

"Many Convincing Proofs"

by Dan Trygg

In Acts 1:3, Luke records, "To these He also presented himself alive, after His suffering, *by many convincing proofs*, appearing to them over a period of 40 days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God." **Aside from all other evidences that support the claim of Jesus' resurrection, Luke zeroes in on this most important, most foundational evidence, *the testimony of the eyewitnesses who saw the risen Jesus.***

It is important to consider what Luke is actually claiming. **The phrase, "convincing proofs", is *tekmērion* in the Greek, which means "that which is shown to be true by *clear, undoubtable evidence, or by indisputable, objective indications or signs*".**

We have an example of what Luke thought qualified as such a proof in Lk. 24:36f. Jesus suddenly appeared in the midst of the disciples, who were *not* at all in a meditative, "conjuring" frame of mind, but rather in the midst of animated conversation. They were naturally startled and frightened (they were *not* expecting Him to "show up" right then, ...or *ever*, for that matter). He assured them it was indeed Him, *and that He was not a spirit, or a figment of their imagination.* He encouraged them to *touch* Him, and *ate food* in front of them, to prove that He was *actually* physically there. Then He taught them about the significance of what He had accomplished by His death and resurrection, especially emphasizing the Holy Spirit's coming.

By stating that Jesus presented Himself alive by many convincing proofs over a period of time, Luke actually is building a strong case to establish a historical fact by inductive reasoning methodology. He is saying that, based upon a *repeated series of observable confirmations* (the post-resurrection encounters with Jesus), it is reasonable to conclude that the claim of the NT (that He really *did* rise from the dead) is true.

In our age of near-worship of modern science, it is important to see that this respected academic discipline relies on similar inductive methodology. The scientist observes a phenomenon, proposes an explanation (hypothesis *A*), then proposes ways to examine his theory (if *A* is true, then *B, C, D,* and *E* would also be true). He then tests it out by examining a series of repeated events (experiments) designed to establish or discredit each of these ideas. If the hypothesis continues to hold up under examination, and if it satisfactorily explains all aspects of the known data (converging lines of evidence), then the hypothesis is accepted as the "assured and established findings of the scientific community". This means that it is the *most probable* explanation to date.

Historical events are established the same basic way, and our law court systems also seek to discover truth by a similar process. The problem with historical events, however, is that they are *not* repeatable, as are the experiments of the scientist. Nevertheless, historians and lawyers *do* rely heavily on the inductive approach. They gather as many bits of relevant evidence they can find. As they examine these artifacts, they propose theories, or explanations of what occurred, which are suggested by the evidence. Each theory will then be examined by all known evidence to see if it satisfactorily explains all the facts. **The scenario which is best supported by the evidence is considered to be *probably true*.** The more converging evidences found to support a theory, the stronger the probability factor that is associated with that belief. ***Any known facts which directly contradict an explanation would rule it out from further consideration.*** In our law court system, the burden of proof that must be demonstrated for conviction of a crime is required to be *beyond reasonable doubt*. A very high degree of probability must be demonstrated to establish events in a court setting.

In the history of Western philosophy, there was an ongoing search by philosophers for what could be known with absolute certainty. **In the debates about the investigation of information and methods of thought, two types of logic were identified.** There is **deductive logic**, which draws particular conclusions from generally known truths, and there is **inductive logic**, which draws general statements from the examination of many bits of information. **The strength of deductive logic is that, when the premises are true, and the correct logical form is followed, the conclusion will always be true with certainty.** The weakness of it is that it is very limited in its scope. There are some aspects of reality that simply cannot be investigated purely from a deductive basis. **The inductive method, is an alternative strategy for the discovery of truth. Its strength is that it can investigate things where the deductive method cannot. Its weakness, however, is that it is *only capable of probability, not certainty.***

The inductive method actually employs an *expanded version of a process of thought that is recognized by deductive logicians as an *invalid, fallacious form.** In a nutshell, the two methods would look like this:

<u>Valid Deductive Syllogism:</u>	<u>Fallacious Deductive Syllogism:</u>
If A, then B. <hr/> A ∴ B.	If A, then B. <hr/> B. ∴ A
If all men are mortal. <hr/> Socrates is a man. ∴ Socrates is mortal.	(If Christ rose, then witnesses would see Him.) <hr/> (Eyewitnesses saw Christ.) (Therefore, Christ rose from the dead.)

In logic-talk, this is an example of the fallacy known as *affirming the consequent*. **The fact that it is a fallacious logical form does not mean it is *false*. It just means that the logical structure of the argument does not guarantee with certainty that it is true.**

Many attempts over the years to discredit the resurrection have tried to offer *other explanations* for the fact that Jesus was seen by the disciples. For example, some have said that He did not really die. Others have suggested that the disciples were hallucinating. These possible explanations must be examined in light of *all* the evidence. As theories, do these adequately explain *all* the facts?

The inductive method was based upon an *expanded version of what logicians saw as an invalid deductive form*, one incapable of guaranteeing absolute certainty. In spite of a similar basic approach, it is *not* the same as the simplistic form rejected by deductive logicians. **Inductive approaches commonly utilize three principles to protect the results from error: (1.) Repetition; (2.) Converging Evidences; and (3.) Cross Examination.**

Inductive Method

If A, then B	(e.g., If Christ is risen, then He will be seen.)
Step One: Repetition B1, B2, B3, B4,...etc. <hr/> ∴ A	(Christ <i>is</i> seen on <u>numerous occasions.</u>) ∴ (Christ is risen.)
Step Two: Converging Evidences If A, then C,D,E,... <hr/> C,D,E,... ∴ A	(If Christ is risen, what <i>else</i> could we expect?) (Other supporting <u>evidence is present</u>) ∴ (Christ is risen.)

Step Three: Cross Examination

If A, then X, Y, or Z?

What other possible explanations might there be for these events? Is there any conflicting evidence? Other theories?

If there is no directly conflicting evidence, or if the opposing theories do not better explain the facts, then we must affirm what the evidence most probably points to, ...that Jesus *did*, in fact, rise from the dead!

Finally, the conclusion of the inductive process is *the most probable scenario explaining all the available evidence.*

It is beyond dispute that, in spite of its limitations, the inductive approach to discovering truth is valuable, practical, and generally reliable, ...*even if not 100% certain.* We all employ it *every day* in making decisions. Its benefits are widely seen and accepted. Even though absolute certainty *must* always evade the true scientist, **there is a great deal of understanding that can be acquired, and established as highly probable, which is of tremendous value.** We have been able to develop and employ any number of various applications in the form of technological advances that we enjoy every day based upon such "un-certain", but "highly probable" discoveries. **We accept by faith that they will work, because they have performed for us in previous experiences.** In fact, we are *so* confident in these "probabilities" that we don't even think about them. We simply live with the *belief* that they will work for us as they have in the past.

Luke says that **Jesus showed Himself to the disciples with many convincing proofs over a 40 day period of time.** Of these appearances, there were at least a dozen instances recorded for us in the New Testament. It is important to note that **these were in a variety of settings, different locations, usually without any expectation of His coming, to many different people, both to individuals as well as to groups of various sizes.**

The witnesses employed not only *sight* and *hearing*, but they also *touched* Him and watched Him consume food.

Instead of furtive glimpses, or brief appearances, they *spent extended time with Him*, eating meals and conversing. They even went on long walks with Him.

Twelve Resurrection Appearances

1. To Mary Magdalene -- Jn. 20:11-18; Mk. 16:9.
2. To women returning from the tomb -- Matt. 28:9.
3. To Peter -- Lk. 24:34; I Cor. 15:5; Jn. 21:15-22.
4. To the disciples on the road to Emmaus -- Lk. 24:13-35.
5. To "the ten" in the upper room -- Lk. 24:30,31; Jn. 20:19-23.
6. To "the eleven" (including Thomas) -- Jn. 20:26-29; Mk. 16:14; cf. I Cor. 15:5.
7. To five hundred -- I Cor. 15:6.
8. To James (Jesus' brother) -- I Cor. 15:7.
9. To the seven disciples by the lakeside (in Galilee) -- Jn. 21:7.
10. To "chosen witnesses who dined with Him" -- Acts 10:41.

11. To "many" on the Mount of Olives near Bethany (in Judea) at His ascension -- Lk. 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-12.

12. To Paul (in Syria) -- I Cor. 15:8; Acts 9:1-20.

Other Corroborating Evidences

13. The Empty Tomb -- Without an empty tomb, the claim of resurrection is meaningless. To refute the resurrection, all that would have been necessary was to produce the body. The body was *missing*!

14. The Condition of the Grave Clothes -- It is clear that the grave clothes were left behind. Why steal a corpse, but take the time to *remove* the linen strips, especially since a paste-like mixture of oil and 75 pounds of spices had been applied to them (Jn. 19:39)? The record indicates the grave clothes remained "twirled up", and their appearance immediately inspired faith in those who saw them (Jn. 20:1-8).

15. The Change in the Disciples -- The disciples were transformed from fearful, cowardly men, who fled for their lives at Gethsemane, and who locked themselves away for fear of reprisal from the Jews (Jn. 20:19), into champions for the faith. Why? *Their* explanation for the change in their lives was that the risen Jesus appeared to them. *They never profited from this claim*, but instead boldly faced persecution, imprisonment and even death because of it.

16. The Existence and Testimony of the Church -- The coming of the Holy Spirit, the birth of the Church and the testimonies of literally millions of people that have been radically transformed by faith in Jesus Christ cannot be dismissed.

Something must have happened to explain these experiences. The explanation all of these witnesses give is that Jesus rose again, and is alive today.

What do you think?

In a court of law, the testimony of a single witness is significant. The corroborating testimony of two or more is *very weighty*, usually *compelling* enough to convince beyond reasonable doubt. **When these post-resurrection appearances are taken together, along with the other corroborating evidences for this historical event, we have a very sound basis for faith.** We may not have absolute certainty, but this is true of any historical event. **What we do have is a very high degree of probability, a degree of probability based upon sound and solid evidence**, a degree of probability we do not hesitate to operate on in other areas of life.

Why do some doubt, or even castigate the claim of the resurrection? Their objection is not due to a lack of evidence, it is usually the result of pre-judgment, e.g., presuppositions of anti-supernaturalism, or possibly an unwillingness to believe something that would demand their accountability to God. **The evidence is there. We can be confident that He is risen, indeed!**

Faith in Jesus is not a shot in the dark. It is a faith commitment in response to a *well-established historical event*. If Jesus claimed to be God, and rose from the dead, as He predicted, then we'd better pay attention! God's promise is that if we align with Jesus as our Master, and believe that He was raised from the dead, then God will save us (Rom. 10:9). **It is not a blind leap, but a reasonable choice.**

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