

Session 5



EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION

Occasionally bodies turn up missing in pulp fiction and real life, but rarely do you encounter an empty tomb.... The issue with Jesus isn't that he was nowhere to be seen. It's that he was seen, alive; he was seen, dead; and he was seen, alive once more. If we believe the Gospel accounts, this isn't a matter of a missing body. No, it's a matter of Jesus still being alive, even to this day, even after publicly succumbing to the horrors of crucifixion.

*Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ**

READ THIS!

If possible, read the following content in preparation for your group meeting. Otherwise, read it as follow-up.

The Case for Christ, chapter 11: The Medical Evidence

The Case for Christ, chapter 12: The Evidence of the Missing Body

The Case for Christ, chapter 13: The Evidence of Appearances

WATCH THIS!

DVD Teaching Segment #1

For every DVD clip, space is provided to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

DISCUSS THIS!

1. Do you agree that, if true, the resurrection of Jesus is the pivotal event of history? Why or why not?

“Clearly, the weight of the historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted... Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.”

William D. Edwards, 1986
article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*



Think About This!

The Swoon Hypothesis

The idea that Jesus never really died on the cross can be found in the Koran, which was written in the seventh century—in fact, Ahmadiya Muslims contend that Jesus actually fled to India. To this day there's a shrine that allegedly marks his real burial place in Srinagar, Kashmir.

As the nineteenth century dawned, Karl Bahrdt, Karl Venturini, and others tried to explain away the resurrection by suggesting that Jesus only fainted from exhaustion on the cross, or he had been given a drug that made him appear to die, and that he had later been revived by the cool, damp air of the tomb.

Conspiracy theorists bolstered this hypothesis by pointing out that Jesus had been given some liquid on a sponge while on the cross (Mark 15:36) and that Pilate seemed surprised at how quickly Jesus had succumbed (Mark 15:44). Consequently, they said, Jesus' reappearance wasn't a miraculous resurrection but merely a fortuitous resuscitation, and his tomb was empty because he continued to live.

Like an urban myth, the swoon theory continues to flourish. But what does the evidence really establish? What actually happened at the crucifixion? What was Jesus' cause of death? Is there any possible way he could have survived this ordeal?

4. Read the following sections (pages 75–77) outlining some of the medical evidence behind a Roman crucifixion. How might medical analysis today shed light on the death of Jesus two thousand years ago? What questions or issues do you have regarding the death of Jesus?



Think About This!

Medical Evidence

Medical evidence can be crucial. It can determine whether a child died of abuse or an accidental fall. It can establish whether a person succumbed to natural causes or was murdered by someone who spiked the person's coffee with arsenic. It can uphold or dismantle a defendant's alibi by pinpointing the victim's time of death, using an ingenious procedure that measures the amount of potassium in the eyes of the deceased. And yes, even in the case of someone brutally executed on a Roman cross two millennia ago, medical evidence can still make a crucial contribution: it can destroy one of the most persistent arguments used by those who claim that the resurrection of Jesus – the supreme vindication of his claim to deity – was nothing more than an elaborate hoax.

Jesus Is Flogged

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.

John 19:1-3

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Matthew 27:27-31

Roman Floggings

"Roman floggings were known to be terribly brutal. They usually consisted of thirty-nine lashes. The soldier would use a whip of braided leather thongs with metal balls woven into them. When the whip would strike the flesh, these balls would cause deep bruises or contusions, which would break open with further blows. And the whip had pieces of sharp bone as well, which would cut the flesh severely. One physician who has studied Roman beatings said, 'As the flogging

continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh.' A third-century historian by the name of Eusebius described a flogging by saying, 'The sufferer's veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.' We know that many people would die from this kind of beating even before they could be crucified. At the least, the victim would experience tremendous pain and go into hypovolemic shock."

Alexander Metherell, MD, PhD

Fast Fact

Hypovolemic shock: Hypo means "low," vol refers to volume, and emic means "blood," so hypovolemic shock means the person is suffering the effects of losing a large amount of blood. This does four things. First, the heart races to try to pump blood that isn't there; second, the blood pressure drops, causing fainting or collapse; third, the kidneys stop producing urine to maintain what volume is left; and fourth, the person becomes very thirsty as the body craves fluids to replace the lost blood volume.



Think About This!

Jesus Is Crucified

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They

divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” So this is what the soldiers did.

John 19:16b-24

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!” In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Mark 15:29-32

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:28-30

Death by Asphyxiation

“Once a person is hanging in the vertical position, crucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation. The reason is that the stresses on the muscles and diaphragm put the chest into the inhaled position; basically, in order to exhale, the individual must push up on his feet so the tension on the muscles would be eased for a moment. In doing so, the nail would tear through the foot, eventually locking up against the tarsal bones. After managing to exhale, the person would then be able to relax down and take another breath in. Again he’d have to push himself up to exhale, scraping his bloodied back against the coarse wood of the cross. This would go on and on until complete exhaustion would take over, and the person wouldn’t be able to push up and breathe anymore.”

Alexander Metherell

5. Which piece of medical evidence most stands out to you as substantiating evidence for the biblical account of the crucifixion and death of Jesus? Which is the weakest piece of evidence or makes the least amount of sense? In your opinion, what are the odds that Jesus really survived his crucifixion? Do you think it's possible that Jesus didn't actually die on the cross and his "resurrection" was only a "near death" experience from which he recovered? Give reasons for your answers.



Think About This!

Jesus Sweats Blood

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Luke 22:39-44

Fast Fact

Hematidrosis: "[Hematidrosis] not very common, but it is associated with a high degree of psychological stress. What happens is that severe anxiety causes the release of chemicals that break down the capillaries in the sweat glands. As a result, there's a small amount of bleeding into these glands, and the sweat comes out tinged with blood. We're not talking about a lot of blood; it's just a very, very small amount."

Alexander Metherell



Think About This!

Pierced but Not Broken

Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

John 19:31-37

Fast Fact

Pericardial and pleural effusion: *"Even before he died—and this is important, too—the hypovolemic shock would have caused a sustained rapid heart rate that would have contributed to heart failure, resulting in the collection of fluid in the membrane around the heart, called a pericardial effusion, as well as around the lungs, which is called a pleural effusion.... [T]he Roman soldier came around and, being fairly certain that Jesus was dead, confirmed it by thrusting a spear into his right side. The spear apparently went through the right lung and into the heart, so when the spear was pulled out, some fluid—the pericardial effusion and the pleural effusion—came out. This would have the appearance of a clear fluid, like water, followed by a large volume of blood, as the eyewitness John described in his Gospel. John probably had no idea why he saw both blood and a clear fluid come out—certainly that's not what an untrained person like him would have anticipated. Yet John's description is consistent with what modern medicine would expect to have happened. I'll grant you that the soldiers didn't go to medical school. But remember that they were experts in killing people—that was their job, and they did it very well. They knew without a doubt when a person was dead, and really it's not so terribly*

Optional Discussion Questions

- How much of the related chapters in *The Case for Christ* did you have an opportunity to read? Was there any information from the book that impacted you one way or the other regarding the evidence surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and death? Which were the least and most convincing arguments for the case for Christ? What additional questions remain in your mind?
- How does the Bible's prediction that during the crucifixion Jesus' body would be pierced but his bones left unbroken impact your view of his divinity?
- Given the severity of the penalty for an escaped prisoner during the Roman era, how motivated were the guards to prevent such an occurrence? How does this fact affect the credibility of the biblical account surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection?

WATCH THIS!

DVD Teaching Segment #2

"The chances of surviving the crucifixion were extremely bleak. Crucifixion and the tortures that normally preceded it was the worse way to die in antiquity. A person was scourged to the point usually that their intestines, arteries and veins were laid bare. And then after that a person was dragged out where they were impaled to a cross or a tree. And then left hanging there in excruciating pain."

Resurrection expert Michael Licona

DISCUSS THIS!

8. Read the section starting below about the burial of Jesus. What issues does it raise for you? How convinced are you that Jesus' body was securely buried in the tomb after his death?

"The empty tomb ... is the ultimate representation of Jesus' claim to being God."

Lee Strobel



Think About This!

The Burial

As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb. The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

Matthew 27:57-66

The Tomb

“There was a slanted groove that led down to a low entrance, and a large disk-shaped stone was rolled down this groove and lodged into place across the door. A smaller stone was then used to secure the disk. Although it would be easy to roll this big disk down the groove, it would take several men to roll the stone back up in order to reopen the tomb. In that sense it was quite secure.”

William Lane Craig

9. Read the account on page 84 of the discovery of the empty tomb. What questions does it raise or answer for you? Some skeptics suggest that if Jesus was really dead and buried, then the idea of an empty tomb is impossible. So they conclude that either Jesus never really died or the tomb was never found empty. What do you think? Was the tomb really found empty? Why or why not?

“When we turn to the Gospels, we find multiple, independent attestation of this burial story, and Joseph of Arimathea is specifically named in all four accounts. On top of that, the burial story in Mark is so extremely early that it’s simply not possible for it to have been subject to legendary corruption. When you read the New Testament, there’s no doubt that the disciples sincerely believed the truth of the resurrection, which they proclaimed to their deaths. The idea that the empty tomb is the result of some hoax, conspiracy, or theft is simply dismissed today.”

William Lane Craig



Think About This!

The Empty Tomb

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

Matthew 28:1-15

10. William Lane Craig, N. T. Wright, and Michael Licona contend that if the empty tomb story were fabricated by Jesus' disciples, they never would have had said that its discovery was made by women, due to women's low status in that day. Does this argument make sense to you? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?



Think About This!

“When you understand the role of women in first-century Jewish society, what’s really extraordinary is that this empty tomb story should feature women as the discoverers of the empty tomb in the first place. Women were on a very low rung of the social ladder in first-century Palestine. There are old rabbinical sayings that said, ‘Let the words of the Law be burned rather than delivered to women’ and ‘Blessed is he whose children are male, but woe to him whose children are female.’ In light of this, it’s absolutely remarkable that the chief witnesses to the empty tomb are these women who were friends of Jesus. Any later legendary account would have certainly portrayed male disciples as discovering the tomb – Peter or John, for example. The fact that women are the first witnesses to the empty tomb is most plausibly explained by the reality that – like it or not – they were the discoverers of the empty tomb! This shows that the Gospel writers faithfully recorded what happened, even if it was embarrassing. This bespeaks the historicity of this tradition rather than its legendary status.”

William Lane Craig

11. Mark Strauss and Michael Licona point out that since the Jewish authorities tried to claim that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, this supports the fact that the tomb was really empty. Do you agree or disagree with this logic? Why?

“True, the discovery of the empty tomb is differently described by the various Gospels, but if we apply the same sort of criteria that we would apply to any other ancient literary sources, then the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was, indeed, found empty.”

Historian Michael Grant

Optional Discussion Questions

- Even Jesus' enemies acknowledged that the tomb was empty. What weight does this give to the credibility of this claim? Why?
- Everyone in the ancient world admitted the tomb was empty; the issue was how it got that way. Can you think of any logical explanation for the vacant tomb other than the resurrection of Jesus?
- Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Give reasons for your responses.
 - Jesus' tomb was not really empty.
 - The disciples stole the body.
 - The women went to the wrong tomb.
 - The disciples embellished the story of the empty tomb because they were Jesus' friends.
 - The empty tomb was simply a legend that developed over time.
- What's your own conclusion concerning whether Jesus' tomb was found empty on Easter morning? What evidence did you find most convincing in coming to that judgment?

WATCH THIS!

DVD Teaching Segment #3

DISCUSS THIS!

12. If Jesus did, in fact, die on a cross, and the tomb in which he was buried was really found to be empty, what happened to Jesus? Do you believe Jesus was resurrected? Give reasons for what you believe.

"I know pretty well what evidence is, and I tell you, such evidence as that for the resurrection has never broken down yet."

John Singleton Copley,
one of the greatest legal
minds in British history



Think About This!

Jesus Is Risen

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

John 20:11-18

“The appearances of Jesus are as well authenticated as anything in antiquity... There can be no rational doubt that they occurred, and that the main reason why Christians became sure of the resurrection in the earliest days was just this. They could say with assurance, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ They knew it was he.”

British theologian Michael Green

13. Do you believe that people really witnessed Jesus alive after the crucifixion? Why or why not? What is difficult to accept about Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances?

“It was therefore impossible that they [the early Christians] could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact.”

Simon Greenleaf, an authority in jurisprudence at Harvard Law School



Think About This!

The Earliest Christian Creed

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

1 Corinthians 15:3-7

14. The creed in 1 Corinthians 15 is the only place in ancient literature where it is claimed that Jesus appeared to five hundred people at once. The Gospels don't mention it. No secular historian mentions it. Study the section below. Do you agree with the reasons historian Gary Habermas gives that this creed is the earliest and one of the best authenticated passages in Scripture? Why or why not?



Think About This!

“We know that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians between AD 55 and 57. He indicates in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 that he has already passed on this creed to the church at Corinth, which would mean it must predate his visit there in AD 51. Therefore the creed was being used within twenty years of the resurrection, which is quite early. However, I'd agree with the various scholars who trace it back even further, to within two to eight years of the resurrection, or from about AD 32 to 38, when Paul received it in either Damascus or Jerusalem. So this is incredibly early material—primitive, unadorned testimony to the fact that Jesus appeared alive to skeptics like Paul and James, as well as to Peter and the rest of the disciples.

“Now, stop and think about it: you would never include this phrase [the 500] unless you were absolutely confident that these folks would confirm that they really did see Jesus alive. I mean, Paul was virtually inviting people to check it out for themselves! He wouldn't have said this if he didn't know they'd back him up. Look, I'd love to have five sources for this. I don't. But I do have one excellent source—a creed that's so good that German historian Hans von Campenhausen says, 'This account meets all the demands of historical reliability that could possibly be made of such a text.' The creed is early ... it's free from legendary contamination, ... it's unambiguous and specific, and ... it's ultimately rooted in eyewitness accounts.”

Gary Habermas, PhD

15. What is your own conclusion regarding the validity of the 1 Corinthians 15 creed? How pivotal is this creed to your assessment of whether Jesus was seen alive after the crucifixion?



Think About This!

The Appearances

When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

Acts 13:29 - 31

“Without having a reliable testimony for the emptiness of Jesus’ tomb, the early Christian community could not have survived in Jerusalem proclaiming the resurrection of Christ.”

German scholar Wolfhart Pannenberg

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered. He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were

not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

John 21:4-14

"Even the more skeptical historians agree that for primitive Christianity ... the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was a real event in history, the very foundation of faith, and not a mythical idea arising out of the creative imagination of believers."

Historian Carl Braaten

16. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:14: "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." Why does Paul call the resurrection of Jesus the very linchpin of the Christian faith?

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.
John 20:19-20

Optional Discussion Questions

- How feasible is it that Jesus' resurrection appearances really took place? If so, why weren't they more widely reported among those who were not Christians? If, as the early Christian creed states, five hundred people saw the resurrected Jesus at once, why don't other historians, like Josephus, report it? Is it possible that the number "500" could be symbolic or at least hyperbolic? Give reasons for your responses.
- Gary Habermas reduced the issue of the resurrection down to two questions: Did Jesus die? And, was he later seen alive? Based on the evidence so far, how would you answer those questions?
- Could there be any plausible alternatives to explain away the encounters people had with the risen Jesus? Could these accounts be legendary in nature? Or how likely is it that the witnesses had all experienced the same hallucination?
- Gary Habermas concludes in *The Case for Christ* that sometimes people grasp at straws trying to disprove Jesus' appearances, but nothing fits the evidence better than the explanation that Jesus was found alive after he was dead and buried. What do you make of this conclusion?

WATCH THIS!

DVD Wrap-up/Lee's Perspective

BETWEEN SESSIONS

Personal Reflection

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”...

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept....

Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

John 11:17–27, 32–35, 41b–44

- Have you ever lost someone you loved? If so, perhaps you can relate to Martha’s feelings of frustration and pain upon seeing Jesus. Were you angry like she was that God didn’t intervene in some way to prevent it? Like Martha, do you have a distant hope that your loved one will one day rise again? If so, what leads you to believe that there is life after death? From where does your hope come? Is it simply wishful thinking, or is your hope grounded in reality?
- Now that you’ve had a chance to evaluate the evidence, what have you concluded about Jesus’ power and authority over death? Did Jesus really

return alive from the dead? Was the resurrection a legend, a hoax, or was it an actual event that changed the history of the world? What's your own conclusion concerning whether Jesus' tomb was empty on that first Easter morning, and what does it mean for you personally?

- *The resurrection is the supreme vindication of Jesus' divine identity and his inspired teaching. It's the proof of his triumph over sin and death. It's the foreshadowing of the eternal resurrection of his followers and the basis of all Christian hope! It's the miracle of all miracles.* Do these statements make sense to you, or are they difficult for you to believe? What do you think is significant about the resurrection?
- Reread the exchange between Jesus and Martha on page 93. Claiming he was able to defeat spiritual death and impart eternal life to anyone who believes in him, Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" Imagine you are in Martha's place and Jesus is asking you the same question. "Do you believe this?" What is *your* response?
- Whether you believe, disbelieve, or are wrestling with doubts, Jesus is alive today and is willing to meet you wherever you are. Why don't you speak to him at this moment and ask him to reveal himself to you? He is waiting to give you hope and eternal life even now.