

*WHY...*  
BELIEVE IN THE  
RESURRECTION?

CHAPTER 3

Why: Finding answers to 5 of life's big questions

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Why? Finding answers to 5 of life's big questions.

Revised Edition

Chapter 3, Why Believe in the Resurrection?

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# WHY ... BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION?

This booklet contains chapter 3 of  
*“Why? Finding answers to 5 of life’s big questions”*

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# Chapter 3

## *Why believe in the resurrection?*

Amazon.com

Two of my favourite words! As I write, I've just returned from two weeks of annual leave, and if you ask me, there are few more enjoyable and interesting ways to spend a lazy hour or two on holidays than internet shopping! So I've spent a fair amount of time browsing the Amazon site in the last fortnight. As I looked at the hundreds of thousands of books they have for sale, I noticed that Amazon employ a system called *Statistically Improbable Phrases*. Now, statistical improbabilities quite possibly sounds like a class you tried to avoid in school, but at Amazon it's a computer system that scans the pages of tens of thousands of different books. When you select a book that you're interested in, the system tells you all the phrases in that book that are "statistically improbable;" that is, phrases in that particular book that you're not likely to find in any other book.

I had browsed to the product page for *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel's excellent and thorough study of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (what he calls "a journalist's personal investigation of the evidence for Jesus"). As I was reading the

publisher's description ("a riveting quest for the truth about history's most compelling figure") and the readers' comments (five stars and 1256 reviews), Amazon told me that this book contains the statistically improbable phrase, "vacant tomb."

Vacant tomb.

Statistically improbable?

Perhaps you agree!

Perhaps you think the Amazon computer got it exactly right on this one. The vacant tomb *is* statistically improbable, you think. Surely Jesus didn't *really* rise from the dead. People generally don't! It's unusual. It's unexpected. It's statistically improbable.

Or maybe you're in a slightly different category. Perhaps you'd *like* to believe in the resurrection, but you're not sure if you can. Maybe you feel that the resurrection seems to offer some hope; hope beyond death, hope that I'll see loved ones again, hope that I'll have the chance to say something to someone that I've left unsaid, hope for this life, even. But perhaps it just seems a bridge too far; to cling to a hope that has its origins in something so ... well, so statistically improbable!

Or maybe, you do believe the resurrection of Jesus is a fact of history. If so, you're definitely not alone! According to the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, 43% of all Australians

believe that Jesus' resurrection was a real historical event.<sup>1</sup> Maybe you're in that 43%. Perhaps you're even convinced that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is a *significant* fact of history, but you're not entirely sure why.

What *is* the evidence for the vacant tomb?

Is there any evidence?

Or was celebrity atheist Richard Dawkins right when he famously said, "Accounts of Jesus's resurrection and ascension are about as well-documented as Jack and the Beanstalk"?<sup>2</sup>

When a notable professor says something like that we might be inclined to believe it. But is it true? What evidence do we have available to us? And if it's true, why? I don't mean "why?" as in "why is it true?" but "why did Jesus rise from the dead?"

What's the point?

What does the resurrection mean?

What does it prove?

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<sup>1</sup> Evans, A. *Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2009*, The Australian National University: Australian Demographic & Social Research Institute, Canberra, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Dawkins: You Ask the Questions Special, *The Independent*, December 4, 2006.

It seems to me that we first need to find out if there is any evidence for Jesus' resurrection. And then, if there is evidence to be considered, and if it's compelling, we need to consider its meaning and implications.

Matthew's gospel is just one source to which we can refer to find out about the events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We could turn elsewhere in the Bible. We could read other ancient historians who were writing at a similar time – Josephus, Pliny, or Tacitus, for example – but let's start here, in Matthew's gospel. And since we're looking particularly at the events that unfolded *after* Jesus was crucified and buried, let's turn to Matthew 28 and consider for a few minutes the evidence that Matthew the historian assembles for us.

## *Exhibit A ~ Eye-Witnesses Experience*

I wonder if this has ever happened to you ...

You're meeting someone.

And you're waiting.

The appointed time comes and goes.

5 minutes ... 10 minutes ... 15 minutes.

And perhaps if you're meeting a teenager, you don't think anything of it. Teenagers are not renowned for their attention to time and promptness, are they? But otherwise you pull out your phone and you call the person you're supposed to be



meeting, and you ask, “Where are you? You’re supposed to be here!” And they reply, “I *am* here. Where are *you*?”

Let me say at this point that my favourite coffee shop, in the main street of our small town is opening a second store right in the middle of the city. Sazón Espresso is my preferred place for meeting people, not just because the coffee is excellent, but because the staff are friendly and helpful, and because I’m always likely to see other people I know while I’m waiting for whoever I’m meeting.

So back to waiting. Now I have a problem, because there are now two coffee shops in which I like to meet people. So as I’m on the phone to my apparently invisible friend who insists that he is, despite all evidence to the contrary, *in* the coffee shop, I look around to make sure he’s not right next to me! Nothing makes you look more foolish than talking to someone on the phone when it turns out they’re just a few paces away! It does however inject some humour into the day for all the other customers in the shop who are watching this unfold!

But back to waiting, again. With still no sign of your friend, you say, “I’m at Sazón in Mount Barker. We’re supposed to be meeting here!” And your friend says, “I’m at Sazón in the City. We’re supposed to be meeting here!”

Wrong place. Right time!

There's nothing quite like not being where you're supposed to be to get your day off to a bad start!

If ever there was a case of being in the wrong place at the right time, this was it; Matthew 28.

Earlier, Jesus had told his friends:

*"... after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."*

*Matthew 26:42*

Galilee was the northern part of the land of Israel. It was where Jesus grew up, and it was the location of much of his early ministry.

But as chapter 28 of Matthew's gospel opens, notice where Jesus' friends and disciples can be found:

*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.*

*Matthew 28:1*

Jesus' friends are still in Jerusalem, and two of them have gone to the tomb in which his body was laid three days earlier.

Mark and Luke, two of the other historians whose records of Jesus' life we find in the Bible, tell us in their accounts that the women took with them to the tomb spices that they had prepared. We have a spice rack in our kitchen. It holds little jars of cinnamon, nutmeg, and about 25 other things that I don't know what they are, or even how to pronounce their names!

But I know what they're *for*!  
They're to make food taste better.  
You can tell I'm a culinary giant!

In the first century AD though, spices also had another use. A use that to us probably seems a lot less pleasant. The spices these women were carrying, weren't the marinade for the Easter long-weekend barbeque, they were for embalming and anointing a dead body.

These are not the spices that the women *just happened* to have in their handbags, having decided to stop by the tomb on a whim while out for their morning walk. These women have deliberately come to the tomb, carrying the spices required to anoint and preserve Jesus' body according to their custom, and as a reflection of their great love and affection for him.

But ...

*... an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.*

*His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.*

*The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.*

*Matthew 28:2 - 6*

*He is not here; he has risen.*

These two women have just become the very first witnesses of the resurrection.

We generally think that eye-witness testimony is pretty good, don't we? And when the testimony of multiple eye-witnesses generally agrees (even though different people notice and remember different details) we'd think that testimony is very reliable. When it comes to evidence in court, or the recording of history, eye-witness testimony counts for something. In fact, it counts for a lot more than the opinions of someone who wasn't even there!

When I was a teenager, back in the dark ages, the police came knocking on my front door one day. Now, despite what you might think, they hadn't come to cart me off to prison for being a juvenile delinquent or anything like that! The police came to visit because they were investigating a theft. A theft of some money. This theft had occurred in a dentist's surgery,

and, you guessed it! I had been in the dentist's waiting room around the time of the theft! Now I'm sure you've just judged me guilty in your mind, or at least *wondered* if I was involved! So, let me assure you that I had nothing to do with it, and the first I knew of it was when the police knocked on the door!

But the police wanted to know what I had seen.

They asked if I had observed anything that seemed out of the ordinary.

They wondered if I had any thoughts as to who might have been responsible.

But there was a much more serious crime committed just last weekend here in Adelaide. A man was murdered and his house was set alight. That's a *much* bigger deal than some money being stolen from the dentist's office.

Why did the police not come and ask me about that crime? Money being stolen, or murder? Surely if the local constabulary want my help solving a crime, then the murder is the one they'd ask me about. For all the police know, I might have sat up all Saturday night waiting for them to arrive and interview me! I even thought about ringing the police and giving them my address in case they'd misplaced it and didn't know where to find me.

What's the difference between those two events? Why were the police interested in what I have to say regarding one of them, and not about the other? Why out of all the crimes that

were committed that day when I was a teenager, did the police come and ask me about *that* one in the dentist's office?

Well, it's obvious isn't it?!

That afternoon in the dentist's office I was an eye-witness. I was there.

My perspective was unique and of the highest value, because I saw exactly what had taken place during the time I was present.

These two women were eye-witnesses of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

They saw the empty tomb.

They saw the magnificent messenger from heaven, whose job was really just to be a bright flashing billboard announcing, "God is at work. God is at work." And, as we'll see in a moment, they actually met the risen Jesus shortly after.

Now, you might say, "Well, that was then. This is now. They believed in all sorts of things in those days that we're too clever for now.

You know, their maps even had stuff written on them like 'Here be dragons'! Surely they'd believe anything!"

But we've got to remember that these women went to the tomb expecting what *we* would expect if we were in the exact same situation!

They expected Jesus to still be dead, just like we would have, if we'd been there.

They expected to find his body, just like we would have if we'd been there.

They had been hoping to care for his body, just like we would have, if we'd loved and been loved by Jesus like they had. They were shocked and surprised at what they found, just like we would have been, had we been the first eye-witnesses of the event that changes everything.

Remember the coffee shop?

Remember Jesus' words about rising from the dead and going "*ahead of you into Galilee*"?

Wrong place. Right time!

We might assume, based on the fact that Jesus had *told* his friends that he was going to rise from the dead and go ahead of them to Galilee, that that's exactly where they would be – in Galilee! Surely a huge crowd of his followers were waiting there with bated breath and eager anticipation.

But that's not where Jesus' friends are, are they?

And that's not what Jesus' friends are expecting, is it?

See, they were not so different from us at all. A resurrection isn't what these women were expecting. They know that Jesus is dead, and they think he's going to stay dead. When someone *we* know dies, that's exactly what we think. It's why death hurts so much. It's why those platitudes that people offer at so many funerals are worse than useless, "She's not really gone, it's like she's just in another room." No! Death is permanent! People who are in another room, come back.

People who have died don't come back. It's why we hate death so much.

No doubt these women had been to funerals, like we have been. Matthew's original readers would have been to funerals. Mostly they tend to follow a similar pattern. We stand around a grave, or in a chapel, remembering a lost loved one. And, although each occasion is a little different, the same kinds of things are said, and done, and acted out, as we perform the official or unofficial rituals of our culture that help us deal with the pain and separation that death brings.

But violent earthquakes?

Graves being forced open?

Angels from heaven in gleaming clothes?

These, thankfully, are not the usual pattern for graveside services, are they? Matthew the historian records these details to let us know that these events are out of the ordinary! This is not your regular, every day, run-of-the-mill, sort of scenario. The conclusion that Matthew wants us to come to, is not that these eye-witnesses were more gullible than us, but that God is at work in this event.

When something really dramatic, or unexpected, or amazing happens it can be hard to make sense of it, can't it? Imagine if, while you're reading this, a dark little raincloud appears over the page, and rains on the paper. Only on the paper. Not on you. Not on your chair. Not on anyone else who might be sitting around you. That would be weird, right? Especially if



you're sitting inside! But what does it mean? Well, who knows? If all we have is the event, the experience, it's almost impossible to arrive definitively at any conclusion. We'd probably have as many different explanations as there are raindrops on your page.

But in the Bible time and time again, when God acts dramatically and miraculously in the world, he also sends an explanation. He doesn't leave people in the dark as to what the dramatic events mean, why they happened, or what their significance is. And that's exactly what happens here at the empty tomb of Jesus. An amazing event has occurred, and the witnesses are given an explanation to make sure they understand it.

And part of the explanation is that this may be an extraordinary event, but it shouldn't be an unexpected event. This was always part of the plan.

Why is Jesus' body not in the tomb? Because it was never going to stay in the tomb. The whole purpose of Jesus' life involves his body not staying in the tomb.

See, people back then weren't so different from us. Which means I'm sure you can imagine the kinds of questions and thoughts that would have been racing through their minds;

"If Jesus has risen from death, then death has been defeated."  
"Since the Bible tells us that death is the consequence of sin and rebellion against God, the result of our failure to honour

God as we ought, then if death is defeated, what does that say about sin?”

“What does this mean for sin’s power over me?”

“If sin leads to death ... and death has been defeated ...”

I imagine there were all kinds of wonderful questions running through their minds as they contemplated their eye-witnessing of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and tried to make sense of it.

Interestingly, though, it’s worthwhile noting that despite this great, reliable eyewitness evidence, it counted for virtually nothing in the first Century. 2000 years ago, the testimony of a woman, even two women, was generally not accepted as proving anything at all! There’s no way Matthew would tell us that two women were the first witnesses of the resurrection unless two women really *were* the first witnesses of the resurrection. If Jesus was, in fact, still dead, and Matthew was just making all this up to try and persuade people otherwise, he would have invented some other, more convincing witnesses.

A recent poll shows that the most trustworthy profession as rated by Australians is ambulance officer! We’re apparently more likely to believe what we’re told by an ambulance officer than anyone from any other profession. There was one thing I’m not sure about, though. According to the same poll, opinion pollsters are only 27% trustworthy! So, I’m not sure

whether we can we trust them when they tell us who we trust!  
You can ponder that conundrum later!

But if Matthew were making this episode up, he would have invented a story that had ambulance officers as the eye-witnesses. Or whatever the first Century equivalent was!

But he didn't.

Because he wasn't making this up.

We're presented with excellent, reliable, trustworthy eye-witness testimony.

## *Exhibit B ~ A Physical Resurrection*

As Matthew continues to assemble the evidence before us, and challenges us to consider it, he goes on to prove that Jesus' resurrection from the dead was a real, physical resurrection.

*So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.*

*Matthew 28:8 - 9*

I don't know about you, but I've never seen a ghost. I have seen a few in the movies, and they all seem to share one particular characteristic. Whether it's Demi Moore trying to hug her dead boyfriend in *Ghost*, or the Hogwarts students being harassed by ghosts in *Harry Potter*, one thing is the same; you can't grab them.

You go right through them.

They're slippery little suckers!

And you certainly can't clasp their feet.

And yet Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, Matthew tells us, *clasped Jesus' feet*. They were able to touch him. Physically.

This was no resurrection merely in their minds.

The Jesus they saw wasn't an apparition.

Jesus didn't rise in their hearts as they thought fondly about him.

His was a physical, bodily resurrection and their very own hands confirmed it. They were *hand*-witnesses as well as eye-witnesses.

For centuries people who *want* Jesus to still be in the grave, have tried to convince us that the resurrection was just one of those other sorts of things:

Imagination.

An apparition.

Grieving minds trying to project their precious memories into reality.

But all of that is just completely contrary to the evidence.

These women didn't take hold of a figment of their imagination. There were two women there remember. Have you ever tried to take hold of a figment of someone *else's* imagination? It can't be done! No matter how hard you try! And no matter how strong the other person's imagination is!

Jesus' resurrection was a real, physical resurrection, not a "conjuring trick with bones" as a former Bishop of Durham once put it.<sup>3</sup> And just as the *fact* of Jesus' resurrection has implications for us; the implications we wondered about in all those excited and awestruck questions that the two Marys must have been asking, similarly the knowledge that Jesus' resurrection was a *physical* resurrection has significance for us.

If you trust in Jesus' death to remove from you that unfavourable record of your sins we talked about in chapter 2, then you can be assured that when you die, you will be welcomed into God's presence forever. But if you think that in heaven, you're going to float above a cloud; some kind of disembodied spirit, playing a harp (even though spirits don't have fingers), here's how you know that's wrong.

A bit further towards the back of the Bible we find a letter that the Apostle Paul, one of the leaders and messengers of the early church, wrote to a group of Christians in the city of

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<sup>3</sup> David Jenkins, on *Poles Apart*. BBC Radio, 4 October, 1984.

Corinth, in about 53 AD. In this letter, Paul tells the Corinthian Christians that Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee of *our* resurrection.

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him*

*1 Corinthians 15:20 - 23*

Jesus had a real, resurrected body.

One day, all who trust in him will also have real, resurrected bodies.

Real bodies.

Glorious bodies.

And if you're frustrated and hurting, with a body that is sick, breaking down, and bearing the symptoms of a world out of step with its creator, hear this good news; all who *hope in Christ*, as Paul says in that letter to the Corinthians, will one day receive a body that does not wear out.

That does not get cancer.

That does not get old and die.

That does not fail, leaving loved ones weeping by the bedside.

This was, and ours will be, a real physical resurrection.

## *Exhibit C ~ It's Really Jesus!*

The next piece of evidence that Matthew lays out for us, makes it clear that this man hanging around the empty tomb, really is Jesus. When the women meet him, they know who he is. This isn't a case of mistaken identity. Nor is it a case of, "Well, Jesus is dead, so let's move on to the next best thing." We know *they* know who Jesus is, because they worship him.

*Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.*

*Matthew 28:9*

The tomb in which Jesus was buried is described as being in a garden. No doubt most of us find ourselves in a garden from time to time, but when you've been out in the garden, have you ever had someone fall at your feet, *grab* hold of you, and worship you? I can think of a few people I know who want to say, "Sure, that happens to me all the time!" But of course, we know that's not what happens!

These women were good, religious (in the good sense; 'religious' easily attracts negative connotations today, doesn't it?), upright women. They knew that only God was worthy of

worship. As a first century Jew, if you cared about doing what was right, and if you wanted to give God the honour that was due to him, you didn't worship your friends; a simple "Hi" usually sufficed!

You didn't worship great leaders; "Pleased to meet you. It's an honour," normally did the trick.

You didn't worship someone just because you were pleased to see them; "I'm so pleased to see you!" was pretty common!

Matthew was also good, religious (in the good sense), and upright, and he wouldn't have wanted to cause dishonour to God by encouraging the worship of people instead of the worship of God. And yet Matthew tells us unashamedly that these women worshipped Jesus.

The two Marys have encountered God.

They know that God broke into the world in the person of Jesus, and has now triumphed over death.

They know that Jesus took the punishment for their rebellion against God (and our rebellion against God).

They know that in Jesus, God himself deals with the sin that separates us from God, so that the unfavourable record of our debts need no longer be counted against us.

Jesus is worthy of worship because he is God. And these women know that!



## *Exhibit D ~ The Problem of the Empty Tomb*

Matthew doesn't leave it there though, because he knows that anyone who tries to convince us that, "no, the resurrection didn't happen" has got a problem.

The problem of the empty tomb.

In the preceding chapter, Matthew described the efforts that the Roman and Jewish authorities went to in order to secure Jesus' tomb.

*... the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate (the Roman Governor). "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead."*

*Matthew 27:62 - 64*

I find it fascinating that even though the disciples obviously didn't remember Jesus' words about rising from the dead, the authorities did. They knew that Jesus had promised this! So the tomb in which his body was laid got the royal treatment; Soldiers. Big, burly security guards. A police cordon. The

whole lot! Even the official government seal. But by the time Sunday dawned, the stone blocking the entrance had been rolled away and everyone could see that Jesus's body wasn't there. But rather than accept where the evidence points, that Jesus has risen from the dead, just as he said he would, the authorities decide on a plan; "Let's make up a crazy story and *pay* people to go along with it!

*When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'*

*Matthew 28:12 - 13*

We wouldn't dare be so foolish, would we?

Would we ever be so desperate to get around the evidence for the empty tomb, just because we're challenged by where it points?

Could we ever be so confronted by the implications of Jesus' resurrection that we would pursue a farcical alternative explanation in the face of overwhelming and convincing evidence?

Surely not!

It seems to me though, that there are at least a couple of major flaws in the plan that the authorities cooked up, or half-baked, we should say! If the soldiers were *asleep*, as they're ordered

to pretend they were, how then could they be sure it was Jesus' disciples who stole the body as the tale states? It's a bit tricky to identify a thief if you sleep through the entire thievery!

Although, to be fair, perhaps in the story Jesus' disciples left some evidence behind; maybe one of them dropped his wallet, or perhaps one left their business card at the scene. What's that you say? There's no evidence of that at all? Of course! Evidence really does matter, doesn't it?!

The other farcical element of this theory is the idea that a group of professional soldiers could sleep soundly through, while a group of untrained men open a tomb officially sealed and closed up with a large boulder.

Imagine your next-door neighbour getting started on some demolition work right outside your bedroom window early one Sunday morning;

First he fires up the jackhammer.

Then the demolition saw.

Then he gets out the pickaxe to break up the pieces.

You get the picture, don't you? No one sleeps through that!

This tale half-baked by the authorities stretches credibility just a bit too far for any thinking person to believe.

There was one thing the authorities could have easily done, though, to give their story some credibility. There is one piece of evidence that would back it up:

The body of Jesus.

All the authorities needed to do in order to make their case decisively was produce Jesus' body. That would have been the end of the matter. And Jesus' disciples, those alleged body snatchers, weren't really what you'd called trained covert operators. There was no switching taxis to avoid being followed, or any of that kind of thing. They were still in the city on the Sunday morning. Then they went to Galilee (right place, right time, eventually!). Then they went back to Jerusalem, where they hung around in a big group, sometimes even standing up and addressing huge crowds. It would have been pretty easy to round them up and get one of them to spill the beans. A dark room, a small stool, a swinging light. You and I have seen the movies. We know how the authorities can get someone to turn on their partners in crime.

But if there's no stolen body, there's no point trying to find it. And of course, the authorities know this, so no disciples are followed. No-one is arrested. None are imprisoned until they reveal the "how?" of the whodunit.

The tomb was empty. The body was gone. Jesus had risen. A real, bodily, physical resurrection! That's the only outcome that is consistent with the evidence. To believe anything else is to ignore the evidence, and to force our brains through some strenuous mental gymnastics that leave integrity and credibility far behind.

## *Will You Believe the Evidence?*

The giant computer that powers Amazon's web store might think that "Vacant Tomb" is a statistical improbability, but it's the only conclusion the evidence will let us reach. The question that all this raises for us is obvious; will you believe the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus? Or will you, like the authorities who had Jesus crucified, try to find some way to ignore where the evidence plainly leads? In his book, *Gunning for God*, Oxford Professor John Lennox observes that the very vocal celebrity atheists suddenly become very quiet when

*It's impossible to ignore all the evidence or dismiss it out of hand, while still maintaining any degree of personal integrity.*

presented with the evidence for Jesus' resurrection. In fact, he goes so far as to say, "I know of no serious attempt by any of the new atheists to engage with the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup> But simply

ignoring the evidence doesn't make it go away. In fact, we'd have to say it makes one look rather foolish! As I mentioned earlier, there is a lot of other evidence, from various sources, and it all points in the same direction. It's impossible to ignore

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<sup>4</sup> Lennox, John, C. *Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists are Missing the Target*. Lion Hudson, Oxford, England. 2011.

all the evidence or dismiss it out of hand, while still maintaining any degree of personal integrity.

I remember talking once to David Cook, who was, for many years, Principal of the Sydney Missionary and Bible College. He was reminiscing about his university days and in particular, about his mathematics lectures that had only three students in them. Since the group was so small, they simply gathered in the lecturer's office for their classes, more or less just sitting around talking. One day the topic of conversation was the Pythagoreans. Now, all I know about Pythagoras is that he figured out that the square of the hypotenuse on a right-angle triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. But naturally, this maths lecturer knew a lot more! And as he was talking about the Pythagoreans, he said something to the effect of, "I find the Pythagoreans compelling. If I wasn't a Christian, I think I'd probably be a Pythagorean!" David Cook recalls that his immediate reaction to hearing that was to think, "Why on earth would you want to be a Pythagorean?!" But one of the other maths students asked, "Why on earth are you a *Christian*?" To which the lecturer replied, "I can't make sense of the evidence for Jesus' resurrection any other way."

No matter who you are;  
A first century woman,  
A Roman civic official,  
A Jewish religious leader,  
A maths lecturer,

Or just a regular person! We're confronted with this question: What will you do with the evidence for Jesus' resurrection? I'm sure that none of us want to commit intellectual suicide and destroy any semblance of personal integrity by simply ignoring it. We don't want to tie ourselves up in knots trying to explain it away. And yet if it's true, it's enormously significant.

If the resurrection is true it means the human verdict against Jesus was reversed. He wasn't just a trouble-maker, a religious nut, or a failed revolutionary. When those types of people die they stay dead. When *any* ordinary person dies, they stay dead. So, the resurrection forces us to consider the claim that Jesus wasn't just any ordinary person.

He said he was able to forgive our sin and rebellion against God.

He claimed to be the way into relationship with God.

He claimed to be God, come in the flesh. God with us.

Let's pretend for a moment that I think *I'm* the solution to the problem of sin and rebellion against God. I could travel far and wide saying,

"I can forgive your sins.

I will make you right with God.

I can give you eternal life.

I can conquer death."

Those were all the sorts of things that Jesus claimed. Publicly. Repeatedly.

And let's pretend that you believed me and were convinced that I could forgive your sins and bring you into right relationship with God even though you've lived as a rebel in his world and thrown of his pattern for life. But then later tonight you hear the news that I have been run over by the Number 864 bus to Mount Barker. When you hear that (after a moment of quiet reflection to mourn my untimely death!), how do you feel?

A bit nervous maybe?

Perhaps worried you put all your eggs in the wrong basket?

I have no doubt at all that you'd wonder something along the lines of, "Well if he's dead, what does that mean for the eternal life he was promising?"

If I'm dead, you wouldn't have any confidence at all that I could overcome death, would you? My death, and the fact that I would remain well and truly in my coffin, would make all too plain the fact that my claims were empty words, with no truth behind them at all.

That's why the resurrection matters. To us.

Maybe hidden away in a dark corner of your life, where you don't go very often, and where you definitely don't let other people go, is something you know you've done wrong. Maybe something you've done wrong against another person. Maybe something you've done wrong against God. And in those moments when you dare venture into that memory, perhaps



you've wondered, "Can I ever be forgiven? For that? How could it be possible that I could ever stand before God, and look him in the eye, when I know that stain is in my past?"

If that's you, the resurrection is your assurance of forgiveness. Remember we heard Jesus claim that he had authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:10)? Jesus promised that he could bring us to stand before God with a clear conscience. If those promises were not true, Jesus would still be dead. He would still be dead, like every fake religious hero and wannabe Messiah that history has produced is still dead. God would not raise up from the dead a charlatan, a liar, who promises forgiveness but offers nothing.

So, the resurrection is God's way of saying Jesus is who he said he is.

He really can do the things he claimed to be able to do. He truly is the way you can have peace with the God you've ignored and rejected.

The resurrection is God's endorsement of Jesus, his words, and his promises.

And it's because of the resurrection that we can be assured that our sin and rebellion against God can truly be dealt with.

The resurrection says to us, every sin, every action, and every thought can be forgiven. Jesus promised it could be, and the resurrection demonstrates him to be true to his word. Entirely true to his word.

The resurrection says God came into the world that he made, a world that was rebelling against him, and he died to restore that broken relationship.

The resurrection says death isn't the end - for Jesus – and just as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, death is not the end for us, either.

The resurrection says there is more to life than this life. And I think we know that, don't we?

Deep down we suspect that.

We long for that to be true.

We know there must be more than what we can see and touch in this life.

Well, here's the proof that makes sense of what we've maybe always felt.

The stakes could not possibly be higher.



# Why: Finding answers to 5 of life's big questions

CHAPTER 3

*WHY...*

BELIEVE IN THE  
RESURRECTION?

## **In this series**

Why Jesus?

Why did Jesus die?

Why believe in the resurrection?

Why trust the Bible?

Why have faith?

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