

The Resurrection: Christ's and Ours

by J. Glyn Owen

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the main artery of our Christian faith and the foundation and mainspring of our hope.

Duration: 47:19

Scripture: John 20:6

Topics: "Resurrection Of The Dead"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the criticism that the Gospels are not factual accounts of Jesus' life and death. He argues that a careful reading of the Gospels, the book of Acts, and the Epistles reveals that they do indeed state facts and record events accurately. The speaker highlights the remarkable unanimity, accuracy, and attention to detail found in the four separate accounts of Jesus' life and death by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He also mentions the psychological need of the disciples to reconcile the contradiction between Jesus' execution and their belief in his messianic glory. The speaker emphasizes that the disciples witnessed Jesus alive and risen from the dead, and they not only saw and touched him but also believed in him as Lord.

Transcript

Having introduced our subject already, namely the Resurrection, Christ's and Ours, which is to comprise a study of this mammoth 1 Corinthians 15, I want to confine myself this evening to a kind of general introduction to the theme itself. I believe that it is quite important for us to see what a strategic place the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ holds, not only in the Christian faith, but in Christian experience too, and in Christian hope. But it is true to say that this and the doctrine of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the doctrine of his full deity and atonement, these three have been very especially attacked by various people throughout the course of human history, and I thought it might be helpful if we just tried to see things in context as we come to examine the remarkable chapter that we have before us.

I would begin then by saying again that the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians is of monumental significance to our entire Christian faith. Both doctrinally and practically, its importance simply cannot be overrated. Having first established the indubitable fact of our Lord's resurrection, the Apostle Paul then points forward with great confidence, with joy and anticipation, he points forward to the certainty of the resurrection of the Lord's people.

Now I would like you to notice that that is the order in the New Testament, and it's a very important order. It is important to grasp the fact that the prospective resurrection of the people of God is related to, is based upon, and is guaranteed by the glorious historical resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The foundation and the mainspring of our hope does not lie in the seasonal cycle, that spring follows fall and winter, or anything like that.

Neither does it rest upon any subjective experience of ours, though if we believe in Christ risen, we shall have certain personal and subjective experiences, most significantly the experience of regeneration. But the hope of our resurrection lies four square upon the fact that he is risen. If he is not risen, you and I have no hope of resurrection.

But if he is risen, and we are properly related to him, our resurrection is as good as done. I believe that's the language, that's the focus, that's the point of view taken in the New Testament. This being so, then, it will be readily obvious that the resurrection of Jesus Christ himself is the main artery of our Christian faith.

Not in isolation, of course. None of you would jump to that conclusion, but let me say it, let me say the possibility. We are never thinking of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus as something hanging in midair, unrelated to what has gone before, and what is coming after.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, in the opening verses here, puts it all in its proper context. Christ became man. He was born, he lived, he died, he was buried.

Then he arose again, and he arose again in order to ascend to the Father's right hand, and to involve himself in his session there which is unending. And it is because of that, that we are able to come into the presence of God tonight, and have hope to enter the presence of God at last, and share his glory. Because he ever lives to make intercession for us, he is risen from the dead, he is ascended up on high, he ever lives to make intercession for us.

Therefore, he is able to save to the uttermost those that come to God by him. Now, we need to see, then, the resurrection in its context. It is the first movement towards our Lord's glorification.

His humiliation has come to an end. Oh, he has many enemies still, but they can't touch him. They can't wound his body anymore, his physical body.

They can wound his people, and they can defend him, but they cannot rob him of his ultimate glory. He has now taken that first step toward the ultimate, and one day he will appear in glory ineffable, glory the kind of which we have never, never yet dreamt of. Now, since the resurrection occupies such an important place in the faith of the Christian, it is obvious that it should be found everywhere in the New Testament, and it is.

I would like to remind you that there are only a few, one, two, three, four, five of the shortest writings in the New Testament that don't mention the resurrection by name, and even they presuppose it, and in total they only come to seven chapters. They are Paul's letter to the Philemon. He doesn't mention the resurrection by name there, though we know, of course, that Paul, the writer of this letter to the Corinthians, believed wholeheartedly in it, and that there was no gospel without it.

Then, too, Peter doesn't mention it, but Peter certainly mentions it in other places, so that Peter unquestionably believes in the resurrection, and it is again presupposed in his second epistle. In two and three John, comprising just two chapters between them, it is not mentioned, but John most certainly

mentions it, and in his first epistle, in beginning of chapter two, he has some, and elsewhere, he has some great things to say about the resurrection of our Lord. And then again Jude.

Jude does not mention it by name, but there it is in the gospel, in the New Testament, in the Gospels, in the epistles, everywhere. It is there in the background, if it is not specifically in the foreground. Even so, during the course of history, this along with every other major tenet of our faith, but with some in particular, it has been subjected to ridicule and disbelief.

Previous ages like our own have also found the gospel of Christ to be a stumbling block, and especially the doctrine of the resurrection. Now, I would like to, just to try and recapture some of that hostile atmosphere tonight. In order to see the glory of the resurrection, in order to recognize its significance, you see, the enemy invariably sees the strong points of the Christian faith.

And the enemy only attacks something that is worth attacking. And in attacking the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the enemy was attacking something that he knew to be strategic. Now, how have people attacked or denied the fact of our Lord's resurrection, and the doctrine that is based upon that fact? First of all, some people have queried the trustworthiness of the New Testament records themselves.

Now, you are familiar with this, and I don't need to dwell upon it at any great length. But it is important to notice, some people have attacked the resurrection by saying that the records that we have of the resurrection are really not reliable. And if the records are not reliable, well, we can't be sure that there has been a resurrection.

If those who report the fact of the resurrection are shown to be false witnesses, or if we can bring any reasonable suspicion in relation to what they record or report, then of course we are left in the nebulous state of uncertainty. This attitude has lingered despite the monumental work of very competent scholars, proving the amazing accuracy of Scripture, and the way in which writers like Luke and Paul go to their sources and report so accurately things that they do report. Now, this skepticism prevails, for example, in the attitude of folk who have come to be known over the last number of years as form critics.

Let me read to you a few lines from Dr. Meryl C. Tenney, who in one of his books wrote in this way concerning the form criticism, as it is called, from its German source, Formgeschichte. Dr. Meryl Tenney writes, Recent literary objections have been focused on the Formgeschichte method of documentary study. Formgeschichte, or form criticism, as it is called, advances the hypothesis that the Gospels consist of individual anecdotes of the life of Jesus, collected and organized in a theological framework supplied by the writers.

The Gospels are thus, says Dr. Tenney, according to these people, the products of the Church, designed for homiletical or liturgical purposes, and they are in no sense critical biographies. Consequently, they contain a large amount of pious commentary and legend, which may have had didactic and devotional value for their time, but which cannot be classed as an exact transcript of what really happened. Now, Dr. Meryl Tenney is not giving his own views there, he is giving the views of the form critics, a school of critics.

Now, here you notice the trustworthiness of Scripture is attacked, and it is attacked in a very special way. It's attacked on the alleged basis that it was never meant to be an exact statement of things. No part of Scripture was meant really to give you a record, an exact record of anything.

What you have in Scripture is a number of anecdotes, of little stories brought together about this and that, having liturgical or a devotional value. So the Gospel writers are not recording facts per se, but they're giving us nice thoughts. And provided the thoughts are lovely thoughts, well, they have a devotional value.

They give you something to think about, something to chew on, but whether they're accurate or not is neither here nor there. Suffice it now to say that this criticism is simply not true to the facts. Any objective reader of the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and of the Epistles, I believe, will have to come to the conclusion that the Gospels do state facts, and do record events as events.

We would find it very... and not only that, they do so with accuracy. I suggest to you that we would find it very difficult to find four witnesses to any event who would write their respective reports with such unanimity, such accuracy, and sometimes reference to detail as we encounter in the four Gospels. It would be very difficult if four people who were in this service this morning were to write a report of this morning's service that would so converge and make one whole as the four separate records of our Lord's life and death do, as given us by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

And sometimes they go right down to some nitty gritty. As Peter, for example, when he records how the linen clothes were lying in the empty tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel of John, he gives us some very specific and pointed details which can only be given by someone that has really noticed things. And so also are the sermons in the Book of Acts.

They're not anecdotes. I just can't understand anybody saying that who has read Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, who has read Stephen's sermon for which he was martyred. Was Stephen martyred because of a bunch of anecdotes? I tell you not.

He was martyred because of his exposition of the Old Testament scriptures and its application to the people that were listening to him. These were not anecdotes. These were not stories that he was telling.

He was expounding the Word of God and applying it to life as the truth of God. And the same, of course, goes for the Apostle Paul's preaching in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, whether it be in one place or another. The case against the Gospels being accurate is not so much objective and scientific as a matter of fact, but what it is is a subjective and philosophical presupposition.

It is not based on evident realities. It is based on a philosophical point of view. Now that's one thing then.

People have queried the trustworthiness of the records of the resurrection. And so they tell us that whatever we have in the New Testament, these people could never have meant us to believe that Jesus, who died on the cross and was buried in a tomb, actually came out again and was seen and touched and handled and heard. They never meant to say that.

Well, what do you think? But the second thing. Others have tried by various means to explain away the New Testament references to the alleged historical and actual resurrection of the crucified slain and buried Lord. They've tried by various means to explain these things away.

Not now so much to say oh, they didn't mean to say that Jesus was risen. Perhaps they did mean it. But we would rather explain the thing spiritually than historically.

The spiritualizers in the church have invariably been dangerous people. Now, how has this been done? Well, let me remind you that it has been done almost from the second century anyway, probably before,

and it has been done right up to our own day and age. It has been done tonight.

A way back in the second century, a man named Celsus saw the belief of the disciples in the resurrection of Jesus as simply a piece of self-deception. Now, this is unbelievable, but this is what he said. It was simply a piece of self-deception and intentional fraud.

Now, I don't propose to attempt an answer to all of these, but I think you will see how very difficult that would be to prove. Because if there is one thing that stands out about the writers of the New Testament and the preachers of the New Testament, it is that they were good men. They were not all clever men.

They were not all school men, college-trained men. But they were good men. They were holy men.

They were men who were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They were men who believed in God and died for God, having lived for Him. And it is very difficult psychologically to say that at one point in their life they became liars and deceivers.

Indeed, we had reference to this this morning. And our brother Mr. Charles Colson has in his book on Loving God a chapter which is very very relevant to this, how Watergate, the Watergate experience, was to him the means for whereby he came to realize the importance of the resurrection. And the significance of it that the disciples could not have figured, could not have made it up.

Because they couldn't keep, as he mentioned this morning, he referred to it, they couldn't keep a lie for so long a time and be prepared to die and lay down their lives and go to all the world to preach what they knew to be a fabrication of the truth. You can't do that. You may be able to do it for a while, but sooner or later, as they say, it has to come out.

Someone or other will bring it out. In the 19th century, to jump over the centuries, we have the famous Friedrich Strauss, who explained away the objective fact of the resurrection as reported and witnessed by the gospel writers, and who put in its place some kind of subjective experience, which the disciples according to him must have had, and which they explained in terms of the resurrection. Now, Strauss was quite clear about this.

These men in the gospels had a great experience of God. And whoever Jesus was, through Jesus, God came to these men and something happened to them, something big happened to them. And they explained all this in terms, they explained the resurrection in terms of this experience.

They weren't witnesses to the resurrection as they claimed to be, but this arose out of their experience of God brought about through Jesus. He claimed that the whole thing was subjective, in other words. There was no objective resurrection, but the resurrection was purely in their minds.

They couldn't understand their own experience, save in terms of the terms they used to describe the resurrection. Let me quote from his book, *Leben Jesu*. Now, this is the view of Strauss, not mine, but listen to how he puts it.

A powerful impression of the magnificent personality of Jesus will doubtless have been capable of inspiring his immediate disciple to visions. There arose in the disciples automatically, he says, the psychological need to resolve the contradiction between the final fate of Jesus and their own assured opinion of him. Thus, the Jesus who had been executed in shame was not lost to them, but remained and retained.

He had only, they thought, entered through death into his messianic glory. How easy it is finally, he said, how easy it is finally to imagine that these feelings were occasionally intensified in a purely subjective fashion in individuals. I'm sorry to say, he adds, especially women.

A little bias, isn't it? They were imagined to become real visions, whereas on others the sight of an unknown person occasionally perhaps made the impression of a revelation from God, or the very appearance of Jesus himself as risen. And so he builds his case on that. And there have been hundreds and thousands of people during the years who have been influenced by this man.

Let me pass on. Adolf von Harnack, again in the 19th century, wrote quite a lot about this. He attempted to explain away the fact of the resurrection by a compound of two elements.

He says that following upon the death of Christ, Peter had a vision. Peter had a vision. That vision, he says, was inspired by what Peter saw on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Now there's no evidence for this at all. It's amazing, you know, people will believe it. But Peter had a vision.

And the vision found its roots, its source, back in what he saw on the Mount of Transfiguration. He saw Jesus glorified. And the vision was so real to Peter, it became infectious.

Everybody caught the vision. And Peter shared it. And they all came to believe that Jesus, whom Peter saw on the Mount of Transfiguration as glorified, they all came to believe that Jesus was still alive.

Have I got a D.D. for writing that? I don't know. But people have got degrees for writing that kind of thing. From time to time, some objectors to the gospel testimony have claimed that the disciples suffered from some pathological condition or other that gave rise to a hallucination or hallucinations.

And they have deliberately said that when they're talking about the actual, physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus, they were really hallucinating. Now again, I'm not able adequately to reply to any of these, but let me throw out to you one or two thoughts. It is very rarely, if ever, that hallucinations arise out of such circumstances as those recorded in the gospels in which the disciples claim to have seen and witnessed Jesus to be risen from the dead.

You may hallucinate if you're unwell and the atmosphere is very heavy and drowsy and various other phenomena combine together. But you will notice that the people who witnessed to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, even though in one or two places they are in an atmosphere that could have been a little heavy, as in the upper room when the windows were closed and barred, if there were any windows, the doors were barred anyway. But they do not only witness that Jesus appeared in the upper room when the doors were closed and barred, and where perhaps the air was a little heavy.

They witnessed to the fact that they saw Jesus alive and risen from the dead early in the morning when the wind of the sea was blowing in their faces. They've seen Him in a myriad life situations, in many life situations. And not only have they seen Him, but they've touched Him.

And they've heard Him. He spoke to them. And He commanded them to go to all the world and preach the gospel.

And they went. Which means, of course, they really believed what He said. They not only heard Him, but they believed Him.

And they believed that He was Lord. It's very difficult. It's impossible, I would say, to make anything of the nature of a genuine hallucination out of the kind of records that we have in the New Testament.

The so-called existentialist views of men, as represented by people like Bultman and others, are not far removed from some of these theories already mentioned. It's alleged by them that the tragedy of Calvary was overcome for the disciples by some leap of faith, taken in what they call the existential moment. But we must not understand their reference to the resurrection in any literal sense.

They don't believe that it happened literally. What they mean is this, that one, in one moment, somehow or other, people became suddenly and strangely aware of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, all of the fact that He is alive. An existential encounter, that it's something quite different from what we have in the New Testament.

They say they saw Him. They say they heard Him. And not only one person, not one particular psychological type, but all types, men and women, now an individual, now two, now ten, now eleven, now five hundred at once.

And on one occasion, they tell us that He cooked a meal for them, and that meal was breakfast. And I don't hallucinate about my food, I don't know what about you. Not a few have claimed that just as you encounter, and this is something different, there are some who have tried to be rather religious about this, more religious than others.

Not a few have claimed that just as you encounter theophanies, that is, appearances of God under the guise of a human being, just as you encounter theophanies in the Old Testament, you remember how Joshua near Jericho, for example, met a man. He didn't know who it was. It was the Lord appearing to him in the guise of a man.

We refer to it as a theophany. So too, that's what we have in the resurrection. God appearing, it's a theophany.

There's a sense in which that is true, of course. God did appear and appear as a man. But there's a more vital sense in which it is not true.

The thing that we are talking about is He appeared in Christ, but the Christ in whom He appeared bears the wounds of the nail prints in His hands, and He's been buried for three days and three nights, and He's risen again. Or some others have been, or very much the same point of view, believe that what really the apostles had was some sort of vision, something like what Elijah had, I'm sorry, Elisha had, and his servant after him. You remember how Elisha near Dothan, and he knew that the enemies were around Dothan, trying to get him and to bring his life to an end, and his servant was afraid.

And Elisha said to the servants, all right, he says, they that before us are far, far more than those that be against us. And the young servant really thought Elisha was off his nut. Where are they? And the young fellow looked out of the moor, the multitude that were for Elisha and his servant, they couldn't see anything.

Dear old Elisha went on his knees and said to the Lord, oh Lord, he says, open the eyes of a young man. And the Lord opened his eyes and he saw the chariots and the horses all around. Now say some people, it's something like that.

But that's not what the writers of the New Testament say. What Thomas says is this, that he insisted that he would not believe that Jesus was risen if he could not put his finger in the wound and thrust his hand into his side. He touched.

And there are others, I must come to a close. There are others who say that it was some experience, like the experience of Isaiah's call in chapter 6, something mystical, something strange, or, if you like, something like a charismatic experience. Now what is significant, of course, is this, that Paul, the writer of this chapter, if ever a man was sure of his call, he was.

But he distinguished between his call and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. His call to the ministry was something quite different from that which took place when Jesus rose from the dead. Not only that, Paul knew something about charismatic experiences.

He tells the Corinthians that however much they experience La Salelia speaking in tongues, he says, I speak in tongues more than any of you. But he says, I don't do it in public, but I do it, he says. He knew what charismatic experiences were.

Nevertheless, he distinguished between all that and this. Suffice it now to say that, concerning it, it is noteworthy that all the witnesses to the appearances of Jesus as risen from the dead ultimately identify him in this way. They had seen him before he died.

Many of them were with him, some of them lived with him for over three years. They got to know him. They saw him die.

Some of them were there when he was buried, saw him buried, saw the seal, the Roman seal, put on the mouth of the tomb. And they couldn't understand things, they were bewildered. They were shattered, even though Jesus had forewarned them that all these things were going to take place.

Yet they couldn't take it all in. But on the morning of the third day, they saw not only the seal rolled away and the tomb to be empty, but they met the risen Lord himself, saw him, heard him, touched him, ate with him, got him. So much so that the resurrection became an integral part of their message, both in Jerusalem where he was actually crucified.

And you see, we must get the challenge of all this. To preach that Jesus was risen in Jerusalem, whose leaders had been largely responsible for his crucifixion. You see, this was a very dangerous thing to do.

But they could not keep silence. We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard, says Peter. We've seen him.

And not only did they speak about it in Jerusalem, but they went to Rome. And the great Apostle Paul could not be silenced, could not be stopped until, as far as him lay, he would make his ultimate way to the very capital of the world, the center of the world, Rome itself. Now he didn't eventually get there as he expected to get there, but he got there.

And he witnessed to the fact that Jesus was risen there. And he wrote a letter saying that to the Roman Christians. These attempts to deny the trustworthiness of the records or of the testimony so unitedly and consistently born to the resurrection of Jesus need to be seen for what they really are.

Now I'm coming to a close. They are subjective, subjective ideas concerning the resurrection, and they're based not upon fact, but upon a philosophy. Now this is important.

The criticism of the records and of the historicity of the New Testament concerning the resurrection is not based on fact, it is based on a philosophy, namely the philosophy that dead men do not rise. Have you ever seen a dead man rise? No they don't, it doesn't happen. And you see, because you and I haven't seen it, because it is not the normal thing that happens, on the basis of that these people say it could not have happened.

Let me read to you from Tenney, a few words again. I've got a lot of help from him. The scientific objection to the historicity of the resurrection is founded on the axiomatic principle that death is terminal.

The syllogism may be formulated as follows, he says. Dead men do not rise again. Jesus was unquestionably dead, therefore he could not have risen.

While it is true that according to ordinary observations, as Tenney, death is final, such an argument is utterly unsound, for it assumes the impossibility of resurrection before any proofs are offered and considered. A truly scientific attitude would investigate all the pertinent phenomena and evaluate them, rather than to exclude arbitrarily any evidence that might bear upon the subject. Asserting that dead men do not rise, and then rejecting the resurrection of Christ for that reason, is just arguing in a circle.

Of course the dead do not usually rise, for if they did, the miracle of Christ's resurrection would lose its distinctive quality, and become only one more of a series of common occurrences. If the resurrection proves to be an exception to the ordinary cycle of human life, it must be treated as a fact which may call for a new explanation of experience. All this brings us to this.

We are concerned for the truth. What really happened on the third day? We want to know, writes John Stott, what actually happened. What then are we to say to those who declare that the resurrection is a myth? And John Stott answers his own question.

We must say to them that the resurrection myth is itself a myth. That is, it's a popular idea without any historical foundation. It is said by some to be the only respectable view to hold in a scientific age.

But it is the very opposite, writes Stott, for it can only be held by suppressing the evidence. The only historical evidence there is for what happened after the death and burial of Jesus is of the resurrection. Of this there is abundant evidence at the end of the gospels.

To this the early church bore witness clearly, bravely, unflinching, unanimously. There is no other evidence. It is quite unscientific to ignore or reject the only evidence there is and substitute another story for which there is none.

To do so on the a priori ground that it couldn't have happened is sheer obscurantism, not science. Now, my friends, I don't often do things like this. But I felt I had to do it tonight.

And I want to do it because I want to come to a point where you and I can see the glory of this chapter before us. It shows the evidence for the resurrection. But it does more than that.

It shows us that the resurrection for which there is evidence is sufficient basis for faith in God as revealed in Christ for time and eternity. And it shows that the resurrection of Christ himself is the basis of a hope that is undimmed by death. Who was it who said that the empty tomb became the cradle of Christian hope? You see, by faith in the crucified Lord Jesus Christ, we are made one with him.

It's a remarkable union, that between the Lord Jesus and his people. You may be a young Christian tonight, but you know, you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ in such a remarkable way that you cannot be separated from him. You are inseparable from him.

See, not only does the New Testament speak of him as the Savior and his people as the saved, you may possibly drive a wedge between those two, at least linguistically, if not actually. But it also speaks of the vine and the branch. Well, you can also lop the branch off the vine.

That is humanly speaking now. It also speaks of Jesus as the shepherd and his people as the sheep, of Jesus as the king and his people as subjects. But wait a moment, there is one analogy which shows that Jesus and his people cannot be separated.

He is the head, and we are the body. Carefully, the head of the body, the head. And the body is not tacked on to the head, it is an extension of the head.

It is one organic whole, the head and the body. And you cannot separate the body, the corpus, from the head. Listen, my friend, the head of the church is risen from the dead, is ascended upon high, he is seated at the right hand of the majesty and the glory from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead, he is coming in all his ineffable glory, the head is coming.

It is not long before the body will share in the glory of the head. Every member, every solitary member, black and white, red and yellow, old and young, rich and poor, cultured and illiterate, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are a member of his body. One day, though you be buried in a tomb, or you go through a furnace and be burned, your ashes will be gathered.

You and I will receive not only a new body, but we shall be made spiritually like him, as our body will resemble his, and something of the glory of God in Christ will become the portion of his body, the church. Hallelujah. Is it your faith? Is it your hope? If it isn't, come to Christ tonight with faith, trust him, rest upon him, yield to him, give him yourself and give him your all, and receive from him his all.

He never gives less than his all, and his all includes. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there you may be also. To his name be all the glory and the praise.

Amen.

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