

## **“The Case for Christ: Evidence for the Resurrection”**

**Date:** June 2, 2018    **Place:** Lakewood UMC    **Occasion:** Case for Christ, series  
**Texts:** Matthew 27:57-66; Matthew 28:1-15  
**Themes:** apologetics, resurrection, Easter

For many people, they are quick to agree that Jesus was a good man. They absolutely love the things he taught and they refer to him as a great moral teacher. But they are very reluctant to acknowledge him as the Son of God.

While they believe the things Jesus said are true, they are stubborn in their refusal to acknowledge his deity, or any of the miraculous things that Jesus did. And one of the biggest things they reject is the resurrection. They say it just isn't possible. It's a legend. It's a lie. It's wishful thinking.

So they've come up with alternative narratives to explain the resurrection. One of the more popular stories is called the "Swoon Theory." Basically the Swoon Theory says that Jesus never really died on the cross. They acknowledge he was crucified, but merely passed out.

Or some have suggested that Jesus had been given a drug that made him appear to die. You remember the sponge filled with bad wine that was offered to Jesus? Well, they conjecture that it was laced with a drug to make Jesus only appear to die. Later, lying in the cool damp air of the tomb, he was revived.

That theory has been around for a long time, but it continues to persist, like an urban myth. But what does the evidence really establish? What actually happened at the crucifixion? What, exactly, was the cause of death? And is there any *possible* way Jesus could have survived this ordeal?

Let's back up a few hours before the crucifixion. It was a common

practice among the Romans to flog their victims before they were crucified. Roman floggings were known to be terribly brutal. I will spare you the gory details, but let me say the beatings themselves often caused the person to die. A third century historian by the name of Eusebius described a flogging by saying, ‘The sufferer’s veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.’

We know that many people would die from this kind of beating even before they were crucified. At the least, the victim would experience tremendous pain and go into hypovolemic shock. – Alexander Metherell

What’s that, *hypovolemic shock*? The person is suffering the effects of losing a large amount of blood. This does four things. First, the heart races to try to pump blood that isn’t there. Second, the blood pressure drops, causing fainting or collapse. Third, the kidneys stop producing urine to maintain what volume is left. And fourth, the person becomes very thirsty as the body craves fluids to replace the lost blood volume.

We know from Scripture that Jesus suffered in this way. He stumbled on the way to the cross and someone else had to carry the cross beam for him. And we know he was extremely thirsty, for he cried out while hanging on the cross. The point of telling you all of that is simply this: Jesus was near death, even before they put him on the cross.

But what was the cause of death? “Crucifixions killed people by suffocation, and this is how: Once a person is hanging in the vertical position, crucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation. The reason is that the stresses on the muscles and diaphragm put the chest into the inhaled position.

Basically, in order to exhale, the individual must push up on his feet so the tension on the muscles would be eased for a little bit. In doing so,

the nail would tear through the foot, eventually locking up against the tarsal bones. After managing to exhale, the person would then be able to relax down and take another breath in.

Again, he'd have to push himself up to exhale. This would go on and on until complete exhaustion would take over, and the person wouldn't be able to push up and breathe anymore."

It is highly unlikely that Jesus would have escaped death by crucifixion. I don't think there are any recorded instances of anyone in history who was crucified who survived the ordeal. And furthermore, any soldier whose job it was to crucify someone, who failed at his job, was threatened with death himself.

One of the Roman soldiers came around and thrust a spear into Jesus right side. The spear apparently went through the right lung and into the heart, so that when the spear was pulled out, some fluid came out, along with some blood.

The Gospel writer's description fits perfectly with what modern medicine would expect to have happened. It's called pericardial and pleural effusion. Roman soldiers were experts at killing people. Under threat of death themselves, they made absolutely certain that every victim under their watch was dead when he was removed from the cross.

The Swoon Theory simply doesn't hold up. Jesus really died. But did he rise from the dead? Did the resurrection really happen? Listen to what William Lane Craig, biblical expert says:

"When we turn to the Gospels, we find multiple and independent testimony of this burial story, and Joseph of Arimathea is specifically mentioned in all four accounts. On top of that, the burial story in Mark is so

extremely early that it's simply not possible for it to have been subject to legendary corruption.

When you read the New Testament, there's no doubt that the disciples sincerely believed the truth of the resurrection, which they proclaimed till their death. The idea that the empty tomb is the result of some hoax, conspiracy, or theft is simply dismissed today."

Now, at the time the Gospels were written, the status of women was extremely low. Her credibility in a court of law as a witness was zero. If the resurrection was a made up story, why would you make the first witnesses women? Why not come up with a better, more believable story?

Further, when we go to 1 Corinthians 15, we find one of the earliest Christian creeds, written down close to twenty years after Jesus' death. In that creed, it makes mention of 500 witnesses to the resurrection. Essentially, what Paul says, and what is referred to in this ancient creed, is this: If you don't believe me, ask one of the 500 witnesses. They saw him, alive again.

Now, if you stop and think about it, you would never include this phrase about the 500 unless you are absolutely confident that these folks would confirm they really did see Jesus alive. These are eyewitnesses to the resurrection. If people doubted it, they could go ask them.

There was a story going around that the disciples stole the body. But if the Jews or the Romans wanted to stop such a rumor, all they had to do was go find the dead body. But it was never found. That's the point. The grave was empty, Jesus was alive.

My friends, the evidence is there – Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, died, was buried and rose from the dead. We are not followers of any

legends. We are not naïve wishful-thinkers. The disciples were willing to be arrested, tortured and killed rather than deny the resurrection of Jesus.

I don't know anyone who will die for a lie. Our hope and our faith are well-founded. If anyone doubts, I ask them to seriously search out the evidence. I believe it supports the claim, that Jesus is risen from the dead, and that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, the risen Lord.

How about you? Are you willing to claim him for yourself, as your Lord and Savior? Are you willing to profess your faith in Jesus – not merely as a good man or a moral teacher, but God in the flesh?

This is where the evidence leads. God does not force us to believe, but invites each one of us to make a leap of faith, and proclaim him Lord. Are you ready?

Let us pray:

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *The Case for Christ*, by Lee Strobel, Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 1998, 2016; pp. 282-358; and the study guide by the same name and author, pp. 65-86.