

INTRODUCTION

When we were in Israel last month we visited the fabulous Israeli Museum in Jerusalem. Rick and Melinda Allen came up to me after our visit and told me they had seen an exhibit that claimed to be the bone box of Jesus of Nazareth. If it were genuine, it would mean there was no resurrection. We joked about it and said that at least we wouldn't have to have Easter services this year!

In 2006, James Cameron, the producer of "Titanic" and "Avatar" produced a program on Discovery Channel called "The Lost Tomb of Jesus." He claimed Jesus survived the cross, married Mary Magdalene and they had a son named Judas. But the theory that this bone box belonged to Jesus of Nazareth has more holes in it than the Titanic did when it sank! First, IF Jesus and Mary did have a son, what are the chances they would name him Judas? That would be like Jewish family who survived the Holocaust naming their sons Adolph Hitler Goldberg! Plus, the name Joshua (Jesus) and Mary were some of the most common names of the First Century. It would be like you finding a deserted grave in Arp, Texas with the names George and Martha on them and saying, "Here is the grave of George and Martha Washington, our first President."

Is there any proof that Jesus rose from the dead? One of our favorite hymns is "He Lives." The chorus says, "You ask me HOW I know He lives. He lives within my heart!" That's wonderful, but that's a very subjective statement. During the height of the Soviet Union, thousands of school children would file by Vladimir Lenin's preserved body in the Kremlin. They would gather on Red Square and shout, "Lenin lives! Lenin lives! Lenin lives in our hearts."

My claim that Jesus lives in my heart isn't really debatable so I want to take some time in this message to share with you that there are some CONVINCING PROOFS Jesus is alive. Luke was an educated physician. When he wrote the book of Acts he set out to give an accurate record of the beginning of the church. He started his account with these words:

Acts 1:2-3. "In my former book, [the Gospel of Luke] Theophilus,* I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many CONVINCING PROOFS that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

**That's a name that means lover of God. It could be a particular man or all people who love God. One strong theory is that Luke was writing to the Roman Senator Seneca, who expressed an interest in Jesus.*

A few years later Paul was speaking to the most educated scholars of his day, the philosophers in Athens, Greece. He commented on all their statues to their different gods. Then he said, "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given PROOF of this to all men by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:29-31)

So Jesus gave CONVINCING PROOFS that He was alive, and the main PROOF of the authenticity of the Christian faith is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you are a skeptic of the resurrection, or you know someone who is, I want to give you some convincing proof that Jesus is alive.

The proof of Jesus' Resurrection is like proof that is presented in a court of law. In our American system of Justice, in a criminal case, the jury must be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt. In a civil case, the jury decides on the preponderance of evidence. If Jesus' resurrection is a lie, then it constitutes one of the greatest crimes against humanity. I'd like to empanel you on a jury to decide beyond a reasonable doubt whether or not Jesus really rose from the dead. I ask you to consider the evidence placed before you and make a verdict, so help you God. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I place before you five sources of evidence.

EXHIBIT A: THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

There are over one hundred Old Testament prophecies about the Jewish Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled every single one of them. The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, that kings would bring Him gifts at His birth, and that His family would flee to Egypt. It was prophesied that He would minister in Galilee, make the blind to see, and the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk. It was predicted that a friend would sell Him out for 30 pieces of silver. Even before crucifixion was practiced the Old Testament predicted that His hands and feet would be pierced, and He would die. But it was also predicted that this Messiah would conquer death. 750 years before the Resurrection Isaiah prophesied, "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering...After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life." (Isaiah 53:9-11)

So what are the odds that one person could randomly fulfill prophecies written seven centuries earlier? Dr. Peter Stoner, a mathematician, has calculated that the odds of one man fulfilling just EIGHT of the Old Testament prophecies are one in 10^{28} —that's one with 28 zeroes beside it. Here's how to illustrate those odds. Take millions of silver dollars and cover the entire state of Texas two feet deep. Put a red "x" on one of the silver dollars and let a man parachute down onto Texas. The odds of him picking that one silver dollar with the x on his first try are 1 out of 10 with 28 zeroes. The odds of one man randomly fulfilling 48 prophecies (remember there are over 100) are one in 10^{157} —1 with 157 zeroes next to it.

In his book, *Science Speaks*, Dr. Stoner concludes, "Any man who rejects Jesus as the Son of God is rejecting a fact proved perhaps more absolutely than any other fact in the world."

EXHIBIT B: THE EMPTY TOMB

Even the enemies of Jesus admitted the tomb was empty. There are three possible explanations for an empty tomb. First, Jesus rose from the dead. Second, the body was stolen. And third, Jesus didn't really die; He just fainted.

First, the Jews claim the disciples stole the body. In Matthew 27 we read that after Jesus was buried the Pharisees told Pilate to set a Roman guard because this deceiver had predicted He would come back from the dead. A Roman guard usually consisted of sixteen soldiers with four of them sleeping for four hours at a time, so that there would always be twelve on duty. So the soldiers were sent to guard the tomb and a Roman seal was placed on the stone rolled over the opening of the tomb. This was an official wax seal with Pilate's stamp on it. This seal meant that if it was broken by anyone other than a Roman official, the punishment was death.

Here's how the Bible described what happened: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'" (John 20:1-2)

Matthew and Mark tell us there was another woman with Mary. It's important to note that they didn't go expecting to find a risen Christ. They were disturbed by the empty tomb, and assumed someone had stolen the body of Jesus.

When the Jewish leaders heard about the empty tomb they bribed the soldiers to say that while they were asleep, the disciples of Jesus came and stole His body. That story is full of holes, because the punishment for a guard sleeping on duty was death. And the disciples were never charged with breaking the Roman seal. It was one of many government cover-ups in history.

If the disciples stole the body, what did they do with it? Where did they hide it? The Roman soldiers would have torn the city apart to produce the *corpus delecti* to disprove the Resurrection theory.

Other skeptics claim the tomb was empty because Jesus really didn't die. He was only unconscious from the crucifixion and when He was placed in the cool tomb He woke up and escaped. Let's examine that hypothesis. Here's a man who had been beaten and hung on a cross in the sun for six hours. A Roman spear had pierced his heart until water and blood flowed together. He was wrapped in 100 pounds of burial spices inside dozens of yards of cloth wrapping. So, try to imagine that this mummy woke up, hopped to the entrance. HE removed a two-ton stone and overpowered sixteen Roman soldiers and escaped into the night.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee was a pastor in California who also had a national radio ministry. He received a letter from one his female listeners. She wrote: "Our preacher said that on Easter Jesus just swooned on the cross, and the disciples nursed him back to health. What do you think?"

Dr. McGee replied: "Dear Sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip until he is almost dead. Nail him to a wooden cross with railroad spikes. Hang him in the sun for six hours. Run a spear through his heart. Wrap him in a cloth cocoon with a hundred pounds of ointment. Put him in an airless tomb for three days. Then see what happens."

EXHIBIT C: THE TESTIMONY OF EYEWITNESSES

In a court of law, much of the evidence is based upon the testimonies of witnesses called to the stand. Even the skeptics agree that many eyewitnesses claimed to have seen Jesus alive after His crucifixion and burial. But is their testimony credible?

Concerning their testimony, there are only three plausible possibilities to their claim. Possibility #1 is that they REALLY DID see Jesus alive. Possibility #2 is that they were hallucinating. Possibility #3 is that they were lying and they knew it was a lie.

Were they hallucinating? People do hallucinate. Hallucinations occur when your senses are fooled into a perception that isn't real. They may be visual, or auditory, but they are mental in nature, not physical. But the disciples claimed to have had physical contact with the risen Lord. They ate with Him, they drank with Him, and they even touched Him. And hallucinations are highly individual. To illustrate this, there might be 100 different people who have claimed at separate times that they thought they saw Elvis alive. But you'll never find 100 people who claimed that Elvis appeared to them at the same time as a group.

So just how many eyewitnesses of the Resurrection were there? The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and 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."

If the disciples were lying about the resurrection that would mean that they died *knowing* it was a lie. Surely, in the face of torture and death, at least one of them would have cracked. But how many of these hundreds of eyewitnesses ever refuted their claim that they had seen Jesus alive? Zero. They all died insisting they had seen Jesus.

Charles Colson was an aide to President Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal. He later spent time in prison for his part in the cover-up. In prison, he became a believer and lived the rest of his life serving the Lord. Here's what He had to say about the eyewitnesses of the Resurrection: "I know the Resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me the apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Don't you think that one of those apostles would have cracked before being beheaded or stoned? That one of them would have made a deal with the authorities? But the apostles could not deny Jesus because they had seen Him face to face, and they knew He had risen from the dead."

EXHIBIT D: THE CONSISTENT MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH

From the very start, the central message of the church was that Jesus rose from the dead. This preaching started in Jerusalem. The population in Jerusalem when Jesus died was about 80,000—smaller than Tyler. According to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, everyone in Jerusalem was talking about the death of Jesus. It was the talk of the town. Now, if you're going to fabricate a legend, you don't do it in a place where the entire city could discredit the message. If it were a hoax it would have been smarter to go to another far-away city and tell the story about a man dying on the cross and rising from the dead. But the message of the Resurrection

was first preached in Jerusalem. Thousands of people knew about Jesus' crucifixion. They knew He had been buried and if anyone could have produced the corpse of Jesus they would have. That would have stopped the Christian movement in its tracks.

But here's the kind of message that the Christians preached from the very beginning. Peter preached: "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this." (Acts 3:13-15)

The Resurrection of Jesus wasn't just a part of their preaching, it was the central focus. Because if the Resurrection had been a lie, everything else they said was a lie also.

The Church began with 120 people in an upper room. Then there were 3,000 saved on the day of Pentecost. Then another 5,000 were added. The church's message of a risen Savior spread throughout the Roman Empire, even in the face of intense persecution. And today, there will be about 2 billion people on the planet who will shout, "He is Risen; He is Risen indeed."

My friend, Dr. Jim Denison, is one of the finest Christian scholars in America. He has researched the Resurrection of Jesus extensively. Here's his conclusion: "There is only one reasonable explanation for the empty tomb, the changed lives of the disciples, and the overnight explosion of the Christian movement upon the world stage: Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He is therefore the person He claimed to be: our Lord and God. He was justified in making the most stupendous claim in human history, one no one else has made in all of recorded history: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" (Matthew 28:18)

EXHIBIT E: THE MOTIVE OF HIS DISCIPLES

It all comes back to the question, "Would the disciples be willing to die for a lie?" There are those who have died for a lie. Consider the Japanese Kamikaze pilots, the members of the Branch Davidians, or the 9/11 terrorists. But these all have something in common: They really thought they were dying for a noble cause. If they died for a lie, they didn't KNOW they were dying for a lie.

If the resurrection is a lie, the disciples KNEW it was a lie. What was their motive? People knowingly lie when they think there is some selfish advantage to be gained. If the resurrection story was a hoax, did the disciples get wealth or fame, or pleasure from it? In fact, they gained the opposite. They were hated, scorned, persecuted, tortured, boiled alive, roasted, beheaded, disemboweled and fed to lions—hardly a list of perks. And tradition tells us that the Apostle Peter was crucified upside down.

Paul admitted that if Jesus really didn't rise from the dead, then we are a bunch of fools who are to be pitied. He wrote, "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. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.” (1 Corinthians 15:16-20)

Are you a skeptic of the resurrection? You’re in good company. Lee Strobel was a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*. He was a Yale Law Graduate and an avowed atheist. In 1980 he set out to prove that the Christian faith, particularly the resurrection, were false. In the course of his study, he came to believe the Gospel and he gave his heart to Jesus. Today, he is celebrating Easter.

Clive Staples Lewis was a professor of literature at Oxford University. He went from being an avowed atheist to an amiable agnostic—but still didn’t believe the truth of the Bible. But from reading the works of C.K. Chesterton’s books and late night conversations with J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, C.S. Lewis was converted to Christ, and became a great evangelist to the Academic community.

CONCLUSION

So, He’s alive. So what? I’ll tell you so what. Either the Resurrection of Jesus is the biggest hoax of history, or it is the most important fact of history. You decide. But if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, we’re all lost to a hopeless eternity. But because He lives, we too shall live.

Dr. S.M. Lockridge was the longtime pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in San Diego. He was one of the greatest African-American preachers in America. He went to be with the Lord in 2000. I want to honor his memory by repeating something Dr. Lockridge told his congregation one Easter.

Jesus is alive. He is the key to all knowledge. He’s the wellspring of wisdom. He’s the doorway of deliverance and He’s the pathway of peace. He’s the roadway of righteousness. He’s the highway of holiness. He’s the gateway of glory. And because He lives, you can face tomorrow.

Jesus is the King of life. He’s the King of the Jews. He’s the King of Israel. He’s the King of righteousness and He’s the King of the ages. He’s the King of Kings and He’s the Lord of Lords.

And because He lives, you can face tomorrow.

Jesus is alive. There is no gauge to measure His limitless love. There is no barrier to block His blessings outpoured. He is enduringly strong; and He is entirely supreme. He is eternally steadfast and He is immortally faithful. He is imperially powerful and He is impartially merciful.

And because He lives, you can face tomorrow.

I wish I could more accurately describe Him to you; but He’s indescribable. He’s incomprehensible; He’s invincible. He’s irresistible!

You can’t outlive Him. And you can’t live without Him. The Pharisees couldn’t stand Him, but they found out they couldn’t stop Him. Pilate couldn’t fault and Herod couldn’t kill Him.

Death couldn't handle Him and the grave couldn't hold Him!

He died and was buried. And low in the grave He lay; Jesus my savior; waiting the coming day; Jesus my Lord. But up from the grave; I said up from the grave; I said up from the grave He arose; with a mighty triumph over His foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain; and He lives forever with His saints to reign. He arose; He what? He arose? He what? He arose. Hallelujah! Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah! Christ arose. He's alive! And because He lives, you can face tomorrow and the next day, and the next day—and because He lives, you can live forever too!

You ask me how I know He lives? There's plenty of proof—convincing proof—but I also know that He lives within my heart!

OUTLINE

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many CONVINCING PROOFS that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” *Acts 1:3*

Paul to the Athenian philosophers: “For God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given PROOF of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” *Acts 17:31*

EXHIBIT A: THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering...After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life.” *Isaiah 53:9-11*

EXHIBIT B: THE EMPTY TOMB

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!’” *John 20:1-2*

EXHIBIT C: THE TESTIMONY OF EYEWITNESSES

“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and 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.” *1 Corinthians 15:3-7*

EXHIBIT D: THE CONSISTENT MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH

Peter preached: “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.” *Acts 3:13-15*

EXHIBIT E: THE MOTIVE OF HIS DISCIPLES

Paul wrote, “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. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.” *1 Corinthians 15:16-20*

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations and/or use material that is not under copyright. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material stimulate your own Spirit-driven preparation—*it is never intended as a substitute for your own study of Scripture.*

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, it is good scholarship (not to mention the right thing to do) to cite the source. If you are teaching, you may simply preface your remarks by saying something like: **“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”** This simple citation also applies to any work you may publish, too, as I routinely publish my material in books that are protected by copyright.

This careful effort on your part may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you. I trust you will find that additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners.

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*