



## THE EVIDENCE

### TEACHING

#### MYTH BUSTER

A myth is a legendary story that depicts a person or event and serves to explain a practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature. There have been several myths throughout the history of the world, like Hercules in ancient Greece and the Kraken in the age of piracy. Each of these myths reveal something about the society from which they originated, and people generally understand them to be no more than tall tales and fables.

Some people may be inclined to perceive the story of Jesus as a myth and reject Christianity as a consequence. Jesus, a Jewish man, was born of a virgin, claimed to be God, and performed many miracles like healing the sick, raising the dead, and controlling nature. He was eventually seen as a threat by His people, so they had him crucified, but He rose from the dead three days later. He then sent out His followers to start a Church before ascending into heaven. If we take a moment to really hear the story of Jesus, it can seem wild and mythical.

However, there are several proofs that show us that the story of Jesus is not a myth; it is a rational belief that is rooted in verified, historical text. While the details about Jesus and His life are primarily told to us through Scripture, we can also look to non-scriptural evidence to see that

EYEWITNESS

it is reasonable to believe that Jesus existed and is who Scripture says He is.

#### HISTORICALLY VERIFIED

Outside of Scripture, there are several instances where a historical person referred to as the Christ is mentioned. In A.D. 64, a fire destroyed two-thirds of Rome. Emperor Nero blamed Christians. A Roman historian named Tacitus wrote about this event and a man named the Christ, saying, “Nero fastened the guilt ... on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of ... Pontius Pilatus” (Annals 15.44). There is also references to Jesus from the writings of a first-century Jewish historian named Josephus and the letters of the Roman governor, Pliny the Younger, to Emperor Trajan around A.D. 112. The Babylonian Talmud, a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings, refers to Jesus, as well. Between all of these references, we learn that Jesus was considered a wise, powerful, and respected teacher who performed miracles and was crucified. We also learn that His followers believed that He rose from the dead and was God.

While these texts can offer us historical evidence, it is also important to recognize that the New Testament is historically reliable. Historians have tests that help determine the historicity, and the New Testament passes these tests relatively better than other ancient texts that are also considered historical truth. As Christians, we view the Bible as more than documentation and writings about God. We reverence it as God’s Word that is living and active.

*Hebrews 4:12*

#### CHRISTIANITY AND MARTYRDOM

Not only can we look to these writings about Jesus as evidence, we can look at the rapid growth of Christianity,

named because of their belief in Jesus, and the willingness of Christians to die for their faith, as well. A second century Greek named Lucian said of the early Christians in a satire: “The Christians ... worship a man to this day — the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. ... [It] was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the sage, and live after his laws” (The Passing of Peregrine).

The first Christians held tightly to the belief that Jesus was God because He died and rose for them. In Scripture, we read that Jesus did not leave His disciples with a sense of ambiguity toward His Resurrection. Instead, He made Himself known to them through His very presence. Jesus physically appeared to His disciples after His death. They were able to see Him, speak with Him, and even touch Him.

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*Luke 24:37, 24:39*

Seeing the risen Jesus had a powerful effect on the apostles. Moreover, it was because of Peter’s palpable witness that the community of believers who did not experience Jesus in the flesh were still able to believe. The Gospel of Luke describes the secondhand witnesses as being able to confidently proclaim that the “Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon”.

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*CCC 641, Luke 24:34*

If only a few people saw the resurrected Jesus, we may still be skeptical of the Resurrection — that is not the case. Saint Paul tells us that more than 500 people saw the resurrected Jesus at one time. These 500 people were willing to follow Christ, even as Roman authorities began torturing and putting to death those who were practicing Christianity. It is highly unlikely that a community of

people were willing to give their lives for something they did not know to be true.

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*CCC 642, 1 Corinthians 15:6*

Jesus’ miraculous appearances to the first disciples made them the bedrock of His Kingdom on Earth. They continued to tell people about this good news, and those individuals came to believe and even die for the faith. While we may still tell mythical stories of ancient figures, we would be hard-pressed to find a person who is willing to give up their life for a myth. It is reasonable to believe that the conviction of Christians is not based on a myth or story; it is based on an authentic experience with the true, living God.

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*Acts 2:38-41*

## **FAITH AND DOUBT**

The Resurrection of Jesus is not a myth or false hope we hold onto but, rather, a historical, verified event. It is through the uncompromising belief of the early Church that we have continued reason to believe that Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead.

However, we must come to understand that, while we may have historical evidence and reasonable proof of the story of Jesus, it also requires faith to establish a personal relationship with Him. This struggle is understandable, but we should not lose hope, for even the apostles had doubts before they saw Jesus’ resurrected body.

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*John 2:18-22*

While the apostles may not have understood that Jesus’ Resurrection would be literal, it was easy for them to make the connection upon seeing the condition of the tomb. This was especially true for John, who “saw and

believed” (John 20:8). The same cannot be said for Peter, though. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Peter left the tomb “wondering at what had happened”.

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*Luke 24:12*

Peter had the evidence needed to believe in Christ’s Resurrection — the empty tomb, the folded burial cloth, the proclamation from Jesus — yet he could not come to fully believe. When he left the grave, Peter was trying to find an explanation for all he had seen and struggled to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Peter struggled because he never experienced anything like this.

Peter fell into what the Church calls “involuntary doubt.” This occurs when one hesitates in believing and has difficulty overcoming objections connected with the faith. If deliberately cultivated, involuntary doubt can lead to spiritual blindness, which means we have to seek answers to our doubts.

The opposite of involuntary doubt is voluntary doubt. This type of doubt occurs when one refuses to believe what God has explicitly revealed. If Peter had seen the risen Jesus and then denied Him, Peter would have been in a state of grave sin because he would have rejected everything that was made known to him.

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*CCC 2088*

There are many instances in our lives where we may be able to pinpoint an experience of involuntary and/or voluntary doubt. However, in the face of uncertainty, we need to ask questions and honestly seek answers about our faith and — more specifically — the miraculous nature of the Resurrection.

It is not enough to identify a list of teachings that one finds hard to believe and leave it at that. Our faith

deserves more. Faith, no matter how strong, should demand curiosity and growth. The act of believing can and should employ our reason and logic, and we should grow in understanding of (although not fully) the many mysteries of our faith as we grow in knowledge. In order to not lose faith, we have to continue to find nourishment.

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*CCC 162*

If we still find it difficult to believe in the Resurrection, we should continue to ask questions and do research. More importantly, we can pray for faith. The Lord provides us with all we need, all we have to do is ask, just as the apostles did, “Lord, increase our faith”.

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*Luke 17:5*

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## KEY TERMS

**Involuntary Doubt:** The hesitation in believing and the difficulty in overcoming objections connected with the faith.

**Myth:** A legendary story that depicts a person or event and serves to explain a practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature.

**Resurrection:** The bodily rising of Jesus from the dead on the third day after His death on the cross and burial in the tomb.

**Voluntary Doubt:** The refusal to believe or hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief.