



Foundations of

FAITH

The Resurrection of the Dead

Lesson 30

One of the great phenomena of history occurred a few weeks after the death of Jesus Christ at Calvary. When he was crucified his disciples were disillusioned. One had betrayed him into the hands of his enemies. The rest had forsaken him at his trial. When he was buried it was by the hands of others than his apostles. Apparently they had lost all hope because their Master was taken away. Yet these same men, who shortly before were utterly discouraged, preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost just fifty days later with astounding success. In the months and years that followed they spread the teachings of the Galilean throughout the world with a rapidity unequalled in history. Eventually, if tradition may be relied on, they all died as martyrs, except for John, the beloved apostle.

How shall we account for the amazing transformation of these men? What changed their dejection into a burning zeal that knew no bounds? There is but one explanation – the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Between the time of his death and the day of Pentecost they had beheld in the flesh the one whom they had seen die on the cross.

The importance of the resurrection cannot be too highly stressed. Man has always been concerned about it. Job asked, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14) The Pharisees and Sadducees of the time of Jesus were divided over the matter. The Pharisees contended for the resurrection, the Sadducees denied it. Our whole philosophy of life necessarily revolves around what we think of life after death. Paul believed in the resurrection, but he declared, "If after the

manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." (I Cor. 15:32) He summed the matter up correctly. If there is no hereafter, then we might as well give ourselves over to enjoying life in the fullest carnal way. If there is a life after death, then our primary concern should be for that.

The doctrine of the resurrection is in the realm of faith. It is not possible to scientifically prove it. By the same token, it cannot be scientifically disproved. There are thousands of things which cannot be demonstrated by science, yet we accept them without question. Why? Because of the testimony of others. For example, we cannot prove by science that Julius Caesar ever lived. Yet this is accepted as an unquestioned fact because of historical records that have come down to us. In the same way, we have abundant testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from those who were eyewitnesses. Our faith, therefore, rests upon a firm foundation, not mere speculation.

THE RESURRECTION IS PLAUSIBLE. In support of the doctrine of the resurrection, Paul draws an argument from things familiar to every tiller of the soil. "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up and with what body do they come? You fool, that which you sow is not quickened (made alive), except it die: and that which you sowest, you sow not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat or some other grain; but God gives it a body as it has pleased him, and to every seed his

own body.” (I Cor. 15:35-38) Whenever a seed is planted, it dies in producing a new plant. In order for there to be new life, there must first be death. Paul’s reasoning is that if we die a physical death, it is possible for that death to produce a new life even as a seed produces a new plant as it dies.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION. Jesus Christ taught the doctrine of the resurrection. Of himself he declared, “Behold we go up to Jerusalem: and the Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.” (Matt. 20:18, 19) Of others he said, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life: and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.” (John 5:28, 29)

Not only did Jesus teach the resurrection, but he proved it possible by himself arising from the grave. Since he arose it proves his teachings relating to the resurrection correct and that we also may arise some day. It is impossible to separate the resurrection of Christ from our future resurrection. Their connection is demonstrated by Paul when he says, “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is Christ not raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; and ye are yet in your sins.” (I Cor. 15:12-17) It follows then that the resurrection of Christ and our resurrection stand or fall together. If the former can be proved from adequate testimony, then the latter is established.

WERE THERE SUFFICIENT WITNESSES TO THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS? The resurrection of Christ has been called the best proved fact of ancient history. We know that he appeared to the following people between his resurrection and ascension. (1) Mary Magdalene – John 20:11-17, (2) some women – Matthew 28:1-10, (3) Peter – I Corinthians 15:5, (4) Cleophas and a companion – Luke 24:13-35, (5) all the apostles except Thomas – John 20:19-25, (6) all the

apostles including Thomas – John 20:26-29, (7) seven disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee) – John 21:1-24, (8) all the apostles on a mountain in Galilee – Matthew 28:16-20, (9) five hundred disciples at once – I Corinthians 15:6, (10) James – I Corinthians 15:7, and (11) all the apostles at the ascension – Acts 1:1-11). These people bore witness that they had seen Jesus. Therefore the number of witnesses is sufficient to establish the resurrection of Christ. Let us notice two other questions which may be asked regarding their testimony.

WERE THEY COMPETENT WITNESSES? If it could be shown that the witnesses were neurotic or mentally incapable, it could be argued that their testimony is unreliable. But the gospel narratives show that neither of these suppositions is true. Thomas, for example, was extremely hard to convince. He refused to believe that Jesus had arisen, even when ten other men declared that they had seen him. But when he saw him with his own eyes, he believed. The gospel records show these witnesses to be dispassionate and not likely subjects of hallucinations. That they were of high mentality is demonstrated in the writings of the New Testament, several of the writers of which were eyewitnesses to the resurrection. These books are not the babbling of either incompetent or deranged minds, as even the disbelievers in the resurrection must admit. Therefore the witnesses were competent.

WERE THEY HONEST? If it could be shown that the witnesses were deceivers, the resurrection story could be discredited. Four reasons which will prompt a witness to testify falsely are fear, avarice, ambition and pride. Fear could not have been the motive, since their declaration of the resurrection only endangered their own lives. The desire for gain did not prompt a lying testimony, since such a declaration could not benefit them materially. In fact, the opposite was true. And certainly ambition and pride were not motives, since their teaching of Christ only resulted in their being ostracised by their own people.

Futhermore, their honesty is demonstrated by their relating matters in their writings to their own discredit, such as the apostles forsaking Jesus. And perhaps, above all, is the fact that they suffered immeasurably for what they believed. They were willing to die rather than renounce Christ. Only an honest man will die for what he teaches. Therefore the testimony must be accepted since (1) there were

sufficient witnesses, (2) they were competent, and (3) they were honest.

The proof of our future resurrection depends upon the promise of Jesus that we will arise from the grave. Since his own resurrection has been proved, we may accept his promise as trustworthy.

THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION. There are things relating to the resurrection which we do not understand. However, of some things we may be certain. We will arise from the grave when Christ returns again. "For this we may say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede (precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (I Thess. 4:15-17). We know that the unrighteous will be resurrected at the same time. "Marvel not at this: for the **hour** is coming, in the which **all** that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall **come forth**; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life: and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:28, 29) While

both the righteous and the unrighteous will arise at the same time, their fate will be vastly different.

We also know that in the resurrection we will possess a body, but that it will not be a physical one. "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." (I Cor. 15:50) We will have a spiritual body. "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body." (I Cor. 15:44) We do not know exactly what this will be like, but we are assured, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (I John 3:2) Our spiritual bodies, therefore, will resemble that of Jesus Christ.

Our resurrection will signal the defeat of the last enemy – death. This is beautifully expressed by Paul when he avows, "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 15:54-57)

TEST ON LESSON 30

The 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians is the great resurrection chapter. Read it and then fill in the following blanks:

1. Christ died, was buried, and rose again the day.
2. The number of appearances of Christ mentioned by Paul is
3. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then did not rise.
4. The last enemy to be destroyed at the resurrection is
5. In death, man is sown in corruption, but is raised in , he is sown in dishonour, but is raised in , he is sown a natural body, but is raised a body.
6. While today we bear the image of the earthy, in the resurrection we shall bear the image of the

7. and cannot inherit the kingdom of God.
8. We shall be changed in the of an eye.
9. The sting of death is

Write true or false after the following statements:

1. When Jesus was crucified, the disciples were not discouraged.
2. The resurrection can be scientifically proved.
3. When a seed is planted, it dies in producing a new plant.
4. If Christ has not been raised, we are still in our sins.
5. Christ made no more than eight appearances between his resurrection and ascension.
6. The witnesses to the resurrection were extremely neurotic.
7. Four motives which lead men to give false testimony are fear, avarice, ambition and pride.
8. Their willingness to die rather than renounce their faith demonstrates the honesty of the New Testament writers.
9. The dead will be resurrected before Christ returns.
10. The righteous and unrighteous will be resurrected at the same time.

Read Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24 and John 20, 21. Then answer the following questions:

1. In which gospel is Cleopas mentioned?
2. When Mary Magdalene first saw Jesus, who did she suppose he was?
3. What did Thomas say when he saw Jesus?
4. Who rolled the stone away from the door of the tomb?
5. What men were paid money to say that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus?
6. What did the disciples at first suppose they saw when Jesus suddenly stood in the midst of them?
7. What were the seven disciples doing when Jesus appeared to them at the Sea of Tiberias?
8. Which gospel specifically states that Jesus arose on the first day of the week?

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Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

- Section 1 –
1. Third
 2. Six
 3. Christ
 4. Death
 5. Incorruption
 6. Glory
 7. Flesh and blood
 8. Twinkling
 9. Sin

Section 2 – F, F, T, T, F, F, T, T, F, T.

- Section 3 –
1. Luke
 2. The Gardener
 3. "My Lord and My God"
 4. Angel of the Lord
 5. Soldiers or guards or watch
 6. A Spirit
 7. Fishing
 8. Mark

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