

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Matthew 28:1-6

A Mohammedan once remarked to a Christian missionary: "We Moslems have one thing you Christians do not have: we have a tomb to which we may go and weep." "Exactly so," replied the Christian, "We, too, have a tomb, but it is empty." That empty tomb makes the difference between Christianity and all other religions. Christianity has a living Founder and Saviour, while all other religions of much age have dead founders and no Saviour. Christ claimed to have power to lay down His life and to take it up again, and the empty tomb justifies His claim.

Christ was and is a unique man. No other man was ever born as He was. No other man ever lived as He lived. No other man ever wrought as He did. No other man ever died as He died. No other ever came out of the grave as He did. No other ever ascended back to heaven as He did.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified our Lord. For three hours He was exposed to the fierce rays of the sun. At noon there came a three-hour period of supernatural darkness which extended over the land. At three o'clock in the afternoon Christ cried, "It is finished," and died.

Joseph of Arimathaea, a secret disciple of Christ, acted quickly by going to Pilate and obtaining permission to remove the body of our Lord from the cross and prepare it for burial. Joseph had not made a confession of his faith in Christ because he was afraid of the Jews. His love had been subjected to his fear, but now, in this hour of crisis his love became triumphant over his fear. No doubt Joseph regretted the fact that he had not shown his love for Christ while He was yet alive. It is one of the most common tragedies of life that we keep our praises of people until they are dead. It would be so much better if we would express our gratitude to them and our praises of them when they are still alive instead of waiting and placing some flowers on their graves after they are gone.

After Pilate had ascertained from the centurion in charge that Christ was dead, he granted the request of Joseph that he be permitted to lay the body of Christ in the tomb which he had prepared for himself, and he gave orders to the centurion to deliver the body to him. Joseph and Nicodemus prepared the body of the Lord Jesus for burial. Joseph provided the fine linen in which His body was wrapped and Nicodemus supplied the spices. 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. With loving reverence they placed His body therein, and then rolled a hugh stone in front of the door.

The next day the chief priests and Pharisees reminded Pilate that Christ had said, "After three days I will rise again" (Matthew 27:63). Pilate authorized them to seal the entrance to the tomb, which seal no one could break except upon the penalty of death, and to station a strong guard of soldiers on duty there to prevent the tomb from being robbed. But how ridiculous for men to attempt to thwart the purpose and power of God! The stone, the seal and the guard could not keep the Lord of life a prisoner to death.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James observed where they had placed the body of Christ, and then returned to their homes and rested on the Sabbath. At sunrise on Sunday morning they and Salome started to the tomb to anoint the body of Christ as a token of their love for and devotion to Him. Usually the bodies of loved ones

were anointed at the time of death, but these friends had not been given the opportunity of thus honoring their Master. Nicodemus had placed spices on Christ, but that was an expression of his love for Him and not their love.

These broken-hearted women never dreamed that Christ would come out of that tomb. But, when faith and hope are dead, love remains alive. You can kill faith and hope, but you cannot kill love. Without a particle of faith in or hope of His resurrection in their hearts, they still loved Him Whom they believed was still behind that stone in the borrowed tomb.

As they made their way to the tomb, they were wondering, worrying and talking about who might roll away the stone from the entrance. Upon their arrival they were amazed to find that their concern had been entirely unnecessary because the stone had been rolled away, and the body of Christ was not there. So often dreaded difficulties are never encountered.

Upon entering the tomb to perform their ritual, possessed with mingled fear and astonishment, the women saw the white-robed messenger of the Lord sitting within the sepulcher. He appeared to be in perfect contentment as though he was celebrating the triumph of Christ. He assured the women that they were no longer to be looking backward to One Who had died, but that they were to be looking forward to One Who was alive.

The words of God's messenger constituted the first sermon about the resurrection of Christ. The message was very short and simple: "He is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him." "He is risen" is the most momentous and meaningful announcement ever made. His resurrection brought the removal of doubts, the relief of distress and triumph over defeat.

The women went immediately and told the disciples and Peter about the glorious victory of Christ over the grave. Peter and John literally ran to the tomb and found the linen cloths and the napkin arranged orderly, but Christ was not there. This evidence showed deliberation rather than any haste in leaving the tomb. It proved that friends had not removed His body to another place, for in that event they would not have removed the grave cloths. Neither would robbers have waited to remove thus these wrappings from the corpse.

The number of witnesses strongly confirms the fact of the resurrection of Christ. Mary Magdalene was the first to bear testimony to the fact. She was the first to see Christ, and mistook Him for the gardener; but she recognized her Master's voice, acknowledged Him as her Lord, by whose direction she ran to tell the apostles. Next He appeared to Mary the mother of James and Salome. When they recognized Him they held Him by the feet and worshipped Him. Peter was then favored with a sight of his risen Lord. What a great favor was bestowed upon him who had deserted and denied Christ!

That afternoon two disciples, Cleopas and his unnamed companion, were journeying from Jerusalem to Emmaus and Christ approached them and walked along with them. They were so completely fascinated by His conversation with them, in which He so delightfully opened unto them the Scriptures, that they insisted upon His spending the night with them in Emmaus. At the evening meal "He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them," whereupon it dawned upon them that He was Christ Who had been raised from the dead. This recognition so revived and thrilled them that they hastily retraced their steps to Jerusalem for the purpose of bringing to the apostles the news that they had seen the risen Lord. Upon their arrival in the midst of the apostles, they related what had happened and how Christ was recognized by them in the breaking of bread.

Immediately Christ appeared in the upper room where ten of the apostles were gathered and, with majesty beaming in His countenance and heavenly consolation flowing from His lips, He said, "Peace be unto you!" Observing their fear, Christ remarked, "Why are ye troubled? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Then, He showed them His hands and His feet. Seeing the certain marks of His sufferings, they were convinced as to His identity. He did not vanish, but remained with them for some time. He showed them, from the Scriptures, the necessity of His resurrection; upbraided them for their unbelief; and, to put the matter beyond the realm of doubt, He offered to eat with them; and did actually eat a piece of broiled fish and a piece of honeycomb. They knew that He was the same Jesus Christ Whom they had known before His death, and they were so glad that they had seen Him again. With the radiant and triumphant conqueror of death in their midst, their whole outlook was changed.

Thomas was not present because he did not expect the Lord Jesus Christ to be there. He did not even believe that Christ had risen from the dead. When the apostles told Thomas that they had seen and talked with Christ after His resurrection, he refused to believe them. He said that he would not believe them unless he actually saw and felt the nailprints in Christ's hands and the gash of the spear in His side. He had to be shown before He would concede Christ's victory over death and the grave. Eight days after Thomas had expressed his doubts about the resurrection of Christ, our Lord appeared to the apostles again in the upper room, and this time Thomas was present. After Christ had said, "Peace be unto you!", He told Thomas to put His finger in the nailprints in His hands, and to place his hand in the gash which the spear had cut in His side. Thomas had been demanding evidence of the resurrection and here was plenty of it. When Thomas did as Christ commanded him, he was thoroughly convinced that He was the risen Lord, and he enthusiastically exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"

During the days which followed Christ showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. On another occasion He appeared to more than five hundred people at one time on a mountain in Galilee. More than half of these were still alive when Paul wrote the account of this incident in I Corinthians 15:6. After that Christ was seen by James; then by all the apostles at Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives at the ascension, and to Paul also (I Corinthians 15:8).

This evidence is sufficient to establish beyond the shadow of a doubt the great truth of the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the best established fact of human history. It is difficult to understand why anybody would want to try to disprove the resurrection of Christ. Does anybody actually want death to be the end for himself and for his loved ones? No normal person wants to die, but since he cannot escape death he certainly does not want to stay dead forever.

If Christ had not arisen, then He would be dead now, and we would be worshipping a corpse today. If Christ had not arisen, all preaching would have been useless; all faith would have been worthless; all of us would still be lost and without hope. If Christ had not arisen, a darkness would be hanging over every grave that no earthly light could ever remove. But, there is a sunburst of glory in the words, "But now is Christ risen from the dead." Thank God, the grave could not hold the Saviour! Christ is risen.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ assures us that all who are united to Christ by a living faith shall live forever. To this end we have His own inviolable promise: "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). Nothing is more certain than the fact that we shall be raised from the dead and live again. Our resurrected

bodies will not be subject to disease, dissolution and decay, but they will be like the body of Christ. What a glorious hope!

"From the Cross they took Him,
 Wrapped Him in a shroud;
 In a tomb they laid Him,
 Followed by a crowd;
 Guards were set to watch Him,
 And the stone made fast;
 Yet, He rose in power,
 Hope was born, at last.

Raise your head, O pilgrim,
 Upward turn your eye,
 Your redemption hastens,
 Glory draweth nigh;
 Doors of hope are open,
 Death has lost its gloom,
 Christ the Lord is risen,
 He will lead you Home."