

## “What the Resurrection Means”

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*“That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” ~ Romans 10:9,10).*

The supreme evidence of the fact of everlasting life is the resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus said that this miracle would be the supernatural sign that would be given to the Gentile nations to corroborate His deity.

When His critics asked Him, *“Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” He replied, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”* (Matt. 12:38-40).

Because God alone can save us from sin and because salvation is inherent in our absolute confidence in the deity of Jesus Christ, our text makes it clear that belief in the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ and an open, unashamed confession of that belief is essential to salvation. Because the resurrection was to be the sign of the deity of Jesus Christ, acceptance of that sign is a confession that Jesus Christ is the incarnate God, the only Savior and able to save completely.

Not only is the glorious truth of the resurrection an absolute imperative to God’s plan for salvation, but it is the very ground and basis of our own resurrection. In I Corinthians 15, Paul builds his whole argument for the resurrection of believers on the great truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ was the *“firstfruits”* and we are to follow. The fact of Jesus Christ’s resurrection in the past, points with unerring certainty to the truth of our resurrection in the future.

Few facts in history have been as well authenticated and established as the fact of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If over five hundred credible eyewitnesses appeared before a modern court to testify unanimously to any one subject, the court would undoubtedly call the matter settled. This was the case of the resurrection. There were more than five hundred credible witnesses who saw Jesus alive in a fleshly body after His resurrection from the dead.

The student of history will remember that two great Romans, Titus and Pontius Pilate, crucified around the walls of Jerusalem some 30,000 male Jews of military age. That means that 30,000 young men, whose average ages were approximately the age of Jesus when He died, were crucified on Roman crosses during that brief period of time. Yet, there is no student of history that could recall the name of any one of those 30,000. The only name universally remembered is that of Jesus Christ.

How is it possible to account for the fact that all the other martyred Jews remained forever nameless, while the whole world remembers the name of the One?

The simple explanation is that all except one are dead and the dead are soon forgotten. But, on the other hand, all history remembers the One who rose from the dead and is alive!

## **The Theory of the Resurrection**

**1.** In an effort to depreciate the person and work of Jesus Christ, unbelieving critics have thrown their tireless blows at the miraculous element that surrounds Christ. One of the favorite points of attack is the resurrection. After having denied its possibility, the critics generally depend on one of three basic theories to find an explanation.

Many of them say that the disciples stole the body, then deliberately tried to deceive the world. This was one of the first attempts to deny the resurrection, because we read in the Scripture, *“When they [the chief priests] had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, ‘Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept’...” So they took the money and did as they were instructed...”* (Matt. 28: 12,13 and 15).

Consider the displaced stone. It was heavy, it was sealed and it was guarded. Yet it rolled away. A band of disorganized, weeping and saddened disciples or timid women could never remove it. In grief they were glad to have Joseph of Arimathea care for the body and would never have attempted or negotiated to have it transferred elsewhere.

The empty tomb indicates that the body was gone, and the surprise of the disciples reveals that they never anticipated its removal.

The grave clothes lying wound, folded still in the shape of the body, make it clear that there was no hasty stealing, no struggle, but only a completely miraculous disappearance of the body from within the undisturbed winding of the cloth.

If it is true that the disciples stole the body of their Lord, how could they go out to preach the gospel of the resurrection, fight for it and die for it, when they knew it was a lie? Men die for many things: for God, for home, for loved ones, but they do not usually die for a lie!

Christianity is most assuredly not founded on a graveyard theft, on a deed done by ghoulish grave-robbers. Western civilization was not built on an ancient lie. A lie doesn't last 2,000 years and transform millions of lost, sinful people into saints and lovers of God.

**2.** Some say that Christ never died. He was merely in a swoon.

He was in a kind of comatose state when taken from the cross and placed in the tomb. The odor of the spices and the cool air of the tomb revived Him and He came back to consciousness and left the tomb. (They do not attempt to explain how He moved the stone and walked passed the guards.)

This theory raises more difficulties than the miracle which it attempts to explain. The Scripture clearly indicates that Jesus had been dead for about 40 hours. When the soldiers came to Jesus to break His legs, they found Him already dead, and John tells us, *'But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs'* (John 19:33).

The record also states that a soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear, and there flowed forth both blood and water. This one wound proves the death of Christ. The water flowing through the wound indicated that the spear had pierced the pericardium in which the water is lodged and which being wounded brings immediate death. Pilate was assured of His death before he ever released the body to Joseph of Arimathea.

If this theory, that Christ never died, is true, it means that a wounded, buried and beaten piece of human flesh, a case fit for a hospital, so impressed the disciples that He was the conqueror of death and the grave, as to have made their moral transformation one of the marvels of the world.

This theory makes a liar out of Jesus Christ. Can it be supposed that the Lord Jesus Christ would risk the founding of Christianity, which He expected to sweep the world and which He knew would arouse the keenest antagonistic criticism of hard-hearted Jews and Gentile philosophers and the challenging dictum of science, on a hoax that He had risen from the dead?

What an unprincipled monster this would make Jesus out to be, to make His disciples believe that He had died when He had not and that this fabrication was to furnish the ground of their hope and was to be the thing they were to depend upon to convert the world.

This would be a chicanery to make them lay down their lives for a deception. This could never be true of Jesus Christ! The claims that He made revealed Him to be the Son of God, and there was no sin in His pure nature, let alone the despicable sin of lying deceit.

**3.** Some say the disciples were hallucinated and saw only a vision of Jesus Christ.

This theory states that the disciples so expected to see Him, that they thought they had.

This idea that the hallucination was built on expectancy falls flat because the resurrection is the one thing that they were not expecting!

It is very difficult to believe that over 500 people who saw Christ after His death all had the same hallucination!

In fact, when He did appear they thought He was a ghost and He took pains to prove it was really Himself.

## **The Evidences of the Resurrection**

The evidence is so overwhelming that it is impossible for any honest man to sift thoroughly this evidence and come to any other conclusion than that Christ did rise from the dead as He said He would.

Consider the following:

### **1. The watch.**

After Jesus was crucified under supervision of Roman guards, the hands of Joseph of Arimathea laid Him in the tomb of stone. A mammoth stone was then rolled before the sepulchre and this stone was sealed with the seal of Rome. Roman guards with swords and spears stood before the tomb night and day to guard the body of a dead man.

Why? The answer is proof of the resurrection. *“‘On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, ‘Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first’”’* (Matt. 27:62-64).

All the power of Rome was back of the seal that was placed on that stone and we can be certain that all the power of Satan and hell was present to keep that body within the tomb.

Hour after hour rolled by and all was still, but on the morning of the third day Jesus Christ illuminated the dark enclosure of the tomb with His resurrection glory. He burst the bonds of death, broke the Roman seal and came forth the conqueror of death, the grave, hell and Satan himself!

When Rome placed its guards to watch the tomb, it removed all possibility of the resurrection being a lie, and left an assurance for all ages that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a reality.

The very fact that the soldiers lived to tell their story is proof of the fact that they never could have fallen asleep as they were watching the tomb. If they had they would have been put to death.

### **2. The empty tomb.**

There can be no question but that the tomb in Joseph’s garden was empty.

The Mohammedans make a pilgrimage to Medina where the dust of Mohammed lies.

The Buddhists have a temple in which they keep the last remains of the body of Buddha, and if all the infidels this side of hell were going into a session for the purpose of exploding and overthrowing the resurrection, the hurling of the empty tomb into the midst of their diabolical deliberation would confound and confuse them forever.

***“He is not here; He is risen!”***

### **3.** The results.

Today millions of Christians are worshipping on the first day of the week rather than the seventh day Jewish Sabbath. This is a result of the resurrection—an empty tomb on that first day.

The church itself is testimony to the validity of the resurrection. If Jesus did not rise from the dead bodily, there would be no church.

During the centuries, that handful of disciples has grown into an institution with millions of members. Their presence in the world is testimony to the fact that their Founder rose from the dead.

### **4.** The changed disciples.

See them at Calvary, despairing and sad. They all forsook Him and fled.

See them a few weeks later at Pentecost, boldly preaching the truth of Christ and indicting the house of Israel. What changed these timid disciples to the fearless witnesses who counted it a privilege to suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and give their lives for His gospel? It was the fact that they saw Jesus alive after His resurrection and had received His Holy Spirit.

Every true disciple of Christ has, in his own life, a witness to the resurrection, for he possesses the very resurrection life of Jesus Christ within himself.

## **The Benefits of the Resurrection**

### **1.** Assurance of our redemption.

The resurrection furnishes every believer with a God-given assurance that he is justified in Christ. His resurrection was the seal of His redemptive work.

The fact that Christ rose was evidence that the Father was satisfied with His sacrifice. His resurrection was a receipt for a finished transaction and the cross is explained only by the resurrection. The debt was paid on Calvary and receipted the morning of the third day.

### **2.** Assurance of His triumph.

The disciples looked for Him to establish a literal Kingdom. They overlooked the fact of His suffering because they were looking for His glory. But His day is coming! He is to be vindicated! He will be the King over an earthly Kingdom. The resurrection assures this.

### 3. Removal of the sting of death.

We can even learn to welcome death and, in the spirit of the Christian martyrs who rejoiced that they would soon behold their Lord, conquer the fear of the *“last enemy”* through Christ.

We can defy Satan, hell and the grave with this powerful cry of victory, *“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (I Cor.15:55-57).

### 4. Assurance of the believer’s resurrection.

If the grave could not hold Christ, it cannot hold believers who are *“in Christ.”*

He is the firstfruits and the believers who will be raised at His coming will be the full-fruit—the harvest.

Our Lord’s resurrection is a pattern of ours. He said, *“...because I live, you will live also.”* (John 14:19).

The Christian’s body is *“sown in corruption”* and *“raised in incorruption.”* It is *“sown in dishonor”* and *“raised in glory.”* It is *“sown in weakness”* and *“raised in power.”* It is *“sown a natural body”* and *“raised a spiritual body”* (I Cor. 15).

On a tombstone in Philadelphia appears the following inscription:

*“The body of Benjamin Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of lettering and gilding, lies here food for worms, but the works shall not be lost, for it will appear once more in a new and more elegant edition, revised and corrected by its author.”*

### 5. Assurance of victory over sin.

Since Christ is risen, we need not be slaves of sin, nor subject to the bondage of Satan.

Because He has risen we may walk in newness of life, *“more than conquerors.”*

The great certainty of the resurrection gives reality to the proclamation of the gospel, substance to our faith, power to our testimony, certainty to our salvation, joy to our lives,

success to our service; puts the seal of authority on every claim of Christ and guarantees the realization of every Biblical hope that dwells in the soul of the believer.

## **Your Reaction to the Resurrection**

We are told that the Apostle Paul preached to the Greeks the resurrection, how that God *“has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed...”* (Acts 17:31-34)

Do not follow those mocking atheists on Mars Hill. Ask God for the strength to remove every obstacle that will prevent you from coming to Christ.

For the safety of your soul, you must know, as Paul reminds us, our Lord Jesus Christ, *“and the power of His resurrection...”* (Phil. 3:10)

Do not follow those who put off the matter to another time. They postponed their decision and deferred accepting the miracle of Christ and the Christ of the miracle.

The Word of God urges us through the Holy Spirit that *“now is the accepted time...”*

You can spurn His grace once too often! The third class in Paul’s audience were those who believed. There on Mars Hill the Spirit touched them and they were saved.

What a thought it is! If you do not allow this claim of Christ upon your life, He might as well be sealed up in a dusty vault in Palestine and forever dead.

If He is dead to you, then you too are dead in trespasses and sin.

But if He is alive to you, then you are alive in Him. Because He rose from the dead to vindicate His deity, because of what He has done to redeem us from sin by His death on the cross, if you believe in Him and unashamedly accept Him before the world, He shall become your Savior.

You can greet each new day with the song of resurrection triumph, *“I know that my Redeemer liveth,”* and you can end all life’s days with the Christ-centered confidence, *“I too shall live.”*