

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST
John 20:1-18

Intro: I count it a real privilege to be able to speak to you this morning about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We might call this the most climactic miracle of the NT because it is at this point that the message of the four writers of the four Gospel records reaches its most critical point, its most decisive moment, because it is here that the claims of Jesus Christ were given their greatest test.

John is keenly aware of this because of what we read in the last two verses of John 20. (Read vv. 30, 31.) It is as though this is the "sign" which adds the finishing touch of proof to everything that John has written concerning our Lord.

The four Gospels, speaking of Christ, begin with a miracle, and end with a miracle. They begin by referring to His virgin birth; they end by recording His bodily, physical resurrection. These two miracles stand, or fall, together.

If you believe in the virgin birth of Christ, then you are not too surprised at the account of His resurrection. It might even be said that you expect it.

BUT--if you do not believe in the virgin birth of Christ, then you will probably also be skeptical about the story of His resurrection.

However (and this is my thought this morning), if you can be convinced that there is something to the Gospel accounts of His resurrection--that it is true--then you must retrace your steps back to the birth of Christ and reexamine the whole story.

This seems to have been what was in the mind of the writers of the four Gospels because they seem to concentrate on the evidences that point to the fact that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a historical fact.

If you can destroy the historical foundation for the faith of those who call themselves Christians, you have destroyed everything. Paul makes this very clear in 1 Corinthians 15. On the other hand, if the resurrection of Christ can be established as something which really happened, then there must be also something to His virgin birth, to His claim to have been the Son of God, to the reason He gave many times for His coming into the world. Then, it must follow, that every person in the world has some major issues thrust at

him, demanding his attention.

All through the book of Acts, the book which takes up the story of what the Apostles did after the ascension of Christ, you have the Apostles preaching with the strongest possible conviction the resurrection of Christ. You take the resurrection out of their message, and there is no message left.

If there had not been a resurrection of Christ, there would have been no Church. If there had been no resurrection, we would not be here this morning. If there was no resurrection of Christ, then I am a false witness. I am trying to convince you of something which did not happen. I am trying to get you to place your hope in something which never took place--IF the Lord Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead.

Let us do something this morning which many people never take the time to do: Let us examine what the Bible has to say about the resurrection of Christ to see if we have the evidence we would like to have that Jesus Christ is alive today!

But, some will say, of course you can prove it if you use the writings of His disciples--some of whom were Apostles!

But let me respond by saying this--two things:

- (1) You will never conduct a fair, thorough investigation of the resurrection of Christ if you ignore the record of those who claim that they saw him, or the record of those who had the opportunity to talk to those who claimed to be eye witnesses.
- (2) An examination of these records can just as easily disprove the claim as well as they can prove it if the claim is false!

Therefore, when we take the Gospels and read them with an open mind, we are going to come away convinced that Jesus Christ arose from the dead, or that He did not!

Let us see.

First of all, let me point out

I. TWO VERY OBVIOUS FACTS.

These facts are apparent in all four Gospels.

- A. Fact #1: Everybody believed that Jesus Christ really was dead.

The centurion watched Him die (Mark 15:39), and was probably the first one to know just when death came to our Lord.

The soldiers who went to break the Lord's legs to hasten death found that He was dead already, and so they did not break His bones (John 19:33).

Joseph of Arimathaea knew that He was dead, and asked Pilate for permission to bury Him.

Pilate was skeptical, but when told by the centurion that the Lord was dead, he allowed Joseph to take the body down from the cross. Cf. Mark 15:44, 45.

Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews, believed that the Lord was dead. He brought spices and linen clothes to wrap the body of Christ for burial. Nothing they saw made them stop until their difficult task was finished.

The chief priests and Pharisees believed that He was dead because they came the next day to Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first" (Matt. 27:63, 64).

The disciples knew that He had died. Let us not overlook the fact that when Mary Magdalene went to tell the disciples that she had seen the Lord that Mark tells us that "she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept" (Mark 16:10).

THEREFORE, ANYONE WHO TRIES TO EXPLAIN AWAY THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST BY SAYING THAT HE NEVER DIED IS SIMPLY INDICATING HOW IGNORANT THEY ARE OF THE EVIDENCE. The passages we have examined speak not only of His friends, but also of His enemies!

But there is a second fact we need to recognize.

- B. Fact #2: No one, including His disciples, believed that He was going to rise from the dead.

As we read a moment ago, the Chief Priests and the

Pharisees were suspicious that the disciples would steal away His body and say that He had been raised from the dead, BUT THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO EVIDENCE THAT THE DISCIPLES WERE EVEN THINKING OF SUCH A THING!

In fact, John tells us that when he and Peter got to the tomb they were amazed by what they saw, "For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9).

In spite of all that the Lord had said about His resurrection on many occasions, not one of the disciples gave any evidence of believing in it, or in trying to get anyone else to believe in it!

There is no evidence that any disciple, any Jew, or any Roman anticipated the resurrection.

When Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb early on the first day of the week, they did not go to see if He was raised from the dead; they went there to anoint His dead body!

I mention all of this to let you know that the disciples were just as surprised (and I might add, just as unbelieving) as anyone else as the reports of the resurrection began to reach them.

Now we are ready to look at

II. THE EVIDENCES OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

Please keep in mind that we are not examining a carefully devised plan which the disciples had to convince the world that Christ was raised; instead, we are seeing how the disciples themselves became convinced about something which not even they believed would happen.

I would like to present four lines of evidence.

- A. The empty tomb. All four Gospel records mention that the stone was rolled away. Matthew tells us that "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door" (Matt. 28:2).

As the women approached the tomb, they knew that it had been sealed by the Jews, and they were wondering how they were going to get the sepulchre open.

Evidently they would be able to anoint the body of the Lord as long as the guard was there IF they could get it open, i.e., get the grave open.

Where was the guard?

Matthew (28:4) tells us that "for fear of him," i.e., the angel of the Lord, "the keepers did shake, and became as dead men."

It is a little difficult to place the sequence of events in their proper order, but this was the first evidence that these women had of the resurrection: the grave was open, the keepers were like they were dead, and the body of Jesus Christ was gone!

Later, when the Lord appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, one of them was telling the Lord, "Yea, and certain of the women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even as the women had said: but him they found not" (Luke 24:24).

At first Luke tells us, "And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke 24:11).

In establishing the evidence it is important that we do not have conflicts. BUT AS UNBELIEVABLE AS THE REPORT OF THE WOMEN WAS, PETER AND JOHN FOUND EXACTLY WHAT THE WOMEN HAD FOUND. "But him they found not."

AND LET ME POINT OUT THAT THE JEWS WOULD HAVE DONE ANYTHING THEY COULD HAVE DONE TO PRODUCE THE DEAD BODY OF CHRIST IF IT HAD BEEN POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO DO SO! Cf. Mt. 28:11-15.

If it was true that He was raised, then no one had better be able to lead us to His dead body--and no one did--even though Mary said, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him" (John 20:2).

She was not thinking at the time of resurrection,

but of treachery!

What about the second line of evidence?

B. The grave clothes.

Why does John make such a point of telling us about the grave clothes? Cf. John 20:5-7.

John and Peter saw something which at first caused amazement, then made believers out of them. If the body had been stolen, the grave clothes would not have been there. But, on the other hand, how could they account for the fact that the grave clothes were still "wrapped" just as they had been around the body and the head (two separate wrappings) of the Lord?

Here was something which they could not possibly have made up on their own! The body of Jesus Christ had been miraculously removed from those wrappings without disturbing them.

John "saw, and believed." V. 9 should read, "For as yet they had not known the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." BUT THEY KNEW IT NOW.

Later the Lord simply appeared to his disciples when they had shut the doors for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). Then John understood even more, and then he could have known that the stone was rolled away, not to let the Lord out, but to let the disciples in!

So unusual was this that John and Peter at this moment believed that their Lord had been raised from the dead.

What did it take for the others? The third and fourth lines of evidence come under a single heading:

C. The personal appearances of the Lord.

1. Those appearances which were made immediately.

The first one He appeared to was Mary Magdalene. He simply spoke her name, "Mary," and she knew it was the Lord. Cf. John 20:16.

He appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. "And their eyes were opened, and they

knew him; and he vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:31).

Then He appeared to the disciples, and "he shewed them his hands and his side" (John 20:20). They were frightened, but He quieted their fears by saying, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39). "And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them" (Luke 24:42, 43).

Keep in mind that this is not what just one of them saw and heard; this is what they ALL saw!

Later Paul tells us that He was seen by more than 500 believers at once, and many of them were still living to testify to that fact when Paul wrote to the Corinthians c. 20 to 25 years later!

IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO FIND AN EVENT WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN VERIFIED BY MORE PEOPLE THAN THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

As Luke begins the book of Acts, this medical man who never knew the Lord when He was here on earth, but who had carried on extensive research in connection with the character and ministry of Christ, says this: Speaking of the apostles, "To whom also he (Christ) shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

And so He appeared; not just once, but again and again over a period of 40 days. Luke had no doubts about the resurrection of Christ.

But there is one appearance that John sets off by itself. It is:

2. The Lord's appearance to Thomas (John 20:24-29) --"after eight days."

Note the integrity of the Word of God. Only John tells us about this incident. If the whole resurrection story were a fraud, he certainly would have concealed this story. But he tells it--possibly long after Thomas was dead--to show how the Lord felt about those who refused the

testimony of those who had seen the Lord.

Thomas wanted personal proof--and he got it!
Then he confessed what he should have been
ready to confess before: "My Lord and my God."

But Thomas missed a blessing which could have
been his--the blessing of believing on the
basis of the testimony he had received from
his fellow disciples.

Is it not true that we can be so skeptical
about the things of God that we have closed our
minds to the evidence? This is where Thomas
was--and there have been many like him from
that day until this!

Concl: There is so much more that could be said, and John
refers to this in John 20:30, 31. But more would
not help at all. We have absolutely all the evidence that
we need right here to believe that Jesus Christ did rise
from the dead, that He was the Son of God. Once we come to
recognize these truths we are not far from the kingdom.
He died and rose again that we might have eternal life,
that we might be forgiven of our sins. How? By just taking
Him as our own personal Saviour.

Cf. John 11:25, 26.