

So What? The Case Assembled

Putting the evidence together, answering the miracle objection, and responding to the risen Christ

For five weeks we have gathered evidence one piece at a time. We examined the manuscripts that carry the New Testament text down to us. We listened to Roman, Jewish, and pagan writers describe a man named Jesus from outside the church. We traced creeds older than the Gospels themselves, confessions of the death and resurrection of Jesus that reach back to within a few years of the events. We weighed the alternatives that critics have offered, and watched them fall apart under the weight of the facts.

Now we set the pieces side by side and ask the only question that finally matters: *so what?* If the evidence holds, where does it leave us? Gary Habermas, whose work has guided this series, closes *The Historical Jesus* with an apologetic outline that gathers the whole argument into three parts. We will walk that outline, answer the one objection that stops many thoughtful people in their tracks, clear away a common misunderstanding about how Christianity began, and then turn from the courtroom to the heart.

THE QUESTION THIS WEEK

Not "did it happen?" but "if it happened, what then?" We move from verdict to response.

WHERE WE LAND

Romans 10:9 — the historical case, when it is honestly weighed, opens onto a personal invitation.

Habermas organizes his conclusion under three headings: the New Testament, Jesus, and miracle-claims. Taken together they move from the documents, to the man, to the events the documents report about him.

A. The New Testament is the best-attested book of antiquity. Whatever one finally concludes about its message, no honest reader can dismiss the New Testament as a poorly preserved text. It comes to us through more, and earlier, copies than any other writing from the ancient world.

5,000+

Greek New Testament manuscripts and portions of manuscripts — while the majority of classical works survive in fewer than 20

"There are over 5,000 New Testament manuscripts and portions of manuscripts. By comparison, the majority of classical works have less than 20 manuscripts."

— Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus, "An Apologetic Outline"*

The dates, too, sit close to the originals. One Gospel fragment dates to roughly twenty-five years after the Gospel of John, and the bulk of the New Testament papyri to within fifty to a hundred and fifty years of the originals, while most classical works survive only in copies made seven hundred to fourteen hundred years after the fact. And none of the canonical New Testament is lost — compare that with the 107 of Livy's 142 books of history that have simply vanished. The Gospels themselves stand close to the events: three of the four are dated within a single generation, and all four within seventy years, all during the lifetimes of eyewitnesses. As the

scholar A.M. Hunter summarizes, these authors were careful to preserve their traditions, they stood close to eyewitness sources, and they were honest reporters.

B. Jesus is solidly historical. The trustworthy Gospels show a deep interest in the real life, death, and resurrection of a real man. But our case has not rested on the Gospels alone. Habermas notes that "numerous pre- and extrabiblical sources record much ancient testimony concerning Jesus within 125 years after his death." Early Christian creeds that pre-date the New Testament, archaeological finds, secular historians and government officials writing from non-Christian viewpoints, and early Christian sources outside the canon all converge on the same person. Strip away the Gospels entirely, and Jesus of Nazareth remains a fixed point of ancient history.

C. Miracle-claims can be investigated, not merely dismissed. Here is the hinge of the whole argument. The New Testament does not present the resurrection as a timeless symbol or a private feeling. It claims that something happened — in Jerusalem, under Pontius Pilate, in space and time, witnessed by people who could be named and questioned. And whatever touches the space-time world can, at least in part, be examined.

"If it is taught that miraculous events have occurred in history, as is the case with New Testament miracle-claims, then at least the objective, historical side of such a claim can be investigated. In other words, if it actually happened, at least the portion of the event that touched the space-time world can potentially be examined."

— Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus, on miracle-claims*

BUT AREN'T MIRACLES IMPOSSIBLE?

This is the objection that quietly decides the matter for many people before any evidence is read. "I don't need to look at the testimony," the thought runs, "because miracles simply can't happen." It feels like hard-headed realism. In fact it smuggles in an enormous assumption.

To rule out a miracle *in advance* — before examining the facts — is to claim that you already know everything that could possibly have happened in the universe. But no human being occupies that vantage point. As Habermas puts it, "No event can be rejected a priori unless one assumes an omniscient viewpoint. Since this is impossible, the facts must be examined." The confident dismissal turns out to require a god's-eye view that the skeptic does not have.

Behind the objection usually lies a misunderstanding of what the "laws of nature" are. They are not a fence God is forbidden to cross. They are a careful *description* of how things normally behave when left to themselves. Water normally does not turn to wine; the dead normally stay dead. Christianity has never disputed this — that is exactly why these events were astonishing to the people who witnessed them. The laws describe the ordinary course of nature; they do not legislate what the Author of nature may do.

"The laws of nature do not disallow any events, but are simply descriptions of how things usually occur. Hume was incorrect in endeavoring to utilize man's experience of these laws against the existence of miracles."

— Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, on miracle-claims

The philosopher David Hume famously argued that the uniform experience of mankind weighs so heavily against any miracle that no testimony could ever establish one. But the argument is circular. To say "experience is uniformly against miracles" already assumes that every reported

miracle is false — which is the very point in question. You cannot settle whether the resurrection happened by quietly counting it as a non-event before you begin. Correct method, the kind we trust in science, medicine, law, and journalism alike, demands that we investigate the relevant evidence *before* we render the verdict, not after.

Note. None of this proves a miracle occurred. It only clears the road. The claim of this section is modest and important: the resurrection cannot be ruled out before the evidence is heard. It has to be weighed like any other historical claim.

DID PAUL INVENT CHRISTIANITY?

A second objection runs deeper into the history. Perhaps Jesus was a simple teacher of Judaism, the story goes, and it was the apostle Paul — that brilliant, restless outsider — who turned him into a divine Savior and founded a new religion in his name. It is a popular thesis. It is also, on the evidence, mistaken at three points.

First, the highest confession of Jesus pre-dates Paul. The earliest creeds, the ones Paul himself received and passed on, already address Jesus by the loftiest titles. Philippians 2:6–11, Romans 1:3–4, 1 Corinthians 11:23ff., and the creed-fragments embedded in Acts call Jesus "Lord" and "Christ" and place him in the very form of God. These confessions reach back before Paul's letters to the earliest church. The deity of Jesus is not Paul's invention; it is the faith Paul inherited.

Second, Paul's message was checked and approved by the original apostles. He did not freelance. In Galatians 2:1–10 Paul recounts laying his gospel before Peter, James, and John — the men who had walked with Jesus — and receiving from them "the right hand of fellowship."

Had Paul been peddling a counterfeit, those eyewitnesses were the people best placed, and most motivated, to expose it. Instead they recognized his message as the same gospel they preached.

Third, neither Jesus nor Paul claimed to be founding a new religion. Both taught that what was happening was the *fulfillment of Judaism*, not a replacement for it. Jesus said he came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17); Paul wrote that Christ is the goal of the Law (Romans 10:4) and that the old festivals were "a shadow of the things to come" whose substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16–17). They stand together, teacher and apostle, inside the one unfolding story of God and his people.

"Paul did not teach a new religion. He taught that Christianity was a fulfillment of Judaism ... which is what Jesus taught, as well."

— Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, on the charge that Jesus' message was changed

And there is a final implication that ties this back to everything before it. As Habermas observes, "Since Jesus literally rose from the dead, any verification of the truthfulness of his teachings would even extend to Paul's message and writings, since they are in agreement with the Gospels at these points." The resurrection does not merely vindicate Jesus in isolation; it sets its seal on the message his apostles carried to the world.

SO WHAT?

Suppose, then, that the case holds. Suppose the documents are reliable, the man is historical, the miracle cannot be dismissed in advance, and the gospel was not a later invention but the apostolic

faith from the start. Suppose Jesus of Nazareth truly walked out of his tomb. What follows?

This is where history quietly becomes personal. A resurrection is not a fact you can file away alongside the date of a battle or the length of a reign. If a man predicted his own death and rising, and then rose, his claims are not merely interesting — they are vindicated. The one who said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" has been answered by God himself in the only currency that could settle the matter. And a vindicated claim asks for a response.

We do not say this to corner anyone or to win an argument. We say it because, if it is true, it would be unkind to leave it unsaid. The pivot of the Christian message is the pivot from *this happened* to *this is for you*. The evidence can carry you to the edge of the tomb. It cannot carry you across the threshold. That step — turning to the risen Christ and entrusting yourself to him — is the step the whole story has been quietly waiting for you to take.

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 10:9

It is fitting that Paul — the apostle some accused of inventing the faith — gives us the simplest summary of how a person responds to the risen Christ. Notice that the confession and the resurrection are bound together in a single breath. The historical event and the personal call are never far apart.

GREEK NEW TESTAMENT · ROMANS 10:9

9 ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν, καὶ πιστεύσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ·

ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION · ROMANS 10:9

9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

KYPIOS

kyrios · "Lord"

The Greek translators of the Septuagint used *kyrios* to render the divine name of God in the Old Testament. To confess "Jesus is *kyrios*" is therefore no small thing — it is the same lofty title the earliest creeds already gave him. To say it honestly is to bow.

An invitation. If this six-week study has stirred a question you cannot shake, you do not have to settle it alone. The doors of Pleasant Springs Church are open. Come worship with us in Pinson, Tennessee, ask the hard questions, and meet the risen Christ among his people. The case has been laid out; the response is yours to make — and we would count it a joy to walk it with you. Reach us any time through our [contact page](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Habermas's outline moves from the New Testament, to Jesus, to miracle-claims. Which of the three parts has been most persuasive to you over these six weeks, and why? Which still leaves you with questions?

2. "To reject a miracle in advance assumes a god's-eye view no one has." Have you ever dismissed a claim before examining it? What would it look like to weigh the resurrection honestly, as you would any other historical question?

3. Why does it matter that the highest confessions of Jesus (the pre-Pauline creeds) are *older* than Paul's letters? How does that undercut the idea that Paul invented Christianity?

4. Galatians 2:1–10 tells us Paul's message was checked and approved by the eyewitness apostles. Why is that act of accountability significant for trusting the gospel we have received?

5. Romans 10:9 joins a historical claim ("God raised him from the dead") to a personal response ("confess ... believe"). For you, what is the distance between agreeing that something happened and entrusting yourself to the One it happened to?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we have followed the evidence, and again and again it has led us back to your Son. Thank you that you did not ask us to believe in the dark, but planted the resurrection of Jesus in the daylight of real history, attested by witnesses who would not be moved. Forgive us where we have hidden behind objections to avoid the question you are asking us. Give us honest minds to weigh what is true and humble hearts to receive whom we find. We confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, and we believe in our hearts that you raised him from the dead. Save us, and make us yours. Through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, Amen.

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