



Conducted by
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"When Paul preached concerning the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:32) the people mocked and laughed. What exactly is meant by the resurrection of the dead". "If the resurrection of Jesus was the model (the first fruits), will our bodies be raised as His was (see my hands and my feet that it is me)".

THE incident that the questioner refers to is the discourse that Paul had with the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers on Mars hill. These people were always seeking some new thing to debate and on this occasion they fastened on to the teaching of Paul concerning the resurrection. Paul had chastised them about their idolatry and their non-belief in the true God. He went on to say that these times of ignorance God had overlooked, but now He called upon all men everywhere to repent, "for He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; and He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:30,31). This evoked the response which it has done ever since; some mocked and laughed, others said that they would hear him further on the matter.

What is Resurrection?

This comes from a Greek word ANASTASIS, which denotes a raising up, or rising. So when we speak of the resurrection of the dead we mean that those who were dead are now caused to stand; they are, in fact, made alive. Therefore, the resurrection of the dead means the rising of those people who are in a state of death, so it can be truly said that it is a resurrection from the dead also. Jesus was well and truly dead. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter affirmed that Jesus was held by the "pangs of death" but "God hath raised him up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24). Christ's resurrection was the means of restoring him to his true position, as Paul wrote to the Romans, "And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

From the foregoing, we can see that death must always precede resurrection (except in one or two biblical instances of a special nature). Jesus was in the mainstream of humanity when he had to die; the Messiah shared the same fate as common mortals. But surely the resurrection of Jesus was the response of God to sin and death; it was the act of redemption. The redeeming death and resurrection was part of God's plan for the salvation of mankind. As Peter said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

Who was the Agent

Certain people have said that Jesus was the agent of his own resurrection. They point to the gospel of John who records Jesus as saying, "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Furthermore John records "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down myself. I have power to lay it down myself. I have power to lay again. This commandment have I received of my Father". (John 10:17,18).

On the other hand there are many scriptures that indicate that Jesus was raised by God. In Solomon's porch Peter said, "And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; wherof we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15). In his wonderful gospel teaching to the Romans Paul said, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9). When Paul wrote to

Thessalonica he exhorted the christians "to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10).

It seems to me that as Jesus was always subject to God in his life and death, that God would also be the motivating agent in his resurrection. This is in keeping with God's redemptive plan in salvation. It is in the understanding of this that the believer finds the key to unlock the seeming mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus the Firstfruit

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits: afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:20-23). In his Colossian letter Paul argues that Jesus has the preeminence in all things, therefore 'he is the firstborn from the dead' (Coll. 1:18). This means that Jesus was raised never to die again. In this he was the author of eternal salvation to all those who believe. Because Christ lives, the dead will live also. This at once extends the physical into the realms of the spiritual. Jesus lives never to die again, and because he is the first-fruits it means that all who are 'in' him will be raised never to die again. As Paul put it, "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:5).

The Resurrected Body

"But some man will say, How are the dead raised up and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body" (1 Cor. 15:35-38).

The Bible speaks of a bodily resurrection; what do we mean by this? Is it that Jesus lives only in the memory of men, or was he carried over entirely and in person into eternal life. Is the Jesus whom we preach in the gospel the same Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, buried, and who rose again from the dead? We are taught that there is a natural body and a spiritual body, but what is the relationship between the two? When the dead body of Jesus was put in the tomb was it still he who had just died, or was it just inanimate flesh? The real significance of the empty tomb was that there was no body in view. The bodily resurrection of Jesus was not just an animated spirit but a true identification in bodily form of what Jesus of Nazareth had been. Therefore, the risen Jesus was a true communication of the dead Jesus of Nazareth whose body was placed in the tomb.

Where does this then leave us? It would seem that the immortal soul of Jesus was clothed again with his own body after three days. There was, however, one very distinctive feature; though similar in appearance, the risen body was not bound by the previous material and mortal condition, e.g. he could appear in a room when all the doors were locked. But nevertheless, as Jesus said, "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" (Luke 24:39). I think we must have faith in what Paul said, "But God giveth it a body as it pleaseth Him".

So what about the question "will our resurrection be like the Lord's?" If Jesus was truly identified with the human condition, which he undoubtedly was but without sin, I see no reason for believing that our resurrection will be different from his. We either believe in a bodily resurrection or we don't. All the scriptural evidence suggests that the resurrection of Jesus was not just a reanimation of that which was put into the tomb, but it was that which was put into the tomb. This should not be too difficult for the christian to believe; with God, all things are possible.

I realise that this brings into view such things as decomposition of matter, and whether or not a christian should be buried or cremated, but these issues will have to remain until, perhaps, someone asks a further question about them.

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