

46. His Resurrection: Its Importance

Our last study together demonstrated the certainty of the fact that Jesus Christ not only died on the cross and that he was buried but also that he was resurrected from the dead on the third day. No fact in history is better attested than these. These three facts—the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus—establish the base of what we call the Gospel, the good news. It has been the heart of the Christian message since the first century. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, the apostle Paul wrote this to those who had been converted in the city of Corinth:

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: 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...”

Now we will see the special meaning the Bible attaches to the resurrection.

ITS IMPORTANCE ACCORDING TO JESUS HIMSELF

Jesus sometimes spoke in a veiled way but throughout his ministry he referred to his resurrection from the dead as the ultimate proof that he had the right to act as he did. After the first time he chased the vendors of animals and the moneychangers out of the court of the temple of God in Jerusalem (John 2:18-22), he said:

“So the Jews answered and said to Him, ‘What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”

In Matthew 12:38-40, in speaking of the same miracle, Jesus uses another comparison, this one referring to an event from the life of the Old Testament prophet Jonah:

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

But with his apostles, Jesus did not always speak in parables. In Mark 9:31,32, we see that he told them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.” But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him. Before his death, Jesus’ disciples could not understand what he said to them about this. Surely he did not have to die so soon! And if, according to them, he did not have to die, then he must be talking in parables when he spoke of resurrection. But in this case he was no longer speaking in parables. He was speaking openly and literally about the fulfillment of his mission on earth.

ITS EFFECT ON THE DISCIPLES

When we think about the effect of Jesus’ resurrection on his disciples, we see that Jesus was right to emphasize this miracle as one that would make him known more emphatically than all the others—the one which would most clearly proclaim his divinity. This is the way Thomas understood the real identity of the Master he had followed for more than three years. John 20:24-29 shows us his reaction before the risen Lord:

“Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ So he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’ And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you

have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

(Notice that Jesus does not reproach Thomas for having called him Lord and God, as if it were a blasphemy. On the contrary, he pronounced a blessing on those who would accept this truth without having been eyewitnesses of the resurrection.)

The disciples of Jesus were transformed by his resurrection. Before seeing their Lord returned to life, they were hiding somewhere behind closed doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders (John 20:19). After the resurrection, we see them full of courage in spite of threats from the authorities, in spite of beatings and prison, proclaiming Jesus as Lord of all men. They aren't even afraid of death anymore, being convinced that Jesus has triumphed over it.

If Jesus had not been resurrected, Christian preaching and faith would be pointless according to 1 Corinthians 15. There would still be no salvation from sin. The sufferings of persecuted Christians would be for nothing. But since Christ was resurrected, Christians know that he has the power to resurrect and to reward those who believe in him. With this assurance, the apostles bore unbelievable trials and almost all of them died rather than renounce their testimony.

ITS PLACE IN THE PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES

Considering the importance of the resurrection of Christ in making the faith of the apostles unshakeable, it is not surprising that it occupies the place of honor in their preaching. They return to the subject again and again throughout the book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter said to the crowd, “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power” (Acts 2:24). He continued by demonstrating that the resurrection had been prophesied a thousand years before by King David. He concluded by applying the passage to Jesus: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:32,36).

The apostle Paul also gave the resurrection an important place in his preaching. In Acts 13, he said this to a Jewish audience:

“But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with

Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’ And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’ ...Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:30-34,38,39).

In preaching to the Gentiles, this same Paul again spoke of the resurrection of Christ. He said to the philosophers in the city of Athens, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30,31).

CONCLUSION: PROOF OF THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

According to Romans 5:8, the death of Christ is proof of the love of God for each of us. According to Romans 1:4, the resurrection of Christ is proof of his divinity. Paul wrote, “[He was] declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” To be “son of God” does not mean that Jesus did not exist and that God had sexual intercourse with Mary, Jesus being born as a result of their sexual relations. No. Jesus existed long before “taking the form of a bondservant” (Philippians 2:7), in other words becoming human, and being born among men.

He himself says, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” (John 8:58). Like God the Father, he always existed. When he refers to himself as the Son of Man, he acknowledges that he had, at least for the space of 33 years, the nature of a man. The expression does not mean that Jesus was inferior to a man or that he was the offspring of a man, because physically he had no human father. But he had become a man and experienced existence as a man. When Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of God, he claimed to have the nature and traits of God—he had existed since eternity; he was without sin; he had all power and all

knowledge, etc. To be the “Son of God” does not indicate that he was inferior to God or that he was born of any sexual intercourse.

The expression means that Jesus was divine and always had been divine. The resurrection was the proof of this. Because he returned to life forever, we know that he was not simply another false prophet or doer of miracles, come to trick people or take advantage of them. On the contrary, he came to reconcile us to our Creator and to give us eternal life.

To be saved, it is necessary to believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that he is therefore the Son of God (Romans 10:9,10). It is necessary to repent of our sins if we want to be forgiven of them (Acts 3:19). It is necessary to confess or declare in front of others that we believe in Jesus (Romans 10:9,10). And it is necessary to be baptized in Jesus’ name. This means to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), a kind of picture of Jesus dying and being resurrected from the grave. But all of this is effective for our salvation only because Jesus went to the cross, died for us and was resurrected. As the Bible reminds us in 1 Peter 3:21, “Baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”