

Session 3: The Truth of the Resurrection (and the Word of God)

How do we know that Jesus really did rise from the dead? This is important!

“If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” 1 Cor. 15:17

Knowing and Showing Truth

Our conviction that the gospel is true is based primarily on the **assurance** of the Spirit – not the **arguments** of reason.

*“My preaching was **not with persuasive words of human wisdom**, but in demonstration of the Spirit”*

1 Corinthians 2:4

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Romans 8:16

Hope does not put us to shame, ***because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit*** who has been given to us.

Romans 5:5

When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.

John 16:13-14

I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able...

2 Timothy 1:12

Nevertheless, we still have to show others reasons for what we believe.

Always be prepared to give an answer [ἀπολογία (apologian) – a defense; from which we get the word ‘apologetics’] *to everyone who asks you to **give the reason** for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...*

1 Peter 3:15

Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth...

2 Timothy 2:25

Some background:

A human being is body, soul and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23)

‘Soul’ and ‘spirit’ are often confused in Christian theology, but biblically the ‘spirit’ is the part which is made to commune with God, whereas the soul is our mind/emotions/will.

Since the fall, each human is ‘by nature’ spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-3) and so ‘must be born again’ (John 3:7)

This new birth happens through the gospel (Rom. 1:16), as the word of God pierces ‘the thoughts and intentions of the heart’ (Heb. 4:12).

Piercing through the soul to the spirit is made more difficult by intellectual ‘strongholds’ which must be dismantled (2 Cor. 10:5).

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ...

2 Corinthians 10:5

So--How do we ~~know~~ show the Bible is true?

Helps to break this down into four questions:

- 1. The linguistic question: Are the Scriptures reliable in their TRANSLATION?**
- 2. The textual question: Are the Scriptures reliable in their TRANSMISSION?**
- 3. The historical question: Are the Scriptures reliable in their TESTIMONY?**
- 4. The theological question: Are the Scriptures reliable in their TOTALITY?**

We'll start with the fourth so you know where we're going—and then we'll go from one to three..

The theological question: Are the Scriptures reliable in their TOTALITY?

1. Within the Scriptures, we find the claim that “All Scripture is inspired by God...” (2 Timothy 3.16), and since God “never lies” (Titus 1:2), it seems simple to conclude that all Scripture must be entirely reliable. But unless we have other grounds on which to accept the claim that Scripture is inspired, we are in danger of basing our trust in Scripture on nothing more than a circular argument.
2. Alternatively, we could simply choose to trust the testimony of the church, remembering that the Scriptures call us not to unquestioning silent submission, but rather to sincerely questioning curiosity and thoughtful engagement—as was modelled by Jesus (Luke 2:46).
3. Thirdly, we might base our confidence in Scripture on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. This will have more or less weight depending on our personal experience of God's power.
4. But if we have been persuaded on historical grounds that Jesus of Nazareth truly was risen from the dead, and if we agree with his followers that He was thus “declared to be the Son of God” (Rom. 1:4), then it is logical to accept and align ourselves with the historical conviction of Jesus – which, as with devout Jews of his day, was clearly that “The Scriptures cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

The linguistic question: Are the Scriptures reliable in their TRANSLATION?

The Scriptures were originally written in Greek (New Testament), Hebrew ('Old Testament'), and Aramaic (most of Daniel). Since most of us don't speak these languages, most of us read the Bible in translation.

The reason translations of the Bible differ is that there are 3 types of translation:

'Word-for-word'	Literal	Eg. Authorised/King James Version
'Thought-for-thought'	'Dynamic'	Eg. New International Version
'Idea-for-idea (?!)	Paraphrase	Eg. The Message

Discuss: What translation do you use? _____
 What type of translation is it? _____

Tip: For Doctrine—use a word-for-word translation.
 For Devotion—use whatever is most helpful.

The textual question: Are the Scriptures reliable in their TRANSMISSION?

Since the original Scriptural manuscripts no longer exist, there are three issues we must consider:

- i. the length of time between the original manuscript and the earliest preserved;
- ii. the number of available manuscripts;
- iii. the variation between the manuscripts.

For the New Testament, we have more than five thousand ancient Greek manuscripts (many viewable online: <http://www.csntm.org/manuscript>), with some dating from perhaps only a few decades after the original.

The earliest complete copy is the 'Codex Sinaiticus' (owned by the British Library, and viewable online: <http://codexsinaiticus.org/>) which dates from the mid-4th century—within three centuries of the original writings.

As for variation, textual scholarship demonstrates that “*substantial variation [ie. not just trivial differences in word order]...can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text*”.

To appreciate just how well-attested the New Testament text is, it is worth [comparing other ancient manuscripts](#).

For the Hebrew Scriptures ('Old Testament'), we don't have a complete Hebrew version until [the Leningrad Codex](#) of the Masoretic Text in AD1008.

But it has been shown to be very reliable by comparing it with the more recently discovered (20th Century) [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) from 200 BC.

And it can also be checked against the early Greek translations ('Septuagint'—a substantial version of which is included in the Codex Sinaiticus).

The historical question: [Are the Scriptures reliable in their TESTIMONY?](#)

In answering this question, scholars use various historical criteria:

- **Contextual Coherence** & **Distinctive Dissimilarity**
- **Unnecessary Detail** & **Unresolved Difficulties**
- **Apostolic Embarrassment** & **Apostolic Suffering**
- **Extrabiblical Confirmation** & **Multiple Attestation**

I will explain these with reference to the gospels, particularly focussing on the resurrection.

Contextual Coherence & Distinctive Dissimilarity

Coherence: Does it make sense in context?

Eg. 'Is the sort of activity we see described in the gospels comprehensible in the context of first-century Palestine?'

Eg. 'Are the references to other historical figures/events corroborated:

Pontius Pilate Mk. 15, Caesar Augustus Luke 2:1 etc.

Eg. 'In the context of first-century Judaism, was it possible that Jesus was considered divine?'

Eg. 'In the context of reality, are miracles even possible?'

(cf. Bultmann's Electric Non-sequitur)

Dissimilarity: Differences between author's context and original are important!

Remember that the context of the authors of the gospels is a little different from that of Jesus himself.

'Dissimilarity' from the writer's context can point to authentic testimony from the original context:

- Words have to be translated – eg. John 4:25: "Messiah (called Christ)"
- Customs have to be explained – eg. Mark 7:3: "For the Pharisees do not eat unless..."

Unnecessary Detail & Unresolved Difficulties

These both point to the authentic transmission of eyewitness testimony without manipulation by a later gospel writer for theological purposes.

Unnecessary Detail:

Eg. "153 fish" John 21:11;
 "supposing him to be the gardener" John 20:14;
 "He acted as if he were going further" Luke 24:28

Unresolved Difficulties

Eg. 'How many angels at the tomb?' 1 (Mk.16:5) or 2 (Lk.24:4); 'Could Mary touch his feet or not?' Yes (Matt.28:9) or No (Jn.20:17); 'Had the sun risen?' Yes (Mk. 16:2) or No (Jn. 20:1)

Often considered a problem for popular evangelical apologetics—but more persuasive for the serious historian! (Because it indicates that the eyewitness testimony has not been manipulated).

Embarrassment & Suffering

Embarrassment: authors wouldn't make up details that reflect badly on them.

But details are consistently included which on the surface do reflect badly:

- Eg. Jesus said to be demon-possessed Mark 3:22, John 8:48;
- Eg. Peter's unfaithful denial Mark 14:66-72

Suffering: you wouldn't suffer and die for something you knew to be false.

- But eg. Paul (2 Cor. 11:23-27), Peter (2 Peter 1:14-15), etc.

Extrabiblical Confirmation & Multiple Attestation

Extrabiblical Confirmation: 'Is it corroborated by historical sources that aren't in the Bible?'

(First its worth pointing out that 'the Bible' isn't one homogenous source: the NT includes 27 different books by at least 9 writers)

Other ancient historical sources which refer to Christ:

Josephus; Tacitus; Suetonius; Pliny the Younger; Rabbinic Talmud; Mara bar Serapion

Multiple Attestation

If an event is independently attested to by multiple different witnesses, that points to its authenticity. This is in fact a biblical principle (Deuteronomy 17:6).

To properly do this historically requires trying to work out when and where each gospel was written, and what access the writer had to whatever other gospels had already been written. This means a lot of guess-work and speculative conjecture.

However, just to consider all the various attestations of the resurrection as they appear in the gospels is an encouraging and worthwhile task.

Alternative Explanations

Having sifted through the evidence, if the event described still seems implausible, then to complete the historical task it is still necessary to suggest an alternative that is plausible and preferable.

Option A. 'Jesus never existed'

-- But then why were so many sources written by eyewitnesses so convinced of their testimony they were willing to die for it?

Option B. 'Jesus wasn't crucified'

-- Then why invent a death so problematic and scandalous? (Cf. 1 Cor. 1:23)

Option C. 'Jesus was crucified, but the tomb was never empty'

-- Then why did the disciples who had seen the body buried risk death?

-- And why did their enemies not point out the body? (Cf. Matt. 27:64)

Option D. 'The tomb was empty, but Jesus wasn't risen'

D1: 'He never actually died'

-- But he was killed by professional killers!

-- And persuaded his followers he was resurrected?

D2: 'Enemies stole the body'

-- But why didn't they produce it to stop the story spreading?

D3: 'Disciples stole the body'

-- But would they be willing to die for something they knew to be untrue?

-- And what about Paul's & James' conversions?

Option E. 'Jesus was risen' (--but are you willing to put your faith in Him?)