

SESSION 6:

THE REALITY OF JESUS

“He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” -Jesus (Matthew 16:15)

I. INTRODUCTION

Many people have a lot of respect and even _____ for Jesus. But Christians go further to follow him and trust him with their lives.

Christians do not just believe Jesus was good; we believe he is _____.

II. MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

The authors of the Old Testament frequently prophesied about the coming of the Messiah.

The authors of the Gospels frequently pointed to the details of Jesus' life as _____ of these prophecies.

THE TIMELINE OF FULFILLMENT

Most scholars believe the Old Testament was completed by 600 BC, but the oldest complete manuscript of the Old Testament was made around 200 BC.

Most scholars believe the New Testament was completed between AD 40-100, meaning that Jesus' fulfillment of any prophecy spans _____.

Given the time span, and the number and specificity of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled, _____ to fulfill the prophecies would have been impossible.

THE PROBABILITY OF FULFILLMENT

In his book *Science Speaks*, Peter Stoner describes a project in which he gathered estimates from over 600 college students assessing the probability that one man could have fulfilled _____ messianic prophecies.

- The odds that a person would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) were 1 in 2,800,000.
- The odds that a person would have a messenger “prepare the way” (Malachi 3:1) were 1 in 1,000.
- The odds that a person would enter Jerusalem celebrated as a king while riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9) were 1 in 100.
- The odds that Jesus would be betrayed by a friend and suffer wounds in His hands (Zechariah 13:6) were 1 in 1,000.
- The odds that a person would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12) were 1 in 1,000.
- The odds that the betrayal money would be used to buy a potter's field (Zechariah 11:13) were 1 in 105.
- The odds that a person would remain silent while He was afflicted (Isaiah 53:7) were 1 in 1,000.
- The odds that a person would die by having His hands and feet pierced (Psalm 22:16) were 1 in 10,000.

Fulfilling any one of these would not be very impressive, but we must remember that Jesus fulfilled all eight. The odds of that are 1 in 2.8×10^{28} .

By the way, there are no fewer than _____ messianic prophecies in the Old Testament fulfilled by Jesus.

III. NONBIBLICAL WITNESSES

There are _____ nonbiblical sources that may be considered “_____” witnesses, which confirm details about Jesus’ life that we see in the New Testament.

	Source	Information
Thallus (52)	Roman historian referenced by Julius Africanus in AD 221.	Jesus lived and was crucified. There was an earthquake and darkness during his crucifixion.
Josephus (37-101)	Jewish historian writing for Roman emperor Vespasian. (Offers the most details.)	Jesus lived in Palestine and did miracles. He was accused by the Jews, crucified under Pilate, and had followers called Christians.
Tacitus (56-120)	Roman historian that describes Nero’s blaming Christians for a fire in Rome.	Jesus lived in Judea and was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He had followers who were persecuted for their faith.
Mara Bar-Serapion (70)	Syrian philosopher writing to his son.	Jesus was a “wise king” who was executed by Jewish leadership.
Phlegon (80-140)	Roman historian also referenced by Julius Africanus.	Jesus had the ability to predict the future. He was crucified under the reign of Tiberius Caesar. He showed his wounds after resurrecting.
Pliny the Younger (61-113)	Roman magistrate who wrote to Emperor Trajan.	The first Christians worshipped Jesus as God. They lived morally and met regularly.
Suetonius (69-140)	Roman historian under Emperor Hadrian.	Early Christians endured persecution and faced execution for their belief that Jesus was God.
Lucian of Samosata (165)	Greek satirist.	Jesus taught about repentance and the family of God. Early Christians were known for their moral and charitable living.
Celsus (175)	Greek philosopher.	Jesus had an earthly father who was a carpenter. He possessed unusual power and claimed to be God.

It is important to note that even the most scathing critique of Jesus and his followers is _____ confirmation of the most crucial aspects of New Testament Christianity.

Worshipping Jesus as God is not an _____ of later Christians; it has always been the essence of Christianity.

IV. THE FACTS OF THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus is confirmation of Jesus’ authority, demonstration of Jesus’ deity, and essential to the gospel. (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17)

In an essay titled “On Miracles,” agnostic philosopher David Hume taught that we are not justified in believing that a miracle happened unless disbelieving requires a “_____ miracle.”

Christian philosopher Gary Habermas developed the “Minimal Facts Method” by which he demonstrated the reality of Jesus’ resurrection based on historical facts that not even the most skeptical doubt.

The Minimal Facts Method may be outlined in this way:

- Premise 1: There are certain _____ facts related to Jesus’ death with which no serious scholar disagrees, regardless of their beliefs about Jesus.
- Premise 2: _____ (non-miraculous) explanations fail to account for all the facts in a realistic way.
- Conclusion: The only _____ explanation for the facts is that Jesus actually rose from the dead.

In Hume’s words, “the _____ of [Jesus’ resurrection] would be more miraculous.”

FACT #1: ESTABLISHED DEATH

Scholar John Dominic Crossan believes that Jesus was a great moral teacher but was not God. Yet he states, “Jesus’ death by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate is as sure as anything historical can ever be.”

Some have offered a naturalistic explanation called the “_____ theory,” claiming that Jesus merely lost consciousness, appeared to be dead, and came-to days later.

But there are several problems with this claim:

- Roman _____ wouldn’t allow it.
- Modern _____ wouldn’t believe it.
- Jesus’ _____ wouldn’t worship it.

In 1986, several medical doctors, writing for the Journal of the American Medical Association, examined the historical method of Roman torture of crucifixion. They then assessed the devastation Jesus’ body took in the process. They concluded that “interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.” Put another way, Jesus’ survival would have required just as much of a miracle as his resurrection.

FACT #2: EMPTY TOMB

Nonreligious Jewish scholar Géza Vermes stated, “when every argument has been considered and weighed, the only conclusion acceptable to the historian must be that...the women who set out to pay their last respects to Jesus found to their consternation, not a body, but an empty tomb.”

The only competing story was that Jesus’ body was _____ by his followers, which assumes an empty tomb.

But there are several problems with this claim:

- The disciples did not have the courage, resources, or gall to steal Jesus’ body.
- This means that the disciples would have died a martyr’s death for something they knew was a _____.

FACT #3: EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

Jewish scholar Paula Fredriksen stated, “I know in their own terms what they saw was the raised Jesus. That’s what they say and then all the historic evidence we have afterwards attest to their conviction that that’s what they saw. I’m not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn’t there. I don’t know what they saw. But I do know as a historian that they must have seen something.”

The most prevalent naturalistic explanation is _____, or as agnostic scholar Bart Ehrman describes, “visionary experiences led them to conclude that Jesus was still alive.”

But there are several problems with this claim:

- Hallucinations would not have been _____.
- Hallucinations would not have been _____ as resurrection.
- Hallucinations would not have happened to Jesus’ _____—a Pharisee named Saul.

Theologian N.T. Wright explains that the idea of a bodily resurrection would have been completely incompatible with Jewish or Roman thinking in the first century. Therefore, upon seeing what they thought was Jesus, his followers would not have assumed resurrection. Yet, that is what they emphatically claim.

A REASONABLE CONCLUSION

Naturalistic explanations fail to explain any one of these facts. Moreover, explaining all three while denying the resurrection of Jesus requires a “_____.”

By the way, while we address three facts, Dr. Habermas’ original work addresses _____ undeniable facts that can only be adequately explained in light of the resurrection of Jesus.

The evidence is overwhelmingly in support of Jesus’ resurrection.

V. CONCLUSION

Many people have admiration for Jesus for his personal character and moral teaching.

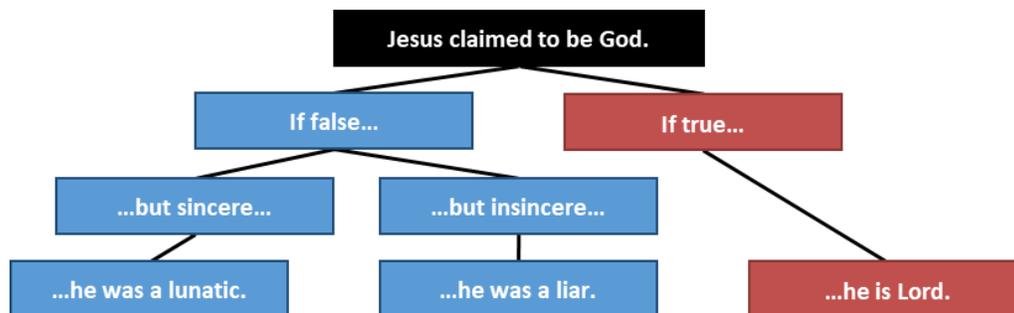
However, this admiration can be a diversion from actually making a choice to _____ Jesus with our lives.

The need for this choice to be made can be demonstrated by a _____ regarding the reality of Jesus.

C.S. Lewis communicated it this way:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say.... You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

The argument could be visualized this way:



Christianity is not merely believing that Jesus existed; it is believing Jesus when he says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” It makes all the difference in how we answer his question, “Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26)