


# Law & Order, XIV

More Than 500

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**An Easter Challenge For Christians**  
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I HAVE AN EASTER challenge for Christians. My challenge is simply this: tell me what happened on Easter. I am not asking for proof. My straightforward request is merely that Christians tell me exactly what happened on the day that their most important doctrine was born.

Believers should eagerly take up this challenge, since without the resurrection, there is no Christianity.

Paul wrote, "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Ye, and we are false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not." (1 Corinthians 15:14-15)

The conditions of the challenge are simple and reasonable. In each of the four Gospels, begin at Easter morning and read to the end of the book: Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20-21. Also read Acts 1:3-12 and Paul's tiny version of the story in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. These 165 verses can be read in a few moments. Then, without omitting a single detail from these separate accounts, write a simple, chronological narrative of the events between the resurrection and the ascension: what happened first, second, and so on; who said what, when; and where these things happened.

Since the gospels do not always give precise times of day, it is permissible to make educated guesses. The narrative does not have to pretend to present a perfect picture—it only needs to give at least one plausible account of all of the facts. Additional explanation of the narrative may be set apart in parentheses. The important condition to the challenge, however, is that not one single biblical detail be omitted. Fair enough?

Today is about trusting God, in His Word, and at your work. And, we'll be tackling the atheists' toughest claims of contradiction in the resurrection accounts. Which **we resolve by trusting every word, woven together, yet left in its context and order.** Some of you have asked why I'm ignoring what Matthew says the disciples did when Jesus rose.

Jesus said to **them**, [Mary Magdalene and Mother Mary] "... Go and tell my **brothers** [which includes the Apostles and every male follower (Mark 3:35)] to go to Galilee; there [in Galilee] **they** [every brother] **will see me.**" While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and **reported to the chief priests** ... [And, after a brief account of that, we read] **Then** the **eleven** disciples **went to Galilee**, to the **mountain** where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but **some doubted.** – Matthew 28:10-11, 16-17 NIV



What's wrong with this story? *Everything!* Mark and Luke say they disobeyed and stayed put till Jesus rebuked 'em, taught 'em, and took 'em *that night* to the Mount of Olives where they saw Him ascend. (Mark 16:11-19; Luke 24:11, 33-38, 50-51; Acts 1:9)



Luke says Jesus told 'em to wait in Jerusalem a few days, for His Spirit. And, while they waited, Matthias replaced Judas. (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 12-26) And, John says Jesus appeared a 2nd time, one week later, confronted Doubting Thomas, and gave them His Spirit. (20:21-22, 26, 21:14) And, *that's* where we left off. Next, John writes that ...



Afterward **Jesus appeared again** [a **third time** (John 21:14)] to his disciples, by the **Sea of Tiberias** [Sea of Galilee]. – John 21:1a NIV

**And this is what Matthew is also referring to.** I hate how so many Gospel harmonizers cut Mark and Luke's ascension account out of its context, and paste it at the end of Matthew. **You either trust God's Word or you trust yourself. And, if you tend to trust yourself, how do you differ from the atheist?**



Let's read **Matthew 28:10-17** (PURPLE) and **John 21:1b-14** (BROWN).

Then Jesus said to **them**, [Mary and Mary] "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my **brothers** [a large group] to go to Galilee; there **they will see me.**"

[Now, *only Matthew* records the following] **While the women were on their way**, [to tell the men; the result of which we know full well from Mark and Luke] some of the guards went into the city and **reported to the chief priests everything that had happened** [which threw ‘em into a panic; so, after excusing the guards they discussed their options, set up an emergency meeting, notified the elders, gathered together, and argued over what course to take]. **When the chief priests had met with the elders** [for who knows how long] **and devised a plan**, [which required getting their hands on a *huge* sum of money, and requesting a meeting with all the soldiers, and gathering together] **they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples** [specifically, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the beloved disciple] **came during the night** [which they had, while it was still dark] **and stole him away** [which they hadn’t] **while we were asleep.’** [Which is punishable by death; but, here’s where the *big money* comes in] **If this report gets to the governor**, [Pilate, which it most likely will, for judicial investigation] **we will satisfy him** [with a bribe; which the governors were known for taking (Acts 24:26)] **and keep you out of trouble.” So the soldiers** [after an unknown period of consideration, and discussion, and unanimous agreement] **took the money and did as they were instructed.** [They entered false information into the formal report] **And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. Then** [after, the guards reported to the priests, the priests then got together with the elders and devised a plan, and then acquired the cash from who-knows-who, and then met with the guards and got them on board. *Then, after all that*] **the eleven disciples went to Galilee**, [How long do you think *all that* took: *a few days*? That’s how long Jesus told the disciples to stay in Jerusalem, before they went to Galilee (Acts 1:4-5)] **to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go** [just days before He died (Mat 26:32; Mark 14:28)].

The first time Jesus appears, Matthias is included in the *eleven*; (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:33) the second time He appears, Matthias is included in the *Twelve*; (1 Cor 15:5) so, **why is Matthias left out of this count?** Because, **he’s not one of the Twelve Jesus had told where to go. Matthew’s point isn’t that only eleven go, but that the “eleven (remaining) disciples” “Jesus had told (where) to go” finally “went”.** And, Matthew’s *mountain* and John’s *Sea of Tiberius* describe the place where, two years before, Jesus fed a multitude with a miraculous catch, chose His Apostles, and taught His Sermon on the Mount.

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but **some doubted.** [Who? The critics cry *“Contradiction! This doesn’t mesh with Doubting Thomas!”* Well, as John writes ...] It happened this way: Simon Peter, **Thomas** [i.e. *twin*] (called **Didymus** [i.e. *twin*]), **Nathanael from Cana in Galilee**, [who is *with* the Twelve, but *not one of* the Twelve] the **sons of Zebedee**, [James and John, (Mark 10:35) Peter’s fishing partners] and **two other disciples** [not necessarily *Apostles*] **were together.** [Waiting, where they were told to wait; but, as the sun set] Simon Peter told them, **“I’m going out to fish,”** [He had a fishing business and a boat] and they said, **“We’ll go with you.”** [Seven men can man the full net] So they went out and got into the boat, but **that night they caught nothing.** [Same thing happened two years before] Early in the morning, **Jesus stood on the shore**, [only 300’ away, the distance from the back of the Ark to the slough] but **the disciples** [who were *only there* to wait for Jesus] **did not realize that it was Jesus.** [Why? He’s frying fish on a campfire; He’s sending up smoke signals!] He called out to them, **“Friends,** [lit. *Children*] **haven’t you any fish?”** “No,” **they answered.** [Still not considering for a moment there’s even a chance this is Jesus] He said, **“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”** [“Okay. We might as well do what that guy on the shore said”] When they did, **they were unable to haul the net in** [even with seven men] because of **the large number of fish.** [It’s a bona fide miracle! Just like the one *Jesus* had done, two years earlier. But, as they battle the net, they remain steadfastly impervious to any suspicion it’s Jesus] Then **the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter,** [“Wait a minute ... you know what?”] **“It is the Lord!”**

What's wrong with this story? *Everything! But, on purpose! Know what it's saying? Make Me make sense.* Because, if you do, you'll find an amazing story concealed in plain sight. But, **we have to know and trust His voice, which is ... what? His Word.** Let's weave in Paul's chronological sequence of appearances.

[Paul writes that Jesus] ... **appeared to Peter** [the day Jesus rose], and **then to the Twelve**. [One week later, with Doubting Thomas and Matthias] **After that**, he appeared to **more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time**, [and in the same place, big enough to handle 'em, like the shore where He'd fed 'em two years before] most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. **Then he appeared to** [or: "was seen by" (NKJ)] **James**, [who was either in the crowd that day, or he's the unnamed disciple who beholds Jesus from the boat] **then to all the apostles**, [on the shore, at Jesus' third appearance] and **last of all he appeared to me** ... [Paul, on the road to Damascus] – 1 Corinthians 15:5b-8a NIV



When did Jesus appear ***"to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time"*** and place, between His 2nd and 3rd appearances to the Twelve? The place where He said "My brothers" "will see Me"! And, **why another miraculous catch? No reason? Doesn't a miraculous catch imply a miraculous feeding?** There'd sure be a lot of mouths. Both times He fed a multitude with bread and fish it records the number of men and adds: *"besides women and children"*. (Mat 14:21, 15:38) ***"Who wants to go see Jesus resurrected from the dead?!" More than 500 brothers, besides women and children, could easily surpass 2000!***

[Let's re-read Matthew] **When they** [the remaining, original eleven, who'd been told where to go, before He died; **when they** **saw him**, [at His third appearance] **they** [the finally-faithful eleven, plus Matthias, "who was added to the eleven Apostles" (Acts 1:26)] **worshiped him**; [having already seen Him, touched Him, and having been filled with His Spirit] **but some** [others, aside from the Apostles] **doubted**.



And if, as Isaiah prophesied, (Isaiah 50:6, 52:14) His beard was pulled out, and His scars had marred Him beyond recognition, doubt would be very understandable among the crowd.

This 4th century (300s A.D.) glass plate contains **one of the oldest portrayals of Jesus**. And, **it depicts Him after the cross. And, without a beard**. Now, let's re-read this seemingly untrustworthy story, and watch it grow and mature (like any living thing) until it makes *perfect sense*.

***"The disciples did not realize that it was Jesus"***. Why? **The campfire wasn't unique, and Jesus wasn't alone**. And, who knows how long they'd been waiting there.

***"Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered"***, **thinking this was just a voice from the hungry crowd**. Why don't they recognize His voice? Either it's not distinctive, they're distracted, or He's having a laugh. I vote the laugh. **He knows they don't know it's Him; yet, He doesn't identify Himself**.

***"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some"***. That sounds like it'd be one of the *brothers* saying, ***"Do what Jesus had you do the last time He miraculously fed us all here."***



And, why not? What've they go to lose? "When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish", and must've been astounded that the same miracle work a *second time*!

"Then the disciple whom Jesus loved" squinted at the crowd pressing together in a familiar fashion, and "said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"" To which the nearly naked Simon-Peter replied, "What?!"



As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. [At the Last Supper, Jesus removed His outer garment to serve. (John 13:4) Now, at the Last Breakfast, Peter wraps *his on* and leaves the serving to others] The other disciples followed in the boat, [His boat!] towing the net full of fish, [Why? Jesus provides everything for a reason; and, the reason is to share with others. In this case, the 500+ brothers and their families. And, it wasn't a big deal] for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. [The back of the Ark to the slough; so, Peter gain by deserting 'em? A reputation for being self-centered] When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. [And, maybe a shivering, soaking wet, disciple warming himself] Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

**He doesn't call us to put down what we do, but to partner up.** We can be so quick to jump ship, to get closer to Jesus, that **we miss His part in our work-a-day purpose**. So, they do what fishermen did: sort the fish, count the fish, inspect the net.

**Simon Peter** [perhaps in a show of regret] climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore [by himself]. It was full of large fish, 153, [the most **common** large fish was the 3.5 pound Tilapia, now known as *St. Peter's fish*. So, that net had to weigh around 500 pounds!] but even with so many [and with only one impulsive gorilla dragging it in] the net was not torn. [Why count 'em? To evenly distribute 'em] Jesus said to them, [the multitude of disciples, among whom some had doubted] "Come and have breakfast." [And, *now*] **None** of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" [They know a miracle when they saw one, especially if they'd seen it before] They knew it was the Lord. [Makes sense to perform the same miracle, in the same place, if you want to show the same people, you're the same Messiah] Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, [the 500+ brothers He supplied 'em for] and did the same with the [153 large] fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. [Just in case *anyone's* keeping track]



**Don't admire Simon-Peter for jumping out of his own boat.**

**We can be so spiritually minded that we're no earthly good.**

**He was so intent on getting closer to Jesus, that he abandoned his post and did what the Lord Himself would *never do*: when Simon turned to Jesus, he turned away from those around him. Worse, he spiritually justified forsaking his earthly duties. And, in his own *boat*, at his own *job*! Bless His heart.**