

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Proclaim the good News! Tell the facts! Carry the message to all the world! Jesus has risen from the dead! This was the apostles' assignment; and to it they applied themselves as men possessed of a magnificent obsession. They knew by tremendous and triumphant experience the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Under the teaching of Jesus during his resurrection appearances, the apostles began to see the significance of these facts in the plan of God for all men. They began to feel the transforming power of this great manifestation of God's might and mercy. They felt the obligation to carry out Jesus' urgently repeated command to tell everybody these facts by which men are brought to salvation and new life and without which men have neither hope nor light in a world of darkness and death.

Far too much, we take it for granted that men do know these facts when in reality they do not. Many, many people have heard something about the resurrection of Jesus. But they think of it as a religious doctrine which some men believe. They do not actually know it as a fact. We must proclaim the resurrection of Jesus not as part of a philosophical ideal, nor as our opinion or a corollary of hopeful dreams for the future, but as certainty of what God has done in the past. Jesus has commanded us to make it known "to the whole creation." For by this knowledge men are saved through believing and obeying the risen Lord.

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST AND HIS RESURRECTION

Christianity is Christ! It is confidence in Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God, having all authority and absolute trustworthiness. Christianity becomes a matter of doctrines and practices simply because Jesus taught and commanded. Its doctrines are His teachings; and its practices are obedience to His commands.

Our Christian faith is faith in Christ and the divine revelation of which He is the source and center. It certainly is not a philosophy or a system of reasonings about realms beyond our experience. It is following Him wherever He leads and trusting Him for all our needs. The whole validity of Christianity and of the Bible depends upon who Jesus is — upon His personal merit and power.

Because He put His stamp of approval upon the Old Testament, and said that it could not be broken (John 10:35) and that none of it shall pass away until all be fulfilled (Matt. 5:18; Luke 24:44), therefore we believe that the Old Testament scriptures are inspired, authoritative and divinely dependable. Because Jesus promised to give to the apostles the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth as well as to remember all that He

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

taught them (John 14:26; 16:12-14), we believe that the New Testament scriptures are inspired of God and possessed of divine accuracy and authority.

The evidence that Jesus is the Son of God is shown:

1. in many O.T. Phophceries (e.g. Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2-4; Psalm 110:1; 45:6, 7; etc.)
2. in His supernatural birth;
3. in the direct testimony of angels (Luke 1:30-35);
4. in the witness of John the Baptist (John 1:33, 34);
5. in the confession of demons (Mark 5:6, 7);
6. in the testimony of the voice of God at His baptism and on the Mount (Matt. 3:16, 17 and 17:5);
7. in Jesus' sinless life, in which all His deeds and motives were of God;
8. in His superhuman wisdom and insight into the nature and needs of men;
9. in His miraculous works, showing both the power and the merciful character of God;
10. in His persistent and positive claims to be one with God (See Matt. 11:27; 28:18; Mark 2:10; Luke 22:69-71; John 8:58; 10:30; 14:6-11; etc.).

But the death and resurrection of Jesus are the facts that reveal most clearly and conclusively His person and character, as well as His purpose and His ministry to us.

In the New Testament the resurrection is made the chief evidence upon which faith in Christ is to be based. It is the fitting climax of every account of His life. The key-note of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost was: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:24-32). "With great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33). It was the major item of testimony in all their preaching (See Acts 3:15; 4:2; 5:31, 32; 10:41-42; 13:30-37; 17:31, 32; 26:8, 23; Romans 1:4; I Cor. 15:1-18). It is continually emphasized in the epistles as the basis of our faith and hope, and as a motive to holy living (See Rom. 6:4-11; 8:34; I Cor. 15:58; Eph. 1:19-23; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 2:12; 3:1-4; I Thess. 4:14; I Peter 1:3-7; Heb. 13:20, 21).

Jesus Himself often predicted His own resurrection and considered it the greatest sign of His authority and truthfulness (See Matt. 12:38-40; 16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19; John 2:19-21; 10:17, 18). His enemies noticed His predictions of His resurrection and even the time that He set for it (See Matt. 27:63). In their blindness they tried to stop the power of God with military might and the authority of a Roman seal. They only provided circumstances that contributed to the proof of the resurrection.

SPECIAL STUDIES

The guard they placed to watch the tomb stands guard today against false objections and foolish doubts that would try to explain away the empty tomb.

Many people who are misled by scientific talk of unvarying uniformity in nature, and who therefore doubt miracles, speak in glowing praise of Jesus' teachings. But they overlook the fact that Jesus' teaching was much more than a set of rules for conduct. He taught much about the life to come and insisted that faith in Him is the only way to life. He taught men to put their trust in Him because of His works which demonstrated that the power of God was with Him. He emphasized the importance of the resurrection as the sign of His authority and dependability. There is no honest or intelligent way to separate something called "Jesus' Teachings" from His words recorded in the New Testament which emphasize repeatedly the supreme importance of every man's definite commitment of self to Him by faith and obedience to His authority (See Matt. 7:21-27; 10:32-38; 11:27; 12:30-42; 16:15-28; 21:37-45; 22:41-46; 26:63, 64; 28:18-20; John 3:36—as properly translated in most versions: "He who doth not obey"—; 5:22-29; 6:29, 53-57; 8:24; 10:24-30; 12:46-48).

Confession of Christ and belief in the resurrection go together to obtain salvation: "Because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and thou shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9). Denying the resurrection of Christ is the same as denying His authority and power to save: "If Christ hath not been raised, your faith is in vain; ye are yet in your sins" (I Cor. 15:17).

DIRECT EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus is not a matter of hope for what will happen, or a faith in what should happen, but knowledge of what did happen. It is not a compelling feeling, or reasonable philosophy, but it is a fact. If the events of the past recorded as history can be known, then we know that Jesus arose from the dead.

The chief proof of the resurrection is *Testimony*. The testimony for Jesus' resurrection is the kind that all experience proves to be reliable—the kind that is acceptable to establish the truth in any court or in any matter of history.

The witnesses are *sufficient in number*—eleven apostles, five or six women (at least), some other disciples, James, Paul, and more than five hundred at one time. These saw Jesus alive after His death again and again, singly and in groups, indoors and outdoors, by day and by night. All were brought to one conviction. Their united, active witnessing and their convincing testimony produced thousands of believers within a few

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

days in the very city where it happened, less than two months after Jesus was in the tomb. The testimony of some of them and the experience of all of them is recorded by at least six writers in different accounts that show all the variations of independent testimonies and all the harmony of truth.

The witnesses were *competent* — men of intelligence (read their classic writings); of mental balance before and after; well prepared by long and intimate acquaintance with Jesus; of a mental attitude requiring proof; having personal interest in knowing the certainty of these things. They, at least the leading ones, repeatedly saw the risen Christ and listened to extensive teaching from Him, walked and talked with Him, touched Him, and saw Him eat in their presence, discussed His death and resurrection and plans for the future.

“To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

They even saw Him ascend into heaven. There was no mistaking His identity. They told of such detailed experience with Him. The circumstantial details of their accounts show that they were not trying to tell of an inner conviction but of real physical experiences. This destroys the supposition that they could have been honestly mistaken. If Jesus did not actually arise and appear as they said, then they knew their testimony was false.

But they were *honest* men. They had been trained in righteousness, in both reverent fear and loving devotion toward the God of truth. Their lives show no tendency to dishonesty. Their teachings and their examples have had the greatest power in the world to make other men honest. They had nothing to gain by spreading a false report; but rather suffered much affliction and even death for their witnessing. Some men might die for what they believed and be mistaken. No such group of men will devote years of life and accept death for what they know to be false. But these apostles lived and died for what they knew to be true; if it had been false they most surely would have known that it was.

But there was other testimony, of unusual quality and force, to support the testimony of the eye-witnesses. The *prophecies of the Old Testament* testify of the coming of this unique event in the life of the promised Messiah (Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 53:10-12). As we have noted above, Jesus Himself predicted it, and it cannot be destroyed without destroying His integrity.

The testimony of the New Testament has been subjected to centuries of unfriendly criticism and scrutiny. Many objections have been made to various details; but no one has been able to deny that the apostles and the

SPECIAL STUDIES

early church honestly and firmly believed that Jesus arose bodily from the grave. And no one has ever given a satisfactory explanation of how this firm and persistent belief could have arisen without the reality of the resurrection. Surely no one can deny that the church came into existence and Christianity became a force in the world, beginning with and growing because of the firm conviction and the convincing testimony of the resurrection.

The resurrection is confirmed by the *Holy Spirit*, who came upon the apostles as Jesus had promised (Luke 24:49; John 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:5, 8), and who bore witness with them concerning the resurrection (Acts 2:33; 5:32).

The testimony is confirmed by *perpetual observances* which are based upon the fact of the resurrection. The form of baptism pictures both Christ's burial and resurrection, and their significance in our lives. The practice of worship on the first day of the week instead of the seventh, and that in a church which was at first Jewish, explicitly and pointedly commemorates both the resurrection of Jesus and its importance in their sight.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a fact made known to us by such an array of testimony and effects that it is more than what is usually called faith. Conviction based on testimony of facts frequently reaches the point at which it is called knowledge; for we speak of knowing many things that happened in the past which are made known to us through testimony and effects. The resurrection of Jesus is a matter of knowledge as much as any other fact in history is a matter of knowledge. At least, it is surely clear that to the eleven apostles the resurrection was not merely a belief, but knowledge of the greatest possible certainty. To us it is not only a part of the doctrine of Christ; but a proof of the authority of all His doctrine—not so much a belief, but a firm basis for faith in Him and hope of that which He has promised.

CONSIDER WHO IT WAS THAT AROSE!

The resurrection of Jesus was not merely an unexplained appearance of some unknown or ordinary man from the grave. His resurrection was in perfect harmony with His manner of life, His unique birth, His unparalleled works, His distinctive death, and with the prophecies that prepared the way for Him. The resurrection of Jesus is made both more readily believable and much more meaningful when we consider the following facts:

1. He fulfilled the promises and predictions of the prophets; His resurrection is a victory for revealed truth.

2. He is the One who lived in perfect righteousness; He arose as victor over great powers of wickedness.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

3. He was the One who had raised others and promised to raise all men; His resurrection gives assurance that He still gives life to whom He will.

4. He is the One who predicted His own resurrection and claimed to speak the truth; it is proof that His words are infallibly true and all His claims are valid.

5. His death was declared to be an offering for our sins (Matt. 20:28; 26:28). His resurrection is our own victory over sin and death if we join our lives with His. His rising proves that His death was adequate and acceptable for our redemption.

6. He is the One who said that all judgment was given unto Him and who read men's hearts with unerring accuracy. His resurrection is positive proof that we all shall stand before Him to be confessed by Him or to be condemned by Him.

We might be interested in what Lazarus would tell of his experience in four days of death and in living again, but we could not have much assurance that Lazarus could deliver the rest of us from death and all its terrors. We should indeed be students of everything Jesus has to say; for He is the author of a divine covenant by which we all may have eternal life, and He is the judge to whom we all must give account.

We can be sure that Jesus is the Lord of life and death. Let us serve Him with glad assurance that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Let every man acknowledge Him as Lord—*admit* who He is, *submit* to His commands and the control of His Spirit, and joyfully *commit* to His keeping all that we are or hope to be.

We must either acknowledge and serve Him as our Lord here on earth, or confess Him as Lord hereafter to our everlasting shame and condemnation (Philippians 2:9-11).