

*“The Mystery”*

CSI: Jerusalem

Message 1

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## PLATFORM SET UP

## CRIME SHOW PICS . . .

Let me ask you a question. Why do we love these shows so much? Isn't the answer this . . . we love a mystery. We love investigation and the unraveling of truth. And behind all that fascination is a conviction . . . we believe in evidence. That is, we believe that there is such a thing as evidence and that the evidence will lead us to the truth.



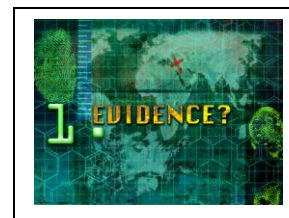
Think about it. Our society makes enormous decisions based upon evidence. Guilt and innocence. Sometimes we even decide who lives and who dies.

And yet there's an irony about evidence and investigation. We love it in our TV shows and we are more than willing to apply it in life . . . as we should . . . except when it comes to one area of life. Arguably, the most important area of life.

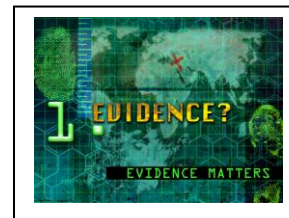
Faith.

In this four week series, "CSI: Jerusalem" we are going to investigate the ultimate crime scene and the ultimate crime . . . the murder of Jesus Christ.

In doing so, we are going to investigate the evidence. What does the evidence say about the crime? Even moreso, what does the evidence say about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



So there, I haven't even started preaching and I've already made my first point. "Evidence?" The point is that there is such a thing as evidence. And it would only be intellectual honesty to consider the evidence and what it has to say about Jesus Christ.



Will you pray with me?

## II. Resurrection?



This week we're going to begin our investigation with a mystery. A murder was committed. Jesus Christ was crucified. The mystery for this week is that while a murder was committed the body was missing.. There are many possible explanations, to be sure. We want to examine the facts and where those facts lead us.

To begin with I want to read the account in John's Gospel that covers Jesus' burial and subsequent events.

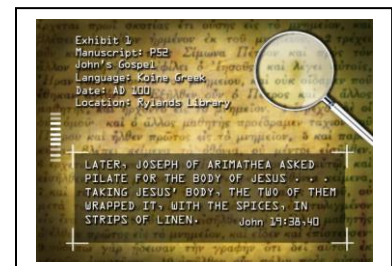
READ JOHN 19:40 - 20:9

Drawing from this passage I want to examine the evidence in order to make four basic points about the alleged death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

### 1. Jesus was dead.

Check out these verses in John 19 . . .

<sup>38</sup> *Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus . . .* <sup>40</sup> *Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen.*<sup>1</sup>  
(John 19:38, 40)



Pilate, as the Roman governor, had charge of the body of Jesus and therefore Joseph had to ask him for permission to take the body of Jesus and bury him. Mark's Gospel adds an interesting note. Pilate sent for the Roman centurion in charge of the execution squad and asked for confirmation of Jesus' death. The centurion stated clearly that Jesus was dead. The point is, everybody believed Jesus to be dead. Joseph certainly did – he asked for the body. And the Romans certainly did. And history makes it clear that the Romans were very efficient in executing prisoners and they knew when a man was dead.

Still, let's go deeper.

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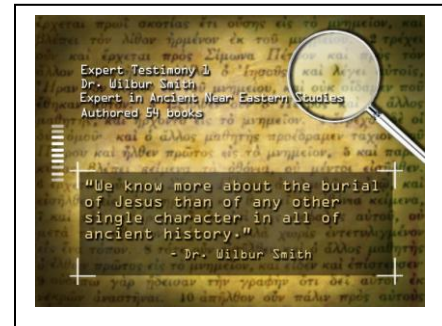
<sup>1</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Jn 19:38-40). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Standard Roman practice before execution was to whip or scourge a prisoner. There was a church bishop who lived 100 roughly years after the time of Jesus. The Romans were still in power and he was an eyewitness to Roman cruelty. His name was Eusebius, the Bishop of Casaerea and wrote of the Roman scourging, the kind that Jesus received, that the sufferer's, "veins were laid bare, and . . . the very muscles, sinews, and intestines of the victim were open to exposure." The whipping itself killed many people.

With regard to the crucifixion and whether or not it was survivable . . . think about it . . . heavy metal spikes drive right through the main arteries. Remember, the Romans were good at this and they did it often. They knew how to kill a person.

Still more, study the accounts of medical doctors and they'll point to the combination of water and blood pouring from Jesus side after the Romans speared him on the cross in order to assure themselves of his death. They'll tell you that the combination of blood and water is an unmistakable proof of death.

I love the way the scholar Wilbur Smith put it . . . "We know more about the burial of the Lord Jesus than we know of the burial of any single character in all of ancient history. We know infinitely more about His burial than we do the burial of any Old Testament character, of any King of Babylon, Pharoah of Egypt, any philosopher of Greece, or triumphant Caesar. We know who took his body from the cross; we know something of the wrapping of his body in spices and the burial clothes, we know the very tomb in which his body was placed, the name of the man who owned it. We know even where his tomb was located, in a garden, near the place he was crucified, outside the city walls."



Here's the unmistakably where the evidence will take you.

Jesus was dead.

## II. The Tomb was empty.

Now, let's take a look at another claim from the supposed eyewitness account . . .

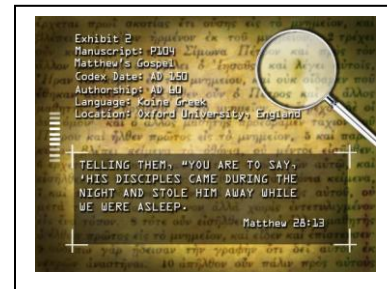
***<sup>2</sup> So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"<sup>2</sup> (John 20:2)***

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<sup>2</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Jn 20:2). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

The body was missing. Apparently everybody knew that there was a body and where it was. In fact, the enemies of the church – the Romans – confirm that there was both a death and a body once more by placing soldiers to guard the tomb. After the body was missing we read the following account:

***<sup>11</sup> While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. <sup>12</sup> When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, <sup>13</sup> telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’”<sup>3</sup>***



Now there are several important points to be gleaned. First of all, the practice in that time was that if you were guarding a prisoner and he disappeared you took his place. This is confirmed time and again in ancient documents. Given the harsh discipline of the Romans these soldiers would have known the real possibility that they would have been sentenced to “take Jesus’ place”. In other words, they knew that if the body disappeared they stood good chance of being thrown into the tomb - either dead or alive. (Why else do you think the guards first reported the situation to the Jewish priests rather than the Roman authorities? They were looking for some kind of cover.)

What this tells you is that it is very unlikely that they would have been so lax in guarding the tomb so as to sleep through a grave robbery. Even if they were asleep in the middle of the night, breaking the seal, rolling back the huge stone in front of the grave opening, and removing the body would have been a noisy affair. It’s not credible to believe the disciples could have pulled a theft like that underneath the nose of four motivated soldiers.

Secondly, notice that in concocting the story of grave robbery all the soldiers and the priests do is confirm the fact that the grave was empty. Is there more evidenced of an empty tomb.

Yes.

Christian preaching from the beginning centered on the Resurrection of Jesus. That’s confirmed not only the Bible but by numerous other sources, secular as well as religious. Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, preached in Jerusalem just a few weeks after Jesus’ death, was typical:

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<sup>3</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Mt 28:11-13). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

***23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,<sup>b</sup> put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.<sup>4</sup>***

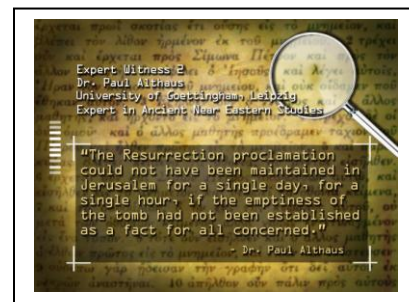
This message was turning Jerusalem upside down . . . the man the Jewish religious leaders had condemned and that the Romans had executed had been resurrected! The direct implication was unmistakable. Jesus of Nazareth was God's Messiah . . . and the Jews and the Romans had killed him. Or at least done their level best. The indictment against them was huge . . . it's hard for us to imagine the threat this represented against their leadership.

But . . . this threat could be very easily be disposed of. To shut up Peter and his friends you only need one thing . . . the body. Produce the body of Jesus and it's over. This fledgling church is over. The threat to the Jewish religious establishment is over. The threat of possible revolution against Pilate and the Romans is over (and it's Pilate's job to keep the peace).

You have to believe that every asset they had was mobilized in order to try and find that body . . . but they could never produce it.

As Paul Althus put it, "The Resurrection proclamation could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned."

So, our first piece of evidence is this. Jesus was dead. There is no other reasonable conclusion. Here's the second piece of evidence . . . the tomb was empty. (And, incidentally, even after 2000 years of searching the body of Jesus has yet to be found.)



#### Appendix: The 1980 Tomb of "Jesus, son of Joseph"

But, in 1980 a discovery was made of a tomb with names on that tomb being "Jesus, son of Joseph", "Joseph", "Mary" as well as a second Mary and a "Judah, son of Jesus". You can imagine that the scholarly world went nuts and a documentary was made and aired on the Discovery Channel in 2007 suggesting that at long last the bones of Jesus of Nazareth had been found.

Big stuff. Until you consider a few things . . . like how common the names "Joseph", "Jesus", and "Mary" were. Mary was the most popular name given to women and it's

<sup>b</sup> Or of those not having the law (that is, Gentiles)

<sup>4</sup>The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996, c1984 (Ac 2:23-24). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

estimated that one out of every four or five women were named “Mary”. “Joseph” was the second most common male name, about one out of every seven males were named Joseph and Jesus was also very common with roughly one out of every 11 having that name.

You see where this is going . . . the names are too common. AS the Discovery Channel documentary itself acknowledged, finding the names of John, Paul, and George is no big deal, but when you add the name Ringo into the pool you may have something. Research tell us that at the time of Jesus there were roughly 1000 men in Jerusalem who would have had the name “Jesus son of Joseph”. 1000. As the archaeologist who oversaw the excavation of this tomb, Amos Kloner, said, “the possibility of it being Jesus’ family is very close to zero.”

### III. The Disciples were convinced.

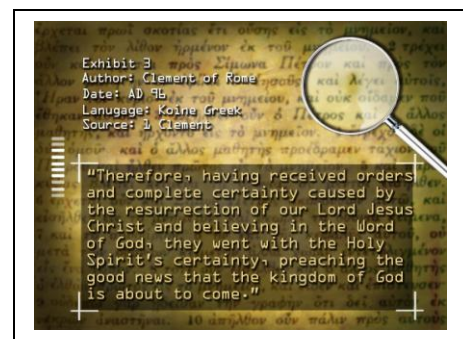
Now, third piece of evidence. The disciples. What happened with them? First of all, let’s deal with the thought that the Resurrection was somehow an invention of the later church. It’s important for you to know that scholarly consensus, both secular and Christian, is that the New Testament was written during the first century . . . during the era of the apostles. It wasn’t written 200-300 years later . . . but more about that next week.

Secondly, the second generation of the church confirms exactly what the first generation tell us . . . the apostles believed in and preached the Resurrection.

For example, Clement of Rome knew the apostles. He was ordained by Peter himself and his writing is decisive, “Therefore, having received orders and complete certainty caused by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and believing in the Word of God, they went with the Holy Spirit’s certainty, preaching the good news that the kingdom of God is about to come.”

Polycarp, like Clement, was also an early church father who had direct contact with the apostles. What he taught, he got from them. In a letter dated 110 AD to the Philippian church he spoke about the resurrection of Jesus no less than five times.

Of course, there is Scriptures themselves. Let’s return to John 20 . . .



<sup>8</sup> *Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.*  
<sup>5</sup>

What is clear is that the apostles believed one message and preached one message . . . the resurrection of Jesus. They did so at their own peril and all of them except John died a martyrs' death. As to the thought that they somehow concocted the whole story, liars make very poor martyrs. Think about it . . . if you were facing your death for what you knew to be a lie do you think you would maintain the lie? Even if 1-2 of the apostles choose to maintain the lie, is it credible to believe that all of them would have?

As to the thought that many people die for their faith, for example today's Muslim terrorist, it must be also be pointed out that in this day and age all who day for their faith do so on the basis of second hand testimony. Both Muslim terrorist and the Christian saint forfeit their lives based upon a faith they have received from others.

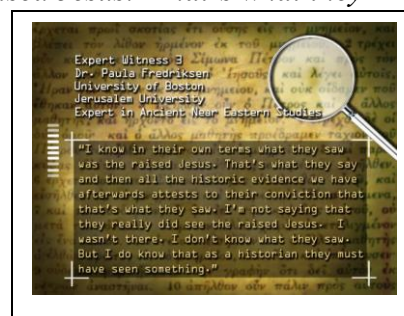
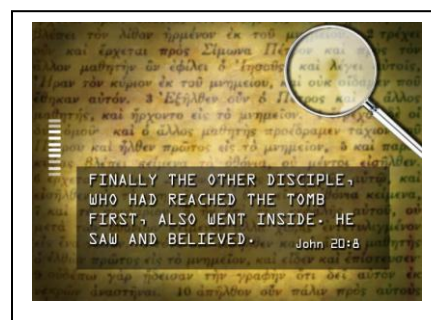
The apostles, however, got it first hand. They knew as no one else could know whether or not what they preached was true. They weren't depending on someone else's version of the events . . . they saw it all first hand. Eyewitnesses they were. And, to a man, they were willing to die for this belief that Jesus has been raised and appeared to them.

Some might suggest hallucination but hallucinations are individual, not group, events. Some might suggest deluded thinking like those who drank the Kool Aid from Jim Jones hand but these men gave the greatest evidence of clarity of thought and the highest moral character. They are the ones who wrote the New Testament, ½ of the greatest book ever written and their impact on those around them was markedly for the good. Delusion seems difficult to believe.

The liberal scholar Paula Fredriksen of Boston University put it this way:

*I know in their own terms what they saw was the raised Jesus. That's what they say and then all the historic evidence we have afterwards attests to their conviction that that's what they saw. I'm not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn't there. I don't know what they saw. But I do know that as a historian they must have seen something."*

Where does the evidence leave us on this one? It is very clear. Something significant – very significant –



<sup>5</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Jn 20:8). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

happened in their lives. And, it is very clear that they were utterly convinced that Jesus had been raised and had appeared to them.

## IV. Skeptics changed their mind.

Did you know that even during the New Testament era there were significant number of skeptics who became convinced of the Resurrection and identity of Jesus. For example, there were a large number of priests in Jerusalem who were converted after the events surrounding Jesus' death and alleged resurrection. There was, of course, the case of Paul which is particularly remarkable.

But I would like turn to one skeptic in particular . . . Jesus' brother – half-brother, that is – James. Let me give you four Bible verses . . . and remember, even the liberal scholars are now dating the New Testament to the generation of the apostles.

<sup>3</sup> *Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon?*<sup>6</sup>

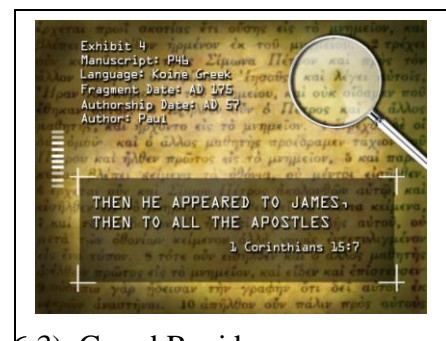
<sup>20</sup> *Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.*<sup>21</sup> *When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> . . . *even his own brothers did not believe in him.*<sup>8</sup>

Hey, it's pretty understandable. How would you be looking at your own brother if he claimed to be God's Messiah and the Redeemer of the world? Tough to swallow, right? We also know that when Jesus died he didn't hand over the care for his mother Mary to any of his brothers, but rather gave her to John the apostle. It's reasonable to conclude that if any of them had become believers he would entrusted her mother to them. He didn't. The evidence strongly suggests that Jesus went to his death without any of his brothers being anything other than completely skeptical of his life, identity, claims, and ministry.

And then, incredibly, we read a fourth verse describing an event sometime after Jesus' death . . . a decisive verse:

<sup>7</sup> *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles*<sup>9</sup>



<sup>6</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Mk 6:3). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

<sup>7</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Mk 3:20-21). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

<sup>8</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Jn 7:3-5). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

<sup>9</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (1 Co 15:7). Grand Rapids: The Zondervan.

Jesus appears to James – his half-brother. Oh my goodness. And then, one more verse with regard to James . . .

<sup>13</sup> *When they finished, James spoke up . . .*

The setting is for this most recent verse is Acts 15, a meeting of the council of the church. James, was now the leader of the church in Jerusalem. What changed? How did James move from “You’re out of your mind, Jesus” to Christian leader?

1 Corinthians 15:7 is the New Testament’s answer as to what happened. Jesus, now resurrected, appeared to James.

Now, two things must be said. First of all, the conversion of James was real. He was a radical skeptic and he became a thoroughly convinced follower of Christ. Here’s the second thing. This radical change does not, in and of itself, prove the Resurrection.

Yet, there are few people more difficult to convince in this life than your own family members. Especially your own sisters or brothers. Right? Most of us have experienced that. And yet, after Jesus’ death something happened so that James’ viewpoint on Jesus completely changed. Furthermore, James is just one of many former skeptics that the New Testament records who later became fully committed followers of Jesus Christ.

Here is the evidence . . . the fact . . . even hardened skeptics had their minds completely changed.

### *III. Faith*

Here’s the problem for many people and the Bible itself states it in John 1:18 . . . “No one has ever seen God.” And for many people, “seeing is believing”.



But is that really the way life works? Day after in courtrooms across America we make enormous decisions about guilt or innocence, even who lives and who dies, based upon a system which does not insist that we actually see the thing that happened.

We rely on evidence. Today we’ve reviewed just a bit of evidence with regard to the ultimate crime scene – the events surround the death and burial of Jesus of Nazareth. He was dead. Those closest to him swore – with their own lives – that he was raised and appeared to them. Those with the most at stake to produce and the body – and they had the means to do so – never could do so. Even skeptics who were eyewitnesses to the whole thing – who were there and predisposed towards unbelief – changed their minds and put their faith in Christ. Furthermore, those who claimed this truth went on to live lives of sterling character and sooner or later paid for their beliefs with their lives.

It would seem to me that God has left his fingerprints indelibly on this matter. In fact, I love what the leading atheist of the last 60 years, Antony Flew, had to say about this matter:

*The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events.*

Sometime after having made that statement he became a believer in the existence of God and is since stated that he believed that the Resurrection is more than plausible.

Many a lawyer has stated that they have received convictions in the court room on evidence not nearly so strong.

It's true that "no one has ever seen God" but to that doesn't mean that there isn't evidence. And you and I, we are used to evidence. As a society we use it to make enormous decisions about guilt or innocence, even who lives or who dies.

And if it is right and reasonable to follow the trail of evidence with matters as weighty as justice then why would we not follow the trail of evidence when it comes to the most important question of life . . . faith in God and in His Son.

Time prevents me from covering all that can be said about this matter – I have more in my message than I have been able to preach and the notes are online at kpc.org along with an article I wrote some time ago entitled "Why I Believe in the Resurrection". Additionally, we have written books for small group study on this all the messages forthcoming in this series which are available in the lobby.

But, maybe, just maybe, you don't need any more evidence. Maybe, just maybe, you need to make a decision. A decision for Christ. Maybe it's time to acknowledge that what keeps you from that decision is a simple, sinful desire to maintain control over your own life. I remember that reality. I remember realizing two things . . . very probably God existed and very possibly Christ was Lord. And I remember being afraid because I wanted to keep doing what I wanted to keep doing.

I made a decision. A decision for Christ. It was the right decision. The decision for life. The decision to honor God. It's the decision you can make today.

*God in heaven, I find myself surrounded by the tokens of death and sin. Resurrection is the great need in my life. How do I become new? Today, I put my faith in your Son Jesus Christ and ask for you to both forgive my sins and renew my soul. I pledge myself in obedience to You for all the days of my life.*

*In Jesus Name, Amen.*