

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 23:50-24:12

The lynch pin of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus. If it didn't happen, Christianity is a farce. If it did happen, it changes everything...EVERYTHING!

So as believers we need to be confident in the resurrection and be able to articulate our reasons as to why we believe it actually happened. Now, can we "prove" it beyond a shadow of a doubt? No. It requires some level of faith/trust. But can we "prove" it beyond a reasonable doubt? Yes, there is enough logical, reasonable evidence for us to feel secure that we're not just wishing upon a star, not superstitiously buying into some elaborate myth/legend.

The fact that Luke was a consummate historian is helpful. (And in the past 2000 years, many have undertaken work to aid believers and non-believers alike in understanding and supporting the reasonableness of the Resurrection of Jesus.) We'll limit our exploration to simply this week's passage...but please know that there is a TON of material out there that adds credence to our primary narrative.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke has mentioned verifiable reference points so that any of his original readers could fact check what he was recording. For example, earlier in his account Luke states, *"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas..."* (Luke 3:1-2) Luke basically date stamps his account with easily provable information. Even by secular scholars, Luke's historicity is applauded. His credibility as a source is bar none.

In this week's passage we see Luke name verifiable individuals (which you would not do if you were simply making up a story): Joseph (of Arimathea) a member of the Council, again Pilate, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James. Incidentally, while Luke is known more of as a historian, the other Gospel writers also offer verifiable data points. We can rest assured than among works of antiquity, the 4 Gospels stand head and shoulders above all other works as credible. They all mention eyewitness accounts, people who (at the time) could be tracked down and asked to give report.

Shockingly, almost scandalously, the first eyewitnesses to the resurrected Jesus are women. In a strange twist this adds to the historicity and credibility of the Gospels, because if you were actually making up a story in hopes to fool people, you would never use women as your first witnesses. They weren't considered credible. So why does Luke, and the other Gospel writers, mention that women were the first to see Jesus alive again? Simply because it was the truth, and they were recording truth...regardless of how unorthodox using women as witnesses would be perceived.

Then there is the empty tomb itself. No one legitimately denies that Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross. So then where is His body? The Christian answer/claim is that He rose from the dead. This would be an incredibly easy point to refute...just produce the body and the claim goes away. Interestingly, throughout the first generation of Christianity, opponents never refuted the resurrection. It simply couldn't be done because there were too many eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus. The resurrection wasn't really questioned by opponents until that first generation of eyewitnesses died off. Historically speaking, this is not an uncommon phenomena. For example, only now in our age (and you can bet it will increase as time goes on) people are beginning to question the Holocaust. We may ask how that could happen. Well, as the generation that experienced it are dying off (eyewitness accounts), people looking back from further and further distance start asking questions. The same happened with the resurrection. Simply look at the book of Acts. None of the opponents of Christianity refuted the resurrection because they couldn't. Too many people could verify it. It wasn't until the 2nd century, as historical distance grew, was it even possible to question it.

Since a body could not be produced, one early attempt to discredit the resurrection was the claim that the disciples stole Jesus' body. The weakness of this argument is that the disciples, and many early Christians along with them, suffered persecution and martyrdom. Humans have a strong survival instinct. We don't willingly die for a lie. If the disciples had stolen the body, their martyrdom becomes very hard to explain. But they were so convinced of the resurrection (and why wouldn't they be—they actually saw Jesus alive again) that they were willing to die for their faith.

Then there is the power of transformation. The disciples went from cowards to bold, outspoken witnesses. The only thing that explains such transformation is having had a personal interaction with the resurrected Jesus. Add to that, one of the most vicious enemies of the faith, Saul of Tarsus, was also transformed by an interaction with the resurrected Jesus. Then we have the snowballing effect of history...two thousand years later, the church still exists, it's still going strong, people's lives are still being transformed, people are still dying for their faith. How do we explain this? Simple, Jesus rose from the dead, and that changed EVERYTHING.

Now, it's one thing to know facts...it's another thing to know Jesus. The facts give us a reasonable basis to believe in Jesus...but that's still different then trusting Jesus. We are not called to place our faith in facts, propositional truth, or subsequent doctrine (as good, important, and helpful as those are). We are called to a relationship with the resurrected Jesus.

- Q. What caused you to believe in Jesus? (HG Leaders—it's a good idea for people in HG together to know each other's "come to Jesus" stories. I would strongly recommend you somehow work in time for such story sharing. You probably can't do it, or not very well, in one meeting.)**
- Q. What evidence of the resurrection is most compelling to you?**

Q. What doubts, questions, skepticism (about Jesus, His resurrection, or the Christian faith in general), have you encountered—either in yourself, or in other people you know?

(*Note: There is probably nothing more over-rated than certainty. Certainty is not the same as faith. And doubt is not the opposite of faith. A couple considerations: In Mark 9 we read about a father who sought Jesus to heal his son. Jesus said to him, “Everything is possible for him who believes.” The father responded, “I do believe; help me with my unbelief.” Apparently, belief and doubt can coexist. Additionally, in Matthew, with the resurrected Jesus present and about to give them the Great Commission, it states, “when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.” I say all this to say, if you experience doubt, don’t beat yourself up about it. But do be honest about it. And HG should be a place where we can work through such things—unless we’re trying to impress one another with our spirituality...which I hope is never the case.***)**

Q. What difference does the Resurrection make in how you live your life?

Q. It is interesting that the disciples (those closest to Jesus) deserted Him, yet other followers of His—Joseph of Arimathea and some women—so people not quite as close to Jesus as the disciples, demonstrated devotion to Him by taking care of His dead body. When have you been surprised by someone’s devotion/faith that you weren’t expecting. When have you been disappointed by someone’s lack of faith/devotion?

Q. While we’ve focused primarily on the Resurrection (and appropriately so), there is something to be said about “Holy Saturday”. Imagine the disappointment and sheer hopelessness the followers of Jesus must have felt the day following the crucifixion. It was a holiday, but the last thing they would have wanted to do was celebrate. This was the worst day of their lives. Describe the worst, most disappointing, most hopeless day of your life. How did you get through it?

(*Note: For some this could be rather fresh/raw. Even for those whose “worst day” was some time ago, or not super bad, be sensitive with this question. Also keep in mind that most people are not well acquainted with healthy grieving. So even though their worst day may have been some time ago, it doesn’t mean they’re “over it” or have even actually dealt with it. In other words, if you use this question/discussion point, be careful.***)**

Q. What are you presently doing to cultivate your relationship with Jesus?

Q. Describe how you went from knowing ABOUT Jesus to actually KNOWING Jesus.