

# empty is good

module

10

## Consider

### The Story so Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality. Rebellion continued at Babel, where God was rejected; the people were spread all over the world and began their own religions. In his love for the peoples of the world, God decided to reach out for them. To do this, he chose Israel as his special people and put them in a special place for the special purpose of representing him to the nations. Jesus came and lived an incredible, perfect life; he made incredible claims and backed them up with incredible miracles. Jesus' mission was to pay the perfect ransom price for sin because he loves humanity with a perfect, passionate love.

### Continuing the Story...

Jesus was crucified and suffered a horrible death. But this was not the end. To the disciples' amazement and disbelief, Jesus came back to life!

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## Day One: It's the Linchpin...

A linchpin is a very important metal clip that is inserted on the end of an axle to stop the wheel from falling off. The resurrection is the 'linchpin' of the Christian faith. Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus. The issue is very simple: no resurrection – no Christianity! Without the resurrection of Jesus, the wheels fall off the Christian faith. Even the Bible admits this is the case. It puts it like this – if Christ has not been raised, then:

1. The Christian message is false and pointless
2. Having 'faith' is worse than useless
3. There is no Christian solution for sin
4. There is no Christian hope when a person is faced with death
5. The members of the entire Christian community are 'Losers' (with a capital 'L!') – victims of a gigantic hoax and should be pitied.

module 10

Really! Go ahead and check it out (see 1 Corinthians 15:14–19 below).

But if Christ is raised, the exact opposite is true

1. The Christian message is true
2. Jesus' claims to be Messiah-Son-of-God are proven right – and he is to be believed
3. Christ's death dealt with sin successfully
4. We have a living hope when faced with death
5. We have a living saviour and can expect him to return and straighten out our chaotic world, just as he promised.

No wonder the resurrection of Jesus is so hotly debated!

Explore the Bible

Read 1 Corinthians 15:14–19.

What happens to Christianity if the resurrection of Jesus is not true?

## Day Two: A Cross-examination...

Of course, some people don't believe in Jesus' resurrection and have suggested the 'swoon' theory – that Jesus never actually died – that the resurrection never happened. Here's the theory: after his whipping and ugly crucifixion, Jesus was taken down from the cross in an unconscious state. Then, after three days in a cold tomb (no food, medicine or treatment), he recovered, rolled away the one-ton-plus stone with his bare nail-pierced hands, and then dragged himself miles on nail-pierced feet to convince 11 disbelieving disciples he had risen from the dead. Not surprisingly, there are some big 'buts' to this theory!

Firstly, the Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus were experts in putting people to death and then disposing of the bodies. While they broke the legs of the two criminals crucified with Jesus (to speed up their deaths), they never broke Jesus' legs. They knew he was already dead. But, just to make doubly sure he'd died (their lives depended on it), they stabbed a spear into his side, piercing his heart. Out came "blood and water" (John 19:34) – a way of saying the blood had separated from its serum. Jesus was so dead they released him for burial.

Secondly, his friends – Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus – took his body from the cross and prepared it for burial. As they turned the body of Jesus over and over, they wrapped his corpse in strips of linen, generously layering between the strips a heavy mix of gooey embalming spices (about 34 kg in full), all designed to help preserve the body. If they had noticed one faint breath or tiny twitch, wouldn't they have stopped the embalming process immediately and done all they could to nurse their friend to health and strength?

Explore the Bible

Read John 19:31–42.

Were these people certain that Jesus was dead?

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## Day Three: Who Stole the Cookie?

The ‘Cookie Jar’ song has been around for years. All over the world, kids still have fun with the clever ice-breaker, learning one another’s names as they sit in a circle reciting the chant:

(Oscar) “*Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar? Isaac stole the cookie from the cookie jar.*”

(Isaac) “*Who me?*”

(Oscar) “*Yes, you.*”

(Isaac) “*Couldn’t be.*”

(Oscar) “*Then who?*”

(Isaac points to Chantelle) “***Chantelle stole the cookie...***”

module 10

Funnily enough, whenever I read Matthew 28:11–15, I think of the Cookie Jar song... slightly modified!

*Who stole the body from the empty grave?*

***The disciples stole the body from the empty grave!***

Both Christians *and their opponents* believe the tomb was empty. No one disagrees. But the point is: *How did it become empty?* Perhaps someone stole the body! But who?

The Roman soldiers or the Pharisees? Couldn’t be! If they’d stashed the body of Jesus somewhere, the moment some Christ-follower stood on his ‘soapbox’ to preach about the resurrection of Jesus, they could have just dumped the corpse at the preacher’s feet for all to see. Christianity would’ve come to a standstill forever. But they didn’t. They couldn’t. They didn’t have it. Then who?

The desperate disciples? Did they steal the body to save face and prop up their Jesus-Messiah-Son-of-God story? Couldn’t be! The Pharisees had the grave secured. The huge, one-ton-plus stone was carefully sealed. A guard was posted. No one could tamper with the grave.

So what if no one stole the cookie from the cookie jar?

Explore the Bible

Read Matthew 27:62–66.

Is the ‘stolen body’ theory reasonable?

## Day Four: Could the Disciples have been Hallucinating?

By itself, the empty grave doesn't prove Jesus' resurrection. It proves only that Jesus' body wasn't there. It's the actual, 'alive and well' appearances of Jesus in the 40 days following his presumed resurrection that show he rose from the dead. This list of appearances to more than 500 people is impressive:

- Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–14)
- The women returning from the tomb (Matthew 28:8–10)
- Simon Peter (Cephas) (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5)
- The Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13–33)
- The apostles, without Thomas (John 20:19–24)
- The apostles, with Thomas (John 20:26–29)
- The seven by Lake Tiberius (John 21:1–23)
- More than 500 believers in Galilee (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- Then James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- Then the eleven (Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–20; Luke 24:33–52; Acts 1:3–12)
- Paul (Saul) (Acts 9:3–6; 1 Corinthians 15:8).

But what if the disciples and others were simply hallucinating – were a bunch of uneducated people all imagining the same thing?

If the disciples were excitable, unbalanced people then we might wonder about what they said they saw. But these were tough, hard-headed types, not mentally unstable people. Even Jesus said they were “slow to believe”. The truth is, none of them expected to see Jesus again. In fairness, we might accept that perhaps one of them could have had a hallucination – but *all* of them? Over 500 of them? People from all sorts of backgrounds? With many different personalities? All having exactly the same hallucination?

Explore the Bible

Read Luke 24:36–43.

What convinced the disciples that Jesus had been physically resurrected?

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## Day Five: Who's Fooling Who?

It was Abraham Lincoln who said: “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.” That’s especially true when it comes to the people closest to us.

It’s interesting that in a passage which mentions over 500 witnesses to the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3–8), only three men are mentioned by name. Peter (Cephas) is mentioned because he will figure prominently in the first part of the early Church. Paul is mentioned because he will be the obvious ‘mover and shaker’ in the last part of the early Church.

module 10

The third man is James (1 Corinthians 15:7). Now that’s interesting. James was to become an important leader in the Church at Jerusalem but, more than that, James was family! James was “the Lord’s brother” (Galatians 1:19) – actually his half-brother because Joseph was not Jesus’ biological father.

As a brother, James was not easily influenced. Most family aren’t – they know us too well. There’s no way we can hide the truth from them. And early on James was troubled by Jesus. At one stage, all the family had some real concerns about Jesus. They wondered if he might have lost his mind (Mark 3:20–21).

Now here’s the question: Would the James that lived so close to Jesus and had serious concerns about him have become one of the strongest leaders of the Jesus movement, so firmly committed that he would surrender his life in martyrdom, if he had any doubt at all about his brother having risen from the dead?

Explore the Bible

Read John 7:1–5.

What did James (Jesus’ brother) initially think of Jesus?

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## Explore

Discussion starter

Q – What do you think about the resurrection of Jesus? Do you think there is good evidence for it?

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Mark 16:2–8.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this section.

Q – Was anyone expecting the resurrection?

Q – Imagine you were one of the disciples. What would you have been thinking?

## View

Video episode 10 – empty is good

Five things God wants us to know about Jesus' resurrection:

1. Jesus' resurrection confirms his .....
2. Jesus' resurrection provides a .....
3. Jesus' resurrection is a huge .....
4. Jesus' resurrection was a display of God's great .....
5. Jesus' resurrection means we have a living .....  
..... and .....

## Discuss

Questions I have

module 10

For more information...  
see [www.longstoryshort.co/empty-is-good](http://www.longstoryshort.co/empty-is-good)

