

# The Resurrection Of Christ

**Introduction.** The history of the life of Christ upon this earth closes with a miracle as great as that of its inception (Acts 1:3; Romans 1:3-4). The reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. If it can be shown that Jesus of Nazareth arose from the dead, it is beyond dispute that He is a unique figure to say the least. We know of no one else who had this experience. Because of this, modern man is as skeptical as the Athenian philosophers who heard Paul speak on Mars Hill and sneered (Acts 17:32).

## I. ***The Evidence For The Resurrection***

### A. The certainty of the biblical accounts.

1. The writers of the gospels stress the fact of His death much more than the manner of His death. All four state that He actually died (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30).
2. Add to these statements the numerous declarations in Acts and the epistles that "Christ died," and you have unanimous agreement by the earliest witnesses to the fact of His death.
3. An examination of the more detailed testimonies found within the gospels also confirms the fact of His death.
  - a) The centurion in charge of the execution squad, who was surely experienced in the grim art of killing and would know whether Jesus had merely fainted or not, said, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39).
  - b) John, who does not mention the verdict of the centurion, says that when the soldiers came late in the day to make certain that they had died before the Jewish sabbath began, they broke the legs of the others but found Jesus was already dead (John 19:33).
  - c) Joseph of Arimathea requested the body for burial (Matthew 27:57-58). Pilate received confirmation of death from the centurion and released the body to him (Mark 15:43-44).
  - d) Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared the body for burial. As they handled Jesus' remains, they would have been able to detect whether there was the slightest evidence of animation and would not have embalmed Him and placed Him in a tomb (John 19:38-41).
  - e) The women who observed His burial (Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55) came to the tomb to complete the preparation previously started. Had they been unsure of His death they would not have undertaken such a mission.

B. The empty tomb.

1. Many skeptics admit that on or before the morning of the third day, the body of Jesus disappeared from the tomb. They further admit that His disciples came to firmly believe in the resurrection of Jesus.
  - a) The stone that had been rolled against the door was displaced (Matthew 28:2).
  - b) The women, as they came, were concerned about how to get the stone removed, and were surprised to find it already moved away (Mark 16:3-4).
  - c) The gospels all agree that the body had disappeared from the tomb (Matthew 28:5-6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:3-8; John 20:1-2).
  - d) The angel told the women that Christ was risen (Matthew 28:5-6).
2. Several theories have been advanced to explain the empty tomb.
  - a) There is the theory that the women went to the wrong tomb.
    - (1) They had observed where he was buried (Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55).
    - (2) They had arrived in the full light of day (John 20:1; Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1; Mark 16:1).
    - (3) The burial had been in a private garden, not a public cemetery (John 19:41-42).
    - (4) Mary Magdalene would hardly have made the same mistake twice. She returned to the tomb a second time (John 20:11).
  - b) There is the theory that Jesus had not died, but was merely in a coma.
    - (1) Pilate was surprised that Jesus was so soon dead, but the centurion assured Him that it was so (Mark 15:44-45).
    - (2) How could one argue that after being mocked, flogged, crucified, wrapped for burial and spending 36 hours in a tomb without warmth, food, or medical attention to His wounds, He could then rally sufficiently to remove the stone in front of the tomb without disturbing the guard?
  - c) There is the theory that Jesus' enemies had stolen the body.
    - (1) As Jesus had predicted His resurrection in three days, they sought and obtained permission from Pilate to post a guard to prevent the disciples from stealing the body (Matthew 27:63-64).
    - (2) If they had stolen the body, they would no doubt have produced it on the day of Pentecost in order to counter the testimony of the apostles.
  - d) There is the theory that Jesus' disciples had stolen the body.
    - (1) The sincere surprise of the disciples when they found the

tomb empty indicates that they did not steal the body (Mark 16:9-13; Luke 24:12).

- (2) Psychologically, they were not prepared to steal the body. After His betrayal, they all left Him and fled and after His death they met behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jews (Matthew 26:56; John 20:19).
- (3) Their subsequent suffering shows them to be sincere in their belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Hypocrites and martyrs do not usually die for fanciful or made-up causes!

#### C. The condition of the grave clothes.

1. Joseph and Nicodemus prepared the body for burial.
  - a) It was wrapped in a clean linen cloth bought for that purpose (Matthew 27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53).
  - b) It was prepared in strips of linen according to the customs of the Jews with about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39-40).
2. The grave clothes were still in the tomb on the morning of the resurrection.
  - a) Their presence is implied by the angel's remark, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:6). There would be something there to show that the body had been there, not merely an empty tomb.
  - b) John uses three different words for "see" in connection with the grave clothes in John 20:3-8.
    - (1) John arrived first and looking in "saw" the grave clothes. His eyes registered that they were visible and real. His observation was casual, but not inaccurate (John 20:3-5).
    - (2) Peter next arrived and rushed on into the tomb. As he stood gazing about, he "seeth" (comprehending the significance of the object or event) the grave clothes lying where they had been with the napkin lying a few inches away (John 20:6-7).
    - (3) John then entered the tomb and "saw" (implying mental perception as well as physical sight). Something "clicked" in his mind and he understood. The grave clothes stood as a silent witness to the resurrection of Jesus.

#### D. The witnesses of the event.

1. Paul cites many of these instances in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8.
  - a) In brief fashion, he lists seven different occasions when Jesus appeared to His disciples.
  - b) By correlating all accounts, at least twelve different occasions when the risen Lord was seen may be enumerated.
  - c) At the time Paul wrote to the Corinthians, there were over 250 witnesses to the resurrection of Christ still alive.

2. The disciples, who were chosen to bear witness of Christ (John 15:16, 27), were credible witnesses.
  - a) They were men of good character who, like Thomas, were unwilling to believe without sufficient evidence (John 20:24-29).
  - b) They were competent and good eyes and ears were necessary equipment (Acts 1:21-22).
  - c) There was a sufficient number of witnesses. On one occasion, over 500 people at one time saw the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).
  - d) The changes wrought in their lives by the experience is evidence of their honesty (1 Peter 1:3-5).

## II. ***The Significance Of The Resurrection***

- A. It reveals the nature of God.
  1. Merrill Tenney commented, "The resurrection is a flash of eternity in the darkness of time that illuminates, if only briefly, the real outline of God's personality" (Romans 1:4; 1 Timothy 3:16).
  2. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:15-20 describes the redemptive character of God by the resurrection. Paul prayed that they might realize its significance expressed in the hope that God offered, the glory that the saints could attain and the power He could impart.
- B. It reveals the continuing ministry of Christ.
  1. He serves today as the mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:14-15).
  2. He still makes intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).
  3. He can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Hebrews 4:14-15).
  4. We are encouraged to draw near to God through Him (Hebrews 10:19-25).
- C. It strengthens our spiritual life.
  1. If the Spirit of God lives in you, the body is dead because of sin. It is no longer an instrument for unholy living (Romans 8:11).
  2. The Spirit "gives life to our mortal bodies." This is not a raising of the dead, but our mortal bodies live as instruments for rendering service to God.
  3. The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead that we might be saved, might be made alive to His service, is a guarantee that even our bodies, as well as our spirits, shall be made alive to righteousness.
- D. It foreshadows the destiny of Christians.
  1. It will not be a resurrection to mortal life, but to a changed, spiritual life (1 Corinthians 15:36-37).
    - a) Paul cites three illustrations to show a change in the body of the

resurrection:

- (4) A grain of wheat (1 Corinthians 15:37-38).
  - (5) Flesh of different kinds (1 Corinthians 15:39).
  - (6) Various kinds of heavenly bodies (Corinthians 15:40-41).
- b) There are four features of the resurrection body as seen in contrast to the body that dies:
- (1) It is incorruptible, not subject to decay.
  - (2) It has glory, whereas it was sown in dishonor.
  - (3) It has power, whereas it was sown in weakness.
  - (4) It is spiritual, whereas it was sown a natural body. It will be a new instrument and dwelling place for the redeemed spirit.
2. The idea is that of continuity without exact similarity. The real you lives on in a different body.
- a) This is not such a radical idea after all. Considering that changes take place in our bodies throughout life -- infant, adolescent, teenager, adult, old age -- our personalities remain the same.
  - b) Our personalities shall survive death and the resurrection (John 5:28-29). But in the resurrection we shall bear the image of the heavenly man (1 Corinthians 15:49; 1 John 3:2).

**Conclusion.** It does make a difference whether we believe in the resurrection or not. If there is no resurrection, the gospel is robbed of its life. A dead Christ could not provide a hope for eternity. A dead Christ might have been remembered and loved as a teacher and miracle-worker, but only a risen and living Christ could be the Savior and life-giver and preached as such to all men. And of this most blessed truth we have the fullest and most unquestionable evidence.

Paul listed four consequences of rejecting the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19: (1) the apostles would be false witnesses; (2) your faith would be vain; (3) you would still be in your sin; and (4) you would be without hope. The resurrection of Christ has given us several fantastic blessings, but only if we are "in Christ."

I am deeply indebted to James E. Cooper for the use of this material.