

Has anyone ever asked you: “How do you know Christianity is correct?” Have you wondered it yourself? It’s a really good question to ask, but more importantly – is your ability to answer.

How do we know that our religion is right? The Jews, the Muslims, the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses all think they’ve got it right. “How do you know Christianity is correct?”

If you’ve ever avoided that question. If you’ve ever felt embarrassed or guilty asking that question. This is why you’re listening, because after today, you’ll want to be asked and you’ll be eager to answer.

You should know today’s lesson took place during the final weeks of Jesus’ ministry. He’s making his way south to Jerusalem when he receives an urgent message from two sisters, Mary and Martha. Their brother, Lazarus, was sick. Jesus didn’t immediately respond. He delayed and as a result, Lazarus, Jesus’ friend, died.

When Jesus finally did show up in Bethany, Martha met him. He spoke with her. Then Mary met him. He spoke with her too. That’s when we hear these emotionally charged words: **Jesus was once more deeply moved.** Actually, the Greek says he was “upset.” He was upset earlier and got so emotional he broke down and cried. He’s upset again. He’s upset that sin had caused this kind of grief for his friends. He’s upset at Satan, the instigator of sin.

After drying his tears, Jesus walked to the tomb. Don’t picture a cemetery like we’d see. This was a cave that had a boulder closing the entrance. Any large cave near a town became the city cemetery.

Archeology tells us that most of these tombs had ledges carved out inside where bodies could be laid. It was at a cemetery, just outside of Bethany, where Jesus gave the orders: **Take away the stone.**

Martha, the dead man’s sister, isn’t so sure that’s such a good idea. Why would Jesus expose them to the smell of a 4-day old corpse, not to mention contact with a corpse would make them

ceremonially unclean? And besides, what’s the use?

Jesus reminds Martha to trust: **Did I not tell you that if you believed, you will see the glory of God?** Martha, trust me and all the promises I’ve made, and all the conversations we’ve had over the past 3 years. Trust me as you’ll have a front row seat for something spectacular.

It would have taken a number of men to push the huge rock away, and once they did, Jesus did what he does best - he spoke with his Father: **I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.**

No one can address God as Father quite the way God the Son does. He had complete confidence his prayer was already heard and answered. We can have that same complete confidence that our Father in heaven always hears and answers our prayers too.

What was Jesus praying for? The whole purpose for his coming to Bethany – that the people staring in the open tomb would believe that he’s God’s Son. And that would make him their Savior and provide them with salvation.

Jesus is praying that same prayer for you. The whole purpose for his coming to earth – that as you stare in his open tomb you would believe that he’s God’s Son. And that would make him your Savior and provide you with salvation.

Then Jesus did something really crazy. He yelled the dead man’s name. No matter how loud you yell in a cemetery, the dead don’t listen. But this was no ordinary voice. The mighty Creator was waking up one of his creatures. The name Lazarus actually means: *My God is my help!* And sure enough, God provided help!

This dead man heard the voice of his Creator and his decaying and lifeless body instantly warmed to

life and sat up as if he'd been taking an afternoon nap.

This dead man had been carried into the tomb by his friends; now walked out under his own power. Actually, he did need a little help - they unwrapped the grave clothes from his face and body.

Lazarus was living breathing proof that his friend Jesus was also his God and Savior. Everyone there got the same message: **Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him ... just like you and I have!**

So, what's your take away from the Son of the living God's encounter with Lazarus? Isn't it obvious? **"Christianity is correct!"** Lazarus leaving his tomb alive is proof of that.

There is a scary 800-pound gorilla in the living room of your life. You know - the one everyone has to deal with, but no one wants to deal with ... because it is so big and scary. The gorilla has a name: *Death*.

What is your only comfort in life and death? For centuries, believers have learned the Christian faith beginning with that question. Why start there? Unless Jesus returns first, you are going to die. I am going to die. To find comfort in life, we must know how we can face death.

One day our cold and lifeless bodies will be placed deep inside a grave. But before that happens, we've got to figure out how we're going to survive that experience! How do other religions, that are not Christian, handle death?

Some ignore it. When you die, you die. That's it. But if one honestly listens to their conscience, they've got to know each soul is too amazing to simply vanish into thin air.

Some say death means you get a second chance - reincarnation. You come back as something else. Then how come every corpse continues to lie in its grave without any second chance?

Some believe in a resurrection after death, if ... you've been good enough. Has anyone ever been good enough? If God is good (and he is), and if God

is holy (and he is), and if God knows everything (and he does) — then God knows that I haven't been good enough and neither have you. No one has. Since God has zero tolerance for sin, how in the world is he going to reward us by raising us to life?

So, we're back to ... you're going to die! I'm going to die! How are we going to survive the experience? These religions offer no solutions.

But Jesus Christ can! In our lesson we heard how on a real day, at a real place, with dozens of real witnesses, Jesus Christ raised a real dead person back to life! He promises, and I quote: **A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear my voice and come out!**

Several weeks after his encounter with Lazarus - on a Sunday, in Jerusalem, with dozens of real witnesses, Jesus Christ raised another real dead person back to life - himself. He promises, and again I quote: **Because I live, you also will live.**

Jesus is the only answer to death. He explains the whole process. Our bodies die because they suffer the sickness of sin and the wages of sin is death. To reverse death, Jesus has to reverse sin. He didn't ignore it or pretend it doesn't exist – he conquered sin and right along with it, death. No one else ever claimed to do that, then actually did it. **"Christianity is correct!"**

Christianity is correct and really very simple to explain to others.

"Here's why I trust Christ, and why you need to trust him, too.

- My body has a problem it's going to die.
- And that's because my soul had a problem it's sinful.
- But Jesus took care of my soul's problem; by taking care of my sin problem when he died on the cross.
- That means Jesus can take care of my body's problem when he raises me from the dead."

You can say that. You need to say that to yourself, your family, your friends. **Christianity is correct!**