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Topic: Christ's Resurrection—The Fundamental Doctrine of the Church

Introduction

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where He lay.¹

Eric C. Rust writes Christ's resurrection constitutes the turning point of biblical history and revelation. In the biblical writers' minds, it transformed what seemed to be the defeat of the crucifixion into a triumphant victory. It confirmed the declaration of our Lord Himself that, in His person, the sovereign rule of God had entered decisively into human history. Moreover, the resurrection meant that God had exalted Jesus to be Prince and Savior and that every tongue should confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.² The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundational doctrine of the Christian Church. It is, however, not without critics. In this paper, I will first examine whether the resurrection is a myth, then the meaning and doctrinal significance of the resurrection for Christ and the church, then the types of the resurrection, and finally, a conclusion.

Is the Resurrection a Myth

¹ Matthew 28:1-6 (English Standard Version).

² Eric C Rust, "Interpreting the Resurrection," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 29, no. 1 (1961): 25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1460178>.

Theologian N.T. Wright notes that the Easter story has been demolished and reconstructed repeatedly over the years. The tantalizing narratives in the gospels have been puzzling to the reader. How do they fit together, if at all? What precisely happened? Which school of thought today, if any, truly tells the story? Many have despaired about what, if anything, happened on the third day after Jesus' crucifixion. Yet despite perplexity and skepticism, many Christians globally frequently repeat that after Christ's crucifixion, He rose again.³ With the seeming complexities surrounding Jesus's resurrection, could this foundational church doctrine be a myth? How solid is this foundation? Let us scrutinize it. Hindson and Caner write that in Christian Apologetics, no historical argument surpasses Jesus's resurrection for its sheer evidential force. They provide the following pieces of historical evidence for Jesus's resurrection. First, they cited the Pauline text of 1 Corinthians 15. Paul states in v.3-8 that he had passed on this gospel recitation he had received from the Scriptures. That Christ died, was buried, rose on the third day, and appeared to many. Then, in v.14, he writes that our preaching and faith are useless if Christ has not been raised. This chapter affirms the Resurrection and that Jesus appeared individually and in groups to many witnesses.

Hindson and Caner also state that recent scholars agree that Paul is the most reliable and excellent witness to Jesus's resurrection appearances. Two of the reasons are that he was once an adamant enemy of Christianity and he was also a Jewish scholar. Paul's life changed remarkably after his conversion. To the point where he said, For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord (Acts 21:13) and, for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21).

³ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 3.

Additionally, almost all critical scholars concede that Jesus's disciples became willing to die for their beliefs. Only a few disagree that they were ready to die because they believed they had seen the risen Jesus. Another proof is that all the gospels state that, shortly after Jesus's burial, His tomb was found empty, and the strongest argument is that they name women as the first witnesses to the empty tomb. This situation is embarrassing because women were on the low rung of the social ladder, and therefore, ancient culture widely rejected female testimony in crucial matters. Even more potent is that Jerusalem would have been considered the last place for the apostles to preach the resurrection unless there was an empty tomb. Many accounts also confirm the empty tomb. No thesis accounts for Jesus's resurrection than His appearances.⁴

Lee Strobel, a former atheist, also addresses this topic. Quoting Theologian Gerald O'Collins, Strobel writes that "in a profound sense, Christianity without the resurrection is not simply Christianity without its final chapter. It is not Christianity at all." He said the resurrection is the supreme vindication of Jesus' divine identity and His inspired teaching. It's proof of his triumph over sin and death. It's the basis of Christian hope. It's the miracle of all miracles.

He interviewed William Lane Craig in what he called the evidence of the missing body. To begin, Craig confirms that Jesus was indeed buried in a tomb. As some might want us to believe, he was not left on the cross to be devoured by birds or thrown in a common grave. William Craig notes the proposed non-burial of Jesus and the other two men flies in the face of archaeological evidence, Jewish customs, law, and practice, and all extant relevant literary and historical evidence. Not surprisingly, the proposal is widely rejected, if ever acknowledged.⁵ Like Hindson and Caner, Strobel referenced 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 which provides a line-by-line

⁴ Ed Hindson and Ergun Caner, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics: Surveying the Evidence for the Truth of Christianity* (Eugene: OR, Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 135-137.

⁵ W. David Beck and Michael R. Licona, eds., *Raised on the Third Day: Defending the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Bellingham: WA, Lexham Press, 2020), 143.

summary of what the other gospels teach. And they give multiple attestations of the burial story. Moreso, the burial story in Mark is so extremely early that it could not have been subject to legendary corruption. Mark is generally considered the earliest gospel and basically consists of short anecdotes about Jesus. But when you get to the so-called passion story, it states that Jesus was buried in a tomb.

Craig also provides other affirmative cases about the empty tomb. He said Jews and Christians knew where the tomb was. Therefore, if it weren't empty, a movement about the belief in the resurrection could not be founded in the same city where Christ was crucified and buried. Also, based on Mark's grammar, language, and style, you can tell that his empty tomb story came from an earlier source. Evidence shows that it was written before AD 37, too early for legend to corrupt it seriously. Also, the earliest Jewish polemic presupposes the historicity of the empty tomb. Nobody claimed Jesus's body was still in the tomb. The question that was asked was, what happened to Jesus' body? ⁶

Bible expositor Herbert Lockyer also has something to say. He writes that one of the most striking proofs of the credence of the resurrection was the transformation in the state of mind and conduct of the apostles. The most outstanding of which was Paul. His remarkable sudden conversion on Damascus Road remains a mighty testimony to the reality of the resurrection. When Paul affirmed, "He was seen of me also," he meant an actual visible appearance, just as the other apostles had. Nothing but an authentic objective appearance of Christ will satisfy the case in the record of his conversion. After this encounter, as a few have, he served and suffered for Christ. The resurrection, therefore, is one of the best-attested facts in history. Paul did not need to test and sift the pieces of evidence. His eyes have seen Him and not

⁶ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Easter: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan 2003), 31-54.

another, and he came to give the church “The Magna Carta of The Resurrection,” as 1 Corinthians 15 has been called.⁷

Keeley also weighed in on whether the resurrection was a fact or a legend. Citing Norman Anderson, he said Paul's list of witnesses is the weightiest piece of evidence. But it is confirmed by what the gospel tells us about the tomb and the disciples. At first sight, some of the gospel accounts seem to contradict each other, but to say they cannot be reconciled is an overstatement. Their apparent inconsistencies add considerably to their value as evidence. Any judge will tell you that honest witnesses will never tell precisely the same story, and any discrepancies (real or apparent) have to be ironed out in cross-examination. No one would suggest that the witnesses whose testimony is given in the gospels made any attempt to concoct an agreed account.

And what is more, the truth of their testimony is confirmed by circumstantial evidence. Also, the change in the disciples' lives is a testimony that they met the risen Lord. The disciples were convinced when they personally met with the risen Jesus and found their hopelessness and despair turned into joyful belief. The disciples saw, touched, and ate with Him (Matthew 28:9, Luke 24:30). His body was different after the resurrection. He went through closed doors (John 20:19). He appears from nowhere and vanishes at will (Luke 24:31). Paul later referred to this body as 'spiritual' or glorified. Jesus was seen after His death over forty days. But after His ascension, He appeared to other disciples. Paul on the Damascus Road, and John on the island of Patmos. They both had visions of Christ in glory.⁸

⁷ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Messianic Prophecies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan, 1973), 164.

⁸ Robin Keeley, ed. *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: MI, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 114-116.

Types of the Resurrection

Not only do we have these pieces of evidence stated above, but we have in the Bible what is known as the types of resurrection or “prophetic symbols.” Types in Scripture is a person or thing in the Old Testament that foreshadows a person or something in the New Testament. It gives us a glimpse of the future. Let’s see how the Old Testament confirms and predicts Christ’s resurrection. Ada R. Habershon discusses types in his book, *The Study of the Types*. He said the types of the resurrection are clearly foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The ark resting on Mount Ararat and Noah stepping onto the new earth prefigures resurrection life. Remarkably, the date is given on which the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat. This date probably coincides with the morning of the resurrection. It is said that the ark rested on the seventeenth day of the seventh month. The lamb was killed on the fourteenth day of the same month. The third day after this was the seventeenth, the day the ark rested. Many believe that it was the day of the resurrection.

Another type of Jesus’s resurrection is seen in Numbers 17, in the budding of Aaron’s rod. The twelve rods were laid up before the Lord. All were equally dead, and there was no sign of life. But when the morning came, a wondrous miracle took place. The rod with Aaron’s name inscribed on it became full of life. It had buds, blossoms, and fruit appearing on it. No one saw when the change was taking place, but Moses saw abundant evidence of life in the morning—reminding us of the morning when the women went to the tomb and found out that Jesus was not dead but had risen. The budding and blossoming rod was shown to the people. Many witnesses attested to it. In the same way, we read in Acts that our risen Lord showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs. Aaron’s rod was caused to bud to show he was the chosen one. Jesus, our Lord, was declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4).

Habershon states, three days and three nights are often typical of death and resurrection, for example, in the history of Jonah, whose “three days and three nights” are mentioned by the Lord as typical of the time He should spend in the heart of the earth. Also, in Hebrews 11, Isaac was restored to Abraham after he had willingly offered him up. This was a figure of resurrection. Abraham is a type of the Father who spared not His Son, and Isaac of the Lamb provided by “Jehovah Jireh.” This foreshadows both the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Genesis 24, we also see the beautiful picture of the faithful servant seeking a bride for the son, who has thus in figure passed through death and resurrection.⁹

The Meaning and Doctrinal Significance of the Resurrection

Michael Bird looks at what he terms the meaning of resurrection. He said the resurrection is a revelation of Jesus's identity and marks the beginning of the future age. He writes that many Jews believe God would resurrect everyone at the eschaton. So, when Jesus told Martha that her dead brother Lazarus would live again, she assumed Jesus meant at the end of the age. Hence, what was shocking about Christ's resurrection is that God made this happen in the middle of history instead of at the end. And so, what this meant was that Jesus was the climax of God's plan. It was a sign that He was given all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). He was vindicated from false accusations (1 Timothy 3:16), marked out as the Son of God (Romans 1:4), designated the heir of all things, and installed as Messiah and Lord (Acts 2:36).

Secondly, the resurrection constitutes the inauguration of the new creation. Bird writes that the resurrection means the curse of creation, sin, and death's stronghold has been broken and

⁹ Ada R. Habershon, *The Study of the Types: Priests and Levites, A Type of the Church* (Grand Rapids: MI, Kregel Publications, 1981), 46-51.

swept aside. Bird quotes N.T. Wright. He says creation doesn't need abandonment or evolution. Instead, it needs redemption and renewal, promised and guaranteed by Jesus's resurrection.

Thirdly, the resurrection is the objective ground of salvation. We are saved by, in, and through Christ's resurrection. "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."¹⁰ "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."¹¹ God vindicates Jesus as the faithful Son and righteous sin-bearer through the resurrection. Because we are united with Christ in the resurrection, we share in the verdict of justification. 1 Peter 1:3 tells us that in Christ's great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.¹²

In his book, *Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Wayne Grudem discusses the doctrinal significance of the resurrection. He says Christ's resurrection affirms the goodness of the material creation. Jesus's physical resurrection and His eternal possession of a physical resurrection body affirm the goodness of God's original creation of man. Not as a spirit like angels. God saw everything He made (including creatures with physical bodies) and it was very good (Gen. 1:31). We must not think that nonmaterial existence is a better form of existence for creatures. When God made us as the pinnacle of His creation, He gave us physical bodies. Jesus rose from the dead in a perfected physical body and now reigns in heaven. He will return for us to be with Him forever.

Secondly, he states that Christ's resurrection ensures our regeneration. 1 Peter 1:3 connects Jesus's resurrection with our new birth. In His resurrection, Jesus earned us a new quality of life just like His. We do not receive all that new resurrection life when we become

¹⁰ Romans 4:25 (New International Version)

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:17

¹² Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: ABiblical and Systematic Introduction*. 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan, 2020), 495-500.

Christians since our bodies are still subject to weakness, aging, and death. However, in our spirit, we are quickened with new resurrection power. He referenced Philemon 3:10, stating that Christ's resurrection gave new power for Christian ministry and obedience to God even in this life. This new resurrection power prevents sin from having dominion over us. However, we will never be perfect in this life. After Jesus's resurrection, He promised His disciples the new intensified power to proclaim the gospel, work miracles, and triumph over the enemy (Acts 1:8).

Grudem also writes that Christ's resurrection ensures our justification and that we will receive perfect resurrection bodies. By raising Christ from the dead, God was, in effect, saying that there was no penalty left for paying sin or wrath for God to bear. You are not guilty but righteous in my sight. He was at this moment declaring us righteous once we become Christians. The New Testament frequently connects Jesus' resurrection with our final bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 6:14, 2 Cor. 4:14, 1 Cor. 15: 12-58).¹³ Eric Rust writes that without the resurrection, as testified to by the disciples to whom the Risen Lord appeared in His risen glory, there would be no triumphant faith in Him as Savior and Lord. The meaning of our Lord's mission was unveiled in the Resurrection, and the redemptive revelation in Him was completed.¹⁴

James Boice notes that the resurrection proved that Jesus is who He claimed to be and accomplished what He claimed to have come to earth to achieve. He said Evangelist Reuben A. Torrey called Jesus' resurrection "The Gibraltar of Christian evidences, the Waterloo of infidelity." The resurrection is the historical base upon which all other Christian doctrines are built and before which all honest doubt must falter. What doctrines stand with the resurrection? The first is that there is a God and that the God of the Bible is the true God. Secondly, Christ's resurrection establishes the doctrine of our Lord's deity. While on earth, He said He was equal

¹³Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. 2nd ed (Grand Rapids:MI, Zondervan Academic, 2020), 755-757.

¹⁴ Rust, "Interpreting the Resurrection," 25.

with God, and after His execution, He would be raised by God on the third day. He substantiated His claim with the resurrection. Thirdly, Jesus's resurrection is a pledge of a final judgment upon everyone who rejects the gospel. On Mars Hill, Paul proclaimed this message, He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31).¹⁵

Conclusion

The resurrection is significant to the Christian faith. Jesus died, buried, and rose again with a physical body. No other religion can claim this about their god. Their god is powerless and those who died remain dead. Scriptures in the Old Testament, such as Psalm 110:1, 16:8-11, 22, and 68:18, and Isaiah 53:5-6 prophecy about Jesus's death; therefore, it was not an accident or afterthought. It was part of God's plan to bring salvation to those believing in Him. Quoting Lawrence Richards, the resurrection was an unexpected event. Although the Lord had foretold His resurrection, His disciples were unprepared. They even found it hard to believe when the reports started to come in. Christ's resurrection is one of history's most thoroughly attested facts, not only through the Scriptures but also through the disciples' transformation. These men were previously cowering in a locked room for fear of the Jews. But after the resurrection, they were transformed into bold and joyful witnesses of Christ's resurrection. Jesus's command to us as servants left in charge of his possession is specific (Mt. 28:18-20). Had Jesus come in glory first, we would have known His power. But His love is not known in His love but His brokenness, not in the throne but in the cross.¹⁶

¹⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology* (Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity Press, 1986), 340-347.

¹⁶ Lawrence O Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton: IL, Victor Books, 1988), 595-599.

Habershon writes faith in Christ's resurrection has changed lives ever since the resurrection occurred. We read, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." We are no longer the servants of the usurper. We know his dominion will soon cease. And so, we wait for Christ's return. "Surely, I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"¹⁷

¹⁷ Habershon, *The Study of the Types*, 52.

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