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The resurrection of Christ — its centrality, certainty and comforts



The synopsis of a sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day evening, April 20th, 2003.

"The Lord is risen indeed," Luke 24:34.

The doubting, despairing disposition of the disciples following the death of the Saviour on the cross adds to the credibility of their witness to His resurrection. They could not be called witnesses of His resurrection when we read of them immediately after Calvary. The portion before us is a prime example of the state of mind and heart the disciples were in, following the harrowing scenes on the cross. The Saviour Himself described them as being of a gloomy countenance, Luke 24:17. Consequently, their subsequent courageously fervent testimony of the resurrection of Christ indicates a change of mind that was radical and complete. Such a turn around can be explained only by a most dramatic convincing of the disciples of the reality of the resurrection. The source of the disciples' doubts and despair was unbelief. The Saviour had repeatedly told them of His forthcoming sufferings and death at Jerusalem and His subsequent rising the third day. Yet, despite His detailed foretelling of His death, the cross and its aftermath left them thoroughly confused and disconsolate. It is little wonder the Lord calls them fools for their unbelief! "Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" Luke 24:25-26. The couple on the road to Emmaus were thoroughly convinced by the revelation of Himself to them by the Saviour. I am sure that their immediate return to Jerusalem, despite the lateness of the hour, verse 29, illustrates the utter change of heart that had taken place.

Consider the statement, which is our text, which sums up the general consensus of opinion amongst the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem on the evening of the resurrection. "The Lord is risen indeed." First of all note:

I. THE CENTRALITY OF THE RESURRECTION

I am referring to the fact that the resurrection of Christ became a central doctrine of the disciples' message. Christ had called Himself "The Resurrection" in John 11:25. It is little wonder then that this great truth became the battle cry of the apostles.

1. It featured early in the first sermons. After explaining just what was happening on the day of Pentecost, in response to the foolish notion that those filled with the Holy Ghost were drunken men, Peter immediately declares the resurrection of Christ. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles



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and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it," Acts 2:22-24. Again and again, the apostles returned to this doctrine in their witnessing. (See 2:31-32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30-31; 10:39-41; 17:1-3.)

2. It was the chief irritation to the Jewish leaders. No doctrine of the gospel message annoyed and irritated the Jewish leaders more than the doctrine of the resurrection. This must tell us something of the importance of this truth. "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide," Acts 4:1-3. No doctrine strikes at the power of the devil and undermines his claims like that of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead.

3. It was the doctrine that the Holy Ghost particularly enabled the disciples to preach. If the devil would have the preaching of this doctrine silenced, the Lord would have it proclaimed with great emphasis. Following the release of Peter and John by the leaders in Jerusalem, the two men return to their own company and a great prayer meeting ensues. At the end of the prayer meeting, the Holy Ghost falls upon the company of believers and there is a most dramatic demonstration of the power of God amongst them. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness," Acts 4:31. In the verse 33, it is clear that the grace of the Holy Ghost particularly enabled the apostles to preach of the resurrection. "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all," verse 33.

4. It runs as a foundational theme through the epistles. Here again we have a demonstration of the importance of the doctrine. Paul wrote to Timothy. "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel," 2 Timothy 2:8. It is clear that God would have this truth remembered by all of His people for it is expounded and set forth repeatedly by the New Testament writers. (See Rom 10:9, 1 Cor 15:1-4; Eph 1:20; 1 Peter 1:3, 21, for just some examples of this truth.) This doctrine that the devil would have God's servants cease proclaiming is one God would have His people well instructed in.

5. It is a distinctive of the gospel of Christ. No other religion deals with or proclaims this doctrine. It is uniquely Biblical. When Paul came to Athens, a centre for worldly learning and proud philosophers, the reaction of those who listened to him indicates the uniqueness of the doctrine of the resurrection. "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection . . . And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter," Acts 17:18, 32. No other religion holds out the glorious prospect of the resurrection.

6. There is no gospel without it. If Christ never rose from the dead, we do not have a



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gospel. Hence Paul declares the dark prospect if Christ did not rise from the grave in that chapter, which might well be called 'the chapter of the resurrection.' "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable," 1 Corinthians 15: 13-19. If there is no resurrection then the Old Testament is a lie, the apostles were liars and not one sinner will be in heaven. The gospel truly lies at the heart of the gospel message.

7. You cannot be saved without faith in the resurrection. Listen to the words of Paul. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved," Romans 10:9. Paul did not say, If you believe in the virgin birth of Christ "thou shalt be saved." Nor did he say, If you believe in the sinless life of Christ "thou shalt be saved." Again, he did not say, If you believe in the atoning death of Christ for sinners on the cross "thou shalt be saved." No, he calls for faith in the resurrection of Christ in order to be saved. Please understand that when you believe in the resurrection of Christ, you **MUST** believe in His virgin birth, His sinless life, His atoning death on the cross. But by demanding faith in the resurrection, Paul was calling for faith in a finished work and in the successful offering of Christ for sin. The resurrection of Christ proclaimed the successful outcome of His death. He had made atonement for the sins of His people. Roman 4:25 states it in this manner: "Who was delivered for (because of) our offences, and was raised again for (because of) our justification." Christ was raised by the Father from the grave because His sacrifice for His people had been accepted and atonement for our sins had been made. Consider also:

II. THE CERTAINTY OF THE RESURRECTION

We have evidence that has withstood the assault of the best minds that the devil can muster and that for over a period of 2000 years and still the doctrine stands.

1. It is a fact to which angels have borne testimony. In Matthew 28: 1-6 we have the account of the angel of the Lord rolling away the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre on the morning of the resurrection. The reaction of the soldiers guarding the tomb indicates the reality of the angel's appearance. The devoted women, who came to the tomb, did not show the fear and dread that the soldiers did. Rather, they heard the angel's message with gladness. "And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you," Matthew 28: 5-7.

2. It is a fact to which enemies have borne testimony. The apostles began their ministry in the camp of the enemy. The first converts were enemies and crucifiers of Christ. ". . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain . . . Now when they



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heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. . . . Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls," Acts 2: 37-38, 41. Many priests testified to the resurrection for they were amongst the converts to the gospel. "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith," Acts 6: 7. Saul of Tarsus was an undoubted enemy of the gospel, yet he became a proclaimer of the resurrection of Christ. The lie of the enemy confirms the resurrection. "Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day." Matthew 28: 11-15. Why was such a lie necessary if there was no resurrection? Their craft but authenticates the witness of the apostles.

3. It is a fact to which God has borne testimony. This He did by pouring forth the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit amongst us in this service is a glorious testimony that Christ has indeed risen from the dead. Finally note:

III. THE COMFORTS OF THE RESURRECTION

1. The resurrection of Christ is a pledge of our resurrection. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept," 1 Cor 15: 20. The firstfruits refer to the first sheaf of the harvest that was brought before the Lord to seek His blessing on the rest of the harvest in Canaan. It was a token of the whole harvest that was to be gathered in. Because Christ has risen, then in due time we shall be like Him. "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself," Philippians 3: 21.

2. It is a pattern for our life. Holiness is pictured for us in the risen life of Christ. "Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life," Romans 6: 4. A holy life is a walking in the experience of the resurrected life of Christ. We are no longer under the power of sin. Its guilt and power have been taken away by Christ's death and resurrection. Christian, claim that power, that life today.

3. It is the basis of the Christian's abiding hope. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us," Rom 8: 34. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," 1 Peter 1: 3. By the resurrection of Christ we are assured that the sacrifice of Christ on behalf of His elect has been accepted. The grave is not the end. Rather we look for that eternal life which shall be revealed when



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Christ returns in glory and calls His people forth from the graves to share in His everlasting glory.

Dear friend, believe the gospel. Put your hope and faith and trust in the crucified, risen and soon returning Saviour. His blood will cleanse you from your sin and assure you of an everlasting home in heaven. "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," John 11:25.