

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages		Pastor/Teacher
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## Christ's Resurrection and Ours

Skeptics have consistently ridiculed or rejected the Christian doctrine of immortality. As we take a backward look through history we find the writings of the sages strewn with doubt and unbelief. Charles Darwin, for example, in his *Life and Letters*, wrote: "As for a future life, every man must judge for himself between conflicting vague probabilities." Robert Ingersoll in *Declaration to Be Free* remarked: "Is there beyond the silent night/An endless day?/Is death a door that leads to Light?/We cannot say." Clarence Darrow, the famous trial lawyer, was dogmatic in his views. On one occasion he stated: "The origin of the absurd idea of immortal life is easy to discover; it is kept alive by hope and fear, by a childish faith, and by cowardice." And H.L. Mencken, the acerbic social critic, wrote in *Will Durant's On the Meaning of Life*: "I do not believe in immortality and have no desire for it. The belief in it issues from the puerile egos of inferior men." To these testimonies George Bernard Shaw, in *Parents and Children*, added: "If some devil were to convince us that our dream of perpetual immortality is no dream but a hard fact, such a shriek of despair would go up from the human race as no other conceivable horror could provoke."<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of immortality in Christianity is directly linked with the resurrection of the body.

The resurrection of Christ, is *the* cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, a point underscored by the Apostle Paul – "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless<sup>2</sup> and so is your faith" (I Corinthians 15:12-19).

### I. THE VERACITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

No serious modern historian or New Testament scholar (even those identified with the infamous *Jesus Seminar*) doubts that Jesus was in fact a real historical figure and that He was crucified.<sup>3</sup> The veracity of Christ's *bodily* resurrection from the dead is evident from the gospel records (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20).

#### A. The Recorded Testamonies

The angels (Matthew 28:5-7; Luke 24:7), the Roman guards (Matthew 28:11), the Apostles (cf. I Corinthians 15:5-7 for a sample listing of Christ's post-resurrection appearances). In the Book of Acts there are over *twenty* references to the resurrection. "The number," declares Wilbur Smith, "... will amaze anyone who has not given this particular point serious consideration (see, e.g., 1:1-3, 22; 2:24, 30-33; 3:15, 26; 4:10, 33; 5:30; 10:40, 41; 13:23, 30, 31, 33, 37; 17:3, 18, 31; 26:22, 23)."<sup>4</sup>

### II. THE NECESSITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

"The core of the matter is not reached till it is perceived that the Resurrection of Jesus is not simply an external seal or evidential appendage to the Christian gospel, but enters as a *constitutive element* into the very essence of that Gospel. Its denial or removal would be the mutilation of the Christian doctrine of Redemption, of which it is an integral part."<sup>5</sup>

#### A. For the Fulfillment of Prophecy

Christ, on the road to Emmaus, declared to the two disciples, “Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself” (Luke 24:26-27).

### III. THE EFFICACY AND BENEFIT OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Christ is not simply a grandiose display of God’s miraculous power. It did demonstrate the power of God (Ephesians 1:19, 20), but it was not done like some Steven Spielberg special effect. Christ’s resurrection was the public declaration of our acquittal before God. “Just as our sins and Christ’ death are closely related, so there is an intimate relationship between Christ’s resurrection and our justification”<sup>6</sup> (cf. Romans 5:9, 19).

#### A. Our Justification

Christ’s resurrection demonstrates that His death atoned for our sins. Listen to the wisdom of the Dutch Puritan, Wilhelmus à Brakel. “Let such a person go to God and ask the Lord, while pleading upon the resurrection of Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 3:21), ‘Are not my sins punished? Has not my guilt been atoned for? Has not my Surety risen from the dead and thus entered into rest? Art not Thou my reconciled God and Father? Am I not at peace with Thee?’ May such a person thus wrestle to apply all this to himself on the basis of the promises made to all who receive Christ by faith, until he experiences the power of Christ’s resurrection unto his justification and being at peace with God.”<sup>7</sup>

### IV. THE PROMISE OF BODILY RESURRECTION

Alexander Thomson points out that, “We cannot define the kind of body possessed by Christ after His resurrection. It was a sinless body prior to His crucifixion and required no change from that standpoint. It was a holy body. Our bodies will be changed, and they need to be changed, and they will be made like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:21): but His body was never defiled by sin. We can go no further than Scripture in our description of His body. It was composed of flesh and bones: it could be seen and felt: it could appear and disappear at will in a manner impossible to ordinary men: yet He Himself indicated that He was not a spirit. He was recognized by his appearance, the marks of the crucifixion being evident in His body: His mannerisms were also recognized, together with the tone of His voice, as in the case of Mary Magdalene. We therefore conclude from all evidences that Christ’s resurrection was physical in its nature and that He appeared in the same, yet a changed and more highly endowed body.”<sup>8</sup>

James Orr likewise observes that, “The subject is full of mystery. The error lies in conceiving of the resurrection of the body of the Christian as necessarily the raising again of the very material form that was deposited in the grave. This, though the notion has been defended, loads the doctrine of the resurrection with a needless weight and is not required by anything contained in Scripture. St. Paul, indeed, using the analogy of the seed-corn, says expressly: ‘Thou sowest not the body that shall be... But God giveth it a body as it pleased Him.’ There is here identity between the old self and the new even as regards the body. But it is not identity of the same material substance. In truth, as has often been pointed out, the identity of our bodies, even on earth, does not consist in sameness of material particles. The matter in our bodies is continually changing: in the course of a few years has entirely changed. The bond of identity is in something deeper, in the abiding organizing principle which serves as the thread of connexion amidst all changes. That endures, is not allowed to be destroyed at death; and stamps its individuality and all it inherits from the old body upon the new.

“Questions innumerable doubtless may be asked which it is not possible to answer. How, for example, can a body so transformed as to be called ‘spiritual’ yet retain the true character of a ‘body’? What place is there for ‘body’ in a spiritual realm at all? No place, assuredly, for the body of ‘flesh’ (SARX); but for a body (SŌMA) of another kind, there not only may be, but, if Jesus has

passed into the heavens, there *is*, place. ‘There are also,’ the Apostle says, ‘celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial.’ Such a body, adapted to celestial conditions, will be the resurrection body of the believer. Even already a hidden tie connects this future resurrection-body with the Resurrection life of the Redeemer. For the production of this body the possession of the Spirit of the Risen Lord is necessary. On the other hand, where that Spirit is present, the forces for the production of the resurrection-body are at work – conceivably the basis of it is being already laid within the body that now is. Hardly less seems to be the meaning of the Apostle’s words: ‘If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelleth in you.’

“In conclusion, the Resurrection of Jesus stands fast as a fact, unaffected by the boastful waves of scepticism that ceaselessly through the ages beat themselves against it; retains its significance as a corner-stone in the edifice of human redemption; and holds within it the vastest hope for time and for eternity that humanity can ever know.

“ ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His great mercy, begat us again unto a living hope, by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.’ ”<sup>9</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** Michael Horton, the host of The White Horse Inn, writes as follows: “The claims of the disciples are not made on the level of psychology, anthropology, morality, sociology, marketing, or even – at least initially – theology. They are historical claims. The eye-witnesses do not tell us about private experiences that they had, encouraging us to experience the same things: ‘You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.’ Nor are their claims based on the relevance of the events: ‘Jesus changed my life and he can change yours too.’ The disciple’s witness, unlike much of what we hear in Christian circles, was more like legal testimony than a pitch for a product or an interview on a talk-show. The court was to make its judgment, not on the basis of the psychological or moral impact of these experiences, but on the basis of whether or not these events which the eye-witnesses reported actually took place.”<sup>10</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> As cited by C.J. Barber in the foreward to S.D.F. Salmond, *The Biblical Doctrine of Immortality* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> The word translated “useless” in the NIV and “vain” in the ESV is KENOS. It means empty, without content, basis, truth or power, without result or profit, an illusion or delusion. Paul uses the word here and elsewhere (cf. II Corinthians 6:1; I Thessalonians 3:5; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 2:16) to suggest that under certain circumstances, certain things would be pointless, fruitless, or in vain.

<sup>3</sup> See the massive amount of evidence and documentation by Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (IVP, 1987). He correctly notes that “much skepticism about the gospel’s reliability stems from faulty methods used in analyzing the gospels of from faulty presuppositions on which those methods depend,” p. XVIII.

<sup>4</sup> W.M. Smith, *The Supernaturalness of Christ* (rpt. Baker, 1978), p. 192.

<sup>5</sup> James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1980), p. 274.

<sup>6</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (rpt. Baker, 1956), p. 370.

<sup>7</sup> W. à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service I* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), p. 632.

<sup>8</sup> A. Thomson, *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?* (Zondervan, 1950), p. 137.

<sup>9</sup> Orr, op. cit., p. 286.

<sup>10</sup> M. Horton, *In the Face of God: The Dangers & Delights of Spiritual Intimacy* (Word, 1996), p. 111.