

Copyright © 2022 Ryan Zachary Leasure

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including without limitation, preservation, or instruction.

TRAINING GRACE BIBLE CHURCH IN MOORE, SOUTH
CAROLINA, TO PRESENT HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS
FOR BELIEVING IN JESUS'S RESURRECTION

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Ryan Zachary Leasure
December 2022

APPROVAL SHEET

TRAINING GRACE BIBLE CHURCH IN MOORE, SOUTH
CAROLINA, TO PRESENT HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS
FOR BELIEVING IN JESUS'S RESURRECTION

Ryan Zachary Leasure

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Timothy Paul Jones

Second Reader: John D. Wilsey

Defense Date: August 9, 2022

For the glory of God

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
PREFACE.....	x
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Context.....	1
Rationale	4
Purpose	6
Goals	6
Research Methodology	7
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	9
Conclusion	10
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT.....	12
Paul Recites Earlier Christian Tradition	13
Formal Transmission.....	14
Credal Formula.....	15
The Creed’s Origins	17
Christ Died.....	18
Evidence for Jesus’s Death.....	19
Could Jesus Have Survived?.....	21
He Was Buried and Raised	23
He Was Buried	24

Chapter	Page
He Was Raised	26
He Appeared	29
Textual Support for the Appearances	29
Transformation of the Apostles	31
Answering Objections	34
According to the Scriptures	35
For Our Sins	42
Historical Corroboration	43
Biblical Support	44
Objections Answered	47
Conclusion	49
3. THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT	51
Summary of <i>The Resurrection of Jesus</i>	51
Critique of Allison’s Work	61
External Evidence for Gospel Authorship	63
Internal Evidence for Gospel Authorship	69
Commitment to the Truth	87
Conclusion	90
4. IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT	92
Preparation for Project	92
Summary of Project Goals	92
Assessment of Understanding of Evangelistic Practice and Historical Arguments for Resurrection	95
Develop Six-Week Sermon Series and Small Group Curriculum	97
Increase Knowledge of Historical Arguments for Resurrection and Evangelism Confidence	104

Chapter	Page
Conclusion	108
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	109
Evaluation of Project Purpose	109
Evaluation of Project Goals	110
Assessment of Understanding of Evangelistic Practice and Historical Arguments for Resurrection	110
Six-Week Sermon Series.....	111
Six-Week Small-Group Curriculum.....	111
Increase in Knowledge of Historical Arguments for Resurrection	112
Increase Evangelism Confidence	112
Evaluation of Project Strengths	113
Evaluation of Project Weakness.....	114
Proposed Project Changes	115
Theological Reflections	116
Personal Reflections	117
Conclusion	118
 Appendix	
1. EVANGELISM AND APOLOGETICS ASSESSMENT	120
2. APOLOGETICS SERMON SERIES EVALUATION	123
3. APOLOGETICS SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM EVALUATION.....	125
4. EVANGELISM ASSIMILATION EVALUATION	127
5. MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION	129
6. SERMON SERIES MANUSCRIPTS.....	131
7. SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM.....	216
8. PRE-SERIES PARTICIPANT RESPONSE CONCERNING EVANGELISM AND APOLOGETICS	227

Appendix	Page
9. POST-SERIES MEAN CHANGE IN EVANGELISM CONFIDENCE.....	228
10. POST-SERIES MEAN CHANGE IN KNOWLEDGE OF HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS	229
11. T-TEST RESULTS	230
BIBLIOGRAPHY	232

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>1 Apol.</i>	<i>First Apology</i>
<i>1 Ep. Cor.</i>	<i>The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians</i>
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325.</i> 10 vols. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annals</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
<i>Extant frag.</i>	<i>The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronography of Julius Africanus</i>
<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Against Heresies</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>The Church History of Eusebius</i>
<i>Joseph</i>	<i>On the Life of Joseph</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish Wars</i>
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>Marc.</i>	<i>Against Marcion</i>
<i>NPNF²</i>	<i>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2.</i> 14 vols. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. New York: Christian Literature, 1890
<i>Rab. Perd.</i>	<i>Pro Rabirio Perduellionis Reo</i>
<i>Scorp.</i>	<i>Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting</i>
<i>Vita</i>	<i>The Life of Josephus</i>
<i>Whiston</i>	Flavius Josephus. <i>The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged.</i> Translated by William Whiston. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Pre-series participant response concerning evangelism.....	95
2. Pre-series participant response concerning what prohibits their evangelism	95
3. Pre-series participant response concerning evangelism and apologetics	96
4. Post-series mean change in knowledge of historical arguments.....	104
5. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for knowledge questions.....	105
6. Post-series mean change in evangelism confidence.....	106
7. Results of <i>t</i> -test for dependent samples for evangelism confidence	107
8. Results of <i>t</i> -test for dependent samples for entire survey	107
A1. Pre-series participant response concerning evangelism and apologetics	227
A2. Post-series mean change in evangelism confidence.....	228
A3. Post-series mean change in knowledge of historical arguments.....	229
A4. Results of <i>t</i> -test for dependent samples for evangelism confidence	230
A5. Results of <i>t</i> -test for dependent samples for historical arguments.....	230
A6. Results of <i>t</i> -test for dependent samples for entire survey	231

PREFACE

This project could not be completed apart from the love and support of so many individuals. First and foremost, I am grateful to the Lord Jesus Christ who took on human flesh, lived a sinless life, died in my place, and rose again from the dead. This project could never happen if I was not confident that he performed these acts in history.

Second, I am grateful to the saints of Grace Bible Church who have been an incredible blessing to me. Their eagerness to dig deeper in God's Word gave me confidence that a project of this nature would be successful.

Third, I am grateful to Dr. Timothy Paul Jones who supervised this project. His oversight helped keep this project focused and on track throughout. Moreover, he was always quick to respond to emails and answer any questions I had, even during the semester he was on sabbatical.

Finally, I am grateful to my incredible family. God has blessed me with a wonderful wife in Tracy and two delightful kids in Nora and Hudson. Coming home from work to their loving embrace is the highlight of every day. Tracy has always been a source of encouragement for me, especially when I am struggling. No one on planet earth means more to me than her.

My prayer is that God will use this project to grow the people of Grace Bible Church to share their faith with more boldness so that God will get more glory.

Ryan Leasure

Moore, South Carolina

December 2022

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Grace Bible Church (GBC) of Moore, South Carolina, exists to glorify God by making disciples of all nations. Making disciples in our cultural climate, however, has proven difficult and often requires the work of apologetics. Because of the culture's general bent towards skepticism, the church must take seriously the exhortation to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). For this reason, GBC aims to equip its people to demonstrate to non-Christians that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God who died on a cross for our sins and rose again from the dead. Because this story is true, the church must proclaim it far and wide so that God gets more glory.

Context

Grace Bible Church launched in the fall of 1994. Its sending church, Heritage Bible Church (HBC), believed the Moore community needed a conservative fundamentalist church, despite the fact that several conservative evangelical churches already existed in the immediate area.

While modern fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism share the same ancestry, fundamentalists broke away to launch their own coalition in the 1960s. Upon leaving, the movement adopted a polemical approach, not just against liberalism, but against evangelicalism in particular. From the beginning, fundamentalists criticized evangelicals for their participation in worldly activities such as attending the cinema, drinking, or listening to secular music.¹ Furthermore, they condemned evangelicalism's

¹ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 19.

ecumenical spirit. In fact, Billy Graham's participation in a New York City crusade alongside "modernists" in 1957 initiated much of the fundamentalist split.² While fundamentalism exists in many stripes, separation—both from the world as well as from other non-fundamentalists—remains a key tenet of the movement as a whole. This tenet, however, in no way impugns the character of its adherents. After all, many fundamentalists sincerely love the Lord and desire to see people come to Christ.

Be that as it may, GBC's early view of culture compelled them to separate from other churches and the non-Christian community. Twelve years ago, however, GBC left fundamentalism and entered into cooperation with the once forbidden Southern Baptist Convention. Despite this transition, GBC still struggles with some residual effects from its past. In particular, the church struggles to engage the community. Though the church itself has transitioned out of the fundamentalist movement, about half of the church's membership grew up in fundamentalist environments and attended fundamentalist colleges. While many of GBC's former fundamentalists appreciate their upbringing, they rarely observed Christians building long-term friendships with non-Christians for evangelistic purposes. For the most part, the evangelistic methods they witnessed did not involve building and sustaining relationships with unbelievers. Instead, they observed and sometimes participated in street preaching, door-to-door evangelism, or event-driven outreach. None of these tactics are wrong, but they do not require establishing long-term relationships—a crucial component for twenty-first-century evangelism.

Another obstacle facing the members of GBC is that many of their childhood churches never modeled for them how to address difficult questions about their faith or the Bible. This criticism is true of fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists alike. Sadly,

² George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 233.

many churches encouraged questioners and doubters to simply “believe” the Bible when they expressed genuine doubts. Believing the Bible is certainly good and necessary, but forcing belief when people have legitimate questions or concerns has proved harmful. Sadly, this anti-intellectual spirit has bred scores of apostates who have left not just their conservative churches but Christianity altogether. By God’s grace, the current members of GBC are not among those apostates. They have persevered despite the lack of intellectual rigor among their former churches. This does not mean, however, that everyone at GBC remains unaffected. On the contrary, many continue to wrestle with difficult questions. Over the last few years, the church has attempted to address these questions with moderate success. Yet more equipping must be done in the realm of apologetics, especially as the culture trends in a skeptical direction.

This trend is especially evident in GBC’s surrounding community. While the church resides in the so-called “Bible Belt,” the greater Greenville and Spartanburg areas are becoming increasingly secular for a few reasons. First, people from all over the world continue to move into the area, making it one of the fastest growing communities in the country. The newly revitalized downtown areas, as well as the relocation of several international businesses, have driven most of this growth. Many of these transplants are non-Christians, thus watering down Christianity’s influence in the community. A second and perhaps more significant explanation for the community’s shift towards secularism is the influence of the universities. The church is blessed to have ten prominent college campuses within a one-hour commute, but with these blessings come curses as well. It is no secret that the American university promotes secular philosophies, specifically philosophical naturalism and relativism. As a result, an anti-supernatural bias permeates collegiate curriculum, placing Christianity outside plausibility structures. Furthermore, since absolute truth does not exist in the secular academy, the only sin one can commit is to tell someone else they are wrong. With thousands graduating from these institutions

each year and remaining local, GBC's community increasingly reflects the university's secular worldview.

Several people in the church work or live closely with people who accept these secular worldviews, and by God's grace, some have embraced the challenge to intellectually engage with these non-Christians. Other times, however, members have reached out to pastors for help because they struggle to know how to answer the skeptic's objections. After all, they grew up in environments where questions were off-limits and therefore never heard good answers to people's biggest questions.

As an elder-led church, GBC's leaders embrace their calling to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry" (Eph 4:12).³ The elders believe that members are responsible to engage the lost in their sphere of influence and should not rely on an elder to do it for them. While GBC has grown by fifty percent over the past six years, this growth came primarily by transfer. Additionally, almost everyone the church baptized over that same period was either a long-standing Christian who had never been baptized or a child of a parent in the church. In sum, the church has struggled to evangelize its secular neighbors. Despite these struggles, the church remains resolute in its desire to reach these neighbors with the gospel. Therefore, additional apologetics and evangelism training is critical.

Rationale

Given GBC's past and the current trajectory of American culture, the church must equip Christians to present historical arguments for believing in the resurrection with an objective of leading others to Christ. Three factors justify this emphasis.

First, Jesus demands that we love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). If we never share the gospel with our non-Christian neighbors, can we truly say that we are

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.

loving them? After all, Scripture is clear that unless one repents of his sins and trusts in the saving work of Jesus, he will die in his sins and spend eternity in hell (1 Thess 1:10). Certainly, if we possessed the cure for cancer or the remedy for heart disease, we would share that information with as many people as possible. In the same way, love compels us to take drastic measures to take the gospel to non-Christians.

GBC, in general, struggles to show this kind of love. After all, many of its members have never experienced non-Christian friendships and have never learned the art of befriending non-Christians. Moreover, they never learned how to bring up Jesus in conversations in a natural way. Sadly, the evangelistic model observed by many of GBC's members was a quick, "ask for a decision" method rather than a more conversational or relational approach that includes apologetics. In other words, most members come by this weakness honestly. Furthermore, doing apologetics is difficult for any Christian no matter their church or upbringing. That is to say, this weakness is not unique to GBC. In short, practicing apologetics is difficult, but love for others and concern for their souls compels us to think deeply about our faith so that we can lead them to Christ.

Second, Jesus commands us to reach non-Christians with the gospel. At the risk of sounding cliché, we commonly refer to Matthew 28:18–20 as the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion. In other words, evangelism is not optional. It is the calling on all believers, and it is God's plan for reaching unbelievers. He could have spoken audibly from heaven or written his message in the clouds. Instead, he chose to use the foolishness of human preaching to convey his message of hope to the lost.

Third, Scripture commands all Christians to practice apologetics. First Peter 3:15 instructs us to give a defense of the hope that is within us. Christians must be ready to answer skeptics' objections and provide positive reasons for believing. Furthermore, Jesus and the apostles repeatedly practiced apologetics by pointing to fulfilled prophecies, providing evidence for the resurrection, and exposing fallacious reasoning. As one considers the skeptical trajectory of American culture, it is difficult to overstate

the importance of this point. In previous generations, more people were interested in what the Bible had to say about their eternal destiny. That respect for Scripture, however, has waned in recent decades. Moreover, many deny the supernatural altogether. Training the church in apologetics will better equip them to engage this skeptical mindset.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the people of Grace Bible Church in Moore, South Carolina, to present historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection to non-Christians with the purpose of leading them to Christ.

Goals

The completion of the following five goals determined the success of this project. These goals are based on the biblical mandate to provide reasons for the Christian faith (1 Pet 3:15). The goals were as follows:

1. The first goal of this project was to assess the understanding of the historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection and the evangelistic confidence among the members of Grace Bible Church.
2. The second goal of this project was to develop a six-week sermon series on sharing historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection.
3. The third goal of this project was to develop a six-week small group curriculum that would prepare the church membership to share historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection.
4. The fourth goal of this project was to increase the knowledge of GBC membership in historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection.
5. The fifth goal of this project was to increase confidence among the members of GBC to share their faith with non-Christians.

A defined means of measurement and a benchmark of success determined the successful completion of each goal. The research methodology and instruments used to

measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.⁴

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these five goals. The first goal was to assess the understanding of the historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection and the evangelistic confidence among the members of Grace Bible Church. Prior to the sermon series, GBC members completed an evangelism and apologetics assessment.⁵ This assessment appraised the members' current evangelistic confidence as well as their understanding of historical arguments for believing in the resurrection. This goal was considered successfully met when fifty members completed the assessment and the inventory had been analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of both GBC's current evangelism confidence as well as its knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection.

The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series on sharing historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. The sermon series took place during the Sunday morning worship services and focused on a range of historical arguments for believing in the resurrection. Arguments included the historicity of the crucifixion, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and the post-resurrection appearances. This goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of the lead pastor of GBC (Eric Vander Ploeg), a long-time minister of education at First Baptist Church in Simpsonville, South Carolina (William Ashley Moore), and a SBTS faculty professor (Timothy Paul Jones). This panel examined the contents of the sermon series to evaluate its biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90

⁴ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

⁵ See appendix 1.

percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded sufficiency level.⁶

The third goal was to develop a six-week small group curriculum that prepared the church to share historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. The curriculum complemented the sermon series and emphasized practical applications of the sermon material. The curriculum consisted of content and discussion questions, role play, and case studies. This goal was measured by the expert panel, who examined the contents of the small group curriculum to evaluate its biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance. The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.⁷

The fourth goal was to increase the knowledge of GBC membership in historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. Participants for this goal were selected from those who completed the initial assessment and attended a minimum of five sermons and five small group sessions. The goal was measured by re-administering the assessment less than two weeks after the completion of the sermon series and complementary small groups. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-series scores among the content questions.

The fifth goal was to increase confidence among the members of GBC to share their faith with non-Christians. Participants for this goal were selected from those who completed the initial assessment and attended a minimum of five sermons and five small group sessions. The goal was measured by re-administering the assessment less than two weeks after the completion of the sermon series and complementary small groups. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a

⁶ See appendix 2.

⁷ See appendix 3.

positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-series scores among the confidence questions.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Apologetics. Apologetics may be defined as “that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”⁸ The term apologetics derives from the Greek word, *apologia*, and refers to a defense of one’s views or actions in general. More specifically, Christian apologetics is “an activity of the Christian mind which attempts to show that the gospel message is true in what it affirms” and is a defense “against criticism and distortion” of the faith.⁹

Evangelism. Evangelism may be understood in a limited sense as “the verbal proclamation of the good news of salvation with a view of leading people to right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ In a broader sense, evangelism can take on different forms other than a straight-forward proclamation. Sometimes evangelism includes responding to a question with another question.¹¹ Jesus frequently utilized this approach (Matt 12:9–12; Mark 10:17–18). Another related method is one that adopts a more modest strategy by simply trying to “put a stone in someone’s shoe.”¹² In other words, one does not need to feel like he must close the deal during the evangelistic

⁸ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truths and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 15.

⁹ C. H. Pinnock, “Apologetics,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 36.

¹⁰ David S. Lim, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 353.

¹¹ Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People’s Hearts the Way Jesus Did* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 26–38.

¹² Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 46.

encounter. Rather, he is merely trying to give the non-Christian something to think about after the conversation concludes. In the end, converting a person to Christ is the goal, but these conversational methods take a more long-term approach.

There was one significant limitation for this project. Due to various circumstances beyond human control, not all project participants were able to be in attendance for each of the six sermons and small group sessions. To mitigate this limitation, all sermons were made available on GBC's website, and each person had the ability to virtually join his or her small group.

Two delimitations were placed on this project. First, the length of the project was limited to seventeen weeks, consisting of two weeks for initial surveys, two weeks to write the sermon outline summaries and complementary small group curriculum, two weeks for review by the expert panel and subsequent modifications to series content, six weeks to implement the sermons and small group curriculum, two weeks for post-series surveys, and three weeks to evaluate the project. While I covered the most significant issues during the six-week series, participants were encouraged to pursue additional studies later.

Second, because of the content-heavy nature of this project, both the increase in knowledge and confidence from goals 4 and 5 relied on data only from those who attended a minimum of five sermons and small group sessions.

Conclusion

Scripture exhorts believers to evangelize the lost. What should Christians do when people reject their message? They should engage in apologetics. Christians should seek to persuade the lost by providing evidence for believing in Jesus and defending their message against objections. A quick examination of the New Testament reveals that the apostles focused on the primacy of the resurrection as they sought to persuade others to become followers of Jesus. Chapter 2 draws attention to the centrality of the resurrection

when doing apologetics by providing a detailed examination of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. Chapter 3 evaluates Dale Allison’s book *The Resurrection of Jesus*, as Allison presents one of the most formidable objections to the orthodox view of the resurrection. Chapter 4 recounts the implementation of the project itself. Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of the project based on the completion of the specified goals.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS
FOR THE PROJECT

About two thousand years ago, the apostle Paul argued that “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17). He could not have been any clearer. If Jesus stayed dead, nobody has any hope of eternal deliverance. Martin Hengel recognized the significance of this point when he noted that Christ’s death and resurrection from the dead is “the most frequent and most important confessional statement in the Pauline Epistles.”¹ Perhaps the clearest expression of this message is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. The text reads,

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Consistent with Hengel’s earlier remarks, Paul declares that this gospel message is ἐν πρώτοις (“of first importance”).² Everything else pales in comparison. With respect to this passage, Michael Licona remarks, “In nearly every historical investigation of the resurrection of Jesus, 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 weighs heavily and is perhaps the most important and valuable passage for use by historians when discussing the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus.”³ This text forms the linchpin of the Christian

¹ Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 3.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Greek citations come from the Society of Biblical Literature Greek New Testament.

³ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers

message. If the text reports false information, then the Christian faith crumbles. If, however, the text reports true information, then Jesus died and rose again for our sins. Its significance cannot be overstated.

This chapter will demonstrate that 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 reports accurate information, thus establishing the truthfulness of Christianity. To substantiate this position, I will investigate six specific claims from the text and show that good reasons exist for believing each claim. The six claims are as follows: (1) Paul recites earlier Christian tradition in this text; (2) Christ died; (3) he was buried and raised; (4) he appeared to several eyewitnesses after his resurrection; (5) his death and resurrection were foreshadowed in the Old Testament; and (6) Christ’s death was a penal substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. I will consider each of these six claims in turn.

Paul Recites Earlier Christian Tradition

Critics of Christianity argue that we cannot trust the Gospel accounts since they were written four to six decades after the events they record. According to their argument, as stories about Jesus circulated the Roman Empire, they gradually shifted and changed as they passed from one individual to the next—much like the children’s game of telephone. Therefore, by the time someone wrote them down, they had accumulated so much dubious material that one is hard-pressed to know which parts are true and which are legendary.⁴ While the critics’ case is overstated, Christians can still get much closer to the events of Jesus than four to six decades, providing further evidence that the gospel message is not the result of legendary embellishments.

Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 223.

⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), 1–3.

Consider 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. Paul wrote this letter around the year AD 55, a mere twenty-five years after Jesus’s death.⁵ Moreover, in verse 1, Paul tells his readers, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received.” He then goes on to declare that gospel in verses 3–8, indicating that he had previously proclaimed the contents of this crucial text to the church. Most likely, this encounter occurred around AD 51, as reported in Acts 18.⁶ As marginal as this time gap is, we can get an even closer date to the life of Jesus. While Paul communicated 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 to the Corinthian church in AD 51, most scholars now acknowledge that the contents of this text express an early Christian creed that predates 1 Corinthians by a couple of decades.⁷ But how, exactly, did scholars reach this conclusion?

Formal Transmission

In 1 Corinthians 15:3, Paul writes, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.” This statement indicates that Paul handed down tradition he had previously received from others. For example, he uses the technical terms παραδίδωμι and παραλαμβάνω for the passing on and receiving of tradition, much like a runner passes a baton.⁸ These Greek words were used for formal transmission in both Hellenistic and Jewish schools and thus would have signaled to Paul’s audience that he was not the original source for what he was about to say.⁹ Elsewhere in the letter, Paul uses almost identical language in 11:23 when speaking on the Lord’s Supper. He notes,

⁵ Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 19.

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000), 29, Logos Bible Software.

⁷ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1188.

⁸ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 683.

⁹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 264.

“For I ‘received’ (παραλαμβάνω) from the Lord what I also ‘delivered’ (παραδίδωμι) to you.” Here, Paul indicates that he is passing along a tradition that dates back to Jesus himself, a tradition which closely resembles the Lukan version of the Lord’s Supper. “These two texts together make it clear,” argues Gordon Fee, “that this is technical vocabulary from Paul’s Jewish heritage for the transmission of religious instruction.”¹⁰

This conclusion is not wishful thinking on the Christian’s part either. Prominent skeptic Bart Ehrman observes, “The terminology of ‘received’ and ‘delivered,’ as often noted by scholars, is the kind of language commonly used in Jewish circles to refer to traditions that are handed on from one teacher to the next.”¹¹ For instance, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus uses the same technical language when describing the practice of the Pharisees. He reports that “the Pharisees have *delivered* to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers” (emphasis added).¹² If the Pharisees were known for passing along previous tradition from their forefathers, and Paul used to be a Pharisee (Phil 3:5), it makes sense that he would adopt the same language when passing along Christian tradition.

Credal Formula

Not only do the contents of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 predate Paul’s visit to Corinth in AD 51, but several features from the text suggest that the early church used this “pre-Pauline formula” for evangelistic and catechismal purposes.¹³

First, the text contains several non-Pauline traits.¹⁴ The phrase ὑπὲρ τῶν

¹⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 721.

¹¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 122.

¹² Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 13.293 (Whiston, 355).

¹³ Dale C. Allison Jr., *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 234.

¹⁴ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 224–25.

ἁμαρτιῶν (“for our sins”) only appears one other time in Paul (Gal 1:4). Everywhere else, Paul prefers to use the singular for “sin.” The phrase κατὰ τὰς γραφάς (“according to the Scriptures”) is utterly unique to Paul. Elsewhere, he prefers the phrase γέγραπται (“it is written”). Similarly, τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ (“on the third day”) is only mentioned here in Paul. The term ὤφθη (“appeared to”) is found nowhere else in Paul with one exception. Finally, τοῖς δώδεκα (“the twelve”) and πεντακοσίοις (“the five hundred”) are also only found in this text. The fact that so much language in this text is foreign to Paul’s other writings suggests that it did not originate with him.

Second, the text exists in a stylized parallel form, most likely for memorization and recitation purposes. As Fee observes, “The four lines are in two nearly perfect sets of semitic parallels.”¹⁵ The first and third lines, for example, each start with a verb, then a modifying phrase followed by “according to the Scriptures,” and then introduce another sentence beginning with the word ὅτι. The poetic-like structure would have served as a mnemonic device for the otherwise illiterate church.

While most scholars recognize that 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 contains creedal content that predates Paul, they still recognize that Paul amended it slightly in its present form. For example, N. T. Wright suggests, “It is quite possible that the whole passage was common tradition, with the final word being ‘to Paul’ instead of ‘to me,’ and that Paul has added phrases like ‘most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.’”¹⁶ Others believe that the original creed did not mention Paul at all. Either way, scholars recognize that Paul modified this early creed with the parenthetical remark about the five hundred eyewitnesses and the reference to himself.

¹⁵ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 723.

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 319.

The Creed's Origins

When and where did Paul receive this creed? Fortunately, Paul provides a brief biographical sketch in Galatians that may shed light on this issue. After describing his former way of life in Judaism and his subsequent conversion, Paul indicates that he did not immediately go up to Jerusalem to visit with the apostles. Rather, he went into Arabia for three years. Then he writes, “After three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit (ἱστορήσαι) Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother” (Gal 1:18–19). Of note is the word ἱστορήσαι (“to visit”), from which we derive the English word “history.”¹⁷ According to Licona, “The term may mean ‘to get information from,’ ‘to inquire into a thing, to learn by inquiry.’”¹⁸ In other words, Paul’s visit with Peter was not, as C. H. Dodd famously quipped, a time when they spent “all their time talking about the weather.”¹⁹ On the contrary, F. F. Bruce contends, “If ἱστορήσαι is used here with its classical force, it means that Paul went up to Jerusalem to interview Cephas.”²⁰ We can presume, then, that Paul took advantage of this two-week stint with Peter and James to learn as much as he could about their experiences with Jesus. This visit is also the most likely time when Paul would have received the creed. After all, the creed mentions both Peter and James as key eyewitnesses.

Moreover, the lack of specificity with respect to some of the eyewitnesses (the twelve and the five hundred) indicates that this creed is “ingroup community tradition,”²¹ meaning, the creed must have originated in a setting where everyone knew what those

¹⁷ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 230.

¹⁸ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 230.

¹⁹ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967), 26.

²⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 98, Logos Bible Software.

²¹ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 169.

two groups meant. As mentioned earlier, Paul never uses the term “the twelve” to refer to the apostles, nor “the five hundred.” This silence suggests that those terms were common parlance among local Jewish communities but not among the Gentiles.

If Paul converted to Christianity about three years after Jesus’s death as scholars believe, that puts him back in Jerusalem six years after Jesus’s death (about AD 36).²² Because the creed already existed prior to Paul’s arrival, the creed must date even earlier than that. Wright argues, “It was probably formulated within the first two or three years after Easter itself, since it was already in formulaic form when Paul ‘received’ it. We are here in touch with the earliest Christian tradition, with something that was being said two decades or more before Paul wrote this letter.”²³

In sum, the Jerusalem church proclaimed the core tenets of the gospel in credal form as early as two years after Jesus’s death. This early date rules out the objection that Jesus’s resurrection was the result of legendary embellishments. Christians were proclaiming this message at a time when the events were still fresh in everyone’s minds. Furthermore, they proclaimed these details in Jerusalem, the very place where people could investigate the claims for themselves. Allison concludes, therefore, that “First Corinthians 15:3–8 is not folklore.”²⁴

Christ Died

The first key component of the creed is Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν (“Christ died”). Of course, Jesus’s death is of utmost importance for the Christian gospel. For if he did not die, how could God forgive sinners? Yet, do we have good historical reasons for believing in Christ’s death? It just so happens that we do.

²² Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 109.

²³ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 319.

²⁴ Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 234.

Evidence for Jesus's Death

The creed does not specify how Christ died. Elsewhere, however, Paul specifically reports that Jesus died by crucifixion (Rom 6:6; 1 Cor 2:2; Gal 3:13; Phil 2:8), as do the four Gospels. Additionally, this belief carried on into the early church, for the Apostle's Creed states that Christ "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried."²⁵

In addition to Christian sources, several non-Christian sources also testify to Jesus's crucifixion. For example, Josephus notes, "And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned [Jesus] to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him."²⁶ While some question the authenticity of some portions of the *Testimonium Flavianum*, this section goes virtually unquestioned. Elsewhere, when commenting on Nero's cruelty towards Christians, the Roman historian Tacitus reports, "Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus."²⁷ Writing around the year AD 112, Tacitus affirms Jesus's death at the hands of Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor of Rome.

While these sources confirm the historicity of Jesus's crucifixion, further confirmation comes when we consider that Christians never would have invented it. While this notion may not be understood by those living today, the idea of a crucifixion was utterly repulsive to anyone living in the first century. This repulsion explains why Paul declares, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23). The cross was a deterrent for many who might have otherwise considered Christianity. Moreover, Jesus's crucifixion defied any messianic expectations

²⁵ Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus?* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1984), 100.

²⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.3.3 (Whiston, 480).

²⁷ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.2 (Jackson, LCL).

in the first century when most were expecting a conquering king. As Wright observes, “Anybody who knew anything about messiahs knew that a messiah who had been crucified by pagans was a failed messiah, a sham.”²⁸

Nobody celebrated crucified figures. They found them repugnant. After all, crucifixion was the most shameful form of death reserved only for the most detestable members of society—the insurrectionists, murderers, and rapists.²⁹ Cicero once remarked, “The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears.”³⁰ As a result, worshipping a crucified person exposed Christians to all sorts of mockery. For example, the *Alexamenos Graffito*, one of the earliest pieces of artwork depicting Christian worship, reveals a crucified figure with an ass’s head. The caption reads “Alexamenos worships God” and is undoubtedly an anti-Christian parody.³¹ Justin Martyr also deals with this objection when he remarks, “They proclaim our madness to consist in this, that we give to a crucified man a place second to the unchangeable and eternal God.”³² The work of the cross really is folly to the unbelieving world (1 Cor 1:18). The idea that Christians heralded a crucified messiah as the object of their worship would have been perceived as both an “offense and foolish” to outsiders,³³ lending credence to its authenticity. Even the highly critical scholar John Dominic Crossan remarks, “That Jesus was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be.”³⁴

²⁸ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 244.

²⁹ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 62, Logos Bible Software.

³⁰ Cicero, *Rab. Perd.* 5.16 (Hodge, LCL).

³¹ Timothy Paul Jones, *Conspiracies and the Cross: How to Intelligently Counter the Ten Most Popular Theories That Attack the Gospel of Jesus* (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2008), 176.

³² Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 13 (ANF, 1:167).

³³ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 10.

³⁴ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperCollins,

Could Jesus Have Survived?

While scholars are unanimous on Jesus's crucifixion, some attempt to explain Jesus's later resurrection appearances by appealing to the Swoon Theory—the theory that Jesus was taken down from the cross prematurely before his death. Then, after lying in the tomb unconscious for a time, he later regained consciousness and presented himself alive to his followers. This scenario, however, does not pass muster.

For starters, crucifixion victims endured far more torture than is often realized. While our historical sources tell us that Jesus died by crucifixion, the Gospels report that Jesus was flogged beforehand—a common precursor to crucifixion in the ancient world.³⁵ While the descriptions of the flogging are short, the actual event was anything but. When speaking about those who had been flogged, the epistle describing the martyrdom of Polycarp reports that “they were so torn with scourges, that the frame of their bodies, even to the very inward veins and arteries, was laid open.”³⁶ This graphic description seems to suggest that something more brutal than a typical whipping was involved. Craig Evans explains that this barbarous activity involved leather whips “to which were attached sharp, abrasive items, such as nails, glass, or rocks. [Flogging] resulted in severe laceration of the skin and damage to the flesh beneath.”³⁷ In short, flogging was a drawn-out process of intense whipping that was meant to bring the victim to the brink of death.³⁸ No wonder, then, that the Gospels report that Jesus collapsed under the weight of his cross.

Once at the crucifixion site, the Roman soldiers most likely would have laid

1991), 145.

³⁵ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.306 (Whiston, 617).

³⁶ *The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna: Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp* 2.4 (ANF, 1:39).

³⁷ Craig A. Evans and N. T. Wright, *Jesus, The Final Days: What Really Happened*, ed. Troy A. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 30.

³⁸ Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 100.

Jesus on his back, stretched out his arms, and nailed his wrists to the crossbeam using five-inch iron spikes.³⁹ They would have then hoisted him up, fastened the crossbeam to a vertical beam already staked in the ground, and contorted his lower body sideways so they could drive a spike through both of his heels. The spikes would have crushed Jesus's nerves, sending excruciating pain through each of his limbs and giving him a similar sensation to having his "funny bone" crushed with a set of pliers.⁴⁰

The excruciating pain aside, physicians maintain that asphyxiation was the most likely cause of death.⁴¹ The way victims were fastened to the cross and the natural weight of their bodies would have left them in a perpetual inhale position. For a victim to exhale, he would have to push up on his nail-pierced feet so that he could relax his chest muscles enough to exhale, and then he would drop back down to inhale. Observers would see him push himself up and relax back down repeatedly for hours on end. If he ever stopped pushing himself up, he would suffocate to death.

Roman soldiers participated in this grueling process hundreds of times over. They were trained killers. The idea that they removed Jesus from the cross before he died is completely unfounded. The Gospel of John reports that because the Jewish leaders did not want crucified victims still hanging on crosses during the Sabbath the next day, they asked Pilate to have the victims' legs broken to prevent them from pushing up for breath any longer (John 19:31). When they came to Jesus, however, John reports that he was already dead. Instead of breaking his legs, a soldier pierced Jesus's side with a spear (John 19:34).

In the entire corpus of ancient history, we know of only one person who ever came down from a cross alive. Josephus reports that when he saw three of his friends

³⁹ Craig Evans, *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 123.

⁴⁰ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 100–101.

⁴¹ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 101.

being crucified, he pleaded with his friend, the Roman commander Titus, to take them down and provide them with the best medical assistance Rome had to offer. Two of the three still died.⁴² No evidence suggests, however, that Jesus was taken down prematurely. Moreover, we have no record stating that he received any medical treatment.⁴³

Even if Jesus survived this brutality, the German scholar D. F. Strauss, who was not a Christian, argues that the Swoon Theory is too far-fetched. He writes,

A person who had crept half-dead from the tomb, crawled about ill, wanting medical assistance, bandages, strengthening and indulgence, and who at last, nevertheless, succumbed to his sufferings, could not possibly make upon the disciples the impression of a conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, which lay at the foundation of their subsequent ministry.⁴⁴

Meaning, if a half-dead Jesus had somehow managed to unwrap himself from his bandages, remove the four-hundred-pound stone from the tomb's entrance,⁴⁵ overcome the Roman guards, walk several miles on nail-pierced feet, and present himself to his disciples all bloody and tattered, they would have been calling for a doctor, not proclaiming him the Lord of life. Jesus's death, therefore, is indisputable.

He Was Buried and Raised

Following the statement about Christ's death, the creed continues by stating that ἐτάφη ("he was buried"), and that ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ ("he was raised on the third day"). Critics, however, have raised objections to both of these claims.

Perhaps the most common objection to Jesus's burial in a tomb is the one put forth by John Dominic Crossan. Since Jesus died by crucifixion, Crossan argues that Jesus never would have received a proper burial. Rather, he argues that the soldiers most

⁴² Josephus, *Vita* 421 (Whiston, 25).

⁴³ Even if Jesus would have been removed prematurely from the cross, nobody would have confused that with a resurrection as is evidenced by Josephus's friend.

⁴⁴ David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (London: Temple, 1835), 225.

⁴⁵ Evans, *Jesus and His World*, 138.

likely would have left Jesus's body on the cross for several days so that birds and dogs could feast on his flesh. The Romans would have then removed his body and tossed it into a common criminal's grave.⁴⁶ Crossan's theory, if proven correct, would refute both statements from verse 4—namely that Christ was buried and rose again. Crossan's theory, however, should be rejected for a few reasons.

He Was Buried

First, ancient Jewish and Roman customs allowed for proper burial of crucified victims. In fact, going back to Old Testament times, the Jews gave highest priority to burying their dead. Consider that Jacob's sons returned him to Canaan after his death so he could be buried in the promised land (Gen 50:4–14) or that the Israelites exhumed Joseph's body at the time of the Exodus so they could bury his bones with his fathers (Josh 24:32). The ancient Jewish philosopher Philo highlights the importance of proper burial when commenting on Jacob's lament over his son Joseph. He envisions Jacob lamenting, "Child, it is not your death which grieves me, but the manner of it. If you had been buried in your own land, I should have comforted and watched and nursed your sick-bed, exchanged the last farewells as you died, closed your eyes, wept over the body as it lay there, given it a costly funeral and left none of the customary rites undone."⁴⁷ In other words, Jacob's anguish was not so much over the fact that Joseph was dead but that he failed to give him a proper burial.

Perhaps the most significant Old Testament text that addresses Jesus's situation is Deuteronomy 21:22–23. It reads, "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by

⁴⁶ John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1996), 169, 188.

⁴⁷ Philo of Alexandria, *Joseph* 5.23 (Colson, LCL).

God.” Jewish law, therefore, prescribed that Jesus’s body be removed from the cross and buried the same day. Evidence suggests that they scrupulously followed this law. “Jews used to take so much care of the burial of men,” writes Josephus, “that they took down those that were condemned and crucified and buried them before the going down of the sun.”⁴⁸ Josephus’s comments suggest that even though Romans carried out the crucifixions, they still allowed the Jews to honor their burial customs. In fact, elsewhere Josephus remarks that the Romans “do not compel those that are subject to them to transgress the laws of their countries.”⁴⁹ In short, both Jewish and Roman customs would have allowed for Jesus to receive a proper burial.

Second, archaeological findings also support Jesus’s burial in a tomb. In 1968, archaeologists uncovered an ossuary (a bone box) of a crucifixion victim named Yehohanan, just outside of Jerusalem. They dated the ossuary to the late 20s, when Pilate was governing Judea.⁵⁰ Yehohanan was clearly a crucifixion victim because a five-inch iron spike with wood fragments was still attached to his heel bone. This discovery demonstrates that other crucified victims also received proper burials; thus, Jesus’s burial is not without precedent. Per Jewish customs, people buried their dead in tombs and then returned a year later to gather up the bones and place them in a small box that occupied less space.⁵¹ Certainly, most crucifixion victims from ancient Jerusalem did not receive a proper burial. This fact, however, does not count as evidence against Jesus’s burial since most of the crucifixions occurred during the Jewish rebellion when the Romans were not eager to accommodate the Jews. During peaceful times, however, the Romans were generally accommodating as demonstrated above. Crossan even admits that “a crucified

⁴⁸ Josephus, *J.W.* 4.5.2 (Whiston, 679).

⁴⁹ Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.6 (Whiston, 798).

⁵⁰ Evans, *Jesus and His World*, 122–23.

⁵¹ Evans, *Jesus and His World*, 113.

person could receive honorable burial in the family tomb in the early or middle first-century Jewish homeland.”⁵²

Third, Joseph of Arimathea is an unlikely invention. If the burial story is legendary, as Crossan believes, why would the Christians give credit to a prominent member of society that everyone knew and not to one of the disciples? As William Lane Craig rightly points out, “It is unlikely that early Christian believers would invent an individual, give him a name and nearby town of origin, and place that fictional character on the historical council of the Sanhedrin, whose members were well known.”⁵³ In other words, if Jesus’s burial was a sham, it makes no sense to attribute his burial to someone who could easily refute the story. Moreover, if Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus’s body, that explains Jesus’s burial in a tomb—something only the aristocracy could afford.

Finally, of all the sources that report Jesus’s burial, not one of them suggests that Jesus remained on the cross for several days only to be tossed in a criminal’s grave. Each of the four Gospels unanimously affirms that Jesus was buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb. Wright bluntly states that Crossan’s view is not “based on any evidence whatsoever.”⁵⁴

He Was Raised

What does the creed mean when it says Christ “was raised”? All of the evidence suggests that Jesus left the tomb in bodily resurrection. Some critics, however, argue that since the creed does not mention the empty tomb, the resurrection must have been merely spiritual, and Jesus’s physical body remained in the tomb. This view should be rejected for several reasons.

⁵² Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 168.

⁵³ William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 53.

⁵⁴ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 20.

First, as Wright demonstrates, the ancient world unanimously used the words “resurrection” and “raised” and all related terms to refer to physical resurrection. He argues, “When the ancient classical world spoke of (and denied) resurrection, there should be no controversy about what the word and its cognates referred to: it was a coming back again into something like the same sort of life that humans presently experience.”⁵⁵ Thus, despite not referencing the empty tomb explicitly, the creed implies the empty tomb by stating that Christ “was raised.” Richard Hays suggests that “the absence of any mention of the empty tomb tradition . . . does not mean that Paul or any other early Christian could have conceived of a ‘resurrection from the dead’ in which the body remained in the tomb.”⁵⁶ In fact, including the empty tomb in the creed would have been redundant. Using this same logic, Wright suggests that “one would need to amplify the statement ‘I walked down the street’ with the qualification ‘on my feet.’”⁵⁷

Second, if the early church invented the empty tomb, they never would have credited women as its key eyewitnesses—something this creed conspicuously fails to mention. After all, Bauckham argues that men from the ancient world perceived women as “gullible in religious matters and especially prone to superstitious fantasy and excessive in religious practices.”⁵⁸ One does not need to look far in Jewish literature to see this misogynistic attitude. For example, Jewish tradition states, “Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women” (Sotah 19a). Elsewhere it declares, “Any evidence which a woman [gives] is not valid (to offer), . . . This is equivalent to saying that one who is Rabbinically accounted a robber is qualified to give the same evidence as

⁵⁵ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 33.

⁵⁶ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 256.

⁵⁷ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 321.

⁵⁸ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 270–71.

a woman” (Rosh Hashanah 1.8). To put it another way, a convicted criminal was just as credible as any woman in a court of law. With this understanding, one would be hard-pressed to know why the early church would fabricate details about the women eyewitnesses knowing that it would hinder their case. Certainly, if they invented the empty tomb, they would have listed the male disciples as the eyewitnesses.

Third, Christianity could not have gotten off the ground in Jerusalem if Jesus’s body had remained in the tomb. Some critics suggest that the women were confused, went to the wrong tomb, saw it was empty, and thus started the rumor that Jesus was raised from the dead. The Gospels, however, report that the women paid careful attention to where Jesus was buried (Mark 15:47; 16:1–4). If the women were confused, though, how plausible is it to think that nobody thought to check the actual tomb afterward and set everyone straight? Craig argues that “the disciples’ opponents would have exposed the whole affair as a sham by displaying the body of Jesus, perhaps even parading it through the streets of Jerusalem, thus bringing the Christian heresy to a sudden and grisly end.”⁵⁹ He goes on to argue, “Even if the burial story were totally false, and Jesus were buried in the criminal’s graveyard, it would not have been difficult for Jewish authorities to locate a freshly dug grave, even after several weeks, and, if necessary, exhume the body.”⁶⁰

Fourth, the earliest propaganda against the resurrection assumed an empty tomb. Matthew 28:12–13 reports that the chief priests paid the guards to tell everyone that the disciples stole the body. In the second century, Justin Martyr asserts that the Jews were still circulating the same rumor in his day.⁶¹ These reports from Christianity’s opponents, however, assume that Jesus’s body was no longer resting in the tomb. This enemy attestation lends further credence to the empty tomb narrative. One expects friends

⁵⁹ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 46.

⁶⁰ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 82.

⁶¹ Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 108 (*ANF*, 1:253).

and families to provide details in support of a movement, but when enemies do it, those details are most likely true.

Finally, the empty tomb narrative lacks embellishment. The Gospels never record the actual resurrection event. They record the empty tomb and later post-mortem appearances, but they never show Jesus regaining life and bursting out of the tomb. Compare this reserved account with the pseudepigraphal Gospel of Peter, which has a giant Jesus coming out of the tomb with a talking cross behind him (8:35–42). Even Rudolf Bultmann asserts that “Mark’s presentation is extremely reserved, insofar as the resurrection and the appearance of the risen Lord are not recounted.”⁶²

Upon further investigation, Crossan’s view has serious shortcomings. The evidence suggests that Jesus received a proper burial and rose bodily from the tomb.

He Appeared

The creed states that after Jesus was raised, ὡφθη (“he appeared”) to several people at different times and places. Furthermore, based on the repeated use of the words εἶτα and ἔπειτα (“then”), it appears that the creed describes these appearances chronologically.⁶³ As with the previous sections, skeptics take issue with this claim and propose alternative theories, the two most popular being that the disciples either experienced hallucinations or stole the body. To combat these claims, this section will provide textual support for the resurrection appearances, report the subsequent transformation of the apostles, and refute the two key objections.

Textual Support for the Appearances

The appearances begin with “Cephas,” the Aramaic name for Peter. This

⁶² Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 2nd ed., trans. John Marsh (London: Macmillan, 1966), 309.

⁶³ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 320.

appearance may be alluded to in Mark 16:7 but is more specifically reported in Luke 24:34: “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”

Then he appeared “to the twelve.” This appearance is reported in Luke 24:36–49 and describes Jesus eating a piece of fish with his disciples. Additionally, John 20:19–29 notes two appearances to Jesus’s disciples. The first appearance has Jesus showing his nail-scarred hands and feet to all the disciples while Thomas was absent. The second appearance, with Thomas present, reports that Jesus tells Thomas to touch his wounds so that he will believe.

Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that Jesus appeared “to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.” Paul’s aside about those who were still living served a significant purpose. Dodd suggests that “there can hardly be any purpose in mentioning the fact that most of the five hundred are still alive, unless Paul is saying, in effect, ‘the witnesses are there to be questioned.’”⁶⁴ Much dispute, however, surrounds this group appearance because none of our extant sources explicitly report this event. Some erroneously attribute this appearance to Pentecost, but this “suggestion does as much violence to Luke’s account of Pentecost as it does Paul’s account of a resurrection appearance which he expressly distinguishes from other types of Christian experience.”⁶⁵ That is to say, Luke never describes Pentecost as a bonafide resurrection appearance, but as an experience of the Holy Spirit. Two possible candidates for this mass appearance are Matthew 28:16–20 and Acts 1:6–11. In both cases, Jesus appears to his followers outside in the open air, but neither text explicitly mentions five hundred observers. As argued previously, this mass appearance

⁶⁴ C. H. Dodd, “The Appearances of the Risen Christ: A Study in the Form Criticism of the Gospels,” in *More New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 128.

⁶⁵ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 324–25.

must have been well-known to the early Jerusalem church, thus explaining why the creed does not mention other explicit details.⁶⁶

Jesus then appeared “to James.” Similar to the five hundred, none of the other biblical documents report this appearance. Only the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* reports Jesus’s resurrection appearance to James, though scholars generally doubt its reliability.⁶⁷

After James, Jesus appeared to “all the apostles.” Because the creed already describes Jesus’s appearance to “the twelve,” the apostles must be a broader category. The appearance to all the apostles may be found in Matthew 28:16–20, Luke 24:33–53, or Acts 1:6–11.

Then “last of all,” Paul writes, “as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (1 Cor 15:8). Luke reports these appearances in Acts 9, 22, and 26, as does Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:1. While Wright argues that Paul’s self-description as “one untimely born” refers to the suddenness of his apostolic calling versus the others who had the chance to follow Jesus for three years,⁶⁸ Paul most likely means to suggest what he further clarifies in the following verse, namely, that he was “the least of the apostles” based on his previous persecution of the church (1 Cor 15:9).

Transformation of the Apostles

Due to space limitations, this section will focus specifically on the three individuals found within the creed: Peter, James the brother of Jesus, and Paul.

While Peter was one of the original twelve, the Gospels report that he cowardly denied Jesus three times during Jesus’s trial (Matt 26:74–75). Also, Peter is

⁶⁶ Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 657.

⁶⁷ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15–16.

⁶⁸ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 327.

conspicuously missing during Jesus's crucifixion; presumably he is in hiding. Only John and the women were present to watch Jesus die. But then, suddenly Peter is boldly proclaiming in public that "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). Following his preaching in Acts 4, the text reports that the people saw "the boldness of Peter" and were "astonished" (Acts 4:13). And though Peter and John were threatened by the Jewish leaders not to preach Jesus anymore, they responded, "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). History notes that Peter continued preaching the gospel throughout the Roman world until the time of his gruesome death. While Jesus predicts the kind of death Peter would eventually die when he says, "You will stretch out your hands" (John 21:18–19), other church fathers provide more details. Writing around the year AD 95, Clement of Rome affirms, "Through envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars have been persecuted and put to death. Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles. Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labours; and when he had suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him."⁶⁹ Writing near the end of the second century, Tertullian also affirms Peter's martyrdom but provides further information. He writes, "We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross."⁷⁰ Peter's death by crucifixion is part of the historical records.

James also underwent a radical transformation following the death of his brother Jesus. Mark reports that during Jesus's ministry, his brothers believed that he was "out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). John explicitly states that "not even his brothers believed in him" (John 7:5). Subsequently, however, Acts identifies James as a leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:12–21; Gal 1:19). Furthermore, history reports that James

⁶⁹ Clement of Rome, *1 Ep. Cor.* 5.11–13 (*ANF*, 1:6).

⁷⁰ Tertullian of Carthage, *Scorp.* 15 (*ANF*, 3:648).

suffered martyrdom for his faith. Josephus reports that the Jewish authorities “brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.”⁷¹ Quoting early church historian Hegesippus, Eusebius also reports that the Jewish leaders placed James on the pinnacle of the temple so that he would publicly recant his beliefs. When he would not recant, they “threw down the just man, and said to each other, ‘Let us stone James the Just.’ And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; . . . And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom.”⁷²

Similar to Peter and James, Paul’s life took a radical turn as well. By his own admission, Paul formerly persecuted the church (1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13; Phil 3:6); the book of Acts corroborates these claims (Acts 8:1–3; 9:1–2). In a stunning turn of events, Acts reports that Paul converted to Christianity and immediately started preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:20–22). Moreover, Paul claimed to have received apostolic status by nature of his commission from the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 9:1; Gal 1:1). As a result of his radical transformation, Paul notes that he endured beatings, stoning, and imprisonment (Acts 16:16–40; 2 Cor 11:25). Eventually, he paid the ultimate price of martyrdom. Clement remarks that “Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance . . . and suffered martyrdom under the prefects.”⁷³ Tertullian adds “that Paul is beheaded has been written in their own blood.”⁷⁴ Early records agree that Paul was beheaded on the Ostian

⁷¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 20.9.1 (Whiston, 537).

⁷² Eusebius Pamphilus, *Hist. eccl.* 1.23.16 (*NPNF*², 1:126).

⁷³ Clement, *I Ep. Cor.* 5.13 (*ANF*, 1:6).

⁷⁴ Tertullian, *Scorp.* 15 (*ANF*, 3:648).

Road, a road leading southwest from the city of Rome towards the seaport.⁷⁵ Fourth-century church historian Eusebius even remarks that the “account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day.”⁷⁶

Answering Objections

Skeptics are quick to raise objections to these so-called resurrection appearances. One objection is that the disciples stole the body and lied about it. This objection, however, contains at least two fatal flaws. First, the empty tomb by itself did not convince anyone other than John that Jesus had risen from the dead. Paul had certainly heard the circulated rumors about the disciples’ theft and yet remained unconvinced about Jesus’s resurrection. The same could be said for James. Neither of these men would have jumped ship to Christianity away from Judaism over an unoccupied tomb. They required more substantial evidence than that. Second, the disciples never would have endured persecution for a story they fabricated. Charles Colson, accomplice to the Watergate scandal of the Nixon administration, declared,

I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because [twelve] men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for [forty] years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren’t true. Watergate embroiled twelve of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn’t keep a lie for three weeks. You’re telling me [twelve] apostles could keep a lie for [forty] years? Absolutely impossible.⁷⁷

One would think that at least one of the disciples would have admitted to the hoax to avoid crucifixion, stoning, or beheading, yet we have no indication that any of

⁷⁵ Bryan Liftin, *After Acts: Exploring the Lives and Legends of the Apostles* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 178.

⁷⁶ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.25.5 (NPNF², 1:129).

⁷⁷ Martyr Angelo, “How Chuck Colson’s Legacy of Hope Lives On,” Prison Fellowship, accessed March 18, 2021, https://www.prisonfellowship.org/2018/04/chuck-colsons-legacy-hope-lives/?mwm_id=295741440399&sc=WB1710B10&sc=WB1710B10&gclid=CjwKCAjw9MuCBhBUEiwAbDZ-7uNXXzn2Yo1nb-CL47zrLtVO5zipE3LuC1wtH659K-9phs8dk8_yHXBoCt-wQAvD_BwE.

them ever recanted. The apostles' willingness to suffer rules out the theory that they made up the story. In short, liars make bad martyrs.

Another objection to the so-called resurrection appearances is that the disciples must have hallucinated. Based on the aforementioned evidence that the disciples willingly suffered for their belief in the resurrection, many critics suggest that the disciples merely *thought* they saw Jesus. This objection fails on multiple fronts as well. First, hallucinations, like dreams, are private experiences.⁷⁸ The notion that all the disciples, women, and other eyewitnesses all shared in the same group hallucination, even sharing meals with Jesus at different places and times, is absurd. Allison asks it this way, "One person can hallucinate, but twelve at the same time? And dozens over an extended period of time?"⁷⁹ Second, hallucinations cannot account for the empty tomb. Third, hallucinations cannot explain Paul's resurrection experience. After all, he was not in the grieving frame of mind by which to hallucinate.

In the end, the disciples claimed that Jesus appeared to them alive after his death. These appearances led to their sudden transformation, which ultimately resulted in persecution. Neither the disciples' alleged deceit nor their hallucinations can adequately explain these historical facts. As E. P. Sanders has said, "That Jesus' followers (and later Paul) had resurrection experiences is, in my judgment, a fact."⁸⁰

According to the Scriptures

Both Jesus's death and his resurrection are said to be *κατὰ τὰς γραφάς* ("according to the Scriptures"). This reference, almost assuredly, cannot be limited to one specific text.⁸¹ Most likely, the entire corpus of the Jewish Scriptures is in view given that

⁷⁸ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 106.

⁷⁹ Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 269.

⁸⁰ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993), 11.

⁸¹ Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 654.

“Scriptures” in the plural always refers to more than one specific text (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). In defense of this view, Wright observes, “Paul is not proof-texting; he does not envisage one or two, or even half a dozen, isolated passages about a death for sinners. He is referring to the entire biblical narrative as the story which has reached its climax in the Messiah.”⁸² One would be mistaken, therefore, to isolate a few texts while ignoring the broader Old Testament storyline.

How, then, should one go about finding Jesus’s death and resurrection in the Old Testament if Paul does not have a single text or two in mind? This chapter will attempt to locate Jesus’s death and resurrection in the Jewish Scriptures by taking a typological approach; it will explore the recurring patterns of exile and exodus that correspond to and escalate in the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁸³ In other words, both exile and exodus serve as types to their corresponding antitypes of death and resurrection. By taking this typological approach, this chapter will examine the broader storyline of the Old Testament and do justice to the inclusive term “Scriptures.”

Biblical scholar Michael Morales contends, “Crucial for understanding the theology of the Bible, the expulsion from the Garden of Eden means that the restoration of humanity must be in the form of an exodus back to God, a deliverance out of exile.”⁸⁴ For Morales, the themes of exile and exodus form the warp and woof of the Scriptures.

In the beginning, God created people to live in relation to him and to experience fullness of life in an Edenic sanctuary.⁸⁵ Moreover, the first pair was given the task to expand the borders of this garden sanctuary so that descendant priest-kings would

⁸² Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 320.

⁸³ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology: Understanding the Bible’s Promise-Shaped Patterns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 19.

⁸⁴ L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 8.

⁸⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 81.

cover the whole earth as the waters cover the sea (Gen 1:28).⁸⁶ Fellowship with God in this sin-free environment was the good life in the truest sense of the word. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve rejected God's good design and were banished from the garden in what can only be referred to as an exile, precipitating their spiritual death. Morales notes, "The path of exile through Eden's gates was, therefore, a path from life to death, from light to darkness, . . . from a life of friendship with God to alienation."⁸⁷ While this exile resulted in a spiritual death, God did not leave them without hope. As Stephen Dempster writes, "The exile of the couple, who have lost their royal status and dominion, represents in a graphic way their death and fall; but there is a genealogical hope, . . . the so-called *Protoevangelium* (Gen 3:15)."⁸⁸ In other words, God promised them a future exodus.

After their banishment from the garden, the human race continued to move further east from Eden, distancing itself from its maker. God judged the human race in the flood but saved Noah and his family through the waters, prefiguring Israel's future exodus out of Egypt. Despite submerging most of the human race in the deluge, humanity continued to "deny the exile and to reclaim the good life through science, technology, and art,"⁸⁹ culminating at the Tower of Babel. Sadly, humanity was so corrupt they failed to see that they were in exile and in need of a resurrection.⁹⁰ But God had a plan to deliver the exiled community.

Morales argues that "in calling Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees, . . . along with his wife Sarai," God was bringing them "out of exile and initiating a relationship

⁸⁶ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 114.

⁸⁷ Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 9.

⁸⁸ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 68.

⁸⁹ Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 13.

⁹⁰ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 76.

that would serve as the kernel for all humanity's new life with God."⁹¹ Abraham's life prefigures Israel's future exodus. For instance, God plagued Pharaoh, who had taken Abraham's wife and then allowed Abraham to leave Egypt with great possessions (Gen 12). Additionally, God's covenantal ceremony with Abraham in Genesis 15 foreshadows Israel's exodus through the Red Sea when God passed through the parts in the form of a pillar of fire (Gen 15:17).⁹² Even when God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, we discover that "Abraham's faith . . . had matured into the awareness that the God of the exodus, the Maker who delivers out of the death of exile, is ultimately the God of resurrection."⁹³

While God promised future deliverance, Abraham's descendants would first experience bondage for four hundred years. Only then would God deliver his people out of exile using his servant Moses. In his birth, Moses experienced an exodus of his own as he passed through the waters of the Nile in a miniature ark only to be rescued by Pharaoh's daughter (Exod 2:1–10). Decades later, God called Moses to intercede for the exilic Israelites. Part of God's plan was to plague the Egyptians so that his power and glory would be known throughout Egypt and the world.⁹⁴ The tenth and final plague, the death of the firstborn along with the Passover lamb, revealed God's rescuing power from death by means of a blood sacrifice (Exod 12). Following this plague, God demonstrated his redemptive power even further as he delivered his people from death by taking them through the Red Sea. Israel's descent and then subsequent ascent out of Egypt, a land symbolizing death, portrays the death and resurrection of God's first-born son (Exod 4:22). Morales remarks, "For Israel the dry land emerges as they journey out of darkness,

⁹¹ Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 21.

⁹² Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 111.

⁹³ Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 34.

⁹⁴ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 239.

ascending out of the sea toward the rising sun. Through the waters Israel has died to death and has been reborn, resurrected as the people of Yahweh.”⁹⁵ More than any other event, the exodus was the paradigm by which biblical writers understood God’s redemption from exile.

As Israel awaited its promised land, God established the sacrificial system that symbolized death and resurrection. Even the ascending smoke from the burnt offerings represented a resurrection to God, foreshadowing Christ’s future bloodshed and subsequent ascension into heaven.⁹⁶ Of the cultic sacrifices, the Day of Atonement represents the clearest reversal of the exile as the high priest sent the scapegoat eastward further into exile, while he went westward, through the cherubim-embroidered curtain into holy of holies which can only represent God’s Edenic presence.⁹⁷ Pointing towards Christ, Gordon Wenham writes, “The first Good Friday was the definitive day of atonement when man’s sins were purged once and for all. Now every man who is in Christ has the right, once reserved only for the high priest, to enter into the presence of God.”⁹⁸ In other words, Christ endured exile so we could experience an exodus.

After infiltrating the land and establishing the monarchy, Israel built the temple in what is a clear reversal of Babel. While the tower builders wanted to make a name for themselves, Solomon declared, “I have built the house for the name of the LORD” (1 Kgs 8:20). Moreover, God’s temple was meant to usher not just Israel, but the “foreigner” from “a far country” into God’s presence from exile so “that they may know that this house that [Solomon] built is called by [Yahweh’s] name” (1 Kgs 8:41–43). God also chose to focus his exile-reversing plan on Israel’s king, namely the Davidic king. This

⁹⁵ Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 50.

⁹⁶ Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 95.

⁹⁷ Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 100.

⁹⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 237.

king is called God's son and "the highest of the kings of the earth" (Ps 89:27). It is this son who "shall build a house for [Yahweh's] name" (2 Sam 7:13). In other words, God will use the Davidic king to reverse the exile and lead a Gentile exodus so that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14).

While Israel experienced Yahweh's Edenic presence minimally through the tabernacle and temple, they were ultimately exiled back to the East due to their ongoing rebellion. Morales recaps, "The story of Israel, recounted in Genesis 12 through 2 Kings, closes much like the story of humanity recounted in Genesis 1–11, with God's own people scattered in exile."⁹⁹ Yet God promised another exodus. After God cut down Assyria, the region originally developed by the same person who helped build Babel (Nimrod), Isaiah 11:1 declares, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." Kaiser remarks that this shoot "will come forth from what appears to be a dead stump."¹⁰⁰ To put it another way, death will be followed by a resurrection. The term "branch" is used several times by the latter prophets to refer to the future Davidic king who would deliver them from exile (Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5–6; Zech 3:8). This deliverance from exile amounts to an exodus whereby this future Davidic king brings the people back into Yahweh's presence (Isa 49:5). Yet the story takes a twist when it becomes evident that the future exodus will come only after the "branch" endures an exile of his own—death.

Isaiah 53 details the suffering of this "tender shoot" (Isa 53:2 NASB)—more popularly known as the Suffering Servant. Scholars have long debated the identity of the servant from this text. While some suggest that the servant refers to the nation of Israel

⁹⁹ Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 113.

¹⁰⁰ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 164.

based on prior context (Isa 40–48), the best reading of chapter 53 indicates that the servant is an individual figure. Andrew Abernethy describes this transition well. He notes, “Because Israel is unable to fulfill its task as God’s servant to the nations (42:1–9) due to its own spiritual blindness (42:19), God will use an individual servant to achieve atonement for and effect spiritual change in Israel and all nations (49:1–13; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12).”¹⁰¹ The transition from the nation to an individual becomes clear in Isaiah 49:5–6, where the servant is said to “bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him . . . to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel.” The servant, in this case, cannot refer to Israel for then it would be performing an action upon itself.

Additional evidence also supports that the servant is an individual distinct from the nation itself. Isaiah 53:8 declares that the servant will be “cut off out of the land of the living.” If this prophecy referred to the nation, Israel would have ceased to exist altogether. Moreover, the song asserts the servant’s innocence when it declares, “Although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth” (Isa 53:9). By contrast, Kaiser makes it clear that “Israel is not depicted by the prophets as being an innocent sufferer; rather, the prophet Isaiah, for example, describes Israel as a ‘sinful nation, a people . . . given to corruption!’ (Isa 1:4).”¹⁰² Finally, Isaiah identifies himself with the nation in how he uses the pronouns “our” and “us” in contrast with the servant himself. He will be “pierced for our transgressions; . . . and crushed for our iniquities” (Isa 53:5). “Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter . . . [he will be] cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people” (Isa 53:7–8).

Make no mistake about it, this suffering servant will die for the sins of his

¹⁰¹ Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God’s Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 40 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 138.

¹⁰² Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Identity and Mission of the ‘Servant of the LORD,’” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 91.

people. Yet the text asserts that subsequent to his death, this “shoot” will “see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. . . . [He will have] a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, . . . and makes intercession for the transgressors” (Isa 53:10–12). To put it succinctly, “He will be resurrected by the LORD.”¹⁰³ After death, this holy one will not see corruption (Ps 16:10), and through his resurrection he will lead his people through a greater spiritual exodus (Isa 26:19; Ezek 37; Hos 6:2). In light of this ongoing pattern, Graeme Goldsworthy observes,

The latter part of the book of Isaiah refers frequently to God as the redeemer of Israel in the light of the impending release of God’s people from their captivity in Babylon. We shall see also the repetition of the idea of the exodus as the pattern of redemption. There is this first exodus from Egypt, a second involving the return of the captives from Babylon in the sixth century B.C. and then the true exodus in which Jesus takes his people out of the captivity of sin and death.¹⁰⁴

In sum, the Old Testament anticipates that one day a Davidic king would follow the pattern of exile and exodus by descending into death for his people, only to triumphantly rise from the dead.

For Our Sins

The statement that Christ died ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν (“for our sins”) makes more of a theological claim than a historical one. History tells us, for example, that thousands of people died by crucifixion in the ancient world. Yet only one is said to have died as our Savior. Why, then, should anyone believe that Jesus’s death achieved a cosmic transaction whereby he paid the just penalty for our sins and reconciled us to a holy God? Or to ask it another way, did Jesus die a penal substitutionary death? This section will support the

¹⁰³ Kaiser, *The Messiah of the Old Testament*, 181.

¹⁰⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 137.

claim that he did by offering historical corroboration, providing biblical support, and answering key objections.

Historical Corroboration

How can one demonstrate historically that Jesus's death was an atoning sacrifice? After all, atonement is a theological category not generally open to historical inquiry. That said, a few historical details lend credence to the notion that something supernatural transpired on the cross of Christ.

First, a couple Old Testament texts predicted several hundred years beforehand that Jesus would be "pierced." Isaiah 53:5 predicts that the suffering servant would be "pierced for our transgressions." Moreover, Yahweh declares in Zechariah 12:10 that "when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him." In both texts, a future restoration would come to the people of God only after a traumatic "piercing" event. These predictions are significant because the prescribed death penalties for the Jewish people at the time were either stoning or hanging (Lev 24:16; Deut 21:22–23). Crucifixions did not even exist when the prophets made their predictions. Yet the Gospels report that Jesus's hands and feet were both pierced to the cross, and a Roman soldier pierced Jesus's side with a spear (John 19:34). The fact that Old Testament texts were able to predict the kind of death Jesus would endure suggests supernatural involvement.

Second, the midday darkness and earthquake that accompanied Jesus's death suggest that something more than a mere crucifixion occurred (Matt 27:45, 51). While the critic might retort that the Gospel writers made up these details, we may have extra-biblical corroboration for this event in Julius Africanus. Though writing in the third

century, Africanus quotes Thallus's ancient history book on the Eastern Mediterranean, which dates to around AD 52.¹⁰⁵ The quote reads,

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.¹⁰⁶

Africanus sees Thallus's description as verification for the Gospel narratives. While Thallus rationalizes the darkness as an eclipse, he nonetheless reports that an earthquake and midday darkness occurred in Judea around the time of Jesus. While earthquakes and eclipses are not necessarily supernatural, the timing and location with respect to Jesus's death seem highly coincidental if they were just random events.

Third, Jesus's resurrection from the dead suggests that his death accomplished redemption. As mentioned earlier, thousands of people died by crucifixion in the ancient world. Yet only one is said to have come back from the dead. Wright asserts, "Without the resurrection, there is no reason to suppose that Jesus' crucifixion dealt with sins, or with sin. But, with the resurrection, the divine victory over sin(s), and hence over death, is assured."¹⁰⁷ When burnt sacrifices were offered in the Old Testament, we read that it resulted in "a pleasing aroma to the LORD" (Lev 1:9). That is, God found the sacrifices acceptable. In the same way, 1 Corinthians 15:4 notes that Jesus ἐγήγερατῆ ("was raised"), a passive verb, suggesting that God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead, and thus found Jesus's atoning sacrifice acceptable.

Biblical Support

Scripture uniformly teaches that Jesus died as a sin substitute in place of sinners. The meaning of the preposition ὑπὲρ certainly points in this direction. Murray

¹⁰⁵ Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 196.

¹⁰⁶ Julius Africanus, *Extant frag.* 18.1 (*ANF*, 6:136).

¹⁰⁷ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 320.

Harris notes, “The commonest meaning of this preposition (“on behalf of”) seems to have risen from the image of one person standing or bending *over* another in order to shield or protect him, or of a shield lifted *over* the head that suffers the blow instead of the person.”¹⁰⁸ Paul’s use of ὑπὲρ to signify substitution litters the New Testament landscape. Romans 5:8 declares, “While we were still sinners, Christ died for (ὑπὲρ) us.” Elsewhere, he writes that Christ “has died for (ὑπὲρ) all” and that he “gave himself as a ransom for (ὑπὲρ) all” (2 Cor 5:14; 2 Tim 2:6). Galatians 3:13 asserts that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for (ὑπὲρ) us.” This last text gets to the heart of the matter. Not only did Jesus die in our place, but he also became a curse for us. He bore our sin and absorbed the wrath of the Father that was otherwise directed toward our sin. The term “propitiation” describes this diversion. And lest one thinks that Paul is the only one to preach this doctrine, he reminds us just a few short verses after the creed that he preaches the same gospel as all the other apostles (1 Cor 15:11). Simon Gathercole remarks, “This Pauline gospel is not the proclamation of a maverick apostle who goes his own way, ignoring what the other apostles do.”¹⁰⁹

The idea of penal substitutionary atonement traces its roots back to the Old Testament. Leviticus 1:4 states, “He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” By laying hands on the offering, the sins were symbolically transferred to the animal who thus paid the penalty that otherwise was reserved for the sinner—death. Later, God explains the rationale for these sacrifices. He states, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Lev 17:11). In other words, since blood is the symbol of life, God

¹⁰⁸ Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 207.

¹⁰⁹ Simon Gathercole, *Defending Substitution: An Essay on Atonement in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 58.

has determined that blood can be offered vicariously to make atonement for one's sins. This Old Testament background helps explain the statement from Hebrews that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22).

One of the clearest expressions of this principle is found in the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). On this day, the high priest gathered two goats at the tabernacle. The first goat was slaughtered, and its blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat in what can only be seen as a propitiatory (appeasement of wrath) act. With the second goat, the high priest laid his hands on its head, symbolically transferring the sins of the people to the goat. He then sent it away into the wilderness, representing the expiation (removal) of sins. These goats together represent both the payment (shed blood) for sins as well as the purification (removal of guilt) necessary for humanity's reconciliation to God. These sacrifices formed the "interpretive framework for Jesus's death."¹¹⁰ They provided categories by which one can make sense of Christ's death as a penal substitutionary sacrifice.

As the Old Testament progresses, it becomes clear that the animal sacrifices will find their fulfillment in an individual—the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Gathercole remarks, "There is a hugely strong *prima facie* evidence that the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 is the only case of a human being who dies a vicarious death and thereby deals with the sins of others."¹¹¹ What leads Gathercole to this conclusion? The text indicates that this servant "was pierced for *our* transgressions; he was crushed for *our* iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought *us* peace, and with his wounds *we* are healed" (Isa 53:5; emphasis added). A brief glance at the pronouns from this passage suggests vicarious substitution. Verse 6 is even more explicit when it declares "and the

¹¹⁰ William Lane Craig, *The Atonement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 9.

¹¹¹ Gathercole, *Defending Substitution*, 64.

LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Verse 10 indicates that “his soul makes an offering for guilt.” In short, he will suffer a penal substitutionary death.

The Gospels indicate that this suffering servant is none other than Jesus of Nazareth. John the Baptist makes a clear reference to Jesus’s forthcoming vicarious atonement when he proclaims, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Likewise, Jesus indicates that the “Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). By proclaiming that he would die as a ransom, Jesus indicated that he was about to willingly pay the price necessary to rescue humanity from condemnation. Furthermore, the timing of Jesus’s death with respect to the Passover suggests that Jesus saw his death as a fulfillment of the substitutionary lamb from Passover. In the upper room, Jesus declared that his broken body and shed blood was “given for (ὑπὲρ) you” (Luke 24:19).

In sum, the Scriptures teach that Jesus offered up himself as the atoning sacrifice for mankind, and it was through his death that we are pardoned of our sins. Packer says it best: “I am so thankful for the penal substitutionary death of Christ. No hope without it.”¹¹²

Objections Answered

Many, however, reject this view of the atonement for various reasons. This final section will address two of the most popular objections and demonstrate that neither of them undermine penal substitutionary atonement.

First, some reject the theory because they think it portrays God as a vengeful, bloodthirsty deity. After all, the very idea that God’s wrath had to be propitiated wreaks of ancient paganism, whose deities’ whimsical, arbitrary, and spiteful anger often needed to be placated. Paul, however, had no problem with this concept, as he writes in Romans

¹¹² J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 21.

3:25 that God put forward Christ “as a propitiation (ἱλαστήριον) by his blood.” For Paul, God’s righteous anger towards sin was consistent with his holy character. Moreover, unlike paganism where the people had to take the initiative to appease their god’s anger, Paul declares that the Christian God takes the initiative himself; he says that “God put forward” Christ as the propitiation. Instead of being embarrassed by this doctrine, John writes, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). As John Stott remarks, “If it is God’s wrath that needed to be propitiated, it is God’s love that did the propitiating.”¹¹³ Thus, it was love, not uncontrolled rage, that led to the cross of Christ.

The second objection to this theory is that it is ineffective in bringing about salvation. At the root of this objection, however, is a faulty view of Christ’s nature. If Christ was a mere man, then yes, he could not actually redeem mankind. If Christ, however, was both God and man, then he could. Machen concurs when he writes, “It is perfectly true that the Christ of modern naturalistic reconstruction never could have suffered for the sins of others; but it is very different in the case of the Lord of Glory.”¹¹⁴ Historic Christianity has affirmed since its early stages that Christ is both fully God and fully man. This understanding is what compelled Anselm to write *Cur Deus Homo*. He recognized that only a human could represent all of mankind before God, and only an infinite God could pay for an infinite number of sins. Thus, the God-man was the only one who could save the world. In a similar vein, an orthodox understanding of the Trinity also explains why we should celebrate rather than recoil at the penal substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. Those who decry “cosmic child abuse” fail to grasp God’s Triune nature. “Penal substitution is a Trinitarian model,” asserts Packer, “for which the

¹¹³ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 172.

¹¹⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 108.

motivational unity of Father and Son is axiomatic.”¹¹⁵ Christ, therefore, did not go to the cross kicking and screaming. Rather, he decided, along with the Father and the Spirit, that he would willingly go there as an expression of his love for us.

Conclusion

Historical inquiry demonstrates that 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 reports accurate information, thus establishing the truthfulness of Christianity. Based on the early dating of the creed, not enough time lapsed for it to contain legendary material. Furthermore, good evidence supports the creed’s claim that Christ died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to several eyewitnesses alive. Additionally, an investigation into the Old Testament narrative demonstrated that it prefigured Christ’s death and resurrection several hundred years in advance. Finally, based on biblical data, Christ’s nature, and his resurrection from the dead, Christ’s death on the cross paid the just penalty for our sins.

One grammatical point worth noting before concluding this chapter is that the text contains eight aorist verbs and one perfect verb. The aorist is often the default tense in Greek, and it simply states that something happened without any regard for how it happened. Christ died, he was buried, he appeared, and so forth. The perfect tense, on the other hand, speaks of an event that occurred in the past but with ongoing results or significance into the present state. The lone perfect verb in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 is ἐγήγερται (“he was raised”). In other words, not only was Jesus raised, but he still lives! Indeed, this ongoing state is what gives hope for mankind. If Jesus still lives, then those who are united to him by faith have hope that they too will rise again to eternal life. A little later in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul makes this exact point. He argues that the risen Christ is “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20). During harvest time, the firstfruits always indicated to the farmer what kind of crop was to follow. In the case of

¹¹⁵ Packer and Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, 94.

the resurrection, Paul says that Christians will share in the same type of resurrection as Jesus.

Despite the overwhelming evidence supporting the reliability of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, not everyone is convinced of a bodily resurrection. One of the most formidable objections comes from Dale Allison’s academic book *The Resurrection of Jesus*. Chapter 3 will evaluate Allison’s book and demonstrate that even the best objections do not undermine Jesus’s bodily resurrection.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL
ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

Dale C. Allison Jr. serves as professor of New Testament at Princeton University. Allison has authored dozens of books and has established himself as one of the leading biblical scholars of today. In 2021, Allison provided one of the most formidable treatments against a bodily resurrection in his book, *The Resurrection of Jesus*. Based on the nature of Allison’s career and the depth by which he investigates Jesus’s resurrection, Christian apologists cannot easily dismiss his work.

This chapter, therefore, will provide an in-depth, two-part analysis of Allison’s book. First, it will provide a detailed summary of *The Resurrection of Jesus*. Second, it will critique Allison’s arguments and demonstrate that they do not ultimately undermine the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Summary of *The Resurrection of Jesus*

Allison begins the book by presenting his limitations while doing historical investigation on the bodily resurrection of Jesus. He states in no uncertain terms that the bodily resurrection cannot be proven or disproven. He argues that both Christian apologists and skeptics overstate their case. When writing about the inner voices competing inside his head, he notes that one of them declares, “Abandon all certainty, ye who enter here.”¹ According to Allison, historians must play the probability game.

With Allison’s self-prescribed limitations in place, he lays out competing

¹ Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 12, Kindle.

theories of Jesus's resurrection. He correctly notes, "If we are to account for the birth of the church, we must, one way or the other, get Jesus raised from the dead, if only in the minds of his followers."² He then proceeds to list nine competing explanations for the start of the church. Explanations range from the traditional view that Jesus rose bodily from the dead to the hallucination theory to legitimate visions of a spiritual but not physical Jesus. He concludes, "The historian's task is to determine, if possible, which solution is the right one, or at least which one best fits the evidence."³ In the remainder of the book, Allison goes on a quest in search of the right solution.

He next turns his attention to two New Testament texts that he believes contain early Christian credal formulae: Romans 1:1–7 and 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. He argues that both creeds contain language which portray "a very old way of speaking."⁴ To put it another way, the creeds pre-date Paul's letters.

Allison argues that Romans 1:3–4 most certainly traces its origins back to the primitive church. With respect to the Son, Paul declares that he "was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." Allison notes the similarities between this credal formula and the one found in 2 Timothy 2:8. The latter, however, begins with the exhortation *Μνημόνευε* ("remember"). By exhorting Timothy to "remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David," Paul implied that the statement was already well-known.⁵ Moreover, the phrase "seed of David" suggests that the creed originated in an Aramaic-speaking church.

Allison also believes that 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 contains primitive Christian

² Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 19.

³ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 29.

⁴ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 56.

⁵ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 60.

tradition that predates Paul's use. Allison even surmises that perhaps Paul heard this formula from the Christian community before his conversion. As he suggests, "[Paul] cannot have persecuted a group without knowing something about them."⁶ If this hypothesis is right, the contents of the creed go back to a time before legendary embellishment could take effect.

While some of the text originates with Paul, Allison believes, at minimum, verses 3–5 belong to an early credal formula. The creed states, "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." Verses 6–8 go on to describe Jesus's postmortem appearances to five hundred brothers at one time, to James, and to Paul himself. "Given that Paul knew Peter and James," Allison suggests, "1 Corinthians 15:3–8 is not folklore."⁷ He continues, "It is implausible that it never occurred to [Paul], when spending two weeks with Peter (Gal 1:18), to ask anything about the latter's experiences. Here the apologists have a point."⁸ Moreover, the brevity of the creed also implies that Paul and others knew more details. After all, the creed would have left one asking for more information if he did not already have it. Thus, the lack of specificity with respect to Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection appearances assumes that fuller details were already well-known. Based on the early credal formulae, Allison concludes, "Since there is no trace of a competing story line, I infer that we have here not just a social memory but a likely historical fact. Within a week of the crucifixion, something—or somethings—happened which Jesus' friends took to signal his resurrection."⁹

⁶ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 67.

⁷ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 67.

⁸ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 67.

⁹ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 72.

Moving on from credal formulae, Allison draws attention to different postmortem appearances and Christophanies. The four Gospels contain most of the appearances, though some exist beyond these texts. He affirms the legitimacy of Jesus's appearance to Mary Magdalene, though he questions some of the peripheral details. According to Allison, the patriarchal nature of the ancient world, as well as Mary's placement at the head of multiple lists of women, strongly suggests that Jesus appeared to her first. He argues that Paul possibly fails to mention the empty tomb in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 because of the embarrassing nature of women eyewitnesses.¹⁰ Going further, Allison suggests it is far more likely that the early church suppressed Mary's account rather than embellished it.

Allison entertains the idea that Peter had some sort of visionary or hallucinatory experience, though he admits that none of the early sources hint at this conjecture. He notes that "it can no more be confirmed than it can be disconfirmed."¹¹ After all, reconstructing Peter or any of the disciples' psychological state of mind is nigh impossible.

No one need doubt that Jesus appeared to the twelve or the five hundred. That said, outside Paul's brief mention of this latter appearance, "our knowledge is near nil."¹² Allison goes on to remark, "Despite all the exegetical ink, 1 Cor[inthians] 15:6 remains an enigma. It is little more than a tease, a tantalizing hint about something that, barring the discovery of a new source, will forever provoke questions without answers, or at least answers without robust support."¹³

According to Allison, apologists also state their case too strongly when they

¹⁰ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 103.

¹¹ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 108.

¹² Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 124.

¹³ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 126.

declare that only a resurrection appearance explains James's conversion. Other possibilities exist for this transformation, yet apologists want to align James's conversion with Paul's for apologetical purposes. On the other hand, Paul's conversion based on a resurrection appearance is clear cut. Since Luke even preserves Paul's firsthand telling of his experience, the story must originate with Paul.

Allison then investigates Jesus's burial in a tomb. He presents Crossan's theory that Jesus was left on a cross to be ravaged by wild animals and eventually tossed in a criminal's grave. He then proceeds to refute this explanation as pure guess work, devoid of any historical support. In fact, he provides multiple sources refuting Crossan's strongest piece of evidence that a crucified victim would never have received a proper burial. Both ancient Jewish and Roman sources undermine Crossan's claims. Furthermore, the discovery of a crucified man in a Jewish ossuary demonstrates that Romans were willing to accommodate Jewish sensitivities during times of peace. Most importantly, not a single source indicates Jesus was left on the cross after his death. Allison concludes then that "Jesus' committal in a tomb is, then, decently attested."¹⁴ The early Christians had little to no motivation to invent a prominent member of the Sanhedrin as the one who compassionately provided a proper burial for Jesus. "It remains possible that someone made up the story. Yet there are no real signs of this but rather several indications to the contrary."¹⁵

Next, Allison investigates the claim that women found Jesus's tomb empty on Easter morning. He admits that one cannot claim a position with certainty since he rejects the traditional authorship of the canonical Gospels. Be that as it may, he thinks it absurd that no burial and empty tomb narrative existed in the early years, long before the evangelists wrote their Gospels. He goes on to rebuke those who say that Paul was not

¹⁴ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 218.

¹⁵ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 223.

aware of an empty tomb narrative because he remains silent on the matter. Allison offers several other details missing from Paul's writings as well—Pilate, Barabbas, Caiaphas, and so forth. Certainly, Paul was aware of those details. Nevertheless, Allison believes two decent arguments possibly undermine the empty tomb. First, Christians invented fictional stories based on previously held religious commitments. Second, early parallels exist to the story. He quotes Celsus's Jew: "Do you think that the stories of these others are indeed legends, as they seem to be, and yet that the ending of your tragedy is to be regarded as noble and convincing?"¹⁶ While Allison believes these arguments carry weight, he still hesitantly favors an empty tomb. Two issues push him in this direction. First, Mark 16:1–8 lacks any religious or apologetic embellishment. The text is mere reporting, nothing else. Second, based on how ancient Romans and Jews viewed women, it remains unlikely that Christians invented the story about women discovering the empty tomb.

Allison, however, is not entirely convinced that Jesus underwent a bona fide bodily resurrection. Instead, he argues that Jesus's earliest followers projected his bodily resurrection based on Jesus's earlier predictions of his death in the near future and a resurrection of all the saints in the distant future. Jesus's followers, therefore, conflated these two distinct events because they misunderstood the meaning of "after three days." Moreover, he remarks, "If resurrection was not an interpretive possibility before Golgotha, no one would have employed it a few days after Golgotha."¹⁷ Only antecedent expectations could lead the disciples to believe that Jesus's empty tomb meant physical resurrection. Allison, therefore, sees Jesus's multiple predictions about his death and future resurrection as the driving force behind the disciples' post-Easter belief. In fact, he thinks Christian apologists make the mistake of affirming these pre-Easter predictions

¹⁶ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 273.

¹⁷ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 390.

because “the evidence for Jesus’ resurrection [would] be stronger if we could believe that he did not forecast his resurrection, so that the appearances were unprepared for, altogether surprising, utterly out of the blue.”¹⁸ Therefore, even though Jesus only predicted a future resurrection of all the saints in the final day, his empty tomb prompted the disciples to conclude that he had raised bodily from the grave Easter morning.

So, what best explains the postmortem appearances? Allison suggests that Jesus possibly appeared as an apparition, a ghost-like figure, who objectively looked very real to his followers. Allison even draws on his own experiences of seeing and hearing his former friend who had died in a tragic accident to demonstrate the possibility that Jesus’s followers experienced something similar. He then remarks, “I personally remain hesitant to find history in the demonstrations of Luke 24 and John 20–21. I rather detect Christian apologetics here, an answer to the criticism that Jesus was merely a specter or hallucination.”¹⁹ He goes on to note that Jesus’s appearances were “short-lived and sporadic.”²⁰ Jesus would appear and then disappear shortly thereafter—not too dissimilar from typical apparitions. Though Allison thinks Jesus’s postmortem appearances were less than physical, he still maintains the probability that the disciples experienced genuine encounters with Jesus outside their own subjectivity.

Allison further bolsters this claim by pointing to so-called parallels of Jesus’s resurrection. He scours the psychological literature in an effort to demonstrate that apologists often overstate their case when they say multiple people could not have shared the same visionary experience. The literature says otherwise. Again, Allison calls into question Jesus’s appearance to his disciples in John 21 as well as the appearance to more than five hundred brothers in 1 Corinthians 15. Perhaps, he argues, the large group

¹⁸ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 403.

¹⁹ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 456.

²⁰ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 457.

collectively experienced a vision of Jesus in the sky, not unlike Constantine's vision of the cross. Since the Gospels report that some of Jesus's followers did not immediately recognize him, he very well could have been an apparition of sorts, lacking flesh and bones. Yet he notes, "For this writer, the conviction [is] that real human experiences of a visionary nature likely lie behind the canonical accounts, despite all the overlay."²¹ "What counts in the end," Allison argues, "is not the metaphysical or ontological status of the bodily form of the enigmatic post-Easter Jesus—something nobody can know anything about—but the personal identity of the risen one with the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, and the circumstance that, whatever else he seemed to be, he was not an insubstantial, ghostly relic, the defeated victim of death."²² Allison fails to see why those who hold to the traditional view would take issue with his position. He argues, "Traditionally, most Christians have believed that, at some point, Jesus 'passed into a new mode or sphere of existence.' I see no theological deficit in supposing that this happened before he appeared to Mary and Peter."²³

Moving on to an attempt to explain Christianity's origins, Allison ponders the effects of bereavement upon the disciples. He postulates that the disciples must have felt guilty, angry, and confused following the crucifixion. He points to a number of studies demonstrating that many sense the presence of their deceased loved ones after their deaths. Moreover, many recall only the best memories of the departed. Similarly, Jesus's disciples only recalled his impeccable character. Allison suggests that "shortly after his death, the followers of Jesus saw him again, sensed his invisible presence, contracted their guilt by finding sense in his tragic end, repeatedly recalled his words and deeds, and

²¹ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 525.

²² Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 527.

²³ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 528.

otherwise idealized and internalized their teacher.”²⁴ To put it another way, perhaps the disciples misremembered who Jesus was because of their mental fragility.

Allison also believes that Christians should not so easily dismiss other resurrection claims. He believes that in doing so, they show their bias. He does not believe, for example, that Christian apologists should disregard the “resurrection” stories of the Tibetan monks. When Christians note the incredulity of such claims, they only highlight the incredulity of their own claims.

He continues by critiquing apologists’ claims that Jesus stopped appearing to people after forty days (Acts 1:3) by asking about Stephen’s, Paul’s, or John’s visionary experiences. Moreover, Allison argues that those who reject or downplay post-canonical visionary experiences of Jesus call into question his first appearances to the women and the apostles. Yet, Christians often downplay post-canonical appearances because too many similar reports give off a legendary vibe—much like Big Foot sightings.

Allison then raises questions about the Marian apparitions in Zeitoun, Egypt. Numerous eyewitnesses observed and gave testimony that they saw Mary hovering above the domed church. Several photographed the events that transpired over the course of several months. Allison asks, if anyone doubts what happened in Zeitoun, even though much evidence exists in favor it, why should anyone believe Jesus’s resurrection for which there is much less evidence?

After considering so-called parallels, Allison directs his attention towards some of the weaker apologetic arguments. For example, Allison refutes the notion that only a resurrection could adequately explain the world-wide church today. He also attacks apologists who oversell the persecution of the original disciples. After all, he contends that scholars know next to nothing about most of them. He also questions whether the church began meeting on Sunday instead of the more convenient Saturday based on the

²⁴ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 562.

resurrection. Not enough evidence confirms the reason for this transition. He also notes that no non-Christian has ever been convinced that the Shroud of Turin was the burial cloth of Jesus. In short, Christian apologists oversell their position.

Allison attacks some of the skeptical arguments against the resurrection as well. He critiques the arguments put forth by Spinoza and Hume that miracles are violations of natural laws, and therefore impossible. Allison, again, draws on his own visionary and spiritual experiences, which he cannot easily dismiss. Allison suspects that Hume never experienced anything out of the ordinary like he has, for people's experiences tend to shape their views on supernatural activity. Allison also critiques the common objections that Jesus only appeared to his followers and not government officials. For example, skeptics suggest that if Jesus would have performed a second triumphal entry, the church would have exploded at a greater clip. Allison believes this assumption is far from certain. In fact, the way people responded to the risen Jesus depended largely on their previous dispositions towards him.

As Allison brings his arguments to a close, he calls for caution when making historical claims. He declares, "Robust assurance has no place here" since the texts lack enough details to give us complete answers.²⁵ Moreover, he believes some of the resurrection narratives lack historical credibility. Therefore, he still leaves open the possibility that grave robbers stole Jesus's body from the tomb. The empty tomb then prompted Jesus's followers to experience visions of him, and they could do this because they misinterpreted his previous predictions about his death and ultimate resurrection. Even if Jesus rose bodily from the tomb, he thinks apologists overstate their case when they assume it was God's doing. He argues that the resurrection could be explained in any number of ways. After all, some Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus believe it happened, but

²⁵ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 695.

they remain in their distinct faith traditions. Therefore, the resurrection is not final proof that Christianity is true.

In the end, Allison notes that one's worldview will determine how he interprets the data. If one is a Christian, he will find the evidence as proof of his faith. If one is a skeptic, he most likely will remain a skeptic. He states, "The purely historical evidence is not, on my view, so good as to make disbelief unreasonable, and it is not so bad as to make faith untenable."²⁶

Critique of Allison's Work

Allison is to be commended for his impressive treatment on the resurrection. Not only is his research exceptional, but he also analyzes the data fairly. In fact, based on his investigation, he agrees with most of chapter 2's conclusions. Allison affirms the early tradition of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, Jesus's death, his burial in Joseph's tomb, the empty tomb on Easter morning, and subsequent postmortem appearances. However, Allison fails to affirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus as the impetus behind the empty tomb and postmortem appearances. Rather, he argues that an empty tomb—possibly due to grave robbers—prompted Jesus's earliest followers to postulate a bodily resurrection. When the women and disciples subsequently saw Jesus, they wrongly assumed he was physical, when in fact he was more like an apparition. Without a doubt, Allison would couch these claims by saying he favors this position, though one cannot know for sure. Yet he fails to see why it matters. He retorts, "Traditionally, most Christians have believed that, at some point, Jesus passed into a new mode or sphere of existence. I see no theological deficit in supposing that this happened before he appeared to Mary and Peter."²⁷

²⁶ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 728.

²⁷ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 528.

Notwithstanding the impressive scholarship and mostly warranted positions, Allison's book still fails at a few key points. For example, Allison ignores biblical data that suggests the eternal state will be physical. Speaking of the new heavens and new earth, Isaiah 65:21 pronounces, "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit." Instead, Allison seems to suggest that the new heavens and new earth will be a spiritual state, devoid of physical bodies. He claims the resurrected immortal body will "not be made of flesh and blood."²⁸ After all, if Jesus's spiritual resurrection was the firstfruits, everyone else will follow with a spiritual resurrection as well.

Moreover, Allison makes too much of the so-called parallels of Jesus's resurrection while at the same time downplaying the martyrdoms of some of his earliest disciples. Allison goes to great lengths to show that scores of people have claimed to see people return from the dead. Therefore, Jesus's postmortem appearances are not all that unique. Yet, how many of those same people who experienced something were still claiming years later that they witnessed a bona fide physical resurrection? Moreover, how many of them were willing to die for that claim? Most likely, the answer is zero.

These objections aside, by far the biggest weakness with Allison's work is the arbitrary nature by which he treats the canonical Gospels. When discussing the teachings of Jesus, Allison remarks, "I leave it to others to debate which if any of these utterances we should attribute directly to Jesus."²⁹ Not surprisingly, Allison rejects the veracity of Luke 24:36–43 and John 20:19–29, two texts which explicitly report Jesus's bodily resurrection. Instead, he "rather detect[s] Christian apologetics here, an answer to the criticism that Jesus was merely a specter or hallucination."³⁰

²⁸ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 266.

²⁹ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 402.

³⁰ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 456.

But how can Allison make this jump? How can he affirm certain details, such as Jesus's predictions about his looming death and resurrection, but declare that the guards at the tomb in Matthew 27:62–66 are “sheer fiction?”³¹ At times, Allison's posture towards certain texts appears a little too convenient. He can affirm Jesus's predictions about his upcoming death and resurrection because these predictions planted seeds in the disciples' minds to later project what they experienced as a bodily resurrection. Yet the texts that explicitly teach the bodily resurrection are pure fiction?

The only way Allison can reach these conclusions is by rejecting eyewitness testimony in the Gospels. Allison specifically notes that “not a single canonical gospel was penned by an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry.”³² If, however, the Gospels are based on eyewitness testimony, the postmortem appearances cannot be so easily dismissed, and Allison's positions fall flat. Allison even admits that if John Mark and Luke wrote their respective Gospels, then “everything changes.”³³ That is to say, eyewitness testimony increases the reliability of the texts.

Therefore, the remaining part of this chapter will seek to undermine Allison's view that eyewitness testimony does not stand behind the canonical Gospels. Moreover, not only will it argue that there are good reasons to embrace eyewitness testimony, but it will also make the case that the authors made every attempt to report events accurately.

External Evidence for Gospel Authorship

Two lines of evidence support traditional authorship: external and internal. External evidence refers to what the early church said about Gospel authorship. It also refers to the extant biblical manuscripts and their titles. Internal evidence refers to clues within the texts themselves that suggest they are the result of eyewitnesses. This section

³¹ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 274.

³² Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 586.

³³ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 280.

will investigate the external evidence, and the next section will address the internal evidence.

The earliest statement about Gospel authorship in surviving record comes from Papias around AD 130. Papias was a bishop of Hierapolis, a city at the crossroads of Ephesus and Antioch. This unique location afforded Papias opportunities to receive updates from Christian leaders as they passed through his town. In fact, Papias claims to have received information from the disciple John at one point in time. While most of Papias's works have been lost, a few fragments survive in other people's writings. One fragment contained in Eusebius speaks of how Papias received important information about the church. He reports,

If, then, anyone came, who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders,—what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from the books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice.³⁴

Much dispute surrounds the identity of the “presbyter John,” but that debate is irrelevant in this case. Whether John was one of the original twelve or another John who also followed Jesus, Papias received his information from an insider. More than that, Papias is most likely reminiscing about an earlier time in the first century when he had interactions with the presbyter John. Therefore, the following comment on Gospel authorship cannot be easily discounted. He notes,

This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, . . . so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them.³⁵

³⁴ Eusebius Pamphilus, *Hist. eccl.* 1.39.4 (*NPNF*², 1:170).

³⁵ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.39.15 (*NPNF*², 1:173).

This quotation states that Mark—John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas—wrote the Gospel traditionally known by his name based on Peter’s eyewitness testimony. According to Acts 12:12–14, we know that Peter once visited Mark’s house. Additionally, Peter notes that Mark was his companion in Rome (1 Pet 3:15). One can easily imagine how Peter frequently told his friend Mark stories of the time when he followed Jesus. Mark eventually wrote down these stories, though Papias complains that those stories were not in chronological order. That said, Papias notes that Mark made “no error” when writing his Gospel.

Admittedly, Papias’s remarks on Matthew are more confusing. He continues, “So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and everyone interpreted them as he was able.”³⁶ This quotation perplexes because the Gospel According to Matthew was not written in Aramaic, but Greek. Moreover, it gives no evidence of ever being translated from Aramaic into Greek. Either way, an early Christian writing, possibly a Gospel, was attributed to the apostle Matthew.

About half a century later, Irenaeus affirms Mark and Matthew as authors of the Gospels but also adds Luke and John. He remarks,

Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.³⁷

Irenaeus confirms Papias’s remarks that Mark wrote down Peter’s account. Furthermore, in line with Papias, he notes that Matthew wrote a Gospel for the Jewish people in their dialect. Irenaeus’s quote also reveals information about Luke and John. He notes that Luke, the physician and follower of Paul, penned the third Gospel.

³⁶ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.39.16 (*NPNF*², 1:173).

³⁷ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Haer.* 3.1.1 (*ANF*, 1:414).

Additionally, the disciple John, who leaned on Jesus's breast in the upper room, wrote the fourth Gospel.

One should not easily dismiss Irenaeus. After all, he was the spiritual grandson of John himself. Reminiscing about his childhood experiences with the bishop Polycarp, Irenaeus writes,

I remember the events of that time more clearly than those of recent years. . . . So that I am able to describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat as he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and the manner of his life, and his physical appearance, and his discourses to the people and the accounts which he gave of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord. And as he remembered their words, and what he heard from them concerning the Lord, and concerning his miracles and his teaching, having received them from eyewitnesses of the "Word of life," Polycarp related all things in harmony with the Scriptures.³⁸

If Irenaeus learned from Polycarp, and Polycarp learned from John, then Irenaeus was in a strong position to instruct on Gospel authorship.

Around the same time that Irenaeus reported the names of the four Gospel authors, the Roman church composed the *Muratorian Fragment*, providing what amounts to the earliest New Testament canonical list. Sadly, the manuscript is mutilated at the beginning and leaves off the first two books. It begins, "The third book of the gospel: according to Luke." A little further down it states, "The fourth gospel is by John, one of the disciples." With respect to the mutilated portion, F. F. Bruce remarks, "Since its first complete sentence mentions Luke as 'the third book of the gospel', it had presumably mentioned two others, and it is not excessively speculative to suppose that these were Matthew and Mark."³⁹

Writing around the same time, Clement of Alexandria also affirms that Mark wrote his Gospel based on Peter's eyewitness testimony and that John composed his

³⁸ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.20.6 (NPNF², 1:238).

³⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 159.

“spiritual Gospel.”⁴⁰ Around AD 200, Tertullian declares, “John and Matthew first instill faith into us; whilst of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterward.”⁴¹ Tertullian’s remark is instructive for it indicates why the early church received Luke and Mark. Though they were not apostles themselves, they were close followers of the disciples, and therefore appropriately called “apostolic men.” Finally, writing almost half a century earlier, around AD 160, Justin Martyr affirms that the Gospels “were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them.”⁴² Michael Kruger argues that this quote refers to the four canonical Gospels, “two penned directly by apostles and two by apostolic companions.”⁴³

These quotations demonstrate that Allison goes against the universal testimony of the early church. In fact, no competing theories for Gospel authorship existed until the post-enlightenment era.

Not only do the church fathers universally affirm traditional authorship, so do the extant biblical manuscripts with their titles. After all, if Allison is correct that the traditional authorship is wrong, one would expect the earliest extant manuscripts to reflect this error. Those manuscripts should either attribute the Gospels to other names or remain anonymous. Yet not one single manuscript supports Allison’s view. Certainly, incomplete manuscript fragments exist, like P52, which lack titles because they lack the beginning portion of the Gospel where the title would normally be located. Be that as it may, every extant manuscript containing the title portion lists Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John as the authors.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.7 (*NPNF*², 1:173).

⁴¹ Tertullian of Carthage, *Marc.* 4.2.17–18 (*ANF*, 3:347).

⁴² Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 103 (*ANF*, 1:251).

⁴³ Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 226.

⁴⁴ Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: Image, 2016), 16.

For example, the four earliest Matthew manuscripts—P4, P62, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Vaticanus—are each titled “Gospel according to Matthew” or “According to Matthew.” Mark’s four earliest manuscripts—Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, Codex Washintonianus, and Codex Alexandrines—are each titled “Gospel according to Mark” or “According to Mark.” Similarly, Luke’s four earliest manuscripts—P75, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Washintonianus—are each titled “Gospel according to Luke” or “According to Luke.” Finally, John’s four earliest manuscripts—P66, P75, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Vaticanus—are each titled “Gospel According to John” or “According to John.” In short, no anonymous Gospels or competing authorships exist in the manuscript tradition.

If Allison’s theory is correct, the Gospels must have originally circulated the Roman Empire anonymously for almost a century before anyone thought to add titles to them. This theory, however, is simply too far-fetched. As Martin Hengel points out, “Works without titles easily got double or multiple titles when names were given to them in different libraries.”⁴⁵ Yet, the extant manuscript titles remain consistent throughout. This consistency contrasts some apocryphal works which received multiple titles at different libraries.⁴⁶ Moreover, one must ask how did the church relay the four titles across the Roman world so that each individual church could add the appropriate titles to their anonymous manuscripts? Not only would it have been an impossible task to add the correct titles to the hundreds of Gospel manuscripts already in circulation across the vast Roman Empire, but no one within the church had the power and authority to make this decision. As Hengel notes, “no person, school, or even community in the early second

⁴⁵ Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), 48.

⁴⁶ Hengel, *The Four Gospels*, 48.

century possessed the authority and power to establish its own Gospel collection throughout the church by one decisive action.”⁴⁷

Additionally, Allison must answer the question of why the early church would attribute Gospels to non-eyewitnesses such as Mark and Luke. If the church wanted to add credibility to these texts, why not attribute them to more prominent characters such as Peter and Paul? All the later apocryphal gospels adopt this strategy. Without fail, the later gospels receive prominent names such as Gospel of Peter, Thomas, Judas, and Mary. None of these later pseudepigraphal texts go by lesser-known figures such as Jason or Demas or Mark or Luke. In short, the early church was not motivated to name Gospels after Mark and Luke unless they were the ones who stood behind them. Hengel offers a challenge: “Let those who deny the great age and therefore basically the originality of the Gospel superscriptions in order to preserve their ‘good’ critical conscience, give a better explanation of the completely unanimous and relatively early attestation of these titles, their origin and the names of authors associated with them.”⁴⁸ One wonders how Allison would respond to this challenge.

Internal Evidence for Gospel Authorship

The external evidence strongly supports the traditional authorship of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But what about the internal evidence? Are there clues within the texts themselves that indicate they can be traced to eyewitnesses? Even though the Gospels are formally anonymous, that is, the authors do not include their names inside the body of the text, they still bear the marks of eyewitness testimony.

One indication that the texts are not the result of Christians writing down oral traditions in places like Rome, Greece, or Asia Minor, is the familiarity they have with

⁴⁷ Hengel, *The Four Gospels*, 53.

⁴⁸ Hengel, *The Four Gospels*, 55.

ancient Palestine. This familiarity can be seen in the accurate portrayal of Palestinian names and geography.

The gospels list a lot of names: James, John, Levi, Simon, Mary, Joseph, etc. They also mention a lot of geographical details: towns, regions, bodies of water, elevation changes, etc. The names and geographical details demonstrate that the authors were “not too distant from the events to be trusted.”⁴⁹ How so? Imagine that someone was asked to write a biography about a person they never met from a distant land they never visited. Moreover, they were not allowed to use the internet or encyclopedias for research. Could the writer give a realistic story that accurately represented the architecture, laws, politics, landmarks, elevation changes, and common names of that distant region? Chances are they would make a lot of mistakes, especially if their best resources were friends who had heard stories about this person from other people.

In his book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Richard Bauckham compared the ancient names found in the broader Palestinian record—names found in Josephus, burial inscriptions, Dead Sea Scrolls, and other rabbinic texts—and compared them to the names found in the Gospels and Acts. Bauckham discovered that the names in both lists are highly consistent with each other.⁵⁰ He notes that the two most popular male names in the broader Palestinian record were the same two most popular names for males in the Gospels in Acts: Simon and Joseph. Furthermore, both Simon and Joseph make up 15.6 percent of all the male names on the broader record, while they make up 18.2 percent of all male names in the Gospels and Acts. Bauckham also calculates that the nine most popular names on the broader record make up 41.5 percent of all names, while the nine most popular names in the Gospels and Acts make up 40.3 percent of their names.

⁴⁹ Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 51.

⁵⁰ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 71–72.

Furthermore, of both top-nine lists, six names overlap.⁵¹ Though female names are not as plentiful, they show a great deal of agreement as well. In both lists, Mary ranks first, and Salome ranks second.

Another common feature among the names is how people with the same names are distinguished from one another. In a culture with no last names, distinguishing markers were attributed to people with the same names. Sometimes they were identified by their paternal relationship, as with Simon, son of Jonah (Matt 16:17). Other times they were distinguished by their hometown, like Simon of Cyrene (Luke 23:26), their physical traits, as with Simon the leper (Matt 26:6), or their group association, as in the case of Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15). Occasionally they were distinguished by their vocation, as with Simon the tanner (Acts 10:6). Women differentiated themselves in the same ways: Mary Magdalene (location), Mary mother of James (maternal), and Mary of Clopas (husband). These distinguishing features from the Gospels are the same distinguishing features found in the broader Palestinian record.

Bauckham demonstrates that the Gospels provide realistic names for people living in Palestine. What makes this truth especially remarkable is that the Jewish names across the Roman Empire differed substantially from Jewish names inside Palestine.⁵² In other words, one could not simply guess the correct names from a distance and hope to get them right. The realistic names suggest that the sources behind the Gospels had spent a considerable amount of time in Palestine. While the realistic names do not prove the Gospel authors were eyewitnesses, they are consistent with eyewitness testimony. On the flip side, unrealistic names would rule out eyewitness testimony altogether. The Gospel of Judas, for example, lists names such as Adamas, Adonis, Barbelo, Eve, Galila,

⁵¹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 85–92.

⁵² Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 73.

Harmothoth, Sophia, and Yobel.⁵³ None of these names are found in any first-century Palestinian record.

Not only do the Gospel authors get the names right, they get the geography right as well. Again, how likely would it be for someone from a distant land to report accurate details with respect to remote villages, small bodies of water, and elevation changes? It seems incredibly unlikely. Yet the Gospels present accurate details in these matters.⁵⁴ In total, the Gospels mention twenty-six different towns. Some are prominent, like Jerusalem, while others, like Bethany, Salim, and Aenon, are obscure. The Gospels also list thirteen different regions. Peter Williams notes that knowledge of all these different towns and regions “would be extremely surprising if we were to think of the Gospel writers as having lived in other countries, such as Egypt, Italy, Greece, or Turkey.”⁵⁵ He makes this observation based on the fact that each canonical Gospel displays knowledge of several localities, both great and small. He also shows that each Gospel writer presents unique geographical information, demonstrating that these details are not the result of borrowing from each other. In fact, Williams argues that “it does not seem that the Gospel writers could have simply obtained their information from reading. No known sources hold together the particular set of information they have.”⁵⁶ He goes on to suggest, “If these pieces of information result from hearing, then the reports they heard must have been fairly precise—concerned with stories not merely for their message but also for specific details.”⁵⁷

By comparison, apocryphal gospels give almost no geographical details.⁵⁸ The

⁵³ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 69.

⁵⁴ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 52–61.

⁵⁵ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 54.

⁵⁶ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 55.

⁵⁷ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 55.

⁵⁸ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 63.

Gospel of Thomas only mentions Judea once and no other locations. The Gospel of Judas never mentions any locations, and the Gospel of Philip only names Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Jordan. The lack of geographical details in the apocryphal Gospels is consistent with the fact that they were written in the latter half of the second century all across the Roman Empire. Naturally, non-eyewitnesses probably heard of Jerusalem (the capital) and Nazareth (Jesus's hometown). However, would they be familiar with places like Salim and Sychar? One would need to have special knowledge to know about those places.

The Gospels know bodies of water as well. Of particular note is how the four gospels describe the Sea of Galilee. For a body of water that is a mere thirteen miles long, it would be strange for an Egyptian or Roman to call it a "sea." For them, the Mediterranean qualifies as a sea, not this tiny body of water that is about one-three hundredth the size of Lake Michigan. Yet one would expect a Galilean fisherman who spent his entire career on the body of water to refer to it as the sea. The fact that Mark calls it the "Sea of Galilee" makes sense if the Galilean fisherman Peter was his primary source (Mark 1:16; 7:31). Similarly, Matthew and John also refer to it as the sea. Of course, both are Jewish, and John was a Galilean fisherman as well. Luke, however, is different. Luke was a Gentile who grew up outside of Palestine. When Luke saw the body of water, he simply called it "the lake" (Luke 5:1-2; 8:22-23).

The Gospels also know the geography of roads.⁵⁹ In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus tells the story of a man "going down" from Jerusalem (750 meters above sea level) to Jericho (250 meters below sea level). The writer knew enough about the elevations of both towns to write what he did. In John 2 and 4, leaving Cana (200 meters above sea level) for Capernaum (200 meters below sea level) is described as "going down." Likewise, Luke describes the travel from Nazareth (350 meters above sea

⁵⁹ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 58-61.

level) to Capernaum (200 meters below sea level) as “going down.” Even more impressive, the Gospel authors knew of an obscure village called Chorazin. In Luke 10:13–15, Jesus scorns Chorazin along with Capernaum and Bethsaida for their lack of faith. According to Williams, “The little-known village of Chorazin is in fact on the road to Bethsaida and just a couple of miles north of Capernaum. As far as we know, there was not a single literary source that could have provided this information to a Gospel author.”⁶⁰ In fact, Williams observes that the Gospels are not merely accurate in their use of geography. “They are themselves valuable geographical sources.”⁶¹

These accurate details of Palestine, both names and geography, would be remarkable if they came from someone in Rome who had never been to Palestine. That said, one would expect these accurate details from an eyewitness. One wonders how Allison squares these details with his position.

In addition to knowledge of Palestinian names and geography, undesigned coincidence also supports the position that eyewitnesses stand behind the canonical Gospels. According to Lydia McGrew, “An undesigned coincidence is a notable connection between two or more accounts or texts that does not seem to have been planned by the person or people giving the accounts. Despite their apparent independence, the items fit together like pieces of a puzzle.”⁶² In other words, the Gospel authors casually present subtle details that unintentionally and indirectly provide clues or answers to unexplained situations found in other Gospels. As McGrew noted, these details, provided in passing, fit neatly together like “pieces of a puzzle.”

The feeding of the five thousand provides an excellent example of an undesigned coincidence. In Mark 6:30–31, Jesus encourages his disciples to remove

⁶⁰ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 60.

⁶¹ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 62.

⁶² Lydia McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts* (Chillicothe, OH: Deward, 2017), 12.

themselves from a large crowd surrounding them. Yet Mark offers no explanation for why a large crowd gathered near Jesus in the countryside. The Gospel of John, however, “coincidentally” notes that “the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand” (John 6:4). As was customary, large crowds flocked to Jerusalem for the annual festival, which explains why upwards of twenty thousand people were near Jesus at the time. Josephus reports that nearly three million Jews flocked to Jerusalem for the feast, though this number is probably exaggerated.⁶³ Moreover, he describes how Galileans traveled in large packs through Samaria on their way.⁶⁴ Traveling in large caravans also explains how Mary and Joseph left Jesus back in Jerusalem during his childhood. The crowd was so large, they simply assumed he was with someone else.

The timing of the Passover also provides further undesigned coincidences. All three synoptic Gospels mention that there was grass at the place of the miracle. Mark, however, mentions that it was “green grass” (Mark 6:39). The grass in that region, however, was not always green. It was only green during the spring season, and Passover occurred in spring. Mark reports that the grass was green but does not mention that it was Passover time. Only John reports that it was Passover time but says nothing of the grass. These two pieces of information fit together nicely.

The location of the miracle provides yet another example of undesigned coincidences. In John 6:5, Jesus specifically asks Philip where they can buy bread to feed everyone. One wonders, though, why Jesus asked Philip since he was not a leading member of the twelve nor the treasurer. Earlier, John 1:44 reports that Philip’s hometown was Bethsaida. Only Luke, however, reports that the feeding took place near Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). John does not mention this detail. Therefore, Luke’s provided location of Bethsaida explains why, in the book of John, Jesus asked Philip where he could buy food.

⁶³ Josephus, *J.W.* 6.425 (Whiston, 749).

⁶⁴ Josephus, *Ant.* 20.118 (Whiston, 532).

Jesus knew Philip would have been most familiar with the area. The location of Bethsaida also explains Jesus's woes on Bethsaida in Matthew 11:20–24. Jesus proclaimed, "For if the mighty works done in [Bethsaida] had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." Yet Matthew never states what were these "mighty works." Again, Matthew never reports that the feeding of the five thousand occurred near Bethsaida. Only Luke coincidentally mentions this detail, thus explaining Jesus's woes.

The feeding of the five thousand is only one example of many undesigned coincidences. McGrew remarks, "The occurrence of multiple undesigned coincidences between and among these documents supports the conclusion that the Gospels and Acts are historically reliable and that they come from people close to the facts who were attempting to tell truthfully what they knew."⁶⁵ These details undermine the view that the Gospels developed over time. Allison would need to come up with an alternative explanation for how the four different Gospel authors were able to piece together parts of the puzzle in ways that suggest eyewitness testimony.

But what of the traditional authors themselves? Allison states that "Matthew's Gospel was, despite the tradition, almost certainly not composed by one of the twelve."⁶⁶ Additionally, he notes, "along with most Johannine experts, I do not believe that the Beloved Disciple wrote the Fourth Gospel."⁶⁷ It is one thing to make a claim. It is another to back it up. And Allison's claims lack compelling evidence.

Certainly, not everyone accepts the traditional view that Matthew, the converted tax-collector and one of the twelve, wrote the first Gospel. Many, if not most, remain agnostic towards its authorship. One of the main reasons for this position is

⁶⁵ McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View*, 14.

⁶⁶ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 586.

⁶⁷ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 586

Papias's enigmatic statement that Matthew wrote his work in the Hebrew "language." After all, the "Greek Gospel of Matthew shows not the slightest sign of having been translated from a Semitic language."⁶⁸ Matthew may have written an Aramaic source, but if he did, it has vanished from the historical landscape. These points have led Matthean scholars like John Nolland to reject traditional authorship. Nolland argues that the tradition for Matthean authorship "is traceable to a tradition that Matthew produced a compilation of Jesus' teaching in Aramaic or Hebrew."⁶⁹ Therefore, since the Aramaic tradition proved to be false, biblical scholars should reject the tradition altogether.

Irenaeus also states that Matthew wrote in the Hebrew "language."⁷⁰ Yet, Irenaeus knows and quotes from the Greek Matthew. Perhaps Irenaeus had knowledge of an original Aramaic Matthew and a separate Greek translation. But if he was not aware of two distinct versions, then perhaps the Greek behind the phrase "Hebrew language" means something slightly different than what is often assumed. Some, for example, argue that Papias and Irenaeus merely asserted that Matthew wrote in a Semitic style, not the Aramaic language. After all, Matthew is often credited as being the most "Jewish" of the Gospels. Yet as attractive as this option sounds, it must be admitted that the Greek word *διαλέκτω* most naturally translates as "language."⁷¹

Despite the fact that no easy answer exists for the Hebrew "language" question, R. T. France fails to see how this mystery undermines traditional authorship. Contra Nolland, France believes rejecting Matthean authorship because the early fathers were wrong about its original language is a *non sequitur*. That is to say, the two traditions

⁶⁸ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 3, Logos Bible Software.

⁶⁹ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 3.

⁷⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.1.1 (*ANF*, 1:414).

⁷¹ Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 232, Logos Bible Software.

are “not logically connected.”⁷² They could have been right about one thing and wrong about the other. France makes a compelling point when he remarks, “When the unanimous tradition of the post apostolic church names Matthew as the author, and when we have reason to believe that that tradition can be traced back into the first century, common sense (even if not critical orthodoxy) might suggest that it could be right.”⁷³ While France comes short of claiming traditional authorship is a “fact,” he believes it best squares with the remaining data.⁷⁴

What data could he have in mind? First, if any early followers of Jesus possessed the ability to write a gospel in Greek, a tax collector seems like a good option. Tax collectors would have had the ability to read and write in both Aramaic and Greek, as they dealt with both Jews and Gentiles regularly. Furthermore, because of its several Jewish features, scholars have long recognized that the author of Matthew was a Jew who wrote to a Jewish-Christian audience. Matthew fits these descriptions perfectly.

Moreover, while all three synoptic Gospels report Jesus calling the tax collector to follow him, only Matthew gives the tax collector the name “Matthew” (Matt 9:9), while Mark and Luke name him “Levi” (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). France notes, “The fact that this gospel alone has an account of the call of Matthew under that name might be sufficient reason to posit him as its author.”⁷⁵ It is also worth noting that while each of the synoptic Gospels lists the name “Matthew” as one of the twelve, only Matthew’s Gospel refers to him as “the tax collector” (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). Perhaps he was the only one comfortable enough to provide the derogatory label.⁷⁶

⁷² R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 66.

⁷³ France, *Matthew*, 74.

⁷⁴ France, *Matthew*, 79.

⁷⁵ France, *Matthew*, 73.

⁷⁶ D. A. Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 17.

Another internal feature consistent with traditional authorship is the author's unusual interest in money—far more than in the other Gospels.⁷⁷ This interest makes sense given that Matthew was a former tax collector. Matthew is the only Gospel to record the story of Jesus paying the temple tax (Matt 17:24–27) and the parable of the vineyard, which describes financial compensation for work (Matt 20:1–16). He is the only one to record Jesus's parable of the unmerciful servant who was forgiven a significant debt only to turn around and not forgive a small debt (Matt 18:21–35). Only Matthew reports that Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matt 26:15). Matthew is also the only Gospel in which Jesus exhorts his followers to come to terms with their accusers before the court, lest they be thrown in prison until they “paid the last penny” (Matt 5:25–26). In all three Gospels, Jesus sends out the twelve to preach but tells them not to take any money. Mark writes that they were to take “no money in their belts” (Mark 6:8). Luke writes they should not bring “money” (Luke 9:3). Matthew gives a more detailed description: “Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts” (Matt 10:9). Finally, in the Lord's prayer, Luke says, “forgive us our sins” (Luke 11:4), while Matthew says, “forgive us our debts” (Matt 6:12). In total, Matthew mentions financial terms a staggering forty-five times, while Mark only mentions them eight times and Luke twenty-one times.⁷⁸ This borderline obsession with money is consistent with traditional Matthean authorship. While these pieces of data do not prove traditional authorship, they are consistent with the early church tradition.

With respect to Mark, church tradition reports that he wrote his Gospel based on Peter's eyewitness testimony. One should expect, then, to find clues of Peter's influence in the text. The first clue is the inclusio with respect to Peter's name. This

⁷⁷ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 305.

⁷⁸ These financial terms include the following: “money,” “penny,” “gold,” “silver,” “copper,” “talent,” “denarius,” “shekel,” and “mina.”

literary device frames material like bookends to emphasize a certain theme. At the outset of Jesus's ministry, Peter is the first mentioned disciple. Mark 1:16 notes, "Passing along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea." Not only does Mark mention Peter (Simon) first, he also appears to place emphasis on his name by repeating it a second time when he mentions Andrew. He could just as easily have said, "Simon and his brother Andrew" like he did in verse 19 when he wrote, "James the son of Zebedee and John his brother." At the end of Mark, Peter is also the last disciple mentioned. While at the empty tomb, the angel tells the women at the tomb to "go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee" (Mark 16:7). Again, it appears that Mark goes out of his way to mention Peter's name when it was not necessary. Bauckham remarks, "The two references form an *inclusio* around the whole story, suggesting that Peter is the witness whose testimony includes the whole."⁷⁹ In other words, the *inclusio* tips off the audience that Peter is the primary source behind the material.

Not only does Peter's name form an *inclusio*, but his name also appears at a much higher clip than the other disciples. The name Simon/Simon Peter/Peter appears twenty-six times in Mark's Gospel.⁸⁰ No disciple comes even close. James is mentioned twelve times, John ten, and Andrew three. Additionally, Peter is present throughout most of the narrative from 1:61–14:72. The only exceptions are 6:14–29, 10:35–40, and 14:10–11, 14, 55–65.⁸¹ Moreover, Peter appears to represent all of the disciples at several points throughout the Gospel (Mark 1:36–37; 8:29; 10:28; 14:37–38). Even among the synoptics, Mark uses Peter's name at a higher frequency than the rest. Mark uses Peter's name once every 432 words compared to Matthew and Luke, who use his name once

⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 125.

⁸⁰ This number does not include mentions of the other Simons in the Gospel.

⁸¹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 126.

every 654 and 670 words respectively.⁸² Finally, if Matthew borrowed material from Mark for his Gospel, as many scholars believe, then this borrowing only makes sense if Peter is really the one behind Mark's Gospel. It would not make sense for Matthew, one of the twelve, to borrow material from a non-eyewitness. Similar to Matthew, this internal evidence is not enough by itself to prove traditional authorship. The data, however, is consistent with the external evidence.

Church tradition also notes that Luke, the Gentile doctor and traveling companion of Paul, wrote the third Gospel (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24).⁸³ The author of Luke also wrote Acts, as evidenced by the fact that both share the same recipient "Theophilus" as well as similar writing styles (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). The so-called "we" passages in Acts imply that the author journeyed with Paul on his second and third missionary journeys and accompanied him to Rome (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–21; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). Leon Morris suggests that "these appear to have been taken from the diary of one of Paul's companions."⁸⁴ The author acknowledges that he was not an eyewitness of Jesus but rather a second-generation Christian who received information from eyewitnesses and investigated their claims (Luke 1:1–4). He writes a great deal about Jesus's ministry to the social outcasts, which would be consistent if he were a Gentile outsider himself. He speaks of Jesus's ministry to the poor (1:46–55; 4:18; 7:22; 14:13), sinners (5:27–32; 7:28; 19:7), tax collectors (5:27–32; 7:34; 19:1–10), women (7:36–50; 8:1–3; 10:38–42), and widows (2:37; 4:25–26; 7:12; 18:3). He also takes a particular interest in the mission to the Gentiles (2:31–32; 3:6; 3:23–28; 7:9; 8:26–39; 24:47). These

⁸² Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 126.

⁸³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 6.

⁸⁴ Leon Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 18.

details are consistent with church tradition that a Gentile named Luke wrote the third Gospel.

Not everyone, however, is convinced of traditional authorship. Ehrman retorts, “Despite this ancient tradition, the problems with identifying Luke as the author of the book are rife.”⁸⁵ The problems, according to Ehrman, are the so-called discrepancies that exist between Acts and Paul’s letters. These discrepancies include Paul’s theology, his relationship towards the Jewish law, and his travel itinerary.⁸⁶ Paul’s travel itinerary is a major point of emphasis for Ehrman. For example, he contends that Paul’s testimony in Galatians 1 contradicts Acts 9. Yet as Morris remarks, “Close examination reveals little of substance in such objections.”⁸⁷ Acts 9, for example, never indicates that Paul arrived in Jerusalem shortly after his conversion and met with all the apostles as Ehrman claims. Ehrman and others have also tried to demonstrate that Paul’s theology is different in his letters than in Acts. One major difference, they argue, is that Paul is loyal to the Jewish law in Acts (Acts 16:3), but he opposes it in his letters (Rom 7; Gal 3). Yet this discrepancy is superficial upon closer inspection. Certainly, Paul was willing to conform to the law when he felt like it enhanced his ability to reach Jews (1 Cor 9:20). Moreover, he never rebukes anyone for voluntarily abiding by the Jewish law (Rom 7:12; 1 Tim 1:8). He only rebukes those who thought the law could save them (Gal 3). Most of the objections are just as easily answered. In the end, none of the objections against traditional authorship are enough to overturn the universal consensus of the early church.

Finally, the author of John comes the closest to revealing his identity. He reports, “Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during supper” (John 21:20). He continues, “This

⁸⁵ Bart D. Ehrman, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 207.

⁸⁶ Ehrman, *Forged*, 208.

⁸⁷ Morris, *Luke*, 20.

is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24). Who is this disciple whom Jesus loved? He was most certainly one of the twelve at the Last Supper (John 13:23).⁸⁸ Moreover, he is repeatedly distinguished from Peter (John 13:23–24; 20:2–9; 21:20). He is also one of the seven disciples who was fishing in John 21. Of those seven, he cannot be Peter, Thomas, or Nathanael. Therefore, he is either one of the sons of Zebedee (James and John) or one of the other two unnamed disciples who were also present on the Sea of Galilee. Since James the son of Zebedee was martyred in the AD 40s, he cannot be the author.⁸⁹

Of note, the apostle John is never mentioned by name in the Gospel. His absence would be extremely odd if another person wrote this Gospel.⁹⁰ After all, the Gospel mentions far less significant people like Judas (not Iscariot), Philip, and Nathanael. Also worth noting is that while all the synoptic Gospels refer to the forerunner of Jesus’s ministry as John the Baptist, this Gospel only calls him “John.” Others who knew both Johns needed a way to distinguish them, so they included identification markers: the Baptist and the son of Zebedee. If the author is John the son of Zebedee, it makes sense that he would not feel the need to mention his own name or provide an identification marker for the other John. As Blomberg states, “If the apostle by the same name were writing to a specific community who knew him well and knew that the Gospel came from him, this silence would be readily understandable.”⁹¹ Finally, the synoptic Gospels, Acts, and Galatians present Peter and John as close companions (Mark 5:37;

⁸⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 29.

⁸⁹ Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel*, 29.

⁹⁰ Bauckham argues that the appearance of “the sons of Zebedee” in 21:2 excludes the possibility that the apostle John is the Beloved Disciple. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 415.

⁹¹ Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel*, 30.

14:33; Acts 3:1–4:23; Gal 2:9). In the fourth Gospel, Peter and the apostle whom Jesus loved are together frequently (John 13:23–24; 20:2–10; 21:20–23).

If John the apostle is behind the fourth Gospel, that best explains the author's apparent eyewitness details throughout the book. He knows, for example, how many water jars are at the wedding in Cana (John 2:6), how long the man had been crippled by the pool (John 5:5), and the number of fish caught in Galilee (John 21:11). He also appears to be Jewish, as he writes about ritual cleansing jars (John 2:6), the Passover (John 2:23), the Festival of Tabernacles (John 7:2), the Festival of Dedication (John 10:22), and the day of Preparation (John 19:14). Moreover, he knows of landmarks that were most likely destroyed during the Jewish-Roman War. For example, he knows of the pools of Bethesda and Siloam (John 5:2; 9:11). He also knows of Jacob's well at Sychar (John 4:5–6).⁹²

Many, Allison included, reject Johannine authorship for a variety of reasons. One critique is that it seems rather pompous for John to refer to himself as “the one whom Jesus loved.” Yet, this objection falls flat. What Christian, after all, does not affirm that Jesus loves them? The title is not a mark of arrogance but of humility.

Another frequent objection posed by Bauckham, Hengel, and others is that a certain elder John, who was also an eyewitness of Jesus, was the Beloved Disciple who penned the fourth Gospel. Bauckham believes that both the external and internal evidence point in this direction. Externally, Bauckham argues that Papias's earlier quotation makes a distinction between the apostle John and another elder John. He also argues that Irenaeus and Polycrates adopt Papias's view. It must be noted, however, that Bauckham must modify Papias's quote to reach this conclusion.⁹³ Moreover, as Carson and Moo point out, the Greek syntax Papias uses, namely the anaphoric use of the article for the

⁹² Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, 27.

⁹³ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 417.

second John, strongly suggests that the elder John and the apostle John are one and the same person.⁹⁴ Furthermore, apostles also thought of themselves as elders in the early church (1 Pet 5:1). Both 2 and 3 John are said to be by “the elder,” and Papias may very well be echoing that language.

Bauckham does not merely rely on external evidence, however. He believes the internal evidence goes against traditional authorship. For example, given the focus on Jerusalem and Judea, he believes the author (the elder John) probably comes from the southern region—not northern Galilee.⁹⁵ He also suggests that the Beloved Disciple’s presence at Jesus’s crucifixion undermines traditional authorship since the Synoptic Gospels do not list any disciples at Jesus’s crucifixion. These arguments, however, do not count against traditional authorship. While John’s Gospel focuses more attention on Judea than the Synoptics, a Galilean eyewitness could have easily documented his experiences while in Judea. Additionally, a faithful Jew traveled to Jerusalem multiple times a year. It is perfectly reasonable, therefore, to believe that a Galilean was quite familiar with the southern region. It is also quite possible that John had a second home in Jerusalem (John 19:27) as the family business would frequently take him there.⁹⁶ After all, Jerusalem did not have a local body of water to supply fish for the city.⁹⁷ Rather, they relied on imports from the surrounding regions—places like Galilee where fish supply was ample. Moreover, while the Synoptics do not mention any disciples at Jesus’s resurrection, they do not explicitly say that the disciples were absent. In other words, Bauckham relies on an argument from silence. Most likely, many observers passed by

⁹⁴ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 234.

⁹⁵ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 562.

⁹⁶ John Wenham, *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 39–42.

⁹⁷ Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*, 3rd ed., trans. F. H. Cave and C. H. Cave (London: SCM Press, 1969), 27.

Jesus's crucifixion site since crucifixions often took place alongside busy roads.

Furthermore, since Jesus's crucifixion lasted about six hours, it is not unreasonable to think the apostle John was at least present for part of it.

Most significantly, if Bauckham is correct, then the so-called elder John must have been present at the Last Supper in John 13. Yet, Mark notes that Jesus ate this meal with the group of twelve alone. Speaking of the Last Supper, Mark 14:17 reports, "And when it was evening, he came with the twelve." If a broader group of disciples were present, Mark most certainly would have used a broader term like "the disciples" instead of "the twelve." Moreover, Luke notes that Jesus ate this meal with the "apostles," which also suggests the twelve (Luke 22:14).

Since Bauckham's argument hinges on the presence of an additional John at the Last Supper, it ought to be rejected. More than that, Bauckham wants everyone to believe that this second John was given a seat of honor next to Jesus over and against the inner twelve. Additionally, his view necessitates that Jesus entrusted his mother to this obscure figure at his crucifixion (John 19:26–27). Not only does the internal evidence from John's Gospel contradict Bauckham's thesis, one must also account for how the early church received an authoritative Gospel from an otherwise obscure figure not found anywhere else in the New Testament. In the end, while Bauckham's arguments for eyewitness testimony are sound, his arguments against traditional Johannine authorship are not.

A final objection raised against traditional authorship is that a Galilean fisherman never could have written a Greek Gospel. Again, this argument fails. Many who hold this position point to Acts 4:13, which notes that Peter and John were "uneducated," and take that to mean they were illiterate. The context, however, does not support this interpretation. Context suggests that "uneducated" meant "not trained in Rabbinical schools." Most Jewish boys actually would have received an education so

they could learn to read the Scriptures.⁹⁸ Additionally, since John came from a wealthy family (his father owned a large fishing business with hired workers), he most likely received an excellent education. Recent studies even suggest that Galilean Jews were often able to speak both Aramaic and Greek, as Galilee was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. In fact, the two largest cities in Galilee, Tiberias and Sepphoris, were completely Hellenistic. Furthermore, Greek coins, Judean-Greek documents, Greek names on burial inscriptions, and even Greek-speaking synagogues suggest that first-century Galileans knew a lot more Greek than what was originally thought.⁹⁹ Finally, if John was written around the year AD 90, as most scholars believe, John had plenty of time to brush up on his Greek, especially if he lived in Greek-speaking Ephesus for an extended period of time.

In summary, the universal consensus of the early church is that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote the four canonical Gospels. While the internal features of the texts are not enough by themselves to prove traditional authorship, these features are consistent with traditional authorship and extremely unlikely if the Gospels were not the result of eyewitness testimony.

Commitment to the Truth

Eyewitness testimony does not guarantee that the authors attempted to tell the truth about everything. After all, it is possible that eyewitnesses of Jesus intentionally distorted or embellished the facts in order to make themselves or their master look good. As was established in the previous section, Allison rejects eyewitness testimony. He also believes that the early church embellished stories about Jesus's resurrection to make it appear more like a bodily resurrection. For example, he writes, "Jesus was probably laid

⁹⁸ Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, 34.

⁹⁹ See Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, trans. John Bowden (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1973).

in a tomb which some women later found empty, and Christian imagination turned their report into a dramatic story that grew in the telling.”¹⁰⁰ He also believes that the early church embellished Jesus’s predictions about his upcoming death and resurrection. He postulates that “these forecasts were certainly to some degree, and probably to a great degree, formulated after the facts.”¹⁰¹ In fact, he argues, “While Jesus likely prophesied death and resurrection, he did not imagine those events as occurring, so to speak, in the middle of history.”¹⁰² In other words, Allison thinks that somewhere along the line, someone was less than truthful about the facts. In other words, the church modified the truth for apologetic purposes. Texts that present a bodily resurrection, such as Matthew 28:8–10, Luke 24:36–43, and John 20:24–29, are embellishments, and therefore cannot be trusted. Allison remarks, “I do not know how anyone can establish that Mary Magdalene really believed that she had touched the risen Jesus, or that a group of Jesus’ followers really thought that they had seen him eat and offer his body for inspection. Historians, cannot, in my judgment, do so much, and on such matters agnosticism commends itself.”¹⁰³ In short, because the Gospels contain embellishments for apologetic purposes, one cannot ultimately believe the accounts.

The Gospels, however, do the exact opposite of what Allison claims. He believes they embellished material to bolster their claims. Yet if Allison is right, one wonders why the Gospels leave in so much embarrassing material. One wonders why Jesus would undergo John’s “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). Does not that account raise certain questions about Jesus’s impeccability? In fact, as Eddy and Boyd note, the Gospels “are brimming with ‘embarrassing’ material, which we

¹⁰⁰ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 301.

¹⁰¹ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 391.

¹⁰² Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 406.

¹⁰³ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 512.

not only cannot imagine early Christians inventing, but which we might have expected the earliest traditions to drop—were they not so invested in retaining historically rooted information about Jesus.”¹⁰⁴ For example, Jesus’s family thought he was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21). Jesus could not perform many miracles in Nazareth (Mark 6:5). The people of Nazareth rejected him (Mark 6:3). Jesus suggested that he was not “good” (Mark 10:18). He associated with social outcasts (Mark 2:14–16) and sometimes comes off as rude (Mark 7:27). He was betrayed by one of his own disciples (Mark 14:43–46) and was brutally crucified on a Roman cross—a stumbling block for anyone in the first century (Mark 15:16–41). It is hard to imagine why the Gospel authors, or early church for that matter, would invent potentially incriminating stories about Jesus. Moreover, it is hard to imagine that the church would invent incriminating stories about its earliest leaders. For example, the disciples are sometimes not able to cast out demons (Mark 9:18) and often lack faith (Mark 4:40). They are also prone to arrogance (Mark 10:35–37). Those in the inner circle do not prayerfully support Jesus during his darkest hour in Gethsemane (Mark 14:37–40), and they all flee like cowards during Jesus’s arrest (Mark 14:50). Perhaps most notoriously, Peter denies Jesus three times (Mark 14:66–72). If the early church was all about apologetics, one must wonder why the Gospels include so much incriminating material about Jesus and his disciples. Eddy and Boyd conclude, “This is the very sort of self-damaging material historians typically look for in assessing the veracity of ancient works, and Mark is literally packed with it.”¹⁰⁵

Another indicator that the Gospel writers attempted to tell the truth about Jesus is the fact that they fail to project early church controversies back onto the lips of Jesus. One would expect this phenomenon if the Gospels were the result of oral traditions that

¹⁰⁴ Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 410–11.

¹⁰⁵ Eddy and Boyd, *The Jesus Legend*, 411.

the church adapted for practical or apologetic purposes.¹⁰⁶ That said, the Gospels are silent on several early church controversies. For example, Jesus never mentions anything about whether a Gentile believer must get circumcised. He never gives his view on spiritual gifts or what to do with meat offered to idols. Jesus also has nothing to say about the role of women in the church. Again, Eddy and Boyd state, “Had the early tradents generally been inclined to invent Jesus material relevant to their particular concerns, rather than hold as sacred what in fact he did say, these are precisely the sorts of issues we would have expected the Jesus of the Gospels to address.”¹⁰⁷

In short, the inclusion of embarrassing material and the exclusion of useful material supports the position that the Gospel writers attempted to tell the truth at all costs. These facts undermine Allison’s view that the Gospels embellished material for apologetic purposes.

Conclusion

Allison’s scholarly treatment on the resurrection cannot be easily dismissed. Not only does he thoroughly investigate the claims, but he does so fairly. To Allison’s credit, he affirms most of the traditional claims surrounding Jesus’s death, burial, resurrection, and postmortem appearances. In this sense, critiquing his work has proved difficult compared to works more skeptical in nature. Allison is to be commended in this regard. That said, *The Resurrection of Jesus* ultimately misses the mark because it rejects the eyewitness testimony of the canonical Gospels. This rejection leads Allison to doubt the bodily resurrection appearances in Matthew 28, Luke 24, and John 20. Moreover, his skepticism leads him to make *ad hoc* claims about the empty tomb and post-mortem resurrection appearances, claims that are not substantiated by any primitive sources. In

¹⁰⁶ Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 456.

¹⁰⁷ Eddy and Boyd, *The Jesus Legend*, 412.

the end, the evidence for the eyewitness testimony and reliability of the Gospels undermines Allison's main contention that Jesus did not raise bodily from the dead.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT

With the biblical and theological foundations in place, the purpose of this chapter is to describe the implementation process of this project. The need for this project has become apparent during the six years I have served at the church. GBC has many strengths, but evangelism is not one of them. In fact, the church has seen few converts over the course of my tenure. Because Christ commands his church to make disciples (Matt 28:18–20), the GBC leadership has made evangelism a greater priority as of late. This project fits well within the overall scheme of GBC’s mission.

Preparation for Project

On October 26, 2021, my faculty supervisor, Timothy Paul Jones, and the Ethics Committee of SBTS approved this project. Shortly after approval, I met with the leadership of GBC to determine the logistics for implementing the project. It was decided that I would conduct the initial pre-series surveys at the next membership meeting on January 9, 2022, for maximum participation. Seventy-five members completed the initial survey.

After analyzing the surveys, I began the six-week project series on January 30, 2022, and concluded on March 6, 2022. The series included the Sunday morning sermon as well as the weekly small group session.

Summary of Project Goals

As previously stated, this project’s purpose was to equip the members of GBC to present historical arguments for Jesus’s resurrection to non-believers with the purpose of leading them to Christ. The success of the project was determined by the completion of

five goals.

The first goal was to assess the understanding of the historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection and the evangelistic confidence among the members of GBC. Prior to the six-week sermon series, a pre-series survey evaluated the participants' knowledge of apologetics and evangelism confidence.¹⁰⁸ Each participant remained anonymous by using a four-digit code on the form. This four-digit code was necessary for evaluating progress at the end of the series. This goal was considered successfully met when at least fifty church members returned surveys, providing a sufficient sample size for the church.

The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series on sharing historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. Chapter 2 of this project provided the outline for the project series. The six major headings from that chapter provided the basis for the six-week sermon series and small group sessions with some minor modifications. Chapter 3 provided supplemental material that I used in the series as well. The development of the curriculum happened on a week-to-week basis throughout the duration of the series. The summaries for the six sermons were presented to my expert panel for their review and feedback. After receiving feedback, any suggested edits were made to the sermons. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded sufficiency level.¹⁰⁹

The third goal was to develop a six-week small group curriculum that would prepare the church to share historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. The purpose of the group studies was to help participants take what was learned during the Sunday morning sermon and put it into practice. The discussion guides were presented to the expert panel for their review and feedback. After receiving feedback, any suggested

¹⁰⁸ See appendix 1.

¹⁰⁹ See appendix 2.

edits were made to the small group curriculum. GBC's small groups meet in people's homes throughout our community. Each group received the curriculum several days before their session. The curriculum was provided early so that participants could read through it and think about their responses to the questions ahead of time. The curriculum each week consisted of ten discussion questions. Some of the questions focused on evangelistic practices, while others focused on doing apologetics. Additionally, some questions included short videos related to the topic at hand, while others included miniature case studies. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.¹¹⁰

The fourth goal was to increase knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection among the project participants. At the conclusion of the six-week series, participants retook the evangelism and apologetics survey they completed before the launch of the series.¹¹¹ Some of the survey questions focused specifically on knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre-and post-survey scores among the knowledge questions.

Finally, the fifth goal was to increase confidence among the members of GBC to share their faith with non-Christians. Some of the survey questions focused specifically on evangelism confidence with different groups of people. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre-and post-survey scores among the confidence questions.

¹¹⁰ See appendix 3.

¹¹¹ See appendix 1.

Assessment of Understanding of Evangelistic Practice and Historical Arguments for Resurrection

The first goal was to assess the understanding of the historical arguments for believing in Jesus’s resurrection and the evangelistic practices among the members of GBC. To achieve this goal, I administered a pre-series apologetics and evangelism survey to GBC. Furthermore, I spent two weeks compiling and examining the results. The surveys revealed that 88 percent of GBC members evangelize at most once per month. Almost half of the members evangelize only once per year.

Table 1. Pre-series participant response concerning evangelism

Survey Question (74 responses)	never	1/yr	1/mo	1/wk	2/wk
1. How often do you attempt to share your faith?	3	31	32	6	3

When asked why they do not evangelize more, the number one answer given was that they were afraid they would not know how to answer people’s questions. The second highest reason was that they were afraid how people would respond to them.

Table 2. Pre-series participant response concerning what prohibits their evangelism

Survey Question (85 responses)	Fear of how others will respond	Not knowing how to answer questions	Not around enough unbelievers	Other/ Miscellaneous
3. What is the greatest obstacle to your evangelism?	27	32	11	15

Of the nine survey questions using the five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, disagree, undecided, agree, strongly agree), most responses averaged out around a 3 (undecided). The lowest average was in response to the comfortability of talking to atheists/agnostics about Christianity (2.84). By far the highest response was the ability to explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross (4.45). This response was expected, as the question had more to do with theology we rehearse in corporate worship rather than apologetics or evangelism.

Table 3. Pre-series participant response concerning evangelism and apologetics

Survey Questions (75 Responses)	SD	D	U	A	SA
4. I am uncomfortable talking to non-hostile unbelievers about Christianity.	3	18	9	33	12
5. I am comfortable talking to individuals of other faiths about Christianity.	7	14	10	36	8
6. I am uncomfortable talking to atheists/agnostics about Christianity.	9	28	10	22	6
7. I can demonstrate to critics that the Bible is reliable.	3	19	25	27	1
8. I can demonstrate from a historical perspective that Jesus died on a cross.	1	20	25	25	4
9. I do not know how to respond to skeptics who argue that Gospels fabricated Jesus's burial in Joseph's tomb.	4	27	18	20	6
10. I know how to respond to the argument that Jesus's earliest followers stole his body from the tomb and then lied about the resurrection.	4	19	22	24	6
11. I can demonstrate from the Old Testament that Jesus's death and resurrection were predicted hundreds of years in advance.	2	11	17	34	11
12. I can explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross.	2	1	3	24	45

Develop Six-Week Sermon Series and Small Group Curriculum

The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series on sharing historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. The third goal was to develop a six-week small group curriculum that would prepare the church to share historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. After examining the pre-series surveys, I began the six-week series. Each week I delivered the Sunday morning sermon at GBC and wrote a complementary small group curriculum.

Sermon 1: “Jesus Is No Legend.” In this first sermon, I introduced the entire series and explained its purpose. People in our communities are lost and need Jesus. Furthermore, many of them have serious objections to the truth claims of Christianity. Though I could have focused on any number of issues, I chose the resurrection as it remains the linchpin of the Christian faith. Paul even claimed it is “of first importance” (1 Cor 15:3).

Before jumping into the text, I explained to the congregation that many skeptics doubt the truth claims of Christianity because they believe the Jesus story contains legendary embellishments. In other words, a real Jesus figure existed, but not the one found in the Gospels. Rather, as the early church passed along stories of Jesus, those stories shifted and changed along the way—not unlike the children's game of telephone. Eventually, the Gospel writers wrote down these stories, mixed with both truths and legends.

Critics, therefore, argue that the few decade timespan between Christ's death and the Gospels provided too much time for an accurate recording of what actually happened. Be that as it may, compared to other biographies in the ancient world, four decades is a relatively short time period. For example, Alexander the Great's first biography came about four hundred years after his death.

While I wanted to show the church that the span of a few decades was actually short by ancient standards, I also wanted to show them that we can get even closer to the events of Jesus than a few decades by examining 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, thereby eliminating the legendary embellishment theory.

Paul begins 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 by stating, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.” By using these technical terms, Paul indicates that he was passing along a tradition he had previously received from others. In fact, Paul uses these terms elsewhere in the same letter when speaking of the Lord’s Supper. There he indicates, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you” (1 Cor 11:23).

Additionally, many of the terms within the text are utterly unique to Paul. Among others, these terms include “the twelve” and “according to the Scriptures.” Furthermore, the stylized form of the verses indicates that this block of text was crafted for memorization and recitation purposes.

I made the case that Paul received the creed in Jerusalem in AD 36, just a few short years after his conversion while visiting Jerusalem (Gal 1).

This text, then, looks like an early creed that originated in Jerusalem within a few years of Jesus’s death. The early date as well, as the Jerusalem location, rules out the legendary embellishment theory.

In addition to the early dating of the creed, I spent the second half of the message arguing that the Gospels are reliable sources as well. I gave four reasons, all starting with the letter E: (1) Eyewitness testimony, (2) Early dating, (3), Embarrassing material, and (4) Extra-biblical sources.

In addition to the message, I also wrote small group curriculum that built off and expanded the Sunday morning sermon. The curriculum included discussion questions, videos, role play, and situational apologetics questions. I repeated this process for each of the remaining weeks.

Sermon 2: “God’s Love Displayed.” In this sermon, I turned our attention to the phrase, “Christ died.” Christ’s death, of course, is of utmost importance for the Christian gospel. Do we, however, have good evidence that Jesus died on a cross? In the first part of the sermon, I focused on the historical evidence for Christ’s crucifixion.

I examined early texts such as the canonical Gospels and the New Testament letters, as well as other extra-biblical sources. Specifically, I focused on quotations from Josephus and Tacitus that indicate Jesus died by crucifixion under the direction of Pontius Pilate. Moreover, I examined the embarrassing nature of crucifixions and made the case that the early church never would have invented this story. Finally, I examined the crucifixion process itself to give the church a feel for what Jesus endured that day and to prove that Jesus could not have survived the brutal treatment.

After examining the evidence for the crucifixion, I turned our gaze to the question of why God would subject himself to a brutal crucifixion. In short, I made the case that it was the immeasurable love of God that placed Jesus on the cross. God loves the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son. Furthermore, the crucifixion is an excellent example that God accomplishes his great purposes through suffering. While people can never know for sure why God allows suffering, the cross tells us that suffering is not because God does not love us.

As was true of the entire series, the goal of this message was to equip the church to share the Gospel with unbelievers. I brought up the problem of evil because it is a common objection. My hope is that when faced with that objection in the future, the church will be able to point people to the crucifixion and share the love of God for the world.

Sermon 3: “Quietly Buried.” Why does God seem distant or hidden? Other than the problem of evil, the problem of God’s hiddenness is perhaps the greatest objection to Christianity. People wonder why God fails to answer their prayers or show

up when they really need him.

In this sermon, I examined the phrase, “he was buried.” In doing so, I took the church through the evidence for Jesus’s burial in a tomb. Before doing so, I introduced the church to the objection that Jesus would never have received a proper burial. Rather, the Romans would have left him on the cross for days so that animals could eat away at his flesh.

So why believe Jesus received a proper burial? First, our earliest sources (the canonical Gospels) unanimously state that it happened. Second, both Jewish and Roman customs allowed for the proper burial of crucifixion victims. Third, archaeological findings support that crucified victims did in fact receive proper burials. And fourth, Joseph of Arimathea is an unlikely invention.

As was true with the previous message, I raised a difficult question that skeptics have when it comes to Christianity. Why is God so hidden? I spent the rest of our time focusing on this question by thinking more deeply about Jesus’s burial.

On Holy Saturday, it appeared as if God was distant or silent. All the disciples’ hopes and dreams had vanished. Why had God not come to their aid? All of us have had that experience. Yet, Jesus’s burial in a tomb indicates that God’s silence does not mean his absence. Rather, God’s silence on that Saturday was part of his sovereign plan from the beginning.

Sermon 4: “Alive and Visible.” This message addressed the heart of the series: Jesus’s resurrection from the dead. By examining the phrases “he was buried” and “he was raised,” I covered the evidence for both the empty tomb and the subsequent post-mortem appearances.

I started with evidence for the empty tomb. First, all four canonical Gospels report that it was empty. Again, these are four first-century sources. Second, Christianity could not have gotten off the ground in Jerusalem if Jesus’s body remained in the tomb.

The Jewish leaders could have easily exposed the myth by presenting Jesus's body to the public. Third, the Jewish opponents even admitted the tomb was empty. They told everyone that the disciples stole the body and implicitly admitted the tomb was empty. Fourth, the early church never would have credited women as the first eyewitnesses. A woman's testimony, after all, was not admissible in a court of law.

The empty tomb, however, was not enough by itself to get Christianity off the ground. In fact, almost no one assumed a resurrection upon seeing the empty tomb. Instead, they believed someone had moved the body. All that changed, however, when Jesus appeared to them. Paul does not mention the women in his list of eyewitnesses, but he gives a long list of others including Peter, the twelve disciples, Jesus's brother James, over five hundred people at one time, and Paul himself.

In the second portion of the message, I emphasized the transformation of Peter, James, and Paul. Specifically, I demonstrated that all three transformed from either cowards, skeptics, or opponents to bold ambassadors of Jesus, ultimately being martyred for their faith. I explained that the best explanation for their transformations is that they saw Jesus back from the dead.

After presenting the positive evidence, I answered two key objections. The first was that the disciples stole the body and lied about it. Yet their gruesome deaths indicate that they were sincere in their beliefs. The second objection was that the disciples hallucinated. However, hallucinations are private, individual experiences. Entire groups could not experience the same hallucination.

Finally, as I brought the message to a close, I asked the congregation to consider how Christianity spread in the early days. For the most part, Christianity spread because the people who encountered Jesus told others about their experience with Jesus. Though we have not seen Jesus physically, all of us have had a life-transforming experience with Jesus. I asked the church to consider how they could adopt the same methods as the earliest disciples by telling others about Jesus. I also reminded them that

the same Spirit who empowered those earliest followers to boldly proclaim Christ no matter the consequences also dwells in us today.

Sermon 5: “Predicted Hundreds of Years in Advance.” In this fifth sermon, I examined how the Old Testament points toward Jesus’s eventual death and resurrection. Specifically, I examined the phrase, “according to the Scriptures.” While all of the Old Testament points to Jesus, this message focused primarily on the Suffering Servant passage in Isaiah 53.

I began by showing the church the chiasmic structure of the text. The point of this exercise was to show them that verses 4–6 emphasized the Servant’s substitutionary death.

Using the chiasmic structure, I broke down the text into two major sections. The first section emphasized the death of the Servant. The second section emphasized the resurrection and exaltation of the Servant. Of all the messages, this one was the most unique in that I spent the entire time unpacking one particular text. The purpose, of course, was to highlight that the Old Testament accurately predicted Jesus’s future death and resurrection. Moreover, Isaiah accurately predicted the kind of death Jesus would die when he indicated he would “be pierced.” At the time of Isaiah’s writing, the known death penalties were either hanging or stoning. The fact that Isaiah could predict a crucifixion demonstrates supernatural involvement.

Throughout the message, I answered objections about the text. Specifically, I addressed those who suggest that the Servant refers to the Israelite community at large and not an individual. I gave several reasons for rejecting this view. As I brought the sermon to a close, I demonstrated for the church how they could use this text in an evangelism scenario.

Sermon 6: “In My Place.” In this final sermon, I focused on the phrase “for our sins.” While in the first five sermons, I focused mostly on doing apologetics, this

sermon had more of a theological emphasis, though I still included apologetics. I began the message by asking why we should think Christ's death accomplished a cosmic transaction. Thousands of people were crucified in the ancient world. What makes Jesus's crucifixion unique?

I provided five reasons for thinking Jesus's death was a sacrifice for sins. First, the Old Testament prophets predicted it. Both Isaiah and Zechariah even predicted the type of death Jesus would die long before crucifixions had been invented. Second, the sacrificial system pointed to it. The book of Leviticus provides the necessary categories of blood sacrifice to see that Jesus's death made atonement for sin. Third, Jesus foretold it in his earthly ministry. At one point, he specifically claimed that he would "lay down his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28). The word ransom implies payment. Fourth, the darkness and earthquake suggested it. In other words, these occurrences coinciding with Jesus's death seem highly coincidental if God was not, in fact, saying something about Jesus's death. A first-century historian named Thallus possibly alludes to these events. Fifth, the resurrection shouted it. If Jesus stayed dead, then no one could be sure that God received his sacrifice. His resurrection, however, demonstrates that God found his sacrifice pleasing.

After examining the reasons for believing Jesus's death was a sacrifice for sins, I spent the next half of the message considering three implications of his death. First, I considered the implication that God is holy, and we are sinners. That is to say, the cross provided an opportunity for God to judge sin while simultaneously showing mercy towards sinners. I also addressed the objection that penal substitutionary sacrifice is unbecoming of a loving God.

The second implication is that Jesus is the only way of salvation. In other words, the cross is God's solution to humanity's problem. No other world religion deals with the problem. I also demonstrated that it is entirely false to suggest that all religions basically teach the same thing.

The third implication is that Christians must proclaim this message. If, in fact, the cross is the only solution to man’s greatest problem, then we cannot afford to keep the message to ourselves. We must get it out. The gospel is a message of hope that this dying world so desperately needs to hear.

Increase Knowledge of Historical Arguments for Resurrection and Evangelism Confidence

The fourth goal was to increase knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus’s resurrection among the members of GBC. The fifth goal was to increase confidence among the members of GBC to share their faith with non-Christians. The successful completion of both goals was determined by comparing pre- and post-series surveys. Of the sixty-one participants who completed the post-series surveys, most completed them within two weeks of the series conclusion. I spent another three weeks compiling and examining the data from the pre- and post-series.

Table 4 demonstrates that the mean scores between pre- and post-surveys using a five-point Likert scale increased for all questions related to the knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus’s resurrection.

Table 4. Post-series mean change in knowledge of historical arguments

Survey Question	Pre-series Mean	Post-Series Mean	Change
7. I can demonstrate to critics that the Bible is reliable.	3.06	4.05	+0.99
8. I can demonstrate from a historical perspective that Jesus died on a cross.	3.10	4.23	+1.13
9. I do not know how to respond to skeptics who argue that the Gospels fabricated Jesus’s burial in Joseph’s tomb.	2.92	4.11	+1.19
10. I know how to respond to the argument that Jesus’s earliest followers stole his body from the tomb and then lied about the resurrection.	3.02	4.21	+1.19

Survey Question	Pre-series Mean	Post-Series Mean	Change
11. I can demonstrate from the Old Testament that Jesus's death and resurrection were predicted hundreds of years in advance.	3.63	4.20	+0.57
12. I can explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross.	4.50	4.61	+0.11

The greatest increase in knowledge revolved around the historical evidence for Jesus's death (+1.13), burial (+1.19), and resurrection (+1.19). Additionally, knowledge with respect to the Bible's reliability (+0.99) and how the Old Testament predicted Christ's death and resurrection (+0.57) increased at significant margins as well. As was expected, the smallest increase was with respect to what the cross accomplished (+0.11) since participants already scored high in that category in the pre-series surveys.

Table 5 presents the results of the *t*-test for dependent samples for the pre- and post-survey knowledge questions. A *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey total scores for knowledge questions: $t_{(60)} = -10.667, p < .001$.

Table 5. Results of *t*-test dependent samples for knowledge questions

	Pre-Series Knowledge	Post-Series Knowledge
Mean	20.13114754	25.40983607
Variance	10.21584699	10.61256831
Observations	61	61
Pearson Correlation	0.282872179	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	60	—
t Stat	-10.66716508	—

	Pre-Series Knowledge	Post-Series Knowledge
P(T<=t) one-tail	8.75545E-16	—
t Critical one-tail	1.670648865	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.75109E-15	—
t Critical two-tail	2.000297822	—

Table 6 demonstrates that the mean scores between pre- and post-surveys using a five-point Likert scale increased for all questions related to confidence in evangelism encounters.

Table 6. Post-series mean change in evangelism confidence

Survey Question	Pre-Series Mean	Post-Series Mean	Change
4. I am uncomfortable talking to non-hostile unbelievers about Christianity.	3.42	3.61	+0.19
5. I am comfortable talking to individuals of other faiths about Christianity.	3.29	3.56	+0.27
6. I am uncomfortable talking to atheists/agnostics about Christianity.	2.71	3.26	+0.55

While the growth was less substantial than the knowledge questions surrounding Jesus’s resurrection, the participants nonetheless grew in their evangelism confidence. The largest increase was with respect to sharing their faith with atheists/agnostics (+0.55). This growth was expected, as the series was directed at answering common atheist/agnostic objections to the gospel story. Confidence also grew in speaking to people of other faiths (+0.27) and non-hostile unbelievers (+0.19).

Table 7 presents the results of the t-test for dependent samples for the pre- and post-surveys related to evangelism confidence. A t-test for dependent samples

demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey confidence questions: $t_{(60)} = -3.345$, $p < .002$.

Table 7. Results of t -test for dependent samples for evangelism confidence

	Pre-Series Survey	Post-Series Survey
Mean	9.459016393	10.42622951
Variance	5.58579235	4.615300546
Observations	61	61
Pearson Correlation	0.5024396292	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	60	—
t Stat	-3.345403788	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000710637	—
t Critical one-tail	1.670648865	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001421275	—
t Critical two-tail	2.000297822	—

Table 8 presents the results of the t -test for dependent samples for the entire pre- and post-series surveys.

Table 8. Results of t -test for dependent samples for entire survey

	Pre-Series Survey	Post-Series Survey
Mean	29.59016393	35.83606557
Variance	19.14590164	17.43934426
Observations	61	61

	Pre-Series Survey	Post-Series Survey
Pearson Correlation	#N/A	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	60	—
t Stat	-10.25642298	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.06264E-15	—
t Critical one-tail	1.670648865	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	8.12529E-15	—
t Critical two-tail	2.000297822	—

The *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey overall scores: $t_{(60)} = -10.256, p < .001$.

Conclusion

This project was intended to equip the members of GBC to present historical arguments for believing in Jesus to non-believers with the purpose of leading them to Christ. The success of the project was determined by the completion of five goals. The first goal was to assess the understanding of the historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection and the evangelistic practices among the members of GBC. The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series on sharing historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. The third goal was to develop a six-week small group curriculum that would prepare the church to share historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. The fourth goal was to increase knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection among the members of GBC. Finally, the fifth goal was to increase confidence among the members of GBC to share their faith with non-Christians.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter will assess the project by giving careful attention to its purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. The chapter will also offer recommendations for future implementation as well as theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the people of Grace Bible Church in Moore, South Carolina, to present historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection to non-Christians with the purpose of leading them to Christ. This purpose originated from observing two trends. First, GBC's community is growing increasingly skeptical of the truth claims of Christianity. This skeptical trajectory is due to both the rapid influx of non-Christians into GBC's community as well as the several secular universities within an hour's drive of the church. Second, GBC has seen few converts over the last several years, despite the fact that the church continues to grow numerically. By the grace of God, the current membership of GBC recognizes the need to provide intellectual reasons for their faith. Doing so, however, is a difficult task.

The purpose of equipping people to engage unbelievers with the truth claims of Christianity is consistent with Scripture's exhortation to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20). How one makes a disciple looks different from person to person. In a skeptical environment, making disciples often takes the form of showing evidence that Christianity is true. This method of persuasion is consistent with the apostle Paul's evangelistic method as he frequently "reasoned," "proved," and "persuaded" his unbelieving counterparts (Acts 17:2-4, 17; 19:8). Moreover, the exhortation to "always

be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” supports this project’s overall purpose (1 Pet 3:15). After all, providing evidence for Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection is providing a defense of the Christian faith.

Evaluation of Project Goals

The five goals supported the project’s purpose and proved effective in equipping the people of Grace Bible Church in Moore, South Carolina, to present historical arguments for believing in Jesus’s resurrection to non-Christians with the purpose of leading them to Christ. The project included the following five goals: (1) to assess the understanding of the historical arguments for believing in Jesus’s resurrection and the evangelistic confidence among the members of GBC; (2) to develop a six-week sermon series on sharing historical arguments for believing in Jesus’s resurrection; (3) to develop a six-week small group curriculum that would prepare the church to share historical arguments for believing in Jesus’s resurrection; (4) to increase knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus’s resurrection among the members of GBC; and (5) to increase confidence among the members of GBC to share their faith with non-Christians.

Assessment of Understanding of Evangelistic Practice and Historical Arguments for Resurrection

The first goal was to assess the understanding of the historical arguments for believing in Jesus’s resurrection and the evangelistic confidence among the members of GBC. Prior to the six-week series, a pre-series survey was dispersed to the membership of GBC at a membership meeting. The initial goal of receiving at least fifty surveys was surpassed when seventy-five members completed the initial survey. Evaluation of the data revealed that a majority of GBC evangelize at most once per month. Furthermore, about half of the congregation evangelize at most once per year. This initial data

confirmed chapter 1's concerns that GBC fails to engage consistently with non-Christians.

In addition to evangelism frequency, the initial surveys also revealed the average participant score of 3.14/5 on a Likert scale measuring evangelism confidence. The surveys also reported an average score of 3.37/5 on a Likert scale measuring knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. These data points informed the direction of the series content.

Six-Week Sermon Series

The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series on sharing historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. Chapter 2 of this project served as the outline for the sermon series. Chapter 3 also provided complementary material. The sermon summaries were presented to the expert panel, who provided feedback. The sermons were composed and delivered on a week-by-week basis throughout the series. The content of these sermons focused on equipping the participants to engage GBC's skeptical community. This goal was met when 100 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level as determined by the expert panel.

Six-Week Small-Group Curriculum

The third goal was to develop a six-week small group curriculum that would prepare the church to share historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. The curriculum was largely based upon the Sunday morning sermons and was meant to expand upon the material as well as provide opportunities for application. The small group curriculum was presented to the expert panel, who provided feedback. That feedback was incorporated into the curriculum. The curriculum was created prior to the series, though slight modifications were made along the way as the series progressed. The curriculum aimed to equip the participants to engage GBC's skeptical community by providing opportunities for people to practice conversations in a safe environment. The

curriculum was critical to the success of the project since much of GBC grew up in fundamentalism and never had before engaged spiritual skeptics in conversation. This goal was met when 100 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level as determined by the expert panel.

Increase in Knowledge of Historical Arguments for Resurrection

The fourth goal was to increase knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection in the members of GBC. The sermon series and small group curriculum served as the tools to achieve this goal. The presentation of the historical arguments for believing in the resurrection in the sermons was meant to show that Christianity can withstand intellectual scrutiny. The pre-series survey yielded an average score of 3.37/5 on a Likert scale measuring knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus. The post-series surveys saw that number increase to 4.23/5 on a Likert scale. This goal was considered successfully met when an evaluation of the pre- and post-series surveys demonstrated positive statistically significant results: $t_{(60)} = -10.667, p < .001$.

Increase Evangelism Confidence

The fifth goal was to increase confidence among the members of GBC to share their faith with non-Christians. The sermon series and small group curriculum served as the tools to achieve this goal. Again, the primary evangelism techniques most observed during their upbringings were street preaching or door-to-door evangelism—two methods that are largely ineffective today. As a result, evangelism confidence was low among GBC's membership. Hence, the need to increase their confidence was evident. The pre-series survey yielded an average score of 3.14/5 on a Likert scale measuring evangelism confidence. The post-series surveys saw that number increase to 3.48/5 on a Likert scale.

This goal was considered successfully met when an evaluation of the pre- and

post-series surveys demonstrated positive statistically significant results: $t_{(60)} = -3.345$, $p < .002$.

Evaluation of Project Strengths

The first strength of the project was that it was rooted in Scripture: both the necessity of doing apologetics as well as the content itself originated from the biblical text. Scripture is abundantly clear that Christians are called to make disciples (Matt 28:18–20). Furthermore, Scripture exhorts believers to make a defense of their faith (1 Pet 3:15). In addition to the exhortation, Scripture contains examples within historical narratives in which Christians seek to “reason with” or “persuade” lost people that Christianity is true (Acts 17:2–4, 7; 19:8). At the same time, while much of the content for this series came from outside of Scripture, the general outline of the series came from 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. In short, the series both came out of and was justified by Scripture. This commitment to Scripture is also consistent with GBC’s statement of faith.

The second strength is that the project addressed a specific weakness at GBC. The project, therefore, was not simply “speaking to the choir.” It addressed what is arguably the greatest weakness of the church: evangelism. As chapter 1 indicated, GBC has struggled to successfully engage non-Christians. Much of this struggle can be attributed to the fact that a large percentage of the church came from fundamentalist backgrounds that, on principle, chose to separate as much as possible from the world. Moreover, when the former fundamentalists observed evangelism, they observed methods that do not work in our cultural climate: street preaching and door-to-door evangelism. Therefore, evangelism remains a weakness in the church. As the pre-series surveys demonstrated, 88 percent of GBC evangelizes, at most, only once per month. Almost half of the participants indicated that they evangelize only once per year. The project, therefore, was immensely practical for the overall health of GBC. Because a lack of evangelistic zeal pervades the entire congregation, it was decided that the project should

target the whole church at Sunday morning services and small groups, rather than offering an evening class that might only affect a small number of people.

The third strength is that the project addressed the felt needs of the congregation. In the pre-series surveys, the number one reason given for not evangelizing more was that people did not know how to respond to other people's questions. This response was not surprising since numerous people in the church come from fundamentalist backgrounds, and their exposure to skepticism continues to rise. Moreover, many of these same congregants had previously expressed concerns about not being able to answer their friends' objections to the Christian faith. Even if people did not have specific people in mind who were raising objections, the church as a whole recognizes that the next generation is leaving the church over intellectual objections, and therefore, it must be ready to provide good reasons for its beliefs. While other factors may have contributed, average weekly attendance increased about 10 percent from the normal average throughout the duration of the series, demonstrating that the congregation knew it needed to grow in this area.

The fourth strength was that the project generated growth. By comparing the pre- and post-series surveys, the church grew in both its evangelism confidence and its knowledge of historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection. The t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey overall scores: $t_{(60)} = -10.256, p < .001$. Throughout the course of the series, several participants shared with me how much they appreciated the series and how they were already implementing it in their contexts. While the long-term fruit of this project is unknown, at this point the church is heading in the right direction as it seeks to engage its skeptical community, thus overcoming its fundamentalist history.

Evaluation of Project Weakness

The first weakness of the project was that it never made people put the series

content into practice. To be sure, the small groups provided opportunities for the participants to practice responding to skeptics' objections and providing reasons for believing in Jesus's resurrection. The participants, however, never had to actually have conversations with unbelievers, though they were encouraged to do so throughout the series. Now, some did share that they had opportunities to talk with skeptical co-workers or schoolmates about the contents of the project. Yet, the number of participants who shared these experiences was less than ten percent of the total participants. Again, as chapter 1 noted, a large percentage of GBC's congregants come from fundamentalist backgrounds. These members were conditioned to separate from the world. Furthermore, since the culture continues to trend in a skeptical direction, sharing the series content with unbelievers may prove too difficult for some.

The second weakness of the project is that it did not provide enough evangelism training for the participants. The sermons and small group curriculum emphasized the historical evidence for the resurrection. They did not, however, provide enough practical tools for the participants to use in evangelistic encounters. The first and fifth sermons did provide evangelism tools to a certain degree, but the rest of the series fell short in this area. As many in the congregation have never seen good evangelism, I could have boosted the participants' evangelism confidence even more by providing more evangelistic tools for the participants.

Proposed Project Changes

One change that could be made to this project is including a culminating question and answer time for the participants. This session would have provided opportunities for people to express whatever questions they had about the content or counsel on how they might engage their skeptical friends' objections. In a way, this time could have tied up any loose ends that may have been left unaddressed throughout the

six-week series. While the series was comprehensive, it most certainly did not address everything there is to know.

A second change that could have improved the project was requiring participants to implement the series content by participating in a simulated apologetics conversation. This suggestion, however, is only recommended for those who have extra time to schedule simulated conversations with the project participants. As this project had sixty-one participants, implementing this simulated conversation would have taken more time than was available. Be that as it may, these conversations could consist of the administrator playing the role of skeptic and raising a series of objections. The administrator would then score how well the participant handled the conversation using a rubric.¹

Theological Reflections

As I researched and developed this project, I was able to reflect on several important truths. First, I was reminded that God's Word is always true (John 10:35). After spending over a year doing historical research, I never once fretted over whether my research would lead me to question Scripture's veracity. On the contrary, the historical inquiry only bolstered my confidence in Scripture's truthfulness. This confidence in Scripture was also conveyed to the project participants, not only through the first message of the series, which focused on the reliability of Scripture, but throughout the series as a whole.

Second, I was struck by how frequently the early apostles engaged in apologetics when seeking to win the lost. I discovered that they did not typically proclaim propositional truths and leave it at that. They frequently pointed to proofs and reasons to persuade others that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 17:2-4, 17; 19:8). This evangelistic

¹ See appendix 4.

method has not been impressed upon the church enough. People often assume that simply sharing that Christ died and rose is all that they are called to do in evangelism. They believe the Holy Spirit will then take that message and save people. Certainly, the Holy Spirit can save people that way. Yet, it is not undermining the Spirit's power to use apologetics when seeking to save the lost. After all, the apostles, who were filled with the Holy Spirit, frequently did apologetics.

Third, I was reminded how frequently the apostles emphasized the centrality of Christ's resurrection when doing evangelism (Acts 2:22–36; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33–37; 17:31; 26:23). This point is especially helpful when engaging skeptics' objections about other points. While certain objections need answering, steering the conversation back to the resurrection is often the best strategy an apologist can employ. After all, if Jesus rose from the dead, Christianity is true whether or not one thinks events such as the Canaanite conquests were immoral. The apologist and the skeptic can work out those other issues later.

Fourth, the project impressed upon me the importance of loving my neighbor. While doing apologetics can be time-consuming and requires a lot of mental work, my love for unsaved friends compels me to keep growing as an apologist. I also shared this impression with the church as the sermon series began. I noted how most of our culture has a skeptical bent and will die in their sins unless we can show them that Jesus is the risen Lord. Both the Great Commission and the command to love our neighbor as ourselves compel us all to become better apologists so that more people will get saved.

Personal Reflections

Though my goal was to help my participants grow as evangelists and apologists, I was personally convicted to apply the truths and principles myself. Like most of GBC, I also came out of fundamentalism and face the same hurdles that many in the church face. Yet, throughout the series, I found myself praying more frequently for

unsaved neighbors and going out of my way to have spiritual conversations with them. My improved apologetics abilities also gave me more confidence to share my faith with others because I was more prepared to answer their questions. Throughout the course of the series, I engaged in several spiritual conversations with one of my non-Christian neighbors.

At the same time, I am still reminded that the Holy Spirit must do a supernatural work in someone's heart if they are going to turn to Christ. As the old adage goes, you cannot argue anyone into heaven. Of course, that statement is true. At the same time, you cannot preach, pray, or love anyone into heaven either. The Holy Spirit must work through these various means to bring about salvation in someone's life. And as the New Testament demonstrates, the Spirit frequently works through apologetics to convert sinners. In short, I frequently reminded myself that growing as an apologist and evangelist should never breed pride in me.

Conclusion

This project succeeded in its stated purpose: to equip the people of Grace Bible Church in Moore, South Carolina, to present historical arguments for believing in Jesus's resurrection to non-Christians with the purpose of leading them to Christ. At the same time, GBC has a long way to go. Only time will tell if the project produces long-lasting fruit.

Five months after the conclusion of the series, I emailed the congregation and solicited feedback on whether they had been able to use the sermon series content in conversations with unbelievers. Though only five members responded to this email, their responses were overwhelmingly positive. One member reported that she was able to explain the evidence of the resurrection to a group of unbelievers while on a recent mission trip to New York City. She was even able to respond positively to some of their objections. Another member described having conversations about the historical evidence

of the resurrection with co-workers. One member stated that he was able to use the message on fulfilled prophecies from the Old Testament to start conversations with non-Christians. Another said that he shared content from the series with a stranger while playing disc golf. Though that person has yet to receive Christ, that initial conversation on the golf course led to a friendship and ongoing discussions about faith. Everyone who responded noted that the series gave them greater confidence to share the gospel message.

Certainly, ongoing vision casting and training must occur in the church if the project is to have any long-term effect. GBC's stated mission is to glorify God by making disciples of all nations. If the church is going to carry out the spirit of that mission, it will need to continue to build off this project in the months and years ahead.

APPENDIX 1

EVANGELISM AND APOLOGETICS ASSESSMENT

The following instrument is an evangelism and apologetics assessment. Some general questions will be followed by a twenty-question survey with a five-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose is to assess each member's present understanding of the historical arguments for believing in Jesus and their evangelistic involvement.

EVANGELISM AND APOLOGETICS ASSESSMENT

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to gather information on your current understanding of historical Jesus studies as well as your evangelistic involvement. This survey is being conducted by Ryan Leasure as part of his doctoral research. As part of this research, you will complete this survey again at the completion of the apologetics series. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential. Participation in this study is completely optional, and you are free to withdraw at any time.

Demographic Information

For pre and post series comparison purposes, please provide the last four digits of your Social Security Number: _____

How many years have you been a Christian? _____

How many of the six sermons did you listen to? _____
(Note: only to be answered after the series)

How many of the six small groups did you attend? _____
(Note: only to be answered after the series)

Evangelism Confidence

1. Circle the answer that best indicates the minimum of how often you attempt to share your faith.
never once a year once a month once a week 2 times a week
2. Have you ever received evangelism training? Yes No
If yes, what type of training did you receive?

3. Place an X next to the greatest obstacle for your evangelism.
____ I'm fearful of how they'll respond to me.
____ I'm fearful I won't know how to answer their questions.
____ I don't think evangelism is my job.
____ I'm too busy.
____ Other: _____

Using the following scale, please write the number that best corresponds to your beliefs in response to the following statements:

SD – Strongly Disagree

D – Disagree

U – Undecided

A – Agree

SA – Strongly Agree

#	Question	SD	D	U	A	SA
4	I am uncomfortable talking to non-hostile, unbelievers about Christianity.					
5	I am comfortable talking to individuals of other faiths about Christianity.					
6	I am uncomfortable talking to atheists/agnostics about Christianity.					
7	I can demonstrate to critics that the Bible is reliable.					
8	I can demonstrate from a historical perspective that Jesus died on a cross.					
9	I do not know how to respond to skeptics who argue that the Gospels fabricated Jesus's burial in Joseph's tomb.					
10	I know how to respond to the argument that Jesus's earliest followers stole his body from the tomb and then lied about the resurrection.					
11	I can demonstrate from the Old Testament that Jesus's death and resurrection were predicted hundreds of years in advance.					
12	I can explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross					

APPENDIX 2

APOLOGETICS SERMON SERIES EVALUATION

The following evaluation was provided to an expert panel. This panel evaluated the sermons to ensure that they were biblically accurate, sufficiently thorough, clear in their presentation, and practical.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Apologetics Sermon Series Evaluation					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
The sermons were sound in their interpretation of Scripture.					
The sermons were faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The sermons sufficiently covered each issue they were designed to address.					
The sermons sufficiently covered objections to the historical Jesus.					
Accessibility					
Each sermon was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each sermon was accessible for the average person.					
Practicality					
The sermons clearly detail how to share historical arguments for believing in Jesus.					
At the end of the series, participants will be able to better share historical arguments for believing in Jesus.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3

APOLOGETICS SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM EVALUATION

The following evaluation was provided to an expert panel. This panel evaluated the small group curriculum to ensure that it was biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, accessible to a broad audience, and applicable.

Name of Evaluator: _____

Date: _____

Apologetics Small Group Curriculum Evaluation					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
The small group curriculum was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
The small group curriculum was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The small group curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The small group curriculum sufficiently covers historical arguments for believing in Jesus.					
Pedagogy					
Each small group session was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each small group session targeted multiple learning styles.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to share historical arguments for believing in Jesus.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better share historical arguments for believing in Jesus.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 4

EVANGELISM ASSIMILATION EVALUATION

The following evaluation was used during an evangelistic simulation for the purpose of completing goal 4. After the completion of the six-week series, the author used this tool to gauge the members' competency in sharing the Christian faith with skeptics. The participants were scored based on their ability to answer objections and ask pointed questions to the skeptic while engaging in a winsome manner.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Evangelism Assimilation Evaluation				
1 = insufficient 2 = sufficient 3 = exemplary				
Objection	1	2	3	Comments
Jesus was a myth.				
The Gospels are full of legendary details.				
Jesus did not receive a proper burial in a tomb.				
The disciples lied about the resurrection.				
There are lots of different ways to get to heaven.				
The Gospel writers made up stories to make it look like Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.				

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 5

MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION

The following tool was provided to an expert panel to evaluate the plan for training the church to present historical arguments for believing in Jesus.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Ministry Plan Evaluation					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The goals of the ministry plan are clearly stated.					
The need to grow in apologetics and evangelism is clearly stated in the ministry plan.					
The material presented in the ministry plan is faithful to the Bible.					
The material presented in the ministry plan is theologically sound.					
The components of the ministry plan are well-organized and concise.					
A timeline for implementing the ministry plan is clearly stated.					
The number of people necessary for implementing the ministry plan have been stated.					
Obstacles that may hinder implementing the ministry plan have been stated.					
Overall, I believe the plan, when executed will promote more evangelism by GBC's members.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 6

SERMON SERIES MANUSCRIPTS

This section contains the manuscripts of six sermons preached at Grace Bible Church during the Sunday morning services.

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES
Sermon 1: “Jesus Is No Legend”
1 Corinthians 15:3–8
January 30, 2022

Jaroslav Pelikan once remarked, “If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen—nothing else matters.” What did Pelikan mean by this statement? Well, on the one hand, he says if Christ is risen, then it’s the most important event in the history of the world and everything else pales in comparison, and it is worth devoting your entire life to him.

On the other hand, if Christ didn’t rise from the dead, then nothing in this life matters at all. Why is that? Well, what does Christ’s resurrection signify? It signifies that life exists beyond the grave. That when someone dies, they won’t cease to exist. But if Jesus stayed dead, and life doesn’t exist beyond the grave, then when we die, we’re simply worm food. We came into existence without any kind of purpose, and we will pass away from existence upon our death. No ultimate purpose. No ultimate meaning. Just arbitrary random existence.

The stakes couldn’t be higher. These two alternative options couldn’t be further from one another. If one is true, then life is filled with meaning and purpose and eternal life—a future resurrection for all who are in Christ. But if the other is true, life is devoid of any meaning at all.

For this very reason, the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus’ death and resurrection is of “first importance.” It’s of first importance because without it, Christianity is a hoax. As Paul says, “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14) He later goes on to say that if he didn’t rise, “we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19). We’re just wasting our time on this Jesus fella when we could be out living it up with the only short life we have.

Because Jesus’s resurrection is of “first importance,” we’re going to spend the

next six weeks examining the historical evidence for it. And we will do so by unpacking 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. Turn there with me.

I have two purposes in mind for this series. First, if you're a Christian, I want to increase the confidence you have in your faith. I want you to see that the historic claims of Christianity—specifically that Jesus died and rose again—are not based on wishful thinking. There are compelling reasons for believing that they happened in history.

The second purpose for this series is to equip you to go out and share the gospel of Jesus Christ more confidently. It is no secret to any of you, that our culture is becoming increasingly skeptical towards the truth claims of Christianity. It used to be that a majority of people in our community were interested in what the Bible had to say about Jesus and their eternal soul. They were interested because most people sort of assumed that the Bible was true. That's usually not the case anymore. Usually, people reject the Bible as a reliable text. They assume it's simply a manmade book littered with errors, offensive material, and not relevant to twenty-first century life.

So are you prepared to answer to the skeptics' objections against the Bible and Christianity? If Jesus commands us to make disciples, and many people in our culture are skeptical, how are we going to make disciples of them? We do what 1 Peter 3:15 instructs us to do. We give a defense of our faith. We answer objections and we provide evidence for what we believe.

Now some of you may object to this. This sounds like a lot of hard work. It is. But it's worth it. It's worth spending the time studying the evidence and thinking through arguments because lost people's souls matter. This is why we're going to spend six weeks thinking about how we might be able to persuade people to follow Jesus by pointing them to the evidence.

And can think of no better place to do this than 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. Let's read it together.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

The contents of this text form the linchpin of the Christian message. As Paul says, it's of "first importance." If the text reports false information, then the Christian faith crumbles. If, however, the text reports true information, then Jesus died and rose again for our sins. Its significance cannot be overstated.

This series, then, will be devoted to establishing the truth claims of this text. Did events like Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and postmortem appearance really happen? We will take six weeks to make the case that they did.

Today, our focus and main idea will be this: The story of Jesus has been reliably preserved. That is to say, the gospel message isn't some made up story. It's not a legend. It hasn't been tampered with. No. What we read about in this text, and what we read about in the Gospels is a true message that the earliest followers of Jesus reliably preserved for us.

The first argument I want to make this morning is this: The contents of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 have been reliably preserved. To make this point, we're going to focus on the beginning phrase: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received." Why is this phrase significant? Well, how many of you have ever heard of the children's game telephone? Back when I was an elementary school teacher, I used to play this game with my kids. It was always great fun. I'd start it out by whispering in the first kid's ear something like "Mr. Leasure is the best teacher in the whole world." And it would pass from one kid to the next till eventually the last kid would blurt out the message "Mr. Leasure has a bald head." Kids can be brutal.

Critics of Christianity believe that something similar happened with the story of Jesus. After his death, stories about Jesus circulated by word of mouth around the

Roman Empire. And while the story started out with a very human Jesus, as the story passed from one person the next hundreds of times over, all across the Roman Empire, the story gradually accrued legendary material. And so by the time people actually wrote these stories down in what we now know as the Gospels, they claimed Jesus was the miracle working Son of God who died and rose again for our sins. It's the classic legendary embellishment story—much like the one our grandparents told us about walking to school in three feet of snow, uphill, both ways.

Now obviously, the critic doesn't believe the Gospels were actually written by the traditional authors Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And they also don't believe that the earliest Gospel was written till at least four decades after Jesus' death. And they argue that forty years is a lot of time for legends to creep into the story. Therefore, they say we can't know for certain that the stories about Jesus are actually true. I'll address these objections in our second point. For now, I want to show you that we can actually get much closer to the time of Jesus than four decades by examining 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.

When Paul begins with the phrase, “for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,” he indicates that the message he is about to proclaim, didn't originate with him. Rather, Paul was passing along a tradition that he had received from others. We know this because Paul uses technical terminology for the passing and receiving of tradition—the words *paradidomi* and *paralambono* “delivered and receive.” These Greek words were used for formal transmission in both Greek and Jewish schools. In fact, Paul uses these terms elsewhere in 1 Corinthians when he talks about the Lord's Supper. There he says, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.” Again, Paul is passing along tradition he had received previously.

Even prominent atheist Bart Ehrman remarks, “The terminology of ‘received’ and ‘delivered,’ as often noted by scholars, is the kind of language commonly used in

Jewish circles to refer to traditions that are handed on from one teacher to the next.”¹ The first-century Jewish historian Josephus even notes that “the Pharisees have *delivered* (same Greek word) to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers.”² In other words, Pharisees passed along tradition that they received from their teachers. And guess what Paul used to be before he converted to Christianity? A Pharisee. It makes sense the Paul would continue to adopt the same language when passing along Christian tradition.

Now what exactly is Paul passing along? Most scholars agree that the message Paul passes along isn’t some generic statement, but rather a Christian creed that the early church used to recite in corporate worship. Remember, most people couldn’t read at this point, and the Gospels had not yet been written. So the early church created creeds that explained the core tenants of their faith and were easy to memorize.

Scholars agree that the text from verses 3–7 didn’t originate with Paul because it contains terms that Paul never uses elsewhere. For example, Paul never uses the phrase “the twelve” when referring to the disciples. He never uses the phrase, “according to the Scriptures” either. He prefers to use the statement, “it is written.” Paul also never mentions “on the third day” or the “five hundred.” Finally, Paul typically refers to our “sin” in the singular whereas the creed talks about “sins” in the plural. All that to say, Paul didn’t create this creed.

You may be wondering why scholars think it was a creed. Well, the text exists in a stylized parallel form, most likely for memorization purposes. In fact, the four lines of the creed are in two sets of parallel statements. This is exactly the structure one would expect if the goal was for people to memorize it.

¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Arguments for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 122.

² Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 13.10.6 (Whiston, 355).

Now while Paul uses the creed, he seems to amend it slightly. First, he adds the material about his own experience at the end in verse 8, and he adds the parenthetical remark, “most of whom are still living though some have fallen asleep.” Those don’t seem to have been part of the original creed.

Now the questions remains, where and when did Paul receive this creed? Fortunately, Paul provides a brief biographical sketch in Galatians that I believe sheds light on this question. In Galatians 1, Paul indicates that after he converted to Christianity, he did not immediately go up to the Jerusalem. Rather, he spent three years in Arabia. Then he writes, “After three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother” (Gal 1:18–19). Now sadly, the word “visit” isn’t the best translation for the Greek word *historasia*. You can hear the English word “history” there. The word is actually better translated as “inquire.” Paul came to inquire with Peter and James. As C. H. Dodd famously quipped, Paul and Peter didn’t spend “all their time talking about the weather.”³

No, I can imagine that Paul spent those fifteen days finding out—inquiring—everything he could from Peter and James about their experiences with Jesus. After all, those two are specifically mentioned as eyewitnesses to the resurrection in the 1 Corinthians 15 creed. And this is most likely the time Paul would have received the creed. If that’s the case, the creed originated in Jerusalem and dates to before AD 36. I say AD 36 because if Jesus died in the year 30, and Paul converted to Christianity in 33, as most scholars believe, then that puts Paul back in Jerusalem three years after that in 36. And if Paul received the creed in 36, that means it was already circulating prior to his arrival in Jerusalem.

³ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967), 26.

The renowned biblical scholar N. T. Wright argues, “It was probably formulated within the first two or three years after Easter itself, since it was already in formulaic form when Paul ‘received’ it. We are here in touch with the earliest Christian tradition.”⁴

To sum it up, the Jerusalem church proclaimed the creed of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 as early as two years after Jesus’ death. The early date rules out the objection that Jesus’ resurrection was the result of legendary embellishments. They were proclaiming this message when the events were still fresh in everyone’s minds. Furthermore, they proclaimed these details in Jerusalem—the very place where people could investigate the claims for themselves. These details lead even Dale Allison, not a conservative scholar by any stretch to conclude, “First Corinthians 15:3–8 is not folklore.”⁵ To put it another way, the contents of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 have been reliably preserved.

So Christian, be confident that this isn’t some made up story. At the same time, the creed only contains information about Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and postmortem appearances. What about the rest of Jesus’ story? What about the Gospels?

My second argument is this: The contents in the Gospels have been reliably preserved. Now we could spend a six-week series focusing specifically on the reliability of the Gospels. There is a lot of evidence to suggest they are reliable. We don’t have that kind of time though. So in the next few minutes, I want to give you four reasons. Each reason starts with the letter E.

First, we can trust the Gospels because they contain eyewitness testimony. As I mentioned in the beginning, skeptics argue that non-eyewitnesses wrote the Gospels. Only later did people attribute the Gospels to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to give

⁴ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 319.

⁵ Dale C. Allison Jr., *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 234.

them needed credibility. The problem with this assertion, however, is that it lacks any evidence and goes against the universal testimony of the early church.

The earliest statement we have about Gospel authorship comes from a man named Papias around the year AD 130. Papias was a bishop in Hierapolis, a city in Asia Minor. Papias claimed to have had a personal relationship with the apostle John and claims to have received the following information from him:

This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, . . . so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote something as he remembered them.⁶

This quotation states that Mark—John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas—wrote the Gospel traditionally known by his name based on Peter’s eyewitness testimony. According to Acts 12:12–14, we know that Peter spent time in Mark’s house. Additionally, 1 Peter 5:13 notes that Mark was Peter’s companion in Rome. One can easily imagine how Peter frequently told his friend Mark stories of Jesus. Mark eventually wrote these stories down, though Papias complains that those stories were not in chronological order. That said, Papias notes that Mark made “no error” when writing his Gospel.

A few decades later, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, tells us all four Gospel authors. He remarked:

Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.⁷

⁶ Eusebius Pamphilus, *Hist. eccl.* 1.39.15 (*NPNF*², 1:173).

⁷ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Haer.* 3.1.1 (*ANF*, 1:414).

Around AD 200, Tertullian declared, “John and Matthew first instill faith into us; whilst of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterward.”⁸ Tertullian’s remark is instructive for it indicates why the early church received Luke and Mark. While they were not apostles themselves, they were close followers of the apostles, and therefore, appropriately called “apostolic men.” In fact, writing almost half a century earlier around AD 160, Justin Martyr affirms that the Gospels “were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them.”⁹ The apostles were Matthew and John and those who followed them were Mark and Luke.

This statement is consistent with Luke’s opening prologue. He remarks:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

In this opening paragraph, Luke indicates that he wasn’t an eyewitness like Matthew and John. However, Luke says he investigated the eyewitness sources so that he could write a reliable Gospel account as well.

Not only do the church fathers universally affirm Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as authors, and when I say universal, I mean there isn’t one dissenter, we also have universal consensus among all the earliest Greek manuscripts. If the skeptics were right, wouldn’t some of the earliest manuscripts have different titles? Yet, of all the Gospel manuscripts we have discovered from the earliest centuries, every single one of them is titled Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

One final point before moving on: if the skeptics are right, and the early church wanted to add credibility to the Gospels, why would they attribute them to people like

⁸ Tertullian of Carthage, *Marc.* 4.2.17–18 (*ANF*, 3:347).

⁹ Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 103 (*ANF*, 1:251).

Mark and Luke. After all, neither one of them were eyewitnesses themselves. Why not attribute them to more prominent characters like Peter, James, or Paul. If the early church was simply making up titles to add authority to the texts, they picked some strange names to do it.

The second reason the Gospels are trustworthy is because of their early dating. As I mentioned earlier, critics argue that Mark was the earliest Gospel written and it wasn't written till around AD 70—forty years after Jesus' death. Even if they are right, forty years is still a relatively short time for a biography in the ancient world. For example, the earliest biography for Alexander the Great was written four hundred years after his death. Four hundred years! And guess what? Historians think it is generally reliable.

Or consider the earliest biography on Tiberius—the emperor during Jesus' ministry. His earliest biography was about eighty years after his death. That's a lot better than Alexander the Great's, but it's still not as good as Jesus'.

That said, I'm fairly convinced that at least a couple of the Gospels date back much closer to the time of Jesus than forty years. Allow me to explain by way of illustration. Suppose you were to walk into a used bookstore one day and you stumbled across a book on the World Trade Centers. On the front cover you see the two towers standing tall over the New York City skyline. You open it up and you start reading about its history. You read about the architects and the builders. You read about all the different companies that used the office space. You read about famous people who visited the towers and what the view was like from the top. And as you got to the end of the book, it concluded with a picture of the towers still standing and thoughts about what the future might hold for the skyscrapers.

Now, what would you conclude about when that book might have been written? At the very least, you would conclude that it was written prior to September 11, 2001, when the buildings were knocked down by terrorists. Why? Because September 11

is too significant to leave out of a story on the twin towers.

Something similar happens in the book of Acts. Now, the Gospel of Luke and Acts were both written by the same person. No one disputes this. And a quick reading of Acts reveals some central themes and characters. First of all, Peter and Paul are by far the most significant characters in the book. James, the brother of Jesus, and leader of the Jerusalem church might come in a distant third. Also, the theme of Jewish persecution against the Christians is prevalent throughout.

What is interesting about Acts is that while it follows closely the ministries of Peter, Paul, and James, it doesn't mention their martyrdoms. It mentions the martyrdom of James the son of Zebedee in Acts 12, but not more significant figures like James the brother of Jesus, Peter, or Paul. What best explains this? To me, the best explanation is that they hadn't happened yet. James the brother of Jesus was martyred in the years 62, while Peter and Paul were both martyred during Nero's persecution around the year 65. Another key significant event that took place was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 68–70. With all the Jewish persecution against the Christians, as well as Jesus' predictions of the destruction of the temple, one would think it would be advantageous for Luke to include these events. Yet he never mentions them. I think the logical explanation is that the book was completed in the year 62 before any of these significant events occurred as Paul was standing trial in Rome. This is where Acts 28 ends.

Now, if Acts was written in 62, Luke had to have been written a few years earlier—perhaps sometime in the mid to late fifties. And as is the general consensus among biblical scholars, Luke used Mark as a source when he wrote his Gospel which means Mark had to have been written earlier. At the latest, Mark is written in the early fifties, although some scholars suggest even earlier. That shrinks the gap to twenty years instead of forty. And remember, how long was the time gap between Alexander the Great's death and his first biography? Four hundred years. And scholars think it's

generally reliable. A twenty-year time gap was nothing. It was certainly soon enough for the original followers of Jesus to remember all the significant events surrounding his life. And it was at a time when eyewitnesses could have challenged the stories if they didn't really happen. But we don't have any evidence that anyone ever did.

The third reason to believe the Gospels reliably preserved the story of Jesus is because of embarrassing details. What do I mean by that? What I mean is that the Gospels contain information that could have potentially made Jesus and the earliest leaders of the Christian movement look bad. And the reason this is evidence for the reliability of the Gospels is because if the earliest Christians invented the stories of Jesus, they simultaneously invented stories that would have hurt their cause. But no one does this. If people lie, it's usually to make themselves look good not bad. In fact, if I were to poll the room and ask how many of you have ever lied to make yourself look good, I guarantee that everyone of your hands would go up. If not, then you were just lying to make yourself look good. On the other hand, if I were to ask how many of you have lied to make yourself look bad, nobody would raise their hands. Why? Because nobody lies to make themselves look bad.

Yet the Gospels are filled with incriminating material that makes Jesus or the disciples look bad. Take for example, Jesus' inability to perform miracles in Nazareth because of the people's lack of faith. Now why would Mark make that up? Doesn't that undermine Jesus' power and authority as the Son of God? Or what about the time when the man calls Jesus "good teacher," but Jesus rebukes him and says no one is good except God alone. Doesn't that make it sound like Jesus doesn't believe he's God? Or what about every time Jesus rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith. Or about the time Jesus calls Peter Satan. Or the time when Peter denied Jesus three times. Imagine sitting in the early church next to Peter when the pastor was reading those texts. Talk about awkward. I could give you dozens of examples here. Jesus being baptized made it look like John was greater than him and that Jesus was possibly a sinner. Jesus' family not

believing in him and thinking he was crazy. Jesus not knowing the time of his return. One of his disciples betraying him. Imagine telling that story to people trying to convince them to follow Jesus. Wouldn't they be tempted to think, "if one of Jesus' closest followers didn't believe in him, why should I?" The embarrassing information indicates that the Gospel writers attempted to report the events surrounding Jesus accurately, even the events that could have hurt their cause.

Fourth, extra-biblical sources corroborate the Gospels. In other words, we have other writers outside the New Testament that independently verify the Gospel's claims. We will consider more of these over the next few weeks as we consider Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. But for now, let me draw your attention to one example. We have a non-biblical source that writes about Herod killing John the Baptist.

Now remember the Gospels report that Herod had John the Baptist imprisoned because John had spoken out against his unlawful marriage to Herodias who was previously married to Herod's brother. Herod eventually had John beheaded. What the Gospels don't tell us, but what a first century Jewish historian named Josephus tells us, is that Herod's divorce and remarriage to Herodias created tensions between Galilee and the region to the east called Nabataea. Why? Because in order for Herod to marry Herodias, he had to first unlawfully divorce the king of Nabataea's daughter.

When the king of Nabataea, Aretus IV, attacked and defeated Herod's army, the people in Galilee believed it as God's judgment on Herod for how he treated John. Here is what Josephus said:

Now it seemed to some of the Jews that the destruction of Herod's army was by God, and was certainly well deserved, on account of what he did to John, called the Baptist. For Herod had executed him, though he was a good man and had urged the Jews—if included to exercise virtue, to practice justice towards one another and piety toward God—to join in baptism. . . . And when others gathered (for they were greatly moved by his words), Herod, fearing that John's great influence over the people might result in some form of insurrection (for it seemed that they did everything by his counsel), thought it much better to put him to death before his work led to an uprising than to await a disturbance, . . . So the prisoner, because of Herod's suspicion, was sent to Machaerus, the stronghold previously mentioned, and there was executed. But to the Jews it seemed a vindication of John that God

willed to do Herod an evil, in the destruction of the army.¹⁰

Josephus goes on to mention Herodias' divorce with her previous husband Herod (Philip), the brother of Herod Antipas whom she remarried.

But Herodias, their sister, was married to Herod (Philip), the son of Herod the Great, a child of Mariamme, daughter of Simon the high priest; and to them was born Salome. After the birth Herodias, thinking to violate the ways of the fathers, abandoned a living husband and married Herod (Antipas)—who was tetrarch of Galilee—her husband's brother by the same father.¹¹

Here we read that Josephus corroborates what the Gospels had to say about Herod marrying his brother's wife as well as him executing John the Baptist. In the next few weeks, I will share even more examples of extra-biblical corroboration. Each of these four points demonstrates that the contents of the Gospels have been reliably preserved.

I'm going to ask the worship team to come up and lead us in one final song. As they do, I want to give you three ways of response:

First, while we covered a lot of material today, there is much more that I could have said. So let me encourage you to attend your grace group this week and the next five as the groups will be taking what was covered in the sermon and going even further. The groups will take time unpacking some of the content from the sermon, think through how to implement the material as we talk to non-Christians, and watch some short videos from other biblical scholars and apologists who provide additional helpful insight. If you aren't connected to a group, come find me afterwards and I will point you in the right direction.

Second, I don't want this to simply be useful information that you store away in your heads. No, I want you to think about how you might be able to use the reliability of the Gospels and the 1 Corinthians 15 creed while sharing the Gospel with non-Christians. After all, that is one of the main purposes of this series. Again, your small groups will help you think through how you might be able to do this effectively.

¹⁰ Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.2 (Whiston, 484).

¹¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.4 (Whiston, 485).

Third, allow the reliability of the gospel message to lead you to worship. We've seen today that the message of Jesus has been reliably passed down to us. And this message includes Jesus' death and resurrection for our sins. This message should not leave us unmoved. So let's exalt him together!

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES
Sermon 2: “God’s Love Displayed”
1 Corinthians 15:3–8
February 6, 2022

“Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” I grew up singing this song as did many of you. And it’s a song I continue to sing with my children to this day. I love the song because it communicates a very simple yet life-altering truth. Jesus loves me. He really loves me. And he loves you too. And how do we know this? Because he has shown it to us. It’s not just lip service for him.

We all are familiar with examples of people who say they love someone else, but they never demonstrate it. It’s like the husband who is perpetually a jerk to his wife and when he feels like he’s on the hot seat will give his wife flowers and say he loves her in an attempt to cool her off. That’s just lip service. Saying one thing, but never demonstrating it with actions.

Jesus’ love is not like that. No, Jesus talks the talk and walks the walk. On the one hand, he can say things like this: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” (John 15:9). And he can go on to say, “Greater love has no one than this, than someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus knew how to verbally express his love. And at the same time, he backed it up with his actions. In our remaining time this morning, I want to help you get a greater glimpse of God’s love for you by taking a look at Jesus’ crucifixion.

This is the second week in our series titled “First Importance.” Throughout this series we will be taking a close look at 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. So please turn there with me. The series is titled “First Importance” because the contents of this text are the most important contents of the Christian faith. Last week, we focused on the phrase “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received” and observed that the text is an early Christian creed that Paul embedded in his letter. And we saw that because the

creed dates to an earlier time, it cannot be the result of legendary embellishment because legends take a long time to develop. Instead, the creed reports exactly what the earliest followers of Jesus were saying.

Today we're going to turn our focus to the first part of the creed, but before we do, let's read it together.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Our focus this morning will be on the phrase, "Christ died." In future weeks we will think about how Christ's death dealt with our sins, but this morning I have a different point I want to emphasize. This morning our main idea is that Christ's brutal death demonstrates that God loves us even though he allows us to experience suffering. And since one of the goals of this series is to equip you to share your faith with unbelievers, our first point this morning will focus on the evidence for Christ's death. Now why is this important? It's important because when you try to lead someone to Christ and they respond by saying they're not interested, or that's good for you but not for me, or I don't really believe that stuff, we don't just give up on them. We have the words of eternal life!

So, we try to persuade them. And persuading them often includes providing reasons for why they should believe. In Acts 17, as Paul was in Thessalonica, as was his custom he went to the Jewish synagogue. And we read, "on three Sabbath days *he reasoned* with them from the Scriptures, explaining and *proving* that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead." . . . And some of them were *persuaded*" (Acts 17:2-4). And just a short while later, while in Athens, we read of Paul, "he *reasoned* in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace

and every day with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:17). And again in Corinth we read, “And he *reasoned* in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to *persuade* Jews and Greeks.” You see, this was one of the primary methods of evangelism for one of the greatest Christian missionaries to have ever lived.

And that is why this series exists. We must get better at persuading people to follow Jesus. With that in mind, let’s consider our first point: Christ’s brutal death is historically certain. I say brutal, because not only did Christ die as the creed says, we also know the method of his death—crucifixion. There are three reasons for believing this to be true. First, the crucifixion is well-documented. In other words, several sources tell us how he died.

Consider, first, the New Testament documents. All four Gospels give us detailed descriptions of Jesus’ crucifixion. They tell us that the Jewish leaders convinced Pontius Pilate to execute Jesus as a revolutionary—as someone who claimed to be a king that would rival Caesar. And so as was customary, they nailed the charges on the cross—“king of the Jews”—so that everyone passing by would be reminded to never challenge the Romans.

Also Paul in his many letters tells us Jesus died by crucifixion. In fact, it was so central to his beliefs, he said, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). Acts, Hebrews, 1 Peter, Revelation. They all universally affirm Jesus’ death by crucifixion.

Several non-Christian sources also testify to Jesus’ crucifixion. Let me share two brief examples. First, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus wrote, “And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned [Jesus] to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him.”¹ And writing shortly after him, the Roman historian Tacitus noted, “Christus, the founder of the name, had

¹ Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 18.3.23 (Whiston, 480).

undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilates.”² And I could share others. Ancient Jewish, Roman, Greek, and Syrian authors all universally affirm Jesus’ death by crucifixion.

Why is this significant? Well, if only one person told us Jesus was crucified, we might not know whether to believe him or not. If two people independently say it happened, well, then we’re pretty certain it happened. But when dozens say it, it’s historical fact.

The second reason to believe Jesus died by crucifixion is that the crucifixion was embarrassing for the Christian movement. Last week we saw how unlikely it would have been for the earliest followers of Jesus to invent all the embarrassing material in the Gospels because people don’t generally lie to make themselves look bad. While this may be lost on us, Jesus’ crucifixion would have been the most embarrassing detail in the gospel story. And that means, no Christian would have ever invented this story because it made the founder of their movement look despicable.

You see, the idea of a crucifixion was utterly repulsive to anyone living in the first century. This repulsion explains why Paul declares, “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23). Christ’s crucifixion was a stumbling block! It was a deterrent for many who might have otherwise considered Christianity. Why?

Because crucifixion was the most shameful form of death reserved only for the most detestable members of society—the insurrectionists, murderers, and rapists. The ancient Roman philosopher Cicero once remarked, “The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears.”³ Heraldng a crucified messiah was both foolish and offensive for outsiders. It

² Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.2 (Jackson, LCL).

³ Cicero, *Rab. Perd.* 5.16 (Hodge, LCL).

would be like worshipping a serial murderer today who received the death penalty.

People would find that offensive just like they found the crucifixion of Jesus offensive.

In fact, outsiders mocked Christians for worshipping a crucified Jesus. One of the earliest pieces of artwork depicting Christian worship reveals a crucified figure with a donkey's head. The caption reads, "Alexamenos worships God." This artwork seems directed at a certain slave named Alexamenos and mocks him for his worship of a crucified figure. The cross really was folly to the unbelieving world. Crucifixions often took place right along the road so people could hurl insults, spit, and mock the mostly naked victims. It was utterly shameful. Christians never would have invented this story about their Lord.

The fact that Jesus was crucified is indisputable. And yet critics need to explain why Jesus' followers believed he really appeared to them alive afterwards. So one of the theories proposed is that Jesus didn't really die on the cross, he merely passed out. He was then taken down prematurely and placed in a tomb where he later revived and appeared to his disciples. And they wrongly mistook it for a resurrection. Our third reason for believing the historical certainty of Jesus' brutal death is in response to this claim. The crucifixion was not survivable.

You see, crucifixion victims endured far more torture than is often realized. For starters, the Gospels report that before his crucifixion, Jesus was flogged. The flogging was like an unwanted appetizer before an even more unwanted meal. As was customary, the Romans would tie both hands above the victim's head to a poll while Roman soldiers would whip his backside to shreds. One early account of a flogging also known as scourging gives some of the grizzly details: "they were so torn with scourges, that the frame of their bodies, even to the very inward veins and arteries, was laid open."⁴

⁴ *The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna: Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp* 2.4 (ANF, 1:39).

This graphic description suggests that something more brutal than a typical whipping was involved here. And it was. This barbarous activity included leather whips with sharp abrasive items attached on the end of them for greatest effect—items such as nails, glass, rocks, and iron balls. As the Roman soldiers unleashed this vicious weapon on Jesus' back, beating him over and over and over again, Jesus would have been pushed to the brink. In Jewish law, someone could only be whipped thirty-nine times. The Romans had no such restriction. And so Jesus' back was completely ripped off exposing all of his insides for further torture. While flogging did occasionally kill a victim, the soldiers wanted to stop just short so that the victim could be shamefully crucified.

And so following his flogging, Jesus was forced to carry the cross beam to his crucifixion site where the vertical beam was already in place. The cross beam was placed across his shoulders and tied to his hands and weighed about 100 lbs. After the intense flogging he just endured, he collapsed under the weight of the beam, probably smashing his face on the ground. A nearby stranger named Simon of Cyrene carried it the rest of the way.

At the crucifixion site, the Roman soldiers most likely laid Jesus on his back, stretched out his arms and nailed his wrists to the crossbeam using six-inch iron spikes. They then hoisted him up, fastened the crossbeam to the vertical beam already in place, and contorted his lower body sideways so they could drive a similar spike through both of his heels. The spikes from his hands and feet would have crushed Jesus' nerves sending excruciating pain through each of his limbs. One medical doctor says the sensation would have been similar to having your funny bone crushed with a pair of pliers.⁵

The excruciating pain aside, physicians maintain that asphyxiation was the

⁵ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 100–101.

most likely cause of death.⁶ The way victims were fastened to the cross and the natural weight of their body would have left them in a perpetual inhale position. And in order for a victim to exhale, he would have to push up on his nail-pierced feet so that he could relax his chest muscles enough to exhale, and then he would drop back down to inhale. Observers would see him push himself up and relax back down repeatedly for hours on end—all the while scraping his flogged back on the beam of wood. If he ever stopped pushing himself up, he would suffocate to death.

Roman soldiers participated in this grueling process hundreds of times over. They were trained killers. The idea that they removed Jesus from the cross before he died is completely unfounded. The Gospel of John reports that because the Jewish leaders did not want crucified victims still hanging on crosses during the Sabbath the next day, they asked Pilate to have the victims' legs broken to prevent them from pushing up for breath any longer (John 19:31). Breaking their legs with a club was actually a merciful way of putting them out of their misery. When they came to Jesus, however, John reports that he was already dead. Instead of breaking his legs, a soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear (John 19:34).

To think Jesus survived the crucifixion is ridiculous. But let's suppose, even if Jesus survived all this brutality, and after being placed in the tomb half-dead in need of immediate medical attention, Jesus somehow got himself up, removed the four hundred pound stone blocking the tomb's entrance, fought off some guards, walked a couple of miles on his nail-pierced feet, and presented himself to his disciples, there is no way they would have jumped to the conclusion that Jesus rose again and was the Lord of life. They would have been calling a doctor instead.

Now why go through all that detail. Well, for one, the scene I just described was well-understood by early Christians. They knew all the brutality involved in Jesus'

⁶ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 101.

crucifixion. We often have a sanitized version of it because we've never witnessed one. So I think it's important for us to understand all that Jesus endured that day. But the second reason I share all that detail is because I want you to see the depths that God goes to to express his love for us.

And this is our second point this morning. Christ's brutal death demonstrates God's love towards us. What other explanation can be given for why Jesus endured all the pain and the agony that Friday, April 7, AD 30? It was love. God—Father, Son, and Spirit—loves us with an everlasting love. The sovereign Lord of the universe who owes love to no one freely expressed his love in Christ. The death of Christ was the only way by which any of us could escape the righteous judgment of God. And so instead of leaving us in our pitiful state which we truly deserve, God sent forth his son on a rescue mission.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God loves the world. And not because we are good people and deserve his love. God didn't set his affection on us because we are special. No. God loved us when we were loveless. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). As Jesus said, “greater love has no one than this, than someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). For his friends!

The idea that God considers me a friend is utterly astonishing. There are some pretty important people in this world that I think it would be pretty cool if they considered me a friend. I would be ecstatic if Phil Mickelson, my absolute favorite golfer, considered me his friend. If he were to call me up and want to hang out or hit the links. I could help him with his swing. That would be really fun. But as great as it would be for someone like Phil Mickelson to consider me a friend, he's just a person like you and me. Sure he has certain skill sets that make him rich and famous, but he's a person nonetheless—a drop in the bucket compared to the almighty creator of the universe. And

yet it's this very same creator who loves us enough to call us friends. And how do we know this? Because he laid down his life for his friends.

If you're ever tempted to doubt that God loves you, look to the cross. The cross speaks volumes. The cross says that even though we were enemies and hostile to God, he wanted to adopt us into his family.

I've always admired parents who foster and adopt. Some of you in this church. It's such a beautiful picture of sacrificial love. It frequently costs a lot of money, a lot of time, and a lot of emotional roller coasters. Yet, to every parent I've talked to who has adopted or fostered, even with all the sacrifice involved, they say they would do it a hundred times over. Why? Because they love those little kids. Kids that are frequently in a bad spot. Kids who aren't able to help themselves. Kids that need someone to love them enough to come to their rescue. And that gives us just a little picture of the kind of love God has shown towards us by sending his son.

Paul writes, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as son" (Gal 4:4-5). Christian friend, you were a spiritual orphan wandering aimlessly through life. Your only hope was that a loving heavenly Father would send forth his Son to die on a cross so that you could be adopted into his family. That is love!

Without the cross, we could never have imagined the depths of God's love for us. Christ didn't go to the cross against his will. He wasn't dragged there kicking and screaming. No, he laid down his life on his own accord out of love for us because we're his friends.

And this isn't just like any other love. It's an infinite love. A. W. Pink notes, "His love is without limit. There is a depth to it which none can fathom; there is a height to it which none can scale; there is a length and breadth to it which defies measurement,

by any creaturely-standard.”⁷

Christian friend, dwell upon this immeasurable love. Allow God’s love for you in Christ to stir up your affections for him. Allow God’s love to lead to a life of complete devotion to Christ. Look back to the cross. Think about the agony he endured. And remember he willingly endured it all to share his love with you. As the old song goes, he could have called ten thousand angels, but he died alone for you and me.

If you aren’t a Christian, I can’t offer you any greater gift than the love of God in Christ Jesus. Do you really want to remain a spiritual orphan forever? Do you really want to live a life devoid of the infinite love of God? Why don’t you turn to him? Why don’t you tell him you want Christ as your Savior? Jesus says whoever comes to him, he will never ever cast out. He will welcome you in with open arms. We’d love for you to join our spiritual family, as imperfect as we are. We’re still a bunch of messed up sinners who would still be without hope if God’s love wasn’t infinitely greater than our sin. We are great sinners. But Christ is a great savior! Oh friend, put your hope in Christ.

Our third and final point this morning. Christ’s brutal death demonstrates that a loving God does allow suffering. This point seems counter-intuitive. We often think to ourselves that if God truly loved us, he would only make us happy all the time. If God really loved me, he wouldn’t make me deal with this depression. If God really loved me, he would remove this chronic pain. If God really loved me, he wouldn’t have allowed me to miscarry. If God really loved me, he wouldn’t have allowed my spouse, my kid, or my parent to die. If God really loved me, he wouldn’t have given me a horrible spouse. If God really loved me, he wouldn’t have let me lose my job. Why God, if you love me, do you let me suffer like this? Don’t we all have that question from time to time?

It’s such a difficult question to answer because none of us knows the mind of God. None of us are able to discern from our limited perspective why God allows the

⁷ Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (1975; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 79–80.

suffering he allows. But I do think that the cross of Christ, at minimum, dispels the myth that suffering is a result of a non-loving or non-existent God.

You see, when Christ was crucified, a great injustice was done. An innocent man, morally pure in every way, was arrested because of hatred and jealousy. And he received the most brutal treatment one could imagine. Jesus suffered greatly. But Jesus' suffering was not evidence that a loving God doesn't exist.

I think when we take a step back, we realize that as evil as the cross was from a human perspective, and as much suffering Jesus endured, God demonstrated his love through it. For without the suffering on the cross, the entire world would perish. You see, God worked through suffering to bring about a greater purpose—the salvation of the world.

From an earthly perspective, the cross made it look as if God didn't care. Imagine being one of the women who followed Jesus watching him be slaughtered. It didn't look as if a loving God was in control. But God had a plan. As Peter said to the Jews at Pentecost, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). Yes suffering occurred. But it was God's plan from the beginning to bring about a greater good.

I realize that most of the time, we don't have the benefit of seeing God's perspective of our suffering. From our perspective, everything looks like chaos. But if we could see things from God's perspective, we would acknowledge that his plans are perfect.

Take a cross stitch for example. I don't do these, but I've seen them done. There's a kit with some thread, a needle, and a pattern that you're supposed to follow. And so the person does their best to weave the thread in and out of the cross stitch in order to create a beautiful pattern. And suppose one day your grandma was doing one of these but instead of watching it from above, you laid down on your back and watched

from underneath as she weaved the thread in and out. And to be honest, as you watched the cross stitch, none of it made any sense to you. In fact, it looked pretty ugly and random. When she was done, you stood up and looked at it from above and realized that she was weaving a beautiful pattern.

I think that's a good parable for how we see our suffering. Our perspective is limited to the underneath side. We look at all the suffering we or our friends are going through, and we wonder if God knows what he's doing. But we must keep going back to God's word which encourages us to trust that God is weaving a beautiful pattern.

This last week, we took our four-year-old son for his annual checkup. And as part of his checkup, he had to get a couple of shots. Trust me when I say, it wasn't his favorite thing. But here is what I do know. The suffering we put him through was not because as parents we didn't love him and weren't in control of the situation. No, in fact his suffering was precisely because we love him. And as his four-year-old brain isn't quite able to grasp how loving parents could allow him to suffer, our human minds are often not able to grasp how an all-wise God could allow us to suffer.

Just as my son trusted us to go through with the shots even though he didn't understand his suffering, God wants us to trust him even though we don't understand our suffering. He wants us to find comfort in the fact he is our loving heavenly father. If we're honest, a lot of the times we don't want a heavenly father but a heavenly grandfather. Someone who is like a giant Santa Claus in the sky who's only purpose is to make us happy. But we have something much better than that. We have a father who has our well-being in mind, and therefore, allows us to suffer from time to time so that we will grow in holiness.

As C. S. Lewis once said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."⁸ I think

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (1940; repr., San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 93.

when we take a step back, we know that what Lewis says here is true. None of us like the suffering. But we can certainly see how God uses our suffering more than anything else to mold us and shape us more into the image of Christ.

Friend, as you suffer, let me remind you that our God doesn't remain aloof to your suffering. No. He entered into it in the person of Christ. As we've just seen, he suffered a great deal. Not only on the cross but elsewhere. He knows what it's like to lose family members. His father Joseph died. He knows what it's like to not have much money. Sometimes he didn't even have a place to lie his head at night. He knows what it's like to have people hate him. The Jewish leaders despised him. He knows what it's like to have friends turn on him. Judas betrayed him and Peter denied him. He knows what it's like to feel shame. He hung naked on a cross. He knows what it's like to be overwhelmed with emotional distress. He sweat drops of blood. He knows friend. And he understands.

The author of Hebrews notes, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we have, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). So draw near to Christ. Go to him with your sufferings. He won't reject you or turn you away. He knows. He cares. He understands.

Christ's brutal death demonstrates that God loves us even though he allows us to experience suffering.

Friends, the world needs to hear this story. They need to know they were created by someone who loves them so very much. He loves them so much that he entered into their suffering and was brutally murdered on a cross to rescue and redeem them from sin and death. They need to know that the story of Jesus isn't just wishful thinking. It really happened. And that God has revealed himself to us very clearly in the person of Jesus. They need to know that Jesus reveals God to us what God is like.

Church, my prayer is that the story of Jesus' death will overwhelm you with gratitude. That you will have a renewed sense of appreciation of what Jesus went through

out of love for you. And I pray that as you contemplate the gruesome death of Christ, you will be compelled to sacrifice your life for him. That you'll turn from your half-hearted allegiance to Christ and give it all over to him.

And finally, my hope is that you will never doubt the love of God for you. That even when you suffer, you will trust that a loving God has good reasons for it, even if you are unable to discern what those might be. And that as you endure hard times, you will be able to sing with confidence, Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so.

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES
Sermon 3: “Quietly Buried”
1 Corinthians 15:3–8
February 13, 2022

For almost ten years, I have prayed diligently for a friend to turn to Jesus. This seems like a good request. Like something God would want to answer. And yet, the Lord hasn't answered my prayers.

How many times have you prayed for something so desperately, but yet from your perspective, your prayers seemed to have fallen on deaf ears? Perhaps you've prayed for a loved one to turn to Christ or for a close friend to be healed. Or maybe you've prayed that you would get a good grade on the exam or that your boss would give you a promotion. And yet, in all of this, God didn't grant your requests.

This troubles you because Scripture is filled with examples where we are encouraged to make requests to God, and we're given promises that he will answer them. “Ask,” Jesus says, “and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you.” And yet, after pouring out your heart to God, you seemingly get nothing in response.

The hiddenness of silence of God is one of the most difficult challenges for us as humans. For non-Christians, the fact that God doesn't make himself more apparent to them keeps them from believing that he's really there. For Christians, his silence or apparent distance keeps us from truly embracing his goodness.

This morning, I want to show you why we shouldn't jump to those conclusions when God seems silent. And to do this, we're going to look at Jesus' burial. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.

This is our third sermon in a series titled “first importance.” It's titled “first importance” because the contents of this text are the most important points of the Christian faith. If Jesus didn't die and rise again, Paul says that our faith is in vain. So

establishing the truth of this text is of utmost importance. In week one, we considered the first phrase “for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received” and determined that the text is an early Christian creed that Paul embedded into his letter. And because it’s an early creed, it cannot contain legendary material which takes a long time to develop. Last week, we considered the phrase “Christ died.” We saw that Christ’s death by crucifixion is one of the best attested events in the ancient world. Almost no one doubts that it happened. We also saw that Christ’s death demonstrates the infinite love of God. This week, we’re going to turn our attention to another phrase in the text. But before we do, let’s read the text together once again.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

This morning, we’re going to consider the phrase “he was buried.” Now I doubt many of you have ever heard a sermon on Jesus’ burial. We tend to focus on the events on either side of it—his death and resurrection—but not the burial itself. I think the reason for that is because we tend to not see as much significance in the burial as we do in the other events. And while there is some validity in that, establishing Jesus’ burial in a tomb is crucial if we are going to make a historic case for Jesus’ resurrection.

As we’ve alluded to in previous weeks, one of the main goals of this sermon series is to equip you to persuade non-Christians that the Christian faith is true. That Jesus really did die on a cross and rise again for our sins. But if we’re going to do that, we need to be able demonstrate that a certain chain of events happened. That Jesus was crucified, buried in a tomb, the tomb was found empty, and Jesus appeared alive to his followers. If any of these links goes missing, then our ability to demonstrate that Jesus rose from the dead takes a massive hit.

For example, if Jesus was never crucified, well then his appearances to his followers on Easter Sunday don't mean anything. It was just a normal, non-dead man appearing to people. If Jesus wasn't buried in a tomb, well then the empty tomb is irrelevant since his dead body was never placed there in the first place. And if Jesus never appeared alive to his followers on Easter, well then the empty tomb might only mean that some people moved Jesus' body and then lied about it. Each of these events must be established if we're going to demonstrate that Jesus conquered the grave.

And in addition to these historical facts, I also want us to see that the silence of God while Jesus was in the tomb has significant implications for how we think about God's hiddenness or silence. So our main idea is that Jesus' burial in the tomb demonstrates that God's silence doesn't mean his absence. That even though God remained hidden and silent that Saturday while Jesus' dead body remained in the tomb, he was still at work. Of course, if we're going to make that point, we must first demonstrate that Jesus received a proper burial.

So our first point this morning is this: Jesus was buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. If you've been here for the first two messages, you know that skeptics raise objections to everything in our text. Some doubt the text's reliability. Others question whether Jesus really died on the cross. And relevant for today's message, some skeptics deny that Jesus would have received a proper burial.

They argue that there is no way the Romans would have allowed a crucified victim—someone who is seen as an enemy of the empire—to receive a dignified burial. Rather, they argue, as was the case with many crucified victims, Jesus' body would have been left up on the cross for several days for maximum humiliation and further reminders to those who walked by to not mess with the Romans. And as his body remained on the cross, wild animals and birds would eat away at Jesus' flesh until eventually they would take his body down and toss it into a mass criminal's grave filled with dozens of other bodies. If the skeptic is right, then we have a more difficult time demonstrating Jesus'

resurrection because no one would have been able to locate the exact location where they placed Jesus' body to see if he really rose bodily from the dead. So let me give you four reasons to believe that Jesus did, in fact, receive a proper burial.

First, each of the four gospels say Jesus was buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. There is not a single source that says otherwise. In other words, the skeptic objection isn't based on any evidence at all. It's based on a hunch. But when the four gospels all unanimously say one thing—these are four first-century sources—one better have good evidence if he is going to make claims to the contrary. Unfortunately for the skeptic, no such evidence exists.

Now let's consider Luke's account of the burial. He writes in 23:50–56:

Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Here we read one of the four accounts of Jesus' burial. As I said earlier, all four Gospels report that Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus' body in his tomb. Now what would this burial have looked like?

First, Joseph, and probably others with him, would have taken Jesus' body down from the cross and taken him into the burial chamber and placed him on a stone table. Here they would have washed Jesus' bloodied and battered body with warm water. Early Jewish sources say that this washing process was so thorough, Jews would clean and cut the corpses' finger and toenails as well as wash and arrange his hair.

As was custom, they would place seventy-five to one hundred pounds worth of spices on Jesus and wrapped them inside his burial cloth. Luke's account indicates that the process was a bit rushed as they tried to finish before the Sabbath. So the ladies

weren't able to complete the preparation. They returned early Sunday morning, the day right after the Sabbath with their spices to finish preparing Jesus' body.

Jewish bodies were actually wrapped in three separate grave cloths. One would have been wrapped around his feet all the way up to his arm pits with his arms outside the cloth. The next one would have been wrapped around his arms all the way up to his neck. The third cloth was wrapped around his head.

Jewish custom was to leave the body for one year in the tomb. At the conclusion of the year, families would return to the tomb to gather up the bones and place them in a small box called an ossuary. The box would have been about two-and-a-half to three feet long, about one-and-a-half feet wide and about one-and-a-half feet tall. They would then take these bone boxes and place them into a smaller compartment cut into the side of the tomb which would take up less space. This process allowed several family members to be buried in the same tomb. Everything that the four gospels say about Jesus' burial seems consistent with the Jewish customs.

And this brings us to our second reason for believing Jesus received a proper burial. Both Jewish and Roman customs would have allowed it. Going back to Old Testament times, the Jews gave highest priority to burying their dead. Consider that Jacob's sons returned him to Canaan from Egypt after his death so he could be buried in the promised land (Gen 50:4–14). Also, remember that the Israelites exhumed Joseph's body at the time of the Exodus so they could bury his bones with his fathers (Josh 24:32) in Israel. The first-century Jewish philosopher Philo highlights the importance of proper burial when commenting on Jacob's lament over his son Joseph's death. He imagines Jacob saying, "Child, it is not your death which grieves me, but the manner of it. If you had been buried in your own land, I should have comforted and watched and nursed your sick-bed, exchanged the last farewells as you died, closed your eyes, wept over the body

as it lay there, given it a costly funeral and left none of the customary rites undone.”¹ In other words, Jacob’s anguish was not so much over the fact that Joseph had supposedly died, but that he failed to give him a proper burial.

Perhaps the most significant Old Testament text that addresses Jesus’ situation is Deuteronomy 21:22–23. It reads, “And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God.” Here we see that Jewish law prescribed that Jesus’ body be removed from the cross and buried the same day. And evidence suggests that Jews religiously followed this law. Josephus remarks, “Jews used to take so much care of the burial of men, that they took down those that were condemned and crucified and buried them before the going down of the sun.”² Josephus’s comments suggest that even though Romans carried out the crucifixions, they still allowed the Jews to honor their burial customs. In fact, elsewhere Josephus remarks that the Romans allowed the Jews to follow their own customs provided that the Jews remained loyal subjects. In short, both Jewish and Roman customs would have allowed for Jesus to receive a proper burial.

Third, archaeological findings also support Jesus’ burial in a tomb. In 1968, archaeologists uncovered an ossuary of a crucifixion victim named Yehohanan just outside of Jerusalem. They’ve dated the bone box to the late 20s—when Pilate was governing Judea.³ Yehohanan was clearly a crucifixion victim because a five-inch iron spike with wood fragments was still attached to his heel bone. This discovery demonstrates that other crucified victims also received proper burials, and thus, Jesus’ burial is not without precedent.

¹ Philo of Alexandria, *Joseph* 5.23 (Colson, LCL).

² Josephus, *J.W.* 4.5.2 (Whiston, 679).

³ Craig Evans, *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 122–23.

And fourth, Joseph of Arimathea is an unlikely invention. If the burial story is legendary, as critics believe, why would the Christians give credit to a prominent member of Jewish society that everyone knew and not to one of the twelve disciples who could easily lie about it? As William Lane Craig points out, “It is unlikely that early Christian believers would invent an individual, give him a name and nearby town of origin, and place that fictional character on the historical council of the Sanhedrin, whose members were well known.”⁴ In other words, if Jesus’s burial was a sham, it makes no sense to attribute his burial to someone well-known who could easily refute the story. Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent figure in Israel. He was on the ruling council. He was a celebrity. If the earliest followers of Jesus were lying about the burial, how smart would they have been to credit Joseph of Arimathea? Not at all. Joseph could easily refute the story if it was false. We have no evidence that he ever did.

Additionally, if Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus’ body, that explains Jesus’ burial in a rock tomb—something only the wealthy could afford. And as a member of the ruling council, Joseph would have had substantial means. Also, since Joseph is not from Jerusalem, but from Arimathea, that explains why his tomb had not been used before as Luke tells us. You see, none of his ancestors were from Jerusalem, but from the town of Arimathea. When Joseph moved to Jerusalem as one of the members of the Sanhedrin, he bought a tomb for himself and his immediate family, though none of them had obviously died yet. Jesus was the first to occupy his tomb.

As you can see, critics who argue that Jesus didn’t receive a proper burial do so without merit. The evidence overwhelmingly supports the view that Jesus was buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb.

And this brings us to our second point this morning. Even though God

⁴ William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 53.

sometimes seems silent or distant, he is always at work. Jesus' burial in the tomb and the time his dead corpse stayed in there, beautiful illustrates this point. Put yourself in the shoes of Mary Magdalene—one of the women who followed Jesus. Mary witnessed Jesus' death and his burial. Mary had her hopes up that God was going to do something remarkable through Jesus. And yet, as Jesus' body lay quiet in the tomb on that Saturday, God was silent. It looked as if God was disinterested or indifferent. But Sunday morning was a coming. Because on Sunday morning, Jesus burst forth from the tomb as the risen savior of the world.

I think all of us have gone through what we might call a spiritual dry spell. That is, we don't feel like praying, reading Scripture, or going to corporate worship on Sunday morning. We feel spiritually lethargic. And in these moments, we don't sense the abiding presence of God. God seems anything but present. He seems distant. And no matter what we do, we can't seem to shake the feeling that God is distant. These moments come at random times, and sometimes they can last for months. It's not like anything crazy has happened in our lives, we're just in a daze and we're not sure why. Haven't we all felt like that? And isn't this feeling somewhat frequent?

Other times, God seems distant or silent because he hasn't answered our earnest prayers. We pray for things that we think are right and good, but yet God doesn't seem interested in granted our requests. What should we do when we feel this way?

First, we should pray. I realize this seems counter-intuitive, but the solution to God's silence and unanswered prayers isn't to abandon prayer altogether. No. James 4:8 tells us, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." We cannot expect God to lift the clouds of darkness by abandoning communication with him. No. We pray. We keep pursuing the Lord believing that God will pull back the dark cloud and draw near to us. He will help our weak souls to get a greater glimpse of himself. He will give us a peace that passes all understanding.

Yes, the darkness can seem like it lasts forever. One could easily get depressed

thinking about God's ongoing distance and silence. But Lamentations 3:31–32 offers a great reminder. It says, "For no one is cast off by the LORD forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love." Friend, Lamentations is a great reminder. Though his silence is painful, it is but temporary. And let me also remind you, that you aren't alone. People have been feeling this way for thousands of years.

David cried out in Psalm 28:1, "To you, O LORD, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit." You see, even King David battled God's silence. And that silence caused him to go down to the pit. That's just the ancient way of saying he would become depressed.

Another Psalmist similarly cried out, "O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God!" (Ps 83:1). God, answer me. God I need to hear from you. God where are you? You see, friend, many have felt the same way you feel. Let me encourage you to follow the example of the Psalmists. When God seems silent, pray to him all the more. Don't give up. Keep pressing on. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Second, we should examine. We should examine our own hearts to see if we are preventing God from responding to our prayers. I'm not saying this is always the case, but often times we're living lives running rampant with secret sin and we wonder why God seems distant or silent. Well, Scripture says that our sin can inhibit our prayers from getting above the ceiling.

James 1:7 tells us that if we live a double-minded life, we shouldn't expect God to answer our prayers. What James means by that is a life that isn't fully committed to Jesus. If we are just half-hearted in our commitment to Christ, or not even a Christian but expecting God to do something for you, you shouldn't expect God to respond to your prayers.

James 4:3 says that you shouldn't expect God to answer your prayers if you have the wrong motives. Specifically, James says that people are praying only for their

benefit, not the glory of God. How many times do we offer up prayers selfishly?

1 Peter 3:7 notes that husbands who don't treat their wives well shouldn't expect God to answer their prayers. I think the same is probably true in reverse. Wives who don't treat their husbands well shouldn't expect God to answer their prayers. After all, marriage is a beautiful picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If husbands and wives don't display the kind of love that Christ displays towards the church, then they're being a bad witness to the watching world. Those spouses shouldn't expect God to answer prayers.

So, if you're feeling far from God, examine your life to see where you might be rebelling against God. Don't excuse your sin. Don't think it's not a big deal. As R. C. Sproul used to say, every sin we commit is "cosmic treason." Our sin is much worse than we think it is. So take this as an opportunity to confess and repent of your sin. As Proverbs 28:13 states, "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces finds mercy."

Third, we should trust. We should trust that the Lord has good reasons for not answering our prayers. I think of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 who desperately prayed that God would remove his so-called "thorn in the flesh." And even though Paul prayed multiple times, the Lord said no. Instead here was the Lord's response, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). We're not sure what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, but we know it was something that caused great discomfort to him. And I think we can assume that Paul dealt with this ailment for the rest of his life.

Some of you need the reminder this morning: "My grace is sufficient for you." I know as I look out across this room, many of you have been battling with God's silence. He hasn't taken your depression away. He hasn't cured your cancer. He didn't answer when you prayed for him to spare your loved-one's life. He hasn't saved your spouse. And as discouraging as this may be, God promises to give you enough grace for every

situation. This does not mean we give up praying. God may answer your prayers still. But it also may not be part of his sovereign will. As 1 John 5:14 states, “if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.” When God doesn’t grant our requests that we think are right and good, the only thing we can really do is trust that his ways are higher than our own. Friend, God’s grace is sufficient for you, even as your prayers remain unanswered.

Fourth, we should look. We should look around and realize that God isn’t as hidden or silent as he may seem. For starters, God has revealed himself in creation. The very existence of the universe demands an explanation beyond itself. The fact that our universe is fine-tuned for life’s existence and that life is intricately designed speaks louder than we often realize. In those times when God seems silent, going on a walk in nature can often do more good for you than reading a good book, as much as it pains me to say that. When you look at the beautiful flowers in your garden, or the river brook in the woods, or if you’re lucky enough the sunset on the beach or the beautiful mountains, God speaks through these things. As Psalm 19:1 states, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” God isn’t as hidden or silent as some make him out to be. His creation declares and proclaims his glory. In other words, God speaks through his world.

God also speaks through his word. Often times, when we want God to show himself to us or to speak to us, the appropriate response is to open up our Bibles. To look at the book. If you think about it, God was so good in giving us Scripture. It was his way to speak to all of us. To tell us what he’s like and what he’s done and what his will is for us. The very nature of Scripture suggests that not only has God spoken, but he is still speaking. As Hebrews 4:12 declares, “The Word of God is living and active.” It’s alive. It’s not a dead text. It’s the way God continues to speak to the world.

At the end of Luke’s Gospel, he shares a story about Jesus appearing to two people on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. In the story, we read that these two people walk with Jesus for several miles, but they don’t recognize him. In fact, they are

distraught the entire journey because the one they had put their hopes in had been crucified. Only after reaching their destination and sharing a meal together, did these people realize that it was Jesus who had been with them the entire time.

Is this not a parable for many of us? How many times have we been plagued with doubts? How many times have we wondered why doesn't God show up? Why doesn't he respond to me? We wonder where God is, when all along, he's been walking right beside us.

Friend, if you will just look, you will see God. You will see him in his world and in his word. And as we've been covering the last few weeks, we've seen him act decisively in Jesus' death, burial, and subsequent resurrection. Look to those places. Don't always rely on your subjective experiences. Our feelings are often at odds with reality. Instead of listening to ourselves, we must speak to ourselves and remind ourselves that God isn't as silent or distant as we make him out to be. After all, Jesus' burial in the tomb is evidence of that.

Again, our main idea this morning was that Jesus' burial in the tomb demonstrates that God's silence doesn't mean his absence. Church I pray that these truths will be of encouragement for us this morning. That when you're struggling with unanswered prayer or feelings of God's distance that you will go back to the empty tomb and remember that God wasn't absent. He had a plan. He was still at work. And he's still at work in your life too.

If you were to travel to Jerusalem today in search of Jesus' tomb, you would most likely end up at this place. It's called the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Why do people think Jesus' tomb was here? Back in the early 300s, when Constantine became emperor, he wanted to know the location of Jesus' tomb, and people pointed him to this location. However, they needed to demolish a pagan temple dedicated to Venus before they could start construction. When they leveled the temple, they found the tomb underneath.

Ever since the early 300s, various structures have been built at this location. Today, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher stands over the tomb. In fact, if you were to enter the church, you would see a miniature church building inside. And inside this smaller building is the tomb that many people believe belonged to Jesus. Most people who know what they're talking about think this is the location.

A small minority this is the location. It's called the Garden Tomb. After all, John's Gospel says that Jesus' tomb was in a garden. And close to this site, is a large rock edifice that looks a bit like a skull which could be the place of the skull where Jesus was crucified. And the Gospels report that Jesus was buried close to his crucifixion site.

To be honest, the exact location of Jesus' burial isn't all that important. What is important, is that no matter which tomb it was, it was incapable of holding down Jesus. I invite you back next week as we examine Christ's resurrection from the dead. Let's pray.

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES

Sermon 4: “Alive and Visible”

1 Corinthians 15:3–8

February 20, 2022

History is filled with monumental events. In AD 476, the Roman Empire finally fell after lasting for almost 500 years. In 1066, William the Conqueror won at the Battle of Hastings and forever changed the nation of England. In 1440, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, making books easier and cheaper to make and raising the literacy rates by a wide margin. In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in America. In 1517, Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation. In 1760, the Industrial Revolution started in Great Britain, increasing productivity around the globe. In 1776, the United States declared their independence from Britain. In 1939, Germany invaded Poland sparking World War II. In 1989, the Berlin Wall came down ending the Cold War and dealing a blow to Communism. September 11, 2001, terrorists knocked down the World Trade Centers in New York City.

These events and many more changed the world as we know it. It’s hard to overstate the significance of Gutenberg’s invention, Columbus’ voyage, Luther’s boldness, and Hitler’s invasions. Yet none of these events hold a candle to the most significant event of them all—Jesus of Nazareth’s resurrection from the dead. Why has this event dwarfed all the others? Because the resurrection vindicated Jesus’ claim that he was the Son of God who came to take away the sins of the world. If Jesus stayed dead, he accomplished nothing. If rose, he accomplished everything. He not only transformed the world, he opened up the gates for eternal life. His resurrection makes his words in John 11:25 all the more meaningful, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” If Jesus stayed dead, those words ring hollow.

For two thousand years now, Christians have put their hope in Christ’s resurrection. But the question I have for us this morning is do we have good reason to believe that it actually happened. After all, dead people usually stay dead. And one

doesn't need an advanced degree in biology to know this. Yet, as unbelievable as the resurrection is, I believe we have good reasons for believing that it really happened. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.

This morning marks the fourth message in our series titled “First Importance.” Before we look at the text, let me remind you of the ground we have covered. The first week, we examined the phrase “for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received” and determined that this text is an early Christian creed that Paul embedded into his letter. Many date the creed to within two years of Jesus' death, demonstrating that it's not the result of legendary embellishments. This creed states exactly what the earliest Christians were claiming.

The second week we examined the phrase “Christ died.” We discovered that Jesus' death by crucifixion is one of the best attested events in the ancient world. Almost no one doubts that it happened. We also saw how the death of Christ expressed the immeasurable love of God. Last week, we looked at the phrase, “he was buried” and we concluded that Jesus' burial in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb is historically certain. This week, we're going to turn our attention to different phrases in the text. But before we do, let's read the text together once again.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

This morning, we're going to consider the phrases, “he was raised” and “he appeared.” In many respects, this message marks the pinnacle of the series. Everything we have discussed so far leads up to this monumental event. As we discussed last week, if we can establish a certain chain of events, then we have historical evidence for Jesus' resurrection. We have already established Jesus' crucifixion and burial. Today, we will

consider the empty tomb and his resurrection appearances. Now, when Paul says Jesus was raised, and when the angels at the tomb said Jesus was raised, we have to bear in mind that no human actually witnessed the exact moment Jesus' dead corpse came back to life. No, the women and the disciples got there after the fact and found an empty tomb. Shortly thereafter, Jesus appeared alive to them. And these resurrection appearances had a profound effect on them. And this brings us to our main idea: After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his earliest followers who then proclaimed his resurrection, even though it meant their persecution. In other words, something truly unbelievable happened that first Easter Sunday that changed not only the earliest followers of Jesus, but the rest of the world too. Now let's break down the main idea into three events.

First, Jesus' tomb was empty. As I just alluded to a moment ago, nobody saw the exact moment that life returned to Jesus' body. But many did observe the empty tomb afterwards. Now this text doesn't specifically say the tomb was empty, but it implies as much when it says, "he was raised." He was raised, and therefore, left his tomb. So what kind of evidence do we have for Jesus' empty tomb. Let me give you four lines of evidence.

First, all four Gospels report that Jesus' tomb was empty. As was true with the burial last week, those who deny that Jesus' tomb was found empty must go against the four first century sources that report it. Now, it might make sense to go against the unanimous witness of the first century if one could establish that the Gospels are unreliable. But as we saw in the first message of this series, the Gospels are reliable eyewitness accounts which attempt to tell the truth about what really happened, even the parts that were more embarrassing—things like Jesus' disciples betraying and denying him. Jesus' own family thinking he was crazy. His inability to perform miracles in Nazareth. And so forth. Nobody inventing story in order to gain followers would make up any of these embarrassing details because these details would have hurt their case. But they included these details anyways because the Gospel writers attempted to tell the

whole truth. And all four Gospels report that Jesus' tomb was empty. Not one single source says otherwise.

Second, Christianity could not have gotten off the ground in Jerusalem if Jesus' body remained in the tomb. Now some critics suggest that the women were confused, went to the wrong tomb, saw it was empty, and started the rumor that Jesus raised from the dead. The Gospels, however, report that the women paid careful attention to where Jesus was buried.

But if the women were confused, how plausible is it to think that nobody thought to go check the actual tomb afterwards and set everyone straight? Certainly the Jewish leaders would have been motivated to do this. They could have exposed the whole story as a hoax by presenting Jesus' dead corpse to the public. This would have certainly brought Christianity to an immediate end. William Lane Craig even argues, "Even if the burial story were totally false, and Jesus was buried in the criminal's graveyard, it would not have been difficult for Jewish authorities to locate a freshly dug grave, even after several weeks, and, if necessary, exhume the body."¹ Remember Jesus was publicly crucified and buried in Jerusalem. The very fact that Christianity exploded in Jerusalem demands that Jesus' dead body was nowhere to be found.

Third, the Jewish opponents even admit the tomb was empty. And how did they do this? Matthew 28:12–13 reports that the chief priests paid the guards to tell everyone that the disciples stole the body. You see, none of the Jewish leaders were arguing his body was still in the tomb. No, they implicitly admit the tomb was empty by saying the disciples must have stolen the body. And guess what? It wasn't just the earliest Jews making this claim. Justin Martyr, in the second century, says the Jews were still circulating the same rumor in his day. While writing to his Jewish counterpart, Justin remarks, "You (Jews) have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to

¹ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 82.

proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb.”² These reports from Christianity’s opponents assume that Jesus’ body was no longer resting in the tomb. And when enemies admit facts in favor of their opposition, those facts are more than likely true.

For example, if your mother says you’re a nice guy, we’re not sure whether to believe her or not. But when your sworn enemy says the same thing, well then you must you be a nice guy after all. And the very fact that the enemies of Christianity said the tomb was empty strongly suggests that it must have really been empty.

And fourth, if the early church invented the empty tomb, they never would have credited women as its key eyewitnesses. Now why is this significant? It’s significant because as the biblical scholar Richard Bauckham says, men from the ancient world perceived women as “gullible in religious matters and especially prone to superstitious fantasy.” In other words, men didn’t trust women. And one doesn’t need to look very far in the Jewish literature to see this misogynistic attitude at work in early Judaism. For example, we read in the Rabbinical literature, “Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women” (Sotah 19a). That sounds pretty extreme doesn’t it? Well how about this statement from the Jewish rabbis about a woman’s testimony in court: “Any evidence which a woman [gives] is not valid to offer, . . . This is equivalent to saying that one who is Rabbinically accounted a robber is qualified to give the same evidence as a woman” (Rosh Hashanah 1.8). You see that? A woman’s testimony was on par with a convicted criminal.

With this understanding, one would be hard-pressed to know why the early church would fabricate details about the women eyewitnesses knowing that it would hinder their case. This would be like putting forward a convicted Nazi as a key character

² Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 108 (*ANF*, 1:253).

witness in court, and your life depended on the jury believing his testimony. That would be an incredibly foolish decision as nobody would take his words seriously.

Again, here we have another embarrassing detail that the early church wouldn't have made up. Certainly, if they invented the empty tomb, they would have listed the male disciples as the eyewitnesses, not a bunch of women that nobody would believe. The only reason, then, that the Gospels list women as the key eyewitnesses is that they must have been the key eyewitnesses for the empty tomb. No reason to make it up.

Jesus' empty tomb is historically certain. So what happened after that? Our second point: Jesus physically appeared to his followers. Now our text reports several appearances. First, the creed says that Jesus appeared to Cephas. Cephas was Peter's Aramaic name. The use of his Aramaic name is another reason to believe the creed originated in Jerusalem because Aramaic wasn't spoken across the Roman Empire—but it was in Israel. Luke 24:34 reports this appearance when the disciples stated, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Of course, Simon was another name for Peter.

Next, he appeared to the twelve. This appearance is reported in Luke 24:36–49 where Jesus even eats a piece of fish with his disciples. Now why is that significant? Because it demonstrates it wasn't just some kind of apparition or visionary experience the disciples had. No, it was flesh and blood Jesus. It was a bodily resurrection. And this is the point that John 20 makes as well when Thomas touched Jesus' scars from the crucifixion.

Next, the creed says Jesus appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time. We don't have an explicit reference to this mass appearance in the Gospels or Acts. Now some think that the end of Matthew 28, when Jesus gives the Great Commission is a possibility since Jesus appeared in the Galilean countryside where a large crowd could have been present. But we can't know for sure. However, Paul's note about most of them

still being alive is significant. Paul wrote this letter in the year 55, twenty-five years after Jesus' death. And most of those five hundred were still around. C. H. Dodd suggests that "there can hardly be any purpose in mentioning the fact that most of the five hundred as still alive, unless Paul is saying, in effect, 'the witnesses are there to be questioned.'"³ In other words, you don't believe me, go ask all of them. Ask Salome, Joanna, and Joseph. They saw him too

Next, we read that he appeared to James. This is James the Lord's brother. And while we have apocryphal books that report this appearance, none of the biblical texts specifically mention this appearance either.

After James, he appeared to all the apostles. Because the creed already mentions the twelve, the apostles must be a broader category. I believe this appearance is the one we read about in Acts 1 before Jesus ascended into heaven as this was the final earthly appearance. I think the creed is listing the appearances in order that they happened. Before this final appearance, Acts 1:3 reports, "He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days." In other words, Jesus appeared several times and proved to them he had truly risen. We discussed some of what those proofs might have been, things like letting them touch him or watching him eat.

And finally, Paul says, Jesus appeared to him. This resurrection appearance is reported in Acts 9 as Paul was traveling to Damascus to persecute Christians. Paul also reports it in 1 Corinthians 9. Now Paul's appearance was a bit different than the others, and it makes sense that it would be. After all, his appearance came after Jesus had already ascended into heaven. This explains why Jesus appeared in a blinding light. His glory was on full display. Jesus' pre-ascension appearances were much more subdued by

³ C. H. Dodd, "The Appearances of the Risen Christ: A Study in the Form Criticism of the Gospels," in *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester Press, 1968), 128.

comparison. Again, let me remind you that this creed dates to within a couple of years of Jesus' death. This is a really early text. These appearances were well-known by the church from the very beginning. These aren't legendary stories.

Now, why can we trust that Jesus really did physically appear to these people? How do we know that they simply didn't make up this story as some skeptics suggest? This brings us to our third point: Jesus' followers boldly proclaimed his resurrection even though they were persecuted for it.

Why would they do this? Well, let me give you two reasons why they didn't. First, it's not because they lied about it. Now we don't have time to document how every follower of Jesus boldly endured persecution for the name of Jesus, so let's just briefly consider the three individuals mentioned in this creed: Peter, James the brother of Jesus, and Paul. All three underwent significant transformation after Jesus' death and eventually each of them died a martyr's death.

Let's begin with Peter. While Peter was one of the original twelve, the Gospels report that he cowardly denied Jesus three times during Jesus' trial. Again, that's embarrassing so it can't be made up. Also, Peter is conspicuously missing during Jesus' crucifixion, presumably in hiding.

But then, suddenly in Acts, Peter is boldly proclaiming in public that Jesus had risen from the dead. He was threatened by the Jewish leaders and thrown into prison. Yet he continued to preach. As he and John said, "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

History notes that Peter continued preaching the gospel throughout the Roman world until the time of his gruesome death. Writing in the late first century, Clement of Rome affirms, "Through envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars have been persecuted and put to death. Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles. Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labours; and when he

had suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him.”⁴

And writing near the end of the second century, Tertullian also affirms Peter’s martyrdom, but provides further information. He writes, “We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross.”⁵ Peter’s death by crucifixion was part of the historical records in the second century.

James also underwent a radical transformation following the death of his brother Jesus. Mark reports that during Jesus’ ministry, his brothers believed that he was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21). John explicitly states that “not even his brothers believed in him” (John 7:5). Again, these are embarrassing details the church wouldn’t have made up. Subsequently, however, the book of Acts and Paul identify James as the leader of the Jerusalem church. And history reports that James suffered martyrdom for his faith.

Josephus reports that a Jewish authority “brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.”⁶ After all, Christians were frequently seen as violators of the Jewish law.

The early church historian Hegesippus also reports that the Jewish leaders placed James on the pinnacle of the temple so that he would publicly recant his beliefs. When he would not recant, they “threw down the just man, and said to each other, ‘Let us stone James the Just.’ And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; . . . And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom.”⁷

⁴ Clement of Rome, *1 Ep. Cor.* 5.11–13 (*ANF*, 1:6).

⁵ Tertullian of Carthage, *Scorp.* 15 (*ANF*, 3:648).

⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 20.9.1 (Whiston, 480).

⁷ Eusebius Pamphilus, *Hist. eccl.* 1.23.16 (*NPNF*², 1:126).

Similar to Peter and James, Paul’s life took a radical turn as well. By his own admission, Paul formerly persecuted the church. In a stunning turn of events, Acts reports that Paul converted to Christianity and immediately started preaching the gospel as an apostle of Jesus Christ. As a result of his radical transformation, Paul notes that he endured beatings, stonings, and imprisonment. Eventually, he paid the ultimate price of martyrdom.

Clement in the first century remarks that “Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance . . . and suffered martyrdom under the prefects.”⁸ Tertullian in the late second century adds “that Paul is beheaded has been written in their own blood.”⁹

Early records agree that Paul was beheaded on the Ostian Road—a road leading southwest from the city of Rome towards the seaport.¹⁰ Fourth century church historian Eusebius even remarks that the “account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day.”¹¹

Now I ask you what best explains the radical transformation of these men? Peter the coward, James the skeptic, and Paul the persecutor radically transformed into bold preachers of Jesus Christ, even though it cost all of them their lives. Knowing what they went through, is it reasonable that they lied about the resurrection?

No, of course not. Why would anyone willingly endure persecution for something they made up and with nothing to gain? There was no money, power, or women to be gained by this ploy. In fact, the church didn’t have any power to speak of until three centuries later when Constantine became emperor. All the early disciples had

⁸ Clement, *1 Ep. Cor.* 5.13 (*ANF*, 1:6).

⁹ Tertullian, *Scorp.* 15 (*ANF*, 3:648).

¹⁰ Bryan Liftin, *After Acts: Exploring the Lives and Legends of the Apostles* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 178.

¹¹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.25.5 (*NPNF*², 1:129).

to gain was being ostracized from their communities and being persecuted by either the Jewish or Roman authorities. Surely, if it was all made up, someone would have fessed up along the way.

Charles Colson, a well-known accomplice to the Watergate scandal of the Nixon administration notes:

I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because [twelve] men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for [forty] years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled twelve of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me [twelve] apostles could keep a lie for [forty] years? Absolutely impossible.¹²

One would think that at least one of the disciples would have admitted to the hoax to avoid crucifixion, stoning, or beheading. Yet, we have no indication that any of them ever recanted.

Now some object to this and say that when Muslim terrorists blow themselves up in the name of Allah, that doesn't prove that Islam is true. And they would be right. It doesn't make Islam true. But let me tell you why the disciples' martyrdoms are different. The Muslim terrorist sincerely believes in the cause he is dying for. But he dies on the basis of faith alone. He is not in a position to know for sure whether or not Islam is true. While he is sincere, he could be sincerely wrong.

The disciples, on the other hand, didn't die on the basis of faith. They were there. They were eyewitnesses. They were in a position to know for sure if the story was made up or not. And they still willingly died. In short, people will die for something they believe is true, but they will never die for something they know is false. And the disciples would have known for sure if the story was false. In short, liars make bad martyrs.

¹² Marty Angelo, "How Chuck Colson's Legacy of Hope Lives On," Prison Fellowship, accessed March 18, 2021, https://www.prisonfellowship.org/2018/04/chuck-colsons-legacy-hope-lives/?mwm_id=295741440399&sc=WB1710B10&sc=WB1710B10&gclid=CjwKCAjw9MuCBhBUEiwAbDZ-7uNXZn2Yo1nb-CL47zrLtVO5zipE3LuC1wtH659K-9phs8dk8_yHXBoCt-wQAvD_BwE.

Additionally, the theory that the disciples stole the body and then lied about it doesn't adequately explain how James and Paul converted to Christianity. They needed more evidence than an empty tomb and a story. In fact, when you read the Gospel accounts, when people saw the empty tomb, they didn't immediately assume Jesus rose from the dead. They thought someone moved the body.

Certainly, Paul had heard the stories about the empty tomb before. But that never convinced him of a resurrection. Neither Paul nor James, two men committed to Judaism, would have jumped ship over an unoccupied tomb. Something more radical was required. Something like a post-resurrection appearance. So, the disciples didn't lie about it.

Second, we know they didn't hallucinate. Based on the evidence that the disciples willingly suffered for their belief in a resurrection, many critics suggest that the disciples sincerely believed they saw Jesus, but it was just in their heads. This is probably the most popular objection to the resurrection. But this objection fails on multiple fronts as well. First, hallucinations are private individual experiences.¹³ In this sense, they are a lot like dreams. As cool or fun as it might be to share dreams with other people, dreams just don't work that way. If so, I could just tap Tracy on the shoulder at night so we could enter a dream and enjoy a vacation in Hawaii together. So the notion that all the disciples, women, and other eyewitnesses all shared in the same group hallucination at different places and different times is, well, absurd.

Medical Doctors will also tell you that when people hallucinate, they don't report having conversations with the apparitions, touching them, or sharing meals with them. While ghosts might be able to do a lot of things, eating fish isn't one of them. Yet these details are precisely what the Gospels report when the disciples saw Jesus.

Another problem with the hallucination theory is that it cannot account for the

¹³ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 106.

empty tomb. In other words, hallucinations might be able to get Jesus in the disciples' heads, but it cannot get him out of his own tomb. Yet as we've seen, Jesus' empty tomb is a historical fact. Finally, hallucinations cannot explain Paul's resurrection experience. After all, the person most likely to hallucinate is a grieving individual who lost someone close to them. Paul hated Jesus and the Christians. He was certainly not in that frame of mind by which hallucinate. But the fact that Paul radically changed suggests that something radical happened to him.

Certainly, many people have hallucinated throughout history. Perhaps some of you have. But we don't have any record of people radically changing their worldview and cherished beliefs over an hallucination. Moreover, we don't know of anyone who has been willing to suffer and die over seeing an hallucination. The hallucination theory just doesn't work.

In the end, the disciples claimed that Jesus appeared to them alive after his death. These appearances led to their sudden transformation which ultimately resulted in persecution. Neither the disciples' deceit nor their hallucinations can adequately explain these historical facts. The disciples most certainly had legitimate experiences with a resurrected Jesus.

And these experiences led to the explosion of Christianity. Within a few weeks, thousands of people left their life-long cherished belief in Judaism to worship Jesus as Lord. This all happened because the earliest followers of Jesus boldly proclaimed what Jesus had done. They shared the message. If you think about it, Jesus' resurrection wouldn't have led to the explosion of Christianity around the globe if the first eyewitnesses kept quiet about it. If they remained scared and embarrassed. But their bold proclamation of the risen Jesus literally changed the entire world.

Christianity started in Jerusalem, but it quickly spread across the Roman Empire. The book of Acts reports much of this expansion. Interestingly, we have an early second century historian named Suetonius who tells us that Christianity had made such a

big splash in Rome, that in the year AD 49, the Emperor Claudius “expelled from Rome the Jews constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.” Now Chrestus and Christus would have sounded almost identical in Latin so it’s easy to see how Suetonius spelled Christ with an e. But it seems that Claudius had heard enough about the disputes between the Christians and Jews in Rome that he wanted them all out of the city.

What’s more, in the 1800s, this marble slab was discovered in Nazareth. Archaeologists date the slab to around the year AD 50—about the same time that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome. The slab is a decree from Caesar, so from Claudius, stating that if anyone steals a body from any of the tombs, they will suffer capital punishment. Now, why would the most powerful man in the world care about grave robbers in a tiny remote town thousands of miles away, and even threaten them with the death penalty? It seems that the Roman Emperor had heard the Christian story that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead, though he misunderstood the exact location of his resurrection. Claudius either heard the Jewish story that the disciples stole the body, or just assumed that was the explanation for all the hysteria.

Either way, the Nazareth decree demonstrates that the Christians boldly proclaimed the story of Jesus’ resurrection all the way to the capital of the Empire. And for two thousand years, this is how the Christian message has spread. People, boldly proclaiming that Jesus rose from the dead. Eventually someone passed the story along to you, and now it’s your turn to pass it along to others.

We must pass it along because it’s the message of hope that this dying world so desperately needs to hear. Many people live as if there is no ultimate purpose in life. And that worldview can certainly lead one towards despair. It’s no wonder that we live in the most miserable and fearful society in the history of the world. But we have a message that gives hope.

And that message is that life exists beyond the grave. That eternal life is possible through Jesus Christ. That because he rose from the dead and defeated death, all

those who trust in him will rise from death as well to eternal life. As Jesus said in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." John 6:40 Jesus says, "Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." That's why the resurrection is so important. Eternal life is possible. And everyone needs to know. So tell them. Be like those earliest followers of Jesus who boldly proclaimed the resurrected Jesus even though it cost them dearly. They were beaten, stoned, thrown in prison, beheaded, and crucified, all because they knew the world needed to hear what Jesus had done for them. Will you do your part? Will you seek to persuade people that Jesus really did conquer the grave? I pray that you will. Because if not you, then who will do it?

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES
Sermon 5: “Predicted Hundreds of Years in Advance”
1 Corinthians 15:3–8
February 27, 2022

About two thousand years ago, there was a certain Ethiopian official who was traveling back to his homeland from Jerusalem. While sitting in his chariot, he read from the Jewish Scriptures—what we call the Old Testament. Specifically, he was reading from Isaiah 53. As he read, a Christian leader named Philip ran over to his chariot and asked if the man understood what he was reading. The Ethiopian replied, “how can I unless someone explain it to me?” He then read aloud the following words to Philip:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearers is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe this generation? For his life is taken away from the earth” (Acts 8:32–33).

The Ethiopian then asked, “who is this describing? Does it describe the prophet who wrote it or someone else?” This question, posed by the Ethiopian in Acts 8 is a question that many have asked since. Who is the prophet describing?

This morning, I want to show you why the answer to the Ethiopian’s question is Jesus. The Old Testament text was talking about Jesus. Now why is that significant? It’s significant because Isaiah made these prophecies hundreds of years before Jesus lived on the earth. And if Isaiah was able to correctly predict what would happen to Israel’s Messiah, then that demonstrates that God supernaturally orchestrated the events.

In fact, being able to predict the future is something that only God can do. Earlier in Isaiah’s book, the LORD mocks the so-called gods that Israel continually chased after. He challenges them in Isaiah 41:22–23, “Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. . . . Or declare to us the things to come. Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods.” The Lord concludes that these idols are just heaps of scrap metal—just junk. Why? Because they couldn’t predict future events. On the other hand, the LORD proclaimed, “I declared them to you from of old, before

they came to pass, I announced them to you, lest you should say, ‘My idol did them, my carved image and my metal image commanded them’ (Isa 48:5). It’s the LORD, and he alone who is able to guarantee what will happen in the future. As he says in Isaiah 45:21, “Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god beside me.”

That’s it. Only the LORD—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—can establish what will take place in the future.

This morning marks the fifth message in our series from 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 titled “First Importance.” While we will look at the text again, we’re actually going to spend the bulk of our time this morning in Isaiah 52–53. You can go ahead and turn there.

So far, throughout our series, we have examined four key components of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. In the first week, we examined the phrase, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,” and determined that this text is an early Christian creed that dates to within two years of Jesus’ death. Therefore, it states what the church was saying about Jesus from the very beginning. The second week, we examined the phrase “Christ died,” and saw that Jesus’ crucifixion is one of the best attested events in the ancient world. Almost no one doubts that it happened. The third week we looked at the phrase “he was buried” and discovered that Jesus’ burial in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb best explains the data. And last week, we looked at the phrases, “he was raised” and “he appeared” and found that Jesus’ empty tomb and post-resurrection appearances are historically certain.

This morning we’re going to turn our attention to another phrase: “according to the Scriptures.” That is to say, the Old Testament Scriptures point to Jesus’ death and resurrection. And while we could examine any number of texts, we’re going to look at what I think is the best one. It’s the so-called Suffering Servant Song from Isaiah 52 and 53. It’s the passage that the Ethiopian was reading from in Acts 8, and it’s the passage we’re going to read now. Beginning in 52:13:

Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be

exalted. As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

Chapter 53: Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

In many respects, we have already demonstrated, in the first four weeks, that Jesus' death and resurrection can be verified from a historical perspective. That said, the fact that texts like Isaiah 53 accurately predicted hundreds of years in advance what would happen to Jesus strengthens our case. It's like the proverbial "icing on the cake" or "the cherry on top." We already have a good case, but this makes it even better. Because if we can establish that the Old Testament prophesied the events in the 1 Corinthians 15 creed, then we have further evidence that Jesus' death and resurrection were not random events without a purpose, but events orchestrated by God packed with life-altering

significance.

In other words, Jesus wasn't just a random guy who showed up one day and was crucified and supposedly appeared to some of his followers a few days later. No, Jesus came into a certain Jewish context that was ripe for Messianic fulfillment. And he accomplished exactly what texts like Isaiah 53 said he would accomplish.

Our main idea, then, is this: Because the Old Testament accurately predicts the contents of the 1 Corinthians 15 creed, Jesus' death and resurrection must be supernatural events. That is to say, God was clearly involved in Jesus' death and resurrection, and he accomplished something profound through them.

As we look at the Suffering Servant text, we see both the servant's future death and resurrection predicted. In fact, the way that Isaiah structures the text highlights this very point. He breaks the text down into five short stanzas each containing three verses. The outer two stanzas emphasize the exaltation of the servant. Moving our way concentrically towards the center Isaiah explains why this Servant is worthy of his exalted status. Though it's unjustified, he is rejected by the people and ultimately dies as a sin offering for them. The technical term for this structure is a chiasm—a frequently used technique in Jewish literature.

To simplify matters, we will break the text down into two sections. First, we will examine the middle three sections which highlight the servant's suffering. Then we will examine the outer two sections that speak to the servant's resurrection and exaltation. With that said, our first point is that Jesus' death was accurately predicted.

The first question we should ask is why would the people crucify their Messiah? He's their king and savior after all. Why would they do this? It's because he wasn't what they expected. Verse 2 notes, "he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." You see, the Jewish people were expecting a great conquering king to arise from their midst. Someone who would combine both the wisdom of Solomon and the military might of David and bring Roman

oppression to an abrupt end. They wanted pomp and splendor. They wanted their king riding in on a war horse. Instead, they got lowly Jesus riding on a baby donkey. They wanted his birth to be surrounded by much fanfare. Instead, they got baby Jesus born in a manger with only some sketchy shepherds as visitors. They wanted someone from the royal palace. Instead, they got the carpenter's son from Nazareth.

You may recall in John 1 when Philip goes to his friend Nathaniel and says that he found the Messiah. It's Jesus of Nazareth! he said. Nathaniel's response was, Nazareth? "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" The Jewish people were looking for a ruler to come out of Judea. Someone who was prominent in Jerusalem. Someone from the aristocratic families. And instead, Jesus came from the back woods of Nazareth—a region that would have put him on the receiving end of much discrimination. We have ancient records of Judeans mocking the northern Jews from Galilee for the way they talked. Much like a cultural elite from Washington DC mocking southerners for their unsophisticated accents. Jesus would have had an unsophisticated accent.

Verse 3 goes on to note that he was so unattractive, that men would hide their faces from him. They didn't even want to look at him. He wasn't prince charming, and so the people esteemed him not.

We must bear in mind that when we read the Gospels, we see that most people rejected Jesus. This rejection was especially true of the Jewish elites. They despised the very thought of him and looked for any opportunity to destroy him. Repeatedly we read that they hated the fact that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. He associated with prostitutes and had compassion on the lepers. You see, they thought any true Messiah would never associate with such riff raff. He would certainly know better than to make himself ceremonial unclean by eating with sinners, touching lepers, and letting women wipe his feet with their hair. All so scandalous among the Jewish elites, but perfectly instep with Jesus' mission.

Because Jesus didn't come for the well, but for the sick. He came to call sinners to repentance. And it's a good thing, because that's what we are.

The Jewish elites also hated Jesus because of what he claimed for himself. In John 5:18 we read, "This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." And as God, Jesus exposed the religious leaders for their hypocrisy. He repeatedly complains that they worship with their lips while their hearts are far from God. He says, "they were like a bunch of whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones" (Matt 23:27). Jesus wasn't what the Jewish people were looking for in a Messiah, and so they despised and rejected him for it.

So much so that they handed him over to be crucified. In verse 7, we read that "he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth."

At Jesus' trial, we read in Matthew 26:62–63, "And the high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?' But Jesus remained silent." A little later when Jesus is before Pilate we read, "Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed" (Matt 27:14). Jesus had every right to defend himself. He probably could have been spared a crucifixion by offering his defense. But he kept quiet, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.

And the reason for this silence is found in the center section of this text. He remained silent because he knew he needed to die in our place. He needed to take our sin upon his shoulders and suffer the consequences as if he had committed all it himself. As verse 5 reads, "he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” You see, Jesus had to deal with our sin on the cross.

As I’ve read some of the literature on this text, critics try to get around this prophecy by suggesting that the Servant isn’t referring to Jesus, but to the nation of Israel. And they make this argument because in chapters 40–48 Israel is called God’s servant. That said, this text makes very clear that the Servant is not Israel, but an individual—someone distinct from the Jewish community.

Andrew Abernethy in his book on Isaiah describes how the servant could refer to Israel in previous texts but not here. He notes, “Because Israel is unable to fulfill its task as God’s servant to the nations (42:1–9) due to its own spiritual blindness (42:19), God will use an individual servant to achieve atonement for and effect spiritual change in Israel and all nations (49:1–13; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12).”¹⁴ The transition from the nation to an individual becomes clear in 49:5–6 where the servant is said to “bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him . . . to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel.” The servant, in this case, cannot refer to Israel for then it would be performing an action upon itself. It makes no sense to say that Israel would bring back Israel. No, it’s an individual servant who brings back the nation.

Additionally, Isaiah 53:8 declares that the servant will be “cut off out of the land of the living.” If this prophecy referred to the nation, Israel would have ceased to exist altogether. Moreover, the song asserts the servant’s innocence when it declares in verse 9 “Although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.” By contrast, Walt Kaiser observes that “Israel is not depicted by the prophets as being an innocent sufferer; rather, the prophet Isaiah . . . describes Israel as a ‘sinful nation, a

¹⁴ Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God’s Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 40 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 138.

people . . . given to corruption!’ (Isa 1:4).”¹⁵ Israel’s sinful history demonstrates that the innocent servant must be referring to someone else.

Finally, Isaiah identifies himself with the nation in how he uses the pronouns “our” and “us” in contrast with the servant himself. He (third person) will be “pierced for our (first person) transgressions; . . . and crushed for our (first person) iniquities” (Isa 53:5). “Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter . . . [he will be] cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people” (Isa 53:7–8). That is to say, the servant will suffer for the people.

And the servant must suffer because as verse 6 reads, we have all turned away, like lost sheep. And for that reason, the servant laid down his life for us. Notice that Isaiah’s comments in verse 6 are all inclusive. He doesn’t say that some of us have turned away. No, he says ALL of us have turned away. It’s just as Paul says in Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Every last one of us is the wandering sheep who would most certainly get gobbled up by a dangerous enemy if it weren’t for our shepherd laying down his life for us. As Jesus declares in John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” As we saw a few weeks ago, Jesus’ crucifixion is historically certain.

And what’s especially powerful about Isaiah’s prophecy is that not only did he predict that Jesus would die, but he predicted how he would die. Notice again in verse 5 we read that “he was pierced for our transgressions.” Jesus was pierced through the hands and feet as well as his side. This is an especially impressive prediction because crucifixions didn’t even exist at the time that Isaiah wrote this. No, if anyone was going to suffer the death penalty, they were most likely going to be stoned, or possibly hanged.

This prediction demonstrates that Jesus’ death was part of God’s plan from the

¹⁵ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Identity and Mission of the ‘Servant of the LORD,’” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Christian Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 91.

beginning to deal with our sin. This is why he is described as a lamb being led to the slaughter. The lambs were slaughtered in the Old Testament as sacrifices for sin. On the night of the Passover, each family had to slaughter a lamb and spread its blood on the door posts so that they could be spared God's judgment. This is why John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus coming, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

After the servant was cut off from the land of the living, as verse 8 notes, we read in verse 9 that "they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death." While it's hard to tell in the English, the word "wicked" is plural indicating that the servant would suffer alongside wicked people (at least two of them). And as the Gospels report, Jesus was crucified between two wicked people. At the same time, Isaiah notes his grave would be with a rich man. And as we covered a few weeks ago, Jesus was buried in a wealthy man's tomb. Matthew 27:57 reports, "When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph." And it's this Joseph of Arimathea that buried Jesus' body in his tomb.

When offering a sacrifice in ancient Israel, the sacrifice had to be pure. One couldn't offer an animal with a birth defect or with disease. It had to be without spot and blemish. Similarly, Isaiah notes in verse 9 that the servant suffers "although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth." In other words, the suffering servant would be innocent. And if anyone was ever innocent, it was Jesus of Nazareth. He was so innocent that Pilate did not want to crucify him. He symbolically washed his hands and caved to the Jewish pressure to allow Jesus to be crucified, even though he had never done anything wrong. As you can see, Jesus' death was accurately predicted.

Second, we see that Jesus' resurrection was accurately predicted. Certainly, the text emphasizes Jesus' suffering far more than his exaltation. But it does speak of his eventual exaltation, nonetheless. And we find glimpses of this exaltation and resurrection in the outer sections of the text.

In chapter 52:13 we read of the servant that he shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. Instead of “act wisely” a good case can be made for the word “prosper.” Many commentators go in that direction, the NASB goes in that direction, and it’s the one that I think makes the most sense in this context. He will prosper in what he attempts to accomplish.

And as a result, he will be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. This threefold exaltation possibly refers to Jesus’ threefold exaltation in his resurrection, ascension, and heavenly enthronement.¹⁶ Elsewhere in Isaiah, the phrase high and lifted up always refers to YAHWEH. In Isaiah 6:1 we read, “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.” In Isaiah 57:15 we read, “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy.” You see, this servant will not only rise from the dead, but he will be exalted to a place where only the Lord of the universe can go.

Yes, the servant will suffer first. As 52:14 notes he will be disfigured from the brutal treatment he receives. But he didn’t become disfigured against his will. No, Jesus said that he laid down his life on his own accord. As 53:10 notes, “it was the will of the LORD to crush him.” This was God’s plan from the beginning. The servant would endure humiliation before his eventual and eternal exaltation. As Peter preached at Pentecost,

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless man (Acts 2:22–24).

It was the will of the LORD to crush him. But not out of spite. But because it was the only way to reconcile sinful people to a holy God. As verse 10 remarks, he made “an offering for guilt.” As 52:15 notes, he “shall sprinkle many nations.” That word

¹⁶ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 374–75.

sprinkle is used twenty-four times in the Old Testament, and it always refers to priestly activity. The sprinkling of water to cleanse and purify or the sprinkling of blood to atone for sin. Jesus' death, therefore, was an offering to cleanse and purify us from our sin. And notice that the sprinkling wasn't just for Israel, but for "many nations"— for people from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. For people from upstate South Carolina.

After Jesus' death, we read in verse 10 that "he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper his hand." That is to say, he will come back to life. His days are prolonged in that death has no mastery over him. He shall see his offspring—the ones he suffered for. He shall see you if you are his follower.

While preaching at Pentecost Acts 2, Peter quoted from Psalm 16:9, a Psalm written by David. It says, "For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption." And then Peter goes on to say,

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses (Acts 2:29–32).

In verse 12 we read that he will receive a portion with the many. In other words, after his resurrection, he will receive an inheritance. And what is that inheritance? It's the sheep he died for. Christians like you and me. We are his eternal possession. We've been bought by his blood. As he says in Matthew 20:28, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." A ransom. He paid us. Now, we are his inheritance.

After his exaltation to the throne, we read at the end of verse 12, "he will make intercession for the transgressors." The tense of the verb implies that he will do this work continually until the end of time. Again, it should be obvious that he can only continue to make intercession for us if he didn't stay dead. And what does this ongoing intercession entail? It's Jesus continually praying for us and appealing to the Father on our behalf as

our resurrected high priest. Christian friend, Jesus is praying for you right now. He is mentioning you, by name, to his Father. He's saying, they're mine. They've been bought. They've been covered in my blood.

You see, the fact that Isaiah accurately predicted the events of Jesus demonstrates that God was supernaturally involved. No human could make a prediction like this. Again our main idea: Because the Old Testament accurately predicts the contents of the 1 Corinthians 15 creed, Jesus' death and resurrection were, therefore, supernatural events.

As we come to a close, let me help you think about how you might be able to use this text in an evangelism encounter. After all, this is one of the main goals of this series.

Suppose you were telling your neighbor that you're a Christian. That you believe Jesus died on the cross and rose again for your sins. And your neighbor, who's not a Christian, asks why you believe that? Or if they don't ask but seem rather disinterested, you could ask them, do you want to know why I believe this is true? They might say no, but they'll probably say yes out of courtesy.

You could then pull out your smart phone, open up your Bible app, and flip to Isaiah 53. You could then get right beside them so they can see your phone and you could just read a few verses from the chapter. After reading them, you could ask your friend who do they think it's talking about. Most people in America have heard enough about Jesus that they will probably say Jesus. Then you can ask them this question: "Do you know when this was written?" And then you tell them, "it was written 700 years before Jesus was born. Isn't that incredible? Don't you find that interesting that a prophet hundreds of years in advance could accurately predict what would happen to Jesus? This is especially remarkable because crucifixions didn't even exist when the prophet wrote this." And then you could say something like this: "You might think that's just a lucky coincidence, but I don't see how Isaiah could accurately predict Jesus' crucifixion

hundreds of years in advance on his own. Something supernatural must have been involved. It seems like this was God's doing. And as the text says, it's through Jesus' death that our sins are forgiven. What do you think? Wouldn't it be great if God forgave your sins and didn't condemn you for them after you die?"

Going back to the Ethiopian's question to Philip: "who is this text talking about? Is the prophet talking about himself or someone else?" I hope by now you realize the prophet was talking about someone else. He was talking about Jesus hundreds of years in advance. And if we had the time to survey the entire Old Testament, we would find even more text pointing to Jesus. We can safely conclude then with the 1 Corinthians 15 creed that Jesus' death and resurrection were "according to the Scriptures."

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES
Sermon 6: “In My Place”
1 Corinthians 15:3–8
March 6, 2022

First Peter 3:15 reads, “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” Peter says, we must be ready to “make a defense.” The word defense there comes from the Greek word *apologia*. It’s where we get the word apologetics from. It’s the same Greek word that Paul uses in Acts 22:1 when standing before the Jewish mob who wanted to kill him. He declares, “Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.” In other words, he’s trying to make a case for his innocence.

And making a case for the hope that is in us is what 1 Peter 3:15 instructs us to do. Be ready to make a defense—be ready to make a case—to anyone who asks about your faith.

Over the last few weeks, it has been my aim to show you how to do this. I have purposely exposed you to the most popular objections against the story of Christianity so that you will be more prepared to answer those questions if and when they come. And we have done this by examining individual phrases from 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.

In the first week, I exposed you to the objection that the documents reporting Jesus’ death and resurrection are unreliable. They can’t be trusted. But after examining the phrase “for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,” and also looking at the Gospels themselves, we discovered that these are early accounts that contain eyewitness testimony that attempt to tell the truth about what really happened, even the stuff that would potentially hurt their case. Specifically, we saw that 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 is an early Christian creed that dates to within 2 years of Jesus’ death. And that means it’s way too early to be the result of legendary embellishments.

In the second week, I exposed you to the objection that Jesus wasn’t crucified

or perhaps they took his body down from the cross prematurely. We saw, however, that Jesus' crucifixion is well-attested, even among secular sources. And we also saw how unlikely it would have been for a bloodied and battered Jesus to have survived the horrific torture he endured, especially without receiving immediate medical treatment.

The third week, we looked at the objection that Jesus never would have received a proper burial. That as a criminal, the Romans never would have allowed anything so dignified. We refuted this objection as well by showing that Romans, in fact, did allow for proper burial of crucified victims. We even have archaeological evidence which backs this up. We also observed that Joseph of Arimathea is an unlikely invention since as a well-known member of the Sanhedrin, he could have refuted the burial story.

The fourth week, we looked at the objections against the resurrection itself. We considered whether the women could have gone to the wrong tomb, whether the disciples stole the body and lied about it, or whether they all just hallucinated. After examining each objection, we concluded that none of these objections adequately explain key features of the narrative: that the Gospels report women as the chief eyewitnesses, that the disciples' willingly enduring persecution for their belief in a resurrected Jesus, and that Christianity immediately exploded in Jerusalem—the very place where Jesus was crucified and buried.

Last week, we considered that Christ's death and resurrection were prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures hundreds of years in advance. While looking at the Suffering Servant text of Isaiah 53, we refuted the objection that the servant wasn't a reference to Jesus but to Israel. We provided several reasons why that couldn't be the case—the way Isaiah used pronouns in the text, the innocence of the sufferer compared to rebellious Israel, and so forth.

Now I realize that what we've covered over the last five weeks is a lot to take in. I certainly wouldn't expect you to remember every detail. This is why we have emailed you the sermon slides every week. Let me encourage you to save those slides to

your computer for future reference. To go back and listen to some of the messages. Do whatever you can to prepare yourself to make a defense. Because I'm here to tell you, if you proactively evangelize, you will have to make a defense. It's simply part of evangelism.

Certainly, if you've tried to share the Gospel with unbelievers over the last few years, you see the value of what we've been covering. Because when people say they're not interested or they don't believe this stuff, it's on us to make a case for them. When they say they don't believe that someone could possibly rise from the dead, or they think that the Bible is just a bunch of made up fairy tales, we don't just give up on them. No! We have the words of eternal life! We must do whatever we can to help them see that Jesus died and rose again so they could be made right with God and have eternal life. This is what love for the lost entails. We put in the mental hard work because eternity is at stake.

Now this is a good segue into the sixth and final phrase that we will examine from 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. But before we consider what that phrase is, let's read the text together one final time. I've put it on the screen for you.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

The phrase we will spotlight this morning is “for our sins.” Now this statement is different from the previous five in that it makes more of a theological claim than a historical one. For example, we can demonstrate historically that Jesus died, but it's a different matter altogether to say that he died for our sins—that his death actually accomplished something supernatural on a cosmic scale.

In a way, everything we have been discussing over the last five weeks has been

leading up to this very point. Because if we can demonstrate that Jesus rose from the dead, then we can have confidence that our sins have been forgiven. This is why Paul proclaims in 1 Corinthians 15:17, “If Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins.”

And this is the main point I have for us this morning: Since Jesus was raised from the dead, his death was an acceptable sacrifice for our sins. That’s big if true. Right? So why should we think that it is true? First, there are good reasons for believing Jesus died as a sacrifice for sins. Now history tells us that thousands of people died by crucifixion in the ancient world. Even other so-called Messianic figures were crucified by the Romans. None of us, though, would claim that their deaths brought about atonement for our sins. So why should we think that Jesus’ death did? Let me give you five reasons why.

First, the prophets predicted it. Now, we’re not going to rehash everything we covered last week. But the main point bears repeating. Several hundred years before Jesus was born, Isaiah predicted that Jesus would be “pierced for our transgressions” (Isa 53:5). Additionally, the LORD declares in Zechariah 12:10 that “when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him.”

Both texts predict a traumatic piercing event that would happen in the distant future. And as we pointed out last week, these predictions are especially significant because crucifixion didn’t even exist at the time the predictions were made. You see, the prescribed death penalties for the Jewish people at the time were either stoning or hanging (Lev 24:16; Deut 21:22–23). But Isaiah doesn’t say he was stoned or hanged for our transgressions. No, he was pierced for our transgressions. And this is precisely what happened to Jesus. His hands and feet were both pierced to the cross, and a Roman soldier pierced Jesus’ side with a spear (John 19:34).

And I will simply point out that Isaiah didn’t merely predict that Jesus would be pierced. But that he would be pierced for our transgressions. That is, for our sins as the

1 Corinthians 15 creed states. Since God must have been involved in the prophets' writings to be able to accurately predict the kind of death Jesus would die hundreds of years in the future, we can also conclude God accomplished exactly what Isaiah said he would accomplish when Jesus was pierced. He would pay the penalty for sins. The supernatural nature of the text evidenced by this incredible prediction of Jesus' crucifixion, suggests that something supernatural was accomplished through that crucifixion.

Second, the sacrificial system pointed to it. In the Old Testament, animals were offered as penal substitutionary sacrifices. In penal substitution, the penalty that the sinner owes for his sin is paid by a substitute. And from the very beginning, God told Adam that the penalty for sin was death (Gen 2:16–17). It's just like Paul says in Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death." Sin requires death. Specifically, sin required a blood sacrifice. And in the Old Testament, this blood sacrifice was made by an animal.

Leviticus 1:4 instructs the sinner offering a sacrifice, "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him." By laying hands on the animal's head, the sins were symbolically transferred to the animal who then paid the penalty of death and bore the judgment that was otherwise reserved for the sinner.

Later in Leviticus, God explains the rationale for these sacrifices. He states in 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." That is to say, since blood is the symbol of life, God has determined that the blood of an animal can be offered vicariously to make atonement for a person's sins. To bring about a kind of reconciliation between God and the sinner. This Old Testament background helps explain Hebrews statement that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb 9:22).

These Old Testament sacrifices give us then the "interpretive framework for

Jesus's death."¹⁷ That is, they provided categories by which we can make sense of what Christ's death accomplished. As the author of Hebrews made clear, while those animal sacrifices were acceptable at the time, they were insufficient to deal with the sins of the world. A greater sacrifice had to be made. One that was sufficient to deal with the sins of the world. And that sacrifice was made by God himself, Jesus of Nazareth. But if we didn't have the Old Testament sacrificial system pointing towards Jesus' ultimate sacrifice, we couldn't know what Christ's sacrifice accomplished. He would have just looked like a man who was wrongfully killed. But since we have the Old Testament sacrificial system as background, we can see that Jesus' death was an atoning sacrifice for sins. That he really was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

Third, Jesus foretold it. We read in Matthew 16:21, "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Jesus made this prediction on a few occasions. And again, we fall back on the evidence we examined in the first week of this series that the Gospels are reliable accounts. They report Jesus' ministry accurately. They didn't just make up stuff that would bolster their case.

Now, not only did Jesus accurately predict his own death, he predicted that he would die as a payment for sins. He declares in Matthew 20:28, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." A ransom. Jesus predicted that he would give his life to make payment for sin. And that payment for sin, the currency so to speak, was his own blood. This is most certainly the meaning of the Last Supper when he took the cup and said, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28).

¹⁷ William Lane Craig, *The Atonement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 9.

Jesus told his followers in advance that his death was going to be packed with profound significance. Namely, that his death would pay the ransom price for sins.

Fourth, the darkness and earthquake suggested it. In Matthew 27, we read that while Jesus was hanging on the cross, it became dark in the middle of the day and a great earthquake occurred. While the critic might retort that the Gospel writers made up these details, we have extra-biblical corroboration for this event in a man named Julius Africanus. Though he was writing around the year 220, Africanus quotes Thallus' ancient history book on the Eastern Mediterranean. A book which dates which dates to around the year 52.¹⁸ So about twenty years or so after Jesus' death. The quote reads:

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.¹⁹

Africanus sees Thallus' description as verification for the Gospel narratives. While Thallus rationalizes the darkness as an eclipse, he nonetheless reports that an earthquake and midday darkness occurred in Judea around the time of Jesus. While earthquakes and eclipses are not necessarily supernatural, the timing and location with respect to Jesus' death seem highly coincidental if they were just random events. We don't have record of anyone else in the history of the world whose death coincided with midday darkness and an earthquake. These events suggest something more was going on—a cosmic transaction was taking place. As Jesus hung on the cross, he bore the sins of the world upon his shoulders and died as a substitutionary sacrifice.

Fifth, and most importantly, the resurrection proclaimed it. As I mentioned earlier, thousands of people died by crucifixion in the ancient world. Yet only one is said to have come back to life. And Christ's resurrection from the dead—an event we have

¹⁸ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 196.

¹⁹ Julius Africanus, *Extant frag.* 18.1 (*ANF*, 6:136).

very good reason to believe happened—demonstrates that his sacrifice dealt with our sins. As Paul said, If Jesus stayed dead, we're still in our sins. But since he rose, we can have confidence that his death was an acceptable sacrifice for our sins.

You see, when burnt sacrifices were offered in the Old Testament, we read that it resulted in a pleasing aroma to the LORD (Lev 1:9). Now God doesn't literally have nostrils. But what that means is that God found the sacrifices acceptable. He received the sacrifices for sin and therefore forgave the person. In the same way, 1 Corinthians 15:4 notes that Christ "was raised"—a passive verb—suggesting that God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead. And if it's God who raised Jesus, that demonstrates that he found Jesus' atoning sacrifice acceptable. It was a pleasing aroma to him. The resurrection also vindicated Jesus' claims that he was dying as a ransom for our sins.

When the 1 Corinthians 15 creed says that "Christ died for our sins," it means to say that Jesus died as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. He died in our place. He paid the penalty so we wouldn't have to. And this brings us to our second point this morning:

Christ's sacrifice for sins has significant implications. There's a lot that could be said about the significance of Jesus' death. We could devote another six-week sermon series to it. That said, this morning I'd like to give you three significant implications of Christ's sacrifice.

First, it means God is holy and we are sinners. If God was indifferent towards evil, then the cross would be unnecessary. He could just let bygones be bygones. He could sweep our sin under the cosmic rug of the universe. But if he did, he would no longer be holy, and he would no longer be just. But a perfect being who is worthy of worship is perfectly holy and just. He cannot remain indifferent towards evil and rebellion. If he did, then the worst scum bags in the history of the world get off the hook. They would never get justice.

Joseph Stalin, whose regime was responsible for untold millions of deaths,

never gets justice. Adolph Hitler, who was responsible for the death of six million Jews never gets justice. Osama Bin Laden who was responsible for the terrorist attacks on September 11 never gets justice. Dylan Roof who shot up a black church in Charleston even after they had welcomed him in never gets justice. Those responsible for the sex trade, abducting thousands of little girls, never get justice. The abusive parents, the charlatan pastors, the scammers who steal your money, the crony politician, never gets justice.

But nobody wants to live in an unjust world. Take a look at our culture and people are crying out for justice. Justice is a good thing. Justice means that everyone gets a fair shake. Everyone is treated fairly. And for the most part, I think people want to live in a just world. But if God remains indifferent towards sin, then ultimately, justice is just a pipe dream. And even worse, God isn't good. It would be like me being indifferent towards sin that has negatively affected my children. If I wasn't righteously angry at what happened to them, then what kind of father am I? A good father would be angry at the sin done to his children.

Now many object to the idea that God gets angry at sin. They think this is unbecoming of a benevolent being like God. They think it portrays God as a vengeful, blood-thirsty deity, much like many of the pagan gods of ancient Greece and Rome. When we look at the apostles, however, they had no such objection to God's righteous anger towards sin.

Paul writes in Romans 3:25 that God put forth Christ "as a propitiation by his blood." Now what does propitiation mean? It means that God's wrath was appeased. God had been storing up wrath that was directed towards our sin, but Jesus' death appeased or satisfied that wrath. Again, going back to the sacrificial system from the Old Testament, God's holiness demanded a blood sacrifice as a payment for sin. Jesus, became that blood sacrifice that satisfied God's wrath. As a result, those who are united to Christ by faith won't ever experience God's wrath because Jesus bore that wrath in our

place.

But those who don't embrace Jesus as Lord, will experience God's wrath for their sin. They will experience that wrath for all eternity in hell. In other words, judgment is reality in a just world. God's holiness demands that he judges all sin. Again, some think this makes God look like an angry despot, yet the apostles think otherwise.

John writes, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). As John Stott remarks, "If it is God's wrath that needed to be propitiated, it is God's love that did the propitiating."²⁰ Thus, it was love, not uncontrolled rage, that led to the cross of Christ.

It was at the cross where both God's holiness and love were on full display. In his holiness, he pours out his wrath on the sins of all who would put their trust in Christ. And at the same time, it's the love of God that willingly sacrifices himself to spare us of that wrath.

This is not "cosmic-child abuse" as some skeptics retort. This is the love of God on full display. We should never ever think that Jesus was forced to come to earth and suffer against his will. That's a massive misunderstanding of how the Trinity works. No, it was the will of the Triune God, including the Son, that he come and lay down his life. Jesus came willingly. He laid down his life on his own accord as the ultimate expression of his love for us.

The very fact that God put forth his Son as an atoning sacrifice suggests that he will not allow sin to go unpunished. And this brings us to our second implication.

It means we must trust in Jesus as the only way. Jesus being the only way of salvation is a logical implication of the cross. If salvation could be earned, then sure, multiple paths could exist. If Oprah Winfrey is right, then we could all scale the mountain in our different ways and reach the top together. But the holiness of God and the

²⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 172.

sinfulness of man means it's impossible for us to scale the mountain. We have rebelled against him. We have sinned. We are criminals in his court. It doesn't matter how many good things we have done. It doesn't matter how sincere or kind we've been. We've all broken God's law. And because he's holy and just, he can't just let that go. Payment must be made. And Jesus' death was that payment.

As Peter says, there is salvation is no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. Jesus says, he is the way, the truth, and the life, no one can come to the Father except through him. That's it. Jesus was not a pluralist. He didn't teach there were multiple paths to eternal life. No, he was an exclusivist. He taught that he was the only way. And the cross of Christ demands this. For if we could get to Heaven through our own efforts, or through any other way, then Jesus died for no purpose. He foolishly endured all that suffering needlessly.

But Jesus knew what he was doing friends. God's righteous anger was justifiably aimed at sinners, and he would have been perfectly just to unleash the avalanche of his wrath upon us. But instead, Jesus stepped in front of us and absorbed that wrath in full. Friends, this is why we must trust in Jesus and in him alone for our eternal salvation. By trusting in Christ, he shields us from God's righteous wrath. But we don't think we need Christ, then we will stand before God on our own two feet and bear the brunt of his wrath for our sin.

But how awful would that be. If you aren't trusting in Christ, I'm glad you're here. But I must warn you that judgment is coming. God's wrath is coming. His holiness and perfection demand it. But his love provides a way of escape. You have a choice friend. You can turn to Jesus today. You can be spared the judgment you deserve by turning to Jesus. By asking God to forgive you of your sins and by acknowledging that Jesus died to save you. And by doing this, God's wrath will be redirected from you to the cross. Oh friend, please do it. It's a free offer of forgiveness. Free offer of pardon. Come judgment day, you don't want to stand before God on your own two feet and try to make

a good case for yourself. That won't end well. But you don't have to. Instead, you can stand before God on the basis of what Christ accomplished. There's an old song that goes like this: "I need no other argument, I need no other plea. It is enough that Jesus died and that he died for me." That's our only hope friends.

And third, it means we must proclaim it to the world. If Jesus died to save us from our sins, and his death is the only way by which we can receive forgiveness and eternal life, then it is imperative that we get the message out. Yes, people will claim you're arrogant or intolerant for saying that Jesus is the only way of salvation. But Jesus is the only one who solved the problem. Muhammed didn't. Joseph Smith didn't. The Buddha didn't. Jesus alone did. They all might have taught some good things, but Jesus alone paid the penalty for sins.

And because this is true, and because we can have life through his name, we must proclaim this message far and wide. This truth has really been the heartbeat behind this series we've been doing. To show people what Jesus has done for them. To help them see that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

Several years back, I came across a quote by an outspoken atheist that has really stuck with me to this day. It was a quote by Penn Jillette, a well-known illusionist. Perhaps you know him as one part of the Penn and Teller illusionist team. Either way, as an atheist, here's the comment he made that has stuck with me:

"I've always said that I don't respect people who don't proselytize. I don't respect that at all. If you believe that there's a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward . . . how much do you have to hate somebody to *not* proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"

"I mean, if I believed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn't believe that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is *more* important than that."

And he's right. This is more important than that. Brothers and sisters, we live surrounded by people who are about to be hit by the truck. We must go out and tackle

them. We must give them to good news that Jesus died and rose for their sins so that they can experience forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

And as we do, we must keep in mind that the way we live has a profound effect on how they listen to us. It's no surprise to any of us that Christians don't always have the best reputation in our culture. Some of that isn't fair, but some of it is. If we're going to persuade people to join the movement, then the movement needs to be an attractive option. They need to see a community where the people are living out their faith. Where people love others sacrificially like Jesus. Where people have compassion on the hurting. Where outcasts feel welcomed. They need to know that Jesus died to save people of every stripe. Let us not be a stumbling block for unbelievers. Let's give them a compelling vision of what true Christianity is like.

Back to our main idea: Since Jesus was raised from the dead, his death was an acceptable sacrifice for our sins. Six weeks ago, I began this series with a quote from Jaroslav Pelikan. The quote said, "If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen, then nothing else matters." I hope by now you see the truthfulness of that quote. That if Jesus didn't rise, then life has no ultimate purpose. That there is no hope beyond the grave. Our lives are just random at best. And we will cease to exist. But if Jesus did rise, then nothing else in the world matters by comparison. That it's worth devoting your entire life to him. Because his resurrection proclaims in the loudest terms that life does exist beyond the grave.

As Paul says later in 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits of the resurrection. During harvest time, the firstfruits always indicated to the farmer what kind of crop was to follow. In the case of the resurrection then, Paul says that Christians will share in the same type of resurrection as Jesus. Jesus blazed the trail for future resurrections.

And this reality gives us enormous hope. That death doesn't have the final word. That death has lost its sting. That death has been swallowed up in victory. As Jesus

said, even though we die, yet shall we live. We will live forever in the presence of Christ and all the saints. We will enjoy his presence and live with him and all of his children for all eternity. Think about a time in your life when you were the happiest you have ever been. Now think about experiencing that happiness forever, and that gives you a small glimpse of what eternity will be like.

I'd like to end by reading a portion from Revelation that speaks to the eternal joy that all of God's redeemed will experience. John writes:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Let's stand and join in that chorus.

APPENDIX 7

SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

The following curriculum was designed to complement the Sunday morning sermon material. Each small group went through the associated questions in the same week that the complementary sermon was delivered.

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES
Sermon 1: “Jesus Is No Legend”
1 Corinthians 15:3–8
January 30, 2022

Small-Group Session

1. Who is the person or people that you are intentionally trying to reach for the gospel? What steps have you taken as of late to help them get to Jesus? (After answering this question, take time as a group to pray for each person.)
2. Have you ever had doubts or serious questions about the Bible’s truthfulness? These doubts could revolve around difficulties squaring Scripture with your life experiences, passages that seem to contradict one another, texts that appear to contradict science, or passages that seem to go against our modern sensibilities. If so, would you share with the group? (it’s ok to be honest!)
3. Have you ever had a discussion with someone who raised objections about the reliability of the Bible? If so, what were their objections and how did you respond to them?
4. Often times, it can be intimidating to talk to skeptics who challenge the truth claims of Christianity. Watch the following video by Greg Koukl that provides useful tactics for starting the conversation:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySlpcYUTvtY>. In addition to Koukl’s suggestion, have you found any other techniques helpful?
5. Watch another video which provides some good responses to the telephone game objection: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmapLSFES6w> What points did Bill Mounce make that you found most helpful from the video? Can you think of any other reasons not mentioned in the video that would undermine the telephone theory?
6. Read Luke 1:1–4. As a group, unpack the significance of this prologue. What specific claims does Luke make?
7. Suppose after trying to witness to a friend, he says that he thinks the Gospels made up stories about Jesus. He especially thinks they embellished stories to make Jesus look better than he really was (miracle worker, Son of God, risen from the dead). How might you respond to your friend to show him that the Gospel authors didn’t embellish the facts, but tried to report details as truthfully as possible? How might a passage like Mark 6:1–6 be useful in this conversation?
8. In the beginning of the sermon, Ryan shared a quote from Jaroslav Pelikan. He said, “If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen, nothing else matters.” What did Pelikan mean and do you agree with him? Why or why not?

9. In the message, Ryan shared some evidence suggesting that 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 can be dated to within a couple of years of Jesus' death. What was some of the evidence that he used to make his case? And why is this early date so significant for making a case that Christianity isn't made up?

10. The series is titled "First Importance" based on Paul's phrase in 1 Corinthians 15:3. How might the priority of the resurrection help us steer conversations with people who have questions about other less important objections to Christianity? In other words, how might you redirect a conversation with a skeptic who raises questions about evolution or the Canaanite conquests in the Old Testament or any other issue that isn't the resurrection?

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES
Sermon 2: “God’s Love Displayed”
1 Corinthians 15:3–8
February 6, 2022

Small Group Session

1. Who is the person or people that you are intentionally trying to reach for the gospel? What steps have you taken as of late to help them get to Jesus? (after answering this question, take time as a group to pray for each person)
2. Has there ever been a situation where you had a difficult time with God allowing evil or suffering in the world? If so, explain.
3. How does the cross address the problem of evil and suffering?
4. Watch the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkn5lfutSrY> As Tim Keller answered the question about why God would allow evil and suffering, what do you think were his best points? Would you add or change anything to what he said?
5. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:23, a crucified Messiah was a “stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles.” The ancient Roman philosopher Cicero once remarked that “the very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears.” What was it about the crucifixion that made people feel this way?
6. Suppose a friend of yours tells you that he doesn’t think there is any good reason to believe that Christianity is true. How might you use the points from today’s message to convince them otherwise?
7. Read John 19:17–30. As a group, discuss what you think are key observations from the text.
8. In the message, Ryan mentioned the graphic nature of Jesus’ death and the unlikelihood that Jesus could have survived. As you think about all that went through, from an earthly perspective, what do you think was the worst part for Jesus?
9. In the message, Ryan noted that Jesus’ crucifixion was an example of how God accomplished a greater good through someone’s suffering. Can you think of any other examples in Scripture? And can you think of any examples in your own life?
10. How might you use the details of Jesus’ death to share the gospel with someone who is wrestling with the idea of God based on all the evil and suffering in the

world? Can you think of a natural way that you might insert Christ into a conversation like that?

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES

Sermon 3: “Quietly Buried”

1 Corinthians 15:3–8

February 13, 2022

Small Group Session

1. Who is the person or people that you are intentionally trying to reach for the gospel? What steps have you taken as of late to help them get to Jesus? (after answering this question, take time as a group to pray for each person)
2. Has there been a time in your life when you struggled with God’s silence? Or to put it another way, has God seemed distant to you at a time when you felt like you really needed him to show up? Please explain.
3. Have you ever heard a sermon on Jesus’ burial? If not, why do you think his burial often gets overlooked?
4. Suppose a friend raised the objection that Jesus didn’t really receive a proper burial. That he was tossed in a common criminal’s grave and was eaten by wild animals? What bits of evidence would you share with them to help them see that there are good reasons for believing Jesus received a proper burial?
5. Read Genesis 50:4–14, Joshua 24:32, and Deuteronomy 21:22–23. What do these two texts tell us about the importance of burial practices among the Jewish people?
6. Of the four points Ryan gave for what to do when God seemed silent, which did you think was most helpful and why?
7. As a group, read the following burial accounts: John 19:38–42; Matthew 27:57–66; Mark 15:42–47; Luke 23:50–56. What are the similar points in all the accounts? What are some of the differences?
8. As you talk to people who question God because they don’t see him show up or he doesn’t answer their prayers, how might you use the story of Jesus’ burial to show them that God is still active in spite of their perceptions?
9. Watch the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hx6XvPgG0l4>
Have you ever talked to someone who said there just isn’t enough evidence to believe God exists? Taking points from the video, how might you respond to the objector?
10. Have you ever heard of the Shroud of Turin? What do you make of it?

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES

Sermon 4: “Alive and Visible”

1 Corinthians 15:3–8

February 20, 2022

Small Group Session

1. Who is the person or people that you are intentionally trying to reach for the gospel? What steps have you taken as of late to help them get to Jesus? (after answering this question, take time as a group to pray for each person)
2. Have you lost anyone close to you who was a Christian? If so, how did knowing that Jesus rose from the grave comfort you as you grieved their death?
3. All four Gospels report that women were the first eyewitnesses of Jesus’ empty tomb and his resurrection. How does that fact point to the historicity of the resurrection?
4. Suppose someone told you that they think the earliest followers of Jesus made up the story about his resurrection. How might you respond to disavow them of this claim?
5. Watch the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Je9II5jPTnQ> What do you think is the strongest piece of evidence for Jesus’ resurrection? What do you think is the strongest objection?
6. Read Luke 24:1–12, Matthew 28:1–10, and Mark 16:1–8. How might you respond to the objections that the resurrection narratives contradict one another and therefore must not be true? Do you see any details that could possibly be spun as contradictions?
7. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, Paul mentions that Jesus appeared to more than 500 people at one time. And then he says most of them are still living, though some of them have fallen asleep. First off, can you think of any instance in Scripture where Jesus could have possibly appeared to 500 people at one time? And second, why do you think Paul makes the comment “most are still living, though some have fallen asleep”?
8. Most people intuitively recognize that life seems to have some sort of purpose. That is to say, we seem to be here for a reason. How does the resurrection confirm those intuitions?
9. Watch the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gtpOmo12u8> If, as Justin Holcomb says, the resurrection gives hope to those who experience loss, how can we winsomely share the hope of the resurrection with those who have been around death?

10. The earliest followers of Jesus told their stories about their experiences with Jesus. As a result, thousands converted to Christ. What about your story? How might you be able to share how Jesus changed your life that could compel others to turn to Jesus? Perhaps you could even practice sharing your story to the group.

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES
Sermon 5: “Predicted Hundreds of Years in Advance”
1 Corinthians 15:3–8
February 27, 2022

Small Group Session

1. Who is the person or people that you are intentionally trying to reach for the gospel? What steps have you taken as of late to help them get to Jesus? (after answering this question, take time as a group to pray for each person)
2. Other than Isaiah 53 (the text Ryan used in the message), what is your favorite OT prophecy about Jesus?
3. Have you ever had any spiritual conversations with an orthodox Jew who believed the Old Testament was the Word of God but not the New Testament? If so, how have your conversations gone?
4. When Paul said that what Jesus accomplished was “according to the Scriptures,” he most likely didn’t have one passage in mind. He probably had the entirety of the OT in mind. Watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dEh25pduQ8> What are some observations from the video that you found helpful?
5. Knowing that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament, what does that say about our relationship to the Old Testament? How much should we read it?
6. Read the following texts from the Old Testament and explain what they were prophesying: Genesis 3:15; Genesis 12:3; Genesis 49:8–12; 2 Samuel 7:12–13; Psalm 16:9–11; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:6–7; Isaiah 11:10; Isaiah 42:1–4; Jeremiah 23:5–6; Daniel 7:13–14; Daniel 9:25–26; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9; Zechariah 12:10
7. Suppose after showing a friend of yours these Old Testament prophecies about Jesus, your non-Christian friend raised the objection that the New Testament writers just made up stories to make it seem like Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament. How might you respond to their objection
8. As we mentioned earlier, Jesus didn’t just fulfill specific prophecies. He fulfilled the Old Testament in its entirety. Can you think of other ways in which Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament? (think themes, offices, institutions, festivals, and significant events)
9. If the Old Testament accurately predicted much of the New Testament hundreds of years in advance, what does that say about the nature of the Old Testament? Watch this video for more explanation:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zb_gibWVEpE&t=216s

10. How might you use the Old Testament to persuade a lost person that Jesus is the Savior of the world?

FIRST IMPORTANCE SERIES

Sermon 6: "In My Place"

1 Corinthians 15:3–8

March 6, 2022

Small Group Session

1. Who is the person or people that you are intentionally trying to reach for the gospel? What steps have you taken as of late to help them get to Jesus? (after answering this question, take time as a group to pray for each person)
2. Our culture has talked a lot about justice lately. What do you think are some of the greatest injustices in our day and in history?
3. Ryan provided five reasons to suggest that Jesus' death accomplished a supernatural effect. What were those five reasons?
4. When Paul says that Christ died "for our sins," what did he mean by that? In other words what did Jesus accomplish by dying on the cross?
5. Christ's death on the cross was necessary for a just God to be able to forgive sinners and still punish sin at the same time. Watch the following video by Greg Koukl: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6zpySZDBo0&list=PLoCtBcnaHo6OVdOcrxWUfJ_BzGKK_FF-F&index=5 What points stand out to you about the video?
6. Christ's death raises the important question about his exclusivity. Why, if Jesus is God in the flesh, can Christians legitimately say Jesus is the only way of salvation? What is it about Christianity's plan of salvation that differs from every other religion?
7. God's justice also raises the idea of hell. Suppose your friend raised an objection by saying that she could never worship a God who sends people to hell? How might you respond to your friend?
8. After discussing the last question, watch the following video on the topic of hell: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpEaoMg3sG8> What points by Sean McDowell stand out to you the most?
9. Some reject that Christ died as a substitutionary sacrifice because they think it makes God out to be some kind of monster who commits cosmic child abuse against his Son. Why is this view wrong? In other words, why is it wrong to think that the Son was sent down against his will to experience the rage of his vengeful Father?
10. As we bring this series to a close, what have been your major takeaways?

APPENDIX 8

PRE-SERIES PARTICIPANT RESPONSE
CONCERNING EVANGELISM AND APOLOGETICS

Table A1. Pre-series participant response concerning evangelism and apologetics

Survey Questions (75 Responses)	SD	D	U	A	SA
4. I am uncomfortable talking to non-hostile unbelievers about Christianity.	3	18	9	33	12
5. I am comfortable talking to individuals of other faiths about Christianity.	7	14	10	36	8
6. I am uncomfortable talking to atheists/agnostics about Christianity.	9	28	10	22	6
7. I can demonstrate to critics that the Bible is reliable.	3	19	25	27	1
8. I can demonstrate from a historical perspective that Jesus died on a cross.	1	20	25	25	4
9. I do not know how to respond to skeptics who argue that Gospels fabricated Jesus's burial in Joseph's tomb.	4	27	18	20	6
10. I know how to respond to the argument that Jesus's earliest followers stole his body from the tomb and then lied about the resurrection.	4	19	22	24	6
11. I can demonstrate from the Old Testament that Jesus's death and resurrection were predicted hundreds of years in advance.	2	11	17	34	11
12. I can explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross.	2	1	3	24	45

APPENDIX 9
 POST-SERIES MEAN CHANGE IN
 EVANGELISM CONFIDENCE

Table A2. Post-series mean change in evangelism confidence

Survey Question	Pre-Series Mean	Post-Series Mean	Change
4. I am uncomfortable talking to non-hostile unbelievers about Christianity.	3.42	3.61	+0.19
5. I am comfortable talking to individuals of other faiths about Christianity.	3.29	3.56	+0.27
6. I am uncomfortable talking to atheists/agnostics about Christianity.	2.71	3.26	+0.55

APPENDIX 10

POST-SERIES MEAN CHANGE IN KNOWLEDGE OF
HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS

Table A3. Post-series mean change in knowledge of historical arguments

Survey Question	Pre-series Mean	Post-Series Mean	Change
7. I can demonstrate to critics that the Bible is reliable.	3.06	4.05	+0.99
8. I can demonstrate from a historical perspective that Jesus died on a cross.	3.10	4.23	+1.13
9. I do not know how to respond to skeptics who argue that the Gospels fabricated Jesus's burial in Joseph's tomb.	2.92	4.11	+1.19
10. I know how to respond to the argument that Jesus's earliest followers stole his body from the tomb and then lied about the resurrection.	3.02	4.21	+1.19
11. I can demonstrate from the Old Testament that Jesus's death and resurrection were predicted hundreds of years in advance.	3.63	4.20	+0.57
12. I can explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross.	4.50	4.61	+0.11

APPENDIX 11
T-TEST RESULTS

Table A4. Results of *t*-test for dependent samples for evangelism confidence

	Pre-Series Survey	Post-Series Survey
Mean	9.459016393	10.42622951
Variance	5.58579235	4.615300546
Observations	61	61
Pearson Correlation	0.5024396292	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	60	—
t Stat	-3.345403788	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000710637	—
t Critical one-tail	1.670648865	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001421275	—
t Critical two-tail	2.000297822	—

Table A5. Results of *t*-test for dependent samples for historical arguments

	Pre-Series Survey	Post-Series Survey
Mean	20.13114754	25.40983607
Variance	10.21584699	10.61256831
Observations	61	61
Pearson Correlation	0.282872179	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	60	—
t Stat	-10.66716508	—
P(T<=t) one-tail	8.75545E-16	—
t Critical one-tail	1.670648865	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.75109E-15	—
t Critical two-tail	2.000297822	—

Table A6. Results of *t*-test for dependent samples for entire survey

	Pre-Series Survey	Post-Series Survey
Mean	29.59016393	35.83606557
Variance	19.14590164	17.43934426
Observations	61	61
Pearson Correlation	#N/A	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	60	—
t Stat	-10.25642298	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.06264E-15	—
t Critical one-tail	1.670648865	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	8.12529E-15	—
t Critical two-tail	2.000297822	—

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abernethy, Andrew T. *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 40. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016.
- Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.
- Allison, Dale C., Jr. *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters*. New York: T & T Clark, 2005.
- _____. *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2021. Kindle.
- Angelo, Marty. "How Chuck Colson's Legacy of Hope Lives On." Prison Fellowship. Accessed March 18, 2021. https://www.prisonfellowship.org/2018/04/chuck-colsons-legacy-hope-lives/?mwm_id=295741440399&sc=WB1710B10&sc=WB1710B10&gclid=CjwKCAjw9MuCBhBUEiwAbDZ-7uNXZn2Yo1nb-CL47zrLtVO5zipE3LuC1wtH659K-9phs8dk8_yHXBoCt-wQAvD_BwE.
- Bauckham, Richard. *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- _____. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.
- Bauer, Walter, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Edited by Frederick William Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Logos Bible Software.
- Beale, G. K. *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 17. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Luke*. Vol. 1, *Luke 1:1–9:50*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.

Bray, Gerald. *Creeeds, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus?* Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1984.

Bruce, F. F. *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

_____. *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982. Logos Bible Software.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*. 2nd ed. Translated by John Marsh. London: Macmillan, 1966.

Carson, D. A. *Matthew 1–12*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Carson, D. A., and Douglas J. Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

Cicero. *Pro Lege Manilia. Pro Caecina. Pro Cluentio. Pro Rabirio Perduellionis Reo*. Translated by H. Grose Hodge. Loeb Classical Library 198. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927.

Clement of Rome. *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, translated and edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Series 1, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, 5–21. Rev. ed. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885.

Craig, William Lane. *The Atonement*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

_____. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truths and Apologetics*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

_____. *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000.

Crossan, John Dominic. *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991.

_____. *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 1996.

Dempster, Stephen G. *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 15. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003.

Dodd, C. H. *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*. 3rd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967.

- _____. “The Appearances of the Risen Christ: A Study in the Form Criticism of the Gospels.” In *More New Testament Studies*, 102–33. Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1968.
- Eddy, Paul Rhodes, and Gregory A. Boyd. *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: HarperOne, 2012.
- _____. *Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.
- _____. *Jesus before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior*. New York: HarperOne, 2016.
- _____. *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna: Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp*. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, translated and edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Series 1, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, 39–43. Rev. ed. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885.
- Eusebius Pamphilus. *The Church History of Eusebius*. Translated by Arthur Cushman McGiffert. In *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Series 2, vol. 1, *Eusebius: Church History from A.D. 1–324, Life of Constantine the Great, Oration in Praise of Constantine*, 3–387. New York: Christian Literature, 1890.
- Evans, Craig. *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013.
- Evans, Craig A., and N. T. Wright. *Jesus, The Final Days: What Really Happened*. Edited by Troy A. Miller. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009.
- Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.
- Flavius Josephus. *The Works of Josephus*. Translated by William Whiston. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987. Logos Bible Software.
- France, R. T. *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989.
- Gardner, Paul. *1 Corinthians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.

- Garland, David E. *1 Corinthians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Gathercole, Simon. *Defending Substitution: An Essay on Atonement in Paul*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.
- Gentry, Peter J., and Stephen J. Wellum. *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Goldsworthy, Graeme. *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991.
- Habermas, Gary R. *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996.
- Habermas, Gary R., and Michael R. Licona. *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004.
- Hamilton, James M., Jr. *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022.
- Harris, Murray J. *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Hays, Richard B. *First Corinthians*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.
- Hengel, Martin. *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament*. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.
- _____. *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977. Logos Bible Software.
- _____. *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*. Translated by John Bowden. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000.
- _____. *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*. Translated by John Bowden. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1973.
- Henry, Carl F. H. *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947.
- Hurtado, Larry W. *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

- Irenaeus of Lyon. *Against Heresies*. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Series 1, vol. 3, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, 315–567. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885.
- Jeremias, Joachim. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into the Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*. 3rd ed. Translated by F. H. Cave and C. H. Cave. London: SCM Press, 1969.
- Jones, Timothy Paul. *Conspiracies and the Cross: How to Intelligently Counter the Ten Most Popular Theories That Attack the Gospel of Jesus*. Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2008.
- Julius Africanus. *The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronography of Julius Africanus*. Translated by Philip Schaff. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Series 1, vol. 6, *The Fathers of the Third Century*, 125–40. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1886.
- Justin Martyr. *The First Apology of Justin*. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Series 1, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, 161–87. Rev. ed. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885.
- _____. *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew*. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Series 1, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, 194–270. Rev. ed. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885.
- Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. “The Identity and Mission of the ‘Servant of the LORD.’” In *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, edited by Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, 87–107. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012.
- _____. *The Messiah in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.
- Koukl, Gregory. *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.
- Kruger, Michael J. *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. 1940. Reprint, San Francisco: Harper, 2001.
- Licona, Michael R. *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.
- Lifitin, Bryan. *After Acts: Exploring the Lives and Legends of the Apostles*. Chicago: Moody, 2015.

- Lim, David S. "Evangelism in the Early Church." In *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, 353–59. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.
- Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity and Liberalism*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Marsden, George. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- McGrew, Lydia. *Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts*. Chillicothe, OH: DeWard, 2017.
- Moo, Douglas J. *Galatians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013.
- Morales, L. Michael. *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020.
- Morris, Leon. *Luke*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Motyer, J. Alec. *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 20. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.
- Newman, Randy. *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004.
- Nolland, John. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. Logos Bible Software.
- Packer, J. I., and Mark Dever. *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007.
- Philo of Alexandria. *On Abraham. On Joseph. On Moses*. Translated by F. H. Colson. Loeb Classical Library 289. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959.
- Pink, A. W. *The Attributes of God*. 1975. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.
- Pinnock, C. H. "Apologetics." In *New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, 36–37. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988.
- Pitre, Brant. *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ*. New York: Image, 2016.

- Sanders, E. P. *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London: Penguin, 1993.
- Stein, Robert H. *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Cross of Christ*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- Strauss, David Friedrich. *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. Translated by George Eliot. London: Temple, 1835.
- Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.
- Stuart, Douglas K. *Exodus*. New American Commentary, vol. 2. Nashville: B & H, 2006.
- Tacitus. *The Annals: Books 13–16*. Translated by John Jackson. Loeb Classical Library 322. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962.
- Tertullian of Carthage. *The Five Books Against Marcion*. Translated by Peter Holmes. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Series 1, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, 271–474. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885.
- _____. *Scorpiace: Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting*. Translated by Rev. S. Thelwall. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Series 1, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, 633–48. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885.
- Thiselton, Anthony C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Logos Bible Software.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *The Book of Leviticus*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Wenham, John. *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005.
- Williams, Peter J. *Can We Trust the Gospels?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.
- Wright, N. T. *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. Vol. 3, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

ABSTRACT

TRAINING GRACE BIBLE CHURCH IN MOORE, SOUTH CAROLINA, TO PRESENT HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS FOR BELIEVING IN JESUS'S RESURRECTION

Ryan Zachary Leasure, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy Paul Jones

This project aims to equip the members of Grace Bible Church in Moore, South Carolina, to share historical arguments for believing in Jesus. Chapter 1 presents the ministry context of GBC as well as the rationale and various goals of this project. Chapter 2 unpacks 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 and demonstrates that Jesus's resurrection from the dead can be historically verified. Chapter 3 reviews Dale Allison Jr.'s *The Resurrection of Jesus* and explains that Allison's arguments do not ultimately undermine Christ's bodily resurrection. Chapter 4 recounts the implementation of the project itself. The implementation included conducting pre-series surveys, preaching a six-week sermon series, writing complementary six-week small group curriculum, and conducting post-series surveys to determine progress among project participants. Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of the project based on the completion of the specified goals. Based on a *t*-test for dependent samples, this chapter demonstrates a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey overall scores: $t_{(60)} = -10.256, p < .001$.

VITA

Ryan Zachary Leasure

EDUCATION

BA, Bob Jones University, 2007

MA, Furman University, 2012

MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015

ORGANIZATIONS

Evangelical Theological Society

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Associate Pastor, Grace Bible Church, Moore, South Carolina, 2015–