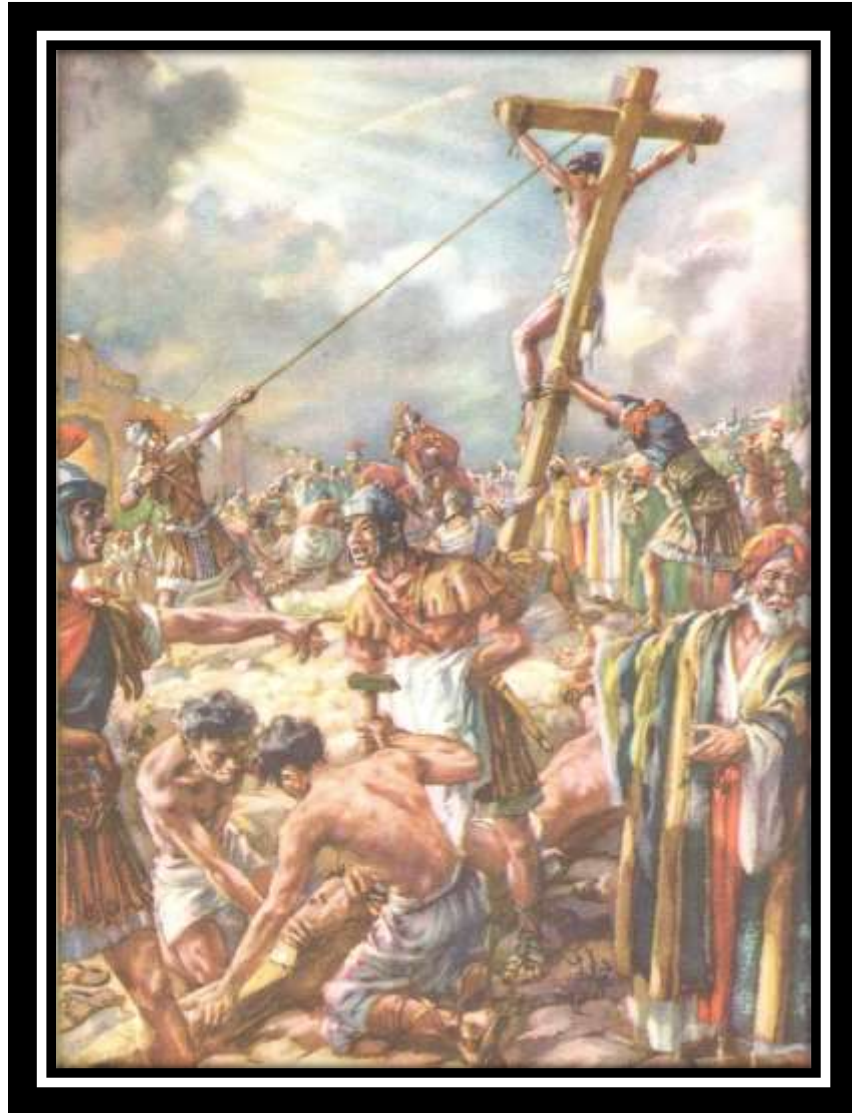


FAITH IN WHAT—WEEK 4

CONNECTING THE DOTS



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Faith in What, Week 4 — Connecting the Dots

In this final chapter of Faith in What, we walk through the things that were specific to Jesus's crucifixion: the blood and water that flowed when He was speared; the necessity of crucifixion; the proof that it was Jesus on the cross, that he was healthy later, and that He appeared to specific people.

The dots all connect. We know He rose.

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1 John 19:33–34, 38 (NKJV)

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. ...

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus.

It makes sense for blood to come out, but why would there be water?

In *The Crucifixion of Jesus: a Forensic Inquiry*, Zugibe explains that the “water” is actually pleural effusion from the pleura sac surrounding one of Jesus’s lungs. His followers couldn’t have known this unless they witnessed it.

However, a skeptic might say that the emission of blood and water could have been common knowledge because popping the corpse in the side with a spear was normal.

But there’s no historical evidence to support that. Besides, it doesn’t fit with what we know about the Roman practice of crucifixion.

Rome wasn’t in a hurry to get people down off the cross. Remember, the purpose of crucifixion was deterrence. Why not just leave them up there for a while? An empty cross doesn’t have the visual impact of one with a person on it, even a lifeless one.

Thus, leaving them up increases the deterrent effect, especially after a few days. Like Martha said to Jesus about her brother Lazarus after he’d been dead for a few days (John 11:39, King James translation):

He stinketh.

As hard as it is to unsee someone being crucified, imagine trying to forget the smell.

And any Roman soldier given the task of removing a corpse from a cross wouldn’t want to turn it into a wet slimy one by poking holes in it.

This shows that Jesus’s friends were eyewitnesses to His crucifixion, which refutes the theory that, due to mistaken identity, the Romans crucified somebody else.

*Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, “**Woman, behold your son!**” Then He said to the disciple, “**Behold your mother!**” And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. — John 19:25–27 (NKJV)*

John knew it was Jesus. *His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene* all knew it was Him. *Joseph of Arimathea* wanted the body because he knew it was Him.

2 John 18:12–14, 28–32 (NKJV)

Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. ...

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. Pilate then went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this Man?”

They answered and said to him, “If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.”

Then Pilate said to them, “You take Him and judge Him according to your law.”

Therefore the Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,” that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.

Despite their claim that it wasn't *lawful for us to put anyone to death*, they obviously had no problem with stoning people to death. We already saw this in Josephus's report of the stoning of James the brother of Jesus in Antiquities XX 9:1 (200) and in the report of the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:59–60.

In truth, they didn't just want Jesus to die; they wanted Him crucified. They wanted the whole movement suppressed. Ironically, by getting Him crucified they helped establish the veracity of that movement.

One last case of stoning is important—that of Paul in Lystra.

Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. — Acts 14:19-20 (NKJV)

Notice that when *he rose up* after being stoned, it's not a resurrection. The *multitudes* had made the mistake of *supposing him to be dead*. Paul recovered from being stoned.

If Jesus had been stoned instead of crucified, the swoon theory would make perfect sense.

We've knocked down the swoon theory, but only in general terms. We ignored all the different “flavors.” Zugibe patiently goes through, in detail, a great number of specific theories for how Jesus could have survived crucifixion and thus never actually rose from the dead. These theories typically involve wild conspiracies and medical phenomena just as impressive as bringing the dead back to life.

To learn more about the forensics of crucifixion and see all the detailed refutations of the various swoon theories, see Zugibe's book.

3 1 Corinthians 15:3–7 (NKJV)

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

Bart D. Ehrman, in multiple books, including the best seller *The Triumph of Christianity: How a Forbidden Religion Swept the World*, contends that only seven of Paul's epistles are genuine. Those seven are: Romans, 1st Corinthians, 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1st Thessalonians, and Philemon. On page 300, he calls those epistles, "The seven undisputed letters."

There's no need to argue against Ehrman's thesis. Today's passage is undisputed. It was written by Paul.

That's important because he names names, which is essential to disproving one possibility that seems quite reasonable—that no one actually saw Him. In other words, the rumor was that He rose, but no one could name the people He appeared to. I call this "The Emperor's New Clothes Theory," as it mirrors what everyone was thinking at the end of that story.

This passage nails down two specific people, both known to Paul, who saw Jesus. They relayed their firsthand experience to Paul, and he mentioned it in his first letter to the Corinthians. Thus, we have a counterexample that refutes the Emperor's New Clothes Theory.

This establishes that some of the people who lived and died in poverty and torture without recanting actually saw, firsthand, the resurrected Christ.

That proves that He was healthy enough to give them, as D. F. Strauss said, *the impression that he was a conqueror over death and the grave*.

We need to be clear here about what this does and does not prove. It only proves that they were sincere.

Throughout history, believers in many things have been willing to die for their causes. Their willingness to die doesn't prove they were right, only that they were sincere. It's not evidence at all that their cause was right or just. Many people have given their lives in the belief that they were doing something good. Sometimes their cause was good. Sometimes they were tragically misguided.

So it is with the early Christians. Their willingness to die for what they believe only proves that they were sincere. But what were they sincere about?

That Jesus was the Lord, and that belief rested on the resurrection. They sincerely believed that He rose from the dead. Still, this by itself doesn't prove that they were right.

That's what the crucifixion forensics analysis was for.

4 John 20:24–28 (NKJV)

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.”

So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Notice that Thomas says that he *will not believe* unless he sees *in His hands the print of the nails* and puts his finger *into* them and puts his hands *into His side*. Then he doesn't even touch anything. What's up with that?

Thomas not actually touching Jesus is a perfect portrait of the emotional power of seeing the resurrected Lord. Remember, Jesus wasn't present when Thomas announced his doubts and made his rather extreme request.

So, when Jesus told Thomas to touch His wounds, it showed that He knew what Thomas had said. That spoke to the fact that Jesus isn't just anyone; He is Lord.

And Jesus telling Thomas to, *“reach your hand here, and put it into My side,”* showed that He wasn't a spirit or a ghost. He was physically there. That triggered a seismic shift in Thomas's attitude, and he blurted out in ecstasy, *“My Lord and my God!”*

The presence of the risen Lord was what Thomas really needed.

Today's passage gives us a feel for how the emotions of those eyewitnesses turned on a dime. When Jesus died, the disciples' hopes and dreams collapsed. They were at a low point. Thomas's severe doubts mirrored everyone's depression.

Then Jesus showed up.

But suppose Jesus had been, so to speak, “lying on a gurney with tubes sticking out of Him.” Thomas's reaction would have been completely different. That's D. F. Strauss's point.

A barely resuscitated Christ wouldn't have inspired anyone to move mountains.

5 1 John 1:1–4 (NKJV)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

This passage beautifully summarizes John’s motivation in writing. Mine too.

I didn’t start researching this topic in order to write a DEEP series. I did it for myself. I wanted a bulletproof baseline faith in the resurrection.

Specifically, I hadn’t seen anything that addressed the view I call “The Emperor’s New Clothes Theory.” That seemed credible. I had to hammer that nail flat or be bothered by it forever.

For the curious, I unconditionally recommend *Evidence for Christianity* by Josh McDowell, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Forensic Inquiry* by Frederick Zugibe, and *Crucifixion* by Martin Hengel.

The books by Bart Ehrman are not for everyone, especially anyone put off by their titles. That said, studying alternative points of view can be invaluable. Ehrman’s analysis was essential to some of the conclusions presented in this series. Thus, his books aren’t for Christians who are merely curious, but for advanced students who’ve already read the three mentioned above.

We’ve come to the end of the “Faith in What?” series. Christianity is the certainty that Jesus is Lord, combined with a genuine pledge of fealty to Him.

We can know that He is Lord because we can know that He rose from the dead.

We’ve shown that it must have been Jesus on the cross. We’ve shown that He suffered catastrophic injuries from which no one could recover. We’ve refuted the claim that Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, because he wasn’t dead to begin with. We established that He appeared to many Christians (specifically including Peter and James) afterwards. History books record that Christians went on to live lives of testimony to what they witnessed. Many of them (particularly James) were martyred for that testimony.

Note that we ignored the claim that the whole thing is fiction—that Jesus wasn’t even a real person. No serious student believes that anymore. Josh McDowell’s book is a good reference on this.

So, the dots all connect. Jesus really lived. It was really Him on the cross. He was really dead. Some real, specific people thought they saw the risen Christ. They were sincere. They were not mistaken. He rose.

He is Lord. And always remember to confess that He’s “my Lord,” not just, “the Lord.” Case in point:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRaFdFkOVyY>

