

Newsletter April 2012

During April of this year, Christians worldwide celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For a true believer, the commemoration of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection eclipses the celebration of Jesus' birth in personal significance; for it represents the sealing of our salvation for which purpose Jesus earlier came down to earth to dwell in mortal flesh. (See Book I, Chapter 4.1 and *Newsletter December 2011* wherein we discussed the Incarnation). The following text contains edited excerpts from *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity*, Book I, Chapter 4.6, wherein the resurrection of Jesus Christ is addressed.

That Jesus died on the cross is an historical certainty. That matter is disputed by few, for men die every day. Yet, of greater importance and significance is the fact that Jesus did not remain dead in the grave, but having defeated death, He arose again to life (Lu.24:5-7). To be very clear, the physical body of Jesus was raised by the Holy Spirit so that Jesus was (and is) the same Jesus that died on the cross. Jesus was raised from the dead complete in body, soul, and spirit.

If we fail to realize that Jesus rose from the dead in the flesh, we destroy in our minds the truth of the Gospel (1Co.15:3,4). Such disbelief does not change the fact of his resurrection, but it does alter our relationship to Christ with regard to trusting Him for our salvation. If we believe we have died with Him to sin, it would follow that we would surely remain dead in Him, thus destroying all hope of our own future resurrection from the grave. Joyfully, this is not so. "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection... Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Ro.6:5,8).

The Apostle Paul also said, "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1Co.15:14). If Jesus Christ did not rise bodily from the dead, Christianity becomes meaningless. It would be a religion devoid of any true hope as are many others. The ultimate great hope unique to Christianity is the bodily resurrection of the dead to eternal life through Him. When Jesus died, He carried all of mankind's sins with Him to the grave. If we were only identified with Him in his death but are not identified with Him in a bodily resurrection, where then would be our hope? "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" (1Co.15:17,18). The sin debt to God would be paid through Christ's death, but there would be no justification of man to God without a living Christ. God's holiness would be appeased, but mankind would remain dead in his fallen nature; the grave would retain its ultimate victory over us.

As Paul emphatically stated, "[Jesus] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Ro.4:25). Therefore, it was imperative that Jesus be raised from the dead in order that we who died in Him should also be made alive in Him. If there were no resurrection, then Jesus would merely have been a martyr who potentially paid the price of atonement through his death in order to appease God, but provided no genuine benefit to mankind. Without Jesus' physical resurrection, there would be no proof of God's acceptance of the atonement offered for our sin or of justification restoring fellowship between God and man. When Jesus arose from the grave, where He had put to death the sin of the entire world, we who are in Him through personal faith also arose to newness of life along with Him. "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Ro.6:11).

If Jesus did not arise in his physical body from the grave, then we also have no hope of life after our death, but only cling to a vague hope of some vaporous form of spiritual existence that knows no substance in reality. Why then did Christ come to Earth and for what purpose was his death on the cross? Jesus, speaking of his own, said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn.10:10). Yes, and not merely an eternal existence in a mindless and bodiless state of being, which is akin to death, but eternal life in fullness and abundance of physical bodily substance. Having accomplished his great purpose wasn't it appropriate, even necessary, that Jesus Himself should be the first to rise from the dead? "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1Co.15:20). Jesus the firstfruits after which will come forth the joyful harvest of the great multitude who follow Him through faith (Re.7:9).

The biblical accounts of Jesus' resurrection leave absolutely no doubt that Jesus appeared to his followers fully alive from the dead (1Co.15:5-8), for as we read in his own words to them: "...it is I myself" (Lu.24:39). The claim of physical resurrection is not some strange theory that is unsupported by the facts of Scripture. Rather, a careful study of the Scriptures leaves a rational man with no alternative but to accept the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ as an incontrovertible fact. If we are able to believe in the existence of God, are we not then able to believe all of the Truth that He has revealed to us in his written Word? The accounts of the Scriptures are very clear: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, because death was not able to hold Him (Ac.2:24).

Therefore, all arguments against the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ must necessarily arise from rationalization of the human mind apart from Scripture. That all myths concerning Jesus physical resurrection may be laid to rest, we exposed the more common of those arguments within the text of Chapter 4.6, Book I, beginning on page 255. We first refuted directly from Scripture accounts the stolen body theory that was put forth by the Jewish elders (Mt.28:12,13) to account for the empty tomb. We also refuted the strange notion of a spiritual resurrection in which Jesus arose without a body, the coma theory in which it is supposed that Jesus did not actually die on the cross and later awakened from a coma in the tomb. We examined the twin brother theory in which it is supposed that a twin brother either died on the cross or represented himself as the resurrected Christ after the crucifixion. We considered the wrong tomb theory in which the tomb was empty merely because it was not the one in which Jesus was buried. Lastly, we examined the hallucination theory in which more than five hundred people had a mass hallucination of seeing Jesus at various times and even individually conversed with Him.

Almost all anti-resurrection theories have originated in the minds of the rank unbeliever. The secular minded man would naturally be biased to think in such a way that he refutes the clear teaching of all Scripture out of hand, since it declares him a sinner. The unbeliever lacks the benefit of spiritual guidance in the diligent study of Scripture. He therefore deliberately reacts in complete ignorance of the historic accuracy of that which is clearly stated in the Scripture texts regarding the resurrection. Nevertheless, it is also true that many who confess Christ as their savior, or at least refer to themselves as Christians, often find themselves siding with unbelievers in denying the physical resurrection. That state of doubt was once the condition of the Apostle Thomas: "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his

side, I will not believe” (Jn.20:24,25). However, at the first sight of Jesus, Thomas immediately recognized him as both “Lord and God.” Thomas believed because he saw Him in his resurrected body. “Jesus saith unto him, blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. (Jn.20:29)” Scripture is filled with many other signs and proofs which John could not relate in his gospel text because of their enormous number, but what John did write was written down that “ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing ye might have life through his name” (Jn.20:30,31).

Even enlightened believers often feel somewhat foolish in going up against the law of nature, which declares that that which dies does not spring back to life; the flesh fully decays and is no more. We must admit that death is both usual and absolute in the human experience; it is a common event in a sin-cursed world. However, death is not really natural, but it is the direct result of fallen mankind’s sinful state. When we speak of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are speaking of a unique supernatural event. We are speaking of God Himself directly intervening in the affairs of man in which God’s own natural laws were overruled to achieve his divine purpose.

The apostles became totally convinced of Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the dead by the proofs shown to them as is clearly evidenced by them risking their lives to perpetuate the Gospel; all but John died while engaged in that effort. So we should be convinced by the zeal of their witness. What benefit is it to us to doubt what we know through overwhelming evidence to be fact? How can we deny the truth that our very hope rests upon? What benefit to us would be a dead savior?

It is indeed painful for one who knows the Scriptural accounts to even consider the many tales that others have devised in denial of the truth. After all, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus did not take place in some dark corner when no one was looking (Ac.26:26). It took place in Jerusalem at the crossroads of human civilization with large numbers in attendance from many nations. An historical account of those events was recorded by eye witnesses so that future generations could know with absolute certainty that Jesus arose bodily from the dead. We know more about the life, death, and burial of Jesus, than any other man who lived two thousand years ago. That we, as believers, believe by faith does not detract from the overwhelming evidence that has been provided for us through Bible accounts. One representative of the human race has died and returned from the grave. That one man was and is Jesus Christ, the Son of man and the Son of the living God, who promises us eternal life in Him. Therein is the Christian’s great hope firmly established! May the joy of that hope fill you this season as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Arthur J. Smith April 2012