

THE CERTAINTY AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PHYSICAL RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD

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The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the corner-stone of Christian doctrine. It is mentioned directly one hundred and four or more times in the New Testament. It was the most prominent and cardinal point in the apostolic testimony. When the apostolic company, after the apostasy of Judas Iscariot, felt it necessary to complete their number again by the addition of one to take the place of Judas Iscariot, it was in order that he might "be a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts 1:21,22). The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the one point that Peter emphasized in his great sermon on the Day of Pentecost. His whole sermon centered in that fact. Its key-note was, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32, cf. vs. 24-31).

When the Apostles were filled again with the Holy Spirit some days later, the one central result was that "with great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." The central doctrine that the Apostle Paul preached to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on Mars Hill was Jesus and the resurrection. (Acts 17:18, cf. Acts 23:6; 1 Corinthians 15:15). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the two fundamental truths of the Gospel, the other being His atoning death. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:1,3,4. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, 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."

This was the glad tidings, first, that Christ died for our sins and made atonement; and second, that He rose again. The crucifixion loses its meaning without the resurrection. Without the resurrection, the death of Christ was only the heroic death of a noble martyr. With the resurrection, it is the atoning death of the Son of God. It shows that death to be of sufficient value to cover all our sins, for it was the sacrifice of the Son of God. In it we have an all-sufficient ground for knowing that the blackest sin is atoned for. Disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ and Christian faith is vain. "If Christ be not risen," cries Paul, "then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14). And later he adds, "If Christ be not risen, your faith is vain. You are yet in your sins." Paul, as the context clearly shows, is talking about the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the one

doctrine that has power to save any one who believes it with the heart. As we read in Romans 10:9, "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."

To know the power of Christ's resurrection is one of the highest ambitions of the intelligent believer, to attain which he sacrifices all things and counts them but refuse (Philippians 3:8-10 R. V.). While the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the corner-stone of Christian doctrine, it is also the Gibraltar of Christian evidence, and the Waterloo of infidelity and rationalism. If the Scriptural assertions of Christ's resurrection can be established as historic certainties, the claims and doctrines Of Christianity rest upon an impregnable foundation. On the other hand, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead cannot be established, Christianity must go. It was a true instinct that led a leading and brilliant agnostic in England to say, that there is no use wasting time discussing the other miracles. The essential question is, Did Jesus Christ rise from the dead? adding, that if He did, it was easy enough to believe the other miracles; but, if not, the other miracles must go.

Are the statements contained in the four Gospels regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ statements of fact or are they fiction, fables, myths? There are three separate lines of proof that the statements contained in the four Gospels regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ are exact statements of historic fact.

1. THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE OF THE AUTHENTICITY AND TRUTHFULNESS OF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES

This is an altogether satisfactory argument. The external proofs of the authenticity and truthfulness of the Gospel narratives are overwhelming, but the argument is long and intricate and it would take a volume to discuss it satisfactorily. The other arguments are so completely sufficient and overwhelming and convincing to a candid mind that we can do without this, good as it is in its place. The next argument is from

2. THE INTERNAL PROOFS OF THE TRUTHFULNESS OF THE GOSPEL RECORDS

This argument is thoroughly conclusive, and we shall state it briefly in the pages which follow. We shall not assume anything whatever. We shall not assume that the four Gospel records are true history; we shall not assume that the four Gospels were written by the men whose names they bear, though it could be easily proven that they were; we shall not even assume that they were written in the century in which Jesus is alleged to have lived and died and risen again, nor in the next century, nor in the next. We will assume absolutely nothing. We will start out with a fact which we all know to be a fact, namely, that we have the four Gospels today, whoever wrote them and whenever they were written. We shall place these four Gospels side by side, and see if we can discern in them the marks of truth or of fiction.

1. The first thing that strikes us as we compare these Gospels one with another is that they are four separate and independent accounts. This appears plainly from the apparent discrepancies in the four different accounts. These apparent discrepancies are marked and many. It would have been impossible for these

four accounts to have been made up in collusion with one another, or to have been derived from One another and so many and so marked discrepancies to be found in them. There is harmony between the four accounts, but the harmony does not lie upon the surface; it comes out only by protracted and thorough study. It is precisely such a harmony as would exist between accounts written or related by several different persons, each looking at the events recorded from his own standpoint. It is precisely such a harmony as would not exist in four accounts manufactured in collusion, or derived one from the other. In four accounts manufactured in collusion, whatever of harmony there might be would appear on the surface. Whatever discrepancy there might be would only come out by minute and careful study. But with the four Gospels the case is just the opposite. Harmony comes out by minute and careful study, and the apparent discrepancy lies upon the surface. Whether true or false, these four accounts are separate and independent from one another. (The four accounts also supplement one another, the third account sometimes reconciling apparent discrepancies between two).

These accounts must be either a record of facts that actually occurred or else fictions. If fictions, they must have been fabricated in one of two ways — either independently of one another, or in collusion with one another. They cannot have been fabricated independently of one another; the agreements are too marked and too many. It is absolutely incredible that four persons sitting down to write an account of what never occurred independently of one another should have made their stories agree to the extent that these do. On the other hand, they cannot have been made up, as we have already seen, in collusion with one another; the apparent discrepancies are too numerous and too noticeable. It is proven they were not made up independently of one another; it is proven they were not made up in collusion with one another, so we are driven to the conclusion that they were not made up at all, that they are a true relation of facts as they actually occurred. We might rest the argument here and reasonably call the case settled, but we will go on still further:

2. The next thing we notice is that each of these accounts bears striking indications of having been derived from eye witnesses. The account of an eyewitness is readily distinguishable from the account of one who is merely retailing what others have told him. Any one who is accustomed to weigh evidence in court or in historical study soon learns how to distinguish the report of an eye witness from mere hearsay evidence. Any careful student of the Gospel records of the resurrection will readily detect many marks of the eye witness.

Some years ago when lecturing at an American university, a gentleman was introduced to me as being a skeptic. I asked him, "What line of study are you pursuing?" He replied that he was pursuing a post graduate course in history with a view to a professorship in history. I said, "Then you know that the account of an eye witness differs in marked respects from the account of one who is simply telling what he has heard from others?" "Yes," he replied. I next asked, "Have you carefully read the four Gospel accounts of the resurrection of Christ?" He replied, "I have." "Tell me, have you not noticed clear indications that they were derived from eye witnesses?" "Yes," he replied, "I have been

greatly struck by this in reading the accounts." Any one who carefully and intelligently reads them will be struck with the same fact.

3. The third thing that we notice about these Gospel narratives is their naturalness, straightforwardness, artlessness and simplicity. The accounts, it is true, have to do with the supernatural, but the accounts themselves are most natural. There is a remarkable absence of all attempt at coloring and effect. There is nothing but the simple, straightforward telling of facts as they actually occurred. It frequently happens that when a witness is on the witness stand, the story he tells is so artless, so straightforward, so natural, there is such an entire absence of any attempt at coloring or effect that his testimony bears weight independently of anything we may know of the character or previous history of the witness.

As we listen to his story, we say to ourselves, "This man is telling the truth." The weight of this kind of evidence is greatly increased and reaches practical certainty when we have several independent witnesses of this sort, all bearing testimony to the same essential facts, but with varieties of detail, one omitting what another tells, and the third unconsciously reconciling apparent discrepancies between the two. This is the precise case with the four Gospel narratives of the resurrection of Christ. The Gospel writers do not seem to have reflected at all upon the meaning or bearing of many of the facts which they relate. They simply tell right out what they saw in all simplicity and straightforwardness, leaving the philosophizing to others.

Dr. William Furness, the great Unitarian scholar and critic, who certainly was not over-much disposed in favor of the supernatural, says, "Nothing can exceed in artlessness and simplicity' the four accounts of the first appearance of Jesus after His crucifixion. If these qualities are not discernible here, we must despair of ever being able to discern them anywhere."

Suppose we should find four accounts of the battle of Monmouth. Suppose, furthermore, that nothing decisive was known as to the authorship of these four accounts, but, when we laid them side by side, we found that they were manifestly independent accounts. We found, furthermore, striking indications that they were from eye witnesses. We found them all marked by that artlessness, straightforwardness and simplicity that always carries conviction; we found that, while apparently disagreeing in minor details, they agreed substantially in their account of the battle — even though we had no knowledge of the authorship or date of these accounts, would we not, in the absence of any other accounts, say, "Here is a true account of the battle of Monmouth?" Now this is exactly the case with the four Gospel narratives. Manifestly separate and independent from one another, bearing the clear marks of having been derived from eye witnesses, characterized by an unparalleled artlessness, simplicity and straightforwardness, apparently disagreeing in minor details, but in perfect agreement as to the great central facts related. If we are fair and honest, if we follow the canons of evidence followed in court, if we follow any sound and sane law of literary and historical criticism, are we not logically driven to say, "Here is a true account of the resurrection of Jesus." Here again we might rest our case and call the resurrection of Jesus from the dead proven, but we go on still

further:

4. The next thing we notice is the unintentional evidence of words, phrases, and accidental details.

It oftentimes happens that when a witness is on the stand, the unintentional evidence that he bears by words and phrases which he uses, and by accidental details which he introduces, is more convincing than his direct testimony, because it is not the testimony of the witness, but a testimony of the truth to itself. The Gospel accounts abound in evidence of this sort. Take, as the first instance, the fact that in all the Gospel records of the resurrection, we are given to understand that Jesus was not at first recognized by His disciples when He appeared to them after His resurrection, e.g., Luke 24:16; John 21:4. We are not told why this was so, but if we will think awhile over it, we will soon discover why it was so. But the Gospel narratives simply record the fact without attempting to explain it. If the stories were fictitious, they certainly would never have been made up in this way, for the writer would have seen at once the objection that would arise in the minds of those who did not wish to believe in His resurrection, that is, that it was not really Jesus Whom the disciples saw. Why, then, is the story told in this way? For the self-evident reason that the evangelists were not making up a story for effect, but simply recording events precisely as they occurred. This is the way in which it occurred, therefore this is the way in which they told it. It is not a fabrication of imaginary incidents, but an exact record of facts carefully observed and accurately recorded.

Take a second instance: In all the Gospel records of the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection, there is not a single recorded appearance to an enemy or opponent of Christ. All His appearances were to those who were already believers. Why this was so we can easily see by a little thought, but nowhere in the Gospels are we told why it was so. If the stories had been fabricated, they certainly would never have been made up in this way. If the Gospels were, as some would have us believe, fabrications constructed one hundred, two hundred, or three hundred years after the alleged events recorded, when all the actors were dead and gone and no one could gainsay any lies told, Jesus would have been represented as appearing to Caiaphas, and Annas, and Pilate, and Herod, and confounding them by His re-appearance from the dead. But there is no suggestion even of anything of this kind in the Gospel stories. Every appearance is to one who is already a believer. Why is this so? For the self-evident reason that this was the way that things occurred, and the Gospel narratives are not concerned with producing a story for effect, but simply with recording events precisely as they occurred and as they were observed.

We find still another instance in the fact that the recorded appearances of Jesus after His resurrection were only occasional. He would appear in the midst of His disciples and disappear, and not be seen again perhaps for several days. Why this was so, we can easily think out for ourselves — He was evidently seeking to wean His disciples from their old-time communion with Him in the body, and to prepare them for the communion with Himself in the Spirit that was to follow in the days that were to come.

We are not, however, told this in the Gospel narratives. We are left to discover it

for ourselves, and this is all the more significant for that reason. It is doubtful if the disciples themselves realized the meaning of the facts. If they had been making up the story to produce effect, they would have represented Jesus as being with them constantly, as living with them, eating and drinking with them, day after day. Why then is the story told as recorded in the four Gospels? Because this is the way in which it had all occurred. The Gospel writers are simply concerned with giving the exact representation of the facts as witnessed by themselves and others.

We find another very striking instance in what is recorded concerning the words of Jesus to Mary at their first meeting. (John 20:17). Jesus is recorded as saying to Mary, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father." We are not told why Jesus said this to Mary. We are left to discover the reason for it if we can, and the commentators have had a great deal of trouble in discovering it. Their explanations vary widely one from another. I have a reason of my own which I have never seen in any commentary, but which I am persuaded is the true reason, but it would probably be difficult to persuade others that it was the true reason. Why then is this little utterance of Jesus put in the Gospel record without a word of explanation, and which it has taken eighteen centuries to explain, and which is not altogether satisfactorily explained yet? Certainly a writer making up a story would not put in a little detail like that without apparent meaning and without an attempt at an explanation of it. Stories that are made up are made up for a purpose; details that are inserted are inserted for a purpose, a purpose more or less evident, but eighteen centuries of study have not been able to find out the purpose why this was inserted.

Why then do we find it here? Because this is exactly what happened. This is what Jesus said; this is what Mary heard Jesus say; this is what Mary told, and therefore this is what John recorded. We cannot have a fiction here, but an accurate record of words spoken by Jesus after His resurrection.

We find still another instance in John 20:4-6: "So they ran both together; and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen Clothes lie." This is all in striking keeping with what we know of the men from other sources. Mary, returning hurriedly from the tomb, bursts in upon the two disciples and cries, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid Him." John and Peter sprang to their feet and ran at the top of their speed to the tomb. John, the younger of the two disciples (it is all the more striking that the narrative does not tell us here that he was the younger of the two disciples), was fleeter of foot and outran Peter and reached the tomb first, but man of retiring and reverent disposition that he was (we are not told this here but we know it from a study of his personality as revealed elsewhere) he did not enter the tomb, but simply stooped down and looked in. Impetuous but older Peter comes stumbling on behind as fast as he can, but when once he reaches the tomb, he never waits a moment outside but plunges headlong in.

Is this made up, or, is it life? He was indeed a literary artist of consummate

ability who had the skill to make this up if it did not occur just so. There is incidentally a touch of local coloring in the report. When one visits today the tomb which scholars now accept as the real burial place of Jesus, he will find himself unconsciously obliged to stoop down in order to look in.

Still another instance is found in John 21:7: "Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved saith to Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea." Here again we have the unmistakable marks of truth and life. The Apostles had gone at Jesus' command into Galilee to meet Him there, but Jesus does not at once appear. Simon Peter, with the fisherman's passion still stirring in his bosom says, "I go a-fishing." The others replied, "We also go with thee." They fished all night, and, with characteristic fishermen's luck, caught nothing. In the early dawn Jesus stands upon the shore, but the disciples did not recognize Him in the dim light. Jesus calls to them, "Children, have ye any meat?" And they answer, "No." He bids them cast the net on the right side of the ship and they will find. When the cast was made, they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. In an instant, John, the man of quick spiritual perception, says, "It is the Lord." No sooner does Peter, the man of impulsive action, hear it than he grasps his fisher's coat, casts it about his naked form and throws himself overboard and strikes out for shore to reach his Lord. Is this made up, or, is it life? This is not fiction. If some unknown author of the fourth Gospel made this up, he is the master literary artist of the ages, and we should take down every other name from our literary pantheon and place him above them all.

We find a still more touching instance in John 20:15: "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." Here is surely a touch that surpasses the art of any man of that day or any other day. Mary had gone into the city and notified John and Peter that she had found the sepulcher empty. They start on a run for the sepulcher. As Mary has already made the journey twice, they easily far outstrip her, but with heavy heart and slow and weary feet, she makes her way back to the tomb. Peter and John have long gone when she reaches it, broken-hearted, thinking that not only has her beloved Lord been slain, but that His tomb has been desecrated. She stands without weeping. There are two angels sitting in the tomb, one at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain. But the grief-stricken woman has no eye for angels. They say unto her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" She replies, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." A rustle in the leaves at her back and she turns around to see who is coming. She sees Jesus standing there, but, blinded by tears and despair, she does not recognize her Lord. Jesus also says to her, "Why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" She, supposing it to be the gardener who is talking to her, says, "Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him and I will take Him away." Now remember who it is that makes the offer, and what she offers to do; a weak woman offers to carry a full grown man away. Of course, she could not do it, but how true to a woman's love that always forgets its weakness and never stops at

impossibilities. There is something to be done and she says, "I will do it," "Tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." Is this made up? Never! This is life; this is reality; this is truth.

We find another instance in Mark 16:7: "But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you," What I would have you notice here are the two words, "and Peter." Why "and Peter?" Was not Peter one of the disciples? Surely he was, the very head of the apostolic company. Why then, "and Peter?" No explanation is given in the text, but reflection shows it was the utterance of love toward the despondent, despairing disciple who had thrice denied his Lord. If the message had been simply to the disciples Peter would have said, "Yes, I was once a disciple, but I can no longer be counted such. I thrice denied my Lord on that awful night with oaths and curses. It does not mean me." But our tender compassionate Lord through His angelic messenger sends the message, "Go tell His disciples, and whoever you tell, be sure you tell poor, weak, faltering, backslidden, broken-hearted Peter." Is this made up, or is this a real picture of our Lord? I pity the man who is so dull that he can imagine this is fiction.

Incidentally let it be noted that this is recorded only in the Gospel of Mark, which, as is well known, is Peter's Gospel. As Peter dictated to Mark one day what he should record, with tearful eyes and grateful heart he would turn to him and say, "Mark, be sure you put that in, "Tell His disciples and Peter."

Take still another instance in John 20:27-29: "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. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Note here two things; the action of Thomas and the rebuke of Jesus. Each is too characteristic to be attributed to the art of some master of fiction. Thomas had not been with the disciples at the first appearance of our Lord. A week had passed by. Another Lord's Day had come. This time Thomas makes sure of being present; if the Lord is to appear, he will be there. If he had been like some of our modern doubters, he would have taken pains to be away, but, doubter though he was, he was an honest doubter and wanted to know.

Suddenly Jesus stands in the midst. He says to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands, and reach thither thy hand; and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless but believing." At last Thomas' eyes are opened. His faith long dammed back bursts every barrier and sweeping onward carries Thomas to a higher height than any other disciple had as yet reached — exultingly and adoringly he cries, as he looks up into the face of Jesus, "My Lord and My God!" Then Jesus tenderly, but searchingly, rebukes him. "Thomas," He says, "because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they [who are so eager to find and so quick to see, and so ready to accept the truth, that they do not wait for actual visible demonstration but are ready to take truth on sufficient testimony] that have not seen and yet have believed." Is this made up, or is this life? Is it a record of facts as they occurred, or a fictitious production of some master artist?

Take still another instance: In John 21:15-17 we read: "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My lambs. He saith unto him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed My sheep." Note especially here the words, "Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me?" Why did Jesus ask Peter three times, "Lovest thou Me?" And why was Peter grieved because Jesus did ask him three times? We are not told in the text, but, if we read it in the light of Peter's thrice repeated denial of his Lord, we will understand it. As Peter had denied his Lord thrice, Jesus three times gave Peter an opportunity to reassert his love. But this, tender as it was, brings back to Peter that awful night when in the courtyard of Annas and Caiaphas, he thrice denied his Lord, and "Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me." Is this made up? Did the writer make it up with this fact in view? If he did, he surely would have mentioned it. It cannot have been made up. It is not fiction. It is simply reporting what actually occurred. The accurate truthfulness of the record comes out even more strikingly in the Greek than in the English version. Two different words are used for "love." Jesus, in asking Peter, "Lovest thou Me?" uses a strong word denoting the higher form of love. Peter, replying, "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee," uses a weaker word, but one denoting a more tender form of love. Jesus, the second time uses the stronger word, and the second time in his reply Peter uses the weaker word. In His third question, Jesus comes down to Peter's level and uses the weaker word that Peter had used from the beginning. Then Peter replies, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee," using the same weaker word. This cannot be fiction. It is accurately reported fact.

Take still another instance: In John 20:16 we read, "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." What a delicate touch of nature we have here! Mary is standing outside the tomb overcome with grief. She has not recognized her Lord, though He has spoken to her. She has mistaken Him for the gardener: She has said, "Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." Then Jesus utters just one word. He says, "Mary." As that name came trembling on the morning air, uttered with the old familiar tone, spoken as no one else had ever spoken it but He, in an instant her eyes were opened. She falls at His feet and tries to clasp them, and looks up into His face, and cries, "Rabboni, my Master." Is this made up? Impossible! This is life. This is Jesus, and this is the woman who loved Him. No unknown author of the second, third, or fourth century, could have produced such a masterpiece as this. We stand here unquestionably face to face with reality, with life, with Jesus and Mary as they actually were.

One more important illustration: In John 20:7 we read, "And the napkin, that

was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself." How strange that such a little detail as this should be added to the story with absolutely no attempt at explaining. But how deeply significant this little unexplained detail is. Recall the circumstances. Jesus is dead. For three days and three nights his body is lying cold and silent in the sepulcher, as truly dead as any body was ever dead, but at last the appointed hour has come, the breath of God sweeps through the sleeping and silent clay, and in that supreme moment of His own earthly life, that supreme moment of human history, when Jesus rises triumphant over death and grave and Satan, there is no excitement upon His part, but with that same majestic self-composure and serenity that marked His whole career, that same Divine calm that He displayed upon stormtossed Galilee, when His affrighted disciples shook Him from His slumbers and said, "Lord, carest thou not that we perish?" and He arose serenely on the deck of the tossing vessel and said to the wild, tempestuous waves and winds, "Be still," and there was a great calm: so now again in this sublime, this awful moment, He does not excitedly tear the napkin from His face and fling it aside, but absolutely without human haste or flurry, or disorder, He unties it calmly from His head, rolls it up and lays it away in an orderly manner in a place by itself. Was that made up? Never! We do not behold here an exquisite masterpiece of the romancer's art; we read here the simple narrative of a matchless detail in a unique life that was actually lived here upon earth, a life so beautiful that one cannot read it with an honest and open mind without feeling the tears coming into his eyes.

But someone will say, all these are little things. True, and it is from that very fact that they gain much of their significance. It is just in such little things that fiction would disclose itself. Fiction displays itself different from fact in the minute; in the great outstanding outlines you can make fiction look like truth, but when you come to examine it minutely and microscopically, you will soon detect that it is not reality but fabrication. But the more microscopically we examine the Gospel narratives, the more we become impressed with their truthfulness. There is an artlessness and naturalness and self-evident truthfulness in the narratives, down to the minutest detail, that surpasses all the possibilities of art.

The third line of proof that the statements contained in the four Gospels regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ are exact statements of historic fact, is:

3. THE CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

There are certain proven and admitted facts that demand the resurrection of Christ to account for them.

1. Beyond a question, the foundation truth preached in the early years of the Church's history was the resurrection. This was the one doctrine upon which the Apostles were ever ringing the changes. Whether Jesus did actually rise from the dead or not, it is certain that the one thing that the Apostles constantly proclaimed was that He had risen. Why should the Apostles use this as the very corner-stone of their creed, if not well attested and firmly believed?

But this is not all: They laid down their lives for this doctrine. Men never lay

down their lives for a doctrine which they do not firmly believe. They stated that they had seen Jesus after His resurrection, and rather than give up their statement, they laid down their lives for it. Of course, men may die for error and often have, but it was for error that they firmly believed. In this case they would have known whether they had seen Jesus or not, and they would not merely have been dying for error but dying for a statement which they knew to be false. This is not only incredible but impossible. Furthermore, if the Apostles really firmly believed, as is admitted, that Jesus rose from the dead, they had some facts upon which they founded their belief. These would have been the facts that they would have related in recounting the story. They certainly would not have made up a story out of imaginary incidents when they had real facts upon which they founded their belief. But if the facts were as recounted in the Gospels, there is no possible escaping the conclusion that Jesus actually arose. Still further, if Jesus had not arisen, there would have been evidence that He had not. His enemies would have sought and found this evidence, but the Apostles went up and down the very city where He had been crucified and proclaimed right to the faces of His slayers that He had been raised and no one could produce evidence to the contrary. The very best they could do was to say the guards went to sleep and the disciples stole the body while the guards slept. Men who bear evidence of what happens while they are asleep are not usually regarded as credible witnesses. Further still, if the Apostles had stolen the body, they would have known it themselves and would not have been ready to die for what they knew to be a fraud.

2. Another known fact is the change in the day of rest. The early church came from among the Jews. From time immemorial the Jews had celebrated the seventh day of the week as their day of rest and worship, but we find the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles, and also in early Christian writings, assembling on the first day of the week. Nothing is more difficult of accomplishment than the change in a holy day that has been celebrated for centuries and is one of the most cherished customs of the people. What is especially significant about the change is that it was changed by no express decree but by general consent. Something tremendous must have occurred that led to this change. The Apostles asserted that what had occurred on that day was the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and that is the most rational explanation. In fact it is the only reasonable explanation of the change.

3. But the most significant fact of all is the change in the disciples themselves, the moral transformation. At the time of the crucifixion of Christ, we find the whole apostolic company filled with blank and utter despair. We see Peter, the leader of the apostolic company, denying his Lord three times with oaths and cursings, but a few days later we see this same man, filled with a courage that nothing could shake. We see him standing before the council that had condemned Jesus to death and saying to them, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand before you whole" (Acts 4:10).

A little further on when commanded by the council not to speak at all nor teach

in the name of Jesus, we hear Peter and John answering, "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" (Acts 4:19,20). A little later still after arrest and imprisonment, in peril of death, when sternly arraigned by the council, we hear Peter and the Apostles answering their demand that they should be silent regarding Jesus, with the words, "We ought to obey God rather than man. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things" (Acts 5:29-32). Something tremendous must have occurred to account for such a radical and astounding moral transformation as this. Nothing short of the fact of the resurrection and of their having seen the risen Lord will explain it.

These unquestionable facts are so impressive and so conclusive that even infidel and Jewish scholars now admit that the Apostles believed that Jesus rose from the dead. Even Ferdinand Baur, father of the Tubigen School, admitted this. Even David Strauss, who wrote the most masterly "Life of Jesus" from the rationalistic standpoint that was ever written, said, "Only this much need be acknowledged that the Apostles firmly believed that Jesus had arisen." Strauss evidently did not wish to admit any more than he had to but he felt compelled to admit this much. Schenkel went even further and said, "It is an indisputable fact that in the early morning of the first day of the week following the crucifixion, the grave of Jesus was found empty. It is a second fact that the disciples and other members of the apostolic communion were convinced that Jesus was seen after the crucifixion." These admissions are fatal to the rationalists who make them.

The question at once arises, "Whence these convictions and belief?" Renan attempted an answer by saying that "the passion of a hallucinated woman (Mary) gives to the world a resurrected God." (Renan's "Life of Jesus," page 357). By this, Renan means that Mary was in love with Jesus; that after His crucifixion, brooding over it, in the passion of her love, she dreamed herself into a condition where she had a hallucination that she had seen Jesus risen from the dead. She reported her dream as a fact, and thus the passion of a hallucinated woman gave to the world a resurrected God. But the reply to all this is self-evident, namely, the passion of a hallucinated woman was not competent to this task. Remember the make-up of the apostolic company; in the apostolic company were a Matthew and a Thomas to be convinced, outside was a Saul of Tarsus to be converted.

The passion of a hallucinated woman will not convince a stubborn unbeliever like Thomas, nor a Jewish tax-gatherer like Matthew. Whoever heard of a tax-gatherer, and most of all of a Jewish tax-gatherer, who could be imposed upon by the passion of a hallucinated woman? Neither will the passion of a hallucinated woman convince a fierce and conscientious enemy like Saul of Tarsus. We must look for some saner explanation than this. Strauss tried to account for it by inquiring whether the appearance might not have been visionary. Strauss has had, and still has, many followers in this theory. But to this

we reply, first of all, there was no subjective starting point for such visions. The Apostles, so far from expecting to see the Lord, would scarcely believe their own eyes when they did see Him. Furthermore, whoever heard of eleven men having the same vision at the same time, to say nothing of five hundred men (1 Corinthians 15:6) having the same vision at the same time. Strauss demands of us that we give up one reasonable miracle and substitute five hundred impossible miracles in its place. Nothing can surpass the credulity of unbelief. The third attempt at an explanation is that Jesus was not really dead when they took Him from the cross, that His friends worked over Him and brought Him back to life, and what was supposed to be the appearance of the raised Lord was the appearance of one who never had been really dead and was now merely resuscitated. This theory of Paulus has been brought forward and revamped by various rationalistic writers in our own time and seems to be a favorite theory of those who today would deny the reality of our Lord's resurrection. To sustain this view, appeal has been made to the short time Jesus hung upon the cross and to the fact that history tells us of one in the time of Josephus taken down from the cross and nursed back to life. But to this we answer:

- (1). Remember the events preceding the crucifixion; the agony in the garden of Gethsemane; the awful ordeal of the four trials; the scourging and the consequent physical condition in which all this left Jesus. Remember too the water and the blood that poured from His pierced side.
- (2). In the second place, we reply, His enemies would have taken, and did take, all necessary precautions against such a thing as this happening. (John 19:34).
- (3). We reply, in the third place, if Jesus had been merely resuscitated, He would have been so weak, such an utter physical wreck, that His reappearance would have been measured at its real value, and the moral transformation in the disciples, for which we are trying to account, would still remain unaccounted for. The officer in the time of Josephus, who is cited in proof, though brought back to life, was an utter physical wreck.
- (4). We reply in the fourth place, if brought back to life, the Apostles and friends of Jesus, who are the ones who are supposed to have brought Him back to life, would have known how they brought Him back to life, and that it was not a case of resurrection but of resuscitation, and the main fact to be accounted for, namely, the change in themselves would remain unaccounted for. The attempted explanation is an explanation that does not explain.
- (5). In the fifth place, we reply, that the moral difficulty is the greatest of all, for if it was really a case of resuscitation, then Jesus tried to palm Himself off as one risen from the dead, when in reality He was nothing of the sort. In that case, He would be an arch-impostor, and the whole Christian system rests on a fraud as its ultimate foundation. Is it possible to believe that such a system of religion as that of Jesus Christ, embodying such exalted principles and precepts of truth, purity and love, "originated in a sincere heart is not cankered by fraud and trickery can believe Jesus to have been an impostor, and His religion to have been founded upon fraud. A leader of the rationalistic forces in England has recently tried to prove the theory that Jesus was only apparently dead by appealing to the fact that when the side of Jesus was pierced blood came forth

and asks, "Can a dead man bleed?" To this the sufficient reply is that when a man dies of what is called in popular language, a broken heart, the blood escapes into the pericardium, and after standing there for a short time it separates into serum (the water) and clot (the red corpuscles, blood), and thus if a man were dead, if his side were pierced by a spear, and the point of the spear entered the pericardium, "blood and water" would flow out just as the record states it did, and what is brought forth as a proof that Jesus was not really dead, is in reality a proof that He was, and an illustration of the minute accuracy of the story. It could not have been made up in this way, if it were not actual fact. We have eliminated all other possible suppositions. We have but one left, namely, Jesus really was raised from the dead the third day as recorded in the four Gospels. The desperate straits to which those who attempt to deny it are driven are themselves proof of the fact. We have then several independent lines of argument pointing decisively and conclusively to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Some of them taken separately prove the fact, but taken together they constitute an argument that makes doubt of the resurrection of Christ impossible to the candid mind. Of course, if one is determined not to believe, no amount of proof will convince him. Such a man must be left to his own deliberate choice of error and falsehood; but any man who really desires to know the truth and is willing to obey it at any cost must accept the resurrection of Christ as an historically proven fact.

A brilliant lawyer in New York City some time ago spoke to a prominent minister of that city asking him if he really believed that Christ rose from the dead. The minister replied that he did, and asked the privilege of presenting the proof to the lawyer. The lawyer took the material offered in proof away and studied it. He returned to the minister, and said, "I am convinced that Jesus really did rise from the dead. But," he then added, "I am no nearer being a Christian than I was before. I thought that the difficulty was with my head. I find that it is really with my heart."

There is really but one weighty objection to the doctrine that Jesus arose from the dead, and that is, "There is no conclusive evidence that any other ever arose." To this a sufficient answer would be, even if it were certain that no other ever arose, it would not at all prove that Jesus did not arise, for the life of Jesus was unique, His nature was unique, His character was unique, His mission was unique, His history was unique, and it is not to be wondered at, but rather to be expected, that the issue of such a life should also be unique. However, all this objection is simply David Hume's exploded argument against the possibility of the miraculous revamped. According to this argument, no amount of evidence can prove a miracle, because miracles are contrary to all experience. But are miracles contrary to all experience? To start out by saying that they are is to beg the very question at issue. They may be outside of your experience and mine, they may be outside the experience of this entire generation, but your experience and mine and the experience of this entire generation is not "all experience." Every student of geology and astronomy knows that things have occurred in the past which are entirely outside of the experience of the present generation. Things have occurred within the last ten years that are entirely

outside of the experience of the fifty years preceding it. True science does not start with an a priori hypothesis that certain things are impossible, but simply examines the evidence to find out what has actually occurred. It does not twist its observed facts to make them accord with a priori theories, but seeks to make its theories accord with the facts as observed. To say that miracles are impossible, and that no amount of evidence can prove a miracle, is to be supremely unscientific. Within the past few years, in the domain of chemistry for example, discoveries have been made regarding radium which seemed to run counter to all previous observations regarding chemical elements and to well established chemical theories. But the scientist has not therefore said that these discoveries about radium cannot be true; he has rather gone to work to find out where the trouble was in his previous theories. The observed and recorded facts in the case before us prove to a demonstration that Jesus rose from the dead, and true science must accept this conclusion and conform its theories to this observed fact. The fact of the actual and literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead cannot be denied by any man who Will study the evidence in the case with a candid desire to find what the fact is, and not merely to support an a priori theory.

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