



“The Case for Christ”: The Movie

There have been many Christian movies in the history of American cinema, including *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*, and *Ben-Hur*. *The Case for Christ* compares favorably with any of them.

The movie is a dramatization of Lee Strobel’s book by the same name, which has sold 14 million copies. It is the true story of an investigative reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* who sets out to disprove the Christian faith after his wife becomes a Christian. He is told by someone that if he wants to destroy the Christian religion, then he needs to demonstrate that the cardinal belief of that faith — the resurrection of the Jesus Christ — simply did not happen. Then the remainder of the Christian faith will collapse “like a house of cards.”



Strobel (played by Mike Vogel) and his wife (Leslie) are both non-believers at the beginning of the movie; she later explains to someone that although she was raised in a Christian home, she and Lee had “moved on” from that.

But when their daughter, Allison, almost chokes to death in a Chicago restaurant, and is rescued by a nurse (Alfie), the Strobels’ atheistic worldview begins to change. After they profusely thank her for saving their daughter’s life, Alfie launches the Strobels’ spiritual journey by relating to them that she had felt that Jesus was telling her to change from another restaurant to “this one tonight.”

At home, Allison is naturally curious as to who this Jesus mentioned by her rescuer is. When Leslie (played by Erika Christensen) begins to give her the typical, “he was a good man who lived a long time ago” story, Lee interrupts and tells her that Jesus is like a character in one of the fairytale books they often read to her. “We’re atheists,” Strobel tells little Allison, to which she replies, “I guess I am an atheist, too.”

But Leslie is led to take Alfie some muffins at Mercy Hospital. Alfie then invites Leslie to church, and this first step begins the spiritual journey that leads her to believe in Jesus herself.

Leslie holds back from telling Lee about her interest in the Christian faith, but when she finally does tell him that she has prayed for Jesus to “be in her life,” Strobel is angered, and they argue. Eventually, he tells her that if she persists in this belief, their marriage is over.

Strobel asks for help from a fellow skeptic, who suggests reading Bertrand Russell’s book *Why I Am Not a Christian*. Recalling his own struggles with a daughter who became a believer, the fellow skeptic advises Strobel that he should consider just “living with it.”

But Strobel is determined to knock down the resurrection story, and thus take out the legs from



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underneath the Christian faith. He believes that his ability as an investigative reporter will help him find proof that Jesus did not rise from the grave. After all, he was a prize-winning reporter whose series on safety issues with the Ford Pinto had won him wide acclaim. Jesus, however, turns out to be a much tougher opponent than the Ford Motor Company.

As Strobel begins his travels to interview experts who are both believers and skeptics, his relationship with his now-Christian wife is deteriorating. After she is baptized, he accuses her of “cheating” on him with another man: Jesus. But as he tells his skeptic friend, he knows his wife is a different person from before.

While Strobel is searching for answers concerning the resurrection of Jesus, he is simultaneously working on a story for the newspaper — about a man accused of shooting a policeman. His investigative reporting seals the accused man’s fate, forcing him to cop a plea deal to avoid even more time in prison. Unfortunately, Strobel’s journalistic efforts also reveal on the front page of the paper that the accused man had been an informant for the police in the past, which leads his jailmates to beat him almost to death. Later, when Strobel uncovers previously overlooked evidence that reveals that the accused man is actually innocent, this leads him to reconsider his past rejections of the evidence of the resurrection.

Strobel’s theories as to why Jesus did not rise from the dead get shot down one by one, over several months. For example, an agnostic psychologist (played by Faye Dunaway) tells him that his thesis that the 500 people who, the Apostle Paul said, saw Jesus in His risen state were suffering mass hallucination just does not work. “It would be a greater miracle than the resurrection,” she argues, informing him that there is no such thing as “mass delusion.”

When Strobel asks a Christian physician about the Swoon Theory — the belief that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross, but simply lost consciousness — the physician demolishes that theory as unsupported by medical facts, even showing him an article from the *New England Journal of Medicine* that concludes that Jesus could not have survived the cross. Strobel is left in a quandary, asserting, “Doc, you are not telling me what I wanted to hear today.”

It is becoming clear even to Strobel that he is not just letting the facts take him where they lead — that he is simply rejecting the evidence before his eyes.

Following his talk with the Christian physician, Strobel goes to the hospital to see the man who had been falsely accused of killing a police officer. He apologizes to him and tells him that he had “missed the truth” in his first story. The man peers at him through swollen eyes, and finally tells Strobel that it wasn’t just that he had missed the truth, but that Strobel “did not want to see the truth.”

Finally, Strobel becomes convinced that the truth is that Jesus *was* resurrected, thus proving the veracity of the Christian faith. He tells his wife that “the evidence for your faith is more overwhelming than you can imagine.” Then he relates to her the final reason that he had come to believe in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

The Christian will go away from this movie with his faith confirmed, while the skeptic should have many of his questions answered. Both will find the movie great entertainment.

Photo: Mike Vogel playing Lee Strobel in The Case for Christ

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