

# Jesus: His Death and Resurrection

Loving Our Magnificent, Invincible Savior

Jesus' death and resurrection are the FACTS of our new life. To this day, no rational argument holds up against the evidence of the empty tomb, the combined eye-witness reports, and the explosion of transformed lives.



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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through



Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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## CHAPTER ONE

# His Terrible Death

No one could see it at the time. Jesus had to descend into the abyss of suffering and sin without a guide to lead Him through it, or a friend to cheer Him on. How it must have looked to everyone who knew Him like a colossal mistake, a ghastly travesty of justice. In reality it was the most noble and valiant conquest of a hideous foe—all that is fallen and corrupt in our nature. The innocent Victim became the invincible Victor, even before He died!

**"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." John 10:17-18 ESV**

## How Far We Fell

There are three ways to attempt to see how far we have fallen into sin:

**1) There is the view from the top.** With our imaginations aided by divine revelation we can look at created human nature as it existed in Adam and Eve on the high ground of holiness before the fall. Innocence, purity, intimacy with God, mind-body-soul in perfect harmony—all lost! Lost even beyond the capacity of unredeemed humanity to believe it ever existed.

**2) There is the long way back up.** We can observe how extraordinarily difficult is the climb back to even a semblance of restored purity of heart, of freedom from sin, of health and well-being, of an unbroken flow of love, joy and peace, to say nothing of living once again in the unveiled presence of our God. There's such a long way to go.



These views are from our perspective. But there is another view. It is God's perspective.

**3) There is the broken heap at the bottom.** We can look to the cross to see how much it cost Jesus to reverse the direction of the curse, by meeting us at the very depth of our fallenness—at the place where our sins would have plunged us into their awful penalty. Looking at the sufferings of Jesus during His terrible death enables us to see what God had to do from His perspective to deal with the terrible consequences of our fall from His grace.



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Take this journey slowly. Allow time to let it sink in. With each of the steps you may want to breathe out this prayer: "Dear Lord, forgive me that this is what You had to suffer because of me." Then follow it with this one, "Thank You, Jesus, that You were willing to suffer all of this for my sake!"

## What Jesus Suffered

Let your heart meditate on what Jesus had to endure because of our sins.

### 1. The Suffering in His Body

a) In the early stage of making atonement Jesus suffered in His body... all that human cruelty could devise as torment. His body was bruised by beatings from the guards—brutal men who enjoyed inflicting pain. He was torn by the whipping that ripped His flesh, laying bare His bones. A crown of thorns was pressed like spikes onto His head. The hard weight of the cross beam (estimated at 100 pounds) was an agony to carry after these punishments. Then came the piercing of the nails (large spikes) through feet and hands and the wrenching effect on Him as He was lifted upon the cross. Finally, not least, there was the agony of crucifixion itself—gasping for breath, heart strain, and the cramping of all His muscles. The cross was designed by the Romans to torture its victims to death.

But that was just the beginning of His physical sufferings.

b) In the latter stage of making atonement Jesus suffered in His body... physical pains and ailments that the Author of health had never known. Isaiah revealed that the Messiah would carry within Himself our sicknesses and our diseases. This would have included our wasting illnesses and afflictions in all of their dreadful forms. Our pains, fevers and piercing agonies were all in the cup from which He drank.

### 2. The Suffering in His Soul

a) In the early stage of making atonement Jesus suffered in His soul... all that human sinfulness could heap upon Him. He suffered reproach and insults along with vile and baseless accusations from those who surrounded Him. He felt the rejection of those He had served, the hatred of those He loved (all of us), and scorn by those He had tried to reach. He fully experienced the pains of betrayal, abandonment and intense loneliness.

But that was just the beginning of the sufferings in His soul.

b) In the latter stage of making atonement Jesus suffered in His soul... thoughts and feelings the sinless One had never known as His own—except as temptations to be spurned. On the cross it was necessary for Him to be made one with our sins. He suffered the feeling of our kind of anger which has such hatred in it. He knew within Himself our sullen bitterness as hard and implacable as rocks; our lust that craves pleasure and is never satisfied; our untrusting fears, anxieties, and terrors that destroy all peace; our ugly prejudices spawned by ignorance and contempt; our heartless apathies that abandon hope and embrace despair; our loneliness that reeks with self-pity; our jealousies and envies that love nothing but their own self-seeking; and our pride



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and ambition in all of their scheming forms. Jesus experienced for the first time in His life the unspeakably foul thoughts and feelings of our sin nature.

But was this His final and most terrible suffering? No, there was worse to come.

### 3. The Suffering in His Spirit

This is a mystery so deep we can barely lift the veil.

a) In the first stage of suffering in His Spirit Jesus began to bear not the experience of what our sin is like, but the awful consequence of our sins. Sin darkens, deadens and defiles and destroys all that it touches. His incomparable understanding began to be darkened. We live in semi-darkness—stunned by moments of enlightenment; now the Enlightened One was stunted by our darkness. His inward vitality began to wither and die. We are half dead to the glory of each moment, thrilled at being quickened by His Spirit; now the Spirit-filled One was experiencing our deadness. Defilement by sin is normal for us — holiness and purity are rarely experienced; now the Holy One of God was experiencing the staining of our defilement. His inner peace began to be destroyed by the crushing weight of sin. He who knew no sin was made to be sin.

Yet, these evils were as nothing compared to the most terrible suffering of all... This may well have been the suffering Jesus saw in the cup the Father showed Him in dark visions at Gethsemane. Here was the ultimate punishment, the suffering that He would have set aside, if only the Father in all His love and wisdom could have devised another way to save us. But there was no other way to reverse our fall.

b) In the second stage of the suffering in His Spirit Jesus faced the unimaginable—unimaginable for Him and unimaginable surely for us. He received within Himself the horror of sin's ultimate penalty. Jesus began to experience for the first time in all the eons of uncreated time, total separation from the Father's loving presence. There! There is the thing He dreaded most: Cut off from God!

### His Greatest Agony

Sin separates us from God. It destroys our vision of God. It destroys our communion with God. It destroys our intimacy of conversation with God. It separates us from the blessed presence of God. This is the deepest agony of His travailing prayer at Gethsemane. This is at the heart of His cry of dereliction at the cross. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

He who had never known the slightest separation from His Father finally bore our sins to the point of being identified with us in our separation. Even in our darkest, loneliest moments we only experience this separation in part—we are covered by so much love, surrounded by so much grace that the pain of our separation is cushioned. He suffered in its sheer, dreadful totality. Gone now was the all-consuming embrace of divine love. It was still flowing ever outwards, but Jesus was cut off, stricken for our sins, seemingly forever exiled from the presence of pure love and perfect, joy-filled fellowship. This is an anguish our minds simply cannot fathom.



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These terrible sufferings were in the cup that Jesus drank from at the cross. What of suffering, or sin, or sorrow has been in your cup? Know that He has already drained it all for you—and blazed the pathway out!

**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV**

## The Final Word

The sufferings Jesus endured — as terrible as they were—didn't get to have the last word. He did! When it was all over, when He had completely drained the cup His Father offered Him, Jesus declared His great Work finished! Only then did He freely surrender His Spirit to God and leave for Home in triumph.

**When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:30 ESV**



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## CHAPTER TWO

# The Temple Background

Sometimes you see a thing, as with a silhouette, more clearly by stark contrast with what it is not. The gospels show us the events that led Jesus to the cross on Good Friday. The writer of Hebrews interprets those same events by contrasting that Sacrifice at Calvary with the Temple sacrifices of ancient Israel which were still being practiced in his day. It helps to understand the Reality by gazing upon its “shadow.”

**For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near... For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Hebrews 10:1, 4 ESV**

## Worship and Sacrifice

If we aren't attentive to the Hebrew Scriptures, we might easily think of an Old Testament worship service as being like synagogue services which (then as now) are similar to our own—with their prayers, readings of scripture, homilies, and liturgical structure.

In fact, Biblical worship was radically different from anything we experience, so much so that we might find it revolting, even nauseating. Worship in the Old Testament was primarily an act of animal sacrifice. Why? Why the ritual slaughter of animals? Why the gruesome display of blood? Why was ancient Israel so involved with animal sacrifice in the first place?



## Back to the Garden

We have to go back to the scene of the crime — the first crime—that of Adam and Eve's original rebellion against God's leadership. They had been warned that if they ate the forbidden fruit they would die. They disobeyed God, ate the fruit, and a very strange thing happened: they died, but they didn't die! The spirit within them died, as it “converted” into the “fallen nature” in them and in all of their children. But their bodies and souls didn't die right away. Instead, both body and soul came under the death-dealing influence of their (now) fallen nature. Unless God were to intervene, however, their bodies would eventually die, returning to dust, and their souls would also experience death, the everlasting death of hell. All of this from one act of rebellion!



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What was God's response? Clearly, He delayed the punishment, but how? From the first moment of the Fall, God provided a covering for their sin. Blood was shed in the garden for Adam and Eve to have their "nakedness" covered by the skin of animals that God (apparently) sacrificed on their behalf. Was this initial sacrifice intended as a spiritual covering for Adam and Eve as well? This certainly seems to be the case.

## Still in Need of a Covering

Atonement means "covering." Our sins need to be covered so that God can look upon us without our sins getting in the way and "spoiling" the view, so to speak. This should hardly be surprising. When someone sins against us, unless we cover them with mercy by forgiving them, we are reminded of their sin each time they come before us. Without a covering we can't "see" past their sin now that their sinfulness—their nakedness—has been exposed to us. Uncovered by mercy, we see them through the perpetual stain of that sin, not as they really are in their full potential as a child of light. God cannot turn a blind eye to sin. He doesn't have one!

Why doesn't God simply forgive people, as we do? There are two sides to this. We can "simply" forgive (as God now does), because the justice issue has already been fully "covered" by Jesus' death on the cross. Once we are ready to let go our offense with a person's sin, the underlying, necessary work of atonement, is already there for us to act upon. But atonement had to happen. No amount of forgiveness on our part could ever release a person from the sin debt they owed to God and to the created order, nor could it remove the interior defilement that even one sin caused within them. For instance, I have chosen to forgive Adam and Eve, but I'm not crazy enough to think that my forgiveness of them can undo the world-wrecking damage their one sin brought about. God will have to go deep and long on that one.

## Israel and Sacrifice

Israel was well-schooled by the Lord in the necessity of sin being covered by an atoning sacrifice. They knew that sin was an extremely serious issue with the Lord: sin's punishment was death for any "soul who sins." God was holy, mighty and absolutely sovereign. He insisted upon sin-less obedience from His people. Yet, He was also merciful. God didn't want anyone to die for their sins, so He opened the way of substitution: an animal could die in the sinner's place. The lion's share of the Law they received in the desert had to do with the sacrificial system, showing them how to atone for the laws they were going to break! That atonement almost always required blood. The writer of Hebrews summed it up this way:

**[In fact] under the Law almost everything is purified by means of blood, and without the shedding of blood there is neither release from sin and its guilt nor the remission of the due and merited punishment for sins. Hebrews 9:22 AMP**

This then, was the beginning of the sacrificial system, instituted by God through Moses, during the wilderness years. As they came into the Land, places of worship arose as reasons to celebrate the goodness of God proliferated. Sin proliferated too, requiring sacrifice to remove the guilt. Hence, throughout the Old Testament period we see the steady growth of the Levitical order and the labor of the Temple. Why all this shedding of blood? No people on earth had ever received such a fearful religious vision, guaranteed to perpetually fuel their altar fires:



- 1) They had been made terrifying aware of the absolute holiness of God.
- 2) They had been given the Law of God which laid bare their every sin.

## A Very Bloody Covering

The Lord's chosen people were confronted with the awful reality of sin and its consequences—separation from God and eternal death. To make matters worse they knew that they were without excuse for any sin and that they had no other recourse than the means God had given them for covering their guilt. To put this in practical terms, let's remember that at the very moment Jesus was being crucified, John tells us that the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple. Consider for a moment how many lambs that may have been. Estimates are that the population of Jerusalem would swell to over 200,000 people during the high holy festivals of [Passover, Pentecost and Booths](#). At Passover one lamb was required to feed 10 men. You do the math.

Yet, Passover was only the “camel's nose in the tent.” There were morning and evening sacrifices; there were sacrifices appointed for every Sabbath, for every new moon, for every religious festival, for every first-born son, for every mother giving birth, and on and on. In addition to all of these appointed sacrifices there were the five voluntary sacrifices: the grain offering, the peace offering, the sin and trespass offerings and the burnt offering. Always the motive was a hope of having one's conscience relieved and one's life restored to fellowship and favor with God. Yet, as the endlessly repeated cycle of sin and sacrifice spun out of control, it reaped an ever-increasing harvest of death. Paul Johnson in his *History of Christianity* attempts to describe the scene of sacrifice at the Temple with these words:

*Herod's fabric was elegant, modern, sophisticated—he had, indeed, added some Hellenic decorative effects much resented by the fundamentalist Jews who constantly sought to destroy them—but nothing could hide the essential business of the Temple, which was the ritual slaughter, consumption, and combustion of sacrificial cattle on a gigantic scale. The place was as vast as a small city. There were literally thousands of priests, attendants, temple-soldiers and minions. To the unprepared visitor, the dignity and charity of Jewish Diaspora life, the thoughtful comments and homilies of the Alexandrian synagogue, was quite lost amid the smoke of the pyres, the bellows of terrified beasts, the sluices of blood, the abattoir stench, the unconcealed and unconcealable machinery of tribal religion inflated by modern wealth to an industrial scale.*

## The Sacrifice of Christ

The author of Hebrews tells us is that none of these God-ordained sacrifices could do what the worshipers hoped they would accomplish: It was “impossible” that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. The guilt remained, the deep root of the sin nature remained, and the sins remained, year after year. All this was because the Old Testament sacrifices were only instituted to provide a temporary covering—a mere “shadow” of reality, until better things could come with the final and full sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

The sacrifice of Christ was intended by God to bring to end the need for any further sacrifice. The last lamb that God's justice required offered Himself on the altar at Calvary. Did the Old Testament sacrifices end there? We know that they didn't. Animal blood kept flowing on the strength of centuries of momentum and the blindness of a misguided zeal. It would all, perhaps,



have continued within Judaism to this day, but for the otherwise unfortunate tragedy of the Roman conquest of Jerusalem and final destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

When the smoke cleared, the outlines of modern Judaism emerged in the form of synagogue worship completely displacing the former preeminence of the Temple. With the Temple destroyed its sacrificial rituals disappeared from the face of the earth. It would seem that the Lord took matters into His own Hands and somehow worked through the tragic events of the First Jewish Revolt to bring about the demise of a system His justice no longer required.



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## CHAPTER THREE

# The Power of His Blood

According to the Lord's own instructions to Israel, the power of an atoning sacrifice is in the blood that is shed. Many moderns typically become squeamish at the thought of a bloody sacrifice and question its necessity. Being willing to shed that world view allows us to see through the lens of scripture what is in the Mind of our Redeemer. Knowing and believing what Jesus' Blood means can establish your faith like nothing else.

**For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:19-20 ESV**

## The Crucial Point

Archimedes once said that if he had a fulcrum and a lever long enough he could move the world. Our God has moved the world! The cross was the fulcrum. What He used for leverage was the Blood of His Son. Why the Blood and not simply the death of Jesus? Wouldn't the same results have occurred if Jesus had been executed by hanging, or electrocution, or lethal injection as in our day? Not at all!

As we saw in the previous article, [The Temple Background](#), the Lord explained in scripture that only "the shedding of blood" can atone for sin. We might easily imagine that the shedding of blood isn't necessary or that it shouldn't be necessary, but Christianity is based upon revelation—upon God revealing to us by His Word and by His Spirit what we could never have known otherwise. This may be an affront to our understanding, but it is no different than our science telling us that the "solid" objects surrounding us in daily life are in fact composed of billions of swirling electronic particles which if combined in the wrong way could easily blow us to kingdom come! That too is a form of revelation completely at variance with our common sense view of the world.



Therefore, let's settle it in our own minds once and for all that the blood Jesus shed is absolutely vital to our salvation and see where these thoughts take us. First of all, what does every possible problem "in this crazy world" trace back to? Sin. Not just the original sin, of course, but also every sin since then as well as the sinful nature resident in all of Adam's children. Absolutely everything wrong with the world and with us is due to sin. Even the enemy's power over the world and over us is due to sin. According to God, what is the One Thing that can possibly cleanse us and our world of sin and free us from the enemy's power? The Blood of Jesus!



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## Nothing but the Blood

The Blood of Jesus alone makes possible our forgiveness, our reconciliation, our cleansing from sin, the covering for our sinfulness, our victory over the enemy, our communion with Christ and our access to the Father. Even the “other half” of the grace-gift of our salvation—the [Holy Spirit](#) living within us—is completely dependent upon the Blood of Jesus clearing the way for the Spirit to come and remain.

We may be arriving at this realization slowly, but there are two important “sets of players” who know this truth far better than we do: the [Two Invisible Kingdoms](#) which surround us. On the one hand, the devil and his demon hordes have no doubt about the power of the Blood and work desperately to keep us in the dark. They hate and fear it for it speaks uncompromisingly of their doom, just as they hate and fear those whose confidence is built upon it. On the other hand, the entire kingdom of heaven is thrilled and delighted about what the Blood accomplishes on our behalf—every moment of the day. Watchman Nee wrote that everything would change for us if we could only see what the Blood of Jesus means to the Father.

The Blood is powerful! Nevertheless, as important as the Blood is to our salvation, it is not nearly so great as Jesus Himself, or His love for us and the Father which led Him to the cross where His Blood could be shed. Nor is the Blood as great as the Father’s determination to see His lost children restored, or the Holy Spirit’s willingness to descend and live within us. Let us always remember that above the Blood is the heart of mercy and love in all three Persons of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God loved us and chose us from before the foundation of the earth, long before the Blood was shed. Even so, it is the Blood of Jesus that divine love and mercy “conspired” to use as the effective instrument of our salvation.

## Five Powers of the Blood

Consider the following five ways by which the Blood grants immense gifts of salvation to us. All five by a happy “accident” begin with the letter “C” in English, just as Jesus’ messianic title, Christ, also does: Covenant, Communion, Covering, Cleansing, and Conquering. Although I have only cited a few scriptures here, the complete list for each of the five is at [Scriptures on the Blood of Jesus](#).

### 1) Covenant

Once we were far off, but now we have been “brought near” to God by a new and better covenant, one that is ratified by the Blood of Jesus. Please see [Two Competing Covenants](#) to get a fuller picture of the radical difference between this covenant and the one it replaces. You, too, will sing the praises of how impossibly good our New Covenant in His Blood really is!

**And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." Luke 22:20 ESV**

**Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant.** Hebrews 13:20 ESV

## 2) Communion

All four gospels, plus Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, record the events of the Last Supper when Jesus instituted the service of [Holy Communion](#). Evidently, this communion that we share "in His Blood" is extremely important for it to receive so many mentions in scripture. Whether we believe the bread and wine are the actual Body and Blood of Christ, or partake of them simply "in remembrance" of Him, we are renewing the covenant through a memorial meal in which Jesus Himself is truly present.

**So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."** John 6:53-56 ESV

## 3) Covering

There are two benefits of the New Covenant that are extremely beneficial on a daily basis: confidence before God and a clear conscience. These enable us to "draw near with boldness" to the throne of grace to receive mercy and help for any problem we may have. Without faith that the Blood is truly "covering" us, the awareness of past sins and present sinfulness, would crush us under that heavy cloud of condemnation the enemy ever seeks to instigate.

**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.** Hebrews 10:19-23 ESV

## 4) Cleansing

As good as it is to be covered by the Blood, it is always a relief—when we need it—to be cleansed by the Blood. Being covered speaks of our position as [justified](#) believers; being cleansed indicates the ongoing process of [sanctification](#). We need both! Just as clothes cover us while we are out in the world, a good hot shower (while we stand exposed in our nakedness) refreshes and restores us! May it be your joy for the "water of the Word" and the Blood of Christ to wash and cleanse you.

**But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we**



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**confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:7-9 ESV**

## 5) Conquering

Knowing the Name of Jesus gives us our power and authority over the enemy for it is at the Name of Jesus that every knee must bow. Knowing the power of the Blood as the crucial instrument of God's saving work through Jesus, gives us enhanced confidence in wielding the Name of Jesus against the spiritual darkness that threatens at times to overrun our world. Make no mistake about it: the enemy hates and fears the Blood. Don't hesitate to use it against him.

**And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Revelation 12:10-12 ESV**



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## CHAPTER FOUR

# Christ as Victor, Victim and Vision

So much of what the Lord does is holographic. Turn the image just a little and it will appear entirely different. Few things demonstrate this principle better than His death on the cross. What was He doing? Great truths infuse our hearts through these three historically favored perspectives on what happened at the cross. Take care that you don't only hold to one. We need them all!

**For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18 ESV**

## What Happened at the Cross?

It must come as a surprise to everyone who studies the cross of Christ that, historically speaking, there is no one clear idea of what took place there. Surely, this crucial act of God on our behalf is universally understood and agreed upon? Evidently not! No one questions that the cross is central to our salvation or that our sins were forgiven there. However, what actually happened and how it works to save us has been the subject of lively debate and shifting opinions for two thousand years.

It seems that every age focuses upon some aspect of the cross which either meets their deepest need or reflects their cultural setting or both. Of the three dominant theories, the second one (with considerable modifications) leads the field in our day.



Should we continue searching for the one and only “correct” theory? My own belief is that the Lord can accomplish many things at once, a trait He amply displayed when He said “Let there be light!” The cross is to redemption what those first words were to creation: the fountainhead of all that would follow. We *should* expect that no one theory would suffice to encapsulate this immense “making new” of the former creation, just as no one science can describe the wide range of the natural order. It may be “messy” to have such a proliferation of theories, but if you want quick closure to all your pressing questions, the Lord probably isn't the One to ask!

## Three Theories of the Atonement

We may not have one definitive, final answer but we do have a wide array of fascinating insights and foundational truths. I think that it is just like the Lord to have worked patiently through the centuries and through differing cultural context to bring forth a fuller understanding of what He



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was doing at the cross. I firmly believe that they all fit together. To explore the question in a more organized way, I have grouped these ideas under three general headings: Christ as Victor, Victim and Vision.

All three interpretations focus on aspects of the cross that are vital to our salvation. Moreover, because our battle is ongoing, it strengthens us to understand and embrace the full array of what has been won for us. One key to understanding these three theories is seeing that there are three “interested” parties which God worked through the cross to address: God Himself, Satan and humanity. It will help to think of these theories as complementary, not competing.

## Christ as Victor

As Victor the atonement consists of Christ’s triumph over His enemies and ours. This was the view of the Early Church fathers, beginning with Irenaeus of Lyon, and it held sway for the first thousand years of Christianity. As Victor Christ triumphed in two ways: by ransoming us with His life and by defeating Satan who held us captive. Unquestionably, these two explanations are marked down in scripture, but they fell out of favor as other theories emerged and as belief in the devil declined in scholarly circles.

The idea of [Ransom](#) has a long history in scripture, going all the way back to Job, often considered one of the oldest books in the Bible. In the Hebrew Scriptures there is a clear and consistent foreshadowing of the need for God’s people to be ransomed, though how this would happen or by whom is left in the shadows. That mystery is resolved when Jesus appears, but unfortunately for our curiosity, He doesn’t tell us how or why. He simply states that by being willing to “give His life” Jesus would ransom us. In this view the “purchase price” of our redemption is in some way a payment made to the enemy: Jesus’ life in exchange for ours.

**“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** Matthew 20:26-28 ESV

**You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.** 1 Corinthians 7:23  
ESV

Related to this idea of ransom is the view of Christ as the Victor in a spiritual battle waged for our freedom. Here, it seems to me that in terms of details we have even less to go on. As with the image of ransom, there is plenty of Old Testament foreshadowing, showing us that battles do indeed have to be fought for the sake of redeeming God’s captive people. Think of the Exodus from Egypt and the constant battles over the Promised Land as exemplars of the spiritual warfare between the [Two Invisible Kingdoms](#) which continue to our own day. In what way, however, was Jesus battling Satan at the cross? St. John emphatically stated that He was, but the Early Church fathers only outlined the theory; they didn’t fill it in. Nevertheless, scripture clearly credits Jesus with “triumphing” over the dark powers that had us enslaved.

**He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.** Colossians 2:15 ESV

**The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8 ESV**

Let's consider for a moment the broad cultural context behind this accurate (if incomplete) view of Christ as Victor. The Roman Empire set the tone for the age. The power of its sword subdued kingdoms all around the Mediterranean and beyond, uniting them in a universal peace, the Pax Romana under the rule of a supreme monarch. It would be only natural to see Jesus similarly, as a conquering King, though one whose kingdom was not of this world. Not only that, but it was an age which readily believed in the activity of those dark powers which the New Testament describes Jesus as fighting. To understand how Jesus gained that victory, however, we will have to turn to the second great view of the atonement, that of Christ as Victim.

## Christ as Victim

As Victim the atonement consists of what Jesus had to suffer on our behalf. Like Christ the Victor, this theory also has two variations. The first to appear was the "satisfaction" theory developed by St. Anselm of Canterbury during the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In this view it is the sovereign God, not Satan, whose claim is addressed by the atonement. Humanity's sins bring insult and injury to the honor of God. Just as with medieval codes of honor (note the cultural context), satisfaction must be made. However, because God's glory is so great, only a perfect sacrifice could possibly atone for the affront to His honor. Since the "merits of Christ" far outweigh the debt owed to God by humanity, the sacrifice of Christ fully "satisfies" the requirements of honor. In this view the ransom, or purchase price of redemption, is in some way paid to God. This theory replaced Christ as Victor as the leading view of the atonement for the next five hundred years.

**For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Romans 5:10 ESV**

**And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:2 ESV**

Through the Reformers, especially John Calvin, the idea of satisfaction was again taken up, but turned away from God's honor towards His justice. Humanity was indeed in debt to God as Anselm would have it, but it was a debt to the moral Law which we have all transgressed. This view, termed "penal substitution," takes seriously the statement by Paul in Romans that the "wages of sin is death." Because of our sins we are legally subject to God's wrath and deserve eternal punishment in hell. God loved us too much to let that happen!

At the Father's request Jesus went to the cross, was punished in our place and died the death our sins required. In this view it is humanity's sin which is the "enemy" to be overcome for sin places us at enmity with God, as well as enslaves us to the evil one. Here, then is the inside story on how Christ the Victor "destroyed the works" of the devil who tempted us into sinning against God in the first place. Jesus "triumphed" by becoming the Victim, an innocent victim, thereby creating the condition for God to overturn His Son's death and strip the enemy of his legal claims. As our representative (or substitute) Jesus' death fully atones for our sins, releasing us from the curse of the law and the punishment we deserved.

**But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Romans 5:8-11 ESV**

**And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. Colossians 2:13-14 ESV**

These views of the atonement are called “objective” because they focus upon what Christ was doing for us at the cross, apart from any involvement by us or with us. They neglect what the sight of the cross, received by faith, does for us on the inside where the saving transformation needs to take place. To understand that work of the atonement we will have to look through the lens of the third view, Christ as Vision.

## Christ as Vision

As Vision the atonement consists of what God accomplishes in us. This internal or “subjective” view of the atonement was first advanced by a contemporary of Anselm, Peter Abelard. Called the “moral influence” theory, it draws our attention to what God uses to get our attention: the death of His Son at the cross. Nothing convinces us of the terrible reality of our sinfulness or of God’s merciful love like seeing Jesus dying there. Looking to the cross we see a Savior who lays down His life for His friends and a loving Father who was willing to sacrifice even His only begotten Son to rescue us.

This vision of “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” changes us, because it enables us to trust to God’s love. By [Beholding Him](#), especially in the way divine love is revealed at the cross, we are transformed into His likeness. Not only that, but the example of Jesus in loving us to the point of selfless sacrifice, shows us the true path of life for us to follow. By His example we are inspired to love like He does; by faith in the love He has shown us, we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to become like Him.

**I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 ESV**

**But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed... And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:16, 18 ESV**

I can’t help thinking that this view of the atonement will gain ground in the future. The role of vision in the spiritual life can hardly be overlooked in an age as attuned to the visual arts as our own. The connection between sight, inward focus and interior state is being more fully experienced and widely understood by everyone from advertisers to designers to media producers. This will surely awaken in the church the as yet untapped potential of growing [“eyes](#)

[to see](#)” the pathway to transformation that comes to those who learn the secret of [Beholding Jesus](#) with ever renewed eyes of faith.



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## CHAPTER FIVE

# His Triumphant Resurrection

Without the resurrection we have no religion worth shouting about, no hope of heaven, no escape from our sins or our sin nature. Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we wouldn't have a living and Risen Lord to know and to follow. Without His resurrection we wouldn't even know how powerful a victory was won by the cross. Where would our faith be then? Funny thing is, it was the one thing He didn't do...

**Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26 ESV**



Because life and death issues are so dear (and fearful) to us, we really need to know for certain that we have a Savior in Jesus of true resurrection power and experience to count on. His triumphant resurrection is intended to free us from all fear of death, as well as bring to us a whole host of other divinely inspired benefits.

**That through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Hebrews 2:14-15 ESV**

## Facing the FACTS

Believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not optional for a Christian. It is the defining thing about us. That Jesus rose from the grave means that the Savior of the world is Alive. This is the first astounding FACT on which our faith is built. The second flows from it: This Risen Lord can be known by faith. This too is a FACT. By fact I mean that these are indisputable truths for those who have had their spiritual eyes opened to the eternal Reality that surrounds us, comparable to knowing that there is a sun in the physical heavens encircling the earth. On these two FACTS all of Christian believing is established.

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone upon which we build all of our understanding of the world we live in. Every scripture, every event, every person, is now interpreted through the lens of these two outstanding FACTS: Jesus is alive and can be known!

**From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.**



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**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 ESV**

Suppose Jesus were Risen and, yet couldn't be made known to us? Everything that the gospel and the Bible asks us to believe would be a stretch, requiring huge "leaps" of faith on our part. Because He is risen AND can be known, everything else we need to believe becomes far more readily believable. By receiving genuine faith in Jesus, we "know that we know that we know" that He is alive and that He is Lord. This settles a lot of issues.

For instance, if Jesus can be known by anyone (ourselves for instance), then He can (theoretically) be known by everyone. They must be told! It also follows that because Jesus can be known, every denial of faith by skeptics and atheists is exposed as a lie promoted by people who have no real desire to seek God. We know that all who truly seek Him will find Him (or be found by Him as the case may be). Not only that, but all who believe in a different deity than Jesus Christ and the One He calls Father are shown to be tragically deceived. There is only One Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Along with Father and Holy Spirit, He is God all by Himself. There are no other gods besides Him. These are the new facts.

## Look at the Disciples

So important is the Resurrection that the disciples were not even called "believers" until after they received faith in the Resurrection. Unquestionably, what the Holy Spirit inspired and anointed Peter to preach on Pentecost Day was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

**This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it... This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Acts 2:23-24, 32 ESV**

Please note what Peter didn't preach. The one thing that Jesus didn't do for us in His great Work of saving us through His life, death and resurrection, was resurrect Himself. The New Testament writers are unanimous in attributing the Resurrection to the Father, not Jesus. They saw this as the Father's vindication of His Son. Jesus was innocent of all charges leveled against Him, He truly bore our sins as a spotless Passover Lamb, and the powers of darkness were stripped of their legal authority. It also proved that the entire plan for our salvation was the Father's initiative. The Father attested to all of this by raising Jesus from the dead, openly rewarding Him with a Name above every name and further exaltation in Glory. The resurrection was the Father's Master Stroke, unmistakably revealing His Hand upon His Son's entire mission of salvation.

The significance of this is important for us to grasp, since we are to be raised the same way. Just as Jesus hoped in God, so do we. Just as Jesus put no effort of His own into being raised from the dead, neither do we. Just as He committed His Spirit to the Father, for the Father to raise Him up from death, so do we. Just as the Father raised Jesus and bestowed upon Him a glorified Body and an eternal inheritance, so we too will receive a glorified body and an inheritance in heaven. All of this will happen with no effort on our part, but to trust and believe. Jesus' triumphant resurrection shows us the way to enter into the same triumphant resurrection that the Father offers us.



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**We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.** Romans 6:4-5, 11 ESV

## How Faith in this FACT Affects Us

Faith in the [Resurrection](#) carries over into all manner of things in this life as well. Paul says that just as Jesus was raised by the glory of the Father, so too, we are raised in “newness” of life. As we by faith grow to see the glorious love that Jesus and God have for us, this faith vision is used by God to raise us again and again out of our captivity to darkness into greater light and freedom. Please see [Beholding the True Image](#) for understanding how God “raises” us into His higher, peace-filled way of living by getting us to look through the veil of circumstances and get our eyes back on our glorious Lord.

These seven benefits of faith in the Resurrection are appropriately shown us by Peter, who was the first to preach on the Resurrection. (See 1 Peter 1:3-9 in the Scripture section below.)

### 1) A New Birth

Through forgiveness and regeneration, we are “new creations.”

### 2) A Living Hope

No need to fear death—our hope cannot die.

### 3) An Imperishable Inheritance

This is kept in heaven for us. Our eternal future is secure.

### 4) A Salvation Yet to Come

There is a glorious destiny that awaits us.

### 5) A Love for Jesus

No earthly love can compare with loving and being loved by God.

### 6) A Joy that Is Filled with Glory

When our faith is activated, joy springs to life.

### 7) The Salvation of Our Souls

Even now our inner life can experience true peace and freedom.



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## What about Us?

As it was for the disciples, faith in the resurrection is our key of entrance to the new life God desires to give us. Because it is so important and because we have an enemy who tirelessly attempts to undermine our faith, let's focus on two ways to establish this FACT as a convinced belief in our hearts.

### 1) Searching for the Truth

The basic strategy is to fill your head with truth while praying it into your heart. When truth reaches your heart, revelation has come. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. Our part is in the searching to discover the truth. Be honest about your doubts, but not with the intention of defending your doubts, but of sincerely seeking to move beyond them into truth. Bring your doubts and reservations to the scriptures and to those in the faith community around you who truly believe. There are many good explorations of the facts concerning Jesus' resurrection which will absolutely convince any honest skeptic. Combined with even a little openness to faith in Jesus, they will destroy all doubts. (See the three companion articles, beginning with Resurrection Proof: The Empty Tomb)

### 2) Seeking the One Who Is Truth

You cannot know truth fully until you open your heart to God, because God is the ultimate Truth to be known and His life enters into and "informs" all truth. Therefore, the most powerful way to become convinced of the Resurrection is to live for Jesus. The Lord promises that He will allow you to find Him if you seek Him with your whole heart. This doesn't just apply to a one-time conversion experience. Seeking to know Him includes seeking His will and His help in each and every situation you face that holds anything of a problem or temptation for you. The more you cling to Him and call upon His Name, the more you will be able to see Him prove His power and presence to you. It's that simple!

Most of us entered into faith in our Risen Lord by calling on Him for mercy and saving help. Our need for Him didn't end with being saved for heaven. That's just the beginning. The more you learn to lean on Him, the more convinced you will become that He is alive and well. That's a FACT!



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## CHAPTER SIX

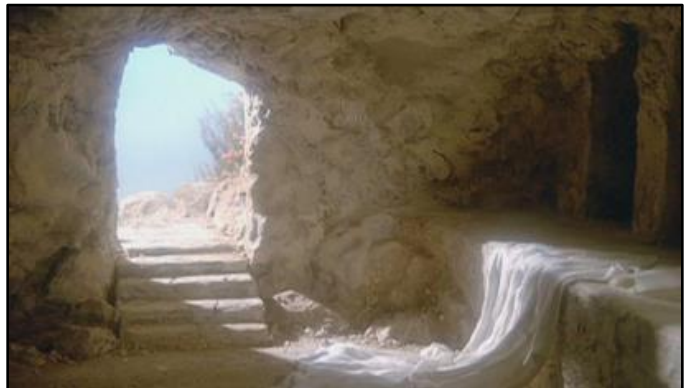
# Proof: The Empty Tomb

This is a rare “argument from silence” that still speaks volumes to anyone giving it serious, open-minded attention. One of the most well attested facts of history is the unexpected disappearance of Jesus from His own tomb. It literally pushes doubt and unbelief into a corner where the only way out is to acknowledge resurrection as the only possible explanation.

**But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Luke 24:1-3**

## The "Missing" Evidence

How can nothing be proof of something? Sounds unlikely, unless you consider the time you once left something special in the fridge for breakfast the next morning. When you woke up and checked the fridge it was gone! You just knew it could only have been your roommate who ate it—the empty fridge was proof. Or was it? Might your roommate have taken it, but not eaten it; or invited friends over while you slept? If all other possibilities wind up as dead ends, then the absence is indeed proof.



The evidence of the empty tomb is just like that. Close off other possible explanations and you are left with only one. But can the other explanations actually be closed off beyond a reasonable doubt?

## An Oddly Unconvincing Proof

It is a curious fact that no one in the Bible believed in the resurrection of Jesus because of the "evidence" of the empty tomb with the possible exception of John (which we will look at in a moment). In every case it was the resurrection appearances that convinced the disciples and other followers that Jesus was indeed raised from the grave. Even Thomas who knew the tomb to be empty and had heard about the resurrection appearances, was only convinced when He saw Jesus for himself.

We too have “seen” Jesus for ourselves by the opening of our spiritual eyes which faith provides. The proclamation of the empty tomb is, therefore, of great faith-strengthening power to believers, since we know the inside story and are thrilled by the full significance of what it means. However, we should realize that proclaiming that the tomb was empty probably won’t mean much to non-believers in our day any more than it did in the beginning.



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This is strange, since the empty tomb is a great proof of the resurrection of Jesus. It may rarely convince anyone in itself, but it is an enormous stumbling stone for honest seekers after truth who might otherwise want to doubt the resurrection. Why? Because the empty tomb is one of the most well-attested facts in history.

The four gospels and the book of Acts all reveal that not only the believers knew the tomb to be empty, but the whole unbelieving world around them accepted it as an unarguable fact. All the people involved agreed that the tomb that had been guarded was empty, the stone that sealed it had been rolled away, and that the dead body that had been buried there was gone. The problem of course was that they couldn't agree on what had happened. They still can't.

## Three Sets of Facts

### 1) The Women Got There First

No one even gave it a thought that the women could have rolled the stone away, least of all the women themselves. It weighed at least one and a half to two tons and was not even on its tracks. It was moved some distance away according to the description of John. If the male disciples had been the ones to steal the body, they had to keep that secret not only from unbelievers, but also from all the women who saw the empty tomb and heard the angel's explanation!

### 2) The Guards Went Unpunished

Once the guards recovered themselves, they went into the city and reported what they had seen. That something highly unusual happened is clear because ordinarily the guards would have been executed for losing the body they were commanded to guard, an outcome they rightly feared. Yet in this case they were bribed to silence and protected by the Temple authorities, who were then placed in a position where they could not claim the soldiers had failed in their duties! No one ever raised that charge. Very strange.

### 3) The Body Was Never Found

The Jewish leaders wanted to crush all speculation that Jesus might resurrect as He said He would. Unquestionably, the easiest way for the authorities to end those "rumors" was to produce the dead body. This they never did. Yet the resurrection began to be preached right away, right there in Jerusalem. This could never have happened if anyone—anyone at all—knew where the body was. Not only would the authorities have been vindicated, but the believers would have been thoroughly disabused of their belief, unable to proceed honestly and boldly with their witness.

## The Case is Sealed

The absence of a dead body "re-seals" the tomb. No one in the historical record outside of the gospels ever produced a body or ever questioned that Jesus had been dead when He was placed in the tomb, though they had plenty of motivation to do so. No one in the gospels did

either. What happened to the body? According to the guards it was not stolen away. It was simply and stunningly gone!

What other possible explanation is there? Could He have revived and walked out? Impossible—no battered and bruised person could have rolled that stone away. In fact the resurrected Jesus didn't need to have the stone removed. He walked out through the walls! The rolling away of the stone didn't happen for His sake, but for ours. An angel revealed to the women (and guards) what had happened when he rolled the stone back: there was no body of Jesus inside. The tomb was already empty!

The women immediately assumed that someone had stolen the body. This shows that their entire expectation was to find, not a resurrected Lord (as He had prophesied), but a dead body. Their first thought was that Jesus' lifeless body had been removed somewhere else—what other explanation could there be? Yet, the seal on the stone and the continuous presence of the guards, as we have seen, completely contradicts that possibility.

When John and Peter heard the news, they raced to the tomb to see for themselves. The sight that greeted them was both the absence of Jesus and the presence of His grave cloths. Peter saw the linens "lying there," indicating the expected place for them on the tomb's burial shelf. Tellingly, the face cloth was in a separate location, "still rolled up" as it would have been around the deceased person's head. Peter "marveled" but we are not told he believed. John entered behind Peter, saw the same scene and "believed." It seems likely that it was the additional "evidence" of the grave cloths which convinced him, not solely the sight of the empty tomb itself.

## "Entombed" with an Enigma

This examination of the evidence surrounding the empty tomb does not, of course, "force" a belief in the resurrection upon anyone. But what other explanation is there? When all other possibilities are eliminated, the rational thing to do is believe the only one that is left, no matter how "irrational" it may seem. This is the beauty of the empty tomb as a proof of the resurrection: it eliminates other explanations. It backs unbelief into a corner, where both logic and common sense bring one face to face with resurrection as something that has to be seriously considered. Faith in the resurrection is the only honest way out of the dilemma posed by the empty tomb!

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Proof: Visible Appearances

In any court of law, the testimony of eye witnesses is crucial to establishing the facts of the case. In this “case” we have a super-abundance of testimonies. What really compels faith in these accounts, however, is not the number of them, but their unexpected character. True to form, the resurrected Jesus didn’t act in a way anyone could predict—even though He was the One who most frequently predicted it.

**And they rose up that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Luke 24:33-34 ESV**

## Seeing Is Believing

The resurrection appearances of Jesus convinced everyone who received one in the New Testament. This continues to be true into our own day: “seeing is believing” after all. Not only that, but God stands ready to open the spiritual eyes of anyone who desires to receive Jesus as Savior.

All of us who now believe in the Risen Lord can say that “once I was blind, but now I see.” Still, to take that first step towards believing most of us needed some convincing. That’s where the vast treasury of resurrection appearances comes in handy.



## Were Their Eyes Deceiving Us?

Before we look more closely at this testimony, we should make sure that it is authentic. Even things plainly seen can lead to mistaken impressions. We have to ask: Were the disciples mistaken in what they believed they saw? Had their eyes deceived them? If so, as we look through their eyes, so to speak, won’t we be deceived as well? Then let’s first consider all other possible explanations for the reported resurrection. There are only four possibilities, leaving resurrection out.

### 1) Swoon

One theory is that Jesus didn’t actually die on the cross, but lost consciousness and was mistakenly believed to be dead by the Romans. In the tomb He recovered enough to rise and walk out.



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### Refutation:

The Romans were experts at killing people. The executioner's life depended upon it. If there was any doubt that Jesus wasn't dead, His legs would have been broken to make sure of it. Even so, supposing He did "miraculously" survive crucifixion, how could a half-dead man have rolled that massive stone away? How could He have slipped past the guards? How could the disciples ever have thought that such a battered, bleeding man could be a resurrected Person of power? And why was He never seen again afterwards? This theory is simply preposterous!

### 2) Hallucination

Other theorists have speculated that what the disciples "saw" was really a hallucination. In their distress and shattered hopes, they saw what they wanted to see, but it was just a projection of their unconscious longings or a figment of their imaginations.

### Refutation:

The great problem here is that hallucinations happen to crazy people, to very disturbed people, or to individuals in private moments, not to massed gatherings of ordinary folks. Actual hallucinations are deeply subjective and extremely transitory, lasting only moments. These appearances went on "in public" for 40 days! Hallucinations have no substance in the real world: this One ate fish on two occasions, could be touched and examined, and held intelligent audible conversation for days on end with whole groups of listeners. Nothing like this has ever happened by way of hallucination in the recorded history of the world. Case closed.

### 3) Myth

It is well-known that many great stories are mere legends which grew up around every day events. The religious imagination hates a vacuum and always seeks to fill in details, no matter how bizarre or unworldly, as readings of saints' lives in many religions demonstrates. The disciples simply allowed the myth to grow that Jesus had resurrected, becoming more than just a man. They didn't conspire to create the myth, but they didn't act to silence it either.

### Refutation:

Myths take time to develop—lots of it. There is scant evidence in history of myths developing around major historical figures within 30 years of their lifetime. Why? Because too many people would be still alive to debunk the legends. Yet, the proclaiming of the resurrection began immediately at the center of events by people who claimed they were telling truth, not myths.

In addition, the stories they told have nothing of the character of myth about them. Myths are fantastic and spectacular, filled with excessive description and under-developed characters—just the opposite of what we have in the gospels and the Book of Acts.



Read enough actual myths and you will quickly spot a counterfeit. The gospels are “counterfeit myths.” They only seem like myth if you can’t accept the resurrection as a real event. Otherwise, they read like lean and clean reporting.

#### 4) Conspiracy

The disciples for whatever reason couldn’t let Jesus’ life and ministry die out with His death. They conspired together to say that He had resurrected, was still alive and was Lord of all.

#### Refutation:

All the other three theories devolve into this one. If Jesus truly swooned, recovered and disappeared the disciples participated in the cover-up. If Jesus was a hallucination the disciples exaggerated and lied about His bodily form. If His resurrection was a myth, the disciples would have had to be involved in promoting it. But could they have been so devious? Could they have conspired together and kept it together for all the years that followed? Under enormous pressure against them, under unceasing scrutiny by their enemies, and even under torture at their deaths, not a single one recanted!

The disciple’s proven character throughout the rest of their lives argues strongly against any such conspiracy. Besides, what would have been their motive? It brought a fire-storm of trouble upon them. Not only that, but if they were lying, the Jews would have quickly (and gladly) produced the corpse. That never happened! [The Empty Tomb](#), the known character of the disciples once they became apostles, and the lack of refutation by their adversaries demolishes this theory.

## Down to Brass Tacks

What are we left with? Resurrection! It is the only possible explanation. Honestly, logically, thoroughly examining the evidence knocks out all other theories, leaving this one standing. What we have about it in narrative form is a marvel. The gospel accounts read with the crisp precision of a Hemmingway and the attention to detail that eye witness accounts typically supply. Referring to the scene of Jesus writing in the dirt as an example, Peter Kreeft observes:

*The only explanation is that the writer saw it. If this detail and others like it throughout all four Gospels were invented, then a first-century tax collector (Matthew), a “young man” (Mark), a doctor (Luke) and a fisherman (John) all independently invented the new genre of realistic fantasy nineteen centuries before it was reinvented in the twentieth.*

The unexpected elements of these resurrection appearances are especially intriguing. So many non-miraculous, but decidedly *odd* things happen. If someone were making up these accounts with a view to “selling” them as authentic, why add in all the whimsical and troubling details? Why have women receive the divine revelation ahead of the men? They had no standing as legal or credible witnesses in that day, especially Mary Magdalene who had seven demons cast out of her.

Or, why have the two men on the road to Emmaus fail to recognize Jesus except in retrospect after “the breaking of the bread”? For that matter, why have Jesus act as if He wanted to leave



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them without revealing His identity, if that was the devised purpose for the story? And what about that fish breakfast and the way Jesus used the opportunity to “grill” Peter—his number one man—in front of all the others? What a strange way for any author to highlight Peter, the group’s leader! Read through the gospels with this in mind and discover more for yourself.

The numerous instances of people not recognizing Jesus at first raise interesting questions, as well. Were they too shocked and dumbfounded to recognize Him, or was there something about the resurrection body that made Jesus appear different to their eyes? Was He “veiling” Himself for some undisclosed reason? Was He, perhaps, having some good-natured fun with them? Or, was He weaning them off their natural dependence upon His visible presence? After all, they had been with the Lord in “flesh and blood” fellowship for three years. They were “hooked” on knowing Him that way. Now, they needed to be readied for a time that was soon coming when their fellowship with Jesus would be only by His Spirit. Their eyes were clearly on the surprise (and delight) of His resurrection. He was always looking ahead. Still is.



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## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Proof: Transformed Lives

The evidence keeps mounting up. You may already be one whose transformed life is evidence to your friends and family that something or Someone has powerfully been at work in your life. Let's hope that you've told them (in so many words) that Jesus is Alive—that's what's changing you! A changed life can be tremendously convincing. The testimony of changed lives after the resurrection of Jesus is just as powerful a witness today as it was then.

**And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. 2**

Corinthians 3:18 ESV

## Radically Changed

We all know people who have changed for the worse as they got older; few change for the better. What accounts for genuinely positive transformation? The reasons for corrupting changes are as wide as the world and just as easy to understand: It's only natural for fallen nature to take people down.

However, the gospels and Book of Acts show us, not a lone individual, but a whole group of people who changed radically for the better, then helped countless others change for the better, too.

That couldn't have happened by chance. There had to be a reason, a powerful something, that caused such widespread and lasting transformation. What was it?



## First, the Disciples

On the eve of Good Friday, the disciples, under the pressure of mounting opposition from the religious establishment and the looming death of their beloved leader, were already spiraling down into discord, arguing over who would come out on top even during Jesus' farewell supper with them. Later that night they fled from the Roman soldiers in the garden of Gethsemane. Then Peter denied even knowing Jesus at the high priest's house. All of them except John (and the women!) abandoned Jesus at the cross. Apparently, their fears compounded with their grief and sense of failure, for on Easter evening when the risen Lord visited them, He had to enter through a door that was locked "for fear of the Jews."

Before we feel too smug, we should all wonder if we would have done any better. On the whole these were poor, uneducated working-class men with little or no standing in the "proper" Jewish society which ruled in Jerusalem. Not only that but they were far from their own small, rural communities and the usual support that family and friends provide. They were Galilean fish out



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of water. The religious and civil leaders—those who had possessions, power and privilege—were vehemently united against Jesus and, therefore, also against them. If Jesus couldn't survive that onslaught, how could they?

Fifty days later everything has changed. The disciples are bold, even aggressive, in promoting their faith. They show no hesitation, no fear. Religious and civil opposition no longer intimidates them. Instead, we see them standing up to the authorities and to huge crowds of people saying things that are guaranteed to infuriate anyone who isn't willing to repent for putting Jesus to death. In a stunning reversal the Jewish leaders are now the ones on the defensive, wondering how to silence a movement that has found its voice and its courage.

### What Changed Them?

If we were to ask them what made the difference, they would unanimously say that they had seen the Risen Lord, that Jesus had triumphed over death for all our sakes, had ascended to heaven, was seated at the right hand of the Father, and was still with them by His Spirit. That was their story and they stuck with it! Through thick and thin, in all parts of the empire, under all manner of temptation and persecution, they never wavered, until the world was “turned upside down.” The post-resurrection disciples emerged on the world scene, claimed the entire playing field and never left. If this was a “scripted” conspiracy, as some would have us believe, it was one that was maintained by every last one of them to their dying day, an inconceivable possibility. Blaise Pascal put it this way:

The hypothesis that the Apostles were knaves is quite absurd. Follow it out to the end and imagine these twelve men meeting after Jesus' death and conspiring to say that he had risen from the dead. This means attacking all the powers that be. The human heart is singularly susceptible to fickleness, to change, to promises, to bribery. One of them had only to deny his story under these inducements, or still more because of possible imprisonment, tortures and death and they would all have been lost.

This unreversed transformation of character in the apostles continues to stand as an unanswerable proof that they had indeed encountered Jesus raised from the grave just as they claimed. But what about those who had never walked with the Lord, who never knew Him in the flesh? Could they too encounter the risen Lord and be transformed in ways that give further proof to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave? It's time to call in Paul as Exhibit A for the defense!

### Then, Came Paul

Paul represents the other side of the divide. He was of the wealthy upper class, a brilliantly educated, young, cosmopolitan Jew of the Diaspora, studying in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, one of the most sought after rabbis of his day. By his own description he was of a long, proud line of devout Pharisees, a true zealot for the Law of Israel and an unabashed upholder of religious orthodoxy. Unlike the disciples he had no previous connection to Jesus. He, therefore, had no reason to want to believe that Jesus had survived the crucifixion in any form. Just the opposite! He was energetically persecuting and imprisoning anyone who made the blasphemous claim that Jesus was Lord. He wanted to crush the heretical “sect of the Nazarenes,” not become one of them!

**I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. Acts 22:4-5 ESV**

With the disciples we noted their fear and inner divisions, but we might just as well have praised their expressions of genuine goodness. After all, they had been helping Jesus serve the lost, diseased and demon-possessed people of the land for three years. They had been engaged in a true ministry of compassion and had even participated directly in supernatural works of healing and deliverance. They were on friendly terms with the Lord of the Law, not acting as self-righteous paragons of the Law, "lording it" over others. Unlike Paul they weren't building their careers on the backs of people they had bloodied and imprisoned. They were altogether more likeable than Paul before his conversion. Around Peter and John, you could relax, go fishing and enjoy a good meal; Paul would have kept you on edge.

### What Changed Paul?

Paul tells us no less than four times in scripture that it all began for him when he received a totally unsought revelation of Jesus Christ. That was the last thing he expected to happen! So brilliant was the light of Christ that it literally knocked him off his mount and blinded him. Dazed, he asked who he was encountering. Jesus answered him directly, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting." This reported encounter didn't just make a "lasting impression" on Paul. His entire life was changed! He became an entirely new man who championed both the resurrection of Jesus and the full reality of spiritual transformation from that point onwards to anyone who would listen.

**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 ESV**

True to form Paul once again became a zealot, but of a wholly different kind than he had been. Whereas before, he was willing to make others die for the sake of his own beliefs, now he embraced death to self in order to live for Christ, eventually dying as a martyr for the sake of "birthing" his faith in others. Paul, the persecutor, faced persecution countless times in his journeys—without once wavering in his new-found faith. Paul, the self-righteous Pharisee, saw himself as the "chief of sinners." Paul, the privileged scion of a proud heritage, counted all that he once esteemed "as rubbish" that he might gain Christ. Paul, the hated and feared religious bigot, became one of the greatest lovers of humanity the world has ever seen. How do you explain that, if not by the reality of the resurrection appearance he says he received?

### The Rest of the Story

Those first apostles were eyewitnesses. For them the resurrection was not hearsay, speculation, wishful thinking, or even an article of instructed belief. It was an established FACT of their experience. They saw Jesus after death and the grave had taken their best shot. They saw Him with their own eyes, heard Him with their own ears and touched Him with their own hands. In the presence of the Risen Lord they received the gift of saving faith and the indwelling Spirit. This gave them something to shout about!



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Even with all this, they don't seem to have found the courage to make their "discovery" public until after Pentecost. In truth there were two things that turned the fearful band of disciples into valiant witnesses for the Lord. We cannot put it all down to the resurrection appearances alone. Jesus Himself didn't leave it at that. In His parting instructions He commanded them to pray for a [Baptism of Power](#) that He desired to send them. When it came at Pentecost this "baptism of the Spirit" helped propel them with boldness into Jerusalem itself and then out to the world beyond.

Nevertheless, what the disciples received at Pentecost was not faith in the resurrection, but the power to proclaim it successfully in the "faith-hostile" environment of Jerusalem. This was a gift of power at two levels. On the one hand the disciples' fears were overcome. They now had "boldness" to proclaim the name of Jesus and witness to His resurrection amidst many of the very people who had demanded His death only seven weeks earlier. On the other hand, their words received divine enabling to break through the barriers of unbelief. The Holy Spirit inspired them with the right words and then anointed their words to reach the multitudes.

### What Changes Us?

The same holds true for us. Pentecost (the baptism in the Holy Spirit) follows Passover (faith in our Resurrected Savior), but it was never meant to be separated from it or—God forbid!—left out entirely (See [Passover, Pentecost and Booths](#)). If you have had your spiritual eyes opened to see Jesus as Lord, then be sure to seek the empowerment He also wants to give you!