

Cold-Case Investigator Tries to Disprove Christ's Resurrection, Gets Shocked by the Evidence

PAUL STRAND

GREENSBORO, N.C.— When atheists find evidence of Jesus' Resurrection and become believers, you know there must be more than just faith that it happened. Two of the most famous former atheists came to a Truth for a New Generation conference outside of this North Carolina city to talk about how they ended up strong defenders of the fact Christ really did rise from the dead.

As a successful cold-case detective, J. Warner Wallace became so well known at solving decades-old murders, he ended up as the foremost expert on national TV true crime shows.

But as an atheist, he decided to turn his superior detective skills on disproving the Resurrection of Jesus Christ...or even proving it if the evidence should somehow take him there.

He remembered telling himself, "I'm going to have to figure out how to evaluate that for its truthfulness given this skill set that I had as a cold case detective."

CBN News talked to him at this crowded conference where hundreds of people gathered to hear Wallace and others tell their stories and learn how their faith in Christ rests on solid evidence.

Tackling Theories Against the Resurrection

For years some doubters clung to one theory that Jesus didn't actually die on the cross but was just nearly dead and revived later.

Wallace points out when you work with dead bodies all the time like he has and people in Christ's time did, you can definitely tell "dead" from "nearly dead."

"As a homicide detective, I'm thinking 'I've seen a lot of dead people, and I know what dead people look like,'" he said, and then talked about something called "the mortise triad."

"That hot blood's going to stop circulating, you're going to cool down. That's called algor mortis," he stated. "You'll be cool to the touch. And we can actually judge time of death based on how cool."

Jesus Really Was Dead

This author of [Cold-Case Christianity](#) moved on, saying, "This is something I've seen my entire career: there's the thing called rigor mortis. It's the second of the mortise triad. And you'll see that kind of stiffness. You won't be as flexible as you would be if you were just unconscious."

And Warner finds in the Gospel of John a key point of proof that Jesus wasn't faking it and that He really did die: a line about blood and water coming out of Jesus' body on the cross when a Roman soldier pierced him with a spear.

"Water will collect in your lungs," he explained. "Now if that happens, if you pierce that cavity, you will see a separation of blood and water."

It struck Wallace powerfully that John wrote of this, saying, "He was either so clever that he included some little-known biological fact that nobody would discover for 1800 years or he just reported what he saw. And as a result, we have a good piece of hidden science that confirms that Jesus actually died of cardiac arrest and was dead at the point of the body being taken off the cross."

As a young atheist, Josh McDowell set off to write [Evidence That Demands a Verdict](#) to show the evidence about Christ, including His Resurrection, was so weak, the verdict would be "Not True."

"The Resurrection was one of several things I knew I had to refute as a non-believer," McDowell recalled.

How Could He Move? Or Roll Away the Stone?

But instead of refuting, he became so convinced it happened, he spends dozens of pages in [Evidence That Demands a Verdict](#) knocking down false theories, like the one suggesting Christ didn't really die but woke up and escaped from the tomb.

"There were a hundred and some pounds of encasement of aromatic spices and gumming of cement consistency around His body, wrapped tightly in three separate linen cloths weighing about 117 pounds," McDowell told CBN News.

He continued, "Christ was encased in that, and it becomes hardened. Second, how would He be able to move in such a state like that a one-and-a-half to two-ton stone away from the entrance?"

Did the Disciples Steal the Body?

As for the theory His disciples stole the body, the Jewish leaders opposed to Jesus were so worried about that exact thing happening, they talked the Romans into putting a massive guard group — as many as 16 soldiers — outside the tomb.

McDowell scoffed, "The impossibility of that! That they could have climbed through there, tiptoed around all the guards and become invisible to the guards in front of the tomb, rolled a one-and-a-half to two-ton stone that in that day that they said 20 men couldn't move it."

Wallace can't accept this was all just a conspiracy because detectives know those often fall apart when there are too many conspirators and the people involved face real threats if they don't recant.

He pointed out, "And we don't have a single, ancient record of any of the disciples ever recanting when that was often the goal of the people who were persecuting Christians."

Wallace pointed out courts don't expect the law to prove absolutely no possible doubt. Only no reasonable doubt.

"So is it possible that they conspired for 60 years, at 500 plus people, under immense pressure with not enough family relationships to hold it together?" Wallace asked. "Yeah, it's possible. It's just not reasonable."

Jesus Appeared to All Sorts of People

Debunkers say Jesus in the biblical accounts only showed up to his closest followers, those most likely to lie about His Resurrection. But McDowell said the opposite is true.

"He appeared to the Apostle Paul, Saul of Tarsus, who was anything but a follower of Christ. He despised Christ as a false Messiah," McDowell said.

He also pointed out Jesus appeared to James, saying, "You take James, His brother. James was not a follower of Jesus Christ. He was embarrassed by Christ, his brother, going out and doing these things and claiming these things. But James ended up coming to Christ and became a leader of the Jerusalem church."

No Two People – Much Less 500 – Have the Same Hallucination

The Bible talks about Christ after His Resurrection showing up before 500 people. Some debunkers say that was likely just a mass hallucination. Neither Wallace or McDowell buy that.

McDowell interviewed five experts and learned, "No two people ever have the same hallucination because there's no external reference to it. It's all internal."

Wallace added, "There's just no history of kind of group hallucinations with the kind of detail that we see in the gospels. So I was never fond of that explanation."

Worshipping Jesus

McDowell stated, "In my research to refute Christianity, I became convinced the Church would never have been founded without the Resurrection. Everything that they did pointed back to that."

One huge thing they did: break the Sabbath and worship Jesus as they did it. Remember: all the early believers were fervent Jews who had believed they faced dire danger if they broke the Sabbath.

Alex McFarland – who organized this Truth for a New Generation conference – points out how that changed right after Jesus' Resurrection.

"Pious Jews whose very relationship with God is contingent on keeping a Sabbath that they've observed for centuries, suddenly overnight begin to worship on Sunday. Why? Something must have happened. Well, Sunday was Resurrection day."

"Now you have to understand what it meant to the Jew if they ever broke the Sabbath," McDowell explained. "It could mean death."

The Resurrection Proves It All

But the Resurrection on a Sunday had been the proof positive that Jesus was indeed the Risen Lord, worthy of worship on that day of the week.

"If Christ physically rose from the grave, then that proves His identity, message, and credentials," McFarland pointed out. "What was His identity? God Incarnate. What was His message? Salvation by faith in what He did on the cross. His credentials? Virgin-born, sinless life, rose from the dead, i.e.: He is the Savior."

McDowell told CBN News the meaning of it all is so powerful and overwhelming, it still touches him deeply more than half a century after he first came to believe Jesus was indeed the Resurrected Son of God, able to conquer death.

"It gives me hope that as Christ was raised from the dead, I shall be, too. Because of that," he stated.

McFarland added, "In the empty tomb, we have it all, ironclad, guaranteed. I tell people the tomb was left empty so that your life could be made full."

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