eyewitness encounters were faithfully penned in God’s infallible Word, giving assurance to future believers that we do indeed serve the risen Saviour.

iii. Subjective Evidences

People from every nation, from all walks of life, all levels of age or education or material prosperity, all religious backgrounds, and all kinds of moral or immoral lifestyles can testify to a radical change of values, priorities, relationships, and purpose in life as a result of trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Drunks, violent men, criminals, addicts, and otherwise godless men and women have found victory from sin through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible explains that by His life-giving Spirit Jesus dwells in the hearts of believers through faith (Ephesians 3:17) to gradually transform their lives to be like Christ (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17; Ephesians 2:8–10).

Changed lives are exactly what we would expect if the One who claims to forgive sin and give eternal life really did rise from the dead. Conversely, if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, it is very difficult to explain so many changed lives down through the centuries.

6. Principle of Embarrassment

Modern historians recognize another fact that helps to authenticate the biblical accounts of the Resurrection: the “principle of embarrassment.”

If the writer included details that would seem to hurt his position, then those details are likely true, since one would not readily undercut his own beliefs with certain data that could just as easily be left unreported. The Bible includes numerous embarrassing details about its leading figures. Think of David, who was an adulterer and murderer (2 Samuel 11).

When it comes to the Resurrection accounts in the Gospels, the writers included some embarrassing details that actually afford credibility to their extraordinary claim that Jesus rose from the dead. Why would writers of history invent details that do not seem to help their cause? For example, the first eyewitness of the risen Saviour was not an important dignitary like Caiaphas, Pilate, or King Herod; nor was it a leading disciple like Peter or John. Instead, it was a woman. And not just any woman, but Mary Magdalene, a woman from whom Jesus had cast seven demons (Luke 8:2).

If the disciples were inventing Christianity, as has been alleged by some critics and sceptics, then surely they could have made up a more respectable story. They could have claimed that the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Christ were respected men like Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and perhaps some other members of the Sanhedrin. Maybe they could have said that Jesus appeared to Herod, Pilate, or even the emperor himself. That would be impressive. But what does Scripture tell us about the first witnesses of these things? They were women—at least five of them travelled to the tomb early on Easter morning (Luke 24:10). Given that a woman’s testimony was not highly valued in that patriarchal society, it would make no sense for the writers to include this detail if they were attempting to gain a following—unless it was true.

Who in their right mind would ever make up the idea that Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Saviour? By this time Mary was surely a devoted follower of Christ, but she would have virtually zero credibility with anyone outside of the disciples’ circle, and even they didn’t initially believe her report (Luke 24:11). After all, this was a woman **“out of whom had come seven demons”** (Luke 8:2). That the biblical writers assign Mary Magdalene as the first eyewitness of the resurrected Christ lends strong support for the truthfulness of the account.

Why would the Gospels claim that Mary was the first witness when a woman’s testimony, let alone a former demoniac, was not highly valued in first-century Israel? Either the writers were quite foolish or exceedingly clever, or they wrote precisely what happened.

7. A Growing List of Failed Alternate Explanations

Ever since Jesus rose from the dead, sceptics have concocted various proposals attempting to explain away the truth of the Resurrection. In nearly two thousand years, none of these views has survived scrutiny. Not only do they fail to acknowledge the infallible record of Scripture, but they fail miserably at explaining five key details, which are accepted as undisputed facts by the vast majority of scholars today, believers and unbelievers alike.

Five Key Evidences

The Bible is the Word of God, so It is accurate in all it affirms. Since It tells us Jesus rose from the dead, we can have complete confidence that He did. What many people fail to recognize is that even when we use the critics’ and sceptics’ own criteria, the most reasonable conclusion is the same: Jesus rose from the dead. That is, even if we did not presume biblical authority and treated the New Testament as unbelieving historians do, the bodily Resurrection of Jesus is the only explanation that matches all the accepted facts. So what are these facts?

Since 1975, Resurrection expert Dr Gary Habermas has catalogued over 3,400 academic works on the fate of Jesus, from conservative, critical, and sceptical scholars in English, German, and French.

From this research Habermas has been able to show that of the 3,400 works studied, the majority of writers accept the following 11 events as historical fact:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Jesus was buried.
3. His death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope, believing that his life was ended.
4. The tomb was empty a few days later.
5. The disciples had experiences that they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus.
6. The disciples were transformed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold proclaimers of His death and Resurrection.
7. This message was the centre of preaching in the early church.

8. This message was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, where Jesus died and was buried shortly before.
9. The church was born in Jerusalem and grew rapidly.
10. Orthodox Jews who believed in Jesus made Sunday their primary day of worship.
11. Paul was converted to the faith after his experience which he believed was with the risen Jesus.

Habermas went one step further and reduced this list to just the top five evidences, which he calls the “minimal facts”:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. His disciples believed that He rose and appeared to them.
3. The church persecutor Paul was suddenly changed.
4. The tomb was empty.

To make this list, each of these points had to meet two criteria: (1) the data are strongly evidenced, and (2) the data are granted by virtually all scholars on the subject, even the sceptical ones. So even if we were to use the criteria set forth by critical and sceptical scholars, the conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead is still the most reasonable explanation of the facts concerning what happened to His body on that first Easter morning.

The alternate theories often account for one or two of these details, but none can account for all five of them, let alone the dozens of other evidences presented in Scripture for the Resurrection. Also, many of these false views depend upon another improbable theory to explain other details. Here are the most popular alternate theories proposed by sceptics and critics.

Can any other theory explain all five widely accepted facts about the Resurrection?	1. Jesus died by crucifixion.	2. The tomb was empty.	3. The disciples confidently proclaimed they saw the risen Christ.	4. Paul converted because he believed he saw the risen Christ.
Mistaken Identity: A disciple was supernaturally transformed to look just like Jesus and then was crucified in His place (a popular belief among modern Muslims).	If Jesus did not die on the Cross, why did He have the nail scars when He appeared to people? This view requires deception on the part of Allah.		?	?
Swoon Theory: Jesus fell into a coma-like state on the Cross and later revived in the tomb (a popular belief in the 1800s).			No one would mistake a Jesus barely clinging to life with the mighty death-conquering Son of God. Why would the disciples risk their lives for someone they knew to be a fraud?	
Body Moved: The Lord’s body was moved or stolen prior to Sunday morning.			This view doesn’t even attempt to explain Christ’s appearances. The disciples could not steal the body from trained Roman guards. If Christ’s enemies stole the body, why didn’t they produce it later to prove Jesus was still dead?	

<p>Visions: Christ’s followers either hallucinated or had visions of the risen Savior (most popular view among critics today).</p>				<p>Proponents of this theory say the disciples had visions as a result of being distraught. But why would skeptics like Paul ever be in this mental state? And would 500 people at one time have all had exactly the same vision?</p>
<p>Jesus Family Tomb: Jesus was buried in a family tomb in Jerusalem, known to early Christians (popularized in a 2007 documentary).</p>		<p>This view is built on false claims and distorted evidence. Why would the disciples proclaim the Resurrection throughout Jerusalem if everyone knew that Jesus remained buried in a family tomb? Why would a poor family from Galilee own an expensive tomb in Jerusalem?</p>		
<p>Séance: The disciples held a séance and some sort of phantasm manifested, leading them to think they had seen the resurrected Jesus (not a widely held view).</p>			<p>?</p>	<p>Paul didn’t participate in the séance. Also, why would the disciples, as faithful Jews, violate the law forbidding contact with the dead (Deuteronomy 18:9–12)?</p>
<p>Annihilation: For reasons unknown, the body of Jesus was annihilated, leaving no evidence behind (not a widely held view).</p>			<p>If Jesus’s body was destroyed, who appeared to the disciples and Paul?</p>	
<p>Wrong Tomb: The women and disciples saw an empty tomb, but it was the wrong one (not a widely held view).</p>		<p>Did everyone who is mentioned in the Resurrection accounts visit the wrong tomb, including the women, the disciples, Joseph of Arimathea, the Roman guards, the Jewish leaders, and angels? Why were grave cloths in the wrong tomb?</p>		

8. Even Caesar Confirmed the Resurrection

After Christ's Resurrection, Claudius Caesar issued a decree for people to stop stealing bodies from Judah's sepulchers. Without realizing it, he was confirming Christ's Resurrection!

The Nazareth Inscription is a powerful piece of extrabiblical evidence that Christ's Resurrection was already being proclaimed shortly after He was raised. It is a marble tablet, 24 inches (61 cm) by 15 inches (38 cm), written in the Greek language. Since the discovery was published in 1930, no scholar has produced evidence to disprove its authenticity. It's an abridged decree by Emperor Claudius (AD 41–54), pronouncing the death penalty in Israel for anyone caught robbing bodies from tombs. (Normally, grave robbers stole valuables, not bodies!) It refers specifically to "sepulcher sealing tombs," a special type used in Israel.

This "Decree of Caesar" is known as an imperial rescript, having the force of law. Rescripts frequently dealt with unusual legal, religious, or political issues arising in a specific region. The text fits both the style and structure of other rescripts of Claudius.

In his dialogue with a nonbelieving Jew, Justin Martyr (AD 100–165) also refers to these early attempts to explain away the empty tomb of Jesus: "Yet you not only have not repented, after you learned that He rose from the dead, but, as I said before you have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb, where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven."



The Nazareth Inscription forces sceptics to deal more deeply with the two major competing views of events: believing in the Resurrection of Christ or believing that His disciples stole His body from the tomb to perpetrate a great religious fraud. The account of Christ's Resurrection was first circulated by the Apostles themselves, according to Scripture, and it was not a later invention by Christians of the post-apostolic period. The inscription is excellent evidence confirming this truth.

I can do all things through Him

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content...I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:11,13).

Paul didn't learn the secret of living in every situation by natural skill or temperament. He learned it in the school of the Holy Ghost, through patience, persistence, humility, self-denial, dedication and confidence in God. As a result, he could joyfully proclaim: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content." Through what power? The power of faith in the living Christ granted to Him by the Holy Ghost.

A little boy was crossing the ocean with his father, who was captain of the ship, when they ran into a terrible storm. The waves tossed them about like a cork and everyone was sick with fear. But he sat unafraid, his eyes directed toward a certain spot. When someone asked him why he was not afraid, he answered; "I have my eye on that little window. Through it I can see the bridge, and on that bridge is my father. He's the captain of this ship. He has taken it through many storms and I know he will take it through this one too." Rejoice, you will make it through this storm and get to the other side. God has promised it. Start saying: "By my God I can."

When faith collides with reality, it flexes and holds on until victory emerges. It's like a tree that bends in the storm, then bounces back, but does not collapse. "I can do all things through (the risen and living) Christ, which strengthens me."