

Can you imagine having Jesus as an older brother? Here's Mary:

- 'Jesus, get in the water and swim with your brothers. Stop walking on top of it.'
- 'I'm warning you. If you turn one more clay sparrows into a real bird, I'm going to get Joseph.'¹
- 'You can wait for dinner, stop turning stones into bread.'

Seriously, the Bible has very little about Jesus' childhood. But we do know he had brothers and sisters.²

- The people of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown 'Scoffed, "He's just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us." They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him (Mk 6:3 NLT).' Earlier Mark wrote, 'One time Jesus entered a house, and the crowds began to gather again. Soon he and his disciples couldn't even find time to eat. ²¹When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. "He's out of his mind," they said (Mk 3:20-21 NLT).'
- Jesus' family thought he was crazy and the Pharisees thought he was possessed by a demon (Mk 3:22). Embarrassing start to a ministry.
- The brothers even taunted Jesus. 'It was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, ³ and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! ⁴ You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!" ⁵ For even his brothers didn't believe in him. ⁶ Jesus replied, "Now is not the right time for me to go ... I'm not going to this festival, because my time has not yet come" ... ¹⁰ But after his brothers left for the festival, Jesus also went, though secretly, staying out of public view (Jn 7:2-5, 8, 10 NLT).'
- Initially Jesus' own brothers thought he was a lunatic and taunted his calling.
- They must have ignored all the miracles Jesus did. Assumptions are hard to overcome.
- Not a good start to changing the world.

¹ The apocryphal story is when he was five. He supposedly fashioned twelve sparrows from clay and when he clapped his hands, they flew away, *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, 2:1-4 (mid-second century).

² Catholics say Jesus had no direct brothers or sisters to safeguard their doctrine of 'perpetual virginity.' They say, these brothers and sisters are from Joseph's former wife who probably died. Support for this position is a second century pseudepigraphal work, *The Protoevangelium of James*, James A. Brashler, 'Jesus, Brothers and Sisters of,' in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 820. Three explanations: 1) physical brother, 2) brother by a previous marriage, 3) a cousin, Florence Morgan Gillman, 'James, Brother of Jesus,' in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 620. Protestant scholars believe that the simple Greek word for 'brother' is probably accurate.

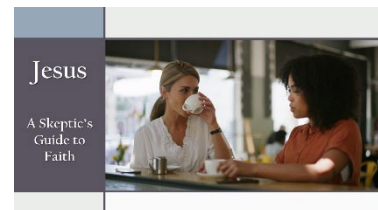
Today's message will have a little different focus. Rather than be devotional in nature, I want to answer the questions and doubts that skeptic may have.

Between now and Father's Day, I am going to look at important questions that skeptics may have.

- Jude writes, 'Be merciful to those who doubt (Jd 22 NIV).' Being merciful to means listening carefully and helping doubters over their doubts.
- We will look at Bible passages and ask the hard questions.
- I encourage you to bring your friends who doubt or who are skeptics.
- We are not going to be argumentative, but I hope to honestly wrestle with issues and provide solid answers. 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1Pe 3:15 NIV).'
- We will keep it accessible to everyone, not just philosophy majors.

Today, let's look at Jesus, the central figure of our faith. Because he claimed to be both God and man, the question is, 'How do we know Jesus rose from the grave?'

Jesus
A Skeptic's Guide to Faith



Let's go look at the brother who was closest to Jesus age wise - James. James was probably born to Mary and Joseph right after Jesus. James thought Jesus to be crazy, but he changed his mind.

- First, James is among those waiting to be filled with the Holy Spirit in the upper room: 'They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus (Acts 1:14 NLT).'
- Paul wrote that he went to Jerusalem and 'I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother (Ga 1:19 NIV).'
- Finally, we that James was the first overseer of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. At the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, he played a significant role in allowing non-Jews into the Church (Acts 15:13-21).

We can trust the story: Jesus died and rose to take away our sins.

What happened? Did James rise to power through nepotism? Was he trying to get rich? No.

- Because according to an early church historian, in 62 A.D. a mob of religious leaders demanded James 'deny' his brother. Instead, James declared 'Jesus, was the Son of God.'³ – Eusebius
- They were so mad they threw him off one of the turrets of the Temple and then clubbed him to death.

Church history records that James prayed so much they called him 'camel knees,' because his knees were so hard.⁴

What would cause a brother to go from doubting, ridiculing, and thinking Jesus was mad to becoming such a strong believer that he was willing to die for it?

The resurrection.

Let's unpack one passage through a skeptic's lens.

1. Prophecies, 1Co 15:1-4.

'Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before ... ³I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said (1Co 15:1, 3-4 NLT).'

Here is the heart of what Christians believe. Paul received it from the apostles, those who were eyewitnesses and he passed it on accurately to the Corinthians. Some at Corinth doubted the resurrection of believers at the end of time. Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that ...

1. Jesus died for our sins.
2. Jesus rose from the dead. Paul is merely stating an historical fact – Jesus died and rose again.
3. The resurrection is the key. Paul says that 'If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die (1Co 15:32 NIV)."' If there is no resurrection, we are without hope.

Paul gives them two supports for the resurrection.

1. Prophecy. Jewish prophets predicted these events long ago. For emphasis, he says twice, 'just as Scriptures said.'

³ Eusebius, *The History of the Church: From Christ to Constantine*, G.A. Williamson, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), 99 (2.23:4-18).

⁴ Gillman, 'James,' 621.

- For example, seven hundred years before Jesus, Isaiah prophesied about a suffering servant. 'But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed (Is 53:5 NIV).'
- Jesus himself said, 'Destroy this temple (own body), and in three days I will raise it up (Jn 2:19 NLT).'

2. The second are the eyewitnesses.

A skeptic's mind can think of all sorts of 'what ifs' to claim the disciples were deceived. Here are the most popular alternative theories to Jesus rising from the dead.

How Skeptics dispute Jesus' resurrection.

1. They were hallucinating.

- Hallucinations are not experienced by groups.
- Jesus appeared to many over 40 days.
- The tomb was still empty. The Romans could have paraded Jesus' body around Jerusalem.

2. They went to the wrong tomb.

- The Romans were guarding the tomb.
- This does not explain the appearances. Paul was not convinced by the empty tomb. 'It took an appearance of Jesus himself to turn Paul around.'⁵

3. Jesus just swooned.

- Friends, enemies, and Roman soldiers thought he was dead. Pilate checked.
- Jesus was embalmed (Jn 19:40). That is 75 pounds of bandages and spices.
- How could a gravely injured man move a huge stone 36 hours later and get by the elite Roman guard?
- Jesus seemed healthy after the resurrection. His wounds were healed.
- Does not explain the bright light Paul saw.
- Non-Christian writers affirm that Jesus died.

4. The disciples stole the body (Mt 27:64). The Pharisees encouraged Pilate to post guards so this would not happen.

- This makes the witnesses liars and conspirators. Charles Colson was one of President Nixon's inner circle during the Watergate conspiracy. He wrote, 'I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me... Watergate

⁵ Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 304.

- embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.'⁶
- How did the disciples get past the Roman guards and move the stone?
 - This gives credence that the tomb was empty.
5. A substitute took Jesus' place. Someone like Judas took Jesus' place at the last minute.
- Muslims believe this (600 years after Christianity). Jesus died and was taken directly to heaven.
 - Everyone was mistaken about who was on the cross?
6. They copied pagan myths (like Marduk, Adonis, and Osiris).
- Unlike myths, there are eyewitnesses and historical evidence.
 - Non-Christian sources know it is not mythical.
 - There is no myth of an incarnation, death, and resurrection of a god.
 - The first pagan resurrection myth occurs 100 years after Jesus' resurrection.

THEREFORE, We can trust the story: Jesus died and rose to take away our sins.

2. Many Witnesses, 1Co 15:5-8.

Let's look at Paul's second defense. 'He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him (1Co 15:5-8 NLT).'

Last week, for Easter, we looked at Luke 24 where there are four resurrection appearances. In total there are 12 recorded appearances.⁷ These are listed on your handout.

Let's look at this from a skeptic's perspective. Why should we believe this Biblical account?

Why believe?

⁶ Charles Colson, *Loving God* (Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 61-70.

⁷ Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:10-18), Mary Magdalene & the other Mary (Mt28:1-10), Peter (Lk 24:33; 1Co 15:5) & John (20:1-10), Two disciples (Lk 24:13-35), Ten apostles (Lk 24:36-49; Jn 20:19-23), Eleven apostles (Jn 20:24-31), Seven apostles (Jn 21), All apostles (Mt 28:16-20; Mk 16:14-18), 500 at one time (1Co 15:15:6), James (1Co 15: 7), All apostles (Acts 1:4-8), Paul (Acts 9:1-9; 1Co 15:8)

1. They eyewitness accounts are early.
 - They were written between 15-40 years after the event.⁸
 - Additionally, they have multiple sources and have various viewpoints. If a detective notices that all the witnesses' stories are the same, it raises doubts of collusion.
2. The witnesses claimed truthfulness and morality.
3. There is independent, non-Christan verification of the events.
4. Archeology corroborates specific events, people, and locations.
5. Even enemies support a few aspects.
6. There are details embarrassing to Jesus.⁹ For example, that Jesus' own family thought he was mad is embarrassing. That would have been removed if the story was made up or an embellishment.
7. They were willing to die to support what they saw.
 - They change from frightened and cowardly to boldly proclaiming Jesus' resurrection.
 - 'People may die for a lie they think is true, but they will not die for a lie they know is a lie.'¹⁰
8. The Romans and Jews were in charge.
 - In a city like Jerusalem, Romans and Jews would have exposed fraud if they could.
 - Instead, thousands of Jews gave up their most treasured beliefs and practices to follow Jesus.
9. Saul's rapid and complete change.
10. James' rapid and complete change.

We all know that family members are difficult to convince of something at times.

- A brother will not let you get away with anything – exaggeration, self-promotion, or delusion.
- Yet, after the resurrection we know the brothers are completely changed, they believe.

Jesus' resurrection radically altered their worldview.

⁸ Geisler, *I Don't Have Enough Faith*, 300, 318.

⁹ Geisler, *I Don't Have Enough Faith*, 300, 318.

¹⁰ Geisler, *I Don't Have Enough Faith*, 318

- Life after death is true.
- Normally, worldviews evolve slowly and take root in a culture, but idea of the resurrection spreading rapidly is 'absolutely unprecedented in history, (it) sprang up full-blown immediately after the death of Jesus.'¹¹

Friends, we should want the resurrection to be true – it gives us hope.

We can trust the story: Jesus died and rose to take away our sins.

Let's return to one line, 'Christ died for our sins (1Co 15:3 NLT).'

3. Atonement, 1Co 15:3.

'Christ died for our sins (1Co 15:3 NLT).'

How does this happens; how does it work? It is a mystery.

This mystery is called the atonement. Because it is a complex idea, the writers of the Bible gave us many word pictures to help us see parallels.

Word-Pictures for the atonement.

- Lamb of God (Jn 1:29) – takes away our sin by sacrifice.
- Justified (Ro 10:10) – declared righteous, no condemnation. These are legal terms where God declares us not guilty. 'For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved (Ro 10:10 NIV).'
- Ransom / Redemption (Mk 10:45) – a slave or captive is purchased from their captivity. A life for a life, with a costly payment. Purchased with Jesus' blood (Re 5:9, 14:4).
- Cleansing (Is 1:18) – the blood of Jesus washes away the dirt of our sin. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow (Is 1:18 NIV).'
- Reconciliation / Relationship (Col 1:20) – our relationship was broken or distant, at war with God, but Jesus' work on the cross restores our relationship.
- Victory / Christus Victor (1Tim 1:10) – by dying on the cross Jesus destroyed death.

I could go on; there are a lot more ...

- Covenant
- Healing

¹¹ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (NY, NY: Penguin Books, 2018), p. 217.

- Adoption

Imagine a courtroom where a witness walks in and says, 'I saw him.' That's interesting.

Then twelve walks in and say the same thing.

Then, five hundred walks in and the judge says, 'most of them are still alive; go ask them yourself.'

We can trust the story: Jesus died and rose to take away our sins.

Salvation plea.

Receive Communion.

'While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:26-28 NIV).'