

Jesus
His Wife and
Character.

RR
28
2P
no. 6

Infallible Proof of the Resurrection of Christ

By
H. Tucker Graham, D. D.

RR
28
2P
NO. 5

PUBLISHED BY
PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE
OF PUBLICATION
RICHMOND, VA.

Infallible Proof of the Resurrection of Christ

Matthew 28: 6. "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

The Keystone of the Gospel Arch is the Resurrection of Christ. It is to a review of the evidence upon which rests our belief in this pivotal event of all history that I am directing your attention now. The late Senator Davis, of Michigan, a member of the commission which drew up the treaty of peace after the Spanish-American War, declared that as he followed the course of history back through the centuries, he found that near the beginning of the first century of the Christian Era something vital and decisive happened that moulded the history of the afteryears, and investigation proved beyond question that that something "was nothing less than the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

For the sake of convenience and of greater clearness, the evidence upon which our belief in this supreme fact is based may be arranged under three heads.

First, we have the strong Presumption of its truth.

Every thoughtful reader of the Old Testa-

ment Scriptures has observed the long line of prophecy, running like a golden thread from Genesis to Malachi, which points to the coming of a Great Deliverer. From the initial promise spoken at Eden's gates to "the seed of the woman," these prophecies grow in light and clearness until under David, and those who come after him, they take definite shape as a King of the royal line of David, whose dominion shall extend from sea to sea, and under whose righteous sway every nation and kindred and tongue shall eventually be brought.

Yet, while the exalted nature of this Messiah is everywhere emphasized, only once is it distinctly said that he should be buried and rise again from the dead—though this fact is indirectly shadowed forth in other places. In Psalm 16: 10, David says: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol (the place of disembodied spirits), neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." In this Psalm, David declares his confidence in God's good providence over him both in this life and in that which is to come. Probably also he here declares his belief in his own physical resurrection, though this is not clear. Yet this can not exhaust the meaning of the passage. It can find its complete fulfilment only in David's greater Son, as the application made of it in the New Testament establishes beyond question.

Peter, speaking at Pentecost, under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 25-31), applies this passage to the Resurrection of Christ. As all the Jews well knew, David was

dead and buried, in proof of which his sepulchre was with them still. Continuing, he declares: "Therefore, being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he, seeing this before, **spake of the Resurrection of Christ**, that his soul was not left in Sheol, neither his flesh did see corruption." Paul, speaking later at Antioch in the heart of Asia Minor (Acts 13: 35-37), quotes this passage to precisely the same effect: "For David was laid unto his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up saw no corruption."

But while this is the only clear-cut prophecy of the Resurrection in the Old Testament, it must be understood by good, and indeed necessary, inference from all those passages which speak of the great sufferings of the Messiah and of the glory that shall follow. In Isaiah 53, He is described as "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed . . . the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all . . . for the transgression of my people was he stricken . . . his grave was appointed to be with the wicked but with the rich man was his tomb." Yet immediately after, the prophet breaks out in exultant prediction of the mighty conquests which this Great Sufferer should thereafter achieve.

We have yet stronger presumptive evidence in Christ's oft-repeated prediction that He would be slain and would rise again from the

dead. Upon not less than six separate occasions is He recorded as predicting His own resurrection after His enemies have done their worst upon Him (Matt. 12: 38-40; Mark 8: 31; 9: 31; 10: 30; Luke 24: 6-7; 24: 25-27). In three instances, He even stakes the proof of His Messiahship upon His rising again on the third day (Luke 24: 25-27; 24: 45-46; Matt. 12: 38-42).

These things are not of themselves complete and conclusive proof, yet the word of Him who had never failed to accomplish even those things confessedly beyond all human power awakens strong anticipations that this also will not fail. By the word of His power the dead were raised up, the lepers were cleansed, every form of disease was instantly healed, and the raging tempest of the sea was stilled. These give us a presumption amounting almost, if not quite, to a certainty that nothing is beyond His power.

But we are not required to rest content with evidence like this, remarkable though it is. This presumption is merely the stepping stone which leads us to solid ground.

Next we have PROOF—The Empty Tomb.

“He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

That Christ was dead, there can be no doubt. The rough soldiers who came to take Him down from the Cross found that He was already dead, and so they broke not his legs to hasten death as they did those of the malefactors that were crucified with Him. Yet to “make assurance

doubly sure,” and so prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that this was not a mere swoon or fainting spell, one of these legionnaires thrust his spear into His side and “forthwith came there out blood and water”—thus making the continuance of life impossible.

That He was buried, and that the place of His burial was perfectly known both to His friends and to His enemies, is no less certain. For at the request of the Jews and by command of the Roman Governor, the body was taken down from the Cross that it might be buried before the Jewish Sabbath, which was now at hand. With the Governor’s consent, Joseph of Arimathea took charge of the dead body of Jesus. Then he and Nicodemus embalmed it, and wound it in linen cloth and laid it in a new tomb in Joseph’s garden and they rolled a great stone against the entrance and took their departure. Here then is a tomb known to contain the body of Jesus of Galilee, and on the third day thereafter, it is admitted by all to be empty. How came it so? This is the fact that needs to be explained, and only one of two explanations is possible—either the body was stolen, or else Christ Jesus rose from the dead.

The Apostle John tells us (19: 38-42) that Nicodemus came also to share in this last tender ministry to a secret friend. He brought with him a hundred pounds of spices with which to anoint for his last long sleep the body of his dead friend. Both of these men had been timid disciples before, but now both came out boldly and aligned themselves with Him at a time when

even the Apostles, with the probable exception of John, had fled and gone into hiding. These spices which Nicodemus brought, myrrh and aloes, were gummy substances used in embalming the dead, and so preventing putrefaction. The body thus prepared was laid in Joseph's new tomb, hewn out of the rock, and a great stone was rolled against the otherwise narrow open entrance. Of this, John and also certain women were eye-witnesses (Mark 15: 47; Luke 23: 55; John 19: 35).

But this was not all. His enemies strangely enough remembered that He had said that He would rise again. Hence to prevent the body from being stolen, they requested the Governor to seal the tomb and to appoint a guard of soldiers to keep it. This was done, and the sepulchre was made sure.

Yet, despite the stone, the seal, and the Roman guard, the tomb was empty on the morning of the third day, and those who came at the dawn, not to greet the risen Jesus, but to do honor to the body of the dead Christ, found Him not. But they found the stone rolled away, and the linen cloths lying within, and the napkin that had been about his head carefully folded and laid in a place by itself—this last a simple act and fact yet one of tremendous significance. Not thus are thieves wont to do their work. Here was no evidence of haste or fright, but the unmistakable marks of orderly, deliberate movement. With an armed guard just at hand, would "body-snatchers" multiply the chances of cap-

ture by stopping to undo a body thus securely wrapped, and even fold one of these garments and lay it in a place by itself?

No rational motive for this unwrapping, under the attendant circumstances, can be assigned. It would have been far more easy, and immeasurably more safe, for them to carry the body as it was, and thus dispatch their work quickly and make their escape, leaving behind no trace of what they had done.

The Roman guard, who saw what happened, and were full of terror because of what they had seen, had no thought that the body had been stolen. This was a clumsy after-thought—a shallow falsehood—invented by the Jewish rulers, and which, by means of heavy bribes, they induced the soldiers to tell instead of what they had actually witnessed. The shallowness of all this is easily seen, for if asleep they could not have known that the disciples, or any one else, had **stolen** the body. The testimony of a sleeper is nothing worth. Moreover to sleep on duty is one of the worst offenses of which a soldier can be guilty, and, if discovered, means certain death in many armies even in this softer age. But the discipline of Rome knew no mercy, and hence a Roman soldier would have been the last man on earth to confess voluntarily this fatal breach of duty; and had it been true, the chief priests and elders would have been the first to make clamorous and insistent demand that they be put to death for their criminal neglect.

Truly, that cause is desperate indeed which

begins with murder, and ends with bribery and falsehood.

Clearly, then the body of Jesus could not have been stolen. This would require the impossible assumption, to sum up the case briefly, that an official and imperial seal could be broken; a great stone barring the entrance to the tomb be rolled away; a carefully embalmed body be tediously unwrapped and separated noisily from the sticky embalming substance; these cloths arranged in an orderly manner within the tomb; and then the body carried out under the very eyes of a band of soldiers detailed for the express purpose of preventing this very thing.

Moreover, what rational explanation for its removal could be assigned? The body lay in friendly ground. It had been tenderly prepared for burial, and laid away by loving hands with tears and grief profound. What could be gained by stealing the body? The cause of Christ could live in fact alone—not deception. Nor would men have dared suffering, prison and death simply to disseminate a deliberate and conscious falsehood.

Here, then, we have a chain of evidence so closely knit that no court on earth could refuse to accept it—for if this body was not stolen, there is no other alternative but that Jesus “rose from the dead according to the Scriptures.”

But when we add the further fact that He was seen by, and talked with and ate with, witnesses whose credibility can not be fairly ques-

tioned, Proof rises to the level of absolute Demonstration.

Our minds are so constituted that we can not refuse assent to testimony that is properly attested. A man of proven integrity, of sound mind and discretion, who bears witness to a fact that is fairly within his knowledge, when there is no reasonable ground for supposing that he has been deceived, forces upon us the conviction that he speaks the truth. Such is the nature of the testimony which we are now to consider.

Here again God has supplied us with evidence so abundant that all rational doubt is excluded. We are not confined to a single witness, or to a solitary appearance, but can appeal to a great number of witnesses who saw Him on many different occasions, and under widely different conditions. Not less than eleven times did Christ appear to His disciples and in a manner which finally carried full conviction even to the minds of the most sceptical. Moreover, He appeared to them in numbers extending all the way from one to above five hundred persons at once. On a twelfth occasion, He appeared to Saul of Tarus “as to one born out of due time” (Acts 9: 3-8; I. Cor. 15: 8).

These are of definite record, viz: (1) to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16: 9-10; John 20: 14); (2) to the women (Matt. 28: 9-10); (3) to Peter (Luke 24: 34; I. Cor. 15: 2); (4) to two on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13); (5) to Apostles in the Upper Room (John 20: 19); (6) to same (John 20: 26, 29); (7) to seven at Sea of Galilee (John 21: 14); (8) to eleven on Mountain (Matt.

28: 16); (9) to "above five hundred" (I. Cor. 15: 6); (10) to James (I. Cor. 15: 7); (11) to all Apostles on Olivet at Ascension (Luke 24: 51; Acts 1: 6-11).

Three times it is recorded that they touched Him (Matt. 28: 9; Luke 24: 39; John 20: 27). Twice we are told He ate with them (Luke 24: 42; John 21: 12-13), and always it is either stated, or to be inferred, that He talked with them.

We have not space to review all these appearances, nor is it necessary to do so. Let us be content with a brief reference to the two appearances to the Apostles in the Upper Room.

On the evening of the Resurrection Day, Jesus stood suddenly in their midst—Thomas being absent. Luke tells us they were swept with terror and thought they saw a ghost. But Christ calms their fears, and gives them tangible convincing proof that He is not a ghost, nor is this a mere phantasm of the brain, but that He is indeed the risen Jesus. "Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold, my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a ghost hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. When he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet . . . and . . . he did eat before them." (Luke 24: 36-43).

On the following Sunday evening, He comes again, when Thomas also was present. He bids this doubting faithless disciple to reach hither his finger and behold His hands; and to reach hither

his hand and thrust it into the gaping wound in His side, and be not faithless but believing. And as with the others, so also with Thomas, all his stubborn doubts vanished and he exclaimed: "My Lord and my God."

Christ, you observe, does not appeal merely to the sense of hearing, for in that alone they might possibly have been deceived, but He appeals also to the powerful and unerring testimony of **sight** and **touch**. Sane men would not confound the unmistakable touch of flesh and bone with the elusive properties of a ghost. Matter and spirit can not be thus confused. Nor, after the first flush of astonishment and fright, would they mistake the familiar voice and the well-known features of Him with whom they had been in intimate fellowship for the past three years, for the appearance of an unknown spirit; nor yet the fact of seeing Him eat food before their eyes for a vision of the mind.

These facts are of the utmost importance in connection with a prevalent form of disbelief in the Resurrection, called "The Vision Theory." The proponents of this wild theory, which in one form or another is taught in some of our schools today, say the Apostles were expecting a Resurrection. Their minds were in a state of such feverish excitement and anticipation that they mistook mental impressions for actual appearances.

To charge that the Apostles were thus self-deceived is to attribute to them a degree of imbecility that is utterly inconsistent with the

calmness and majesty and power of the Gospel narratives, and with the mighty work which these men afterwards accomplished.

Moreover, the theory is without a shadow of foundation in fact. We search the records in vain for even the faintest evidence of feverish excitement. Not one of them approached the sepulchre until the third day, and then in mingled amazement and curiosity after word had been brought by the startled women that the tomb was empty. On the contrary, they had shut themselves up in a state of gloom, perplexity and utter hopelessness. In this state of brain and heart, could they have mistaken a mere shadow of the mind for the actual touch of flesh and bone? Can you stretch your hand in air and then persuade yourself that you have laid it upon the body of a friend? One who in all seriousness charged you with having done so would simply provoke your amusement, your anger, or your contempt.

But the number who witnessed these appearances of the risen Christ—more than five hundred at one time—precludes the idea of hallucination. It is simply inconceivable that more than five hundred men and women in the open air, with as many different temperaments, should at exactly the same time, be in exactly the same mental state, and imagine that they saw precisely the same mental image. Such unparalleled agreement of most unusual mental states among so great a number would be a miracle scarcely less strange than the actual appearance of the risen Jesus.

Moreover, those who accept this strange hypothesis must explain why there were only a limited number of these appearances, and why all took place within a brief and clearly marked period of time. There are recorded just eleven of these appearances to the original body of disciples, and these all occurred within a definite period of forty days—beginning at a given time and ending at a given time. Why men and women in such a state of feverish excitement, as this theory presupposes, should have waited three days before they beheld any vision, and why at the end of forty days this extravagant mental state should suddenly and sharply cease, are facts which the critics quite wisely have not attempted to explain.

But beside all this, the whole theory rests upon an assumption that is in the very teeth of the real facts, viz., that the **disciples expected a Resurrection**. Every atom of evidence goes to show that this is the **very thing they did not expect**, and this fact gives greater force to their subsequent conviction, and to their full-hearted acceptance of the truth. It is true that the disciples had heard Christ predict that He would be crucified and would rise again, but they understood not. They gave to His words some figurative meaning, which to them was not clear. They were Jews and like the rest of their nation, held erroneous views as to what their Messiah was to be. They regarded Him as a mighty prince who would establish a world-kingdom, and so every reference to His humiliation they interpreted in a highly symbolic sense. In the

ninth chapter of Mark, it is stated that "they questioned one with another what the rising from the dead should mean." In the preceding chapter, we are told that when Christ spoke of His death and resurrection, "Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying: 'This be far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.'" The devout women who came early to the tomb came not to greet the risen Lord but to perform a last loving ministry to their dead friend by preparing anew His body for its last long sleep. They even wondered how they should reach the dead: "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" (Mark 16: 1-3). Surely there is no glint of an expected resurrection here.

The two disciples who walked with sad hearts toward Emmaus on Sunday afternoon voiced their shattered hopes in these plaintive words as they thought of the Crucified One: "But we trusted that it had been he that should have redeemed Israel" (Luke 24: 21). Their hope of a conquering Messiah was locked in the tomb with the dead Christ.

Thomas came into the upper room after Jesus had come and gone on that first Sunday evening, and his brethren told him: "We have seen the Lord." But Thomas answered: "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." The very antithesis of an expectation that Christ would rise!

Thus the record shows that not one of the

disciples expected His resurrection, and even that some of the women that believed, with characteristic love and fidelity, had gone to the grave to anoint anew His body with rich spices on the very morning that He rose from the dead.

From Friday to Sunday they were plunged into utter gloom and hopelessness, disheartened and despairing, mourning over the wreck of their bright hopes which they believed to be buried in the tomb in Joseph's garden. When the report of the Resurrection came they received it with incredulity and refused to believe until they had actually seen and touched and talked with Him. It was this disbelief rising at last into assured conviction which suddenly transformed this company of timid, disheartened disciples into a band of bold and fearless preachers of Christ and his Resurrection, whom neither threats nor prison, persecution nor impending death, could turn from their self-devoted task. And when we turn to the Acts and the Epistles we find it was His crucifixion and resurrection, the crowning proofs of His Messiahship, that formed the keynote of all their preaching. This complete and wonderful transformation from utter despair to intense activity forced even the German rationalists, Paulus and Strauss, whose cold scepticism was seldom altered even by cold facts, to admit that "something extraordinary must have occurred."

With all its boasted wisdom and scholarship, this theory, vulnerable at every point, is the utmost that modern infidelity can advance in ex-

planation of great facts too well attested to be flatly rejected even by it.

There is indeed an off-shoot of this infidel view that is widely current in some sections to-day—a rabid rationalism resident even in the Redeemer's church. Its proponents deny the supernatural elements of our glorious faith, and declare that while His body could not rise, they believe in a "spiritual resurrection." But spirit can not die, and therefore can not be restored to life, and hence a "spiritual resurrection" is no resurrection at all, but merely a very shallow delusion and a snare—an irrational attempt to rationalize a supernatural Faith: It empties of its meaning the great declaration 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: and that he was seen (of many) . . . And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain . . . if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished . . . But now is **Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.**" (I. Cor. 15: 3-20).

Moreover, Saul of Tarsus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the followers of Jesus, is confronted in his mad career by the risen Christ, and from a relentless persecutor of the Christians becomes the foremost preacher of the Christ and of his Resurrection. Christianity can safely challenge the world to offer any adequate explanation of the conversion of a man of

Paul's position and character and talents—acknowledged leader of his people, with nothing to gain and everything to lose if Christ were not all that His people claim for Him—except that Christ Jesus was indeed risen from the dead, and had appeared in person to him on the Damascus road.

There is another argument too weighty to be omitted in this review of the evidence, yet one which we can merely state in passing. It is the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week as a perpetual memorial of the fact that the Redeemer rose from the dead on that day. The Fourth of July commemorates the birth of a nation. It might have been observed by a few here and there in any case, but the day could never have obtained nation-wide recognition had not the event which it celebrates actually occurred. In the same way, Sunday could never have displaced the day which had been observed by God's people for at least four thousand years, and be universally recognized by the Church of the Living God, had not the event which it commemorates actually taken place.

This is a rapid outline of the main evidence upon which we base our belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, our divine Lord and Redeemer. It may safely be declared that we have "an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast"—that our faith rests upon a foundation that can never be moved.

Without the Resurrection, the Apostles must have lost all faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and

would have gone back to Judaism, and thus Christianity would have died at its birth.

It is the cardinal fact of the Gospel, and the continued existence of Christianity in the world is itself a mighty, ever-present witness to its truth. It stands unshaken by the assaults of nineteen hundred years because its proof is overwhelming.

A brilliant lawyer, known in his prime the country over, and associated with some of the most notable judicial cases in our history, once said to me: "I have never won a case in court upon evidence so clear and conclusive as that which convinces me of the Resurrection of my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

"It is," says the great Dr. Charles Hodge, "the best authenticated event in the history of the world."

The doctrinal and practical bearings of this subject are many and varied. I select but two, and these will be briefly stated.

First, I would remind you that our trust is **not in a dead Christ**. "Christ that died" is the beginning of the glorious Gospel of the Son of God. But we can not stop there. We rest secure only when we can add: "Yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom. 8: 34). Once, for our sakes, He permitted Himself to be mocked and buffeted and spitted upon and nailed to the accursed tree. Now He is raised "far above all principality and power and might

and dominion, and every name that is named," "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father." Oh, wondrous love! This exalted Prince condescends to be our Saviour and our unforgetting Friend. "In his presence is fulness of joy; at his right hand, there are pleasures forevermore."

Again, **Christ's Resurrection is the prophecy and pledge of our own**. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul teaches that our hope for time and for eternity hinges upon this great fact. "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. For if in this life alone we have hope we are of all men most miserable."

He died on Calvary's Cross for our sins. He rose again on the third day to prove His right to die, and so became "the first fruits of them that slept." (I. Cor. 15: 17-19).

And so ye who mourn for loved ones whom you have laid beneath the sod, take courage. Thy loved ones shall rise again. If their lives are hid with Christ in God, then "beyond the smiling and the weeping," beyond that which mortals mean by death, they shall rise and reign with Him in endless day. For the risen Jesus proclaims: "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14: 19).