

## A Pastor's Perspective: On the Historical Jesus

“Confidence in the Gospel Accounts” by Timothy Sprinkle

I follow Jesus because his remarkable life demands a response. The humble Galilean changed the landscape of human history, not merely as a moral teacher or religious sage, but as a death-defying Messiah. N.T. Wright asserts in *The New Testament and the People of God*, “The whole point of Christianity is that it offers a story which is the story of the whole world. It is public truth” (London, 1992, 42).

And yet, every Easter season questions surrounding this public truth and the historical Jesus resurface, calling into question the validity of the New Testament Gospel records. Popular media, scholars, and skeptics annually attempt to excavate the bones of Jesus and, thus, deconstruct Christian faith. Their plot is not novel. Matthew's gospel exposed the priests' and elders' plan to payoff Roman guards and spread a rumor of Jesus' stolen corpse (Matthew 28:11-15). Spoiler alert: It didn't work

Doubters will not find the living Jesus among the dead. He is risen, indeed, and the following lines of reason build confidence in the gospel accounts as reliable witnesses.

**Early and Broad Attestation:** Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John circulated closer to Jesus' ministry (30-33 AD) than other, so-called gospels (e.g., Gospel of Thomas). Publication dates for the canonical gospels range from 50-90 AD. By the end of the first century, other Christian leaders were quoting the gospels. Moreover, [given recent work on orality in the NT era](#), the gap of thirty to fifty years between historical event and record seems minimal.

**Apostolic Authority:** While not all biblical scholars agree on authorship of the gospels, the early church recognized an apostolic witness standing behind each gospel. They considered Peter as a source to Mark. Luke, while not an apostle, references several sources in his historical research (1:1-4). His relationship to the apostle Paul boosted his credibility.

**Consistency and Diversity:** The four accounts agree on the major details of Jesus' life (e.g., baptism, kingdom message, parables, miracles, death, burial, resurrection, etc.), while providing different narrative details. Each gospel author brings a theological (or thematic) angle, which affects chronology and other variants. Thus, “discrepancies” often fade when considering authorial intent and original audience. Other alleged fabrications (e.g., two temple cleansings, anointings, and mass feedings) presuppose Jesus did not replicate a miracle or illustrative act.

**Enduring Authority and Rule of Faith:** Skeptics assume human tampering in the canonization process. Like inspiration, a project combining human and divine authors, canonization combined human and divine wisdom. While some books were challenged (e.g., Hebrews, Revelation), others were adopted early. The Patristic Fathers *recognized* authoritative books, they did not *ascribe* authority to them. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were recognized early and have played a central part in shaping Christian preaching, ethics, worship, and liturgy.

Surely other ancient books and religious works can boast an enduring legacy. What they cannot do, however, is claim their central character has overcome death. The resurrection of Jesus, the great climax of each gospel account, provides the greatest evidence for my confident faith. No other explanation (e.g., stolen body, resuscitated corpse, mass hallucination) explains the evidence and emergence of this historic faith. He is risen, indeed.

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