

The Resurrection of Christ

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central and vital point of Christianity, proving Jesus' divinity and His power over death and sin.

Scripture: Matthew 12:38, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22, John 2:19, Acts 1:22, Romans 1:4, 1 Corinthians 15:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 1 Peter 1:3

Topics: "Christ Resurrected", "Easter Miracle"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches on the vital importance of the Resurrection in Christianity, likening it to a strategic point on the battlefield of Waterloo that determined the final outcome. He emphasizes the centrality of the Resurrection in the Gospels and the New Testament, highlighting the converging lines of evidence supporting it, including the life and character of Jesus Christ, the empty tomb, the transformation of the disciples, the existence of the primitive Church, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and the record of the appearances of the risen Christ in the Gospels. Thomas challenges the skepticism towards miracles, arguing that the Resurrection is a pivotal historical fact that cannot be dismissed.

Transcript

There was one point on the battlefield of Waterloo which was taken and retaken three times during that memorable day. Both Napoleon and Wellington realized the strategical importance of the position and concentrated attention upon it. Its ultimate possession and retention by the British troops contributed largely to the final result. In the same way, there is one point in connection with Christianity which from the first has been felt to be vital and central - the Resurrection.

As a consequence, the opponents of Christianity have always concentrated their attacks, and Christians have centered their defense upon it. Everyone realizes that it is vital, fundamental and essential. With this uncertain, everything else is uncertain; with this safe, all is safe. It is therefore of the utmost importance for our present inquiry that we should give attention to the subject of the Resurrection as it appears in the Gospels and as it is dealt with in the rest of the New Testament.

There are several converging lines of evidence in support of the Resurrection, and not one of them can be overlooked. They include historical and moral proofs and each must have its place and weight. The issues at stake are so serious that nothing must be omitted. Christianity is either based on the fact of Christ or else it has no logical standing ground. What, then, are the lines of proof on which Christians base their belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ? 1. The first proof is the life and character of Jesus Christ

Himself.

It is always a keen disappointment when a life which commenced well finishes badly. We have this feeling even in fiction, an instinct which demands that a story should end well. Much more is this true of the life of Jesus Christ. A perfect life characterized by Divine claims ends in its prime and a cruel and shameful death. Is that an appropriate and fitting close? Are we satisfied? Surely there must be something else, for death could not end everything after such a noble career.

The Gospels give us the resurrection as the answer to these questions, and as the natural, inevitable issue of such a life. The Evangelists record the resurrection as the completion of the picture they draw of their Master. There is no real doubt that Christ anticipated and spoke of His own resurrection. At first He used only vague terms, such as, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." But later on in His ministry He spoke quite plainly, and whenever he mentioned His death He added, "The Son of Man ... must be raised the third day."

These references to His resurrection are too numerous to be overlooked, and, in spite of all difficulties of detail, they are on any proper treatment of the Gospels an integral part of the claim made for Himself by Jesus Christ. [Matt. 12:38-40, 16:21, 17:23, 20:19, 27:63; Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34, 14:58; Luke 9:22, 18:33; John 2:19-21.] His veracity is therefore at stake if He did not rise. Surely the word of such an One as Jesus Christ must be given due credence. We are therefore compelled to face the fact that the resurrection of which the Gospels speak is the resurrection of no ordinary man but of Jesus - that is of one whose life and character had been unique, and for whose shameful death no proper explanation was possible or conceivable.

It is the resurrection of Jesus. If the witnesses had asserted about Herod, or about any ordinary person, what they did about Jesus, the presumption would have been all against them. The moral incongruity would have discredited their testimony from the first. But the resurrection was that of one in whom His friends had recognized while He lived, a power and goodness beyond the common measure of humanity, and they were sensible when it took place that it was in keeping with all they had known, hoped, and believed of Him. [Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 122 f.]

Consider, then, the resurrection in the light of what we have already advanced about the character of Christ. Is it possible that, in view of that perfect truthfulness of word and deed, there should be such a climax as is involved in a denial of His assurance that He would rise again? If, then, it be admitted that the existence of the Gospel portrait of Christ is sufficient proof that it was drawn from life, and that He who is there portrayed laid claim to no knowledge affecting the outcome of His work which He did not possess, it must also be admitted that if He definitely stated that He would rise again from the dead, we have a strong a priori ground for believing that He did so rise. [C.

H. Robinson, *Studies in the Resurrection*, p. 30.] Consider, too, the death of Christ in the light of His perfect life. If that death was the close of a life so beautiful, so remarkable, so Godlike, we are faced with an insoluble mystery - the absolute and permanent triumph of wrong over right, and the impossibility of believing in truth or justice in the world. It does not seem unreasonable to expect that God should vindicate in some striking and exceptional manner One who had trusted in Him completely, and who could truthfully say of Himself, "I do always those things that please Him." [C.

H. Robinson. op. cit., p. 36.] So the resurrection is not to be regarded as an isolated event, a fact in the history of Christ separated from all else. It must be taken in close connection with what precedes in the life

of Him for whom resurrection is claimed. The true solution of the problem is to be found in that estimate of Christ which "most entirely fits in with the totality of the facts." [Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 14.] 2. Another line of proof is the fact of the empty grave and the disappearance of the body.

That Jesus died and was buried, and that on the third morning the tomb was empty, cannot be seriously challenged. There have been those who have suggested the theory of a swoon and a recovery in the tomb, but to this, as Dr. Orr says, Strauss "practically gives its death blow" [Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 43.] in words that may be usefully quoted again. It is impossible that a being who had stolen half dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening, and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to His sufferings, could have given to His disciples the impression that He was a conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life - an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. [Quoted in C.

R. Robinson, *Studies in the Resurrection of Christ*, p. 42.] At His burial a stone was rolled before the tomb, the tomb was sealed, and a guard was placed before it. Yet on the third morning the body had disappeared. There seems to be only two alternatives. His body must have been taken out of the grave by human hands or else by superhuman power. If the hands were human, they must have been those of His friends or of His foes. If His friends had wished to take out His body, the question at once arises whether they could have done so in the face of the stone, the seal and the guard.

If His foes had contemplated this action, the question arises whether they would have seriously considered the matter. Why should they do the very thing that would be most likely to spread the report of His resurrection? As Chrysostom said, "If the body had been stolen they could not have stolen it naked, because of the delay in stripping it of the burial cloths and the trouble caused by the drugs adhering to it." [Quoted in Day, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, p. 35.] There is therefore no other possibility but that the body was taken out of the tomb by superhuman power.

How, too, is it possible to account for the failure of the Jews to disprove the Resurrection? We know that not more than seven weeks afterward Peter preached in that very city the fact that Jesus had been raised. What would have been easier or more conclusive than for the Jews to have produced the dead body and silenced Peter forever? As it has been truly said, "The silence of the Jews is as significant as the speech of the Christians." [Fairbairn, *Studies in the Life of Christ*. p. 357.]

The fact of the empty tomb and the disappearance of the Body still remains a problem to be faced. By some writers the idea of resurrection is interpreted to mean the revival of Christ's spiritual influence on the disciples, which had been brought to a close by His death. It is thought that the essential idea and value of Christ's resurrection can be conserved, even while the belief in His bodily rising from the grave is surrendered. [Orr. *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 23.] But the various forms of the vision theory are now being gradually but surely regarded as inadequate and impossible.

They are seen to involve the change of almost every fact in the Gospel history, and the invention of new scenes and conditions of which the Gospels know nothing. [Orr, *op. cit.*, p. 222.] From the physical standpoint, it has never been satisfactorily shown why the disciples should have had this abundant experience of visions, nor why they should have had it so soon after the death of Christ and within a strictly limited period, and why it suddenly ceased. And so in the present day the old theory of vision is virtually set aside, and for it is substituted the theory of a real spiritual manifestation of the risen Christ.

The question at once arises whether this is not prompted by an unconscious but true desire to get rid of anything like a physical resurrection. Even though we may be ready to admit the reality of telepathic communication, it is impossible to argue that this is equivalent to the idea of resurrection. "The survival of the soul is not resurrection." [Orr, op. cit., p. 229.] As someone once observed, "Whoever heard of a spirit being buried?" In view of the records of the Gospels and the testimony of the New Testament generally, it is impossible to be "agnostic" as to what happened at the grave of Jesus, even though we are quite sure that He who died now lives and reigns.

We are sometimes told that faith is not bound up with holding a particular view of the relations of Christ's present glory and the body that was once in Joseph's tomb, that faith is to be exercised in the exalted Lord, and that belief in a resuscitation of the human body is no vital part of it. It is no doubt true that our faith today is to be exercised solely in the exalted and glorified Lord, but surely faith must ultimately rest on fact, and it is difficult to understand how Christian faith can be really "agnostic" with regard to the facts about the empty tomb and the risen body, which are so prominent in the New Testament, and which form an essential part of the apostolic witness.

The attempt to set faith and historical evidence in opposition to each other, which is so marked a characteristic of much modern thought, will never satisfy general Christian intelligence, and if there is to be any real belief in the historical character of the New Testament, it is impossible to be "agnostic" about facts that are writ so large on the face of the records. And so we come again to that insuperable barrier, the empty tomb, which, together with the apostolic witness, stands impregnable against all the attacks of visional and apparitional theories.

It is becoming more evident that these theories are entirely inadequate to account for the records in the Gospels, as well as for the place and power of those Gospels in the early Church and in all subsequent ages. The force of the evidence for the empty grave and the disappearance of the Body is clearly seen by the explanations suggested by various modern writers. [Those of Oscar Holtzmann, K. Lake, and A. Meyer can be seen in Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, cb. viii, and that of Reville in C.

H. Robinson, *Studies in the Resurrection of Christ*, p. 69.] It will suffice to say that not one of them is tenable without doing serious violence to the Gospel story, and also without putting forth new theories which are not only improbable in themselves, but are without a shred of real historical or literary evidence. The one outstanding fact which baffles all these writers is the empty grave. Others suggest that resurrection means a real objective appearance of the risen Christ without implying any physical reanimation, that "the resurrection of Christ was an objective reality, but was not a physical resuscitation." [C.

H. Robinson, *Studies in the Resurrection of Christ*, p. 12.] But the difficulty here is as to the meaning of the term "resurrection". If it means a return from the dead, a rising again (re-), must there not have been some identity between that which was put in the tomb and the "objective reality" which appeared to the disciples? No difficulty of conceiving of the resurrection of mankind hereafter must be allowed to set aside the plain facts of the record about Christ. It is, of course, quite clear that the resurrection Body of Jesus was not exactly the same as when it was put in the tomb, but it is equally clear that there was definite identity as well as definite dissimilarity, and both elements must be faced and accounted for.

How the resurrection Body was sustained is a problem quite outside our ken, though the reference to "flesh and bones," compared with St. Paul's words about "flesh and blood" not being able to enter the

Kingdom of God, may suggest that while the resurrection Body was not constituted upon a natural basis through blood, yet that it possessed "all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature." [Article IV.] We may not be able to solve the problem, but we must hold fast to all the facts, and these may be summed up by saying that the Body was the same though different, different though the same.

So the true description of the resurrection seems to be that "it was an objective reality, but not [merely] a physical resuscitation." We are therefore brought back to a careful consideration of the facts recorded in the Gospels as to the empty tomb and the disappearance of the Body, and we only ask for an explanation which will take into consideration all the facts recorded, and will do no violence to any part of the evidence. To predicate a new resurrection Body in which Christ appeared to His disciples does not explain how in three days' time the Body which had been placed in the tomb was disposed of.

Does not this theory remand a new miracle of its own? There is much that must remain a mystery. We do not know how Christ was raised, nor with what manner of body He came. We cannot explain how that Body, which, as far as we know, had been subject in all respects to the laws to which all other bodies are subject, was so changed as to be able to pass out of time and space into infinity; but we do not know the origin and the essential nature even of that which is visible and tangible.

And though we, who through the preaching of Christ's resurrection have reached a higher conception of eternal life than existed in the pre-Christian world, may be disposed to think that the resurrection of Christ would have been complete, even if His dead Body had turned to dust in the tomb where it was laid, it is difficult to see how in the first century the fact of Christ's perfect life after His death could have been made known to men apart from the resurrection of His body.

Those who first appealed to the world to believe in the resurrection of Christ did so on the ground that they themselves had seen Him. [Kennett, Interpreter, vol. v., p. 271.] 3. The next line of proof to be considered is the transformation of the disciples caused by the resurrection. They had seen their Master die, and through that death they lost all hope. Yet hope returned three days after. On the day of the crucifixion they were filled with sadness; on the first day of the week with gladness.

At the crucifixion they were hopeless; on the first day of the week their hearts glowed with certainty and hope. When the message of the resurrection first came they were incredulous and hard to be convinced, but when once they became assured they never doubted again. What could account for the astonishing change in these men in so short a time? The mere removal of the Body from the grave could never have transformed their spirits and characters. Three days are not enough for a legend to spring up which would so effect them.

Time is needed for a process of legendary growth. There is nothing more striking in the whole history of primitive Christianity than this marvelous change wrought in the disciples by a belief in the resurrection of their Master. It is a psychological fact that demands a full explanation. 4. From this fact of the transformation of personal life in so incredibly short a space of time, we proceed naturally to the next line of proof, the existence of the primitive Church. There is no doubt that the Church of the Apostles believed in the Resurrection of their Lord. [Burkitt, The Gospel History and its Transmission, p. 74.]

It is therefore true, and is now admitted on all hands, that the Church of Christ came into existence as the result of a belief in the resurrection of Christ. Leaving for further and fuller consideration the general question of the Church's existence and progress, we are now concerned only with its commencement as recorded in the early chapters of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, and there we see two simple and

incontrovertible facts: (1) The Christian society was gathered together by preaching; (2) The substance of the preaching was the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Apostolic Church is thus a result of a belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These early chapters of Acts bear the marks of primitive documents, and their evidence is unmistakable. It is impossible to allege that the primitive Church did not know its own history, that myths and legends quickly grew up and were eagerly received, and that the writers of the Gospels had no conscience for principle, but manipulated their material at will. For as Dr. Orr points out, [Orr,

The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 144.] any modern Church could easily give an account of its history for the past fifty years or more, and it is simply absurd to think that the earliest Churches had no such capability. In reality there was nothing vague or intangible about the testimony borne by the Apostles and other members of the Church. Archbishop Alexander has well said, "As the Church is too holy for a foundation of rottenness, so she is too real for a foundation of mist." [Alexander, The Great Question, p. 10.] 5.

One man in the Apostolic Church must, however, be singled out as a special witness for the resurrection. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is our next line of proof. Leaving for fuller examination the testimony of his whole life, we call attention to the evidence of his writings to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some years ago an interesting article appeared in the Expositor [E. Medley, Fifth Series. vol. iv., p. 359.] inquiring as to the conception of Christ which would be suggested to a heathen inquirer by a perusal of Paul's earliest extant writing (1 Thessalonians).

One point at least would stand out clearly - that Jesus Christ was killed (ch. 2:15, 4:14), and was raised from the dead (ch. iv. 14). As this Epistle is usually dated about A.D. 51 - that is, only about twenty-two years after the resurrection - and as the same Epistle plainly attributes to Jesus Christ the functions of God in relation to men (ch. 1:1, 1:6, 2:14, 3:11), we can readily see the force of this testimony to the resurrection. Then a few years later, in an Epistle which is universally accepted as one of St.

Paul's, we have a very much fuller reference to the resurrection. In the well-known chapter where he is concerned to prove (not Christ's resurrection, but) the resurrection of Christians, he naturally adduces Christ's resurrection as his greatest proof, and so gives a list of the various appearances of Christ after His resurrection, ending with one to himself, which he puts on an exact level with the others. "Last of all he was seen of me also." Now, quite apart from any consideration of the arguments based on the resurrection, we must give special attention to the nature and particularity of this testimony.

"I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how 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." This, as it has been often pointed out, is our earliest authority for the appearances of Christ after the resurrection, and dates from within thirty years of the event itself. But there is much more than this. As Professor Kennett says - Important as this consideration is, it is of even greater importance to notice that St.

Paul expressly claims that the account of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which he states with the precision of a formal creed, is not something which has only recently taken shape, when men's memories have begun to fail, but something which he himself learned in substantially the same form when he first became a Christian. In other words, he affirms that within five years of the crucifixion of Jesus he was taught 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." [Interpreter, vol. v., p. 267.]

And if we seek to appreciate the full bearing of this act and testimony we have a right to draw the same conclusion as Professor Kennett and: Maintain that within a very few years of the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus was, in the mind of at least one man of education, absolutely irrefutable. [Ibid., p. 267.] Besides, we find this narrative of St. Paul includes one small but significant statement which at once recalls a very definite feature of the Gospel tradition - the mention of "the third day."

A reference to the passages in the Gospels where Jesus Christ spoke of His resurrection will show how prominent and persistent was this note of time. Why, then, should Paul have introduced it in his statement? Was it part of the teaching which he had "received"? What is the significance of this plain emphasis on the date of the resurrection? Is it not this that it bears absolute testimony to the empty tomb? Professor Kennett well sums up the argument on this point, and with it the testimony of St.

Paul - It may be claimed, then, for the story of the empty tomb, that St. Paul heard it, and, what is more, believed it, in Jerusalem at a date when the recollection of the tomb was fresh in people's minds; when it would have been possible for him to examine it and see for himself whether it was empty or not, and, if it were empty, to make full inquiries when and by whom it was discovered that it no longer contained the body of Jesus; at a date, moreover, when the hostility to the new doctrine must have exposed its adherents to the fiercest cross-questioning as to the reasons for their belief, especially when, as in the case of St.

Paul, they had been identified with the anti-Christian party. Saul of Tarsus, the promising pupil of Gamaliel, who seemed the coming man of Judaism, threw away all his prospects for the belief in Christ's resurrection, turned his friends into foes, and exchanged a life of honourable ease for a life of toil and shame - surely common sense requires us to believe that that for which he so suffered was in his eyes established beyond the possibility of doubt. [Interpreter, vol. v., p. 271.]

In view, therefore, of St. Paul's personal testimony to his own conversion his interviews with those who had seen Jesus Christ on earth before and after His resurrection, and not least the prominence given to the resurrection in the Apostle's own teaching, we may fairly challenge afresh the attention of today to the evidence of St. Paul for the resurrection. It is a well-known story how that Lord Lyttelton and his friend Gilbert West left the University at the close of one academic year each determining to give attention respectively during the long vacation to the conversion of St.

Paul and the resurrection of Christ, in order to prove the baselessness of both. They met again in the autumn and compared experiences. Lord Lyttelton had become convinced of the truth of St. Paul's conversion, and Gilbert West of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If, therefore, Paul's twenty-five years of suffering and service for Christ was a reality, his conversion was true, for everything he did began with that sudden change. And if his conversion was true, Jesus Christ rose from the dead, for everything Paul was and did he attributed to the sight of the risen Christ. 6.

The next line of proof of the resurrection is the record in the Gospels of the appearances of the risen Christ, and it is the last in order to be considered. By some writers it is put first, but this is in forgetfulness of the dates when the Gospels were written. It is obvious on a moment's thought that the resurrection was believed in by the Christian Church for a number of years before our Gospels were written, and that it is therefore impossible for the record of the Gospels to be our primary and most important evidence.

We must get behind the Gospels if we are to appreciate to the full the force and variety of the evidence for the resurrection. It is for this reason that, following the proper logical order, we have reserved to the last our consideration of the appearances of the risen Christ as given in the Gospels. The point is one of great importance. So far as the fact of the resurrection of Jesus is concerned, the narratives of the Evangelists are quite the least important part of the evidence with which we have to deal.

It is no exaggeration to say that if we do not accept the resurrection on grounds which lie outside this area, we shall not accept it on the grounds presented here. The real historical evidence for the resurrection is the fact that it was believed, preached, propagated, and produced its fruit and effect in the new phenomenon of the Christian Church, long before any of our Gospels was written. This is not said to disparage the Gospels, or to depreciate what they tell, but only to put the question on its true basis.

Faith in the resurrection was not only prevalent, but immensely powerful before any of our New Testament books were written. [Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 111.] Now, with this made clear, we proceed to consider the evidence afforded by the records of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ. Modern criticism of the Gospels during recent years has tended to adopt the view that Mark is the earliest, and Matthew and Luke are dependent on it. This view is said to be "the one solid result" [W.

C. Allen, "St. Matthew," *International Critical Commentary*, Preface, p. vii.; Burkitt, *The Gospel History*, p. 37.] of the literary criticism of the Gospels. If this is so, the question of the records of the resurrection becomes involved in the difficult problem about the supposed lost ending of St. Mark, which, according to modern criticism, would thus close without any record of an appearance of the risen Christ. On this, however, two things may be said at the present juncture. (1) There are some indications that the entire question of the criticism of the Gospels is to be reopened. [Ramsay, *St.*

Luke the Physician, ch. ii. See also Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 63 ff.] (2) Even if the current theory be accepted, it would not seriously weaken the intrinsic force of the evidence for the resurrection, because, after all, Mark does not invent or "doctor" his material, but embodies the common apostolic tradition of his time. [Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 62.] We may therefore meanwhile examine the record of the appearances without finding them essentially affected by any particular theory of the origin and relations of the Gospels.

There are two sets of appearances, one in Jerusalem and the other in Galilee, and their number and the amplitude and weight of their testimony should be carefully estimated. While we are precluded by our space from examining each appearance minutely, and indeed it is unnecessary for our purposes to do so, it is impossible to avoid calling attention to two of them. No one can read the story of the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24), or of the visit of Peter and John to the tomb (John 20), without observing the clear and striking marks of reality and personal testimony in the accounts. [Latham, *The Risen Master*, ch. i.]

The Bishop of Durham calls attention to these in discussing the former incident. It carries with it, as great literary critics have pointed out, the deepest inward evidences of its own literal truthfulness. For it so narrates the intercourse of "a risen God" with commonplace men as to set natural and supernatural side by side in perfect harmony. And to do this has always been the difficulty, the despair of imagination. The alternative has been put reasonably thus: St. Luke was either a greater poet, a more creative genius, than Shakespeare, or - he did not create the record.

He had an advantage over Shakespeare. The ghost in Hamlet was an effort of laborious imagination. The risen Christ on the road was a fact supreme, and the Evangelists did but tell it as it was. [Moule,

Meditations for the Church's Year, p. 108.] Other writers whose attitude to the Gospel records is very different from that of the Bishop of Durham bear the same testimony to the impression of truth and reality made upon them by the Emmaus narrative. [A. Meyer and K. Lake. Quoted in Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 176 f.]

It is well known that there are difficulties connected with the number and order of these appearances, but they are probably due largely to the summary character of the story, and are not sufficient to invalidate the uniform testimony to two facts: (1) the empty grave, (2) the appearances of Christ on the third day. These are the main facts of the combined witness. [Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 212.] The very difficulties which have been observed in the Gospels for nearly nineteen centuries are a testimony to a conviction of the truth of the narratives on the part of the whole Christian Church.

The Church has not been afraid to leave these records as they are because of the facts that they embody and express. If there had been no difficulties men might have said that everything had been artificially arranged, whereas the differences bear testimony to the reality of the event recorded. The very fact that we possess these two sets of appearances - one in Jerusalem and one in Galilee - is really an argument in favor of their credibility, for if it had been recorded that Christ had appeared in Galilee only or Jerusalem only, it is not unlikely that the account might have been rejected for lack of support.

It is well known that records of eyewitnesses often vary in details while there is no question as to the events themselves. The various books recording the story of the Indian Mutiny, or the surrender of Napoleon at Sedan, are cases in point, and Sir William Ramsay has shown the entire compatibility of certainty as to the main fact with great uncertainty as to precise details. [Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveler, p. 29.] We believe therefore, that a careful examination of these appearances will afford evidence of a chain of circumstances extending from the empty grave to the day of the ascension.

When we examine carefully all these converging lines of evidence and endeavor to give weight to all the facts of the case, it seems impossible to escape from the problem of a physical miracle. That the (prima) facie view of the evidence afforded by the New Testament suggests a miracle, and that the Apostles really believed in a true physical resurrection, are surely beyond all question. And yet very much of present day thought refuses to accept the miraculous. The scientific doctrine of the uniformity and continuity of nature bars the way, so that from the outset it is concluded that miracles are impossible.

We are either not allowed to believe, [See Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 44.] or else we are told that we are not required to believe, [C. R. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ, ch. ii.] in the reanimation of a dead body. If we take this view, there is no need, really, for investigation of evidence; the question is decided before the evidence is looked at. [Orr, op. cit., p. 46.] We venture to question and even to challenge the tenableness of this position.

It proves too much. If we are not allowed to believe in any Divine intervention which we may call supernatural or miraculous, it is difficult to see how we are to account for the Person of Christ at all. "A Sinless Personality would be a miracle in time." If it be said that no amount of evidence can establish a fact which is miraculous, we have still to account for the moral miracles which are really involved in and associated with the resurrection, especially the deception of the disciples, who could have found out the truth of the case; a deception, too, that has proved so great a blessing to the world.

And if we are not to believe in the possibility of physical resuscitation, then obviously the miracles recorded as wrought by Christ on Jairus' daughter, the young man of Nain, and Lazarus at once go by the

board. Surely to those who hold a true theistic view of the world this a priori view is impossible. Are we refusing to allow God at least as much liberty as we possess ourselves? Is it really thinkable that God has less spontaneity of action than ourselves? We may like or dislike, give or withhold, will or not will, but the course of nature must flow on unbrokenly.

Surely God cannot be conceived of as having given such a constitution to the universe as limits in the least His power to intervene if necessary and for sufficient purpose with the work of His own hands. Not only are all things of Him, but all things are through Him and to Him. The resurrection means the presence of miracle, and "there is no evading the issue with which this confronts us." [Orr. The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 53.] And so we come back to a consideration of the various lines of proof.

Taking them singly, they must be admitted to be strong, but taking them altogether, the argument is cumulative and sufficient, if it is not overwhelming. Thomas Arnold of Rugby, no mean judge of historical evidence, said that the resurrection was the best attested fact in human history. Christianity welcomes all possible sifting, testing, and use by those who honestly desire to arrive at the truth, and if they will give proper attention to all the facts and factors involved, we believe they will come to the conclusion expressed years ago by the Archbishop of Armagh, that the resurrection is the rock from which all the hammers of criticism have never chipped a single fragment. [The Great Question, p. 24.]

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/the-resurrection-of-christ/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net