

“From Ancient Story to Prophetic Action”

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Today we stand in the court of law. We are standing here today, ready to do case number 144.

The Judge – the Honorable Lord God Almighty – will be seated. This is the case of the state vs. the Apostles and Disciples of Jesus the Christ. [Pastor Scott turns to the choir.] I turn now to the defendants and I ask you to please rise, and I would ask you, “Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; so help you God?” [The choir says,] “We do.” [Pastor Scott responds with,] “Thank you. You may be seated.”

The Honorable, the defendants, and you ladies and gentlemen of the jury, we are here today because the defendants are accused of passing along misinformation that has changed the world in an inappropriate manner. We are here today for the prosecution to state and to prove that the Resurrection is a falsehood that has misunderstood the world, and can finally put to rest a belief in Christianity.

The defense will speak to their crime and help to overcome, and help them understand that what they did was not an offense against God, but is the truth – and that is what we are hoping to portray today.

We begin with opening statements from the Prosecution:

This is an open and shut case. The Prosecution, today, will do its best to help one see that while just about every scholar understands that Jesus – an itinerate preacher and teacher from a place in Nazareth – was an actual human being, he certainly could not have been raised from the dead in a Resurrection account. We will attempt to show – no, we *will* show – that was is a fabrication, not based on an out-and-out lie, but that the defendants – the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ – were so overwhelmed by their grief and their desire to be spiritually right, that they created in their own minds this falsehood called a “Resurrection.”

With that I conclude my opening statement for the Prosecution.

Now, for the Defense:

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I state emphatically that this is not an open and shut case. We, the Defense, will show that the Prosecution does not have what is stated in the law as “truth beyond a reasonable doubt.” There is doubt and an understanding, that there is a real potential for the Resurrection and, while we acknowledge that there is not an opportunity for scientific proof, we, the Defense, will use academic rigor to show that the Resurrection is the best – perhaps only – alternative to what could have happened that day so long ago. The defense rests their opening statements, and now we turn to the Prosecution’s arguments.

I would like to begin the Prosecution's argument by showing that these Defendants – the apostles and disciples of Jesus the Christ – are not bad people. They are misguided. They have misunderstood. And, I will give you six arguments, briefly, that shows why this is an open and shut case, and that the Resurrection could never have happened:

1.) Jesus, while and after he was hung on the cross, might not have actually died. Did anyone think of that? This was 2000 years ago. They did not have modern medicine to determine whether or not someone actually died on that cross. Perhaps he was badly injured. They brought him down while he was still living. They put him into a tomb. They did not bury him. And, perhaps when they rolled that stone, he came back and healed for those three days; and, when that stone was rolled away – voila! – he was alive. That is the first argument.

2.) The woman confused Jesus for someone else. They had already said that her first response was “the gardener”; and then, who else might it be? It could be anybody who might have looked a little bit like Jesus. And, let's be frank here, if they had long beards – and all of the men did – they all had dark hair; they all have olive complexion; they were all from the Middle East. It could be very easy, in their grief and their tears, that they misunderstood who they were talking to; and, it wasn't Jesus at all, or *their* Jesus.

3.) Notice that this “Messiah,” of sorts – this Jesus – only showed himself to his own followers. He didn't appear to the Roman guards. He didn't appear to the Jewish officials. He showed up only to the Defendants – to the apostles and the disciples. So perhaps they had been fooled, in their own grief, from the reality that there really was a dead Messiah.

4.) Their emotional state made them see visions and ghostly apparitions. If you go back in time to the ancient history of antiquity, there are any number of descriptions of people in their grief, after a loved one had died, seeing their ghost or seeing their spirit. What made this one any different?

Now I would like to move even more so to the fifth argument for the prosecution; and, I would like to describe to you the theory of Cognitive Dissonance. This was a theory that was organized and written down in a book called “The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance.” In 1957. Before Cognitive Dissonance, it was very difficult for the academic community to understand how the Resurrection could not have happened.

Before 1957, academicians would say, “Something happened, and we have no understanding of how these defendants – these apostles, these disciples – could have turned from denying Jesus, as many as three times; not even having the courage to go to the crucifixion. Maybe John – one apostle – was there; the others were just women. They stood there, including his mother, and the rest of them ran and hid.” Nowhere in academic life could we, until 1957, have any arguments about what transformed these weak people into such faithful followers, that they would martyr themselves.

Even Peter – the Apostle Peter – who denied Jesus the most – three times – then went on somehow to, all of a sudden, become the martyr who died on his own cross.

But, in 1957, in a book called “The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance,” by Dr. Leon Festinger, a psychologist, answered that question for academia.

It is the theory of Cognitive Dissonance, which is, when someone believes something is so true and invests themselves in it, and all of a sudden they find out it is not true; rather than accept it, they have to make this mental leap all of the way over, create data – new data – in their minds, that may not be logical or rational; but they are so emotionally invested in it, that they succumb to Cognitive Dissonance and believe the new thing – the original belief – rather than the obvious truth, that the data now shows.

So the apostles and disciples, rather than accept the fact that their Jesus was dead and their religious experience is now over, they create a Resurrection account so that they can keep on worshipping Jesus. That is what this is all about. It isn't that they lied. It's the fact that, emotionally, they couldn't handle the truth, and so they made this up, so that they could continue to worship.

That is what the Prosecution says.

And, finally, the sixth one: If you read the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – there are discrepancies in every one of these accounts. Were there two angels? One angel? No angel? How many women were there? In the Gospel of John, that I just read, there was one woman: Mary. Well, in another Gospel, that you see in your bulletin today, there were three women at the tomb. Which was it? If they can't even get their stories right among themselves, how can we believe that any of this actually happened?

And, with that, the Prosecution rests. They are guilty – not because they are liars, but because they have fooled themselves.

And now, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, we will hear the Defense, for why the Resurrection is truly what happened.

I appreciate that the Prosecution is willing to say that Jesus was an actual human being. At least we don't have to waste your time trying to defend that. But, let me go through quickly and explain the Prosecution's errors: The first argument that the Prosecution had, was that maybe Jesus survived the crucifixion.

Let's look at this academically. There is nowhere in the history, and there were a lot of historical people writing during the time of antiquity when Jesus was alive, from Josephus – who was a Jewish historian – to other Roman historians. All of them state that the Romans were *excellent* murders. When they crucified people, they died. There isn't a single time in which somebody somehow survived a crucifixion that was ever written down. It could not have happened. When they killed somebody – they were dead.

Add to this that we were murdering someone who was supposedly a threat to the kingdom of the Roman Empire: Jesus of Nazareth – the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. They slapped it on the top of the cross. With this political trial on hand, there's no way they would ever make a mistake and let him live on that cross. He was surely dead.

Number two: The idea that women confused Jesus for someone else. I have heard that argument any number of times, but it makes no sense, because even if they did confuse him – because, let's face it, in that period of time, women were not good witnesses. They

thought women could not think for themselves – that they were more confused in their minds and their minds were smaller than slaves. So, they wouldn't consider a woman of any value to be a witness, and so, even if, for the sake of argument, you didn't trust the women, at some point, when the "supposed" Jesus came back and talked to the rest of the defendants – the male apostles and disciples – at some point, they would have figured it out. It is not an argument that had any rational facts.

The third argument is that they were visible only to the followers and, so, the followers were somehow misunderstood. They lied about it, or they believed it so hard, that they just faked themselves out. Well, look at doubting Thomas. The apostles weren't looking for a Resurrection. They had all given up. They didn't even show up to the cross. They didn't even show up to the grave. Only Mary did, or the women did, to prepare for a burial.

If they thought there was any chance of a Resurrection, they would all have been there saying, "Let's pull up lawn chairs, grab a beer, and sit and wait for him to come out of the tomb."

He didn't do that. It wasn't in their idea. Plus, not only did Thomas doubt – and when Jesus appeared to them again, he wanted to touch the physical body.

What about the Apostle Paul? When the Apostle Paul was dealing, at the same moment that Jesus was being resurrected and showing himself to the Apostles, Saul – before he was Paul – was persecuting Christians, in fact, possibly even murdering them. What was it that transformed him from murderer, to someone who would fall off his horse and be transformed, to such a degree, that he would call himself an "apostle," for the very person he was crucifying? *Only* if something that transformational had happened. And it wasn't because Saul was a follower – so that argument does not hold weight.

Now, let me move to the emotional state of visions and ghostly apparitions. According to the Prosecution, like so many people when they are grieving a loss, they will wake up from sleep and they will see in a moment a flash of something like a ghost or an apparition, and it will provide them with comfort, that perhaps their loved one was with them before something else happened to them.

But that's not what they are describing. These defendants – these apostles and disciples of Jesus, the Christ – are not saying they saw a ghost. They are not claiming that they saw an apparition. They are claiming that they saw a physical body, who talked to them, whose side could be touched. That isn't an apparition; that isn't a ghost. So that argument doesn't hold. This is different.

And, that takes me to Cognitive Dissonance – a wonderful argument by the Prosecution. It's true that that was something that many academics used as an argument for why the Resurrection might not have happened. But, the response from religious scholars, and including N. T. Wright, one of my favorite, contemporary theologians, speaks to this issue very clearly: Cognitive Dissonance.

Let me give you a very simple example, so we all know what it is: I will give you an example from something I saw on TV about a year ago. I think it was Jane Pauley who was

interviewing the rock musician John Cougar Mellencamp. This is one of the Defendant's favorite singers, so you have got to bear with me. [Laughter.]

John Cougar was doing the interview with Jane Pauley, and he is smoking like a stack. I mean he has cigarette after cigarette, after cigarette. He is smoking about a pack or two a day, and I think it was Jane Pauley [who] turned to him and said, "Can we stop the interview for just a second and ask, how do you sing with all of that smoke in your lungs all of the time?"

He said, "Well, I'm beginning to sound more like my blues forefathers, and I like this gnarly sound."

And she said, "Well, that is great. But aren't you worried about dying of cancer?"

His response was Cognitive Dissonance: He said to her, "No. I know that the data says that smoking causes cancer; but I've noticed that when my friends die of cancer – lung cancer – it's because they drink alcohol *and* smoke. I don't drink alcohol, so I'm not going to die of lung cancer, because I just smoke," and then, he went on puffing.

Now, that's Cognitive Dissonance.

The data shows pretty clearly, if you smoke two packs a day you're probably going to have a problem with lung cancer at some point, or emphysema. There is no data that says "if because you also are drinking" – but he made that Cognitive Dissonance leap, so that he would feel comfortable continuing to smoke, without feeling bad about it. That is Cognitive Dissonance.

Why the defendants – the apostles and disciples – did not follow Cognitive Dissonance is because they had a different paradigm in their heads. They would not have jumped to a crucifixion. They would have said, "We saw an apparition. We saw a ghost." But it wasn't in their paradigm of their thought to jump to Resurrection.

In the early Jewish religion of that time, if they believed in Resurrection at all, it was in Judaism, and there are all sides of that issue in that period of time: Those who did, believed that the Messiah would come again, then all of the people, starting with the Mount of Olives, and then everyone else would be resurrected together.

Nowhere in Judaism, nowhere in the mind of these defendants, would they have ever thought that one individual would be resurrected by themselves, without everyone being there. They wouldn't have thought about a Resurrection. Sure, they thought about a ghostly apparition, or a spirit, going up – but a bodily Resurrection, that would have never entered their minds.

If it never would have entered their paradigm – their mind – then they never could have used this for Cognitive Dissonance – because Cognitive Dissonance would have had to be argument that they could have had come to their mind, like alcohol and smoking. They never would have thought of a bodily Resurrection in that moment – maybe a spirit, maybe a ghost – never a bodily Resurrection. So the argument doesn't hold for Cognitive Dissonance.

Now the last argument. The discrepancies in the Bible – in the Gospels. Why in the world can't they get their story right? The Prosecution says that proves that there is no Resurrection. They are making it up and they can't get their stories straight.

I say to you just the opposite. The discrepancies in the Bible prove that they were telling the truth. They had the chance to get their stories right. They chose to follow the oral tradition that went all of the way back, and they couldn't change their stories, because the original eye witnesses – the defendants – and there weren't just twelve apostles, there were more than 150 disciples who were eye-witness accounts to these things. They never would have changed their story; and so, they shared them from their own oral tradition.

Now there may be a difference about whether there was one angel or two; or, whether there was one woman or three; but what didn't change was that there was a death – what didn't change was that there was a Resurrection in each one of the stories. The fact that they didn't clean it up so that they got their story right, shows they weren't hiding anything.

Let's look at the women. As I said earlier, we would never put a woman in the argument, because in that period of time a woman was somebody you were embarrassed by – a woman was not a witness. Leaving her in there hurt your argument, and to prove I'm right, all you have to do is to read Paul's description of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. In Paul's description, read chapter 15 – there wasn't a woman anywhere. They don't use them, because women don't make your arguments. The fact that we would continue to quote women being there, in spite of it being bad for business, shows it would have been proper – that and those descriptions, celebrate the reality that these descriptions do not get in the way, but they prove it correct.

That's why, while scientifically I can't prove the Resurrection exists, but using academic argument – using academic rigor – the Prosecution has not shown one iota of proof beyond the shadow of a doubt, for why the Resurrection didn't happen.

Since they can't do that, until somebody comes up with something different – what transformed these weak, confused, frightened, little apostles and disciples had to have been something so *transformative* that it changed their world entirely and allowed the Christian faith to develop grow and expand to the entire world. In my mind [it] can only be a Resurrection – an actual, physical Resurrection. It's not something that they could have created in their minds. It was beyond their paradigm and it changed their world.

And with that, your Honor, the defense rests.

Alleluia! Amen.