

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 8: THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Lesson 25

He Is Risen

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The Event That Changed Everything

Key Texts: Matthew 28:1–10; 1 Corinthians 15:3–8; Luke 24:36–43; Acts 2:22–36

“He Is Not Here, for He Has Risen, Just as He Said” — The Proclamation That Divides All of History

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

With Unit 8 we cross into the territory that gives the entire Christology series, and the entire Christian gospel, its decisive ground of hope: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Unit 7's five lessons on the atoning work have established, with systematic precision and devotional depth, what the cross accomplished: the penalty borne, the guilt removed, the wrath turned away, the reconciliation achieved, the work declared finished in the most consequential sentence in human history. But the cross, without the resurrection, is a tragedy. The payment of the penalty is complete only if the Substitute who paid it is vindicated; the declaration of *tetelestai* carries permanent weight only if the one who declared it rises from the grave to prove that death could not hold Him; the High Priest who offered the sacrifice must live forever to make intercession on the basis of it. The resurrection is not an addendum to the cross; it is the divine declaration that the cross accomplished what the Son claimed it accomplished.

Paul understood this with absolute clarity. 1 Corinthians 15:17 is among the most searching theological conditionals in all of the New Testament: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (NASB 1995). The resurrection is not merely an inspiring sequel to the crucifixion; it is the epistemological ground on which the atoning work rests. Without the resurrection, there is no verification that the sacrifice was accepted, no vindication of the Substitute, no guarantee that the penalty has been paid and the guilt removed. The resurrection is the Father's "Amen" to the Son's "It is finished." It is the divine seal of approval on the completed work, the cosmic declaration that the Son of God accomplished what He came to accomplish, and that death, the ultimate evidence of sin's dominion over the human creature, has been conquered.

This lesson, the first of Unit 8's three lessons on the resurrection, addresses the factual, historical, and evidential dimensions of the resurrection: what happened on the first day of the week, what the evidence for it is, and why the alternative explanations fail. It examines the empty tomb, the post-resurrection appearances, the nature of the resurrection body, and the apologetic case against the naturalistic theories that have been proposed to explain away the historical evidence. The goal is not merely to win an argument but to establish, with the full weight of the historical and exegetical evidence, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most well-attested and the most significant historical event in the history of the world. Lesson 26 will then address the theological significance of the resurrection; Lesson 27 will address the believer's participation in the resurrection through union with Christ.

I. THE RESURRECTION DEFINED: WHAT HAPPENED ON THE THIRD DAY

*Not a Metaphor, Not a Vision, Not a Symbol, A Bodily, Physical, Space-Time Event***A. The Resurrection as Bodily and Physical**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the bodily, physical, space-time event in which Jesus of Nazareth, who had been crucified, dead, and buried on the Friday of Passover week, was raised from the dead by the power of God on the third day, appearing in a body that was physical and tangible and yet transformed and no longer subject to the limitations and the mortality of the pre-resurrection body. This definition requires precision at several points, because the resurrection has been subject to reinterpretation in every generation of theological history: some have proposed that the disciples experienced visionary or spiritual encounters with the risen Christ that they interpreted as bodily resurrection; some have proposed that the resurrection was a 'spiritual' event describing the ongoing significance of Jesus' teaching rather than the literal resuscitation of His corpse; and some have proposed that the resurrection narratives are mythological expressions of the early church's faith rather than historical reports of actual events.

The New Testament will not support any of these reinterpretations. The bodily, physical character of the resurrection is established by multiple lines of independent evidence: the consistent testimony of the empty tomb (Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6, all four Gospels attest the empty tomb), the physical tangibility of the resurrection appearances ("Touch Me and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have", Luke 24:39, NASB 1995), the eating of food (Luke 24:41–43: "He took it and ate it before them"), and Paul's own insistence in 1 Corinthians 15 that the resurrection is a bodily event (the term *σῶμα*, *sōma*, body, governs the entire discussion). The risen Christ is not a ghost, not a vision, not a symbol, and not a metaphor. He is the same Jesus who was crucified, now alive in a transformed but genuinely physical body.

B. The Transformation of the Resurrection Body

The bodily character of the resurrection does not mean that the resurrection body is simply the pre-crucifixion body restored to its former condition. The resurrection body is genuinely physical and continuous with the pre-resurrection body, it retains the wounds of the crucifixion (John 20:27: "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side", NASB 1995), it can be touched, it can eat, and it is recognized by those who knew Jesus before His death. But it is also transformed: it is no longer subject to death (Romans 6:9: "Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him", NASB 1995), it appears and disappears in ways that the pre-resurrection body did not (Luke 24:31: "He vanished from their sight"), and it is capable of ascending into the divine presence in a way the pre-resurrection body was not.

Paul's account of the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:35–49 provides the most detailed theological account of the transformation: the body is 'sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in

weakness, raised in power; sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body' (vv. 43–44, NASB 1995). The word 'spiritual' (πνευματικόν, pneumatikon) does not mean 'immaterial' or 'non-physical'; it means 'animated and governed by the Spirit,' in contrast with the 'natural' (ψυχικόν, psychikon) body animated by the soul. The spiritual body is a genuinely physical body transformed and empowered by the Spirit of God in a way that transcends the limitations of mortal embodiment while retaining the genuine materiality of bodily existence. It is the body of the new creation: real, physical, tangible, and imperishable.

II. THE EMPTY TOMB: THE NECESSARY PRECONDITION

The Grave Could Not Hold Him, The Evidential Significance of the Empty Tomb

A. The Testimony of All Four Gospels

The empty tomb is the first and the most foundational piece of evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. All four Gospel accounts agree, without contradiction, that when the women came to the tomb on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), they found it empty. The stone had been rolled away; the burial cloths were present but the body was gone; and the angelic messenger declared: "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying" (Matthew 28:6, NASB 1995). The fourfold Gospel testimony to the empty tomb is among the most multiply attested facts in the ancient record of Christian origins, and it is consistent across accounts that are otherwise independent in their selection and arrangement of the resurrection material.

The empty tomb is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the resurrection. It is necessary: if the body of Jesus had remained in the tomb, there could be no bodily resurrection. Every alternative theory must account for the empty tomb, and the poverty of the alternatives, all of which require implausible conspiracy theories or psychologically strained group-hallucination hypotheses, is itself evidence for the historicity of the resurrection. But the empty tomb alone does not prove the resurrection: an empty tomb could in principle be explained by theft, by mistaken identity, or by a dozen other alternatives. The resurrection requires both the empty tomb and the positive evidence of the appearances.

B. The Significance of the Women as Primary Witnesses

One of the most compelling internal evidences for the historical reliability of the resurrection accounts is the consistent testimony of all four Gospels that women were the primary witnesses of the empty tomb and the first recipients of the resurrection proclamation. In the first-century Jewish and Roman world, the testimony of women was not accorded the same legal and social standing as

the testimony of men; a fabricated resurrection story designed to persuade a first-century audience would not have placed women as its primary witnesses. The inclusion of women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others, as the primary witnesses is precisely the kind of detail that suggests authentic historical reminiscence rather than legendary invention: it is too counter-cultural and too evidentially inconvenient to have been invented by those seeking to persuade.

III. THE POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES: THE POSITIVE EVIDENCE

The Witnesses Who Saw Him, Touched Him, and Ate with Him

A. The Appearances in the Gospels

The empty tomb establishes that Jesus' body was not in the tomb; the post-resurrection appearances establish what happened to the body and to the Person who had occupied it. The Gospel accounts record a series of specific, named, personally identified appearances of the risen Christ over a period of forty days (Acts 1:3): to Mary Magdalene at the tomb (John 20:11–18); to the other women (Matthew 28:9–10); to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35); to Peter individually (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5); to the eleven in Jerusalem (Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–23); to Thomas and the ten a week later (John 20:24–29); to the disciples at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1–14); and to the eleven on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16–20).

The appearances are characterized by a consistent combination of physical concreteness (the disciples touch Him, He eats with them, He shows His wounds) and transformed transcendence (He appears and disappears, He is not immediately recognized, He is eventually taken up into the divine presence). The physical concreteness is not incidental; it is the specific corrective to the assumption that the appearances were merely visionary or spiritual. Luke 24:39–43 is the most emphatic: “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have’... While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them” (NASB 1995). The one who has risen eats broiled fish before His disciples. This is the most physically unambiguous post-resurrection appearance in all of the Gospels.

B. The Pauline Witness: 1 Corinthians 15:3–8

The most historically significant and the most apologetically valuable account of the resurrection appearances is not in the Gospels but in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, specifically in the creedal formula of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. Paul identifies this as material that he received from others and

passed on to the Corinthians (“for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received”, v. 3, NASB 1995), establishing that it predates his own letter (written c. 55 AD) and goes back to the earliest period of the church’s tradition.

The formula itself (1 Corinthians 15:3–8) lists the resurrection appearances in a sequence of increasing scope: “He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also” (NASB 1995). The appearance to more than five hundred people at one time, ‘most of whom remain until now’, is among the most remarkable details in the entire New Testament: Paul is essentially inviting the Corinthian readers to check his testimony against living witnesses who can be consulted. The early dating of the 1 Corinthians 15 creed, most scholars place its origin within two to three years of the crucifixion, makes the legendary development hypothesis virtually impossible: there was not enough time for legendary inflation to transform a non-resurrection movement into a resurrection-proclaiming community.

“He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said.” | “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.”

MATTHEW 28:6; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:17, NASB 1995

IV. AGAINST THE NATURALISTIC EXPLANATIONS

The Swoon Theory, the Hallucination Theory, the Stolen Body Theory, and the Wrong Tomb Theory, Why Each Fails

A. The Swoon Theory

The swoon theory holds that Jesus did not actually die on the cross but merely lost consciousness and later revived in the tomb, escaping and appearing to His disciples in a still-living state that they misinterpreted as resurrection. The theory has been definitively refuted on multiple grounds. First, Roman crucifixion was an efficient execution method, and the Roman soldiers responsible for the death of condemned criminals would not have been deceived by apparent death, John 19:33–34 records that the soldiers, finding that Jesus was already dead, pierced His side with a spear, producing the outflow of blood and water that is consistent with the physiological evidence of death by crucifixion. Second, the physical condition of a man who had survived flogging, crucifixion, and burial would not have produced the impression of a glorious, triumphant, death-conquering resurrection; it would have produced the impression of a desperately injured man in need of medical care. Third, the swoon theory requires that the disciples were deceived by a still-living Jesus into

proclaiming a resurrection, which transforms the disciples from sincere witnesses into unwitting participants in a deception, and Jesus Himself into a deliberate deceiver.

B. The Hallucination Theory

The hallucination theory holds that the disciples experienced subjective visionary experiences that they interpreted as the risen Christ, but that no objective bodily resurrection actually occurred. The theory faces several insurmountable difficulties. First, the diversity of the appearances, to individuals, to small groups, to crowds of five hundred, in various locations and circumstances, over a period of forty days, is not consistent with the pattern of psychological hallucinations, which are typically individual experiences that do not expand into group phenomena of the scope described. Second, the hallucination theory does not account for the empty tomb: hallucinations do not empty tombs, and the inability of the Jewish authorities to produce the body of Jesus is a historical datum that the hallucination theory leaves entirely unexplained. Third, Paul's own experience (Acts 9:1–9; 1 Corinthians 15:8) is explicitly described as a seeing of the risen Christ at a time when he was actively hostile to the Christian movement, not the psychologically prepared disposition that hallucination theories require.

C. The Stolen Body Theory and the Wrong Tomb Theory

The stolen body theory, proposed by the Jewish authorities in Matthew 28:11–15, holds that the disciples stole the body and then claimed it had been raised. The theory has been recognized as inadequate from the beginning: Matthew's own account records the Roman guard placed at the tomb to prevent exactly this scenario, and the psychological implausibility of disciples who were hiding in fear (John 20:19) stealing a heavily guarded corpse and then dying for the claim that it had been raised is the most powerful argument against it. People will die for what they sincerely believe to be true; they will not typically die for what they know to be a fabrication.

The wrong tomb theory holds that the women went to the wrong tomb and found it empty, and that the story of the resurrection arose from this geographical mistake. The theory requires that the same mistake was made by Peter, John, the Roman guard, the Jewish authorities, and the disciples of Emmaus, and that the simple corrective of going to the correct tomb (which the authorities could easily have done) was never taken. The theory collapses under its own implausibility. The early church's proclamation of the resurrection in Jerusalem, the very city where the crucifixion and burial had occurred and where the tomb was publicly known, would have been immediately refuted by anyone who could produce the body or point to the occupied tomb. The silence of the authorities on this point is itself evidence that the tomb was genuinely empty.

V. THE EARLY CHURCH'S PROCLAMATION AND THE HISTORICAL METHOD

*Acts 2:32 and the Apologetic Power of the Earliest Resurrection Witness***A. The Proclamation in Jerusalem**

The early church's proclamation of the resurrection is most powerful as historical evidence when it is considered in its original geographical and temporal context: it was proclaimed in Jerusalem, in the weeks immediately following the crucifixion, by those who had been eyewitnesses of the events. Acts 2:32 records Peter's Pentecost declaration: "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses" (NASB 1995). The proclamation is made in the city where the events occurred, to audiences that included many who had witnessed the crucifixion and who could have investigated the resurrection claims for themselves. The demonstrable success of the early church's resurrection proclamation in Jerusalem, three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), then five thousand more (Acts 4:4), is itself evidence that the proclamation carried evidential weight that its hearers found compelling.

N.T. Wright's historical analysis in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* provides the most comprehensive recent engagement with the historical evidence for the resurrection and reaches the conclusion that the best explanation of the available historical data, the empty tomb, the post-resurrection appearances, and the explosion of the early church's resurrection proclamation, is the actual bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. Wright's argument is not a confessional claim but a historical judgment: the resurrection is the hypothesis that best accounts for the totality of the evidence, and the alternative hypotheses, swoon, hallucination, theft, wrong tomb, each fail to account for the full range of the data. The historian who takes the evidence seriously is led to the same conclusion as the theologian who takes the Scripture seriously.

B. The Resurrection as Historical Fact

The insistence that the resurrection is a genuine historical event, bodily, physical, occurring in space and time, is not a concession to a naive pre-critical historical optimism; it is the necessary implication of the New Testament's own way of speaking about it. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15 stands or falls on the historical factuality of the bodily resurrection: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (v. 17). The conditional is not a theological hypothetical but a logical dependency: the truth of the gospel depends on the factual historicity of the resurrection. A resurrection that is 'true' in some spiritual or symbolic sense but not in the sense of actual bodily return to life from physical death is not the resurrection that Paul is arguing for in 1 Corinthians 15 and not the resurrection that the New Testament everywhere proclaims.

VI. DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: THE EVENT THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the event that changed everything, the event that transforms the cross from a tragedy into a triumph, the proclamation from an extraordinary claim into a verified historical fact, the gospel from a beautiful teaching about love and sacrifice into the announcement of the actual defeat of death and the actual beginning of the new creation. Without the resurrection, the seven last words of Lesson 24 are the final words of a dead man, however heroic. With the resurrection, *tetelestai* is the declaration of the one who rose from the dead, never to die again, having accomplished a work whose effects are as permanent as His own indestructible life.

The proclamation of the resurrection is the oldest, the most consistent, and the most publicly verifiable proclamation of the earliest church. “He is not here, for He has risen” (Matthew 28:6), these words, first spoken by an angel at the empty tomb, have echoed through twenty centuries of Christian proclamation, have sustained the martyrdom of those who would not recant them, have provided the ground of hope for the dying and the ground of courage for those who face the most formidable opposition. They are words that have been tested by every variety of intellectual, historical, and personal scrutiny that the human mind can apply to them, and they have survived every test with the evidence largely intact. The tomb is empty. The witnesses are credible. The alternatives are implausible. The most reasonable conclusion is the one the angel announced, the one Peter proclaimed at Pentecost, the one Paul staked his entire apostolic ministry on, and the one that every Christian confession since has declared: He is risen indeed.

The pastoral significance of the bodily resurrection will be developed more fully in Lessons 26 and 27; but this first lesson of Unit 8 establishes the irreplaceable foundation on which that pastoral significance rests. The comfort that the resurrection provides for the dying, the assurance it secures for the justified, the power it releases for the sanctified, the hope it grounds for the persecuted, all of these pastoral dimensions rest on the prior historical fact that on the third day, the tomb was empty and the risen Christ appeared to His disciples. If that fact is not true, the comfort is groundless, the assurance is unfounded, and the hope is, as Paul says, the most pitiable delusion in all of human history (1 Corinthians 15:19). But if it is true, and the evidence compellingly suggests that it is, then it is the most consequential, the most personally transforming, and the most doxologically demanding fact in the history of the world. He is risen. He is risen indeed.

Key Texts: *Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–49; John 20:1–29; 1 Corinthians 15:3–58; Acts 2:22–36; Romans 6:9; John 19:33–34*

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Bodily Resurrection	The Christian doctrine that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead in His physical body on the third day after His crucifixion, not a resuscitation of a corpse to ordinary mortal life, but the transformation of the physical body into the glorified, imperishable, Spirit-animated body of the new creation. The resurrection body is continuous with the pre-resurrection body (same wounds, same Person, recognizable) and yet transformed (no longer subject to death, capable of appearing and disappearing, ascendable). Distinguished from: (1) spiritual or metaphorical resurrection (the resurrection as symbol of ongoing significance); (2) visionary resurrection (subjective experiences misinterpreted as bodily return); (3) resuscitation (return to ordinary mortal life, as with Lazarus). The bodily resurrection is the non-negotiable center of the New Testament's resurrection proclamation.
Empty Tomb	The historical datum attested by all four Gospels that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was found empty on the first day of the week following the crucifixion. Necessary but not sufficient evidence for the resurrection: necessary because a bodily resurrection requires an empty tomb; not sufficient because an empty tomb could in principle result from theft, relocation of the body, or wrong tomb identification. The evidential significance of the empty tomb is strengthened by: (1) the fourfold Gospel attestation; (2) the prominent role of women as primary witnesses (counter-cultural, evidentially inconvenient, suggesting authentic historical reminiscence); (3) the failure of the Jewish authorities to produce the body of Jesus or to point to an occupied tomb as a refutation of the resurrection proclamation.
Post-Resurrection Appearances	The series of specific, named encounters between the risen Christ and His disciples described in the Gospels, Acts, and 1 Corinthians 15:5–8, occurring over forty days between the resurrection and the ascension. The appearances are characterized by: (1) physical tangibility (Jesus is touched, He eats, He shows His wounds); (2) personal recognition (the disciples recognize Him, though sometimes with initial difficulty); (3) transformed transcendence (He appears and disappears, He is no longer subject to the limitations of pre-resurrection existence); (4) diverse circumstances (individuals, small groups, large groups, various locations). The appearance to over five hundred at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6), with most still living at the time of writing, functions as an implicit invitation to verify the testimony against living witnesses.
1 Corinthians 15 Creed	The creedal formula of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, which Paul identifies as received tradition ('what I also received') passed on to the Corinthians at their founding. Dated by most scholars to within two to three years of the crucifixion, making it the earliest extended account of the resurrection in the New Testament and

Term	Definition
	effectively ruling out the legendary development hypothesis. The formula lists the resurrection appearances in sequence: Cephas, the twelve, five hundred at once, James, all the apostles, Paul. Its early dating in Jerusalem (within reach of living witnesses), its summary character (suggesting pre-Pauline origin), and its explicit appeal to verifiable witnesses make it one of the most historically significant texts in the early Christian corpus.
Swoon Theory	The naturalistic hypothesis that Jesus did not actually die on the cross but merely lost consciousness and later revived in the tomb, subsequently appearing to His disciples in a still-living state. Decisively refuted by: (1) the professional competence of Roman executioners (John 19:33–34: the soldiers pierced His side to confirm death); (2) the physical impossibility of a survivor of crucifixion producing the impression of glorious, death-conquering triumph; (3) the logical implication that either the disciples were deceived or Jesus was a deliberate deceiver. The theory was briefly revived in the 18th century by Heinrich Paulus but has not been taken seriously by mainstream historical scholarship since.
Hallucination Theory	The naturalistic hypothesis that the disciples experienced subjective visionary experiences that they interpreted as the risen Christ, without any objective bodily resurrection. Refuted by: (1) the sociological impossibility of simultaneous group hallucinations of the scale described (five hundred at once); (2) the failure to account for the empty tomb (hallucinations do not empty tombs); (3) Paul's experience on the Damascus road as a hostile witness; (4) the diversity of witnesses (male, female, individually, in groups, in various locations and circumstances) inconsistent with the pattern of psychological hallucinations; (5) the disciples' own initial skepticism (they did not expect a resurrection and were not psychologically prepared for one). Influential form: the subjective vision hypothesis of Strauss and the later form critics.
Stolen Body Theory	The naturalistic hypothesis that the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb and then falsely proclaimed His resurrection. The oldest alternative to the resurrection (proposed by the Jewish authorities, Matthew 28:11–15), and among the least credible: (1) Matthew's account records the Roman guard placed specifically to prevent this; (2) the psychological implausibility of frightened, scattered disciples staging a successful theft of a heavily guarded body; (3) the willingness of the disciples to die for the resurrection proclamation is inconsistent with knowledge that it was fabricated, people do not die for what they know to be false. No serious scholar of early Christian origins holds this view.
Spiritual Body (Sōma Pneumatikon)	Paul's term in 1 Corinthians 15:44 for the resurrection body: 'sown a natural body (sōma psychikon), raised a spiritual body (sōma pneumatikon).' The term 'spiritual' (pneumatikon) does not mean immaterial or non-physical; it means animated and governed by the Spirit (pneuma) of God, in contrast with the

Term	Definition
	‘natural’ (psychikon) body animated by the soul (psychē). The spiritual body is genuinely physical (the risen Jesus has flesh and bones, can be touched, can eat) and yet transformed: imperishable, glorious, powerful, no longer subject to the limitations and mortality of the pre-resurrection body. The spiritual body is the body of the new creation, the first-fruits of the resurrection of all who are in Christ.
Legendary Development Hypothesis	The proposal that the resurrection accounts in the Gospels are legendary elaborations developed over decades of oral transmission from an original non-resurrection proclamation, the disciples initially proclaimed the significance of Jesus’ teaching and death, and the resurrection narratives accrued gradually as the tradition was embellished. Decisively refuted by the early dating of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8: the creedal formula, dated to within two to three years of the crucifixion, already contains the full resurrection proclamation with named witnesses and specific appearances. There was not sufficient time for the legendary inflation the hypothesis requires. Also refuted by the evidential inconvenience of the women witnesses: legendary elaboration would have substituted more credible male witnesses.
Anastasis	Greek: ‘resurrection,’ ‘rising up,’ from anistemi (‘to stand up,’ ‘to raise’). The standard New Testament word for the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. Used throughout the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles for the bodily rising of Jesus from the grave: ‘He is not here, for He has risen (eggerthe)’ (Matthew 28:6); ‘God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death’ (Acts 2:24). The cognate verb egeirein (‘to raise,’ ‘to wake’) is the most common verb in the New Testament for the resurrection event itself. The consistent use of anastasis and egeirein in clearly bodily contexts throughout the New Testament establishes that the resurrection is a physical, not merely spiritual, event.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a genuine historical event, bodily, physical, verifiable in principle by the same historical methods applied to other ancient events, and not merely a theological symbol, a spiritual truth, or a mythological expression of the disciples’ continuing experience of Christ’s significance. The historical foundation of the resurrection is not a concession to modern secular categories of evidence; it is the New Testament’s own insistence. Paul stakes the entire Christian gospel on the historical factuality of the bodily resurrection: ‘If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins’ (1 Corinthians 15:17). The congregation that

understands the resurrection as historical fact will receive the theological and pastoral benefits of Lessons 26 and 27 with far greater depth and far greater confidence than the congregation that treats it as a beautiful but historically uncertain symbol.

We must also believe that the naturalistic alternatives to the resurrection, the swoon theory, the hallucination theory, the stolen body theory, the wrong tomb theory, are not intellectually respectable alternatives that the serious person must consider as equally plausible to the resurrection. They fail on their own terms: they each leave too much of the historical evidence unaccounted for, and they each require implausibilities that are harder to believe than the resurrection itself. The congregation equipped with the apologetic case against the alternatives will be equipped to engage the intellectual challenges to the resurrection that they will inevitably encounter with confidence and with clarity.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the historical factuality of the resurrection produce in you a specific, grounded, personally inhabited confidence rather than the vague hopefulness that often passes for Easter faith. The resurrection is not a cherished tradition or an inspiring symbol; it is the most publicly verifiable event in the history of religion, proclaimed within weeks of its occurrence by people who were willing to die for their testimony that they had seen the risen Christ. The one who rose is not a figure of the past; He is the living Lord of the present, the one who ‘always lives to make intercession’ (Hebrews 7:25), the one who promises ‘I am with you always, even to the end of the age’ (Matthew 28:20, NASB 1995). The resurrection makes every pastoral encounter with a living Person rather than a historical memory.

Desire a congregation that worships on the first day of every week with the specific awareness that Sunday is resurrection day, that the reason Christian worship has gathered on Sunday since the earliest days of the church is the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week. Every Sunday is a weekly Easter, a weekly celebration of the event that changed everything. The congregation that knows why it worships on Sunday will worship differently than the congregation that has forgotten.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Preach an apologetically robust Easter sermon that engages the historical evidence for the resurrection rather than retreating to the purely devotional. Many Easter sermons proclaim the resurrection’s significance without engaging the historical evidence that grounds the proclamation. The congregation that hears the empty tomb, the early creed of 1 Corinthians 15, and the failure of the naturalistic alternatives will have their faith deepened and their apologetic confidence strengthened. The apologetically equipped Easter congregation is the congregation that can engage the intellectual challenges of skeptical friends, family members, and colleagues with the specific, historically grounded evidence for the resurrection.
- Teach the 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 creedal formula as the most historically significant and most apologetically powerful resurrection text in the New Testament. The formula’s early dating

(within two to three years of the crucifixion), its creedal character (received tradition passed on), its list of named witnesses with an implicit appeal to verify the testimony, and its status as the earliest extended resurrection account in the New Testament make it the strongest single piece of historical evidence for the resurrection available in the canonical texts.

- Distinguish carefully between resuscitation and resurrection in your preaching. The resurrection of Jesus is not the same kind of event as the raising of Lazarus (John 11) or the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5): those were resuscitations to ordinary mortal life, and those who were resuscitated died again. The resurrection of Jesus is the transformation of the physical body into the glorified, imperishable, Spirit-animated body of the new creation, which is never to die again. The distinction matters pastorally: it establishes the resurrection as the first-fruits of the new creation (1 Corinthians 15:20–23), the beginning of the age to come breaking into the present age, not merely a miraculous resuscitation.
- Use the resurrection as the christological foundation of your funeral ministry. The sermon preached at a Christian funeral that grounds its hope in the bodily resurrection of Christ, the specific, historical, physical event of the first day of the week, provides a more theologically grounded and more personally consoling hope than the funeral sermon that merely affirms the immortality of the soul in a vague spiritual sense. The specific hope is the hope of 1 Corinthians 15:20: Christ has been raised as the first-fruits; those who are in Christ will follow in the general resurrection at the last day.
- Engage N.T. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003) as the most comprehensive historical and theological defense of the bodily resurrection available in the contemporary literature. Wright's argument, that the best historical explanation of the early church's resurrection proclamation, the empty tomb, and the post-resurrection appearances is the actual bodily resurrection, is developed with rigorous historical method and comprehensive engagement with the alternative hypotheses. Even a pastor who does not engage the full 800-page argument should read the first and last sections and Wright's accessible popular summary in *Surprised by Hope*.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. Has the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ ever been seriously challenged in your own intellectual or spiritual life, a period of genuine doubt about whether it actually happened, or a time when you were confronted by someone who challenged its historical credibility? How did you respond, and

what resources did you find most helpful? Looking back, what understanding of the historical evidence for the resurrection do you wish you had possessed at that time?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

- 2.** Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 carefully. Identify: (a) the signal phrase that indicates Paul is transmitting received tradition rather than his own composition (v. 3); (b) the sequence of resurrection appearances Paul lists and the scale of the largest appearance; (c) the specific appeal to living witnesses Paul makes in verse 6 and what it implies about the verifiability of the testimony; and (d) Paul’s identification of himself as the ‘last of all’ and the description of his own encounter with the risen Christ. What is the apologetic significance of the early dating of this tradition?
- 3.** Read Luke 24:36–43. Identify the specific physical acts that Luke records the risen Jesus performing or inviting in this passage. What is the specific correction Jesus offers to the disciples’ fear (‘they supposed that they were seeing a spirit’, v. 37)? What does His invitation to ‘touch Me and see’ establish about the nature of the resurrection body? What does the eating of the fish demonstrate? How does this passage function as a direct refutation of the spiritual or visionary resurrection interpretation?
- 4.** Read Acts 2:22–36. Identify the specific historical argument Peter makes for the resurrection in his Pentecost sermon: what evidence does he appeal to, and what interpretive framework (from Psalm 16) does he use to explain the resurrection? What is the significance of Peter making this argument in Jerusalem, within weeks of the crucifixion, before people who could investigate the claims for themselves? How does Peter’s audience’s response (Acts 2:37, 41) bear on the historical credibility of the resurrection proclamation?
- 5.** Read John 20:24–29. What was Thomas’s stated condition for belief (v. 25)? What happens when that condition is met (vv. 26–27)? What does the detail that Thomas receives exactly what he demanded establish about the physical reality of the risen Christ’s wounds? What does Thomas’s confession (‘My Lord and my God!’, v. 28) reveal about the theological significance of the resurrection, what does the resurrection declare about who Jesus is? How does Jesus’ response in verse 29 (‘Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed’) apply to every subsequent generation of Christian believers?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

- 6.** The lesson distinguishes between the resurrection of Jesus (transformation of the physical body into the glorified, imperishable body of the new creation) and resuscitation (return to ordinary mortal life). What are the specific textual markers in the resurrection accounts that support the distinction: the texts that show continuity with the pre-resurrection body (wounds, recognition, eating) and the texts that show the transformed character of the resurrection body (appearing and disappearing, the

ascension)? Why does the distinction matter theologically for understanding the resurrection as ‘first-fruits’ of the new creation rather than merely a miraculous resuscitation?

7. The lesson argues that the women as primary witnesses of the empty tomb is a counter-cultural detail that suggests authentic historical reminiscence rather than legendary invention. How does the criterion of embarrassment function as a historical tool for evaluating the authenticity of ancient reports? What other features of the resurrection narratives might be subjected to the same criterion, that is, what other details are evidentially inconvenient for the proclamation but are preserved in the accounts anyway?

8. The lesson presents the hallucination theory as failing primarily on four grounds: group scale, failure to account for the empty tomb, Paul as a hostile witness, and the diverse circumstances of the appearances. Which of these four grounds do you find most compelling, and why? Are there responses to the hallucination theory that the lesson does not address? How would you present the case against the hallucination theory to a thoughtful, academically minded non-believer who finds it the most intellectually plausible of the naturalistic alternatives?

9. Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 15:12–19 proceeds through a series of conditional clauses: ‘If Christ has not been raised, then...’ (vv. 14, 17, 19). Identify each consequence Paul draws from the hypothetical non-resurrection. What does the comprehensive scope of the consequences Paul identifies reveal about the relationship between the resurrection and the entire structure of the Christian gospel? If you were to construct a parallel argument from the hypothetical resurrection, ‘Since Christ has been raised, then...’, what would the positive consequences be?

10. The lesson argues that the proclamation of the resurrection in Jerusalem, where the crucifixion and burial had occurred, where the tomb was publicly known, and where the authorities would have been highly motivated to refute the proclamation by producing the body, is itself evidence for the empty tomb and the resurrection. How strong is this argument from the silence of the opposition? What would have to be true of the historical situation for this argument to fail? What does the Jewish authorities’ response in Matthew 28:11–15 (attempting to discredit the resurrection by bribing the soldiers) tell you about how they understood the evidential situation?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

11. The lesson recommends preaching an apologetically robust Easter sermon that engages the historical evidence rather than retreating to the purely devotional. Draft the main point and two or three supporting moves for such a sermon. Which texts would you use as your primary basis, which apologetic arguments would you incorporate, and how would you maintain the apologetic rigor without losing the devotional and pastoral warmth that the resurrection demands? What is the specific pastoral aim of the sermon, what do you want the congregation to leave with that they did not have when they arrived?

- 12.** The lesson recommends using the resurrection as the christological foundation of your funeral ministry. Think of a specific funeral sermon or pastoral encounter with grief that you have experienced. How was the resurrection incorporated into the pastoral care or the sermon? Was it the specific, historically grounded, bodily resurrection of 1 Corinthians 15, or was it a more general hope for ‘life after death’? What would change in the pastoral care of the grieving if the specific bodily resurrection of Christ were consistently the center rather than the general hope for spiritual immortality?
- 13.** The lesson mentions that Sunday worship in the Christian tradition is rooted in the first-day resurrection of Christ. Has your congregation ever been explicitly taught why Christians worship on Sunday and what that day communicates theologically? Design a brief teaching (five to seven minutes, suitable for inclusion in a Sunday sermon introduction or a small group) that explains the resurrection significance of Sunday worship and that would help the congregation receive each Sunday service as a weekly Easter celebration.
- 14.** This lesson opens Unit 8 on the Resurrection of Christ, which contains three lessons: the bodily resurrection as historical fact (this lesson), the theological significance of the resurrection (Lesson 26), and union with the risen Christ (Lesson 27). How does the historical foundation established in this lesson prepare the ground for the theological content of Lessons 26 and 27? Specifically: what theological claims in Lesson 26 (the resurrection as vindication of Christ’s claims, as the Father’s ‘Amen’ to *tetelestai*, as the firstfruits of the new creation) depend specifically on the bodily, historical character of the resurrection established here?

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this lesson’s prayer time with a reading of 1 Corinthians 15:1-22, Paul’s compressed account of the resurrection evidence and its theological consequences. Read it attending to the progression: first the creedal formula with its list of witnesses (vv. 3–8), then the logical argument about the stakes (vv. 12–19: ‘if Christ has not been raised... your faith is worthless’), then the triumphant affirmation (vv. 20–22: ‘But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep’). Let the group feel the weight of the conditional (‘if... your faith is worthless’) before receiving the full weight of the positive declaration (‘But now Christ has been raised’). The ‘but now’ (*νυνὶ δὲ*, *yni de*) of verse 20 is one of the most glorious adversatives in all of Scripture: not the hypothetical despair of the conditional but the historical, actual, permanent reality of the bodily resurrection.

Spend time in specific, historically grounded thanksgiving for the resurrection. Not the vague thankfulness for ‘new life’ or ‘spiritual renewal’ but the specific, concrete, historically particular gratitude for the fact that on the first day of the week, in first-century Palestine, the tomb was empty, the grave cloths were lying there, the stone was rolled away, and the risen Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and then to the twelve and then to the five hundred and then to Paul. These are

historical events that happened. They can be investigated. The witnesses were real. The evidence is compelling. Let the historical concreteness of the resurrection produce a corresponding concreteness of gratitude: He actually rose. The tomb is actually empty. Tetelestai was actually declared by one who actually lives.

Pray for the congregation's apologetic confidence in the resurrection. Many believers have never been equipped to articulate the historical evidence for the resurrection and are therefore vulnerable to intellectual challenges they cannot answer. Pray for the Spirit to use the apologetic content of this lesson to strengthen the faith of those who have doubted, to equip those who will face the challenges of a skeptical world, and to provide the confidence that allows the proclamation of 'He is risen' to be made not as a cherished tradition but as a historically verifiable claim. Pray also for the missionaries, evangelists, and witnesses in your congregation who carry the resurrection proclamation into contexts of active intellectual opposition.

Close with the earliest resurrection proclamation of the Christian tradition, spoken together as the corporate declaration of the community that has staked everything on the historical fact of the empty tomb:

*"He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said."
, He is risen indeed!*

MATTHEW 28:6, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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