

Resurrection

Key data concerning the earliest years of Christianity which is agreed upon by virtually all scholars:

1. Jesus died via crucifixion
2. Jesus was buried in a tomb
3. Jesus' tomb was found empty
4. Paul and James, who were not initially believers in Jesus, had a change of heart and became believers
5. Jesus' disciples genuinely believed they had encountered him after his death and died proclaiming their belief in Jesus in the face of intense persecution

1: Jesus died via crucifixion

The death of Jesus via crucifixion is regarded as the most well-established fact about Jesus' life. It's a fact accepted by almost every scholar, with perhaps only Jesus mythicists and Muslims being the exceptions.

The New Testament historian Bart Ehrman (an atheist/agnostic) lists 15 independent sources, including New Testament sources, corroborating the crucifixion of Jesus – all dating within 100 years of the incident (which, in ancient history, make them very early sources).

The historian Paul Maier once said: *“many facts from antiquity rest on just one ancient source, while two or three sources in agreement generally render the fact unimpeachable.”*

So it's not surprising practically everyone agrees on this fact, considering the impressive number of independent sources we have.

2: Jesus was buried in a tomb

This fact is not as widely agreed upon as some of the others, but it still has strong historical backing. In fact, the New Testament scholar Gary Habermas (a Christian who specialises in evidence for the resurrection of Jesus) notes in his recent work (“On the Resurrection: Volume 1 - Evidences”, 2024) that in recent scholarship (including among non-Christians) belief in the burial of Jesus in a tomb has risen “somewhat dramatically”.

A key reason for the belief in a tomb burial is the fact that all the earliest sources (e.g. the Gospels) mention this fact, combined with the fact there is no evidence of any early opposition arguing against the tomb burial narrative. This could be, for example, early

critics pointing out that Jesus was not in fact buried in a tomb – but rather he was left in a common grave with the bodies of other crucifixion victims. This has often been a common view among critics – that Romans would typically leave the bodies either on the cross to serve as a warning to others or would be left in a ditch nearby.

It is also widely believed that the message of Jesus' resurrection was first preached in Jerusalem – the very place where Jesus was crucified. It would have been easy for opponents of the early Christian movement (Jews and Romans) in this area to point out that Jesus was not in fact buried in a tomb but rather was left out in the open and his body was ultimately consumed by wild animals. But there is no evidence of any competing narrative regarding the body of Jesus after his death.

Critics such as Bart Ehrman argue that almost universally Romans would not allow for the burial of crucifixion victims, so it's extremely implausible that Jesus was buried in a tomb. However, there is some significant evidence to suggest that exceptions were allowed. For example, a document known as the "*Digesta*" (book of Roman Law) has a section which specifically gives permission to hand over the bodies of crucifixion victims to family members (Digesta 48.24.1,3). In addition, we have physical evidence of this practice from the time of Jesus (1st Century AD Jerusalem) since the tomb of a crucified man called "Jehonanan" was discovered in a tomb (the evidence of crucifixion is seen in the nail through his feet).

A further piece of important evidence for a tomb burial is seen in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. This is widely regarded as an early Christian creed and even many atheist scholars argue it was formulated and spread within 2-3 years of the death of Jesus at latest. This passage mentions the burial of Jesus. The use of the Greek word "*thapto*" – this is a word strongly connected to proper funeral rights. In other words, as New Testament scholar Dale Allison points out, this verb "*would hardly be used of the unceremonious dumping of a criminal into an unmarked trench as dog food*". This makes the passage extremely important early evidence for the belief in a tomb burial.

In summary, the two key points which show us that Jesus was put in a tomb are:

- All the earliest sources say he was placed in a tomb and there are no competing narratives from any of the enemies of Jesus' followers to explain what happened to the body after his death
- Historical evidence shows that Romans did allow for bodies to be taken and placed in tombs at the time of Jesus, making the tomb narrative significantly more plausible than it would if Jesus were the sole example in history of this occurring

3: Jesus' tomb was found empty

The most popular argument favouring the discovery of an empty tomb is that all the Gospel narratives say that women were the first to discover and report that the body of Jesus was missing. If such a narrative was made up, it is extraordinarily implausible that the writers would invent a story of women being the first witnesses to the empty tomb. As Gary Habermas says: "*Comparatively few critical scholars have challenged this major argument*". In a culture where the witness of a woman was not taken so seriously, "*making women the chief witnesses to a vital message like the empty tomb would not have been the best way to achieve this goal.*" (Habermas).

An additional reason why the empty tomb fact is taken seriously is that scholars generally agree that the earliest Christian preaching originated here and that the story of the empty tomb "*was probably being told in Jerusalem shortly after the event*" (James Dunn, New Testament scholar). Christian philosopher of religion, Stephen Davis, also says "*this location is one of the best two indications that Jesus' tomb was empty.*"

The reason for this is because if the empty tomb was being preached in the very location of Jesus' death and burial, it would have been easy for opponents (e.g. the Jewish leaders) to take a short walk to prove to everyone that it is not the case.

Paul's use of *egeiro* in 1 Corinthians 15:4 refers to a physical, bodily action of rising. Thus, the creed Paul uses here shows he was buried in a tomb (as pointed out in the previous data point) and then physically rose after the event. While Paul does not specifically mention an "empty tomb", it is heavily implied in the use of words here (if Jesus *physically* rose, then the tomb in which he was buried would be empty). As John Granger Cook says, in his extensive word study on terms for resurrection within a Jewish context: "*Paul could not have conceived of the resurrection of Jesus without assuming an empty tomb*". Other early credal evidence can be seen in the sermon in Acts 13 (see verse 29-30, which talks about burial in a tomb and subsequent resurrection), which contains what is "almost universally recognised" as an early Pre-Pauline formula (Dale Allison).

Another important consideration is that the opponents of Jesus all agreed the tomb was empty. For example, the Jewish leaders argued that the disciples stole the body, which led to the refutation that the Jews had the tomb guarded, so how could they have stolen it? The mention of a guarded tomb is not in itself that important for arguing for the historicity of the empty tomb, but the narrative in the gospels is very revealing – that the Jewish leaders agreed the tomb was empty and were not able to produce the body to prove the Christian claims false (hence the argument that the disciples stole the body).

4: Paul and James, who were not initially believers in Jesus, had a change of heart and became believers

James, the brother of Jesus, is portrayed in the gospels as an unbeliever (e.g. John 7:5, “even his own brothers did not believe in him” – see also Mark 3:20-35). Due to what historians call “the criterion of embarrassment”, these reports are generally regarded as fact (it would be very embarrassing for the writers to admit that Jesus’ own family didn’t believe in him, in a document which is supposed to show people who Jesus is – it is more plausible that they were simply reporting the facts).

Even the co-founder of the sceptical “Jesus Seminar”, Robert W Funk, agreed that the “brothers were all originally sceptics but only later became part of the Christian movement”.

Many other sceptical scholars have agreed that James initially did not believe but later had an experience that he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus (and Paul specifically mentions Jesus appeared to James in the credal formula in 1 Corinthians 15, which lends credence to the idea that James had an experience which transformed him).

Scholars note that it was only after the death of Jesus that James became a key leader of the early church and so passionate about this mission, he ended up stoned to death (Peter Stuhlmacher).

Because of these widely accepted details, the powerful conversion of James is an important data point that needs to be explained within the context of the early rise of Christianity.

The disbelief and subsequent conversion of Paul is also widely accepted. Even sceptical scholars accept that 7 of the epistles of the New Testament were written by Paul (known as the “undisputed letters”). Thus, the writings in Galatians and 1 Corinthians, for example, are regarded as his own first-hand accounts.

Luke records Jesus’ appearance to Paul 3 times in Acts (Acts 9:1-9, 22:1-11, 26:9-19), showing that Luke likely heard Paul share his testimony on multiple occasions.

Paul’s own accounts (as well as Luke’s re-telling via Acts) show Paul was a persecutor of the early church who suddenly transformed into a major figure in the early Christian movement.

These facts about Paul are so widely accepted, that even the most sceptical scholars agree. For example, atheist scholar Michael Martin in his book “Case against Christianity” argues: “*We have only one contemporary eyewitness account of a postresurrection appearance of Jesus, namely Paul’s*”.

Much like James, Paul's martyrdom shows the sincerity of his faith (Paul's martyrdom is mentioned by Clement and Polycarp, both late 1st century).

This leaves everyone with a very important issue to address: one must find a hypothesis that adequately explains the powerful conversion of James and Paul, who both went from disbeliever to important and zealous leader of the early church, who went on to be martyred for their faith.

5: Jesus' disciples genuinely believed they had encountered him after his death and died proclaiming their belief in Jesus in the face of intense persecution

It is clear that the followers of Jesus abandoned him in the lead up to his crucifixion (e.g. Mar 14:50, Matthew 26:56, Luke 22:56-66, John 18:25-27). It is also clear that his disciples, after Jesus' death, were transformed and were willing to die to proclaim their message (e.g. Acts 7:57-60, 12:1-3, 21:13).

Early sources testifying to the martyrdom of apostles includes Clement, who references the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. Jewish historian Josephus mentions the martyrdom of James (in Antiquities of the Jews). Roman historians, while not mentioning any apostles by name, note the intense persecution Christians faced early on (e.g. Tacitus).

The disciples deserting Jesus certainly fulfils the criterion of embarrassment, making the story significantly more plausible.

As Sean McDowell notes, in "The Fate of the Apostles", there is no early evidence that any of the apostles defected under the threat of death.

At the very least, we can conclude the apostles genuinely believed Jesus had risen from the dead and this experience was the source of their newfound faith.

It seems clear they had some kind of experience that transformed them. The only question, and one that must be explained by any hypothesis concerning the rise of early Christianity, is exactly what that experience was.

Naturalistic Explanations

There is more available data that could be considered, but I always like to focus on the 5 points outlined above because they have the most support from scholars of a wide range of beliefs.

But now we have some key points of data established, the task is to now find an explanation which adequately explains all of it. In particular, it must have the *explanatory power* to explain each point, the *explanatory scope* to account for all the data.

1: Swoon Theory

This theory says that Jesus did not really die on the cross, but that he somehow survived and then went on to appear his apostles, who all believed he had risen from the dead.

This was taken seriously back in the 19th century, but it has generally been rejected by modern sceptics.

Firstly, there is only one known instance in history of anyone surviving a crucifixion – Josephus tells a story of 3 men who were being crucified, but they were taken down from the cross before the crucifixion was complete. Despite medical efforts to help them, 2 of the men still died. So, the only example of a survival was when someone was taken down early.

So one might ask “why couldn’t that have happened for Jesus?” – the key difference is that Jesus’ crucifixion was done to completion and he was not taken down until they confirmed he was dead (as ensured by the spear through his heart, as recorded in John’s gospel). The Romans were very skilled executioners and it’s extremely implausible that they would have let Jesus down too soon.

Secondly, even if we accept the highly improbable survival of Jesus on the cross, it doesn’t adequately explain the transformation of the apostles. If Jesus survived, and stayed in a tomb for 3 days, then appeared to the apostles, it would hardly look like a glorious resurrection. It would have been clear from his condition that he barely survived the ordeal. But what the disciples saw (or at least believed they saw) was a transformed body of Jesus that defies the fate he suffered.

Even David Strauss (a key figure among the sceptical German liberals in the 19th century), at a time when the swoon theory was popular, regarded it as ridiculous:

“It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a conqueror over death and the grave”

Therefore, this theory is woefully inadequate to explain what happened in early Christianity:

1. Jesus died via crucifixion

- This theory fails to explain the universal belief in early history that Jesus died via crucifixion. It also ignores everything we know about the impact of crucifixion on the body, medically speaking, which shows how extremely implausible it is for Jesus to have survived

2. Jesus was buried in a tomb

- This theory at least does say Jesus ended up in the tomb

3. Jesus' tomb was found empty

- By virtue of the fact Jesus walked out of his tomb alive, it does account for this data point

4. Paul and James, who were not initially believers in Jesus, had a change of heart and became believers

- Fails to explain the radical conversion of Paul and James. For example, would James really be convinced by a near-dead Jesus crawling out of the tomb, clearly showing the evidence of his suffering via crucifixion?

5. Jesus' disciples genuinely believed they had encountered him after his death and died proclaiming their belief in Jesus in the face of intense persecution

- Again, fails to adequately explain the transformation of the apostles. Jesus would not have looked like a conqueror of death, but rather one who was on the verge of death

2: Fraud Theory (Disciples stole the body)

This theory argues that Jesus did die and was placed in a tomb, but that his disciples stole the body from the tomb and then preached that he rose from the dead.

This theory was mostly ignored by the German liberals in the 19th century, but there were still some early proponents of this theory and there are still some who hold this view today.

Thomas Woolston was an early example of this view, writing in the late 18th century about how the disciples took the body “in order to pretend a resurrection”.

However, due to the evidence and arguments (used even during the early rise of German liberalism) showing that the disciples were willing to die for their message, most scholars did not take this view seriously. It is true that many people willingly die for what they believe, but that doesn't mean their beliefs are true. However, a key difference with the apostles is that, if this theory is true, they are the ones who stole the body which means they knew for a fact they were preaching a lie. It is extraordinarily implausible, if

not impossible, that the disciples suffered and died for something they knew was a lie – especially when you consider they had nothing to gain from preaching this message. The disciples received no money, no fame, no kind of material fulfillment through their message. All they received was persecution and martyrdom. So why would they lie?

To believe this theory, you must believe that the followers of Jesus pulled off an extraordinary conspiracy. Former homicide detective, J. Warner Wallace, writes about the implausibility of a conspiracy of this scale in his book “Cold-Case Christianity”, drawing on his own experience dealing with conspiracies:

“Successful conspiracies are unpressured conspiracies. The apostles, on the other hand, were aggressively persecuted as they were scattered from Italy to India. According to the records and accounts of the local communities, each of them suffered unimaginable physical duress and died a martyr’s death.”

“These men and women either were involved in the greatest conspiracy of all time or were simply eyewitnesses who were telling the truth.”

Agnostic New Testament scholar A. J. M. Wedderburn argues (in “Beyond Resurrection”): *“We have no reason to suggest that these early Christians deliberately lied.”*

So, to examine the theory against the data:

1. Jesus died via crucifixion

- The theory does accept the death of Jesus

2. Jesus was buried in a tomb

- The theory does say Jesus was put in a tomb

3. Jesus’ tomb was found empty

- The theory does argue the tomb was empty – because the body was taken by the disciples

4. Paul and James, who were not initially believers in Jesus, had a change of heart and became believers

- The theory fails to adequately explain the conversion of Paul and James. Are we to believe the disciples stealing the body and going around preaching his resurrection would be sufficient to convince Paul and James that it is true?

5. Jesus’ disciples genuinely believed they had encountered him after his death and died proclaiming their belief in Jesus in the face of intense persecution

- This theory fails to explain the powerful transformation of the apostles after the death of Jesus. If they stole the body, they knew they were preaching a lie. Considering there is no evidence that the apostles profited in any way from preaching this message (receiving only

persecution and death), the evidence suggests the apostles genuinely believed the message they were preaching

3: Fraud Theory (Someone else stole the body)

Considering the failure of the theory that disciples stole the body, yet the need to explain an empty tomb without a resurrection remains, more scholars prefer an alternate version of the fraud theory – that someone other than the disciples stole the body.

This theory gained more popularity than the alternative because it avoids the major issue of the disciples' willingness to suffer and die for what they knew was a lie.

Some argue that the “Nazareth Decree” (an early 1st century marble tablet discovered in Nazareth) strongly implies that grave robbery was a common problem in this area at the time of Jesus (it is a Roman legal decree which prescribes the death penalty for the crime of robbing graves/tombs). It is argued that it is at least plausible the tomb of Jesus was robbed, which may explain the disappearance of his body.

However, as William Lane Craig points out, nothing of value was buried with Jesus, so his tomb would hardly be a target for thieves. Furthermore, it makes no sense for thieves to take a body – something that would provide no monetary value. Grave robbers would take valuables, not carry around a corpse. It becomes even more perplexing when you consider the graveclothes of Jesus were left folded in the tomb. Why would a grave-robbler unwrap a corpse, take the time to fold the graveclothes, then carry the corpse out of the tomb?

The assumption that a non-follower of Jesus took the body is not one shared in early history. In Matthew 28:11-15 we see the account of chief priests paying the guards to tell the story of how the disciples took the body during the night. In addition, Justin Martyr, writing in his dialogues with Trypho (mid-2nd century) refers to how the Jews sent emissaries “*throughout all the world to proclaim that... his disciples stole him by night from the tomb... and now deceiving men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven.*”

It seems the Jewish leaders didn't even entertain the possibility of some random third-party taking the body, since they knew only the followers of Jesus would have any kind of motive to take it.

Evaluating this theory against the data:

1. Jesus died via crucifixion

- The theory accepts the death of Jesus

2. Jesus was buried in a tomb

- He was put in a tomb

3. Jesus' tomb was found empty

- The tomb was found empty because the body was taken by an unknown third party

4. Paul and James, who were not initially believers in Jesus, had a change of heart and became believers

- This theory suffers from the same problem as the other fraud theory. It does not explain the conversions of Paul and James

5. Jesus' disciples genuinely believed they had encountered him after his death and died proclaiming their belief in Jesus in the face of intense persecution

- Again, this theory does not explain the radical transformation of the disciples. A missing body is not sufficient to transform a group of defeated followers into people willing to suffer and die to preach about how Jesus rose from the dead

4: Hallucination Theory

This is the most popular theory among critical scholars today. This theory attempts to explain how the disciples came to believe they encountered the risen Jesus.

Jack Kent (in "The Psychological Origins of the Resurrection Myth") argues that the apostles experienced "normal, grief-related hallucinations". Paul, on the other hand, experienced "conversion disorder" over his inward conflict and turbulence over participating in the death of Stephen and his persecution of Christians.

A major problem with this theory is that it requires group (shared/collective) hallucinations. There are no confirmed instances of genuine group hallucinations in the history of psychological studies.

All the studies done on hallucinations "*have revealed no clear data indicating that group hallucinations have ever actually occurred or at least have been observed.*"

(Habermas). In addition, neuroscientists Andre Aleman and Frank Laroi say that "*hallucinations are private events*".

The fact that such a phenomena has never been observed doesn't in itself prove that group hallucinations cannot possibly occur, but it certainly makes a group hallucination extremely implausible.

To make things worse, the data we have shows that we're not talking about just one group hallucination, but multiple (Jesus appearing to groups of people on more than one occasion). Just one group hallucination makes this theory implausible, but having multiple group hallucinations makes this theory borderline impossible.

Things get even more difficult for this theory, because as demonstrated by Aleman and Laroi in their hallucination studies, hallucinations that involve multiple senses (sight, hearing, touch) are extraordinarily rare. Yet, the instances of “hallucination” we have in the case of the followers of Jesus involved multiple senses every time (they saw Jesus, heard him, touched him, and Jesus even ate with them). So, even in any instances of individual hallucination, rather than group, it seems extremely implausible that a hallucination explains what they experienced.

Further, hallucinations don’t dramatically alter people’s lives. “*Studies have argued that even with persons who hallucinate, it is quite frequently (or even usually) the case that they abandon or disavow such experiences once they realise that they ‘saw’ things that did not happen or when others present around them state that they did not see the same thing.*” (S.J. Segal, “Imagery and Reality”)

“Conversion disorder” also does not adequately explain what happened to Paul. For example, we have no evidence that Paul (or James) experienced any inner conflict or guilt about their rejection of Jesus. In the case of Paul, he considered his persecution of Christians zealous and faultless (see Philippians 3:6).

In addition, “conversion disorder” does not last very long and people who experience it heal quickly – usually within a few days, or a month at most (Kaplan, Sadock, Grebb, “Synopsis of Psychiatry”), so it does not explain a complete life transformation.

Evaluating this theory against the data:

1. Jesus died via crucifixion

- The theory accepts Jesus died

2. Jesus was buried in a tomb

- Jesus was buried

3. Jesus’ tomb was found empty

- The theory completely fails to explain what happened to the body of Jesus. If the apostles merely hallucinated, the body would still be in the tomb

4. Paul and James, who were not initially believers in Jesus, had a change of heart and became believers

- The theory attempts to explain this data point, appealing to “conversion disorder”, so this is covered in the theory’s explanatory scope. But the psychological phenomenon does not adequately explain the complete life transformation of Paul or James

5. Jesus’ disciples genuinely believed they had encountered him after his death and died proclaiming their belief in Jesus in the face of intense persecution

- Again, the theory does at least make an attempt to explain the data here. However, it does not adequately explain the life transformation of the

apostles. Hallucination studies show that they don't alter lives in this way and it's simple to talk people out of their hallucination-driven beliefs, but the apostles never recanted their beliefs.

5: Other theories

There are a handful of other theories thrown around, but these aren't usually taken seriously in scholarship (and are only really popular with lay sceptics).

For example, there's the "Legend Theory" which argues that the story of Jesus rising from the dead is based on older tales of dying and rising gods. But even Robert Price – a highly sceptical scholar who doubts Jesus even existed at all – rejects this theory and regards it as "untenable". The theory rests on extremely questionable "similarities" between stories of old gods in mythology (such as the Egyptian gods) and the story of Jesus.

There are variations of the hallucination theory: "Illumination Theory" argues that the origin of the disciple's belief that Jesus rose from the dead was not through a hallucination (e.g. by "seeing" Jesus again after his death) but rather through some kind of internal revelation which convinced them he had risen. *"In this sense, Peter is thought to have had an insight that snatched victory from the apparent embarrassment and ignominy of crucifixion by somehow interpreting Jesus' death event as the true victory"* (Habermas).

"Illusion Theory", another variation of the hallucination hypothesis, argues that the disciples misinterpreted some external stimuli for the resurrected Jesus. So, like the hallucination hypothesis, this argues the disciples saw something which triggered their new faith. However, it is something real they saw, not a hallucination (they simply misperceived what they saw). Atheist philosopher Michael Martin suggests the possibility they saw someone who looked a lot like Jesus.

None of these alternate theories adequately account for all the available data.

Summary

We can see there is no naturalistic hypothesis which adequately accounts for everything we know about the rise of early Christianity. As Gary Habermas says: “*At a minimum, [the data] point to exceptionally important occurrences that can be neither dismissed nor ignored easily. One such indication of this tendency is that **only a minority of scholars actually hold that naturalistic hypotheses can account comfortably for the data.***” [Emphasis mine]

Stephen Davies (philosopher) says that critics “*are unable to come up with a coherent and plausible story that accounts for the evidence at hand*”.

So even the sceptics accept naturalistic hypotheses are insufficient, with many preferring to say, effectively, “we don’t know and may never know for certain”. Therefore, if one wants to deny the resurrection of Jesus, one must either stay in agnosticism about what happened after the death of Jesus, or one must combine naturalistic hypotheses together to create a hybrid theory that accounts for all the relevant data (which results in an extraordinarily implausible and ad-hoc theory).

A common hybrid theory is the combination of the hallucination theory (to explain the transformations of the apostles and Paul) with a stolen body theory (to explain the empty tomb), specifically stolen by an unknown third party rather than a disciple.

The most powerful and least ad-hoc explanation for what happened is the resurrection of Jesus. It more than adequately explains all the available data and does so powerfully and simply. It is also the simplest explanation available, requiring the least number of assumptions to make it work (especially when compared to the combined hallucination-stolen body naturalistic theory).

My Own Experience

Bart Ehrman once said that no matter how implausible the naturalistic theories may be, any of them is more plausible than the resurrection of Jesus.

In one of the Sherlock Holmes stories, Sherlock says “*when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.*” This is important to understand because it shows why these naturalistic theories are still preferred.

If a resurrection is literally *impossible*, then by definition it cannot be the most reasonable explanation of the available data. Therefore, no matter how improbable the naturalistic theories may be, they are by definition more probable because at least they are theoretically possible.

This was the big challenge for me when I was still an atheist and examining the evidence for the resurrection. Below are some excerpts from a detailed testimony I wrote in early 2017, roughly a year after I became a Christian (I wrote everything down so I wouldn’t forget!)

1: During the Christian Union events week, I learned (during a music history lecture on the Thursday of that week) about how data can be interpreted in different ways, leading to different “stories” based on that data. From my testimony:

I had in my mind this idea of how things went down and was always looking at data from that perspective, but it came to my attention that when we approach the data differently, suddenly an entirely different story is told. Indeed, this different perspective even makes more sense of the data than the old view I had. How can such drastically different stories be told based around the same data? Surely evidence just speaks for itself? It turns out this most certainly is not the case as the evidence must always be interpreted in some way. I cannot tell you how hard this revelation hit me and it really opened my eyes to the possibility of alternate perspectives on things. I remember asking myself the question “*What else am I wrong about?*” and thought of the Christian Union events week and how I was wrong to assume that Christians don’t think about any of these issues they have been addressing this week... Suddenly, I found myself asking the question “*is it true? Could it be possible that Christianity is actually true?*”

This was a significant factor in both my ability and willingness to look at things from more perspectives – ones I may not have considered before (got to love God’s timing during this week and how everything came together like this!) which ultimately led me to consider the resurrection seriously.

2: The next day, Friday evening, the Christian Union had their final event during which they talked about the resurrection of Jesus. This was the first time I heard a real, evidence-based argument for the resurrection. From my testimony:

As the speaker was going over all the evidence and making his arguments, I was processing it all and thinking “*wait a minute... this can't be right*”. I realised immediately that if the evidence he presented is genuine, then he is absolutely right to infer the resurrection of Jesus as the best explanation of this evidence – the resurrection explanation more than comfortably has the explanatory power to adequately explain all the evidence and easily has the explanatory scope to account for all the evidence. Although the speaker went over some of the attempts to explain the evidence within naturalism and talked about their flaws, he didn't even have to; the flaws in such “explanations” were clear to see.

After the event, I concluded:

However, it was not going to be that easy to convince me that this is all true. I needed to seriously research this evidence for myself and work out what is going on. I figured that perhaps not all the evidence he presented is quite as strong as he made out after all, or he's leaving out some other evidence which would damage the resurrection explanation.

This led me on my own massive research project.

3: I learned that the data presented really is strong and that even sceptical scholars accept it:

To my shock, the evidence presented in the talk is genuine after all; there are some basic facts which are widely, indeed almost universally, held by scholars regardless of whether they are atheist or Christian – I myself during the research was actually more interested in the atheist perspective of this data, in regards to whether or not it is genuine, as I thought Christians could say anything, but if even atheists are conceding this evidence then I cannot pass it off as “believer bias”.

I further learned that there are no adequate naturalistic explanations:

What shocked me even more than the revelation that these facts are widely accepted is that no one has a reasonable explanation for this evidence; it is fascinating that people find themselves resorting to explanations like “Jesus had a secret twin brother” or “Aliens took the body”, which are extraordinarily ad hoc

explanations. Most people seem to try combining multiple hypotheses together in an attempt to explain the evidence, for example: Jesus' body was removed from the tomb somehow and his followers also had hallucinations of him which led to their belief that he rose from the dead and this is why no one was able to point to his body in the tomb.

And:

I was not impressed with the extraordinary demonstration of poor thinking on the part of these atheist and agnostic scholars. Nevertheless, I was still not prepared to accept the resurrection of Jesus as the explanation. I was not prepared to accept that Christianity is true.

So I embarked on a mission to figure this out. I pondered over the evidence we have and considered all the ways that one could make sense of it, but I wasn't getting anywhere. I repeatedly asked myself "*What am I missing here?*" – "*There is something I am missing*"

4: I examine the available evidence carefully:

I could come up with vaguely plausible hypotheses which incorporate most of the evidence, but it was impossible to come up with one which was able to incorporate all of the evidence we have and adequately explain it all. The piece of evidence which drove me insane the most was the conversion of Paul and James. I can honestly understand why so many people dismiss or ignore this evidence as it is extremely inconvenient to the development of any plausible and adequate naturalistic hypothesis. Hallucination is simply an inadequate, and implausible, explanation of Paul's conversion.

And:

We cannot isolate a single piece of evidence and work out a naturalistic explanation for it independently of all the other pieces of evidence. It would be extremely easy to find plausible naturalistic hypotheses if we did that. For example:

-The tomb was empty? Simple – the disciples stole the body. That is the more plausible hypothesis here, rather than Jesus rose from the dead. But in order to assert this one must ignore all the other pieces of evidence.

-People claimed to see Jesus after his death? Simple – they hallucinated. This is certainly more plausible than the resurrection idea, but it ignores the rest of the evidence (not least of all the empty tomb).

It is clear that we have strong evidence here for the proposition that Jesus rose from the dead and we must deal with it and not just ignore it or deny it.

5: Eventually, everything clicked together. I finally was able to challenge my perspective and see things differently:

At some point during my research, everything just clicked together and it finally hit me and I simply said “*This actually is true*”. It all comes down to perspectives again – I was trying to force a conclusion of the data we have which was consistent with my worldview, rather than making any attempts to adjust the perspective from which I was looking at the data.

Despite how powerfully the resurrection of Jesus explains all the evidence, being by far the best explanation in regards to its explanatory power, explanatory scope, and simplicity (as per the Occam’s razor principle), I was unable to accept it simply because I ruled it out *a priori*. The evidence is not what led me to rule out the resurrection, but rather it was my worldview which ruled it out. But when I look at it from another perspective, suddenly everything becomes clear. Everything makes sense. To use an analogy, it’s like I was on the shore of a beach looking at an assembly of rocks and trying to make sense of their arrangement, only to end up standing atop a nearby mountain overlooking the beach and seeing a clear message laid out by the arrangement of those rocks which I could not see when I was on the shore. If you are not looking at something from the correct perspective, then you are either going to draw an incorrect conclusion or you’ll find yourself either having to ignore or dismiss what it is you are seeing because it doesn’t make sense, or seems to mean nothing, from your perspective.