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“The Empty Tomb” — The Lord Jesus Christ truly did rise again”



Based upon a sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church, Lord's Day evening, April 16th, 2006.

“He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay,” Matthew 28:6.

The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is central to the gospel message of hope. So central was it to the apostles' witness that they spoke of it as the whole of their witness.

“Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection,” Acts 1:21-22. This is emphasised again in Peter's sermon at Pentecost. “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses,” Acts 2:32.

The death and the resurrection of Christ is the sum total of the gospel. “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you . . . Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures,” 1 Corinthians 15:1, 3-4. That is an apostolic definition of the gospel.

We may be certain of the truth of the victorious resurrection of Christ, despite the scoffings of men and the scepticism of the so-called scientists.

Consider the words of the angel to the two Marys and learn first of all that . . .

I. HEAVEN WOULD HAVE MEN EXAMINE THE PROOF OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

“Come see . . .” Examination of the evidence is what the Bible invites men to. What wonderful evidences are provided for us within the Holy Scriptures! “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name,” John 20:31.

Christianity is not a religion that entails embracing the irrational. Nothing is more rational than resurrection. Paul once asked the very pertinent question: “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” Acts 26:8. Why indeed, and yet a vast portion of mankind has deemed such a truth an utter folly throughout the ages. The reaction of the Athenians to Paul's preaching of the resurrection of the dead is that of mankind generally. “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter,” Acts 17:32.

Logic

The logic of the Saviour when answering His detractors is unanswerable. “But as touching



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the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine," Matthew 22: 31-33.

The death of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had not resulted in them ceasing to be! They were still "alive" though their bodies were dead. One day their bodies will be raised from the grave, transformed and glorious.

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory," 1 Corinthians 15: 51-54.

There is evidence to prove the glorious resurrection of Christ, just as there is evidence in the creation to show the existence of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard," Psalm 19: 1-3. Men are invited by God to examine the evidence.

1. This invitation to examine the evidence was given to a disciple. It must be remembered that they had to be convinced first before the world! That is important as we evaluate the evidence. The apostles were not "biased" witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, mere automatons blinded by their devotion and zeal! Rather, they were, at the first, sceptics who were convinced by the evidence presented to them that Christ was indeed alive from the dead.

2. Despite the fact that the Lord had repeatedly taught them of His resurrection, they did not, at first, believe. "And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed (entirely at a loss to understand) thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words," Luke 24: 4-8. In the record given us of the Saviour's conversation with the two on the road to Emmaus (verses 13-26), we see Him charging them with unbelief. "Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," verse 25. He had further reason to rebuke his unbelieving disciples when He appeared to them on another occasion. "Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen," Mark 16: 14.

Further evidence

Further evidence of the unbelief that pervaded the ranks of the disciples, at the first, is seen in John 20: 24-28. "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put



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my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."

This spirit of doubting serves only to enhance the assurance and confidence regarding the Saviour's resurrection later displayed by the disciples.

3. Despite the fact that He had raised the dead, they doubted. The disciples had witnessed at least three resurrections during their time with the Saviour. Luke 7:14-15; Luke 8:54-55; John 11:43-44. They would also have been aware of the resurrections recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures (1 Kings 17:22, 2 Kings 13:21) and yet they were filled with doubt when faced with the truth of Christ's resurrection.

This shows how deep-seated is man's prejudice against this doctrine. How slow is man to believe in the resurrection of the dead!

But these early doubts serve to place a high value on the later declarations by the disciples that they were indeed convinced by what they saw that they now did believe that Christ had risen from the dead.

II. CHRIST WAS SEEN BY MANY AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

Here is further proof indeed.

1. He was seen by His doubting disciples. This is what served to convince them. "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true," John 21:24. John was able later to write: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you," 1 John 1:1-3.

2. Proof was given to a great number of people. It was not just the disciples closely associated with Christ who saw Him. ". . . he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep," 1 Corinthians 15:6.

3. The convincing of Saul of Tarsus is a great proof. He was an active, bitter opponent of the gospel who became a faithful and fearless witness of the resurrection of Christ. Indeed, he sealed his testimony of that truth with his own blood, dying as a martyr at Rome. He tells of the impact of his conversion on the early believers who knew him only as a cruel persecutor and enemy of the gospel. "For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it . . . But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed," Galatians 1:13, 23.

The testimony of Saul of Tarsus, better known as Paul the apostle, is a most difficult problem for those who would seek to discredit the gospel of Christ.



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Lord Lyttleton

One man, George Lord Lyttleton, after researching the matter in order to disprove the truth of Christianity, concluded that "the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation."

III. FURTHER PROOF MAY BE SEEN IN HEAVEN'S ENDORSEMENT OF THE MESSAGE OF THE RESURRECTION

1. On the day of Pentecost the apostles boldly and unashamedly preached the resurrection. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles 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. This was the message the Holy Spirit endorsed. Does God endorse lies??

2. It was the message the enemies of the gospel desired to silence. "Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done," Acts 4:2, 15-21. (See also Acts 4:31-33; 5:24-33.)

3. It was the message that saved. Here is proof indeed! The gospel which has the doctrine of Christ's resurrection at its heart is the gospel that saves and transforms, sanctifies and blesses. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received . . . by which also ye are saved . . . how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures," 1 Corinthians 15:2-4.

Shook the world

This is the message that shook the world and will yet shake it again. The Resurrected One will come to judge this world and then all men will have evidence that He did indeed rise from the dead on that morning some 2000 years ago, the witness of which they have refused when they rejected the message of the gospel.



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Time to choose

Be convinced this evening to the saving of your soul, for the convincing of men that lies in the future is a convincing that will but preface their condemnation.