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## Can We Believe the Resurrection Story?

Pastor Bryan Clark and Mark Mathewson, PhD

Luke records the story this way:

**But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” And they remembered His words, and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.** (Luke 24:1-9, \*NASB)

All of Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Disprove the resurrection and we have nothing left but wishful thinking. And that raises the question: How do we know the resurrection is true?

Bill Maher appeared on MSNBC's *Scarborough Country* about four weeks ago and said he believes the story of the resurrection is nothing but a fairy tale, and he thinks those who believe it have a neurological disorder. Listen to what he says:

“We are a nation that is unenlightened because of religion. I do believe that. I think religion stops people from thinking. I think religion is a neurological disorder. If you look at it logically, it's something that was drilled into your head when you were a small child. It certainly was drilled into mine at that age. And you really can't be responsible when you are a kid for what adults put into your head. But when you become an adult, you can have it drilled back out. And you should.”

Scarborough responds by saying, “So you are saying that the millions and millions of Americans who go to church every week...” Maher replies, “...have a neurological disorder, yes.”

Maher goes on to quote Jesse Ventura that “religion is a crutch for the weak-minded people who need strength in numbers.” He states, “I am just embarrassed that it [*America*] has been taken over by people like evangelicals, by people who do not believe in science and rationality. It is the twenty-first century.” He goes on to say, “When you were a kid and they were telling you whatever you believe in religion, do you think if they had switched the fairy tales that they read you in bed with the Bible you would know the difference? Do you think if it was a fairy tale about a man who lived inside a whale and it was religion that Jack built a beanstalk, you would know the difference? Why do you believe in one fairy tale and not the other? Just because adults told you it was true and they tried to scare you into believing it?”

He tells Scarborough that if he had been born in Pakistan...”you wouldn't be believing in Jesus Christ. You would have been told another fairy tale when you were a child and you would have believed *that*.”

- from *Scarborough Country*, MSNBC, Feb. 15, 2005

Well, I understand that Bill Maher may be a bit extreme, but I also think it is common in our culture today to believe that evangelical Christians are unenlightened, illogical, irrational, unreasonable, unscientific, simple-minded people in need of a crutch to make it through life. But is this true?

I have invited Mark Mathewson to join me in talking about some of these questions related to the resurrection. Mark has a PhD in philosophy and has taught philosophy classes at the University of Nebraska, Creighton University, and Nebraska Wesleyan.

**Bryan:** Mark, is it true that there is a conflict between faith and thinking? In other words, can you be an intellectual person and believe the resurrection of Jesus? Have there been people historically, or even in our contemporary culture, that would be considered to be intellectually gifted that still believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

**Mark:** Bryan, there is no conflict, as I see it, between religious faith—the Christian faith—and thinking. In fact, it's just the opposite: I see a conflict between *not* thinking and belief. Belief in and of itself, or faith in and of itself, is worthless. Faith is only as valuable as the object that one puts their faith into. So I think we better have good reasons for placing our faith in one thing rather than another. I think a faith that is without thinking, without reason, without evidence, is simply naïve. And the Christian faith demands that our faith and trust in Jesus and the resurrection is something that is based upon evidence and reason. I know of no instance in the Scriptures where we are called to just believe blindly. It is always on the basis of our knowledge of who God is and how He acts.

So, yes, a Christian can be intellectual. They don't have to abandon reason and intelligence in order to accept the Christian message of Jesus and the resurrection. In fact, many people (and I would include myself in this group) actually believe the Easter story because we have thought through the evidence. We have reasoned through the evidence. I know Jesus lives because the evidence compels me to believe.

To answer the last part of that question, there are numerous cases of people of unquestioned intelligence who have believed the Easter story. Just a few for example: In the 1840s at Harvard School there was a lawyer, Simon Greenleaf, and he was the one who actually put Harvard Law School on the map, or one of several. He had written a 3-volume treatise on evidence in a court of law, and in fact I'm told today that some people still consider that one of the finest works written. Simon Greenleaf wasn't a Christian, and in fact he often liked to ridicule Christian students in his classes, until a group of students at one point challenged him to test the Gospel accounts against his research to see if they would stand up in a court of law. Greenleaf took up the challenge, and through his investigations he became a believer. He became an ardent defender of the resurrection of Jesus.

Another instance in the 1920s was a person named Frank Morrison, who was a legal scholar as well as a journalist. He wanted to do the world a favor, to set out to prove once and for all that the resurrection wasn't true. In the midst of his investigation of the evidence and in the midst of his study, he became a believer. In fact, you can read the book which came out of his search, *Who Moved the Stone?*

In our current day, in my profession of philosophy, some of the world's leading philosophers actually believe in the resurrection story. If you ask anybody in the field of philosophy who Alvin Plantinga is, they will tell you he is a world-renowned philosopher at Notre Dame. He is a believer. He believes the resurrection story. Maybe some of you are familiar with the name of Dallas Willard, I believe one of Christianity's keenest thinkers, who is a professor of philosophy at USC—again, a believer in the resurrection. And we can look throughout history and see great minds: Johann Sebastian Bach, the great composer; Copernicus; C. S. Lewis...the list goes on—people of tremendous intellectual ability who believed the Easter story.

One side note that might give interest in this discussion: This fall it became known that one of the world's leading atheists, Antony Flew, a British philosopher who taught at Oxford and other places,

came out and said that he now believes there was some intelligent being who created the universe. And it was also revealed that, through his investigations in considering Christianity and through a debate he had many years ago with Gary Habermas of Liberty University, he said, “I think of all the miracle stories in all of the religions, the resurrection is the one that is best attested.” So yes, a Christian can hold onto their intellect and believe.

**Bryan:** Here at LBC we have some of the sharpest thinkers in their fields in education, business, science, medicine and athletics—which clearly affirms the truth of what you are saying.

Do we have credible evidence that the New Testament documents are historically accurate and reliable? In other words, does the evidence suggest that the resurrection of Jesus is a fabrication or a fairy tale, as Maher suggests, or that it is indeed a factual event in history?

**Mark:** Yes, we have very good evidence that the New Testament accounts and the resurrection accounts in the Gospels are accurate and reliable. In fact, let’s think through some of the evidence a little bit—actually, just a small part of the evidence. Let’s take first the idea that it was a fabrication or just made up. That’s not really a credible position to take in light of the evidence. First of all, think about this: There was absolutely no motive for making up the story. No one was going to get popular or become rich for making up the resurrection story. In fact, just the opposite was the case. Moreover, the people who propagated this message in that environment in first century Jerusalem and in the outlying areas actually would put their lives in danger for telling this story. After all, if Jesus, their leader, was put to death for those beliefs, then to go around proclaiming that this one now was risen and everything that He said is true would put their own lives on the line. No sane person would make up a story like that. But yet, we have this account.

The second thing to consider is that the characters of the authors of the Gospels were not those of liars or deceivers. These were people who had the ability to tell the truth. And so I think that honesty demands that we give them the benefit of the doubt unless there’s some heavy evidence that they were being deceitful, and their characters don’t show that.

But this might be the most important to think about: Had those early disciples simply made up this story, the story would not be around today. Why not? Because they went around proclaiming this resurrection message not far, far away, but right where the events were alleged to have happened. Right in Jerusalem they started telling this story and during the time when many witnesses (even hostile witnesses) were still alive. At any point, as they were going around preaching this alleged fabrication, anyone could have said, “No, you’re wrong,” and Christianity would have been squashed, just like that. So the story would not have even lasted. But we have the story today, meaning those people in that time who were there to see and witness the events couldn’t refute what the disciples were saying.

One other thing with regards to the fabrication theory is that Gospel accounts themselves, and particularly of the resurrection, bear the marks of authenticity. In other words, they are things that, as you look at the actual text itself, couldn’t really be made up, or no reasonable person would think they were made up. Let me give you just two examples (and we even have alluded to it several times already): The women were the first ones at the tomb that morning, the first witnesses, and in fact a woman was the first one to see the risen Lord. Now, we might not think that very odd in our day, but in that culture, somebody reading that text would have been kind of startled, because women were not considered credible witnesses in that culture. They were not even allowed to testify in a court of law.

Now, think through this with me for a moment. If you are making up this story, would you have as a principle witness to these events someone that the culture would consider untrustworthy? That is highly unlikely. The more reasonable explanation is that the Gospel authors included the women in there because they had no choice. That's what happened; and if they were going to tell the story, they were going to tell the truth.

A second thing to notice is that the writers portray the disciples (themselves) as cowards. Remember, the disciples were actually the writers behind the telling of the story, so this is how they portrayed themselves—as cowards, people with little faith who didn't quite understand what Jesus was saying. Now again, imagine that you are making up a story and you're going to be in it. Are you going to make yourself look like a coward? Are you going to make yourself look like you're not too bright—that you don't quite understand what Jesus is saying? Are you going to make it look like you're just kind of out to lunch? Think of all the faking and posturing that goes on in the political writings of our day when people write their own accounts. They make themselves look as good as possible. Well, these Gospel accounts don't make the disciples look very good. They don't portray themselves as wise and brave individuals. Again, why would they do that? Why would they portray themselves as cowards? The best explanation is because it happened that way. They were not making things up. So there is just no way that it could be a fabrication.

So what about the fairy tale stuff? Maher states that this is a legend or fairy tale. Again, I think there are several problems with that. For one thing, these Gospel accounts read like historical accounts. If you haven't already done so, I would encourage you to read through the resurrection accounts and notice that these read like history. And notice the times where historical people and events are mentioned.

Fairy tales and legends are not anchored in historical events typically, but we see that with the Gospel accounts. They name people and places and events that one can verify historically, and the original readers could verify those things. So again, these accounts read like history; they're rooted in historical events. And in fact, it is interesting to note one of the earliest creeds of the Christian church, the Apostles' Creed, has this interesting little phrase in there that is talking of Jesus: He "suffered under Pontius Pilate." Now think, if we are making up a creed, why throw in Pontius Pilate? What was the point of that? I believe the early Christians wanted to root these events in history so that people would know these things really happened. This wasn't just an event far, far away in some land, but this was an historical event that could be checked out. These accounts read like history and there's a stark realism as you read them. Fairy tales and legends all have these bizarre things, these fanciful, imaginary details. But when you read the Gospel accounts, specifically the Gospel of Mark (which we are presently studying at LBC), there is no legendary development there. It's just a realistic account of what actually happened.

One last point about legends and myths is that they take a long time to develop and get rooted in a culture. This was not the case with the resurrection story. We have written and oral accounts of the resurrection that show up just a few short years after the events of that first Easter. Let me give you two examples. Again, in the Gospel of Mark, it's clear that Mark's Passion narrative—the death and resurrection of Jesus—looks like it is taken from a very early oral or written source. The reason we say this is because, as you read through Mark, you notice that when talking about the High Priest Caiaphas, his name is never mentioned. You might say, "Well, so what?" The reason his name isn't mentioned is probably because that story comes from the time period that he was in office, so there would be no need to actually mention his name. You would just say "the High Priest" and everybody would know who you were talking about. We know Caiaphas was in office from 18-37 A.D. We are

talking three to five years after the events that we already have an established account and story of the resurrection. That is much too soon for it to be a legend or a myth.

The second example is in 1 Corinthians 15:3. Let me read part of what Paul writes:

**For I delivered to you as the first importance what I also received; that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.** (vs. 3-5)

What Paul is doing here is passing on an early creed, or Christian formula, to restate these important events. He says, “Look, I received this, and now I’m passing it on to you.” Now when would Paul have received this? I believe it’s quite clear (and I think the reference to Cephas, or Peter, is important here) that Paul received this Christian formula, or creed, at the Counsel of Jerusalem when he met with Peter and James. That was somewhere in 36-38 A.D., again only three to five years after the event of that first Easter. And for this formula to come to be so well established, it must have been in existence for some time before that. Again, that’s just not long enough for a legend or fairy tale to develop.

So for those who actually want to (unlike Maher) bother with the evidence, they’re going to find that the resurrection accounts are authentic historical records. The event was not something that was made up, and it’s not a fairy tale.

**Bryan:** Mark, I find several of those arguments very compelling. I think the one to me that seems most convincing is just the fact that the Gospel accounts were written while the contemporaries of Jesus were still alive. It would be similar to me trying to convince this group of people that Ronald Reagan was assassinated while in the White House. What is the chance of me convincing this group of people? The answer would be zero. The distance between now and Ronald Reagan is about the same distance as when Jesus was crucified until these Gospel accounts were out there. There were many people that could have stepped forward and said that just wasn’t true. And if it couldn’t be discredited then, it’s ridiculous for people two thousand years later to suddenly discredit the accounts.

**Mark:** May I say one more thing about that? If we are to keep reading in Paul’s account (and this gets to the point you were just making) in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says in verse 6:

**After that, He [*Jesus*] appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now.**

I think Paul put that in just to make the point you made—to say, “Hey, if you don’t believe me, you go ask them. You check it out for yourselves.”

**Bryan:** Yes, that’s very compelling. So we would say that the overwhelming weight of the evidence supports the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as historical fact. Let’s talk about this issue of science and faith. One common belief today is that faith is in conflict with science. Are faith and science in conflict? Is it necessary in this age of science to dismiss supernatural events such as the resurrection of Jesus?

**Mark:** Predictably, my answer is no, we don’t have to choose one or the other. And as far as the resurrection goes, I see no conflict between living in the twenty-first century in a “scientific age” and believing in the resurrection. Let me begin by saying, first of all, that we need to keep in mind that science is limited and often very limited in helping us know and understand some things. Now, I

realize that claim might ruffle some feathers, but despite the edicts of those who very arrogantly think that science and the scientific method are the final determiners or arbiters of truth, that is simply not the case. Science does not have a monopoly on truth and knowledge. There are many things that we know to be true that science can't explain, and I'll name a couple. Consciousness, I believe, is one; morality, I believe, is another. In fact, the very existence of the physical universe I would claim is another. I think there are things that science just can't explain, and that's the nature of any discipline. No one discipline has the monopoly on the truth. And likewise, I think science doesn't have the final say as far as what is true or not in regards to our understanding of God and how God works in the world.

I think the second thing we should keep constantly in mind is that by its very nature, science is a descriptive discipline and not a prescriptive one. In other words, all science can do is describe the way that our world works. What it *can't* do is prescribe what must take place. That's the nature of the discipline. And so to tell us that the resurrection just absolutely couldn't happen is really out of the purview of science. In fact, I would actually be interested in knowing just what particular laws of physics that we absolutely know rule out the resurrection. To my knowledge, that has never been proven.

I want us to think for a moment: What is it exactly that we now know in the twenty-first century that first century people didn't know, that makes us somehow think it is irrational for us to believe in the resurrection? After all, they knew that dead people didn't come back to life. The disciples didn't believe until they actually saw the risen Lord. You had a group of religious people known as the Sadducees who didn't believe in resurrections; they knew that dead men stayed dead. They knew that virgins didn't give birth. Ask Jesus' father, Joseph. So again, just what is it that we think we know now, that they didn't know then, that makes it irrational for us to believe? As I see it, because science doesn't have the monopoly on the truth and because there's nothing that I see that contradicts resurrection and science, I think we can believe in the scientific age that God can come and act in the world that He has created and bring someone back to life.

**Bryan:** Okay, let's talk about this whole resurrection thing and turn the tables a little bit. I want to come at it from a different direction and ask the question: Is there a credible explanation to dismiss the historical fact of the resurrection?

**Mark:** I personally have spent quite a bit of time studying various explanations of the resurrection. This just was an interest of mine, even in high school. And so any chance I get, I try to find different explanations of the resurrection. In fact, it might be odd, but I kind of have this hobby of collecting different theories about what happened that first Easter morning. And I can say with confidence that, without question, the only explanation of the resurrection that makes sense of the facts is a supernatural bodily resurrection of Jesus. None of the others accord with what we know to be true. Let me give a couple of examples.

Originally I thought, *Well, I'm not going to mention the fact that there have been some suggestions that Jesus didn't actually die, because that just seems to be ridiculous.* But I was just recently watching TV on a channel where they were discussing these things, and they were taking this seriously, saying that Jesus didn't actually die and somehow He was revived in the tomb. I thought to myself, *You've got to be kidding me!* These people must not understand Roman crucifixion. They must not have understood the agony that people went through. There have been studies by physicians and medical examiners that show beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus was dead when He was taken from the cross. In fact, one journal article has concluded that any hypotheses about what occurred that first Easter which do not acknowledge that Jesus died are directly at odds with modern

medicine. People didn't survive crucifixion, and rarely would they survive the flogging that Jesus would have received. And He got both. There is no doubt that Jesus was dead, so any hypothesis that Jesus somehow was thought to be alive and revived in the tomb is almost laughable.

One of the earliest attempts to explain away the resurrection that we actually read in the Gospel is that the disciples stole the body. Again, on this TV show they had people on who seemed to be taking this quite seriously. But notice the original people who started to spread that rumor—the Jewish religious leaders—knew it was false even before they started to spread it. Besides, think about the disciples. First of all, their characters were not one of liars, or thieves for that matter. Secondly, these people were kind of cowardly. Now, if you can come to believe that cowardly disciples stole a body from a guarded tomb, with the threat of being punished by the government for such a thing, and then went around and proclaimed their risen Lord and died for those “truths”... well, you certainly have a lot more faith than I do. That just doesn't square with the evidence.

There's a variation on that. Some have suggested that either the Roman or the Jewish authorities moved the body for safekeeping, and when people showed up at the tomb that morning, and it was empty, they went and proclaimed a resurrection. But let's think about that for a moment. How much more secure could Jesus' body be? It was in a tomb hewn out of rock with a stone rolled in front of it with a seal placed upon it, with a guard. That would be like moving the gold out of Fort Knox to keep it safe. It just doesn't make any sense.

But let's just say that was the case that the authorities moved the body. All they would have had to do to kill Christianity immediately was to produce the body and say, “Hey, look, we've moved it. Here it is!” The disciples' message would have been squashed immediately and Christianity would have been dead, just like that. So any hypothesis that says Jesus' body was moved by the disciples or by the authorities doesn't square with the facts.

Another popular theory suggests that people showed up at the wrong tomb that Easter morning. The women in the darkness of the morning in their grief-stricken state happened upon the wrong tomb, and then they went away and proclaimed a resurrection. And the excitable disciples came to the wrong tomb, as well. Again, that explanation is almost laughable. These are the same people, no doubt, who prepared Jesus' body for burial and buried him. If you have ever buried a loved one, I don't care how grief-stricken you are, when you go back to the cemetery you don't have much trouble finding the burial site. That just simply doesn't wash. Let's just imagine that was true—that everyone went to the wrong tomb that morning. All the authorities needed to do was point out to them the correct tomb and Christianity would be dead from the get-go.

I want to mention just one last theory. Some have suggested, like John Dominic Crossan (who is a so-called “Jesus Scholar” gallivanting around the region this weekend), that Jesus' body would have been thrown in a common grave with other criminals, probably in some garbage heap somewhere, which was typical in that day. Then several days later when people came back, there was no way to find the body. Animals could have gotten to it...so forth and so on.

But what that does is it completely denies the reliability of the Gospel accounts. We have already said that they are accurate and reliable. And we know from the Gospel accounts that Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body, placed it in his own personal unused tomb, and that Jesus' followers prepared the body for burial. They buried Him, so that doesn't wash with the facts. And we do know that criminals who were crucified sometimes were buried in family plots. There is at least one instance of a discovery in Palestine of a first century person who was crucified and buried in a family tomb, and they found part of the heel with a spike through it.

So if Maher is interested in fairy tales and fabrications, I'd recommend these hypotheses to him. None of them square with the facts. The only one that makes sense is the supernatural resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

**Bryan:** Over the years, as I've read the different theories trying to explain away the resurrection, I find myself thinking, *Man, if that's the best they can do, this has got to be true.* Because the theories are silly; they're so ridiculous.

Let me ask you one more question. When Jesus was on earth, He claimed to be exclusive. What I mean by that is He claimed to be the one and only Savior. He claimed to be the only way to God. If Jesus is truly who He says He is, and if that claim was validated by the historical reality of a resurrection, is it rational to say that Jesus is one of many ways to God?

**Mark:** No. If Jesus did rise from the dead, if the resurrection story is true, then everything He said and claimed about Himself and claimed about God's plan of salvation is true. What did Jesus claim? We've mentioned some things. He claimed and taught that He was the unique Son of God. He claimed that there was one path to life and all the other paths lead to destruction. If you look at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, you see that. He claimed that He was the way, the truth, and the life—that there was no other way to salvation except through Him. Jesus was unequivocal. There are no other ways to salvation.

You can't debate that He claimed those things. But the question is: Is what He said true? How would we know that those claims were true? Jesus consistently pointed to this one event: He pointed to His resurrection as proof of who He was and that what He said was true. In fact, if you'll pardon the Easter pun, Jesus put all of His eggs in this one basket. Jesus said, "Look, if want proof that My claims of who I am—namely, the unique Son of God—and proof that My claims about God's plan of salvation—namely, that salvation only comes through Me—are true, I'll show you. I'm going to rise again from the dead." And you know what? He pulled it off.

Now, if someone can predict that they are going to rise from the dead, they're going to conquer death as proof of the truth of what they've taught, and then they do it, we better take note. We better sit up and listen and take seriously that they're right about that. The result is this: If the resurrection is true, that means eternal life is only gained by placing one's confidence in Jesus alone for their salvation. But it also means that eternal death is given to those who place their confidence in any other person, any other religious system, any other belief system, for their salvation. In fact, the apostle Paul was quite clear about this. He was on Mars Hill in Athens one time debating the resurrection with some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Let me read you just a few lines of what Paul says in conclusion. He says:

**God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.** (Acts 17:30b-31)

So Jesus' resurrection guarantees eternal life for those who place their confidence in Him and eternal death for those who don't. Again, the resurrection is proof of all that.

**Bryan:** Mark, I appreciate your being with us and wrestling through some of these questions. I think the reality is that people dismiss the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not because they're more intellectual, not because they are more reasonable, not because they are more rational, not because they are more scientific, not because they're somehow stronger, but because they are unwilling to

acknowledge their sin and acknowledge their need for a Savior. They reject the resurrection because they are unwilling to surrender their lives to the God who loves them and gave Himself up for them.

The evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of believing the facts of the historical death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if that is true, then the resurrection of Jesus is the most significant and life-transforming event in human history.

I would invite you to consider the facts, to pursue the truth, and then to respond to the truth by placing your trust in Jesus as Savior. That would be the most enlightened, reasonable, rational, scientific response you could have to the message of Easter.

I realize there are some of you who are just not there. You are on a spiritual journey and you are thinking about these things, but you're just not ready to make that commitment. We have a number of options for you to help you on your spiritual journey. The one I would like to highlight is a class we call *Faith Search*, which begins the weekend of April 9/10. It is an opportunity to be in a small group environment with fellow seekers just like yourself, to ask all the questions you want, to wrestle through whatever you want to wrestle through, but to continue to move forward on your spiritual journey. If you'd like to think more about some of the things we have discussed, I would also encourage you to pick up a copy of a book called *The Case for Christ* at the Publications Center.

But I would remind you, there is an urgency to this. Life is fragile, at best, and we are talking about your eternal soul. So I would encourage you to prayerfully consider the facts, and having considered the truth, to respond to Jesus Christ as your Savior.

*Our Father, we are thankful that when we were lost in our sins, God became flesh and died on the cross for the sins of the world. He was buried and He rose again and today offers salvation to anyone who is willing to embrace the truth and to place their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. Lord, we are thankful that You are a God like no other. In Jesus name we pray this, Amen.*

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## **Study Questions**

### **Can We Believe the Resurrection Story?**

Pastor Bryan Clark

**This week we are considering the truth of the claim that Christianity is an illogical, unscientific, irrational and unenlightened crutch for the weak and simple-minded. As a group, discuss your reactions and responses to the following questions.**

1. Is there a conflict between thinking and faith? In other words, can a person be intellectual and still be a person who believes in Jesus and the Resurrection?

Are there examples of people throughout history who were both intellectually gifted *and* believed in the story of Jesus?

2. Do we have credible evidence that the New Testament documents are historically accurate and reliable?

Does the evidence suggest that the resurrection of Jesus is a fabrication, a fairy tale as Maher suggests, or that it is indeed a factual event in history?

Given the evidence, which position is more intellectually honest?

3. In this age of science, is it necessary to dismiss supernatural events such as the resurrection of Jesus? Are faith and science in conflict?

4. Is there a credible way to explain away the resurrection of Christ? What are the alternatives?

5. Jesus was exclusive in His teaching—meaning He identified Himself as the only way of salvation. If Jesus was truly who He said He was and rose from the dead to validate His claim, is it a valid option to say Jesus is one of *many* ways to God?

Why or why not? Which response is more intellectually honest?