

Why I am a Christian (4)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 April 2024

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Sir Lionel Lackou, I think that's how you say it, Sir Lionel Lackou, was a trial lawyer from Guyana.

He was the most successful defense lawyer in history, having achieved a record 245 murder acquittals during his long career. Later in life, he became a believer, a Christian.

And he wrote a book about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead in which he writes these words. I say unequivocally that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.

The most successful defense lawyer in history, according to the Guinness Book of Records, insisted that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is so overwhelming that it leaves, and I quote, absolutely no room for doubt.

Now, if the world in which I live is the first reason I'm a Christian today, the Word of God I read is the second, the life of the Jesus I follow the third, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the fourth and the most powerful of them all.

[1 : 31] In seasons of doubt, the certainty of the resurrection of Christ from the dead has restored my assurance and sanity.

This is not a truth that society has heard and rejected. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a truth our society has not heard.

But if it did, I believe it would have a strong influence upon it, because as Sir Lionel Lackou insisted, the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is so overwhelming that it leaves absolutely no room for doubt.

Now, the resurrection of Jesus is recorded for us in all four Gospels, each with a slightly different approach. I've decided to appeal to John for his evidence in these verses.

Among the many avenues we could choose, let me suggest the following three lines of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. First, the empty tomb of Jesus.

[2 : 43] Second, the appearances of Jesus. And third, the church of Jesus. So, the empty tomb of Jesus. The appearances of Jesus.

And the church of Jesus. As far as John is concerned, if we are not convinced by the evidence that he provides, nothing will be enough to persuade us that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

Even suppose he should appear physically before us as he did to his disciples and to many others all those years ago.

First line of evidence. The empty tomb of Jesus. The empty tomb of Jesus. John 20 begins in the darkness of the early morning. Mary Magdalene has come to the tomb early and saw that the stone had been rolled away.

She immediately ran to tell Simon Peter and another disciple, who we know was John, the writer of this Gospel. And they ran to the tomb and discovered only the linen cloths lying there, which had been used to wrap the body of Jesus.

- [3 : 55] Other than that, the tomb was empty. The body of Jesus was gone. Now, some have argued over the years that Mary Magdalene went to the wrong tomb.
- But as the previous verses tell us, Mary and the other woman had been at that tomb a mere 36 hours previously. They knew very well where the tomb was.
- And it's impossible that they would have forgotten such a significant event. The wrong tomb theory is just that. A theory.
- Mary. And it simply does not meet the standard of evidence required for it to be true. Mary came to the right tomb. And she found it empty.
- That tomb which so recently had contained the physical body of the crucified Jesus was now empty. Now, there are only a limited number of options available to us to explain such a thing.
- [4 : 54] Each of which is more improbable than the obvious truth that Jesus has risen from the dead. Maybe the disciples stole the body. But then, the disciples were absolutely despondent and disorganized.
- And the presence of Jesus and John that morning show us that they were just as surprised as Mary by the empty tomb. Likewise, we know from the other Gospels that the Romans had placed a guard at the tomb and sealed the stone in place with concrete.
- But all the best to the disciples for managing to spit at the body of Jesus from under the guard's eyes. To break that concrete seal without a noise.
- And to roll that huge stone away. It would have been impossible. Well, others say the Romans or the Jewish leadership.
- They stole the body. But they would have had no reason to steal the body away. If they had, later on when the disciples preached the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, as Ellie read to us in Acts 4.
- [6 : 12] However, they could have killed Christianity in the blood by producing the body of Jesus and saying, no, it's all a lie. But they didn't. Because they couldn't.
- Jesus had risen from the grave just as he said he would. And just as the Bible prophesied he would. Or maybe, as some have suggested, Jesus himself had not died on the cross.
- Again, that supposes that a Jesus who had been tortured and crucified had enough strength to break the concrete seal without a noise.
- To roll away that huge stone without the guards noticing. By the which, those who had crucified Jesus knew he was dead when they took him down from the cross.
- Some of you may know the principle of Occam's razor. Occam's razor is a principle of logic which states that the simplest explanation is preferable to one that is more complex.
- [7 : 28] The simplest explanation of the empty tomb does not consist in any of the theories proposed. They are all complex and each are directly refutable.
- The simplest explanation, even though it might seem to be the most unlikely, is that Jesus rose from the dead, supernaturally bursting open the tomb from the inside.
- When we apply the logic of Occam's razor, this is the only option remaining. If we go into the whole debate with a closed mind saying, well, dead men don't rise, so of course that couldn't have happened, we've made up our minds before we've considered the evidence.
- Any lawyer will tell you that this is not the way to prosecute or to defend a case, to make up your mind before any evidence is presented to you.
- When we're called to duty duty, the judge encourages us to have an open mind and to make our judgments based upon the evidence produced. If we approach the resurrection of Jesus this way, with regard to the empty tomb, we are left with no other reasonable explanation than this.

[8 : 49] He rose from the dead. If anyone else other than the disciples had stolen the body, when the early church started preaching about the resurrection, as they did in the book of Acts, they would have produced the body of Jesus then and then, and Christianity would have been destroyed.

But they couldn't, because as the hymn tells us, up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph for his foes.

As a species, we are called Homo sapien, which means the man who thinks. When we start thinking about the empty tomb, our minds are drawn to just one conclusion, that of the factuality and the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The empty tomb, first line of evidence. Second line of evidence, the appearances of Jesus. The appearances of Jesus. The empty tomb of Jesus is a very powerful argument for his resurrection.

But if that was all, perhaps it would not be enough to secure beyond reasonable doubt, the certainty of his resurrection. There could be, conceivably, an argument, which no one's thought of for the last 2,000 years, which could account for it.

[10 : 13] The possibility of such an argument is infinitesimally small, but God adds to the evidence another way. Namely, that the post-resurrection Jesus appeared and was seen by many.

The first is Mary Magdalene, here in John 20. In verse 11, we find her weeping, her eyes are swimming with tears. Having seen two angels dressed in white, which is itself very supernaturally significant, she turns around and she's a man who she thinks is the gardener.

And he says to her, woman, why are you weeping? Why are you weeping? She replies, sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away.

Clearly, she still hadn't understood that Jesus had risen from the dead. Why she did not recognize Jesus, we do not know. Her eyes were swimming with tears.

She didn't expect to see him or perhaps the post-resurrection Jesus looked a bit different. But it's his voice which sparked a recognition.

[11 : 27] His voice. Mary, he said. He had used her name thousands of times before, but never with this level of intensity, drama, and emotion.

She saw Jesus. She heard Jesus. She touched Jesus. He appeared bodily to her. There's no ghost. It's not an apparition.

Jesus has not been raised spiritually as some false teachers try to pretend. He has physically risen and he appears to Mary. She returns to the disciples and becomes the first preacher of the resurrection.

I have seen the Lord, she announces. But then, of course, some might discounted evidence as mere hysteria after all this was an emotionally charged time.

But then later in the chapter, from verses 19 onwards, Jesus appears to all his disciples. They hear him, they see him, they touch him.

[12 : 35] Then in John chapter 21, he appears to his disciples beside the Sea of Galilee. But this is only the beginning. In 1 Corinthians 15 verse 6, we read that Jesus appeared to more than 500 people at once.

Paul says there, most of whom are still alive. He writes those words. Most of these 500 are still alive. In other words, if you want proof of the physical resurrection of Jesus, all you need to do is go looking for one of those surviving 500 who saw Jesus and ask him.

So we have well over half a thousand witnesses to the post-resurrection physical appearance of Jesus. Now, this would be more than enough evidence.

This would be more than enough significant number of witnesses in any court of law, even the most corrupt, to establish the truth of a matter. Over 500.

No wonder Sir Lionel Lucku could say that the resurrection of Jesus passes every test of proof and leaves absolutely no room for doubt. If we'd spoken to any of these witnesses and said, well, what did you see that have said, I didn't see a what?

[13 : 59] I saw a who? I saw the Lord. Their eyes didn't trick them. Their emotions did not deceive them. For after all, we read in John chapter 20, verse 9, none of them had been expecting to see Jesus rise from the dead in the first place.

But they did, and there's no denying it. It goes back to that question posed by Occam's razor, which states that the simplest explanation is preferable to the one that's more complex.

Either well over 500, half a thousand people were deceived or lying, or they really had seen the risen Jesus after supposedly, after he had been dead.

To have staged a lie like this would have required the greatest conspiracy in history, which is a highly complex argument, or they were telling the truth, which is the simplest explanation.

It was sure and certain confidence in the resurrection of Jesus which led the hymn writer to write, He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today!

[15 : 15] Coupled with the empty tomb of Jesus, what more evidence do we need to convince us of the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead to more than half a thousand people?

Again, let me remind you, we're called homo sapien, the man who thinks, the man who knows. If the physical appearances of Jesus are enough to convince the most successful defense lawyer in history of the reality of the resurrection, what more evidence do we need?

That's the second line of evidence. third line of evidence, the church of Jesus Christ, the church of Jesus. From the first moment the disciples realized that Jesus really had risen from the dead, they began to proclaim the resurrection.

In fact, they made the resurrection of Jesus the central theme of their preaching. Most every sermon they preached recorded in the New Testament contains a central reference to the physical resurrection of Jesus.

What a change had come over these otherwise fearful disillusioned men. In John chapter 20 and verse 19, we read of them that they were so scared of the Jews that they had gathered together in a locked room.

[16 : 45] They went from that level of fear in the space of just a few weeks to a confidence which led them to preaching the resurrection of Jesus publicly to huge crowds in the Jewish temple.

All the disciples would suffer, most of them would die as martyrs, on account of the stubbornness of their belief that Jesus had risen from the dead. Now, today you might be hesitant about saying that you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, but one thing is absolutely clear, the disciples believed that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Those who were closest to the whole affair believed it. As I said a few minutes ago, this is either the greatest conspiracy in human history or they really had seen the risen Jesus.

Would they have preached so publicly, suffered so dramatically, and died so readily for something they knew was a lie? And the change in these men was so dramatic.

Remember Simon Peter, Peter the big mouth, who had promised his Lord he would never, never disown him, but he denied him three times and lost all hope.

[18 : 00] In 1 Peter 1 verse 3, we find Simon Peter a new man. he writes these words, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus had changed Simon Peter from being fearful and having no hope to being confident and holding to a living hope in Christ.

According to church tradition, Simon Peter was crucified upside down in Rome for his faith in Christ. Would he have died so readily for something he knew to be a lie?

Would James or John? Would Paul? Would I die for something I knew was a lie? Would you die for something you knew was a lie?

There is no other explanation for the preaching of the apostles other than that they believed the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to be absolutely true? Over the centuries, the Christian church has been the most persecuted institution in the world.

[19 : 16] Even today, tens of thousands of Christians face imprisonment and death for their stubborn faith in the resurrection of Jesus.

How do we explain the growing church today? where 65 million people a year are becoming Christians other than the risen Christ is still powerfully speaking through his word and bringing people to faith in him.

So the existence of the church itself is powerful evidence for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. From its birth, the resurrection has been central to our life, our self understanding, our message.

How else can we explain the difference the resurrection made in the lives of those first Christians and of every Christian since? Jesus. Now there are many other arguments we could use both from biblical and secular history for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

But these three form the strongest. The empty tomb of Jesus, the appearances of Jesus, and the church of Jesus. Together they form a cumulative case which over the centuries has convinced millions of people to become Jesus' disciples.

[20 : 43] Frank Morrison was a non-Christian skeptic journalist determined to prove that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was a myth. He explored the evidence and through his investigations from a skeptical perspective came to the opposite opinion.

He became convinced through his investigation that Jesus had physically risen from the dead, became a Christian and went on to write a famous book which many of you will have read called *Who Moved the Stone?*

The weight of evidence convinced a hyper-skeptical Frank Morrison that he had been wrong. The skeptic became a believer. The historical truth of the resurrection of Jesus, that resurrection we celebrate every Lord's Day, is the strongest reason I became a Christian.

Let me close today by applying this in three brief directions. Christians in doubt, Christians in evangelism, and non-Christians in faith.

Application one, Christians in doubt. Faith and doubt exist together in most Christians. Faith and doubt exist together in most Christians.

[22 : 09] Our constant prayer is this, is it not? Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief. We all go through periods of doubt in our Christian lives.

Things are going wrong for us in life perhaps, or we're wondering whether all we believe is a lie. We've been in the wrong track all the time and everyone else in the world has been right. Is it a God after all?

If all these bad things are happening to me, and the world in which I live sucks, we all wrestle from time to time with these kind of questions. I remember when I was coming to the end of my studies in the Free Church College, being clearly assailed by these kind of questions while on holiday in the north, and being extremely upset by them.

No doubt you've been what I was during that holiday. What brought me back from skepticism was the historicity and factuality of the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

I couldn't philosophize or argue my way around it. Jesus really had risen from the dead, and therefore all I had believed was true. While our faith is shaken at times, let's go back to that garden tomb just outside Jerusalem and sit there with Mary Magdalene.

[23 : 35] Let's see the empty tomb and the physical appearance of the risen Jesus. Let's think of the difference it made to the first disciples, especially to Peter.

The reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is one of the surest ways to deal with all those doubts and questions which so often beset us.

It doesn't answer every question we want to ask, but it answers the most important. The Christ in whom we believe, upon whom we have staked our lives and who we follow, really has risen from the dead.

He is alive, and therefore everything we have believed is true. Application two, Christians and evangelism.

Christians and evangelism. Christians and Christians take place in the context of long-term friendships and relationships.

[24 : 38] It's not like standing outside the door here where you just meet someone coming down the street and say to them, have you ever thought about Christianity? It's long-term friendships. Our example, examples should prompt our friends to ask questions about our faith, and when they do so, it's easy to talk about God, and it's really easy to talk about the church.

Well, this is the church I go to, and we sing psalms, and we sing hymns, and we listen to a sermon and stuff like that. Having talked about these things, having talked about the morality of society and things like that, where do we go next?

Let me suggest that in the context of long-term friendship evangelism, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is where we need to go. This was, after all, the centerpiece of the apostolic preaching of the New Testament.

We can argue about red headings, about the role of family in society, about the place of the church in a community, about the existence of God, but the resurrection of Jesus is, as far as we're concerned, a historical reality.

In the context of a friendship, we can introduce over time the central truth of the Christian faith and ask our friends to think about it.

[26 : 04] Evangelism means preaching good news, and the resurrection of our Lord is the best news of all. So let's make sure that in our evangelism, that's where we're headed. Last application.

Non-Christians and faith. Non-Christians and faith. John chapter 20 finishes off with these words. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

There may be some of us here today who are not yet Christians. The evidence provided for the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead passes every test.

So much so that the most successful defense lawyer in history, someone who got 245 people off a murder charge, says it leaves absolutely no room for doubt.

Is the standard of evidence enough for you? What next? Listen to what John says, that by believing you may have life in His name.

[27 : 18] Having accepted the historical reality of the resurrection, your next step should be to believe in Jesus, to put your faith in Jesus, to trust your life to Jesus, and in so doing, Jesus promises you will have eternal life.

That one day you too shall rise from the tomb just like He did, and you shall enjoy the beauties of eternal life with the very same Jesus who rose from that grave 2,000 years ago.

Be a homo sapien. Be a true human. A man who thinks. I say unequivocally that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels evidence by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.

Well said, Sir Lionel Lacku, but well said the millions and billions of Christians who over the centuries have been convinced by the evidence for the resurrection and have put their faith and trust in Jesus.

Let's join them today, this Resurrection Sunday. Let's be filled with the resurrection hope of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 32] proteaman. This is the resurrection hope of anyone who