

Circumstantial Evidences of the Resurrection

by Hal Lindsey

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is substantiated by more and better evidence than any fact of ancient times, according to Dr. Simon Greenleaf's investigation.

Duration: 45:34

Scripture: Matthew 27:62, Matthew 28:11

Topics: "Resurrection Evidence", "Faith And Reason"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses how Dr. Simon Greenleaf, the founder of Harvard Law School, applied his laws of legal evidence to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Dr. Greenleaf concluded that the resurrection is supported by more and better evidence than any fact of ancient times. The speaker also mentions that the religious leaders of the Jews tried to explain the empty tomb by bribing the guards to say that the disciples stole the body while they were asleep. The speaker emphasizes that our faith is based on factual evidence, and highlights the transformation of people's lives as a spiritual reality that supports the truth of the resurrection.

Transcript

Please turn to Matthew chapter 27 verses 62 through 66. Some students challenged Dr. Simon Greenleaf, who was the founder and head of the Harvard Law School for 30 years. They challenged him to take his laws of legal evidence and to apply them to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now Dr. Greenleaf wrote three volumes called The Laws of Legal Evidence, and they are the standard for evaluating evidence in the courtroom around the world. And Dr. Greenleaf was challenged to take those laws of legal evidence and to apply them to the Gospels, and particularly to apply them to the Resurrection. He studied for some time, as a matter of fact, he wrote a book after his studies.

It was called The Testimony of the Four Evangelists. When he finished his investigation, he made a very startling statement. He said the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is substantiated by more and better evidence than any fact of ancient times.

And he laid out in his book why. But I'd like to go over some of the sorts of evidence that Dr. Greenleaf found as he studied about the life of Jesus, and particularly about the Resurrection. Because the Christian faith stands or falls with the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If he did not come out of the tomb alive bodily, three days after he was crucified, then we're here in vain. And the Christian faith is a fraud. In fact, it's not just a fraud, it's a vicious fraud.

So let us read some of those circumstantial evidences. You know the Bible tells those who believe in Jesus that they should always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within them. And this is part of knowing how to give a reason for that hope.

Let's look at Matthew chapter 27 verse 62. Now on the next day, which is the one after the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together with Pilate and said, Sir, we remember that when he was still alive that deceiver said, after three days I am to rise again. Now here we have a strange scene.

Jesus has been crucified. His execution had been engineered by the religious leaders of Israel. They had forced the Roman governor, Pilate, to execute him by crucifixion.

And now they are concerned because Jesus had made a prophecy on several occasions. He had said that he predicted that he was going to be taken, imprisoned, beaten, and then crucified. But he also predicted he was going to rise again from the dead on the third day.

As a matter of fact, he predicted that everything that he taught, lived for, and would die for, would only be true if he came out of the grave alive on the third day. In other words, he hazarded everything that he lived and died for on the premise that he would come back alive on the third day. And he didn't just say he would come back in spirit to them.

He said he would come back bodily and physically alive as well. Now that's important because there have been other religious leaders who have said they would come back to their followers in spirit. Lord Krishna of the Hindus said that he would do that.

Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy said that there is no death. Her tomb is still with us and her body is still in it. There have been many who have said that they would come back to their followers in spirit, but Jesus predicted that he would come back bodily alive so that there couldn't be some illusion or some imagination involved.

He would come back in real flesh and blood. And so when you stop and think about this, and this is one of the things that startled Dr. Greenleaf, because it would have been enough to have lived and taught the things that Jesus did. He was still been one of the greatest religious leaders of all times.

No one ever taught like he did. No one ever taught a system of ethics as he did. No one ever taught it before or ever improved on it since.

So why did he hazard everything that he lived for and died for on the proposition that it would only be true if he came out of the grave alive on the third day? The obvious reason is that he absolutely knew that he would. And so these religious leaders who did not accept his claims, they were concerned because as they go on to say here, verse 64, they say, therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal him away and say to the people, he has risen from the dead and the last deception will be worse than the first. Well, this got Pilate's attention.

No one had to draw him a picture to see that if he almost had a complete insurrection in his domain while Jesus was alive, that he would be in sure trouble with Caesar, with the great uproar that would happen if the disciples could come and steal the body and make it appear that Jesus prophecy actually had been

fulfilled. So as Dr. Greenleaf said, in evaluating the evidence, he had every reason to make sure that body was not stolen and that it remained in that tomb. And also the religious leaders had every reason to make sure because their very animosity, their very hatred of Jesus, guarantees they would have done everything to have made sure that body was not stolen and made it appear that he had been raised from the dead.

As a matter of fact, it would have caused much more trouble than Jesus ever did when he was alive. And so they had every reason, every motive to make sure that body was not stolen. So we read in verse 65, Pilate said to them, you have a guard, literally take a guard, go make it as secure as you know how.

Pilate knew that he could trust them to take a guard and make it as secure as was necessary. You see the very political ambition of Pilate, which had been that part of him that had been twisted by the religious leaders in the first place to make him condemn a man that he openly said was innocent. That very political ambition caused him to want that grave to be made secure.

So he told these men, go make it as secure as you can. In verse 66, they begin to tell us some of the things that they did to make sure that Jesus would not be raised from the dead. And they went and made the grave secure along with the guard and they set a seal on the stone.

All right, there are four things here that we want to note that make up very strong evidence about the tomb. First he said, go make the grave secure. What this means is that they would send carefully trained Roman soldiers to the tomb and they would check out the tomb completely.

First thing they would do, since every Roman soldier knew that failure on guard duty meant execution, so the first thing they would do would be to make sure the body was there. Then they would check out all of the surroundings and they would secure that so that it could be kept and so that their watch would be effective. So when they made it secure, it means that they checked every detail of what they were being entrusted with because their lives depended upon it.

Secondly, it says they set a guard. These were not just ordinary guards, these were Roman legionnaires. A legionnaire was trained for five years before he was considered ready for real battle.

These were part of the Roman Tenth Legion, the garrison that guarded Jerusalem. They had been decorated in many battles. They were excellent soldiers.

In a maximum security case of this type, according to the Institutes of the Roman Legions by Vegetius, which goes, this is a manuscript that goes back to the second century A.D., according to those Institutes of the Roman Legions, in a maximum security case, they would station 16 Roman soldiers at a watch. They did this because they were trained to fight in battle squares and they considered 16 men sufficient to stand off an army until reinforcements could get there. What they would do is, if they were threatened, they would form a square, four men on a side, and those soldiers knew how to fight within a six-square-foot area, each soldier six square feet, in an overall square so they could stand off an army.

So they posted these members of the Tenth Legion to guard the tomb of Jesus. And after all, they were guarding it against whom? They were guarding it against the followers of Jesus. Well, they weren't very impressive at this point.

In fact, one had betrayed him and there were 11 that were chosen as his leaders, called apostles, and when Jesus was taken prisoner, all of them fled in terror. And at this time they were behind hidden doors,

but they had sufficient power there to stand off an army. Now, another factor here, a third part of the evidence, is they set a seal on the stone.

Now, this was something that was done in a case that was considered a matter of great consequence to the state. When they set a seal, sealing something, they would take a dab of wax, and in this case they put a dab of wax on the solid rock face of this cliff out of which the tomb was cut, and a dab of wax on the great stone that was rolled over the door of this tomb, and then they stretched a thong across it and pressed it into the wax. And then the seal of Tiberius Caesar would be impressed into the wax.

Now, everyone in the Roman Empire knew the penalty for breaking a seal of Caesar. The penalty was execution, and all the power of Rome would go after you if you broke the seal of Caesar. And that was what was placed on the tomb of Jesus.

The power of Rome backed the holding of that tomb closed. All the power of Rome. The fourth evidence that we have about the tomb of Jesus is that they rolled a stone there.

In Mark chapter 16, verse 4, when the ladies, followers of Jesus, came and they were hoping to anoint the body of Jesus, it says this, and looking up they saw that the stone had been rolled away. Although it was extremely large. Now that's the point.

There was an extremely large stone that was rolled into place over this tomb. Many of you probably have seen my book, *The Prophetic Walk Through the Holy Land*. In that book, I do a lot of photographs, took a lot of pictures of the tomb of Jesus.

And if that's not the tomb of Jesus, it's exactly like the one that he was in, I'll guarantee you that. But as was the custom in that day, a rich man who wanted a very elaborate tomb would cut a tomb out of a solid face of rock, leaving an opening of about five feet high and about three feet wide. And then they would carve out a kind of a trench in the rock, the rock face in front of the tomb.

And this was kind of a trench that they could roll these great round stones into place, and then they would have a specially hollowed out place right in front of the door, and the stone would drop into that and seal against the door. So this was an extremely large stone rolled, leaning against the solid face of the cliff. It was rolled into place and it sealed over that front, and then they had the seal of Caesar over that.

Now those are some of the circumstantial evidences involved in the resurrection. And all of us who are Christians should know these things. We should know them well.

Because our faith is not based on just moral propositions like other religions. The faith in Jesus Christ is based on facts of history as well as spiritual matters. But it will stand the test of time, and it will stand the scrutiny of the keenest observer.

So these things were done. We have the political ambition of Pilate. We have the ambition and the jealousy of the religious leaders.

That guarantees they would have done everything to make sure that Jesus' body was kept in that tomb, and that the prophecy he made about being raised from the dead bodily on the third day would not come true. They had secured the tomb. They had carefully checked out the area.

They had put battle-trained Roman legionnaires there to guard it. They had put a seal of Caesar over the opening, and they had put a very large stone against the rock face. And yet in spite of this, on the third day, a startling thing took place.

The stone was rolled away, and this is by the testimony of the soldiers who were there. The stone was rolled away by two angels, not to let Jesus out, but to show that he was gone already. The soldiers were terrified.

They were terrified for two reasons. Because they confronted supernatural beings, number one, and number two, because when they checked to see if the body of Jesus was there, they saw it was gone. And they fled in terror.

Why? Well, every legionnaire knew the penalty for failing on watch. It meant execution. Some just deserted and hoped that they could melt into the mass of humanity of the Middle East and not be found.

Others ran to the religious leaders of the Jews and told them what happened and asked if they could do something to help them and keep them from being executed. And the only explanation that the religious leaders could come up with is given here in Matthew chapter 28, verse 11. It says, Now while they were on their way, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened.

And when they assembled with the elders and counseled together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers and said, You are to say, his disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep. And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble. And they took the money and did as they had been instructed.

And this story was widely spread among the Jews and is to this day. Well, there was the explanation that was given. I don't want to be marooned there.

That was the explanation that was given about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But let's examine what these men said for a minute. First of all, let's just for the sake of being the skeptic, think about this whole case.

First of all, the most common thing today that's said about the resurrection is, well, how do we know that what's written there is even true? How do we know that these gospel accounts are true? How do we know they're not just the fabrications of his disciples who wanted it to appear that he had been raised from the dead? And though, in fact, it didn't happen at all, they wrote about this later. From extra biblical sources, we know that less than 50 days after the resurrection, the disciples of Jesus, who had been cowering and hiding, suddenly appeared in the streets of Jerusalem, bold as lions, and began to proclaim that they had seen Jesus Christ bodily alive and that he had conquered death. And now they were preaching at the peril of their own lives.

They were preaching that faith in Jesus Christ would give you forgiveness of sins, instant eternal relationship with God, and eternal life. This was done less than 50 days after it happened. We know this.

Now, if what they were saying was not true, then all the followers of the Jewish religion, all of those religious leaders who had engineered the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in the first place, why didn't they just produce the evidence? And the story would have been absolutely squelched right then. It never would have reached beyond the first century, other than an interesting farce in the footnotes of history. But they

had no evidence.

As a matter of fact, these things were preached in the streets within 400 to 500 meters where all of this took place. And all a person had to do to see whether it was true or not was to go over and inspect the tomb and find out what had happened. But no one was able to dispute their message.

No one was able to prove that Jesus was not raised from the dead. No one could produce his body. As a matter of fact, the evidence indicated that indeed he had been raised from the dead.

And so the message has to be true because no one was able to dispute it. As a matter of fact, you know what they did? Instead of refuting the message, they put him to death. And you know, that's the last resort when you can't stop something from being said.

If you can't disprove it, then you attack the people who say it. And that is what took place. History shows that they started putting these people to death who were proclaiming it.

So according to all of the laws of legal evidence, the message would stand up in any court of law that it has to be true because those who had every reason to disprove it could not disprove it. And the message wasn't given in some far place like Rome, away from the facts. It was given right in the place where the facts had happened, and they couldn't disprove it.

All right, well, let's just humor the skeptic and let's go on and say, well, maybe they did report this, but maybe there's another explanation. Maybe what the chief priests and the religious leaders said was true. Maybe the disciples did steal the body.

Okay, let's take that up as a possibility. Here you have nighttime. Somehow the disciples of Jesus, who have been terrified and been hiding, suddenly get courage, and they decide that they're going to risk their lives in order to set up a fraud.

They're going to go steal the body of Jesus because they want it to appear that what their master had said really did occur. So they risked their lives, and they somehow get courage, and they go over, and they go to steal the body of Jesus. So, okay, they arrive at the scene of the tomb.

I've been to this place many times. I believe the place that I have pictured in the prophetic walk through the Holy Land is the place where Jesus was raised from the dead. If it isn't, it's exactly like the description in the Bible.

It was in a garden. So here comes the disciples of Jesus, and to their amazement, they find 16 soldiers asleep. That's a little hard to believe, because in reading the Institutes of the Roman Legions by Vegetius, and this was a complete work how they were trained and what their disciplines were.

In reading that, the penalty for sleeping on watch was, you know what? Well, the first thing they would do, the one checking the watch, and they had a centurion that would check the watch in every place. First thing he would do would be to come and put a torch to the toga and set them on fire. That tended to wake them up, and as soon as they were fully awake to appreciate what was happening, then they would take a sword and hit them right here, just above their breastplate, and drive the sword right down into their heart.

They were killed on the spot. That tended to give people insomnia. But let's humor those who would say this.

So here you have 16 men, and as incredible as it was, they were all asleep, in spite of the fact they could be executed for sleeping on watch. So they tippy-toe past the 16 sleeping guards, and they go up to this great rock. Now it's down in a little hollowed place, so it's very hard to begin to move.

It's very large. It would have weighed at least two tons, a rock large enough to cover that opening. But all 11 of the disciples, knowing that this was such an important task, they began to push on it, and they began to push it.

Have you ever heard a two-ton rock rolling against the face of a rock cliff? It would have awakened the dead, much less soldiers who knew that their lives depended on staying awake. But let's humor the skeptic a little more. Let's say that they did somehow manage to get the rock open, and they didn't wake anyone up.

They go in, and they take the corpse of Jesus. They carry it out, and they dispose of it somewhere. And then 47 days later, they suddenly screw up their courage, and they've gotten their plan together, and they go out in the streets of Jerusalem, and they risk their lives by preaching that Jesus has conquered death, and that now anyone who believes in this dead Savior that they've hidden the corpse of will have eternal life.

And many of them were eventually put to death because of preaching Jesus. And they died horrible deaths, by the way. All they would have had to have done to save their lives would have been to have renounced that they had actually seen Jesus, and to have told the true story.

More than 500 people saw Jesus alive after his resurrection. All 500 of them went to their graves proclaiming that they had seen Jesus bodily alive, and that he had conquered death, and that they feared no death. Now those things just don't happen.

As a matter of fact, you know what would have happened if the, even if the disciples could have screwed up the courage to have gone to that place and tried to pull that hoax off? First of all, they would have surely not found all of the soldiers asleep. But even if in the inconceivable point that they were asleep, they would have certainly awakened them trying to get that stone open. And you know what would have happened then? There would have been more corpses than the corpses of the corpse of Jesus lying around there.

Those soldiers would have wiped them out. These were not trained soldiers. The Romans were.

They would have slaughtered them. And all they would have had to have done to prove that Jesus had not been raised from the dead would be to produce the bodies of those dead followers of his, and shown that they had tried and that they had caught them in the act. There was absolutely nothing of this sort, in spite of all the power of Rome.

They could not keep the body of Jesus in that tomb because God gave him life and raised him from the dead on the third day, just as Jesus predicted would happen. The evidence that is strongest in any case is always the evidence of the opposition. The evidence of the opposition is they tried to secure the tomb, and when they couldn't, they could do no more than try to put to death the ones who proclaimed what had happened.

They had no way to explain it, and they couldn't stop it. Our faith is based on facts, not just on spiritual realities. But you know something? There are some extraordinary spiritual realities that show these things

too, and that is one of the things that is most amazing to me here this morning.

As I look out on this crowd, I see the faces of a few people that I have known before they were Christians and after they became Christians. I have seen the marvel of what God has done in changing their lives. Not that they changed their lives, God changed them.

Some of them were so screwed up that only God could change them, starting with me. And down through the centuries, Jesus Christ has been changing the lives of those who believe in him and empowering them to do things that are contrary to their very nature. And this is what exactly happened among the disciples.

As I have said many times before, the apostle Peter, chosen to be the leader of the apostles, all through the Gospels before the Holy Spirit came upon him, only opened his mouth to change feet. And then suddenly, Jesus did what he predicted he would do. He said, after he would be raised from the dead and he would ascend to be at the right hand of the Father, he would send the Holy Spirit to dwell in all of us who believe in him.

And the Holy Spirit first began this new ministry of taking up permanent residence in each believer on the day of Pentecost. That was the initial giving of that new ministry. And without preparation, without study, Peter gets up and gives one of the most extraordinary messages ever given, and it's recorded in Acts chapter 2. That showed the power that this risen Christ now unleashed upon those who believe in him and follow him.

And he's still doing that today. You know what the great significance for us to rejoice over here today of the resurrection really is? The great significance is that Jesus is alive and that because he was raised bodily from the dead, it is proof positive that what he did on the cross was accepted by God the Father. Because when he died on the cross, he took the sins of every person who would ever live upon himself.

He took the guilt for it, and he was judged in the place of every person who would ever live. He was judged for you. Every time you'll fall short of God's standard in thought, word, or deed, Jesus was judged for your sake.

He was judged in your place. And when he was dying, he cried out, paid in full. That meant that he had paid in full for every sin that you'll ever commit in this life.

But you know, we didn't know whether God accepted what he did until three days later. Because if Jesus had failed to pay for even one sin of the whole human race, that one sin would have held his body in the grave forever, because sin was much more powerful than the Roman Empire. The Bible says that sin is what causes death, and sin is what holds in death.

And so if, you know, Jesus was made guilty for the whole human race, he accepted our guilt, and he was judged for us. If he had failed to completely atone for every sin, if he had failed even on one count, that one sin would have held him in the grave forever. So when the Father raised him from the dead, it was God's way of saying, Amen! To what Jesus had said as he died.

He said, paid in full. And when God raised him from the dead, he said, Amen, paid in full. And because he's alive right now, you can know that there is nothing in your life too great to keep you from being received and forgiven by God.

Because he is alive today, you can know that you can be forgiven and instantly received into God's eternal relationship. Death is a terrible thing. I've had to face death close by.

Death is never pretty. Death is never something we long to see. Death is something we usually want to avoid at all costs.

We never want to see the death of a loved one. But you know, as I have stood by the dead bodies of people that I loved, the one thing that's given me such great hope is, I can truly say, I'll see you later. I know I'll see you again.

By God Almighty, I'll see you. Because Jesus Christ has conquered death. We can have hope.

Death is not the end for us. We know that because he came back bodily alive and he lives forevermore, so he has the keys of death and hell, he says. And he says he can raise us and he will raise us into a new life over which death has no power.

And once we have that hope secure in our hearts, we can truly begin to live here on earth. Because you know something? Psychology has found that the original premise of Freud was wrong. Freud tried to say that the central neurosis out of which things that, you know, out of the which our psychological problems really come and stem from, you know, bad potty training, sexual hang-ups, things like that.

Major things. But you know what psychology has found today, and this is accepted in most schools today, that the most basic neurosis of all mankind is fear of death. That this is at the bottom of our neuroses.

Fear of death. You say, oh come on, I know people who don't know Jesus Christ and they're fearless. Do you know the daredevil? I used to be a daredevil.

When I was young and too stupid to know better. Used to be a daredevil. But do you know something? You take somebody like Evel Knievel.

Every psychologist knows that there's the man who fears death most. It's the daredevil who fears death the most. It's the one who's always risking his life that's got a hang-up with death.

It's almost like he wants to push it and try to get used to it so that he can not be afraid of it. But the only way to solve that neurosis is to know that death is not the end. And that for us, the moment we breathe our last in our soul and our spirits, we go consciously to be face-to-face with the Lord.

Second Corinthians 5, 7, and 8 tell us that. And there we consciously wait for that day when God will raise our bodies into a glorified state. And in these new bodies, we will live forever with Him.

Because Jesus Christ not only died for all of our sins, but He rose from the dead to prove it. And that's why as I close here this morning, I challenge you this way. No one will ever fail to believe in Jesus Christ because of intellectual reasons.

There are enough evidences to prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to prove even the toughest skeptics' skepticism. The problem is people just won't be intellectually honest with the facts. But you take a great scholar like Simon Greenleaf, an expert on legal evidence.

Once he examined them, using the objectivity that would be used in the strictest murder case in courtrooms, he said this was the most established fact of ancient history. I'll take his word over any of

yours. But I've studied it myself, and I have to agree with him.

So no one ever really rejects Jesus Christ because of intellectual reasons. It's always because of a moral bias. We're all hung up with that.

But we have to take a step of faith and say, hey, it's reasonable to try. It's reasonable to take a step of faith and say, Lord Jesus, thank you for dying for me. I confess I can never be perfect, and that's what God requires.

So right now, I receive the pardon that you purchased in my place by dying for me. And I want you to come into my life and receive. And I accept the gift of forgiveness.

And then just be willing for him to come in and change your heart, give you new desires. And that's what he promises to do. For some of you, this could be the greatest Easter morning that you'll ever know.

Because you can make sure right now, this morning, that you know Jesus Christ. You can seal that by praying and closing with faith in Jesus Christ. It takes a step of faith, but you can make that step of faith as I pray this prayer.

That's step one. And step two is God says that we should confess our faith publicly. God says that if you've received Jesus Christ either today or at some other time, you've asked him to come into your life, that you should confess that publicly.

Jesus said, he who is ashamed of me before this generation, I'll be ashamed of before my father. But he who will confess me before men, I will confess him before my father who is in heaven. That puts a seal on your faith.

So I'm going to ask Reno to come up if he's handy here, if he'll come up. And as I pray, then I'm going to give a chance for you who either have received Christ privately or receive him here this morning, give you a chance to take a stand on Easter morning and say, I'm not ashamed of Jesus Christ. I have received him.

Let us pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we thank you that Jesus is alive. We thank you that he has come and died for our sins.

Thank you that he has been raised from the dead and that he's now alive. Father, I pray for each one here. Pray especially for that one who doesn't know where he stands with you.

He or she who is not certain pray this prayer. Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ for dying for me. I confess I can't be good enough for you to accept.

So right now, I invite you to come into my life. Lord Jesus, forgive my sins. Lord Jesus, change my life.

Make it pleasing to God. I can't do it, but I want you to. Thank you for coming in as you promised.

Thank you for eternal life because you can't lie. And you said, behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and banquet with him and he with me.

That door is your will. And as you prayed that prayer, Jesus Christ came into your life. You may not feel him, but he did.

And right now you have forgiveness and eternal life. In Jesus' name, amen. If you would like to write to Hal Lindsay, address your letters to Hal Lindsay, P.O. Box 9992, Marina Del Rey, California 90292, USA.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/3/SID3698.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/hal-lindsey/circumstantial-evidences-of-the-resurrection/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net