

Mark Twain, who wrote the *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, once had to refute rumors that he had died while travelling abroad. He reportedly replied by saying, “The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.” Skeptics today might say that “The reports of Jesus’ resurrection have been greatly exaggerated.”

Before we can answer the skeptics, we have to ask “Was Jesus really dead?” The Muslim faith does not teach that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross. They claim that Jesus was a prophet of Allah who died a natural death. Someone else died in Jesus’ place on the cross. The God of Islam is not the God of the Christian faith. Muhammad was born in 570 A.D., long after the death and resurrection of Jesus. He is not a reliable witness.

Some of the “Gnostic Gospels” claim that Jesus didn’t die on the cross either. The Gnostic Gospels were written 200 years or more after Jesus’ life and are an attempt to blend the Christian faith with the Greek worldview. They teach that Jesus was a knowledge giver, not the Savior who died on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. They claim that a substitute took Jesus’ place on the cross. They are not a reliable witness either.

The Gospels give us Eye Witness accounts of Jesus’ death. John, one of Jesus’ closest Disciples, was at the cross when Jesus died wrote, “Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. When Jesus had tasted it, he said, “It is finished!” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:28-30 NLT) No one walked away from a Roman cross. John tells us that the soldiers who were ordered to break the legs of the criminals to speed up their death, didn’t break Jesus’ legs. He was already dead. They ran a spear into His side that proved He had died. John is a reliable witness.

Jesus’ body was taken down from the cross and placed in a new tomb that belonged to Joseph from Arimathea. The fact that the tomb was new is important because multiple bodies could be put into a tomb. The new tomb means there can be no confusion about whose body was inside. The women say where Jesus was buried. A large stone was rolled in front of the tomb. The tomb was sealed and guards were posted to keep grave robbers out.

The Gospels tell us that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna and Salome went to the tomb at sunrise on Sunday morning to finish embalming the body of Jesus. They came expecting death instead of life. They either didn’t remember or believe Jesus when He said that he would suffer, die and rise on the third day. Friday when Jesus died, Saturday when His body was in the tomb make Sunday when Jesus rose the third day.

The women found the stone had been rolled away. There was an earthquake. Jesus rose from the dead and was seen by the guards. They were the first to see the resurrected Jesus. Some of them reported what had happened to the Jewish authorities who bribed them to say that the Disciples had stolen Jesus' body. Even though they lied, they knew the truth.

When the women looked inside, an angel said to them, **“Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day.”** (Luke 24:6-7 NLT) The women ran back to tell the Disciples. On the way Jesus appeared to them and sent them to tell the Disciples. The Disciples didn't believe the women. Peter and John ran back to see for themselves.

Jesus is not dead! He is alive! That night Jesus appeared to 10 of His Disciples who were hiding behind locked doors because they were afraid of what the Jewish authorities might do to them. They were filled with joy when they saw Jesus. Thomas wasn't there. So one week later Jesus appeared again to His Disciples, this time with Thomas present. Jesus showed Thomas the nail marks on His wrists and the spear mark in His side and Thomas believed.

There is a lot of historical support for the empty tomb and resurrection. Jesus' enemies never disputed the fact that the tomb was empty. They bribed the soldiers to lie about what had happened. No one back then would have made up a story claiming the women were the first to see Jesus after the resurrection. Josephus, a first century Jewish Historian, reported that the tomb was empty and the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. The Disciples' lives were changed by the resurrection. Instead of hiding in fear, they put their lives on the line to spread the good news about the resurrection. Tradition tells us that ten of them died as martyrs for the faith. They died for the truth, not a lie. John died in exile because of his faith.

Jesus' resurrection changes everything. This is not a feel good story about good conquering evil. It is not an story about spring renewal of life. It is the good news that sin and death have been defeated. Sin is our rebellion and selfishness that leads to death and cuts off from God, from all that is good. Jesus paid the price for the sin on the cross. Paul tells us, **“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”** (Eph. 2:8-9 NLT)

The resurrection is not only proof that sins have been paid for. It is also the promise that we too will be raised from the dead and be given a new life in Christ. The Apostle Paul, **“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. . . . But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.”** (1 Corinthians 15:16, 17, 20 NLT) Death is not our end either.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that there were two groups that reported on the resurrection, a group of soldiers and a group of women. The soldiers delivered their report to the chief priests and it hit a dead end. The women took their message to the disciples and it continues to spread throughout the world. People whose lives have been changed by Christ, people who see Jesus through the eyes of faith still report that Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed!