

The Resurrection Factor - Part 5

“If Christ be not raised from the dead your faith is in vain,” Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15.

For four previous sessions we have looked at the various circumstances and evidence and facts and perspectives concerning the resurrection of Christ. In the last session, we just looked at several of the theories to explain away the resurrection. And let me say this, I deal with almost all the theories in detail and document them in my book, *The Resurrection Factor*. It's in English, Russian, German, and French and I believe many of the languages now and so please, get a copy of *The Resurrection Factor* and study further many of the theories that tried to explain away the resurrection. But when you do that, listen carefully to the admonition by Dr. J.N.D. Anderson. He is a little more profound in stating something than I was in the last session of examining all the evidence. Whenever you look at a theory, take into consideration all the evidence, not just part of it.

Dr. J.N.D. Anderson was the head of the institute for advanced legal studies at the University of London. A very scholarly attorney, he makes this observation, “A point which needs stressing is that the evidence must be considered as a whole. It is comparatively easy to find an alternative explanation for one or another of the different strands which make up this testimony” talking about the scriptural testimony of the resurrection for Christ and the various facts that surround the life of Christ as it relates to the resurrection. And then he says, “But such explanations are valueless unless they fit the other strands, or evidence, in the testimony as well. A number of different theories, each of which might conceivably be applicable to part of the evidence, which do not themselves adhere to an intelligent pattern can provide no alternative to the one interpretation which fits the whole.” What Dr. J.N.D. Anderson is saying is that yes, you can always take one or two pieces of the evidence and develop a theory that will make sense according to those two or three pieces of evidence, but you can't do that. You must take all the evidence in light of the theory and if it doesn't fit all the evidence then you better question the theory.

And then we talked about the Swoon Theory that so many people present that Christ really did not die He just passed out and swooned. Well, one of the men who considered this was Dr. David Strauss, a very adamant skeptic of Jesus Christ. And this was his observation about anyone who would believe in what is called the Swoon Theory or that Christ really did not die, He just passed out, was resuscitated and then He just walked out, and people worshipped Him. The skeptic, Professor David Strauss said, “It is impossible that a being who had been 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 least yielded to His sufferings could have given to the 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.” Strauss goes on to say that such resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He made upon them in life and in death. At the most could only have given it a very weak voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm and elevated their reverence into worship.”

The facts speak louder than the voice of the critic. Dr. Paul Maier, a man I have quoted several times before, professor of ancient history, made this statement about the theories, “None of these theories then, offer any solid base for historical reconstruction of what happened on the first Easter morning. If honestly examined, they appear quite fanciful and all of them” that is, the theories, “raised far more difficulties than they solved. No one theory explains the entire phenomenon reported at the time and it would have taken an incredible combination of several of them to begin to do so. This much must be admitted, not merely on any basis of Christian defense or apologetics, but of sober historical inquiry.”

Many people say, “Well, you know, Jesus only appeared to friendly people. He only appeared to His followers. He only appeared to those who wanted to believe the resurrection.” No, here again that does not fit the facts of the case. For example, Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul, was not a friend of Christ. He was not a follower of Christ. He was against Christ. He was adamantly against Christ. Because he believed that Jesus Christ was a false messiah. He believed that Jesus was preaching heresy. Paul was a Pharisee. He is referred to as a Pharisee’s Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, which were phrases that placed a person very high in the structure of the Phariseic sect. Now Paul went about to destroy the church. He got permission to go from city to city to cast the followers of Christ into jail. But in his own words, in the Book of Acts, historically he said, Jesus Christ appeared to him. He was struck blind, Christ told him to go in to the city and a man would come and give him back his eyesight and tell him what to do. Whether you believe that or not, there is one historical fact. Something happened in the life of Paul that literally turned his life upside down and almost overnight he went from a murderer to a missionary. He went from a Christian hater to a Christian lover. He went from a Christian persecutor to a Christian propagator. The life of Paul, Saul of Tarsus, is one of the greatest testimonies that Christ was raised from the dead and then He appeared to Paul himself.

So you can’t make the statement that Christ only appeared to friendly eye witnesses. Look at James, His brother, who eventually became a Christian and headed the Jerusalem church. But James was not a follower of Christ. He thought Christ was embarrassing the family. He would say to Jesus, “Look, go up to Jerusalem and do your things. Do not embarrass us here.” But then it says that He appeared unto James, his brother, and then James became a believer.

Now I believe you can make this statement from what we know of the historical texts – that everyone who Jesus appeared to became a believer. From the facts we know you cannot say He only appeared to friendly eye witnesses, because that is not true.

Now let us look briefly at some of the circumstantial evidence surrounding the resurrection of Christ. Will Durant, the historian, a very well respected historian all over the world, made this statement, “A few simple men, the apostles, should in one generation having been a so powerful and appealing personality, so lofty and ethic, and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the gospel.” What he is saying is what happened almost immediately around the death and resurrection of Christ and the lives of the apostles in the early New Testament church is a miracle in itself - and a greater miracle if Christ was never raised from the dead.

Let us look at circumstantial evidence. Evidence indicates the truth of the fact or an event. For example, the church, the very existence of the church going all the way back to the book of Acts, all the way back to the first century. They say what’s the significance of this and it is this? That’s this – what was the church founded upon? It was founded upon the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The whole foundation of the church is that Christ had been raised from the dead and He was alive. Now, if that was not true, go back to that time, think back. There is no way the church could ever have come into existence. If Christ had not been raised from the dead they would simply have produced the body and there would be no church. The very existence of the church, going all the way back to the first century, is circumstantial evidence that Christ was raised from the dead on the third day or the whole foundation would be false and there were plenty of people who knew the reality of what Jesus said and what He did and about the resurrection would have exposed the fallacy, the heresy, and the church would have disintegrated all in the womb. It would never have been born.

And then, Sunday worship, for me is fifty two times a year, there is a declaration that on the third day Christ was raised from the dead. You say, “Now, I don’t get that.” Well, let me make a statement and then I will try to explain. I believe that change of worship by the early Jewish church and the disciples

from worshipping on Saturday to the Sabbath, to the first day of the week – Sunday, is in honor of the resurrection, taking into consideration all the facts, it is probably one of the greatest, most significant decisions ever made by any group of people historically. Understanding this, that psychologically, what would have happened if they were wrong about Christ being raised from the dead? Now let me try to explain that. The Jews imbedded within them from childhood that you honor God on the Sabbath, that you dare not break the Sabbath; you do not work on the Sabbath. You take that day to worship Him and to rest in the Lord. I mean the Jews would rather die than break the Sabbath. They would be persecuted if they broke the Sabbath – it was honoring the seventh day. Something happened among the devoted, dedicated, and reverent Jews of God, of Jacob, Isaac and Abraham, of the God of the Old Testament. Because they truly believed that Christ was raised from the dead and that He was alive and to honor that, they switched worship from Saturday to Sunday and started to worship Christ on Sunday and it became one of the foundational pillars of the church. To me is a testimony that they were convinced beyond any doubt that on the third day Christ was raised from the dead. Now you have to understand emotionally and psychologically, what had to be going through the minds of those early believers who were Jewish that if they were wrong about Christ being the Messiah and raised again the third day, for them then, to start breaking the Sabbath, they truly believed if they were wrong, God would destroy them. I believe worship on the first day of the week, Sunday, is one of the greatest decisions ever made by any group of people when you take into consideration what they thought would happen to them if they were wrong. I believe worship on Sunday is a confirmation that on the third day the tomb was empty.

And then, baptism, what does baptism depict? It depicts your death, your burial when you go in to the water, your burial with Christ, when you come out of the water, coming out the water with Christ to a new life. This symbol of baptism that goes all the way back to the first century in the early church and believers represented the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Now if Christ had not been raised from the dead, baptism would lose all of its significance, going all the way back to the first century. It is an empty tomb in the appearances of Christ that gives any significance whatsoever to baptism and I believe this every time I see someone baptized. When I was baptized in a river, it showed me again the truth that on the third day He was raised from the dead.

Not just the church, the first day of the week worship on Sunday and baptism, but also communion, communion. You can trace communion all the way back to the early church in the first century. Now the taking of communion, the cup, and the bread represents what? It represents the death, the burial, and the resurrection of life. You say, “Why?” Why in communion do they celebrate the death of Jesus Christ with such joy, with such thanksgiving, and singing hymns to God? Because they knew going all the way back to the first century that Christ was not dead. He had been raised from the dead and that is what gives significance to taking communion. Every act of communion is a confirmation that historically Christ was raised from the dead. And if Christ wasn’t raised from the dead then you would have a hard time explaining away communion. Would you take communion with such joy and thanksgiving to celebrate a dead Messiah? No. On the third day He was raised from the dead. And then I believe also, changed lives are good solid circumstantial evidence that on the third day Christ was raised from the dead. It’s so interesting that, and I have studied this: how people from every walk of life; every racial background; every type of culture; every level of education; every level of society; globally in every culture of the world. When a person comes to Christ and they sincerely repent, and they place their faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, and invites Him into their life, except in a rare situation, significant change takes place. That is more than positive thinking, psychological reasoning, or emotional response. I truly believe that the changed lives of men and women who come and place their trust in Christ from every culture, every walk of life, every language, every background is a testimony that behind all of it, on the third day, He was raised from the dead, He ascended to heaven and then through the Holy Spirit, comes to live within our lives. My wife Dottie puts it this way:

because Christ was raised from the dead, He lives and because He lives, He has an infinite capacity to enter a man or woman's life and to forgive them and to change their life.

I believe what happened in my life, and my testimony is in the book, *The Resurrection Factor* and it is on video tape that is available to you of how I set out to refute Christianity and I could not intellectually. I went through a real struggle. Finally, I placed my trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. Just briefly in that tape I share what happened in my life. Without any positive thought of it, without trying to change my life, all of sudden, I started to find the love for my father, who I hated. All of a sudden, the bitterness, the hatred – without my positive thinking about it – was turned from hatred into love. I was able to love my father so much that he came to the point where he also gave his heart to Christ as Savior and Lord. A personal testimony to me is strong evidence that on the third day Christ was raised from the dead.

The apostle Paul writes something in Romans chapter 1, verse 4. It is very significant when it comes to the resurrection. It says, "Who" that is Jesus, "Who is declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead according to the spirit of holiness Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Theologically it confirms several things. One, it confirmed that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. It was predicted in the messianic prophecy, that the Messiah would be resurrected – when Christ went into the depth of the tomb and when He came back out on the third day and the evidence shows He did. One, it showed that He truly was the Son of God. Second, it confirmed that every sin we have ever committed, God dealt with. You see if there had been one sin that Christ had not forgiven, had not dealt with, that could not be forgiven, Jesus Christ would still be in the tomb. And one thing the resurrection shows me is that when I came to Jesus, and confessed my sins, and asked Him to forgive me, then I have the assurance that I am forgiven because on the third day the tomb was empty, He was raised from the dead. At that point, it showed that every sin that Christ took upon Himself was dealt with before the holy, just, righteous nature of God. And so whenever you think of the resurrection, let it be a reminder to you that God loves you. Christ died for you. You can be forgiven and God wants a relationship with you.

I would like to give you that opportunity right now to place your personal trust and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; to place your trust in a resurrected Christ. He loved you so much; He came out of glory, out of heaven, took your sin upon himself, died on the cross, was buried, and raised again the third day. And now He says, "But to as many as received him to them he gave the right to become a child of God." This is the prayer that I prayed to place my trust in Christ. Maybe it will help you right this moment to express that very desire. I don't ask you to bow your head. I do not ask you to close your eyes because years ago I learned that the key to prayer is not in the position of the body, but the attitude of the heart. You can't fool God. This is the prayer that I prayed. Just quietly in your own heart, if you are sincere, you can express this desire to God. I prayed, "Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. Forgive me and cleanse me. At this moment, I place my trust in you as Savior and Lord. I accept your forgiveness. Forgive me. Come into my heart and change me from the inside out. Thank you that I can trust you. In Christ's name, Amen."

If you just prayed that prayer with me, I want you to do two things. One, in the next day – twenty four hours, I want you to tell at least two people of the decision you just made. And in fact, I would encourage you to tell the person who gave you this video or is showing this video to you. Second, I want you, in the next one or two days, to get a New Testament, open up the Gospel of John, go to Matthew, Mark, Luke, then John, the fourth gospel in the New Testament. Read John 3, three times and before you read John 3, three times, pray a very honest prayer. Say "God, if you are God, if Jesus is your Son and on the third day He was raised from the dead and He came into my heart and I am a child of God, give me the conviction of it." Pray that prayer and then read John 3, three times. After you tell somebody else, you pray that prayer, and then read John 3, three times. And then third, look for significant changes in your life. Look for changes in your attitude and look for changes in your actions and how you treat people.

But as a result of this series together, I pray that when you think of Jesus Christ, you are reminded of one phrase: He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! God bless.