

THE INCOMPARABLE CHRIST

Lesson Five: CHRIST RESURRECTED!

Proclaim the good news! Tell the facts! Carry the message to all the world! Jesus has risen from the dead! This was the apostles' assignment, and to it they applied themselves. They knew by tremendous and triumphant experience the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Of all the facts that support our faith, this is the most certain. We must proclaim the resurrection of Jesus as a certainty of what God has done in the past.

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST AND HIS RESURRECTION.

The gospel is Christ. Our faith is in Christ and the divine revelation of which He is the source and center. It is confidence in Jesus as the divine Son of God, having all authority and absolute trustworthiness. Our faith rests on His teaching, and our practices are obedience to His commands. It is not a system of reasonings about realms beyond our experience. The whole validity of the gospel depends upon Who Jesus is, upon His personal merit and power. We believe the New Testament is inspired of God and possessed of divine accuracy and authority.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are the facts that reveal most clearly and conclusively His person and character, as well as His purpose and His ministry to us. In the New Testament the resurrection is made the chief evidence upon which faith in Christ is to be based. It is the fitting climax of every account of His life. It was the key-note of apostolic preaching (Acts 2:32; 4:33; 10:40,41). It was the major item of testimony in all their preaching. It is continually emphasized in the epistles as the basis of our faith and hope, and as a motive to holy living (Eph. 1:19-23; Col. 2:12).

Jesus Himself often predicted His own resurrection. He considered it the greatest sign of His authority and truthfulness (Mt. 12:38-40; 16:21). His enemies heard His claims of resurrection. "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After three days I rise again" (Mt. 27:63). In their blindness they tried to stop the power of God with military might and the authority of Rome. They only provided circumstances that contribute to the proof of the resurrection. The guard they placed to watch the tomb stands guard today against false objections and foolish doubts that would try to explain away the empty tomb.

Confession of Christ and belief in the resurrection go together to obtain salvation (Rom. 10:9). Denying the resurrection of Jesus is the same as denying His authority and power to save (I Cor. 15:17). The resurrection of Jesus is not a matter of hope for what will happen, or a faith in what should happen, but knowledge of what did happen.

DIRECT EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION.

The proof of the resurrection is testimony. The testimony for Jesus' resurrection is the kind that all experience proves to be reliable, the kind that is acceptable to establish the truth in any court or in any matter of history. The witnesses are sufficient in number. There are twelve apostles, several women, some other disciples, James, Paul, and more than five hundred at one time. These saw Jesus alive after His death again and again, singly and in groups, indoors and outdoors, by day and by night. All were brought to one conviction. Their united, active witnessing of Jesus and their convincing testimony produced thousands of believers within a few days in the very city where it happened, less than two months after Jesus was buried. The testimony of some of them and the experience of all of them is recorded by at least six writers in different accounts that show all the variations of independent witnesses and all the harmony of truth.

The witnesses were competent. These were men of intelligence, of mental balance before and after; well-prepared by long and intimate acquaintance with Jesus; of a mental attitude requiring proof, having personal interest in knowing the certainty of things. They repeatedly saw the risen Christ and listened to extensive teaching from Him, walked and talked with Him, touched Him, and saw Him eat in their presence, discussed His death and resurrection, and plans for the future. They even saw Him ascend into heaven. There was no mistaking His identity. They told of much detailed experience with Him. The circumstantial details of their accounts show that they were not trying to tell of an inner conviction, but of real physical experiences. This destroys the supposition that they could have been honestly mistaken. If Jesus did not actually rise and appear as they said, then they knew their testimonies were false.

But they were honest men! They had been trained in righteousness, in both reverent fear and loving devotion toward the God of truth. Their lives show no tendency to dishonesty. Their teachings and examples have had the greatest power in the world to make other men honest. They had nothing to gain by spreading false reports, but suffered affliction and death for their teaching. Some men might die for what they believe and be mistaken. No such group of men would devote their lives and accept death for what they knew to be false. The apostles lived and died for what they knew to be true; if it had been false they most surely would have known that it was.

There was other testimony, of unusual quality and force, to support the testimony of the eye-witnesses. The prophecies of the Old Testament spoke of this unique event in the life of the promised Messiah (Psalm 16:10). Jesus Himself foretold His resurrection, and it cannot be destroyed without destroying His integrity. That Jesus was dead and buried, and that the tomb was empty the third day are facts that His enemies established. His enemies through the years have tried either to deny His death or explain the absence of His body. Their attempts have tested the accounts at every point and demonstrate both the facts and impossibility of explaining them by anything except the actual resurrection. The disciples' unshakable conviction, the great change wrought in them, the faith of the multitudes of Jews, the transformation and ministry of Saul are all effects that must have an adequate cause, but for which no other cause can be found than the fact of Jesus' resurrection. No one has been able to deny that the apostles and the early church honestly and firmly believed that Jesus rose bodily from the grave. No one has ever given a satisfactory explanation of how this firm and persistent belief could have arisen without the reality of the resurrection. No one can deny that the church came into existence and the gospel became a force in the world, beginning with and growing because of the firm conviction and the convincing testimony of the resurrection.

The resurrection is confirmed by the Holy Spirit. He Who came upon the apostles did so in fulfillment of Christ's promise (Lk. 24:49; Jn. 15:26,27; Acts 1:5,8). He bore witness with them concerning the resurrection (Acts 2:33; 5:12). The testimony is confirmed by perpetual observances which are based on the fact of the resurrection. Baptism pictures Christ's burial and resurrection, and their significance in our lives. The practice of worshiping on the first day of the week explicitly and pointedly commemorates both the resurrection of Jesus and its importance in our lives. Conviction based on testimony of facts frequently reaches the point at which it is called knowledge. The resurrection of Jesus is a matter of knowledge as much as any fact in history.

The resurrection of Jesus was not merely an unexplained appearance of some unknown or ordinary man from the grave. His resurrection was in perfect harmony with His manner of life, His unique birth, His unparalleled works, His distinctive death, and the prophecies that prepared the way for Him. The resurrection of Jesus is our victory over sin and death. We can be sure that Jesus is the Lord of life and death. Let us serve Him with glad assurance that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

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