



**Main Idea:** Christianity stands or falls on one question: did Jesus really rise from the dead?

**Scriptures:** 1 Corinthians 15:16-19

[Leader Note: Play the icebreaker *Pull Across the Line*. Divide the students into two teams and have them stand on opposite sides of the room, separated by a line down the middle. Students line up facing each other. When you say “go,” they attempt to “convert” people to their side by pulling them across the line without crossing it themselves. The game ends when one side has pulled everyone over or when one team forfeits. This can also be done as an upfront game with a few volunteers.]

The game we just played illustrates a really important way to look at life. Imagine a line drawn straight down the middle of humanity. On one side are people who believe Jesus literally rose from the dead. On the other side are people who don't. There's no neutral ground. Every person who has ever lived falls on one side of that line or the other. And for the last 2,000 years, there's been a massive “pull across the line” moment happening in human history.

It all started on the very first Easter morning, when word began spreading through Jerusalem that a man who had been publicly executed – dead, buried, sealed in a tomb – was suddenly alive again. This claim forced everyone to choose a side. Either Jesus really rose from the dead or people had to come up with another explanation. From that moment on, a line was drawn. The disciples and many of Jesus' followers immediately stepped onto the resurrection side, because Jesus had been telling them all along that this was going to happen. He predicted His own death. He predicted His resurrection. And then, it happened.

Everyone else, especially the religious leaders, found themselves on the other side of the line. But they had a huge problem to deal with. An empty tomb. You can debate miracles. You can question motives. You can doubt eyewitnesses. But you still must explain why a heavily guarded tomb that was sealed and protected by Roman soldiers was suddenly empty. Instead of accepting the facts, the religious leaders chose denial. And not just

denial. They came up with a coverup story they hoped people might believe. Here's what Matthew records:

*<sup>12</sup> When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, <sup>13</sup> telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' <sup>14</sup> If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." <sup>15</sup> So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. (Matthew 28:12-15, NIV)*

The explanation was basically this: *"The tomb is empty and Jesus is gone...so it must have been the disciples."* Which is honestly one of the strangest explanations imaginable. Think about it. These were the same disciples who ran away when Jesus was arrested. It was the same disciples who were hiding behind locked doors because they were afraid they'd be next. And we're supposed to believe they suddenly became brave enough to overpower trained Roman guards, roll away a massive stone, steal a body, and then willingly die for a lie they knew they made up? That's the story the religious leaders went with.

And ever since that moment, people have been trying to explain away the resurrection with alternative theories, each one stretching logic a little further than the last. There is the stolen body theory. There's the wrong tomb theory. There's the hallucination theory. And there's the swoon theory. But here's the thing: none of them deal honestly with the evidence. Today, we're considering a simple but massive question: **is Jesus dead...or is He alive?** Because where you land on that question determines which side of the line you're on and it changes everything.

Here are the alternative theories:

1. **The Stolen Body Theory:** *"The enemies of Jesus took His body."* In this way they could secretly help "fulfill" the prophecy Jesus made that they hated so much, right? Wrong. Besides, if Jesus' enemies did take the body, then why did they remain silent when the disciples' started telling everyone about the resurrection of Jesus? All they would have to do is parade Jesus' dead body around town and it would totally destroy the story of Jesus' resurrection.

Or... *"The friends of Jesus took Jesus' body."* Again, picture the scene: untrained fishermen and tax collectors overpower trained Roman killing machines, roll away the stone, steal the body, hide it, then go on to preach lies and die for something they knew wasn't true. I don't think so.

2. **The Wrong Tomb Theory:** *"The women who reported that the tomb was empty went to the wrong tomb."* Oh, you mean they missed the one that was sealed and had soldiers guarding it? Because you know that was such a common thing back then.
3. **The Hallucination Theory:** *"The appearances of Jesus after the resurrection were mass hallucinations."* Exactly, because mass hallucinations of precisely the same thing are common. Right? Wrong. The only time I've seen it happen is on the sci-fi moves with people describing UFOs, but I could be wrong. The point is it doesn't happen. I once heard someone say: *"Over 500 people having the same hallucination would be more of a miracle than the resurrection itself!"*
4. **The Swoon Theory:** *"Jesus never died; He fainted and then regained consciousness in the tomb."* It would take quite the fainting spell to survive a spear thrust through your heart. Even more impressive would be the part where you bust out of your grave clothes, roll a boulder weighing several thousand pounds uphill, overpower the Roman soldiers, then show up at the disciples' door and convince them you came back from the dead so well that nearly all of them were cruelly killed for their faith. Sorry, but I don't have enough faith for that.

Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection being true. If it was fake, then so are we. This is exactly how the Apostle Paul felt as well:

***<sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:16-19, NIV)***

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