

MEDIA: [ZOMBIE JESUS](#)

John Dickson (Studio)

That's a news clip from 2015, from WCPO-9, 'bringing you the latest trusted news and information for the greater Cincinnati Tri-State area'

Zombie Jesus made people mad—and I must admit it is a little creepy.

But that was Christmas. What about Easter?

Easter is all about the dead coming back to life. It is just begging for a 'zombie' reference. We don't have a news story from the trusted WCPO-9 Cincinnati, but a quick search of the internet finds all sorts of Easter Zombie references.

"Zombie Jesus: he died for our sins. He's back for our brains."

I'm so sorry to read that – blame Producer Kaley for that one. But it's an actual meme - and it'll be doing the rounds this Easter. Kaley's put it in the show notes. Fair warning - it's gross.).

But there's a real criticism here.

The central event of the Christian faith is as ridiculous as zombies. To believe it, you have to have had your brain removed. That's the vibe.

One way around the problem is to say the resurrection of Jesus was always just intended as a metaphor. No one actually walked out of the grave. The whole thing is mythopoetic. It speaks of the 'resurrection in our hearts' when we encounter the teaching and spirit of Jesus. That was a very 19th-century Enlightenment approach. Few today think that's what the ancient texts ever meant to say - though you do get the occasional Anglican bishop who goes down that path, someone like John Shelby Spong, a longtime episcopal bishop in the US and a best-selling author.

But most people who study this question conclude that the first Christians really did think someone walked out of the grave. They may have been deluded, but that's what they reckoned. One statement from the apostle Paul in the mid-50s AD puts it starkly: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile."

This is high stakes.

If the resurrection isn't true, Christianity is arguably the greatest hoax in human history.

Easter highlights the risky, even vulnerable, position of the world's 2 billion-ish Christians. The overtly historical claims of Christianity put believers in a precarious position.

Reports of the public execution of a famous teacher and healer, followed by an alleged resurrection, are just asking for a raised eyebrow. The logic is simple: if you say that something spectacular took place on the stage of human history—somewhere in the Middle East, not in Middle Earth—thoughtful people are going to ask you historical questions.

It is as if Christianity happily places its neck on the chopping block of public scrutiny and invites anyone who wishes to come and take a swing.

And after centuries of 'swinging' at the Christian Faith, there it still stands, insisting that there is a bedrock of historical evidence that something unparalleled did happen that first Easter Day.

Personally, I don't think history can demonstrate the resurrection happened. It's only history after all - it's limited in what it can and can't demonstrate. But historical research from believers and sceptics—and everything in between—has led to a very wide consensus among specialists that something remarkable happened shortly after the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

The great Cambridge scholar CFD Moule spoke for many when he wrote that early Christianity “rips a great hole in history, a hole the size and shape of Resurrection.” And he wryly asked the broader guild of historians, “What does the secular scholar propose to stop that hole with?”

In other words, something strange and unprecedented certainly happened, and it’s quite the puzzle working out what exactly it was!

I’m John Dickson and this is Undeceptions

INTRODUCTION

This season of Undeceptions is sponsored by Zondervan Academic. Get discounts on MasterLectures video courses and exclusive samples of their books at zondervanacademic.com/undeceptions.

Each episode we explore some aspect of life, faith, history, philosophy, science, culture, or ethics that’s either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten. With the help of people who know what they’re talking about, we’re trying to ‘undeceive ourselves’, and let the truth ‘out’.

MEDIA - [Dying and Rising Gods with Richard Carrier](#)

John Dickson (Studio)

That’s part of a talk given by the atheist activist Richard Carrier back in 2018. Carrier does have a PhD in ancient history—specifically ancient critiques of Christianity. But he’s chosen not to work in a university but establish a kind of ‘apologetics ministry’--if that’s not a weird thing to say in this context--on behalf of atheism. He’s really very popular in online sceptic circles.

His point here is that Christianity wasn't the first to claim a dying and rising saviour god. It's not a new viewpoint.

It started back in 1890 with a book by James Frazer titled *The Golden Bough*, which was an attempt to find connections between all sorts of ancient myths across the world. One of the great myths, he thought, was the 'corn king'-- life, death, and rebirth as a mythical representation of the cycles of planting and then harvesting in Spring. CS Lewis acknowledged he accepted Frazer's account of Christianity--as just another myth--before he became a Christian.

It's been a popular idea.

So, I asked my esteemed guest today, what he thought ...

John Dickson: What weight should we give, just thinking historically to the alleged other stories of dying and rising gods as the immediate background for this story of a dying, rising god?

Richard Bauckham: I think that, and of course, um, appealing to those, uh, kinds of pagan stories, um, has become very popular among those people who think that Jesus didn't even exist, um, and there are, of course, a lot of other good arguments to be had on that front,

John Dickson (studio)

That, my friends, is Richard Bauckham, one of the most highly rated biblical scholars and historians in the world today. I met him at his home in Cambridge, on a whirlwind trip a few weeks ago. I'd been in Oxford that morning interviewing N.T. Wright (for our next episode actually!) and scooted over to Cambridge to meet Bauckham in the afternoon.

John Dickson (with Richard Bauckham in his home)

"Hello, thank you for having me.

Have you just come from Oxford?

I have! Chicago last night, heathrow straight to Oxford, here now and back to Heathrow. Athens tomorrow morning!..”

John Dickson (studio)

Please excuse the crass ‘place dropping’ there ... I was jetlagged!!

Professor Bauckham is one of the rare breeds of a trained historian and biblical scholar. He was for many years Professor of New Testament at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. He retired early to concentrate on research and writing, and moved to Cambridge where he is senior scholar at Ridley Hall, Cambridge.

Perhaps Prof Bauckham’s most influential volume is *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, where he argued pretty persuasively that behind the NT Gospels lies genuine eyewitness testimony.

We’ll get into that a little later.

TAPE

Richard Bauckham: Probably the best argument against, uh, seeing dying and rising gods as the background to those stories is simply that the, the, the milieu of the stories is thoroughly Jewish.

Um, I think, I think there's no doubt about that. Um, and when the early Christians talked about the resurrection of Jesus, they meant the kind of resurrection that Jews were expecting in any case at the end of history. Um, a resurrection of the, uh, human person. bodily and spiritual, um, by God, um, and, and that's what they identified as having happened in Jesus case.

Um, so the very concept of resurrection that they used to interpret what they witnessed, um, came from Judaism and not from pagan religions.

John Dickson (studio)

There were different strands of Judaism in the first century, as we explored in our Jewish Jesus episode last season - there were Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and more. They all had slightly different ideas about the end of time.

Richard Bauckham: Yes. Well, I think the, probably most Jews did believe in resurrection. I think the Sadducees are singled out because they were an exception to the general view. Um, and of course the - wealthy priestly families in Jerusalem. They were not really terribly important in terms of general Jewish belief. Whereas what the Pharisees believed, uh, other people took notice of and followed. You know, they didn't follow what the Sadducees thought. Um, so the, certainly the Pharisees believed in resurrection and they were probably very influential among Jews in general, and we have plenty of other literature, uh, attesting that.

Um, so what did they believe? They believed that at the end of history, when God brings everything to its conclusion, the day of judgment happens, uh, all the rights and wrongs of history are sorted out, uh, and people are taken into, the righteous are taken into, uh, an eternal, uh, life of bliss, paradise or life, uh, with God and the wicked are condemned in some way. Um, so they expected the general resurrection of all humans at the end of history. Um, and they expected it, I think, well, partly because it was already there in the Jewish scriptures. The book of Daniel, in particular, has a clear indication of resurrection.

READING

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to the everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”
Book of Daniel, chapter 12.

Richard Bauckham: Um, it may, it meant that, I mean, the Jewish, um, the Jewish framework of belief, you know, right back from the scriptures, through the, through the scriptures, through the intertestamental period, the whole sort of framework of Jewish belief, um, Was, was highly moral. In other words, uh, God was expected to ensure that justice was done in the world Um, that the good, as it were, get the reward of their goodness and the wicked pay for, for, for, for ignoring, uh, God's requirements. Um, this doesn't happen in, in the present life as we observe it. Particularly, it didn't seem to be happening in the period when the Pharisees became important. Uh, when there were lots of Jewish martyrs, for example.

Um, and so I think the belief in resurrection that All these apparent injustices of history would be sorted out in the end, uh, made a lot of sense to, to Jews of that period.

John Dickson: So God has to make all things well.

Richard Bauckham: yes, exactly.

John Dickson: But why resurrection? Why not just going into a nether world where he sorts it all out?

Richard Bauckham: Well, exactly that, that's, that's a good point. And I think, again, this is distinctively Jewish, um, a belief in the unitary nature of the human person that we are, we are not.

We are not purely spiritual beings who happen to be in a body, which was a common Greek view. Um, but that the full humanity as God created us consists in a spiritual element, a soul, a mind, and our bodily and the spiritual and the bodily are interconnected and essential to each

other. Now many Jews did believe, uh, that, um, the soul of the dead survived death and was held, as it were, in waiting, uh, for the resurrection. Uh, but it wasn't regarded as a kind of satisfactory afterlife. Um, it was merely a provisional, uh, waiting period, uh, because true human life is embodied life, so in detail they might have differences about exactly what would the resurrection body be like, would it, would it be just like this or would it be improved and so forth, but in general I think the conviction that, um, true human life is embodied life, uh, accounts for the belief in resurrection.

And it's quite clear, of course, that that is what the early Christians thought about Jesus. Not that he'd simply survived death, um, but that he was raised bodily.

John Dickson: So just as some might say wrongly, as you point out, that the Osiris death and resurrection myth could have influenced the resurrection story but is it, is it not possible that all we have in the Gospels and Paul's letters, um, is a kind of, is a storytelling based on that Jewish belief that resurrection has to happen. So rather than it being a pagan background, it is a Jewish background, but it creates the story itself.

Richard Bauckham: Yes, I think the main answer to that is simply that Jesus resurrection happened all on its own, as it were. It wasn't part of the general resurrection which Jews were expecting at the end of history. Um, and I, I think this is why, uh, probably Pharisees, for example, were not, were not easily inclined to believe in Jesus resurrection, because they weren't expecting a single resurrection, one man, ahead of everybody else.

So the sort of singularity of Jesus resurrection was completely unexpected, I would say. Um, in, in, in Judaism. Um, but the other thing that's worth noticing is that when Paul, of course, writes about resurrection, and he connects Jesus resurrection with our future resurrection, and he, he writes quite theologically about it.

But if you read the stories in the Gospels of the empty tomb, they actually don't have much theology in them. They read like straightforward stories of what happened. Um, and they don't look as though they're influenced

John Dickson: Yeah, so if it was a theological creation put in historical narrative, you'd expect the theology to be at the surface.

Richard Bauckham: Yes, you would. Yes, yes. And they don't look like that. They look like *reports*. Yeah.

John Dickson (Studio)

It's a widespread view amongst scholars today - secular, Jewish, and Christian scholars - that the Gospels would have been read as *biographies* in their own time. We have more than 50 other examples of biographies - of emperors, army generals, and so on.

It's an entirely different literary category from ancient fiction.

Richard Bauckham: I think the Gospels would have been perceived at the time that this is kind of, quite important, I think - How would people have read these at the time? Would they have thought they were a piece of historical fiction? Because there was historical fiction in the ancient world. Would they have taken them seriously as history? And I think they would have seen them as somewhat like the historical biographies that people were familiar with, um, which were always written within memory, within the lifetime of someone who knew the subject of the biography.

Um, so they would expect the gospels, if, if they, if they, um, uh, heard anything about the origins of the gospels, uh, they, they would expect them to, to derive from people who had known Jesus and witnessed the events. Um, and, um. The um, the other point about what people looked for in good history is important.

Um, they did, they did expect good history to be contemporary. It had to be within the lifetime of the events. Because ancient historians didn't

have all the documentary sources that other historians had, they depended to a very large extent on, on, on eyewitness memory. Um, so eyewitness memory, but the other thing that was thought to be very good about history, um, that would mark out good history was accuracy about geography and chronology. And I think on those grounds, John's Gospel in particular scores very highly. Um, we always know where Jesus is in John's Gospel. We always know within a few months of what period of his ministry we are in. Um, John obviously takes pains to, to lay out this careful chronological sequence and to give some precise detail very often about locations.

I mean it, I think most people agree that John's Gospel does show considerable knowledge of pre 70 Jerusalem. And it is important to realize, of course, that Jerusalem was only like that up to the Jewish War in 66.

After 70, a great deal of Jerusalem has vanished, destroyed, rubble. Um, and moreover, not many people went there even to see what was there. Um, so I think John's Gospel and I think people would have supposed that that, uh, that constitutes quite good history.

John Dickson (Studio)

There has been a *lot* of stuff written about the resurrection. Biblical scholar and historian Mike Licona estimates that over 3,400 academic books and articles have been written on the topic over the past thirty-five years.

One of the most important volumes comes from Dale Allison from Princeton Theological Seminary. His 2021 book *The Resurrection of Jesus*, states up front that people who write books on the resurrection often set themselves one of two tasks:

“either they seek to establish with some assurance, or even beyond a reasonable doubt, that God raised Jesus from the dead or they seek to establish, with some assurance, or beyond a reasonable doubt, that God did no such thing.”

Attempting to establish that the resurrection itself is beyond reasonable doubt is part of what we might call 'apologetics'. Long-time listeners know that I'm not a great fan of apologetics - of the word or the industry.

I mean, the root word itself is used by the apostle Peter in his letter to the Christians of Asia Minor. "Always be prepared to give an apologia / an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that they have'. But there's no way Peter was imagining a whole industry of books and courses designed to amass arguments to prove every part of the Christian faith. And there's no way he would approve of the exaggerations that often appear in Christian apologetics.

I prefer to bring good historical, good scientific, good philosophical arguments to bear on Christianity - at least to give people *good reason* to consider the Christian faith for themselves.

It's one of the key aims of Undeceptions to clear away *bad* arguments for and against Christianity, so that listeners can work out if there are any solid reasons to take a second look at Jesus.

Sorry, that's my standard rant. it's our *raison d'etre*.

I asked Professor Bauckham what he thinks of the distinction between *apologetics* and genuine history.

Richard Bauckham: Yes, I, I guess that the temptation for people doing apologetics is to actually, Um, put the strongest conceivable case they can find, whereas I think the historians responsibilities to weigh up the evidence, um, and have a reasonable degree of skepticism and a reasonable degree of acceptance of the evidence, but to try not to have an agenda, I suppose is, is the point.

I mean, it's difficult. for even the historian not to have an agenda. Um, we all have preferences and ways, the ways our minds think and all that sort of thing. But I think the historian's job is to lay out the evidence and draw some conclusions. Um, whereas the apologist, I think perhaps a good apologist does do that, but the temptation for an apologist, uh, is to ignore the negative, uh, criticisms that might be made of the case.

John Dickson: I see another distinction and it's one that you've written about between, um, good general history. as an approach to the New Testament studies and New Testament studies.

In fact, I'm going to quote you back at you if you don't mind. It's from an essay 10 years ago. Um, *Gospels scholars need to learn historical method, not within the claustrophobic confines of the dominant tradition of gospel scholarship, but amid the broad horizons of ordinary historical scholarship.*

What do you mean and what difference does that make?

Richard Bauckham: I do think that within biblical studies generally, um, because it's such a specialized field.

People do tend to simply learn from other biblical scholars how to do history as they think it. And there is a great danger, you know, that the subject can develop its own sort of way of doing history, which would not be recognized by historians in other fields. So I've always thought it has been an advantage for me to have had a very good training, first degree and PhD in history Um, before I got into academic biblical studies.

I think the particular temptation is to be over skeptical of the evidence. And I think this partly comes out of the whole issue of the historical Jesus. Because there was a stage where New Testament scholars were saying, well, we really don't know anything much about the historical Jesus. Um, and people who took that up and tried to build a solid historical basis for the historical Jesus were terribly concerned to be as sceptical as possible so that the evidence they uh, came up with, the conclusions they came up with were as stringent as possible.

But I think that just went too far. Um, and it may be a good idea, as it were, to start with the things that are most generally agreed about Jesus, the ones for which we have most evidence. But not to stop there, but for that to be a basis from which to, um, draw a broader picture of, of Jesus.

John Dickson (studio)

In the examination of the Resurrection, almost all scholars agree on a few basic facts about the fate of Jesus. We'll go beyond the cross and into the grave ... and out again ... after this break.

MEDIA - [Elvis is alive](#)

John Dickson (studio)

That's a clip from an *Inside Edition* report titled 'The strangest theories we've seen people believe in'.

Elvis is alive! And we know because some women told us they'd heard from him after he died.

Sounds kind of familiar.

The claim that Elvis is still alive is, rightly, categorised as a conspiracy theory.

Plenty of people would tell you that the resurrection of Jesus is just another conspiracy theory.

But here's the thing: there are sophisticated, academic reasons for taking the resurrection narrative seriously as history. As Dale Allison (whom mentioned earlier) writes, the resurrection is "the prize puzzle of New Testament research."

Few experts today dismiss the resurrection out of hand - like they would the claim that Elvis is alive.

Why is that?

Part of the reason is the extremely early date of the eyewitness claims about the resurrection. We know the basic story can't have been a developing legend. It was an instant something.

We know this because of a passing paragraph in a letter of the apostle Paul to the city of Corinth (I was in Corinth last week, by the way - more place dropping, I know).

Here's what Paul wrote:

John Dickson reading Greek

ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς
καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη
καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς
καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα

TRANSLATION

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve.

John Dickson: Can we talk about, uh, the significance of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 3 to 5, which a lot of scholars say is some kind of pre Pauline creedal statement. That Christ died, that he was buried. That was raised and he appeared. Um, can you explain to listeners what is the big deal about those four lines, historically speaking?

Richard Bauckham: Um, I think the importance of recognizing it as sort of something that Paul took over rather than invented for himself is simply that it takes us further back into history.

Um, and he's most likely to have got it from the Jerusalem church. Um, because after his own encounter with Christ, he He himself visited Jerusalem and met, uh, some of the leaders of the Jerusalem church. Um, so it, it, it takes us back even earlier than, than, than Paul's letter. Um, I think that's important.

John Dickson: To the mid thirties then, if, if it's a reference to that two weeks he spent.

Richard Bauckham: two weeks he spent? Indeed, yes, and, uh, people forget that Paul's conversion, if we can call it that, um, His becoming a follower of Christ, um, happened actually not so long after the Resurrection. Um, uh, so he's a very, he himself is a very early witness really to, to what was happening at that time. Um, my view of that, um, sort of creed or statement. One can almost call it a creed. You know, it's a formulaic statement of belief. Um, is that Paul has probably exerted it from a longer sort of creed. Um, which probably started with Jesus baptism and said something about his ministry. Because if you look at the sermons that the apostles preach in the book of Acts, Um, they all have, they, many of them take the form of a, a little summary of the story of Jesus.

And they habitually start with the baptism of John, with John's ministry of baptism, as indeed Mark's gospel does as well. And they say something about, Jesus went about doing good and performing miracles, and then he was crucified, and then he rose again, and then he was seen by witnesses.

Um, so I think Paul has probably exerted, from a longer, but always a summary, um, the bit that was relevant to his argument in that letter, which was about the reality of resurrection. Um, and, uh, I think, uh, I think that sort of summary of It must, it must have been widely used by early Christian preachers, because what are you going to do if you're

just telling people you know nothing about Jesus, introducing your Christian message? You would want to tell the story of Jesus. Who is Jesus?

John Dickson (studio)

I think maybe Richard is assuming we all know the background to these things ... So, let me be clear about the dramatic historical significance of this little paragraph ...

Paul's letters were written in the middle of the first century, about 20 to 30 years after Jesus. By ancient standards, even that is a relatively small time gap between events and records (I think I've said before that Tacitus, the greatest of ancient Rome's chroniclers, wrote his account of Caesar Tiberias 80 years after the emperor had died). So, 20 years between event and writing is close to as good as it gets.

But here's the thing: those four lines in Paul's letter to the Corinthians are not fresh thoughts of Paul in the 50s AD. They are a mnemonic, a memory device, which Paul says he'd already passed onto them in person several years before, and which he acknowledges he himself had received when he became a disciple.

This was common practice in both Jewish schools and philosophical schools. The Epicureans had a four-line mnemonic that summarised Epicurus' teachings. It was called the 'fourfold medicine' and it goes:

ἄφοβον ὁ θεός,
ἀνύποπτον ὁ θάνατος,
καὶ τὰγαθὸν μὲν εὐκτῆτον,
τὸ δὲ δεινὸν εὐεκκαρτέρητον

TRANSLATION

Unafraid of Deity.
Unconcerned by Death.

The Good well-acquired.
And Trouble well-withstood.”

John Dickson (studio)

The point of these ‘creeds’, you might call them, was to summarise in memorable form a much larger body of material. We know that this four-line Epicurean jingle deliberately summarised over 2000 words of Epicurean philosophy. We have the 2000 word version as well.

My point is ... The four-line statement Paul quotes is the earliest summary of the events of Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, appearances to Peter and the Twelve. And we can roughly date it. Paul became a follower of Christ around 31/32 and made a visit to the eyewitnesses in Jerusalem in AD 33/34. He must have received this little creed somewhere in there, let’s be safe and say the middle of the 30s AD.

This is as close to the events themselves as a historian could hope for.

It establishes beyond reasonable doubt that at least six elements of the narrative of Jesus arose immediately after his death and can’t be part of a developing legend. Already by AD 35 at the latest (1) Jesus’ status as Christ or Messiah, (2) his death for sins, (3) his burial in a tomb, (4) his resurrection after three days, (5) his multiple appearances, and (6) his appointment of Twelve apostles were all sufficiently well known to have become part of a formal mnemonic summary of Christianity which was passed onto converts from Jerusalem to Greece.

Okay, back to Richard Bauckham.

TAPE - Empty Tomb

John Dickson: But can we talk about the burial? Uh, so, so the creedal statement says, Corinthians... That he was buried. And some say he wouldn't have been buried. He would have just, like every other crucifixion victim, tossed into a shallow grave, eaten by dogs or whatever. You probably see it differently.

Richard Bauckham: Yes. Um, we actually have a rather exciting new piece of evidence about this. Um, just very recently, a few years ago of a crucified man was discovered in Cambridgeshire, just about 15 20 miles from here. Um, and it's only the second crucified. person who has been discovered, the other in Jerusalem.

John Dickson (studio)

We actually spoke to the archaeologist in charge of this find. If you want to hear the details check out *The Crucifixion*, episode 93.

Richard Bauckham: So it was quite momentous actual ly, because we know that crucifixions occurred in their thousands all over the Roman Empire, but no one has previously identified any such person. from, from their remains as it, as it were, and there may be various reasons for that. It may be that the two that we have both have a nail stuck in their heel but only one nail and the normal practice after a crucifixion I think would have been to remove the nails.

Could be used again. So it's quite possible that lots of crucified people have not been recognised by the archaeologists because there are no nails, you know, and you'd have to look pretty closely at the ankles to realise. Anyhow, uh, we now have a second crucified man and he, like the one in Jerusalem, was buried, quite properly buried, in a grave, uh, in a grave with other people, uh, in a graveyard, uh, presumably by his family.

The crucified man who was found, his bones were found in an ossuary, a bone box, in a tomb in Jerusalem, was probably also a member of that family whom the family wished to give proper burial to after the crucifixion. Um, so I think that makes it perfectly credible that in Jesus case, um, someone who had one of those rock cut tombs that only quite wealthy people in Jerusalem had, uh, Someone who had one of those tombs, Joseph of Arimathea, um, asked to have the body buried in this new tomb.

Um, and of course we know a lot about those tombs. There are lots of them around Jerusalem. They've been investigated. We, we, we know the burial practice. practices, what they, what they did. Um, and so Jesus would have been laid on a shelf just inside the tomb, preparatory to a year later, his bones being gathered and put in an ossuary to preserve them.

Uh, we, we know that those tombs had, uh, entrances blocked with, with rocks mainly in order to keep the animals out because animals would come and, you know, try and eat. The flesh, and so on. You really didn't want animals getting in there. So, uh, the practice of having a boulder, um, to block the entrance was, was, was commonplace.

Um, so everything that actually the Gospels say in detail about Jesus burial fits perfectly well what we know about that sort of Jewish burial.

John Dickson: So, a burial, yes, um, and, um, the fact that it's mentioned in that creedal statement means it's a very early claim. But the creed doesn't say there was an empty tomb.

And some are very sceptical about the stories of the empty tomb, discovery of the empty tomb, that they're, that they're late accumulations.

What do you feel is historical in the discovery of the empty tomb?

Richard Bauckham: I think, by the way, that probably opinion is moving away from the idea that they're late legends towards an earlier origin for the stories.

Um, uh, so that's not so unusual now to, to think that at least they come from a fairly early period of the early church. And of course, we're only ever talking a couple of decades anyway, but, but fairly early in that period. Um, I think. Um, well, first of all, it's not what anyone would have expected. Um, and of course, the stories tell us, you know, people, people must have taken Jesus.

You know, they can't believe, they can't believe it, basically. You know, when, when the women go to the tomb and they go back to the, the male disciples and they think, oh, it's just a story, you know, women are gullible, they don't really know what's happening. So there's no disposition to believe this on the part of the early Christians.

uh, who found the tomb to be empty. Um, and I think, I think it's reasonable to say that we have multiple testimony to this because, um, the different Gospels have different stories and they, they refer to different characters. You know, um, I mean, Salome, for example, one of the women, is only mentioned in Mark's account.

Joanna, another of the women, is only mentioned in Luke's account.

Magdalene is there in every case. Um, and, of course, when you get beyond the, uh, the, the, the empty tomb to the appearance, and it's the appearances you see that seem to have convinced, um, the apostles in general that the women were telling the truth, but John of course has this story of Peter and the beloved disciple, uh, going themselves to investigate the tomb and finding it empty.

So there are multiple kind of indications of, uh, of what happened that, um, are not easily explained, I think, by a simple, by a simple legend.

READING

Early on Sunday morning,[a] while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Then they went home.

John, Chapter 20

John Dickson: Um, people often raise the fact that it was women who were the first witnesses of the empty tomb, um, strengthens slightly.

The claim because women weren't taken that seriously. Um, so you wouldn't invent women as the best, as the best witnesses. Um, is that more than mere apologetics? You think there's something sort of historically forceful there?

Richard Bauckham: Yes, I think there is something. Um, People sometimes say that women's testimony wasn't very much valued in court, and that There's probably something in that, but I think much more significant actually, is that women were regarded as gullible in matters of religion. Um, one early Christian, I'm sorry, one early critic of Christianity, a man called Celsus, Celsus, um, who's, we have pretty large extracts from his work. Um, and he said, Um, so who were the witnesses to this? One poor fisherman and one hysterical woman.

John Dickson: He wouldn't get well along in this world today. No,

Richard Bauckham: um, but that, that was the, that was a common opinion. And I think it's significant that it was particularly, um, in, in matters of religion that women were thought to be gullible.

I don't know why that was, but it does seem to have been a fact.

John Dickson (studio)

One of the other Gospels (John) tells us that it was one of these women - Mary of Magdala, Mary Magdalene - who was the first to claim to see the risen Jesus with her own eyes. She is one of many individuals we know said they saw Jesus after death.

READING

Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

"Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

"Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message.

John Chapter 20

John Dickson: There seems to be a wide consensus amongst those who have written on the topic of the resurrection, that Jesus first followers, um, experienced sightings of Jesus. We, there might be various ways to say it fought. They saw Jesus. Imagine they saw Jesus. Yes. But there seems to be very wide consensus. Hardly anyone doubts those original people.

Yes. Thought they had encountered Jesus. Yes. Can you just speak historically why? Why there's such a solid consensus around that detail.

Richard Bauckham: Yes. Um, it's partly of course, because we have one such witness who speaks for himself in, in the, in the, in the person of Paul. Um, and, uh, Paul's evidence is rather, rather unique. You know, he, he, he tells us what he himself has experienced and, and how it changed his life and how important it was.

READING

After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am

Galatians, chapter 1

Richard Bauckham: Um, and he's also rather different. Um, the way he describes it, it seems to be a bit different from some of the other stories we have. So, you know, it's kind of distinctive. He's not just following a pattern. Um, and then, of course, Paul gives us a list of other people who'd seen the risen Jesus. Um, quite a long list, um, including at one point he says 500 brothers and sisters at the same time.

Richard Bauckham: Um, which is quite extraordinary. Um, and other groups. So the appearances appear to be to individuals as in Paul's case, but he he also talks about groups like the Apostles, the Twelve, and the Five Hundred. Um, so a range of different kinds of appearances, um, which make it more difficult to explain it all psychologically as some kind of, you know, hysterical phenomenon in which some people influence others and all kinds of things could happen. Um, so I think the range of kinds of Appearance that Paul testifies to and and Paul, I think would have been a quite rigorous questioner of those who claimed to have seen the risen Jesus because you know, he was in the process of taking this on for himself It was extraordinarily important to him.

So I don't think he would have been gullible these reports. Just to go back to the appearance to the 500 brothers and sisters, um, I think it's extremely interesting when Paul says, some of whom are still alive. Now

why does he say that? I mean, actually most of the individuals he refers to, like Peter, uh, were still alive also.

Um, but he says in the case of the 500 that some of them are still alive because he means, ask them. If you doubt it, you know, check it out for yourself, ask them, they're around, and there are lots of them. You don't necessarily have to come to Jerusalem to find one. They're all around you, they're significant people in the Christian communities.

Um, so I think Paul, actually at that point, says, you know, this is evidence anyone can check for themselves. Um, it's not some kind of esoteric knowledge. It's, uh, it's a witness that's open to people to, to, to tap into and make their own judgments about.

Um, I think, and it's also notable, of course, that Paul's list of the resurrection appearances does not mention the women.

So Paul may have been sensitive to this idea that that wasn't the best evidence. Um, Peter and James and so on are better witnesses.

John Dickson (Studio)

People often ask 'why didn't Jesus appear to non-believers?'

He did. It's just that those non-believers did the very logical thing of becoming believers afterwards.

We just heard about Paul's conversion after seeing the risen Jesus. He turned from persecutor of the Christians to the greatest Christian missionary of all time.

The other was Jesus' brother, James.

The Gospels make clear that James disbelieved Jesus right up to the crucifixion. In a brief aside, the Gospel of John laments: "For even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:5). The Gospel of Mark reports this with brutal honesty: "When Jesus' family heard about this,

they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind’” (Mark 3:21).

But James ends up becoming a believer after he has an encounter with the risen Jesus. He goes on to become the leader of the Jerusalem church. And if that sounds dodgy - like ‘of course James would say that Jesus rose from the dead - it came with benefits’, think again. These eyewitnesses didn’t inherit the Vatican or anything. They didn’t get glory. They got ostracisation, plummeting social status, persecution, and - in James’ case - execution. We have a first-century report, from the Jewish writer Josephus, that this same James died for his Christianity in the year 62:

READING

The younger Ananus, who had been appointed to the high priesthood, was rash in his temper and unusually daring. Possessed of such a character, Ananus thought that he had a favourable opportunity because Festus (Roman Governor) was dead and Albinus (new Roman Governor) was still on the way. And so he convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them the one named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Messiah, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the Jewish law and delivered them up to be stoned to death.

Jewish Antiquities, book 20.

John Dickson (Studio)

Here’s the other thing even highly sceptical historians point out: The fact that numerous eyewitnesses lost their lives for their claims at least tells

us they were sincere in those claims. People die for all sorts of true and untrue claims, of course, but no one knowingly dies for what they know to be untrue.

These earliest eyewitness martyrs must have really thought they saw Jesus. “It is impossible to suppose there was any conscious deception” in the resurrection reports. They’re not might words. They’re the words of the father of Jewish scholarship on Jesus, the historian Joseph Klausner.”

Ed Sanders of Duke University recently passed away, but not before leaving an indelible mark on the historical study of ancient Judaism and Christianity. He wasn’t one to defend Christianity. He himself argued the Gospels have plenty of errors and exaggerations, but on the question of the resurrection he wrote in his famous book *The Historical Figure of Jesus*:

“I do not regard deliberate fraud as a worthwhile explanation. Many of the people in these lists (of witnesses) were to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming that they had seen the risen Lord, and several of them would die for their cause.”

So how does Sanders account for this. Well, he does what many scholars do. He says I don’t know. Here’s how he put it:

“That Jesus’ followers, and later Paul, had resurrection experiences is, in my judgment, a fact. What the reality was that gave rise to the experiences I do not know.”

Someone who argued along similar lines was the great Oxford Professor of Jewish Studies, Geza Vermes. Certainly not a Christian, Prof Vermes wrote the book *The Resurrection of Jesus*. His conclusion over 250 pages was straightforward: It looks like there was an empty tomb, and it’s certain people thought they saw the risen Jesus.

I asked Richard Bauckham about this.

John Dickson: Okay. Um, Geza Vamesh, um, in his many books on Jesus, mentioned the resurrection tantalizingly without telling us what he thought.

And then He wrote a book called *The Resurrection*, in which he just, in 250 pages, told us, probably an empty tomb, definitely the disciples thought they saw him, full stop. In some ways it's very frustrating without telling us what it means. Was he just being a responsible historian? Must we stop there? Is that where the full stop must go?

Richard Bauckham: I think it's actually quite interesting that as you quote him, he said, probably indefinitely. I mean, he makes those distinctions. Because are we doing it? We always have to remember that historically, Historical conclusions are probabilistic, you know, I mean some historical conclusions are so very probable that it's madness to doubt them um, but you know Things vary on the scale of probability Um, and so one is always thinking, you know, how probable is this?

It's never It's not usually a cut and dried this or that there's usually degrees of probability involved and I guess that, um, that's what he's trying to do. He's trying to weigh up the evidence, but probably, it's quite a strong statement, I think, um, I quite often say probably when I'm writing history, um, and maybe

John Dickson: Even Dale Allison in his recent book says probably in empty tomb.

Richard Bauckham: Yes, um, and maybe people who aren't used to reading or writing history think probably evinces doubt, you know, whereas actually it's quite a strong statement, probably, um, and, uh, In the nature of the case, one cannot be absolutely certain about a historical conclusion. That's, that's how it is. But, nor can one be

absolutely certain about all kinds of things that we rely on in daily life all the time.

You know, certainty is not the nature of most human knowledge. Most of our human knowledge is probabilistic.

I don't really know what happened in the Rochdale by election yesterday, I just know what the reporters have said on the radio. Uh, they could be lying, they could be misinformed. You know, you never, you never know for certain unless you're there yourself at the time.

John Dickson (studio)

Actually, the Rochdale bi-election was rather a big deal in the 24 hours I was in the UK. Google "What happened in the Rochdale bi-election". That's just for free today!!

After all this talk of the eye witness testimony of the gospels, I had to ask Professor Bauckham about the ending of *Mark's* gospel. The common consensus is that Mark was first to embark on the enormous task of writing about the life and teachings of Jesus.

But Mark's gospel - in its original form - doesn't include the resurrection.

Grab a modern-day bible, and turn to the end of Mark's gospel and you'll see Mark chapter 16, verses 9-20, and an account of Jesus appearing to his disciples after his death. He even gives them a little speech.

But that last section of Mark is a late edition. We don't see it in the earliest manuscripts we have. Historians think that scribes may have been uncomfortable with Mark's inconclusive ending, so they added an appropriate conclusion with what they knew had happened, from the other gospels. It's really, really rare for scribes to take such liberty - and also quite easy for the historian to see what they've done. I don't think the scribe was trying to deceive. He doesn't even hide the fact that he writes in a very different style from Mark. It's clearly an appendix.

Anyway, that means that Mark's gospel actually ends with the three women going to the tomb of Jesus, finding it empty and seeing a messenger from God who tells them that Jesus has risen from the dead.

READING

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.[a]

John Dickson: Why doesn't our first gospel, Mark, have resurrection appearances? I've, I've heard a well known sceptical scholar say, Aha, it's not even there in the first gospel.

Richard Bauckham: Um, the, the, the only start to. To why Mark doesn't, the question is actually why does Mark's gospel end where it does? Which is after the discovery of the empty tomb, but before any resurrection appearances.

I don't know why Mark ended there. I think it's still something of a puzzle.

But I'm absolutely sure that Mark thought there were resurrection appearances because earlier in the gospel he has Jesus predict them. He says Jesus says I will go and I will see you in Galilee. Um, Mark would not have recorded a prophecy of Jesus like that, that didn't happen.

So I think there can be no doubt that whatever the reason why Mark doesn't record them, it's not that he doesn't think they happened. Um, why does he stop there? Um, of course there are lots of theories about, you know, he meant to go on or the ending has been lost. multiple explanations. I do tend to think that Mark must have deliberately stopped there, um, because I find it very difficult to believe that otherwise someone would not have repaired the damage and given us a complete copy rather than this mutilated copy.

So I think Mark, Mark meant to stop there. It may be that Mark was hesitant to record experience which was utterly unique and which perhaps he didn't think he could make convincing by writing a story about it. That's just a guess, um, but maybe that's the reason.

John Dickson (studio)

I actually disagree with Richard on this. I'm not 100% sure that's allowed
....

But for what it's worth I find myself persuaded by Bruce Metzger, the chairman of the editorial committee for the Greek New Testament—these are the people who produce the published Greek text that scholars and translators use.

Anyway, Metzger published a commentary all about the Committee's decisions. And, in a random footnote about the ending of Mark, he writes: "Three possibilities are open: (a) the evangelist (Mark) intended to close his Gospel at this place; or (b) the Gospel was never finished;

or, as seems most probably, (c) the Gospel accidentally lost its last leaf before it was multiplied by transcription.”

That seems more plausible to me, than that Mark ended simply with the women running from the tomb saying nothing. But, of course, I'm not Professor Richard Bauckham - and you should always take what Bauckham says more seriously than what I say.

The excellent point Richard makes is that—whatever the truth of the ending of Mark's Gospel—Mark himself absolutely knew about the appearances after the discover of the empty tomb. There are two earlier references in Mark to Jesus *later* appearing to his disciples in Galilee. In Mark 14:27 the not-yet-crucified Jesus says, “After I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee”. And in Mark 16:7 the strange messenger at the empty tomb tells the women, “go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

This puts it beyond doubt that Mark knew not only of a resurrection, but of stories of the risen Jesus appearing to the disciples in Galilee.

So, contrary to some popular sceptical claims, the Gospel of Mark, the earliest of our biographies of Jesus, *does* report both the resurrection and the appearances.

John Dickson: The other, uh, interesting thing about that book Vimesh wrote, um, is that he, he then has a little appendix that lists, I think, the five naturalistic, Potential naturalistic explanations and basically says they're all rubbish. What do you think is the best naturalistic explanation?

Richard Bauckham: Well, I think the idea that Jesus in some way survived is thoroughly improbable, because this is not the impression of the risen Jesus ... a Jesus who *just about* survived crucifixion, and it would be very difficult to survive crucifixion, but if he just about survived crucifixion, uh, no one, his state would not be such that people could think he had risen to new life. Um, so I think that's extremely improbable.

And eventually, of course, he would have died in that case, and, you know, the whole Christianity would probably have fizzled out if that had happened. So it's extremely improbable. Um, someone stole the body or the women went to the wrong tomb. I suppose those are the other contenders. The women went to the wrong tomb.

Now it's very interesting that Mark clearly sets out his evidence in such a way as to, um, contradict that possibility. Because Mark refers to three of the women disciples who were with Jesus when he died on the cross, the two Marys and Salome, um, and he wants to say, you know, there were people who saw him die, he really died.

And then he tells us that Jesus was buried in Joseph's tomb, and two of those women, the two Marys, saw where he was buried, Mark's words. And then At the empty tomb, it's the three of them again, the two women and Salome. So I think in the first case, Mark is being very careful about citing the witnesses who actually did witness each stage.

So Salome didn't witness the burial, but there she was at the empty tomb.

He's also very clear that they knew which tomb it was and went to it. So I think, uh, Mark is deliberately setting up the evidence like that. You could say he's lying, but Um, it's, uh, I think is, is a reasonable, uh, reason for, for saying that, uh, that was not thought to be, um, a probable explanation.

Someone stole the body. Um, I suppose the The real difficulty with that would be, why did they do it? Um, and the story that Matthew's Gospel reports as something that Jewish opponents of Christianity were saying, that the disciples stole the body,

Of course, it runs into the fact that the disciples were obviously deeply convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead.

I mean, the growth, the origin and growth of the early church is inexplicable unless they really did believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. They wouldn't have believed that if they'd stolen the body. So, it doesn't seem to me that there's an easily available explanation.

John Dickson (Studio)

We'll be back in a moment.

READING

“Perhaps [the critics are right and] the drama is played out now and Jesus is safely dead and buried. Perhaps. It is ironical and entertaining to consider that at least once in the world’s history those words might have been said with complete conviction, and that was on the eve of the Resurrection.”

John Dickson (studio)

That’s a quote from the wonderful Dorothy L. Sayers, one of the ‘patron saints’ of Undeceptions, I’d say.

I love the ‘perhaps’ at the start of that quote. It expresses the hesitation many have towards the resurrection, but also the *possibility*. And as we’ve heard history is more about *possibilities* and *probabilities* than certainties.

The fact is: we do have the kind of historical evidence a resurrection would leave behind, and much more evidence pointing in that direction than we would expect if it were a mistake, legend, or fraud. It looks like

there probably was an empty tomb and it looks even more probably that lots of people thought they saw Jesus alive from the dead.

That's where the history leaves us. It's also where it leads us. How we interpret that evidence depends not on historical considerations but on our background beliefs about God and nature.

If I hold that the 'laws of nature' define the limits of what is possible in the universe—that there's no Law-giver/God behind the laws—then, in principle, a miracle like the resurrection of Jesus can't be viewed as rational—no amount of evidence could be accepted as evidence that it has taken place. We notice that there's a resurrection shaped hole in the historical record, and leave it there, or try to explain it away somehow.

But if I hold that the 'laws of nature' don't define the limits of what is possible (that the laws themselves point to a Law-giver) then, given that such a Law-giver could act through and beyond the natural 'laws', it's rational to believe in a miracle like the resurrection, if there's decent evidence in favour of it.

I've often thought: What if the centre of Christianity wasn't the resurrection, but some other equally unique event with the same quality of evidence but was a natural event!? I suspect every historian would accept it.

For example, if the claim at the heart of Christianity was that Jesus was just the strongest man in the Roman empire, that he survived a formal crucifixion, limbered up, turned over the great stone, beat up by the Roman soldiers, collected his disciples, and then went to Alexandria or something and lived out his days happily ever after ... If we had the same early and widespread evidence for 'Strongman Jesus' that we have for the risen Jesus, no historian would doubt it.

The problem with the resurrection is not really a historical problem - it's a puzzle but it's not a problem. It's not that we don't have the kinds of evidence a resurrection would leave behind - we do have it.

But answering the question definitively: did Jesus rise from the dead? Well, that's above the pay grade of the historian. Or is it? I asked Richard.

John Dickson: What do you make of the view of many, um, including biblical historians, that the resurrection can't be, the resurrection of Jesus can't be a proper topic of study in history? Because in order for us all to play the game of history, we must move forward with naturalistic assumptions.

And we can't even countenance a supernatural event.

Richard Bauckham: I think that, um, In a way that's um, ruling out in advance what your historical study might discover about the past. Um, I, I realize that it's actually a very tricky issue because when we think about the past, we're all inevitably influenced by what we know human life to be like now. Um, but in a way, historians have to get out of that habit because so much was different in different societies and different periods of the past.

We have to learn to, to think that certain things didn't happen the way they happen now. Of course, that isn't a case of, uh, natural law, so to speak, but, but it's, uh, it's a general point about historical inquiry. Um, I think that the, the, the special thing about the resurrection, I think, is not so much that it seems to contradict what we all think happens, um, in terms of the natural sciences, it's more that it's a an event of immense importance if it happened.

I mean, there are lots of historical events. One can just weigh up the evidence. It doesn't really make much difference to one which way you decide, you know. But most people who look at the Resurrection, uh, know that if, if it happened, it's immensely important. It's not something they can just say, oh yes, it happened, and then move on with their life, um, and write the next book about something else, you know.

Um, it's tremendously important. And that's why I think it's difficult for people to Judge it without, as it were, taking into account the consequences that would follow from thinking that it happened. Um, and that's why I think for some people it is simply impossible. Not, I think, because of the natural science issue in the end, um, but much more because, um, They don't, they can't envisage their whole view of the world and their approach to the world and their living of their own life, and so on.

Everything changing in the radical way that would have, it would have to change if one accepted the resurrection as an event. Um, so I think that, that, that idea that everybody who thinks about the resurrection has, as it were, a stake in whether it's true, uh, that makes it a rather special event, I really think that's more influential than the question of miracle or defiance of natural science.

5 MINUTE JESUS

Let's press pause. I've got a 5min Jesus for you.

Years ago, I had great privilege meeting a man named James, a Magistrate of the NSW Court.

He turned up at Church (sat up there in back right) after receiving a serious cancer diagnosis.

Nothing brings clarity about what's important in life like looming shadow death.

At first, just wanted to talk intellectually ...

We talked about the similarity between the legal evidence (his expertise) and historical evidence (my great interest).

Both involve scrutinizing testimony.

James reflected with me on life-changing decisions he'd made (for others) based on testimony.

I'll never forget the day he said to me that he'd been reading the Gospels and he'd come to judge that they had the ring of good testimony, especially the crucifixion and resurrection narratives.

And he told me he thought it showed Jesus rose again.

Now what!!

At that point, it became much more than an intellectual judgment.

Over the next few weeks, James came to trust that Christ's death/resurrection was a pledge that God can breathe life where there is death ... that maybe there was more for him than this one-way encroaching cancer!!

I saw him few days before he passed away.

Seeing him in his morphine stupor I asked to pray

He grabbed my hand and I prayed.

He was back asleep by time of 'Amen' - and 3 days later ... he was more alive than any of us!!

At James' funeral, which his family asked me to lead, was the legal fraternity of Sydney.

Speaker after speaker gave eulogies - there were five or six - and so many were legal experts. They kept talking about how James was known in the courts for his "impeccable judgement".

They gave me my sermon really: I got up and said "Let me tell you about the final impeccable judgment James made.

“Jesus rose again. The Gospels has the ring of good testimony.”

I'm not sure anyone there was interested much in what I had to say, but I'm pretty sure it's what James wanted me to tell them.

You can press play now.

John Dickson: Finally, um, we have a lot of sceptical listeners to Undeceptions, which is, which is wonderful.

Um, What would be your best tip or two to say, maybe some listeners who think any explanation is surely better than the spiritual one, uh, through to the person who just doesn't know what to make of it all? Have you, have you got an Easter tip? This episode will play at Easter time. What's your tip to the more skeptical minded person?

Richard Bauckham: I think one should say that if you're trying to look at the evidence from a historical point of view, um, you should remember that, um, a good historian is steering a course between scepticism and gullibility. So, the good historian doesn't accept things in a way that is gullible, as it were, without without um, thinking seriously about.

But nor does the serious historian dismiss things too easily if there's reasonable evidence. So weighing up the evidence without a bias to either skepticism or gullibility, I would say, is important. To the person who says, I can't accept that, um, Any explanation would be better than that resurrection happened.

I would just ask them to think about why they think that. Why would any explanation, even the most improbable, seem more probable than that God raised Jesus from the dead? And to examine their own presuppositions and their own attitude to life and what difference they think it would make to them if they changed their mind.

I think to be a, a bit, a bit critical about one's own presuppositions and, uh, one's own presuppositions a a and one's own, as it were, predispositions to believe this or that about the world.