

Message: “The Case for Christ Part Two”, Week Four of “Is He Really Who He Says He Is? Series”, presented by Reverend Kristen Lowe on 03-26-2017 at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

The Prophet Isaiah tells us how the Messiah will die. He tells us that he will sacrifice himself so that we may be made right with God.

Isaiah 53:1-5

Who can believe what we have heard, and for whose sake has the LORD's arm been revealed? He grew up like a young plant before us, like a root from dry ground. He possessed no splendid form for us to see, no desirable appearance. He was despised and avoided by others; a man who suffered, who knew sickness well. Like someone from whom people hid their faces, he was despised, and we didn't think about him.

It was certainly our sickness that he carried, and our sufferings that he bore, but we thought him afflicted, struck down by God and tormented.

He was pierced because of our rebellions and crushed because of our crimes. He bore the punishment that made us whole; by his wounds we are healed.

The Gospels each give a narrative of Jesus' death. We learn that he is scourged, mocked and killed by Roman crucifixion.

John 19:1-5

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.

Mark 15:25

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him.

Mark 15:33-39

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, and let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

John 19:32-37

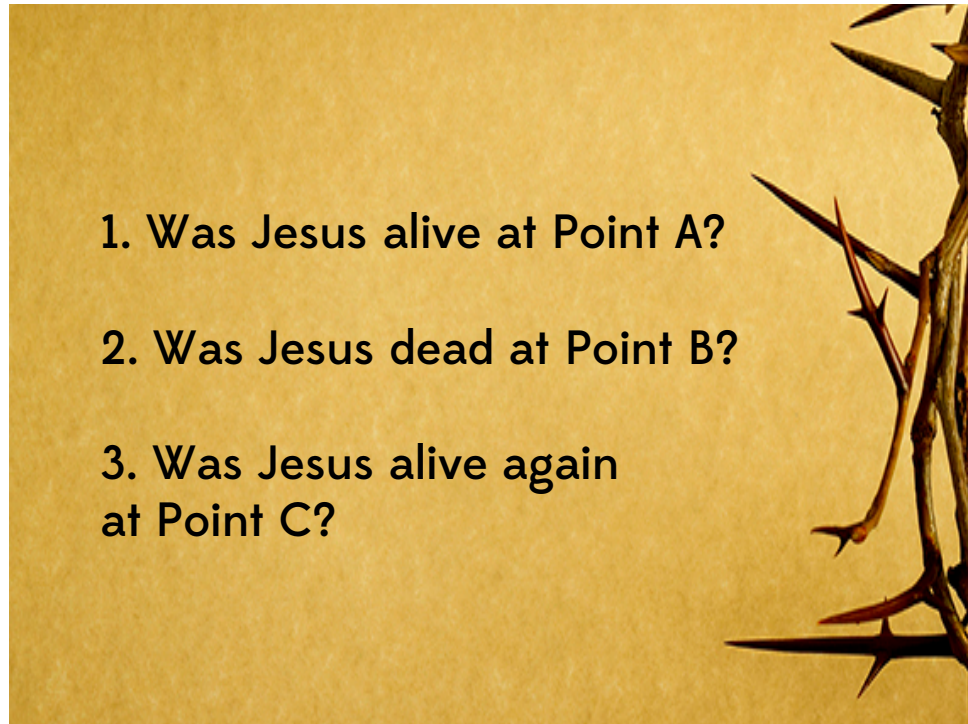
Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced."

God's Holy Word. Amen.

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[We’ve been following the] true story of Lee Strobel, the journalist, whose strong atheist beliefs led him on a journey to disprove Jesus’ divinity so that he could save his wife from her jumping down the rabbit hole of Christianity.

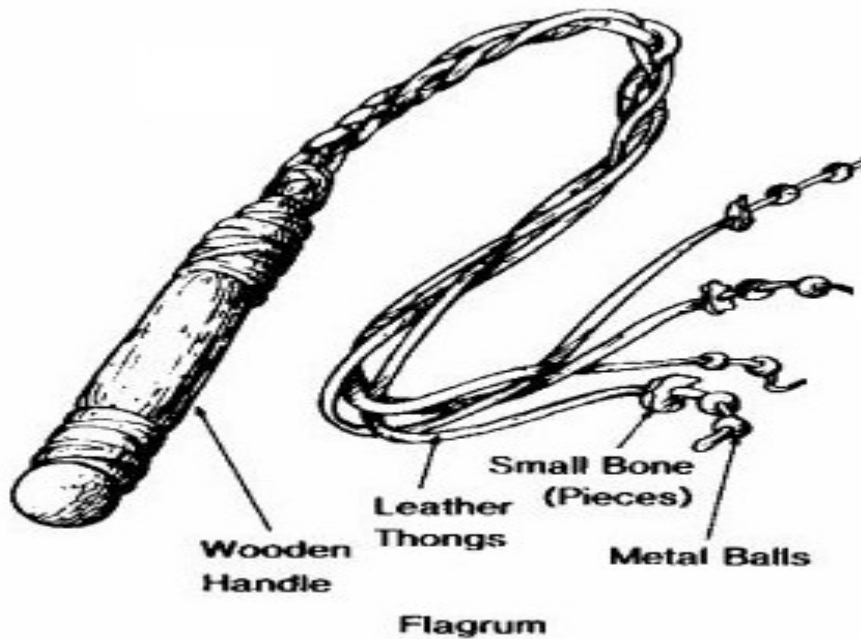
Last week we talked about Strobel’s three starting points in uncovering the truth.

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- 1. Was Jesus alive at Point A?**
 - 2. Was Jesus dead at Point B?**
 - 3. Was Jesus alive again at Point C?**

We explored the idea of point 1 and point 2 and agreed that it’s widely undisputed biblically, historically and through other religious texts that Jesus lived and was crucified. Strobel dug deep into the second point. He questioned the actual crucifixion of Jesus.

Could Jesus have lived through his suffering on the cross? The evidence shows there’s no way anyone could survive the efficient brutality of Roman execution.

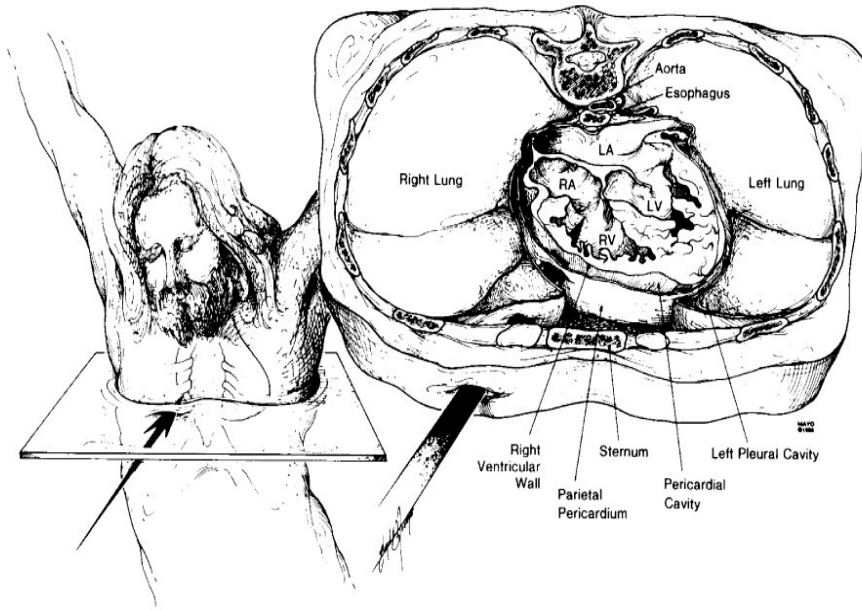
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Jesus was tied to a post and beaten dozens of times with whips that had jagged bones and balls of lead woven into them. Dr. Alexander Metherell said a witness described Roman floggings like this: “The sufferer’s veins were laid bare, and the very muscles and tendons and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.”

Jesus was in hypo polemic shock—or shock from a great loss of blood—and in critical condition after the beating. Then spikes were driven through his wrists and feet. Crucifixion is an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation, because the stress on the chest locks the lungs into the inhaled position. To exhale, the victim has to push up to lessen the stress. He would push up and sag down until exhaustion took over, and he would die from the effects of not being able to breathe.

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Then a soldier plunged a spear between Jesus' ribs, puncturing his lungs and heart, and the expert Roman executioners confirmed that he was dead.

In The Case for Christ movie, Lee Strobel pursues Dr. Alexander Metherell in order to investigate this very subject. Let's watch this clip from the movie as Strobel explores the evidence for the crucifixion.



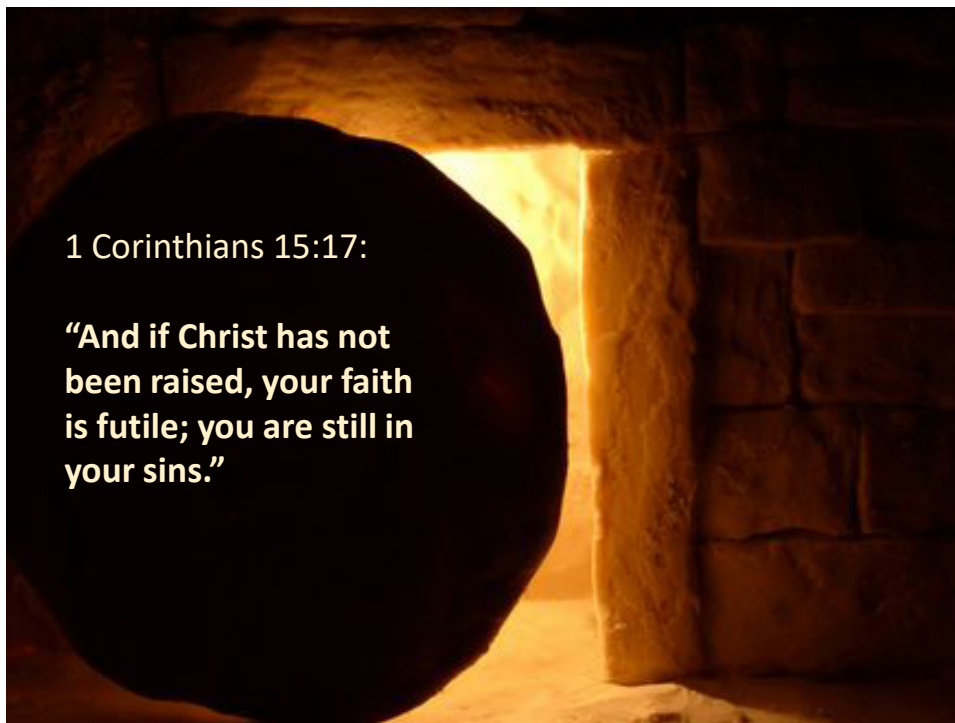
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Did you hear what Strobel read from in this scene? The article from the Journal of the American Medical Association said, “Clearly the weight of the historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted. . . . Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.”

It’s not just Christian scholars who believe this. Agnostic New Testament scholar James Tabor said, “I think we need have no doubt that given Jesus’ execution by Roman crucifixion, he was truly dead.” Even the atheist New Testament scholar Gerd Lüdemann said, “Jesus’ death as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable.”

So we have powerful and persuasive evidence that Jesus Was Alive at Point A and Dead at Point B. Now for the most astounding claim:

Jesus Was Alive Again at Point C



There are two strands of evidence that establish that Jesus came back to life: that his tomb was empty, and that he appeared to people.

Jesus’ body was laid in a tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish council. The tomb was sealed, and Matthew says it was guarded—yet it was discovered empty on that first Easter morning.

So how do we know the tomb was empty?

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First, there's the Jerusalem Factor. Scholar William Lane Craig pointed out that the site of Jesus' tomb was known to Christians and non-Christians alike. If the claim was false, if the tomb was not empty, it would have been highly unlikely for a movement founded on Jesus' resurrection to explode or even exist in the same city where Jesus had been publicly executed. The critics of Christianity could have simply opened his tomb and shown that Jesus' decaying body was still there – in the same place where they had laid him to rest days earlier. This would have effectively ended the Christian faith.

Second, there's the Criterion of Embarrassment. Who discovered the empty tomb? Women. But in first-century Jewish and Roman culture, the testimony of women was not considered reliable. They were generally not even allowed to testify in a court of law.

Now, don't shoot the messenger—I'm just telling you about the culture of that day! In fact, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, who worked for the Romans, wrote this: “But let not the testimony of women be admitted.”

So here's the point: If the Gospel writers were going to make up the story about the empty tomb out of thin air, they never would have said women discovered it empty. Culturally, this was embarrassing and hurt their cause. They would have said a man—Peter or John, for instance—discovered the tomb empty. Yet they reported that it was women who found the tomb vacant. Why? Apparently because that's what happened, and they were committed to reporting the truth, even if it was embarrassing and hurt their cause.

Third, there's Enemy Attestation. In other words, even the enemies of Jesus admitted the tomb was empty.

What were skeptics saying in Jesus' day? They were saying someone stole Jesus' body. This is ridiculous because The Romans weren't about to steal the body; they wanted Jesus dead. The Jewish leaders weren't about to steal his body; they wanted Jesus to stay dead. The disciples didn't have the motive, means, or opportunity to steal the body. Besides, we have seven ancient sources affirming that the disciples lived difficult lives and died for their beliefs because they stood by their claim that Jesus was the Messiah. Why would they have done that if they knew it was all a lie?

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Of course, the empty tomb alone isn't enough to establish that Jesus was alive again. Thankfully, we also have the numerous appearances of the risen Jesus to a variety of people in a variety of settings. And get this: We have nine ancient sources confirming that the disciples were convinced Jesus had risen and that he appeared to them.

But we can go even earlier still—even closer in time to the actual resurrection. Paul used to be Saul of Tarsus, a hater and persecutor of Christians. One to three years after Jesus' death, he was on the road to Damascus when he encountered the risen Christ and became the apostle Paul. Immediately, he went into Damascus and met with some apostles. Many scholars believe this is when he was given this creed that he eventually gave the church in Corinth.

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1. Jesus *was* alive at Point A?

2. Jesus *was* dead at Point B?

3. Jesus *was* alive again at Point C?

The evidence is powerful and persuasive—and, I might add, almost overwhelming. But think about that: We have overwhelming evidence to back up our faith!

Let me sum up what we’ve learned:

Jesus Was Alive at Point A.

Jesus Was Dead at Point B.

Jesus Was Alive Again at Point C.

Jesus really did rise from the dead, and this proves that he was who he claimed to be—the unique Son of God. It means his teachings have authority for our lives today. And it means he has opened heaven to everyone who will receive the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life he purchased for us on the cross.

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Why? Why did he do it? Love. The God of the universe loves you and me with such intensity and power that he willingly entered our world and endured torture and death in order to redeem us.

I hope you've encountered that love and forgiveness with God. If not, please talk with me or the friend or family member you're here with this morning. And together let's keep exploring the evidence for Christ and allow its truths to penetrate our hearts and strengthen our faith each and every day. Amen.