

Neighborly Apologetics

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Neighborly Apologetics

Jesus and the Resurrection, Part 5

The Appearances of the Risen Jesus: Unshakable Evidence for Our Faith

(Thumbnail Sketch from Del Tackett's Webinar, [November 7, 2023](#))

From Del Tackett's Neighborly Apologetics Webinar, Part 5 Facilitator: Marc Fey | Originally presented November 7, 2023

In a world filled with skepticism about the supernatural, the resurrection of Jesus Christ stands as the cornerstone of Christian faith. Yet many today challenge the claim that Jesus physically rose from the dead. Dr. Del Tackett, in this compelling session of his Neighborly Apologetics series, walks us through the biblical record of the appearances of the risen Jesus. These appearances are not vague spiritual visions or later legends. They are concrete, historical encounters with the physically resurrected Lord—encounters that transformed doubters, skeptics, and enemies into bold witnesses.

This article synthesizes the key insights from the webinar, examining the evidence step by step, addressing the primary accusations leveled against the resurrection, and showing why these appearances provide a firm foundation for our faith today. As Dr. Tackett emphasizes, God has graciously given us tangible evidence so that our belief is not a leap in the dark but a reasoned response to what really happened.

The Solid Foundation: What We Already Know

Before exploring the appearances themselves, Dr. Tackett reminds us of the cumulative case built in previous sessions. Jesus truly died on the cross. His body was wrapped with spices and linen according to Jewish custom. He was buried in a sealed tomb guarded by Roman soldiers. On the morning of the resurrection, an earthquake occurred, an angel rolled away the stone, and the terrified guards fled. The women arrived first at the empty tomb and received angelic testimony that Jesus had risen. Peter and John examined the grave wrappings, which lay collapsed as though the body had simply passed through them. The soldiers reported the empty tomb, sparking the first polemical responses.

All of this sets the stage. The tomb was empty. The body was gone. Now the question becomes: What happened to Jesus, and who saw him afterward?

The Appearances: God's Gracious Evidence

Dr. Tackett walks through the recorded appearances one by one, showing how each one carries evidential weight and directly counters common objections. These were not private, unverifiable

experiences. They occurred in different locations, at different times, to different groups of people under varying circumstances.

The first appearance was to Mary Magdalene. Overcome with grief at the empty tomb, she mistook the risen Jesus for the gardener. When he simply spoke her name—“Mary”—she recognized him instantly. Jesus then gave her a message for the disciples about his ascension. This encounter is profoundly moving. Mary was emotionally distraught, yet Jesus knew her by name and spoke words only the real Lord would say. It is difficult to imagine a gardener suddenly impersonating the risen Christ with such intimate knowledge and authority.

Jesus also appeared to the other women who had followed him. They took hold of his feet and worshiped him. He instructed them to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee. Here again we see physical interaction and worship—actions impossible with a mere apparition.

One of the most remarkable appearances occurred on the road to Emmaus. Two disciples walked with the risen Jesus for an extended period without recognizing him. He explained the Scriptures to them, showing how the Old Testament pointed to the Messiah. Only when he broke bread with them were their eyes opened. They later reflected that their hearts had burned within them as he opened the Word. This was the longest recorded post-resurrection appearance. The idea that these grieving men were simply mistaken about a stranger who then vanished from sight strains credulity. Jesus had supernaturally veiled their recognition until the appointed moment.

That same evening, Jesus appeared to ten of the disciples in a locked room. He stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” They saw his wounds and rejoiced. A week later, with Thomas present, Jesus appeared again in the locked room. He invited Thomas to touch the nail prints in his hands and the wound in his side. Thomas’s response—“My Lord and my God!”—has echoed through the centuries. This appearance directly confronts any notion of mistaken identity or a locked-room illusion. An imposter could not enter a locked room, display real crucifixion wounds, and elicit such a confession.

Jesus also appeared privately to Peter. Though none of the four Gospels give the details, the fact is mentioned in Luke 24 and in the early creed of 1 Corinthians 15. Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, was likely staying apart from the others in shame. The risen Lord sought him out individually for restoration. This personal encounter fits perfectly with what we know of both Peter’s failure and Jesus’ mercy.

In Galilee, Jesus appeared to seven disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. After a fruitless night of fishing, he directed them to cast their net on the other side. The miraculous catch and the shared meal of fish provide powerful evidence. A group hallucination is already implausible; a spiritual being eating physical fish stretches the alternative explanations even further.

On a mountain in Galilee, Jesus appeared to the eleven. Some worshiped while others doubted at first. He then gave the Great Commission: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” This public appearance to the leadership of the early church carried immense authority.

Perhaps most striking is the appearance to more than five hundred brothers at one time. The early creed in 1 Corinthians 15 records that most of these eyewitnesses were still alive when Paul wrote. This massive, simultaneous appearance makes mistaken identity or hallucination virtually

impossible to sustain. It also provides a verifiable claim—people could check with the living witnesses.

Jesus appeared to his brother James, who had been skeptical during Jesus' ministry. After the resurrection, James became a pillar of the church. Such a radical transformation in a former skeptic points to a genuine encounter with the risen Lord.

Finally, Jesus appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem and on the Mount of Olives just before his ascension. He blessed them, was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. Two angels then appeared, urging the disciples not to stand gazing into heaven but to act on what they had seen.

Dr. Tackett notes that John tells us Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in detail. Paul himself received a post-ascension appearance on the Damascus road. The cumulative testimony is overwhelming: the risen Jesus appeared to many different people, in many different places, over a period of forty days, under many different circumstances.

Addressing the Accusations Head-On

Dr. Tackett systematically dismantles the four primary accusations brought against these appearances.

First, some claim the appearances were merely hallucinations. Hallucinations, by nature, are individual experiences. They arise from within a person's mind and are not shared by others. Dr. Tackett shares a moving personal story of his father's strokes near the end of life. His father would see people walking in the forest behind their house—people no one else could see. The family desperately wanted to see them too, but they never did. Hallucinations do not occur in groups. Yet here we have multiple people seeing Jesus at the same time on multiple occasions, including more than five hundred at once. The disciples were not in a state of wishful thinking; they were hiding in fear. Many others, including Roman soldiers and James, had no desire for Jesus to rise. Group hallucinations simply do not explain the evidence.

Second, some argue the appearances were cases of mistaken identity. The disciples were grieving and perhaps confused someone else for Jesus. This theory collapses under examination. How does one explain a "mistaken" person entering locked rooms, vanishing from sight, knowing intimate details, displaying real wounds, eating fish, and eliciting worship and confessions of deity? Mary Magdalene would not mistake a gardener who knew her name and spoke of ascending to the Father. The Emmaus disciples walked with Jesus for miles while he opened the Scriptures; their later recognition was supernatural, not a case of poor eyesight or emotional confusion. Thomas's physical examination of the wounds removes any possibility of mistaken identity in that encounter.

Third, some propose that Jesus rose only spiritually, not physically, and that the appearances were spiritual manifestations. This view often leads to the idea that God somehow destroyed or "zapped" the physical body. Yet the biblical record is filled with physical evidence. Jesus ate with the disciples on multiple occasions. Thomas touched the wounds. The women held his feet. The disciples watched him ascend bodily into heaven. A merely spiritual resurrection cannot account for these repeated, tangible interactions. Reducing Jesus to a metaphysical force or higher thought empties the resurrection of its power and contradicts the consistent testimony of the New Testament, including the book of Revelation.

Fourth, some dismiss the appearances as later myths or legends. Dr. Tackett points forward to the next session's discussion of the early creed and the polemic. The creed in 1 Corinthians 15 arose very early, while many eyewitnesses were still alive. Myths do not develop when living people can verify or falsify the claims. The Oxford historian Dr. Sherwin-White observed that even two generations is too short a time for legendary development to erase the hard historical core of events. The rapid rise of the resurrection proclamation, combined with the presence of verifiable eyewitnesses, makes the myth theory untenable.

The Transformative Power of Seeing the Risen Lord

These appearances did not merely prove a fact; they transformed lives. Mary Magdalene moved from weeping despair to bold proclamation. The Emmaus disciples hurried back to Jerusalem with burning hearts. Thomas moved from doubt to worship. Peter was restored. James, the skeptical brother, became a leader in the church. The disciples, once fearful, became fearless witnesses who turned the world upside down.

Dr. Tackett closes the session by returning to the appearance to Mary Magdalene and playing the powerful song "I've Just Seen Jesus" by Sandi Patty and Larnelle Harris. The lyrics capture the raw emotion and life-changing reality of that first encounter:

We knew He was dead It is finished, He said We had watched as His life ebbed away Then we all stood around Till the guards took Him down Joseph begged for His body that day

It was late afternoon When we got to the tomb Wrapped His body and sealed up the grave So I know how you feel His death was so real But please listen and hear what I say

I've just seen Jesus I tell you He's alive I've just seen Jesus Our precious Lord alive And I knew, He really saw me too As if till now, I'd never lived All that I'd done before Won't matter anymore I've just seen Jesus And I'll never be the same again!

The song beautifully expresses what the appearances accomplished: they moved people from the certainty of death to the joy of resurrection life. Those who saw Jesus were never the same.

Our Response Today

The evidence is clear. The physical body of Jesus was raised from the dead. He appeared to individuals and to groups, to believers and to skeptics, in locked rooms and on open roads, by the sea and on mountains, before his ascension and after. God has provided this testimony so that we might believe—not because we have seen with our eyes, but because we have the reliable record of those who did.

As believers, we are among those Jesus called blessed: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Our faith rests on solid historical ground. When we share with our neighbors who question the resurrection, we can gently point them to these appearances and ask thoughtful questions: How do group hallucinations work? What kind of "mistaken identity" enters locked rooms and displays crucifixion wounds? Why would a spiritual resurrection involve eating fish and physical touch?

The resurrection is not a peripheral doctrine. It confirms that Jesus is who he claimed to be. It

guarantees our own future resurrection. It calls us to live with hope and boldness in a world that desperately needs the good news.

Dr. Tackett closed the webinar in prayer, thanking God for the preserved testimony of Scripture, for the empty tomb, and for the resurrected body of Christ. He prayed that the Spirit would guide participants into truth and encourage them for God's glory.

May we, like those first eyewitnesses, never be the same again because we have seen—through their testimony—the risen Lord Jesus.

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From Del Tackett's Neighborly Apologetics Webinar, Part 5 (November 7, 2023)

The resurrection of Jesus is central to Christianity, yet many today deny that He physically rose from the dead. In this webinar session, Dr. Del Tackett examines the biblical record of the risen Jesus' appearances, showing how God provided clear evidence for our faith.

Building on prior evidence—the real death, burial, sealed tomb, angelic announcement, and empty grave wrappings—Dr. Tackett highlights multiple post-resurrection encounters. Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, calling her by name and sending her with a message to the disciples. He appeared to other women, who worshiped at His feet. On the Emmaus road, two disciples walked and talked with Him as He opened the Scriptures, recognizing Him in the breaking of bread. That evening, Jesus appeared to ten disciples in a locked room, offering peace and later inviting Thomas to touch His wounds, prompting the confession, “My Lord and my God!”

Additional appearances included a private meeting with Peter, a miraculous catch of fish by the Sea of Tiberias where Jesus ate with seven disciples, an appearance to the eleven on a mountain for the Great Commission, and one to over 500 at once. He appeared to His skeptical brother James, radically transforming him, and finally to the disciples before ascending from the Mount of Olives.

These encounters counter major accusations. Hallucinations are individual, not group experiences shared by hundreds. Mistaken identity fails against locked-room entries, vanishing, physical touch, and intimate knowledge. A merely spiritual resurrection cannot explain eating fish, Thomas touching wounds, or bodily ascension. Early creeds with living eyewitnesses refute legend.

Dr. Tackett closed by reflecting on the song “I've Just Seen Jesus,” capturing the life-changing reality: those who saw the risen Lord were never the same. The evidence invites us to believe and proclaim: Christ is risen indeed!

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