

The Resurrection of Christ

A Historical and Necessary Reality

There are those who speak of the “immortality” of men who have made a great impact upon history, with reference to the abiding results of their work or to the continuance of their teaching. Such language is but exaggeration at best, for nothing can alter the plain and undeniable fact that these men are dead. There are also many, falsely calling themselves Christians, who teach that the resurrection of Christ is no more than the survival of death by the personality of Jesus in His spirit. Scripture teaches, however, that the dissolution of death, the separation of spirit from body, was reversed, and the human spirit of the incarnate Son of God re-entered the body which was raised from the grave and glorified into a spiritual body. When we affirm **“Jesus, which was dead ... to be alive”** (Acts 25:19), we are stating the fact that this One who actually died, emerged victoriously from the state of death, literally, personally and physically. This is unquestionably a

HUMAN IMPOSSIBILITY, but it is the truth of the Word of God concerning the resurrection of Christ. What is naturally impossible, by an unprecedented direct supernatural intervention in the course of nature, became an actuality. The almighty arm of Omnipotence intervened to do what had never been done before, and what could be done only by the God of the impossible (1Sam. 2:6; 2Kings 5:7; Matt. 21:42).

It was the Father's testimony to that unbelieving world which murdered His Son, of the reality of His Divine Person, and the sufficiency of His atoning sacrifice (Rom. 1:4; Heb. 10:12), the only fitting consummation of His unique life and unique death. Bearing this in mind we see that though the resurrection of Christ was a human impossibility, it was yet a **MORAL NECESSITY**. From the divine standpoint anything less was impossibility (Acts 2:24). ***"It BEHOVED Christ to suffer, and TO RISE FROM THE DEAD the third day"*** (Luke 24:46). See also Matthew 16:21 etc.

Some of these Scriptures indicate that the character of God also demanded the resurrection, inasmuch as it was a clear **SCRIPTURAL PROPHECY**. In 1Corinthians 15:4 we are reminded that Christ's being raised from the dead on the third day was ***"according to the Scriptures"***. This great event was foretold in the Old Testament in three ways. Firstly, it was predicted explicitly, as in Psalm 16:8-11. Peter, in his address on the day of Pentecost, explained how these words could only be true of Christ (Acts 2:24-36). Secondly, it was predicted implicitly. On the same occasion Peter quotes Psalm 110:1 as prophesying the ascension of Christ. So, every Old Testament reference to the glory of Messiah subsequent to His sufferings necessarily implies His resurrection from the dead. This is true, not only of such passages as Psalm 2; Isaiah 52:13; 53:10-12, but also of every prophetic

declaration of His coming kingdom (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46; 1Pet. 1:10,11). Thirdly, the resurrection of Christ is predicted typically. One of the most remarkable revelations of God's prophetic program is found in the calendar of Jewish feast days detailed in Leviticus Ch. 23. The resurrection of Christ is typified in the wave-sheaf (vs. 9-14), which is referred to in 1Cor. 15:20,23. This is seen in relation to the preceding Passover (the death of Christ – 1Cor. 5:7) and the succeeding feast of weeks (Pentecost – Acts 2:1). The sheaf of the first-fruits was waved before God upon the first day of the week, following the Passover, and seven weeks before the day of Pentecost. So, on the first day of the week, following His death on the feast of Passover, and fifty days previous to the descent of the Holy Spirit and the commencement of the Church on the day of Pentecost, Christ was raised from the dead. How unfailingly accurate the Word of God is! And this is one of many types of the resurrection of Christ found in the Old Testament.

We might remember, too, that it was a **PERSONAL PREDICTION**. When here in the flesh the Lord Jesus Christ frequently foretold His approaching death and resurrection (e.g. Mark 8:31; 9:9-10,31-32; 10:32-34). Remarkably enough this prediction seems to have been remembered by His enemies (Matt. 27:63), though not grasped, as it should have been, by His disciples until afterwards (Luke 24:5-8; John 2:18-22).

Now, however, the resurrection of Christ has become a **HISTORICAL FACT**. One early testimony was, ***"The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared"*** (Luke 24:34). The certainty of the resurrection of Christ was established by His appearances, for ***"He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days"*** (Acts 1:3). On at least ten occasions, spread over a period of forty days, the

risen Lord appeared after His death. Many saw Him, on one occasion at least five hundred persons, the greater part which company was still alive some twenty-five years later to bear personal testimony to the truth: and silence the cavils of unbelief (1Cor. 15:6. Compare Mark 16:14). These ***"witnesses chosen before of God ... who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead"*** (Acts 10:41), were not strangers, but those who knew Him most intimately, and who consequently were least susceptible of deception.

Moreover, not only did the Lord resume that social fellowship of old, but He spoke of familiar divine truths in that way which was peculiar to Himself (Acts 1:3), and entrusted His disciples with the mission of universal evangelism with such unmistakable authority that most of those who heard Him went forth and cheerfully laid down their lives in the service of their risen Lord (Matt. 28:18-20).

So complete was the proof that the most chronic doubters were finally convinced (John 20:24-29), cowards were transformed (Matt. 26:69-75 – Compare Acts 2:14 ff.; 4:13-21; 5:29-42), and violent opponents were converted into fearless proponents (Acts 9). Historical evidence indicates that the resurrection of Christ was most surely believed by His disciples from the third day after His death and onwards. It was taught as the basis of the gospel message by the apostles and others from the first. The early church could never have survived its fiery trials had the Christians not known, many from personal experience, that Christ was alive from the dead. How triumphantly such enemies as Saul of Tarsus would have exposed any error or fraud in the Resurrection story, but instead Saul became convinced of its truth, and spent the rest of his life zealously proclaiming it, even to incredible sufferings and persecutions in life, and a martyr's death at last.

Such is the heart of man that he would rather believe a concoction of lies, whether that of the Jews (Matt. 28:11-15), or one of the many totally unsatisfactory inventions of modern unbelief, but the truth remains that the resurrection of Christ, with all its tremendous implications, is a historical fact.

We have already noted that the fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead was given great emphasis by the apostles and other early gospel preachers. They regarded it as a vital **EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE**. After stating this positively in 1Cor. 15:1-4, Paul proceeds in vs. 14-19 to stress this negatively. He says that if Christ is NOT raised, then:

1. **"Our preaching"** (i.e. that of the apostles vs. 11,12) is "vain" (*kenos* – devoid of substance).
2. **"Your faith is also vain"** (*kenos*—devoid of substance, since the message believed has no substance).
3. The preachers are **"found false witnesses of God"**, stating things of God which are false.
4. **"Your faith is vain"** (*mataios* – devoid of result): **"ye are yet in your sins"** (Although in v3 it is the death of Christ which is **"for our sins"**, not His resurrection, yet if Christ be not raised, our Substitute is not delivered from the penalty of sin, so the sin question cannot be settled nor forgiveness be possible).
5. Those who are **"fallen asleep in Christ are perished"** (If they were yet in their sins in life, they must have died in their sins, and so perished in their sins when they died).
6. As those whose eternal hope is thus groundless, Christians **"are of all men most miserable (to be pitied)"**. They have forsaken the world, and suffered for Christ, in hope of an eternal recompense, which, if Christ be not raised, is a

mirage only. The gospel is a lie, salvation is unreal, hope is a delusion, apart from the resurrection of Christ. **"But now is Christ risen from the dead"** (v20) – so that all is not lost, as else it must be.

But this glorious fact is not merely a truth to be taught, it is a power to be proved, for it is a **SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE**. This indeed is one of the most telling evidences. Paul speaks in 1Corinthians Ch. 15 of his own experience of the risen Christ, and the almighty conversion it wrought in him, but he tells also that the message which effected the divine work of salvation in the Corinthians was the gospel of Christ's atoning death and resurrection. Compare Romans 4:24; 10:9; 1Thess. 4:14. Where can new life be found for sinners who are spiritually dead by nature, and under sentence of eternal death judicially except in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:1-14; 2Cor. 5:14-17; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:19,20; 2:1-7; 1Pet. 1:3)? Every indication of spiritual and divine life in a regenerate soul is a living witness to a Saviour who conquered death. That He lives is powerfully and practically demonstrated in that He lives in His people. This is the **"witness of ... the Holy Ghost"** in all **"them that obey Him"** (Acts 5:29-32).

But it is also a **DISPENSATIONAL EARNEST**, for Christ was raised as the firstfruit of a great harvest. His resurrection is both the guarantee and pattern of that of His people. Death shall be destroyed, every enemy put down, and the glorious end be achieved – God shall be **"all in all"** (1Cor. 15:20-28).

Finally, we note that it is a **UNIVERSAL WARNING** (Acts 17:30,31). That God has raised the One the world slew is a testimony to its guilt and a warning of its coming judgment and that by the very One who God raised from the dead. On this ground **"all men everywhere"** are commanded to repent. See John 5:22-31.