

THE CASE FOR CHRIST SERMON SERIES

Excerpt of Sermon 2: Exploring the Evidence for Christ

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[Because of the research-based information in this sermon, many sources are given throughout. These are not intended for you to share during the sermon, but as a reference for your own study or to help answer the questions of those in your congregation.]

Last week we started a four-week series called *The Case for Christ*, and we encouraged all of you to be sure to see *The Case for Christ* movie, which helped inspire these messages. It's a great film that chronicles the spiritual journey of Lee Strobel, the award-winning journalist who went from being an ardent atheist dead set on disproving Christianity to becoming a confident follower of Christ.

You probably know Lee Strobel today as a speaker, pastor, and the best-selling author of many books, including *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Faith*, *The Case for a Creator*, and more. But what you might not know is that a few years ago Strobel had his own TV show called *Faith Under Fire*.

Hosting that program led him into all kinds of interesting spiritual conversations, including – *get this!* – an interview with the publisher of *Playboy* magazine, Hugh Hefner. Strobel interviewed Hefner about his spiritual beliefs and then wrote about the experience in his book *The Case for the Real Jesus* *[note: this book has recently been retitled as In Defense of Jesus]*.

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So here's the story: Strobel sat with Hefner in the living room of Hefner's opulent Los Angeles mansion and asked him very direct questions about his spiritual beliefs. Hefner expressed a minimal belief in God, referring to him as "the beginning of it all" and the "great unknown," but he said he did not believe in the God of Christianity.

Interestingly, when Strobel brought up the resurrection of Jesus, Hefner instantly saw the supreme relevance of it. "If one had any real evidence that, indeed, Jesus did return from the dead, then that is the beginning of a dropping of a series of dominoes that takes us to all kinds of wonderful things," he said. "It assures an afterlife and all kinds of things that we would all hope are true."

But Hefner was a doubter. His rational side couldn't accept it. He said, "I don't think that Jesus is any more the Son of God than we are." And despite the importance of the resurrection, he admitted he had never investigated the historical evidence for it.¹

Well, Hefner was right about one thing: If the resurrection is true, it changes everything. It confirms Jesus' identity as the unique Son of God and opens the door to eternal life for anyone who will truly follow him. On the other hand, if Jesus' resurrection is a legend or a lie, then Jesus is, at best, just another unfortunate crucifixion victim in a long line of failed revolutionaries and false messiahs.

That's why, as you see in *The Case for Christ* movie, Strobel honed in with such a laser focus on the question of whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. He recognized that this issue is, as some have called it, the lynchpin of Christianity. If the evidence for the

¹ See Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 105.

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resurrection stands, then the Christian faith stands; but if the evidence falls, then so does Christianity – which is the outcome Strobel was hoping for.

The apostle Paul, by the way, acknowledged the pivotal nature of Jesus' resurrection in the Bible. He said in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." In fact, he went on to explain that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then we, as Jesus' followers, are hopelessly lost and, as Paul put it in verse 19, "of all people most to be pitied."

So this is a really big deal!

But, as Lee Strobel asked in the movie, and as Hefner later asked Strobel, is there any real evidence that Jesus rose from the dead? That's the question we're going to explore today.

Much of the information we'll talk about today comes from Strobel's hours of research, reading, talking to experts, and searching Scripture. There are incredibly intelligent people who commit their whole lives to studying and understanding these issues. The historical sources are many and the arguments can get complex, so we obviously can't cover everything in our short time together.

But – good news – we can boil down the issue of Jesus' resurrection to three simple questions:

First, was Jesus alive at Point A?

Second, was Jesus dead at Point B?

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And third, was Jesus alive again at Point C?

If the answer to these three questions is *yes*, then Jesus *did* rise from the dead, He *is* the Son of God, and Christianity *is* true! So let's dive into the evidence for these three claims.

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