

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

"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." I Corinthians 15:3-4.

First Corinthians 15 opens with a summary of the gospel of Christ, namely, the death of Christ for our sins according to the Scriptures, the burial of His body in establishment of the fact that He had died, and the resurrection of Christ in fulfillment of the Scriptures.

We are impressed by the marvel of Christ's death, then by the meaning of His death, and finally by the manner of it. Our wonder reaches a climax as we ask, "Why did Christ die?" In fulfillment of an eternal purpose and plan, "Christ died for our sins." His death was voluntary and vicarious. Christ took our sins upon Himself. Through Christ's death on the cross we have obtained the remission of our sins, we have been brought to God, and we have been made the righteousness of God in Him.

On that terrible day of the crucifixion of Christ light turned to darkness at noon, and all said, "He is dead." Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Christ, went to Pilate and obtained permission to remove the body of our Lord from the cross and prepare it for burial. Joseph and Nicodemus prepared the body of Christ for burial. Together they tenderly and lovingly laid their Lord in a new sepulcher which was hewn out of a rock in the garden, and had been prepared for Joseph's own entombment.

When Christ's body was placed in the tomb, the tomb was fastened with the king's seal, and a huge stone was rolled in front of the entrance. Pilate authorized a guard of soldiers to be placed on duty to prevent the tomb from being robbed. How ridiculous for men to attempt to thwart the purpose and power of God! The seal, the stone, and the soldiers could not keep the Lord of life a prisoner to death.

From Friday night until Sunday morning Christ's body remained in the tomb. Early on Sunday morning the angels of the Lord came down, the soldiers fell away, the seal was broken, and the stone was rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. Christ arose, laid aside His grave clothes, and walked out of that tomb a living Lord, triumphant over death and the grave. By His resurrection He recovered His challenged rights, regained His waning influence, and resumed His miraculous power. This was a glorious consummation of all that had transpired and a splendid inauguration of all that is most precious in the present and in the future. Through His resurrection we have received the blessed assurance that the grave is not our goal.

Christ's resurrection is one of the proofs of His deity. We are reminded of the little girl who had come to trust Christ as her Saviour, and was then approached by a so-called infidel who challenged her faith. With an expression of pity for her credulity and of disgust on account of her faith, he said: "Little girl, do you know that there have been ten thousand Christs? Which Christ do you worship?" Without a moment's hesitation, she replied: "The Christ Who rose from the dead, sir."

As it began to dawn on Sunday, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, who loved the Lord devotedly, approached the tomb where Christ was buried for the purpose of anointing His body with spices and perfumes, as an expression of their love for and devotion to Him. Not realizing the significance of the open tomb, these astonished and devoted women entered to perform their ritual, only to discover that the body of Christ was not there. Possessed with mingled fear and perplexity, they were too frightened for words when they saw the two in shining garments and heard the question, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Trying to allay their fears, they urged the women not to be looking back to One Who had died, but to look forward to One Who was alive. Fortunate indeed were these women in having the privilege of viewing the empty tomb and in hearing the announcement of the heavenly messengers that "He is not here, but is risen." It is truly marvelous how much consolation and encouragement were concentrated in that brief declaration. That short and simple statement constituted the first sermon about the resurrection of Christ. "He is risen" is the most momentous and meaningful announcement ever made. The fact of Christ's resurrection is the most comforting and joyous fact which is known by the children of men. His triumph over death and the grave is a guarantee of our victory over the same.

To emphasize the vital importance of the resurrection of Christ to Christians, Paul stated that, if Christ had not been raised from among the dead, Christians would be the most miserable of all people. If Christ had not arisen, which is the blackest assumption imaginable, then He would be dead now, all preaching would be useless, faith in Him would be worthless, the apostles would have been liars, living believers would be unsaved, the righteous dead would have perished, and the Christian life would be a misery.

In I Corinthians 15:20 we have the statement of the triumphant truth that Christ has arisen. This enables us to turn aside from the black path of incredible assumption and stand again in the light of the resurrection and rejoice in the words, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." Historic fact, spiritual experience, transformed lives, and unimpeachable testimony are against His being yet in death's dreary dominion of the tomb. Just as in Adam all die, even so all of the people of Christ shall be raised from among the dead and be made alive. Christ's triumphant victory over death and the grave is the pledge and guarantee of the victory of His followers over the same.

Paul joyfully presented clear and conclusive evidence to the glorious truth of the resurrection of Christ. This truth is the Gibraltar of Christianity, the impregnable rock which cannot be shaken. Christ died and was buried, but He arose and is now alive. Our risen Christ is making His presence felt in the hearts and lives of people in the heart of Africa, in the center of Asia, on the continent of Europe, throughout this great land of ours, and on the far-away islands of the seas. Christ died and was buried, but He arose and came out of the tomb and lives today to be the Saviour, the Friend, and the Helper of all who will receive Him and what He offers to us. If you have not received Him as your Saviour, do so now while we sing.