

The Empty Tomb

The resurrection of Christ is considered by many a miracle so outside the scope of human experience as to be unbelievable – and yet the fact of this miracle is impressed upon every aspect of human experience today. The Bible claims that the resurrection of the Lord provides the guarantee of his second coming. The apostle Paul taught: *“God has a fixed a day in which He will judge the inhabited earth in righteousness through a man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all by raising him from the dead” Acts 17:31.* It is also the assurance of a physical resurrection unto eternal life for all those who accept Christ in the way appointed (*Mark 16: 15,16*).

Whatever view you may take of Christ, you cannot exclude him from history. You may ignore him, but you cannot expunge him. You may neglect or misinterpret him, but you cannot get rid of him. He has left an indelible impression on the condition and institutions of mankind. His name is so ingrained in the fabric of our daily life, that you cannot issue an invoice or execute a deed, or even write a letter without Christ appearing on the face of it in the date – A.D. “anno Domini,” the year of our Lord.

The name of Christ has been ringing through the world during all the centuries that have elapsed since his crucifixion. What is the cause lying at the root of this simple and notorious fact? He led no armies, raised no sedition, employed no violence, and yet his name is above every name. Why was it that the name of a young Galilean carpenter, belonging to an obscure province in the Roman Empire, who had been crucified as a felon, by the Roman and Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, became so influential throughout the Roman Empire as to create a party that at last permeated the army and subverted the very religion and politics of the state? What was there in connection with Jesus Christ that could lead to such a powerful influence?

The Unimpeachable Evidence of Eye-witness

Firstly, we need to consider that the writers of the New Testament wrote in the character of eyewitness. They did not profess to be mere purveyors of the knowledge of other men. Take Peter: *“For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitness of his majesty” 2 Peter 1:16.* Take John: *“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life...” 1 John 1:1-3.* Take Luke's declaration: *“Those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses...” Luke 1:2.* Take the declaration of the apostles to the authorities in open court: *“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” Acts 4:20.* Thus you have in the New Testament the very testimony of the men who lived along with Christ 2000 years ago. The only question to ponder is - were they honest men? And were they capable of judging the evidence of their senses?

We all know in a general way that they suffered persecution, but take their case as presented in the following places: *"I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world...to this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed and are roughly treated and are homeless..." 1 Corinthians 4:9-11. "More than that, I count all things to be loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ" Philippians 3:8.*

What the Eyewitnesses Claim

And now, as the New Testament is the very testimony of the men who were with Christ, who were proved true men by their submission to death for their testimony, and capable men by the writing of such a book, the only remaining question is - what is their claim as to the cause of the name of Christ becoming so widespread in the Roman Empire in a day when there were no speedy means of transport or methods of universally proclaiming such news?

In brief, it is this, that the writers were companions of Christ for three years; that they accompanied him in his journeys, and heard his teaching, which they reproduce in these documents; that they saw his miracles, which they narrate with great clearness and simplicity; that he was arrested by the authorities, and condemned to be crucified; that he was in fact crucified and buried; that they regard his crucifixion as an upsetting of all their hopes in him but that a certain number of days after his crucifixion he appeared to them alive - appeared several times; spoke to them coherently; ate and drank with them; allowed himself to be handled; exhibited marks of crucifixion; made appointments for meeting, which he kept, and finally, after about six weeks of this kind of intercourse, and after telling them that it would be their duty after his departure, to bear testimony to all the world to these things, he took formal leave of them on the summit of the Mount of olives, and went away from the earth.

Their account doesn't stop here. They tell us that just before his departure, Jesus told them not to commence their testimony for his resurrection until he should send power upon them to work miracles in proof of their word (*see Acts 1*). The account goes on to inform us that they did so; that on the day of Pentecost, just a week and a half after Christ's departure, being assembled together in one place, the Holy Spirit came upon them with the power of a rushing wind, filling all the place where they were, manifesting itself in a fiery appearance resting on each, and imparting to them a supernatural knowledge of languages they had not learned, and power to work various miracles.

They then proceeded to proclaim the resurrection of Christ, in accordance with the command they had received, exhibiting the miracles in token of the truth of their testimony. The effect was to cause multitudes, who witnessed these things, to believe. To these multitudes was extended the same power to work miracles, so that the testimony of Christ's resurrection spread far and wide. The authorities who had put Jesus to death naturally felt themselves compromised by these proceedings, and strove to suppress the movement. In attempting to do so they resorted to legal proceedings. They imprisoned the apostles, and raised a great persecution against all believers everywhere. The apostles, miraculously liberated, were re-arrested and re-charged with the offense of proclaiming Christ's resurrection.

Their answer was; *"We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard"* Acts 4:20. Believers everywhere were steadfast under similar tribulation and their number increased by thousands.

Such, in brief, is the account of this most important matter. Is it a true account? You cannot get rid of it without doing violence to every principle of logic and common sense. To say their story is not a true one, you must make them liars, while you have to allow that they preached righteousness, and turned thousands of people from wickedness to God. You must make them parties to an imposture without a motive, for they gained nothing by their enterprise but opposition and death.

Accept their account and all is plain sailing. We then understand the prevalence of the name and faith of a crucified carpenter. He said he would send the Spirit of God upon them to qualify them as his witnesses; that the words they should speak should not be their own; that he would give them a mouth and wisdom that all their adversaries should not be able to resist (*Luke 21:15*). If this is true, all is explained; if it is not true, the inexplicable riddle remains, that the highest literary fact upon on earth was performed by ignorant fishermen, and that the loftiest character and most influential name in the whole range of human history has obtained its power in the world through what in that case is a literary imposture.

But the question is really not an open one. The existence of Christendom is an evidence that the declarations of the apostles are true; for nothing less than the resurrection of Christ earnestly testified by hundreds of eyewitnesses (*see 1 Corinthians 15*) supported by miracle, will account for the fact which no one can contradict, that in the first century the name and faith of a crucified felon (as it was claimed) were diffused throughout the Roman Empire in the face of imprisonment and death. If the resurrection of Jesus Christ is denied, we stand in dim bewilderment in the presence of these matters of undoubted fact which constitute a chapter that cannot be erased from history.

Jesus:
*"Blessed are they
who did not see
and believed."*
John 20:29

***"But God raised him from the dead;
and for many days he appeared to
those who came up with him from
Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones
who are now his witnesses to the
people" Acts 13:30,31.***

And now, if Christ rose from the dead, consider what the fact means with regard to the character of the Bible, and the question of hope for man in the future. If Christ rose from the dead, his word is the truth, as he claimed.

Ingenious theories charm the imagination, but they may always be fallacious. Time and again, the most learned suggestions of science are withdrawn or amended, but the Bible with its teaching remains constant. Moreover, it is designed to give hope and salvation: *"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope"* Romans 15:4.

"The sacred writings are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" 2 Timothy 3:15.

The Bible Provides Hope and Incentive to life

Consider these conclusions in the light of human hope and incentive. What hope have you in any natural direction? The cradle pours its flood of new life from year to year and the cemetery yawns to receive its equal torrent. *"One generation passes away, and another comes,"* only to pass away also. *"All is futility."* Christ is the answer, his resurrection the pledge. Human hope is bound up with him, and with him alone: *"There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved"* Acts 4:12.

The Bible being true, this is what it teaches, and to what it calls you. And what can we say to these things. In Christ we have a man who never sinned; who taught God's righteousness and condemned wickedness with a fervor never before or since shown by man; who cured all diseases; who raised people from the dead; who was put to death because he said he was the Son of God and the King of Israel; who said his death was no accident, but his own voluntary submission to the violence of men in obedience to the commandment of God as a sacrifice for sin; who said he would rise after he should die; whose body could not be found three days after his death; whose resurrection was trumpeted throughout the Roman world as a matter of personal knowledge, by his apostles, within a year after his crucifixion, in the teeth of universal opposition and at the hazard of every consequence that men dread; and whose aim in the proclamation was to turn people from darkness to God's righteousness in preparation for the return of Christ to raise his friends from the dead to immortal life and fill the earth with righteousness.

Now is the time to investigate and accept it. The invitation is open to all who will comply with the conditions attached to it, which are: 1.) a belief of the truth concerning the Kingdom of God and

"If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep" 1 Corinthians 15:19,20.

the name of Jesus Christ; and 2.) baptism in water for remission of sins and union with Christ. *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel; he that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that doesn't believe shall be condemned"* Mark 16:16.

"Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply" Acts 4:13,14.