



Empowering People to Change the World

**Easter 2022
Did Jesus Rise from the Grave?
Steve Holt**

Did Jesus really rise from the grave?

Introduction:

- How many atoms are there in a Brussels sprout?
- How would you measure the weight of your head? (You might want to measure your child's head!)

Fourteen bizarre questions were asked to England's brightest minds, those who are at Oxford and Cambridge, just to see how well they could think on their feet with logic and deduction outside of their area of study. They had a panel of six intellectual celebrities (oxymoron?) answer these questions.

Question #10 was, "Why are we here?"

Why are we here on this earth?

- One person said, "Only God can answer that."
- One philosopher said, "Well, if you are religious, you believe that you are here to serve God; but if you are non-religious, you are here for no reason."
- A TV journalist said, "Most of us spend our lives trying to answer that question, and I certainly have not figured it out yet."
- She should be commended for her honesty, for she speaks for most people today.

In normal everyday life, most people we meet can't answer the most fundamental question: "Why am I here?"

Most people go their entire life unable to answer this most fundamental question.

Woody Allen, a tragic comic figure who is also very intelligent has said, "The fundamental thing behind all motivation and activity is a constant

struggle against annihilation and death. It is stupefying in its terror and renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless."

- Now, to the extent of this thinking will be the extent of one's view of life being utterly meaningless and of no real lasting value!
- We live in a world that considers human beings, men and women, as walking monkeys who got an evolutionary break.

Our world tells us: time + matter + chance = walking monkeys or human beings.

The temptation is to escape...like the man who jumped out of a 34-story building and was heard to say as he passed by a window, "So far, so good."

If life has no meaning, no purpose, then escape into fantasy island!

Like the famous cartoonist Ralph Barton, who wrote this on his suicide note,

"I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes; I have gone from wife to wife, and from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up twenty-four hours of the day." Ralph Barton

Question: Does what happened on Easter speak in any way to these questions? Does Easter speak to the meaning of life? Does it actually relate to me in the 21st century?

Does the resurrection of Christ speak to the meaning of life?

So, this is the situation on that morning 2,000 years ago:

- A man named Joseph of Arimathea had given the tomb, and Jesus's dead body was laid there.

- The Romans had rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb because there was a rumor that He had predicted that He would rise from the grave.
- A guard of Roman soldiers, the finest military men in the world, were guarding the tomb, 24-7.
- The women have bought spices and are bringing them to the tomb to re-anoint the body.
- The stone is looming most large to the women. How are we going to move a two-ton stone? Who will help us? Let's pick up our story in the Book of Mark...

Mark 16:1-8

“Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, ‘Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?’ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.’

So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

- In all the records of the Bible, they all agree that Jesus rose from the dead! They all agree in their different eye witness accounts.

- The interesting thing is that they don't all agree on every detail...it would be very odd if they did.
- Ex. If you were to ask my family what we had for Easter lunch last year, we could not agree!
- For that would speak of men who went into a room and decided just how to invent the story. All of the accounts would be word for word the same. There would be collusion!
- Rather, the story has the different perspectives of different men who saw and experienced the same thing, but they share it from their personality and perspective. This is authenticity, not collusion.
- It is exactly what you would expect...one journalist says it this way...each paper's headline has its own ideas...but they all agree on one fundamental point...Jesus is alive.

But where are the men?

- Since the death of Jesus, these men are nowhere to be found.
- Their behavior is less than commendable.
- Let's summarize where they were:
 - Desertion...they fled the scene...After the garden, they booked it.
 - They hid for fear of the Jews.
 - Denial...Peter openly denied Jesus...all of them denied Him.
 - Disbelief...in Luke 24:10-11, even when the women tell them, they did not believe.
 - Some people say the disciples had a predisposition to believe; nothing could be further from the truth.

- Disappointment...Jesus joins them on the Emmaus Road, and they said, “We had hoped this Jesus would be our Savior, but, well...not now.”

This may even describe some of us here...concerning Christianity and the Church.

Something transformed these men from fear to faith!

But when you look in the Acts of the Apostles, you find this disillusioned, disappointed, depressed group boldly and powerfully proclaiming that Jesus has risen from the dead. They were totally and radically transformed!

They are imprisoned and beaten proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah.

Even secular history tells us that the Church is birthed out of this “Calvary seed” and changes the world. All of history is changed.

- Even our dating system is marked by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ...A.D., Anno Domini, the year of our Lord!

All of us have to wrestle with this issue.

What happened on that Sunday morning?

- What happened?
- What dramatic thing happened that could bring about such a transformation?
- Clearly something happened that changed a group of 12 fearful, depressed, despondent men into the greatest movement that the world has ever seen!
- What was it? What caused the early Church to spring into existence and take the shape that it took?

Let me tell you what you can't say, but so many skeptics say it:

- You just cannot say that Jesus's followers just invented the whole story to deal with their hopes coming to a cruel end; that this was just a fantasy they made up.
- Cognitive dissonance can happen. Those with a mental disorder believe this way...It is not historically plausible...Yes, maybe one might have been that deranged; but not all 12 men, then 120 followers, and then thousands more.
- It is plausible to die for a lie; people do it all the time. But it is not plausible for everyone to die for a lie, when they KNOW IT IS A LIE!
- Eleven of the 12 disciples died a martyr's death proclaiming that Jesus rose from the grave! All of them said they saw Him physically alive.
- They will all die saying they saw Jesus alive, after He had died on the cross.
- In Acts 5, Gamaliel, the great teacher of Israel at that time, predicted it: "If it is not of God, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to stop it."
- Today, Christianity is spreading all over the world! It is growing faster than any other religion.

A follower of a revolution has two choices when the leader is killed:

- Either fold up the revolution and go home, or find another leader.
- They did neither! But to proclaim that the original leader is still alive has never been done before! No religion had ever or has ever said something like that.

Either Jesus is alive or He is not!

- That is your option! Either that tomb was empty or not! You must grapple with this!

- And if you don't believe, it is amazing the fanciful stories you must believe if you don't believe!
- Professor Thomas Arnold, the late chair of Modern History at Oxford, author of the famous three-volume set, *History of Rome*, once wrote,

“I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.” (Professor Thomas Arnold, the late chair of Modern History at Oxford, author of the famous three-volume set, *History of Rome*)

Where are you today?

What will you do with the resurrection of Christ?

- Will you open the door to the possibility that Jesus rose from the grave?
- Are you humble enough to admit that your worldview might be missing something?
- Are you humble enough to open your heart to Christ?
- This is a matter of life and death. In one moment, we will all be gone. The day is coming.
- In every survey, they have found that human beings have a 100% mortality rate! Your day is coming!
- Christianity rises and falls on this one issue that Jesus rose from the grave!
- I could never preach if Christ is not alive...it would be all futile.

- The implications are heaven and hell. Yes, a real heaven with Christ; and, yes, a real hell without Christ.

In June 1815, a famous day in English history...Wellington vs. Napoleon at Waterloo...French against the English. All of the nation of England anticipated the news. If Wellington lost to Napoleon, the English would be speaking French today...

They had signal boats to tell them what was happening. The boats in the English Channel would tell the outpost in the steeple of Westminster the news.

The message was partially obscured by the fog. The signal seemed to say, "Wellington defeated." The worst has happened; the word goes out to the furthest reaches of England...Wellington has been defeated!

Then the fog lifted, and actually, the message says, "Wellington defeated the French."

- Good Friday, blood, sweat, tears, defeat...the message, JESUS DEFEATED.
- The new message today, when the fog clears...Jesus defeated the grave!

Friday at the Cross: "Jesus defeated." Sunday at the tomb: "Jesus defeated Satan!"

For a long time, even into the 14th century, Europeans believed that there was nothing past the coast of Portugal. There was even a sign in the Port of Lisbon, written in French, "Ne Flu Ultra," meaning, "nothing beyond this." Then, of course, in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue, and discovered all the vastness of the new world. They changed the sign to "Flu Ultra," meaning, there is more beyond this!

Ne Flu Ultra or Flu Ultra?

- Do you believe there is more beyond this? Is your sign "ne flu ultra?" There is nothing beyond this? Do you believe that?

- I know that you don't believe that! God has put eternity in your hearts! You know that is not true! You know it is "flu ultra," there is more beyond this!

Jesus rose from that grave!

- The resurrection is the basis for all faith. Jesus is alive...millions concur.
- He alone can give you hope.
- He alone can give you faith.
- He alone can transform your life.
- He alone can transform your marriage.

H.G. Wells, the famous atheist, once said,

"I am an historian and not a believer, but this penniless preacher from Galilee is irresistibly the center of all history." (H.G. Wells, Atheist)

Don't say the really foolish thing about Jesus: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to being God."

That is the one thing you just cannot say. A man who was merely a man and said the kinds of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher...He would be either a lunatic from hell or Satan himself.

You must make your choice: Either He is Who He claimed to be...God, or a madman.

What will you do with Jesus?

John 14:6

***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."* (Jesus)**

Revelation 3:20

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (Jesus)

Romans 10:9-10

“...If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Open your heart to Jesus this Easter...

- **I’m not talking about Church—the Church didn’t die for your sins.**
- **I’m not talking about being an American—no American has died for your sins.**
- **I’m speaking of Jesus, Who died for you and rose again from the dead!**