

The Resurrection and Exaltation of Jesus Christ

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The contents of this book were designed for use as short radio sermons for the Indian sub-continent and for use as Bible class lessons in Churches of Christ. This explains why some topics are treated in two or more chapters. We invite you to study these thoughts and to learn more about the Churches of Christ.

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THE EMPTY TOMB

Text - Acts 2:29-36

That a man could rise from the dead after three days is very improbable. Most would simply declare it impossible. In Jesus Christ, though, we are not dealing with just "any" man. Jesus is the great "I am", not the great "I was". During the days of the "God is dead theology" a bumper sticker said, "My God is alive! Sorry about yours." Jesus Christ is alive. That is the message of the resurrection. One popular rock music opera a few years ago was "Jesus Christ Superstar". While it had some fine music and some beautiful thoughts in it, the whole opera pretended to give a view of Jesus from the viewpoint of Judas. The recording ended with Jesus in the tomb. Granted, some theatrical productions of the opera would symbolically portray the resurrection with a light at the end, but the presentation of Christ in the original was deficient. It left him in the tomb. The story of Jesus Christ, the gospel of Jesus Christ, is incomplete without the resurrection. In this study we will examine reasons for believing in the resurrection. We must realize that Christianity rests on the most sure of foundations, the best proven FACT of ancient history, the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the grave.

Our first argument for the resurrection of Jesus as found in our lesson text is that the tomb of Jesus was empty: "David...both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). Early on that Sunday morning long ago Mary Magdalene, another Mary, Salome, and some other women went to the tomb. They found the tomb empty. They told Peter and John who then ran to the tomb. John got there first but he refrained from entering. Peter arrived and marched in to examine the open tomb. "Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed" (Jn. 20:8). They were convinced by what they saw. It was not just that the tomb was empty, but the grave clothes were evidence. The Greek original may imply that those cloths that had been wrapped around the body of Jesus were lying there as if his body had evaporated out of them. Even if this is not implied, what they saw was a very orderly scene, not one of wild confusion that grave robbers would have left behind. Grave robbers would have taken the body, cloths and all. They would not have taken time to neatly remove the cloths, fold them up, and then take only the body of Jesus.

How can we know for sure the tomb was empty, though. Some skeptics are not convinced. They claim the apostles preached the resurrection of Jesus without ever investigating the tomb. For example, Cadoux argues:

Once the disciples were convinced by the visions they had had that Jesus was alive and active despite His death on the cross, their belief that His tomb must therefore be empty would follow inevitably as the night the day, whether there was any actual evidence for it or not (C. J. Cadoux, *The Historic Mission of Jesus* (1941), p. 284; cited by F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Reprint: Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 61-62.

What Cadoux is saying is that the disciples became convinced, whether by imagination or hallucination, that Jesus was alive. They then began to talk about how real his presence seemed among them. Soon they began to preach that he was alive, resurrected even, without checking the tomb to see if it was empty.

This denial of the resurrection, though, is pitifully weak in dealing with the facts. It involves many errors of reasoning. It does not explain the actions of the soldiers who guarded the tomb of Jesus. These soldiers would be diligent in keeping their duty. A failure in duty could mean the life of a soldier during those days. When they awoke and discovered the absence of the body of Jesus, they were terrified. They went and told the chief priests and elders. Money was then paid to these men to lie: "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep'" (Mat. 28:13). If the body of Jesus was not missing from the tomb, why would they have bothered to tell such a lie. It put their own lives in danger. If the body of Jesus was still in his tomb, why did they not simply display it to discredit the apostles' claims?

I used to live in Frankfort, KY (U.S.A.). On a hill overlooking the beautiful Kentucky River and the state capitol building of Kentucky is the grave of Daniel Boone, the famous frontiersman of early America days. This spot is a favorite spot for people to visit as are graves of famous people in India (Taj Mahal, Humayum's Tomb) and everywhere around the world. Suppose I got up some Sunday morning and proclaimed on the radio show I used to have there that Daniel Boone had been raised from the dead. Would everyone immediately believe me without checking my story? Of course not. People are curious. People want proof. City officials would go to Boone's grave and see if it really was empty. If it was not empty, I would be made a laughingstock before the whole town. If it was empty, only then would anyone begin to take my proclamation seriously.

Many years ago I was a student at the University of Alabama (U.S.A.) during the days of protest against the Vietnam involvement. Times were very tense then as students protested against our military actions. Students were marching and many law enforcement officials were brought in from various places around the state. One morning a young man from next door came to my room and woke me up saying, "They burned down the old R.O.T.C. building last night!" I told him to leave me alone and let me go back to sleep. He insisted it was the truth. Finally I said, "Prove it to me. Let me get dressed and let's drive over there and see." Someone had burned that old building down in protest.

My point, though, is that people are curious. All people do not believe any story they hear immediately without examining the evidence. When the apostles declared that Jesus was raised from the dead, let us not be so naive as to think everyone believed them immediately. When they claimed his tomb was empty, let us realize that curious human nature would prompt many to go look at the tomb. They would want to see with their own eyes if it really was empty. If it was empty, it would confirm the apostles' preaching. If the body of Jesus was still there, the apostles of Jesus would be ridiculed and mocked all over Jerusalem. So we can declare with no doubt or hesitation at all that the tomb of Jesus Christ was empty on that Sunday long ago.

WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses." (Acts 2:32).

C. T. Craig once said, "The early Christians did not believe in the resurrection of Christ because they could not find his dead body. They believed because they did find a living Christ" [The Beginning of Christianity (1943), p.135; cited by F. F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame, p. 62]. In our last lesson we studied the empty tomb of Christ as an evidence of his resurrection. The empty tomb with its graveclothes was enough to convince some of the disciples. Others believed only when they saw Christ alive. The empty tomb is an essential argument to the resurrection, but not the only one. There is no butterfly without an empty cocoon, but there is more to a butterfly than the empty cocoon.

We have heard the expression, "Seeing is believing." For some people seeing Jesus alive meant belief in his resurrection. Mary Magdalene, for example, did not recognize Jesus at first. She saw a man in the garden and assumed it was the gardener. She inquired about the body of Jesus, and when Jesus said, "Mary", she recognized his voice.

Mary! Just one word;
Twas all he need employ.
To turn a woman's sorrowing heart,
Into a well of joy.
She thought He was the gardener;
"Master!" she answered now.
His voice, her name -- it was enough.
She asked not, "Is it thou?"

The disciples were perplexed and afraid, hiding behind locked doors. It was a Sunday evening. Suddenly Jesus appeared to them. Thomas was not with them. When they told Thomas later, he did not believe their testimony. Eight days later he was with them when Jesus appeared to them under similar circumstances. This time Thomas believed when he saw Jesus' body with its wounds. He cried out, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus responded, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn. 20:27-28). These are not all the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, though. Paul summarizes the many witnesses who saw Jesus alive:

...he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and...he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (1 Cor. 15:4-7).

The fact that there were so many witnesses demonstrates that the resurrection of Jesus could not have been a hallucination. Five hundred people do not see the same hallucination. Also notice the phrase, "most of whom are still alive", in the passage. Why is that included? What Paul is saying is that if his readers did not believe him, they could go ask most of those five hundred who

saw him. Paul's assertion that Jesus was raised from the dead was supported by numerous, reliable witnesses who could and would corroborate Paul's teaching. In the Old Testament they needed two or three witnesses to establish a fact. The resurrection of Jesus Christ has been proven as a fact by over five hundred witnesses.

One of the greatest witnesses for the resurrection of Christ is the author of the letter to the Corinthians, Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus. While it is admitted that some of the witnesses were partial to Jesus, already being followers of him, Paul was a harsh critic of Christianity. He had been there when the first Christian martyr, Stephen, was put to death. He approvingly watched over the garments of those murdering Stephen. At the time he saw Jesus alive he was on his way to have Christians arrested. When an ardent opponent is converted and becomes a witness, we need to take his testimony seriously.

Thus far in this series of studies on the resurrection we have seen two reasons for believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. First is the indisputable evidence that his tomb was empty on that Sunday morning long ago. Second there were many witnesses who saw Christ alive. These witnesses consisted of friends and foes. Those witnesses had nothing to gain in this life materially for claiming Jesus was alive. Many of them received hardship and even death for their testimony.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just a technical point of history to be argued in an ivory tower, however. It is very important in relation to our salvation from sin. Paul said you must believe in the resurrection of Jesus if you want to be saved: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved" (Rom. 10:9-10).

Not only must we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, we need to perform an act of obedience that is interwoven with the resurrection of Jesus in its symbolism and in its effects. When we are immersed in water (in baptism) we are imitating the death and burial of Jesus. When we come up out of the waters of baptism, we are imitating his resurrection from the grave. Paul explains:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Rom. 6:3-5).

If you are convinced that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that after he died on the cross he was raised from the dead, you need to put your faith into action by being baptized (immersed) in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If you do this, just as Christ was raised from the dead, you will be raised from the death of sin. You will be given new spiritual life, because your old sins will be forgiven by God. Your conscience will be cleared. You can start all over again! It has all been made possible by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

CHANGED LIVES

The empty tomb of Jesus is one proof of his resurrection from the dead. Also there were many witnesses who saw him alive. In our continued study of the resurrection of Jesus Christ we will now examine a third argument -- the changed lives that resulted from Jesus' resurrection. Lives

of men and women were changed in such a way that nothing except a living Christ can explain those changes.

The apostles themselves are good examples here. The apostles had been cowards in the Garden of Gethsemane, running away and leaving Jesus alone. In the following hours Peter was asked three times if he was a friend or associate of Jesus. He denied that he knew him all three times. Suddenly, though, in Acts 2 we see these very same apostles, these cowards, boldly proclaiming the name of Jesus in Jerusalem. They were threatened with punishment. They were beaten. They were thrown in jail and threatened again. If tradition serves us right, all but one of them died a violent death for their faith in Jesus. Some of them were stoned; others crucified. And what did they gain? Nothing! None of them prospered financially or materially. It ought to be clear that men such as these were not lying when they said that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Another group of individuals whose lives were changed by the resurrection of Jesus would be the brothers of Jesus. Technically we could call them half-brothers of Jesus. They shared the same fleshly mother, but not the same father. Their physical father was Joseph while Jesus was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit for God was his Father. Early in Jesus' ministry we know that his fleshly half-brothers did not believe in him: "For even his brothers did not believe in him" (Jn. 7:5). We are not told when or why a change came in their lives, but after the resurrection of Jesus we read this: "All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (Acts 1:14). Their lives had been changed by the resurrection of Jesus too.

One of the most remarkable changes was the turnabout that occurred in the life of Saul of Tarsus. Saul was an opponent of Christ and Christianity. He was so opposed that he was a leader in having Christians arrested and thrown in jail. Jesus made a special appearance to Saul on the road to Damascus and Saul's life was changed. His name became Paul and he spent the rest of his life preaching and teaching Jesus. Some have said that next to Jesus, he is the most influential person in the history of Christianity. Tradition says he died a violent death for his faith. What could have turned such an opponent around unless he really saw Jesus alive. As Paul explains,

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain (1 Cor. 15:8-10).

Two hundred years ago George Littleton wrote that this change in Paul's life is by itself enough proof to establish the resurrection of Jesus as a fact: "The conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation." Gilbert West and Lord Littleton had agreed to work together to undermine Christian thought. They believed that if they could disprove two things, they could accomplish that goal, namely, (1) the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and (2) the conversion of Paul. Each chose one topic and studied for months on ways to explain and disprove the facts. When they met to compare notes, instead of having disproved the resurrection of Jesus or having explained away the conversion of Paul, they were both persuaded by them. Littleton realized that there was only one explanation for why Saul of Tarsus changed from an opponent of Christianity to an advocate of it -- he witnessed a resurrected Jesus Christ on that road to Damascus.

Just as the resurrection of Jesus changed the lives of the apostles, the brothers of Jesus, and Saul of Tarsus, if you allow the truth of the resurrection to come into your life, it will change your life too. The story is told of a man in a British colony who had read part of the New Testament. He

knew the book had come from a British missionary. He only had a portion of it and only read about the death of Jesus on the cross. He decided he wanted to be a Christian, but he did not know exactly what to do. He noticed that the British missionary was wearing a black arm band, so he decided to do the same. He assumed that such identified one as a follower of Christ. He did not realize that the missionary only wore that temporarily as a custom to signify that he had lost a loved one to death. When this custom was explained to the man imitating the missionary, he said he would continue to wear the arm band anyway because Jesus had died for him on the cross. A short time later, though, this man heard a sermon on the resurrection of Christ. He took that arm band off and never wore it again. He now knew that his Lord was not dead and buried in a tomb. Jesus Christ was alive and resurrected from the grave!

The fact of the resurrection of Jesus should change your life by bringing joy and hope into it. Let me illustrate with a story. Years ago during the war between England and France, in a battle between Wellington and Napoleon, news of the battle was carried by ship across the English Channel to England. It was then sent by semaphore across the countryside to London. On the tall Winchester Cathedral the final message was received. Letter by letter it was seen and shouted out. "W E L L I N G T O N D E F E A T E D ..." Then a fog set in and the mood in London was very somber. "Wellington defeated." Everyone was terribly sad. Suddenly when the fog cleared they began sending the message again. "Defeated" was not the end of the message. The message was, "Wellington defeated the enemy." Everyone's sorrow turned into joy.

Long ago on a Friday evening the disciples of Jesus Christ were sad. They had seen their hopes crushed. Their master had been crucified on a Roman cross. Within three days, though, their sorrow turned into joy, the joy of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave. Their defeat was changed into victory. It is that joy and victory that we offer to you through your faith and obedience to Christ, so that you might share in his resurrection. You can have a share in eternal life through him. He is the resurrection and the life.

OUR RESPONSE TO THE RESURRECTION

What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave mean to you? Is it just a pretty story to tell? Is it merely a nice theme for some movies or books? Let us put it on a personal level: "What are you supposed to do in response to the resurrection of Jesus Christ?" We can answer that question by turning to the Bible and seeing the response that others made to the resurrection of Jesus. Which ones were approved of by God and Christ in their response? Those are the ones we need to imitate.

Let us begin by examining a portion of Matthew's account of the resurrection of Jesus:

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulcher. 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 upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay (Mt. 28:1-6).

Believe. - First of all we see that we must respond to the resurrection of Jesus with faith. His resurrection proves that he was not a liar or a deceiver. His resurrection proves that he was who he claimed to be, the Son of God. The resurrection was hard for even the disciples to believe at first. When the women reported what they saw to the apostles, they did not believe the women at first. They thought it was nothing more than idle talk from foolish women. Eventually eleven of the twelve believed. They all told Thomas that they had seen Jesus alive. He would not believe, however, until Jesus appeared to him. When Jesus did appear to Thomas, he said to him, "Do not be faithless, but believing" (Jn. 20:27). Then he believed too. The resurrection event was so staggering, so amazing, so unheard of that it was difficult for them to believe it. It was almost too good to be true. So faith was their response as it must be ours today. When Thomas finally believed, Jesus said to him: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn. 20:29). Jesus pronounced a blessing on us if we would believe in him, even though we have not seen him literally as they did. Our question to you in this lesson is, "Do you believe Jesus was raised from the dead? Do you believe that he is the Son of God?"

Worship. - A second response we ought to have when we are confronted with the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an attitude of worship. When the women left the empty tomb of Jesus they "departed quickly from the tomb with fear" (Mt. 28:8). Fear and worship are not the same thing, but fear in the sense of awe or reverence is a part of worship. These women left the tomb to tell the other disciples about Jesus. As they were going Jesus appeared to them and greeted them. The Bible then says, "And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him" (Mt. 28:9). Likewise when Thomas saw the resurrected Christ, he said, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:28). This was a sentence of worship and adoration. He realized that the resurrection of Jesus meant that he truly was God's only Son, the Lord of lords. Our question based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ is, "Whom do you worship? Do you worship God as a Christian?"

Joy. - Another reaction of the women who left the empty tomb of Jesus was "great joy" (Mt. 28:8). They were so excited they were running to tell the news to the other disciples. Does it put joy

in your heart to know that there is a hope for eternal life and a resurrection from the grave to that eternal life?

Sharing. - Finally the reaction of the women at the tomb was a desire to share the good news of the resurrection of Jesus with others. The angel at the empty tomb told them to do this: "Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead" (Mt. 28:7). Moments later when Jesus himself met them and greeted them, he likewise said, "Go and tell my brethren" (Mt. 28:10). After Jesus had made several post-resurrection appearances, before his final departure he gave the great commission to the apostles. In essence it told them to share the good news of his resurrection with the world: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19).

"Go tell." That is the first command given to those who saw the resurrected Christ. We should go tell the whole world because it is such a marvelous, joyous truth. We should go tell because it is good news. We should go tell because it brings hope of salvation from sin. We should go tell because it lets us know that death is not the end of it all. There is life on the other side. It is said that at one point in history the coat of arms of Spain said, "There is nothing beyond." Most people in Europe believed that Spain was the end of the world. Eventually some men such as Christopher Columbus became convinced that the world was round. After his discovery of the Americas, the coat of arms had to be changed to "There is more beyond."

Some wonder if death is the end of it all or if there is more beyond death. There is more. We can be certain due to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. There is an old story about a cave that two men were about to enter. One of them suddenly stopped and pointed to the ground. There were many animal tracks leading into the cave, but there were no tracks leading out. Something inside that cave was eating everything up that came into it. One man said to the other man, "I do not know what is in that cave, but I do not want to go inside and find out." Likewise death has been like that cave. People keep dying, but who has come back to tell us what it would be like on the other side? Is there another side? Christ tells us there is. Do you believe this? Do you share this with others?

In this lesson we have looked at how we ought to respond to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we realize that Jesus was raised from the dead and that he is God's Son, our response should be (1) belief, (2) worship, (3) joy, and (4) a desire to share this with others around us.

THE RESURRECTION - A GREAT MIRACLE

If we want to know more about Jesus Christ, a good starting place would be his resurrection. All of the life of Jesus reveals to us his nature, but the climax was his resurrection from the grave. For example, Jesus performed many miracles, but his resurrection could be termed "a great miracle".

Early in his ministry Jesus called Philip to be a disciple. Philip went and told Nathanael about Jesus, saying: "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth" (Jn. 1:45). Nathanael was not impressed. He asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip did not try to convince him with arguments. He merely said, "Come and see." In spite of his prejudice Nathanael went to see this Jesus of Nazareth. He probably went more out of curiosity than anything else. When he arrived, Jesus greeted him as if he knew all about him. Nathanael was perplexed by this, asking, "How do you know me?" (Jn. 1:48). Jesus then amazed Nathanael by telling him where he was and what he was doing even before Philip went to get him. Such extraordinary knowledge meant only one thing to Nathanael: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (Jn. 1:49).

The response of Jesus is very interesting. He said, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these" (Jn. 1:50). And, oh, how the disciples did! The ministry of Jesus was only beginning. In the coming months they were able to witness Jesus performing miracles of healing, miracles against demonic powers and spirits, miracles of multiplication of food, miracles of nature such as the calming of a storm, miracles of prophecy, and even miracles of raising people from the dead like Lazarus.

When children play games they often try to outdo one another. One will perform some feat of throwing some object or jumping in an attempt to impress the other children. Then another child will say, "That is nothing. Watch this." He will then attempt to do something even greater. When Jesus performed the small feat of knowing where Nathanael was and what he was doing even without being there, Nathanael was impressed. In essence Jesus says, "You are impressed with that? You have not seen anything yet. I will do much greater feats."

One of the most extraordinary feats that Jesus accomplished, if not the greatest of all, was his rising from the dead after being killed on a cross. Is it not strange that some people claim to believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, yet they doubt lesser miracles the Bible claims he did? Some who believe in the resurrection doubt that Jesus walked on water. Which is more difficult to do? Both are impossible for me, but I would think resurrection is the more difficult. Some who claim to believe in the resurrection of Jesus doubt that he fed thousands of people miraculously with a few scraps of food. Which is more difficult to do? Both are impossible to me, but I again would think that rising from the dead is more difficult. The point is that if Jesus did rise from the dead, then we should have no trouble believing any of the other miracles associated with his life.

Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? This is crucial in relation to your salvation. Paul explains:

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain....If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins....If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:14, 17, 19).

If Christ has not been raised from the grave, we are to be pitied because we have no assurance of a resurrection. The grave is the end of it all if Christ has not been raised.

The story is told about a man visiting in a crypt at Westminster Abbey. People were buried in this underground vault. He did not hear the guard warn all visitors that it was closing time. Suddenly he realized that the huge, solid oak doors had been shut. He ran over to them and began to beat on them with his fists. He shouted at the top of his voice. He paused to listen, but he could hear no response. He was extremely frightened. If no one heard him he would have to spend a whole night in that grave. Suddenly he heard the rusty gate outside squeaking. He knew that was the keeper leaving to go home. He screamed even louder for help, and finally collapsed unconscious on the floor of the vault from fear. Luckily the keeper heard his screams for help, and he came to let him out. When he open the huge doors, he found the man unconscious on the floor from fear.

That man was afraid of spending only one night in a grave. Realize what it means, though, if Christ has not been raised. There is no resurrection for anyone. The grave is the end for all. We will all spend eternity in our graves. Thanks be to God that death is not the end of it all. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee that there will be a general resurrection of all at the end of time. The question is not will you rise from the grave, but what kind of resurrection will you have? Will it be a resurrection to eternal life or eternal condemnation?

A missionary told the story of a tribal chief whom he befriended in Africa. He taught the man the gospel. In the course of teaching him the gospel he also taught him the resurrection, an integral part of the gospel. When this chief heard of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, he started naming names of various people and asked the missionary if those people would rise too. The missionary told him, "Yes." That chief said, "They must not rise!" He had been cruel and heartless to many people in his lifetime. He had killed many a man. The thought of a resurrection to him was fearful.

If we have unforgiven sins, the thought of the resurrection should be fearful to us too. It will be fearful to fall into the hands of the living God with sin still charged against us. On the other hand, though, if we obey the gospel of Jesus Christ by believing in him and being baptized in his name, our sins will be washed away. Then the resurrection will not be fearful to us, but a glorious hope and promise.

THE UNIQUE RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was a controlling factor for the early church. It was a dominant theme in the earliest preaching of the church. In the very first gospel sermon it was declared that "God raised him up..." (Acts 2:24). Old Testament scriptures were cited as proof that the authors "foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ" (Acts 2:31). In the very next chapter of Acts the apostles were proclaiming, "God raised [him] from the dead" (Acts 3:15). The Jewish leaders became annoyed because the apostles were, in their words, "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). Again the same chapter mentions Jesus Christ and immediately remarks: "...whom God raised from the dead" (Acts 4:10).

No other religion stresses the resurrection like Christianity. Some religions have a belief in immortality, but few of them even make that important in their creed. No other religion claims that their leader and founder rose from the dead except for Christianity. No other religious belief claims that their own faith is null and void, empty and vain if their leader is still in his tomb. Toynbee, an extremely well-known historian around the world, has a very interesting chapter in which he compares the events in and surrounding the life of Jesus which are common to the lives of other great heroes and saviours throughout history. He compares Jesus with other individuals in eighty-seven ways. There are many, many similarities. First he demonstrates that many of them are of royal lineage. Jesus was of the kingly line of David. The last comparison is that the executor is converted. At the death of Jesus one of the soldiers who put him to death made a confession that Jesus was surely the Son of God. Later Saul of Tarsus, a strong opponent of Jesus, was converted. Toynbee shows that this sort of thing has happened with some other great figures in history. The parallels of Toynbee are interesting and full of insight.

Parallels are common, though, and dissimilarities are usually more important than similarities. Suppose a friend had two candidates for you to choose between in marriage. You might make a thousand comparisons between two persons who were prospects for you to marry. One very important dissimilarity, though, would distinguish between the two very quickly and cause you to choose one and reject the other. Even if you discovered that both of these persons had two arms, two eyes, a brain, a pleasing personality, and so forth, you would still reject one and chose the other very easily if you found out that one was male and the other was female. We should expect that there are numerous similarities between Jesus and other personages in history. We ought to be shocked if that were not so. What is crucial, though, is to ask, "How is Jesus different?" There is one very striking difference that is evident in Toynbee's study. He does NOT compare Jesus with any other person by saying that both of them were raised from the dead. On this point Jesus is unique.

Let me give another example of this principle. In Merrill F. Unger's book *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954) he notes that there are other ancient accounts of creation which archaeologists have discovered such as the creation epic from Babylon in Mesopotamia. After reviewing this creation story Unger then lists several resemblances between the Babylonian account of creation and the Bible account of creation. Some of these he calls "striking", but he quickly adds that "in the overall picture the likenesses serve to accentuate the differences, which are much more radical and significant" (p. 32). The fact that there are similarities only makes the more important differences more dramatic. For example, the Bible account of creation is monotheistic while the Babylonian account is polytheistic. So in this example, there are similarities, but the differences are more important. Likewise there are many similarities between

Jesus and other heroes of history. We expect this. What matters is how Jesus was different. His resurrection makes him unique.

Let me give one more example from Unger's book. Just as archaeologists have discovered creation stories that are similar to the one in the Bible, they have discovered stories of the great flood like the one in the Bible. One of these, the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, is said to bear such striking resemblances to the Bible account that its first appearance was "nothing short of sensational" (p. 55). Out of all the ancient traditions discovered thus far, it is the closest parallel to the Bible. Unger gives eleven pages of these remarkable parallels (pp. 55-65). Really these are not that surprising. If both accounts go back to tell about the same true, historical event, we would expect such parallels. Unger then comments,

"Despite the fact that there are numerous similarities between the Babylonian and the Biblical account of the Flood, in some cases startling similarities, the divergences in the stories are much more significant and fundamental. These differences are all the more apparent because they are set in bolder relief by their connection with the likenesses" (p. 65).

Again let us parallel this with the life of Jesus. His life can be compared with many great heroes of history in many ways. This is to be expected. What really matters, though, is the uniqueness of Jesus. How is he different? His resurrection makes him unique, without equal, and beyond comparison.

In that regard he stands alone in human history. There were a very few individuals in the Bible who were raised from the dead, but these were what we call resuscitations rather than resurrections. These people apparently died a natural death once again whereas Jesus was raised, he never had to face death again. Paul explains: "For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). The reason for this is seen in the transformation that takes place at resurrection. Again Paul explains:

Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality....the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

The conclusion of this is obvious. "Jesus Christ" was "designated Son of God in power...by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:1,4).

REACTIONS TO THE RESURRECTION - 1

Jesus Christ, the author and founder of Christianity, was killed by crucifixion on false charges almost two thousand years ago. One of the foundation doctrines of Christianity, though, is that this same Jesus rose from the dead within three days. What is your reaction to such a teaching? Some think the idea is ridiculous. Others scoff at it. Most ignore the implications of it.

A lady in Europe almost 100 years ago was very much opposed to Christianity and all its doctrines. She died a wealthy woman at the age of thirty. They buried her according to the instructions she had left behind. Her grave was covered with a slab of granite which was then surrounded with square blocks of stone. The corners were then fastened with heavy iron clamps. The inscription on her grave read, "This burial place purchased to all eternity must never be opened." She did not believe in the resurrection and ridiculed that Christian doctrine by her burial instructions. Her grave was made so securely that if humans left it alone, she felt certain it would never be disturbed. In time a little birch tree seed sprouted by the edge of her grave. It grew and grew, slowly exerting pressure on the iron clamps. Finally the clamps broke on one side. In time the growth of the tree continued to lift up the huge piece of granite until it was resting on its side on the trunk of this huge birch tree. This mocker of the resurrection found that God is not mocked.

In our study of the resurrection today we will concentrate on the reaction of people close to Jesus when they witnessed the resurrected Christ. As we study their reactions, apply this lesson to yourself. If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, examine your own reaction to this resurrection event. Do you believe in it or are you skeptical? Does it perplex you or make you happy?

To see the apostles' reactions to the resurrection in its clearest light, we need to be reminded first of their disposition before the resurrection. Their hopes had been very high only days before. Jesus was drawing huge crowds to hear him preach. Jesus had performed great miracles before many witnesses. One day the whole city of Jerusalem, it seemed, had given Jesus a triumphant entry like a king arriving in the city. Crowds lined the sides of the road as Jesus rode by. The apostles' emotions were on top of the world. As one commercial in the U.S. says, "It don't get any better than this."

How quickly things changed, though. Suddenly Jesus was arrested and put on trial. Within hours he was scourged and crucified. Their leader whom they looked to as a savior was dead, hanging on a Roman cross with a mocking sign over his head which read: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Nearby people were laughing and mocking Jesus. You might describe the reaction of the disciples of Jesus as one of shock. Jesus died on a Friday. The next day was Saturday or the Jewish Sabbath. The Bible says, "On the Sabbath day they rested according to the commandment" (Lk. 23:56). We are also told, "They mourned and wept" (Mk. 16:10). How can we describe their reaction to the death of Jesus?

First, we can describe their reaction as one of despair. They were utterly crushed and despondent. They had little to look forward to. Everything they had been hoping for had been destroyed. They were like little children who were lost. Imagine how people feel after a storm comes and wrecks everything they have. That is how the disciples felt. Two of them were walking on the road to Emmaus talking with a stranger, not knowing it was Jesus. He asked them about the recent events in Jerusalem and they told him of Jesus. The key phrase for our study is one that shows the low, depressed mood they were in. Dejectedly they declared, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Lk. 24:21). When Jesus was killed the disciples simply gave up hope.

Second, the disciples reacted in fear. When Jesus was arrested in the garden "all the disciples forsook him and fled" (Mt. 26:56). Later one of them, Peter, denied he knew Jesus. Others kept their distance from Jesus in fear. They were scared for their own lives. Even after the resurrection, we are told by John, "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews..." (Jn.20:19). Their fear is understandable. To the Jews Jesus was a blasphemer. To the Romans he was a potential troublemaker or rebel. The disciples feared that they too would be arrested and put to death.

Third, when the disciples finally heard of the resurrection of Jesus, that he was no longer dead but alive, their reaction was skepticism. Some women were the first to find the empty tomb. Angels told the women of the resurrection, saying, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" These women went and told the apostles, but "these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (Lk. 24:11). We are told by Mark that one of the women saw Jesus alive and reported it to the apostles, but again "when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it" (Mk. 16:11). When the two men on the road to Emmaus saw Jesus alive they told others, but "they did not believe them." When Thomas was told by the rest of the apostles that they had seen Jesus alive, he doubted their story. It is not surprising, then, that when Jesus appeared to the disciples that "he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen" (Mk. 16:14). They were so slow to believe as they tried to make sense of things. At Latourette, the great historian, said, the "disciples did not expect the resurrection and that it took them completely by surprise."

Let us review these reactions. The disciples reacted to the death of Jesus with despair and great fear. Their immediate reaction to his resurrection was that of skepticism. The point of this survey is that the apostles and disciples were greatly changed by something. As we will see in our next lesson, they changed from men of despair to men of joy. They changed from men of fear to men of great boldness. They changed from skeptical doubters of the resurrection to men full of worship for Jesus and men full of hope. The only logical explanation for these changes in these men is that Jesus really did rise from the grave. It was the resurrection that had this tremendous impact on their lives.

REACTIONS TO THE RESURRECTION - 2

Before Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross his disciples were full of optimism. Their expectations were extremely high. Only days before he had made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Then the arrest, trial, and death of Jesus came as a terrible shock. Their reaction was one of despair and fear as we saw in our last lesson. When Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to the disciples alive, their first reaction was skepticism. Let us continue in our study of the reactions of the disciples to the resurrection of Jesus.

One reaction of the disciples was joy. At first the resurrection seemed too good to be true. On one occasion Jesus appeared to the disciples saying, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Lk. 24:39). It all was so amazing it was difficult for them to believe. The Bible says, "They still disbelieved for joy, and wondered" (Lk. 24:41). As Lenski explains, "The heart is too small to take in the great joy all at once. There is a flutter as if the reality might after all not be real" (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* [Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1946], p. 1201). Their reaction was like that of a mother upon hearing the news that her soldier son whom she thought was dead was actually alive and returning home. She exclaimed, "I just can't believe it!" Or imagine someone winning a big contest and receiving 10,000 rupees. They would probably shout out, "I just can't believe it!" Likewise the disciples were overcome with joy at the wonderful revelation that Jesus was alive!

As the truth dawned in their hearts they were all full of happiness and joy: "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (Jn. 20:20). Not long ago in Waco, Texas (U.S.A.) two young boys were playing next to a drainage ditch after a heavy rainstorm. One of them fell in and was swept into the underground portion of the ditch. The ditch was contained in pipes for the length of about two kilometers before it dumped into the Brazos River. The rain had been so heavy and the ditch was so full everyone assumed the boy was dead. Authorities were already dragging the river for his body the next day as the waters receded. Back at the entrance where the ditch went underground, though, the brother of this boy and another young man began their own dangerous search underground. They not only found the lost boy's body, they found him alive -- clinging to some branches in the underground ditch. He had fallen asleep there and rested all night long. When the young men emerged with the young man still alive, imagine the joy everyone felt. Imagine the unspeakable joy his mother felt. Certainly it was an overwhelming joy like this that overcame the disciples of Jesus when they found he was still alive.

A second reaction of the disciples was that of worship. The meaning of the event began to become clear to them. They understood more now than ever before who Jesus was. When Thomas saw Jesus alive, he said, "My Lord and my God" (Jn. 20:28). By that declaration he was acknowledging Jesus as Lord and divine. As Matthew tells us, "And when they saw him they worshipped him" (Mt. 28:17). These were not half-convinced, half-interested men. These were men who had witnessed something tremendous and unprecedented. They were now men with a mighty conviction about Jesus.

A third reaction of the disciples was that of hope. Once they believed in the resurrection, they began to understand that it implied hope for a similar resurrection for them. Jesus Christ controls our destiny. He has been victorious even over death, so we have nothing to fear. From Central Africa comes an interesting story of hope in Jesus. The missionaries there converted a witch doctor named Malamba. To give evidence of his conversion he took the implements of his witchcraft and

burned them publicly. Later the missionaries found him sitting alone, very fearful and in distress. Other people had been taunting him saying their voodoo medicine would work on him now. They told him he had no defense against it any more. They all predicted a speedy death for the man. His subconscious fears emerged in a dream where he saw his wife digging his grave. One missionary talked with the man for an hour and did no good at all. The other missionary suggested that they teach Malamba Revelation 1:17-18 where Jesus says, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for ever more, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." This man suddenly realized that Jesus had ultimate control over his destiny, not his neighbors with their voodoo and witchcraft. Very soon Malamba was full of courage, joy, and hope. The resurrection of Jesus gave him hope.

A fourth reaction of the disciples to the resurrection of Jesus was courage. Hours before they were scared and running away to hide. Within days, though, they would be bravely standing in public preaching the name of Jesus. They were arrested and told not to speak in the name of Jesus, but their response was, "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). They were arrested again and even beaten, but they continued every day in the temple of the Jews and in homes to preach the gospel (Acts 5:42).

The despair, skepticism, and fear of the disciples gave way to joy, worship, hope, and courage. This is one of the strongest evidences of the resurrection of Jesus possible. It is an indisputable fact that the first century church believed in the resurrection of Jesus. Why did they believe this? Is it likely that they would make up a story like that? What did they have to gain? The simple truth is that they had nothing to gain. They were beaten, arrested, and martyred for their belief. If tradition is correct, all but one of the twelve apostles died a violent death for his faith in Jesus. The ONLY logical explanation for the sudden change in these disciples is the resurrection of Jesus. One writer, commenting on their reliability as witnesses, said, "They have all the signs of veracity."

Finally, then, what is your reaction to the resurrection of Jesus? Is it just a curiosity? Are you skeptical? Apathetic? Are you fearful of telling others? Your reaction can and should be one of joy, worship, hope, and courage. Will you not accept Jesus who is alive for evermore as your Lord and King?

REINCARNATION VERSUS RESURRECTION - 1

Our series of studies is concentrating on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know Christ was raised from the dead. His resurrection is proof and evidence that there will be a general resurrection at the end of time when Christ returns. Many people in the world do not believe in the Bible/Christian doctrine of the resurrection, though. Instead some of them believe in reincarnation. Our study today will look at arguments commonly used in favor of reincarnation and respond to each argument. There are many different forms of belief in reincarnation and some advocates of it may not use these arguments in exactly the same way, but the major lines of thought will be identical.

First, the most common argument for reincarnation is that it is supposedly the best explanation for evil in this world. We can see this approach in the life of Buddha who led a sheltered life during his early years. He was from a wealthy family, and he did not know how much poverty and misery there was in the world. When he got away from home and saw the universal pain that human existence meant, he searched for an explanation of it. There must be a reason for why there is evil in the world. In the way of thinking which he developed the solution to the pain and misery of the world was not resurrection and eternal life in Jesus Christ. Instead the solution for Buddha was to try to break out of the cycle of human existence. One must continually rise higher in the endless cycle of birth and rebirth until one leaves the cycle and blends back into the existence of God like a drop of water blends into the ocean.

For many in the world reincarnation is the best explanation of why some are rich and some are poor. It explains why some are born with healthy bodies while others have horrible deformities or diseases. In their past life they must have sinned so that they are suffering now for that sin. This is the law of karma. This is the most common argument for reincarnation, that it supposedly is the best explanation for evil, pain, and suffering in the world.

There are numerous problems with this view, however. For example, every soul is supposed to come from the so-called world soul. If that is true, why should anyone have to suffer during their very first cycle of life? They have no debt to pay off from a previous life. Since they have no debt to pay off, they should be able to return immediately to the world soul.

Another problem is the moral impotence of this teaching. If people are poor, sickly, or deformed due to sins in their past life, they ought to suffer for those sins. It would be wrong to try to alleviate pain and suffering. A thorough-going belief in reincarnation means an absence of social consciousness. The rich and privileged will have an arrogance due to their supposed right to be rich. They will feel no obligation to try to help the poor and make the world a better place. Likewise the poor will have no incentive to better themselves. They must stay poor and suffer for their sins. There is no reason to try to alleviate pain and disease in the world or else you would be removing the judgment a person deserves from his sins of a previous life. There is no incentive to provide equal opportunities for all people regardless of their race or caste if reincarnation is true. The social consequences of reincarnation and its corollary doctrine of karma are devastating. By contrast Christianity not only teaches in the blessings of eternal life, but it teaches us how to make this world a better and happier place for ourselves and others.

Second, a common argument for reincarnation is the existence of experiences of *deja vu*. *Deja vu* is the feeling that one has previously had a given experience. Sometimes you do something, say something, or hear something, and you suddenly feel like that has happened before. The reincarnationists claim it has! They say it happened in a previous life, thus, proving reincarnation.

One of the major problems with the déjà vu argument, though, is duplication. There are many people around today who claim they were Napoleon in a past life. They can not all be right. At least all but one of them is in error due to duplication. There was only one Napoleon. Since so many claim to be Napoleon, it ought to be evident that none of them actually was and that there is no such thing as reincarnation. Similarly many people today claim they were Jesus Christ in a previous life. Rather than such déjà vu experiences being an evidence for reincarnation, they are a proof against it. Jesus is not reincarnated in a human being here on earth today. Jesus is exalted at the right hand of the Father and is in heaven right now.

This problem of duplication is the same problem with Pentecostals in their claim of miraculous revelation and miracles from God. Some religious folk today claim that God is working directly in a miraculous way through them by the Holy Spirit. While one person makes such a claim, he may be preaching doctrine A. Meanwhile another person claims God's direct working through him in a miraculous manner, yet he is preaching doctrine B. Doctrine A and doctrine B conflict and contradict one another. If both doctrine A and B come from God, then that means God is confused and mixed up! The God of the Bible is not that kind of God. The Bible says, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33). When we read the Bible, God's revelation, we find it to be a book that has no contradictions or conflicts within it. All parts agree with one another and fit together in perfect harmony. What this means is that the Pentecostals are not really receiving a revelation from God. Instead they are teaching their human doctrines as if they were the doctrine of God. Their contradicting teachings, though, prove their doctrine is false.

In a similar manner duplication means that déjà vu is no evidence of reincarnation. If a dozen people claim to have been Napoleon in a former life, we need to realize these people were not Napoleon in a former life. These people are only deceiving themselves. In fact many such people who claim to have been famous historical personages in their former lives are locked up in lunatic asylums. They are no evidence of reincarnation. Besides, all of us dream dreams from time to time. We dream dreams about people we know in this life. We dream about things that have never happened to us. Why should we not dream a dream about someone we read about in a history book? Why should we not be able to dream a dream about something in the past which never really happened? All this proves is that the human mind can dream. It is no evidence at all of reincarnation.

In our next study we will look at arguments in the Bible against reincarnation and in favor of the Christian doctrine of resurrection.

REINCARNATION VERSUS RESURRECTION - 2

In our last study we saw that some people in the world believe in reincarnation rather than the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. We studied that reincarnation is not the best explanation for pain and evil in the world and that a belief in reincarnation leads to a low social consciousness. If reincarnation and the law of karma are true then there is little or no motivation for helping the poor, sick, hungry, and disestablished of society. Second we saw that experiences of *deja vu* are not a proof of reincarnation either. Third, some claim that the Bible teaches reincarnation and the law of karma. In this study we will see that this is false and that the Bible proclaims a very different doctrine, namely, the doctrine of the resurrection and eternal life.

The law of karma is built around the idea that a person suffers in this life for sins committed in the past life. If a person is born poor, deformed, sickly, or with few opportunities, it must be due to their previous sins. Does the Christian's Bible teach this? Some claim it does. They refer to passages like Galatians 6:7-8 as evidence:

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

For anyone to claim that passages like this teach karma or reincarnation evidences their poor understanding of the Bible. The Bible doctrine is not that we are reborn in a series of existences, paying in each for the sins of the former. The Bible doctrine is that we are born once with a clean slate, innocent in God's eyes. Our one, single life is a time of testing. At the end of this life our fate is determined by how we lived. At the end of time when Christ returns, everyone will be raised from the dead. This is the general resurrection. Everyone will then stand before God in judgement. We will go to heaven for eternal life or to hell for eternal death. We will reap in the final judgement what we have sown in our one life on earth. This is not the same as the teaching of the transmigration of souls.

Another attempt to prove reincarnation from the Bible is likewise a failure to interpret the Bible properly. In the Old Testament Elijah was a great prophet of God. At the close of the Old Testament period another prophet appeared who was very similar to Elijah in many ways. His name was John the Baptist. Speaking of him Jesus Christ said, "If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Mt. 11:14). Later we read,

The disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come? He replied, "Elijah does come, and he is to restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist (Mt. 17:10-13).

The argument is often made that Jesus believed in reincarnation and that John the Baptist was Elijah reincarnated. This is simply not the case.

John the Baptist was asked by the Jewish leaders, "Are you Elijah?" The answer of John could not be plainer. He said, "I am not" (Jn. 1:21). John the Baptist was not Elijah reincarnated. What Jesus meant is that John the Baptist was like Elijah. Someone like Elijah was supposed to come and

that someone was John. Elijah and John were both prophets. They both spent time alone in the desert. They both preached repentance and were persecuted by hostile government rulers. The two men wore similar clothing. John and Elijah were similar, but not the same person. That this is what Jesus meant rather than teaching reincarnation is certainly the case if we will examine the prediction made about John before his birth. It was foretold that "he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk. 1:17). The two men were similar, but they were not the same person.

There is no evidence in the Bible for reincarnation and the law of karma. Not only does the Bible not teach this, there are passages in the Bible which teach contradictory to reincarnation. One example is John 9:1-3.

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.

If Jesus had believed in reincarnation and the law of karma, he would have answered entirely differently. He would have said the man was born blind because of sins he had committed in his past life. Jesus clearly denied such a possibility, though. As the story progresses, Jesus heals this man of his blindness. If Jesus believed in reincarnation and the law of karma, he would not have done this. This man should have been left blind so that he would receive his just punishment for his sins. It is manifest, then, that Jesus Christ did not believe in reincarnation.

Finally there is one extremely clear statement in the Bible which shows that the Christian faith is not compatible with a belief in reincarnation. In the New Testament we read, "It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgement" (Heb. 9:27). According to this verse, how many deaths do we die? Only one. According to the transmigration of souls we die many times, are reborn many times, and suffer for our sins many times in many lives. The Bible, though, says we live one life and die once and then face God in judgment. As Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (Jn. 5:29). Friend, are you ready for that final judgment day when Christ returns? Will you receive a resurrection of life or a resurrection of death?

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS FOR SKEPTICS - 1

Text - Luke 24:1-12; Matthew 28:1-10

An unbeliever once told a Scottish preacher, "It is upon an empty tomb that Christianity is founded." What he thought was a rebuke of Christianity was actually a powerful proof of it. A man supposedly went to a famous French statesman for advice. This man tried to found his own religious system and had failed to draw a following or much interest. The statesman told him how he could gain a great following: "Go and be crucified and then raise yourself from the grave the third day." The resurrection of Christ was a proof that Jesus was the divine Son of God.

Christians are the first to realize, though, that not everyone believes in the resurrection of Christ. For example, in A.D. 150 a Christian named Justin wrote a work on the resurrection. He answered many questions people had about it and some objections a few had to it. Justin was a remarkable man. He was a Gentile born in Samaria near Jacob's well. He was well-educated. He was a truth-seeker. He tried all the philosophies of his day and was not satisfied with any of them. Finally after studying Plato, Socrates and many others, he found what he was looking for in Jesus of Nazareth. He continued to wear his philosopher's gown after his conversion, saying he had finally found the true philosophy. He spent the rest of his life defending Christianity as that true philosophy. His story is a tremendous one and his defense of the resurrection of Jesus is just one in a long string of similar apologies over the past 2000 years.

Nevertheless there are still skeptics, some even pretending to be Christians. Some of the liberal preachers, teachers and theologians in denominations today claim to be Christians yet they deny the resurrection of Christ. Such is a horrible inconsistency. How do they deny something that is taught so plainly in the Bible? They claim everything in the New Testament was written as late as they can date it. The later the better. This leaves a longer gap of time between the events and the recording of the events. Even then, realize we are speaking of less than seventy years for the whole New Testament! During this period of time the liberals claim that everything the church believed was reshaped and transformed by the worship and preaching of the church. Obviously there is some truth to that, but they claim it was drastically changed and altered, that events which never occurred were made up or fabricated to justify some teaching.

The liberals speak of the resurrection faith. What they mean by this is that the disciples believed Jesus was raised from the dead. The liberals do not believe it really happened. They just think the disciples believed it happened and that faith changed them. They ought to be more honest with people and speak of the resurrection hoax or fiction. One well known religious writer, in reaction to a recent book which denied the deity of Christ and his resurrection, said, "Maybe it's time we leveled with the public." This sort of belief is quite common in many denominations. You need to make sure that the church to which you belong truly believes in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not just in a resurrection faith that some disciples supposedly wrongly held in the first century!

Our study today will examine the resurrection of Jesus from the viewpoint of the liberal critic of the Bible. If a person believes and trusts the Bible as the word of God, all we have to do is show them that the Bible tells us Jesus was raised from the dead. That is all the evidence they need. Everyone does not believe the Bible, though. Some people need to be shown proofs and evidences which we are glad to do. There are certain types of proof, certain ways of examining historical data which some liberals use, though, which are not as commonly known. In our lesson we will use

those methods to prove the resurrection. The very techniques developed by the liberal critics who deny the resurrection can be used to strongly affirm and prove the resurrection of Christ.

Here is one example of their methodology. If something is expected to happen but does not happen, then in order to take hold of a claim or a title a devoted follower might distort the truth and pretend it really did happen. If the Messiah was supposed to do something, then the apostles might pretend that Jesus did so that they could convince others he was the Christ. On the other hand if something was not expected to happen and the apostles then made the claim that it did, it probably really did happen. This is a common test of historical credibility by the liberal critic. It takes a very dim view of honesty among human beings, but it is their method nevertheless.

Let us apply their test to the resurrection. If the apostles were expecting Jesus to be raised from the dead, then according to the liberals it is possible that they made up the resurrection story. In the New Testament, though, we see it is not that way. Despite the fact that Jesus told them ahead of time about his resurrection, they still were not expecting it. For example, Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'....He spoke of the temple of his body" (Jn. 2:19, 21). As Matthew recalls, "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Mt. 16:21). After the transfiguration Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead" (Mt. 17:9). Repeatedly Jesus foretold his resurrection from the dead (Mt. 17:22-23; 20:18-19; 26:32; 27:63).

Apparently the apostles did not listen very well or did not believe. They were not expecting the resurrection. They were surprised and amazed when it occurred. By the liberal critics own standard of historical reliability, then, the resurrection must have really occurred! Friends, if the apostles were going to make up and fabricate a story about Jesus, they would have made up a story about Jesus conquering a whole legion of Roman soldiers singlehandedly in the Judean desert. That is what people expected the Messiah to do. People did not expect the Messiah to die on a Roman cross and then be raised from the dead. So what the New Testament tells must have really happened.

In our next study we will look at more proofs of the resurrection from the viewpoint of the liberal critic. (W. Harland Dilbeck, "The Bodily Resurrection of Christ," Firm Foundation, 13 December 1977, pp. 6, 10; Roger S. Busse, "Historical Criticism and the Resurrection," Firm Foundation, 13 December 1977, pp. 7, 11; 20 December 1977, pp. 8, 10).

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS FOR SKEPTICS - 2

Text - Luke 24:1-12; Matthew 28:1-10

In our last study we began an examination of the historical reliability of the New Testament account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Instead of just accepting what the Bible says, we approached the study from the standpoint of a liberal, skeptical critic. The liberal historian uses certain standards by which he declares documents reliable or fabrications. By the liberal critic's own standards, though, the NT accounts of the resurrection of Jesus are shown to be reliable and certain! Let us continue that study.

One method of determining historical reliability is this. If something is said to make the writer himself or his friends look good, the liberal critic says the statement is suspicious. The writer probably made it up in order to make himself look good. It would be like an athlete telling of an athletic achievement. He is likely to brag and boast a little, stretching the truth a little for his own glory. On the other hand, though, if someone tells a story which is not complimentary to the teller or his friends, it is likely to be true. "Why would he make up a story that makes himself look bad?", the liberal critic asks. It is a natural human tendency to make self look good. If you are telling a story about yourself you are more likely to skip the parts that make you look bad than the parts that make you look good. Let us examine the NT accounts of the resurrection by this standard or measurement.

The NT accounts of the resurrection do not make heroes out of the apostles and early disciples. The accounts make them look quite bad! When soldiers came to arrest Jesus, the apostles ran away in fear. One of them, Peter, denied he even knew Jesus three times. They hid in fear after Jesus' death. When some women came and told them Jesus had been raised from the dead, they were reluctant to believe it. When some of the apostles saw Jesus alive and believed, they told Thomas who had not been with them. Even with other apostles telling him, Thomas did not believe it either. He had to see Jesus with his own eyes before he would believe. Two disciples on the road to Emmaeus were extremely slow to recognize and believe in Jesus. Even after these resurrection appearances, the apostles had not figured out the complete significance of it all. When Jesus met them in Galilee, they had gone back to fishing. The whole account of Jesus' resurrection shows how frail and weak the apostles and early disciples were. It is clearly not a fabrication. By the liberal critic's own standard of measurement, the apostles must have been telling the truth.

Now let us look at our final method of determining historical reliability as used by liberal historical critics today. If a person is fabricating a story, it is claimed that they will make the story sound as good as possible in order that others will be likely to accept it. If you are making up an argument for an event, you want it to be as plausible as possible. You do not want to write a story in such a way that it is difficult to believe. For example, if you are trying to explain why you are late for school, you would not make up a ridiculous story about being kidnapped by an alien spaceship. No one would believe that. They might believe that you ran out of gas. Let us examine the NT account of Jesus' resurrection by this standard.

If the apostles were making up the account of the resurrection, whom would they have as eyewitnesses? They would want the most credible and reliable persons possible. They would pretend that a Roman centurion soldier, a Jewish priest, a scribe, a Jewish temple guard, and a Roman government official all saw Jesus alive. That would be impressive. That would be a marvelous list of eyewitnesses. When we turn to the NT account of the witnesses to the

resurrection, though, we read a very different story. The first appearance of Jesus after his resurrection was to common peasant women!

I do not know how acceptable the testimony of women is where you live, but in the first century the testimony of women was not considered very important. Women were not allowed to give testimony. When the women told the male disciples they had seen Jesus alive, the men did not take them seriously: "But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (Lk. 24:11). The word "idle" here is sometimes used in Greek medical language for the wild talk of a delirious person. The Latin word in the Latin translations of this verse is the word from which the English words "delirious" and "delirium" come. The testimony of these women was considered to be a bunch of "wives' tales" as we sometimes say.

If the resurrection story in the NT was made up, the writers who made it up did a horrible job. If they were going to fabricate a story about the resurrection of Jesus, they would not have made the first appearance of Jesus occur to women. The fact that the NT reports it this way, then, is a strong evidence that it must have actually happened that way. By the liberal critic's own standard of measuring historical reliability, the resurrection is shown to be a fact of history. It really occurred. The account is no fabrication but is literal history. Christians should teach the resurrection of Jesus Christ with absolute and total assurance. There should be no wavering of doubt in our hearts -- Jesus Christ is alive!

Some years ago a man's beloved wife died. He suffered from a terrible fit of depression. His wife has been his best friend and closest companion for most of his life. He called in a minister to inquire about the resurrection and eternal life. He wanted to know if there was any evidence for it and if he might ever see his wife again. The minister was a very liberal one who did not really believe in the resurrection. He beat around the bush and gave an evasive answer. The man then called in another minister and asked the same question, telling of his disappointment in the first minister. When he asked the second minister if there is a resurrection and another life, the answer he received was, "Yes". We can answer that question with a decisive, definite, certain, absolute, confident, secure, and unhesitating "Yes". We can know it to be a fact, because we know Jesus was raised from the dead.

THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION OF CHRIST - 1

And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11).

When we speak of the key events in the life of Jesus Christ we usually mention three -- his birth, death, and resurrection. Our study in this lesson is about an event in the life of Christ which is somewhat overshadowed by the previous three in significance, yet, it is vital and essential to the gospel. As one Bible encyclopedia put it, "In fact, there is hardly a NT writer who does not give testimony, direct or indirect, to the truth of the ascension" (Donald W. Burdick, "Ascension," Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, I, p. 157). Another adds that "no complete view of Jesus Christ is possible unless the ascension and its consequences are included" ("Ascension," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, I, p., 263).

Artists have had difficulty picturing the ascension of Christ. Their results have been called grotesque and ridiculous. Few sermons are preached on the ascension. Few articles are written on this vital topic. Some of the "Lives of Jesus" give it little emphasis. Smith gives it four lines. Farrar gives it eleven. Edersheim has twenty lines while the more liberal writers like Holtzman and Klausner do not even mention it at all. Due to the ignoring of this Bible topic by so many modern authors in contrast to its importance in the Bible, it is certainly worth our study time. The topic is a two part study. The ascension and the exaltation of Christ go together. The ascension is when Christ ascended up and left the earth. The exaltation is the position and rank God gave Christ after his resurrection, the rank and role to which he ascended.

Let us look at the details of the event first. The ascension of Jesus occurred forty days after his resurrection (Acts 1:3). It occurred near Bethany on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12). Jesus was speaking his last words to the apostles when he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. The apostles were standing there looking up when two men in white robes appeared (angels). They asked the men why they were standing there looking up, assuring the apostles that Jesus would return in the same way, that is, with clouds and in glory. Luke then tells us, "They returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Lk. 24:52). A parting is usually a very sad occasion. While the apostles hated to see Christ leave, the parting was a happy one. It was a happy occasion because the ascension of Jesus signified several important things. In this study and the one to follow we will examine exactly what the ascension meant (1) for Christ, (2) for our salvation, (3) for the early church, and (4) for us today.

First, what did the ascension mean for Christ? For him it meant his exaltation to the right hand of God. Peter declared, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God..." (Acts 2:32-33). Stephen at the end of his sermon as he was being stoned by the Jewish crowd said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). The early church realized that Christ was alive and in heaven in an exalted position. If Jesus was only exalted to that position in every human heart, every nation and every person in the world would be so much better off and the world would be at peace.

One time a man was trying to read the newspaper without being disturbed, but his little girl kept bothering him. He finally got some scissors and cut up a map into small pieces and told her to

try to put it back together again. He thought that would take her a long time, long enough for him to finish the newspaper. He was surprised to find that she put the map together very quickly. He was so impressed that he asked her how she did it. He knew she knew nothing about geography. She turned the map over and on the other side was a picture of Jesus. She had put the picture of Jesus together and then turned it over to the map. In her innocence she uttered a precious truth. She said, "Daddy, if you put Jesus in the right place, the whole world is all right!" How true this is in our lives. We should exalt Jesus to a place of Lord and King in our lives. The ascension, then, meant that Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God.

To word it another way, the ascension meant that Jesus was exalted as Lord. Again let us hear from Peter: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). Paul said,

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

One time a group of prominent literary men were talking in a clubroom in London. The conversation got around to a discussion of great men of the past. One man suddenly asked, "Gentlemen, what would we do if Milton were to enter the room?" One man said they would give him a great ovation to compensate him for the tardy recognition given him by men of his own day. "What would we do if Shakespeare entered?" They said they would arise and crown him the master of song and poetry. Then he asked the all important question, "What should we do if Jesus Christ were to enter?" There was tension in the room. Everyone was silent. Finally one man said, "We would fall on our faces and worship him." That is what the ascension meant to Christ. He was exalted as Lord.

The ascension also meant that Christ was exalted as the head of the church. Paul said,

He...raised him (Christ) from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places...and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church (Eph. 1:20, 22).

No human being is the head of the church. Christ has been exalted as the head of the church.

THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION OF CHRIST - 2

Our study for today is a continued look at the ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ. After being crucified on a cross, God raised Jesus from the grave and exalted him as Lord and Christ. Our last study saw that the ascension of Christ meant that he was exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:32-33; 7:56). God exalted him by making him Lord (Acts 2:36; Phil. 2:9-11). He is also exalted as the head of the church (Eph. 1:20, 22).

Furthermore, God has exalted Jesus as high priest. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews explains, "Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb. 8:1). Here Jesus is identified as our high priest. He is performing this priestly function from the very throne of God in heaven. The book of Hebrews probably says more about the ascension and exaltation of Christ and their consequences than any other book in the New Testament. Hebrews stresses the superiority of Jesus and his New Testament over the law of Moses and the Old Testament. The superiority of Jesus' priesthood over the Aaronic and Levitical priesthood is shown in great detail. For example, instead of offering the blood of bulls and goats in a temple built by men here on earth, Jesus offers his own blood in the temple of heaven.

Every Christian is a priest. This is the priesthood of all believers. Our high priest is Jesus Christ. Through him every Christian can approach God in worship and prayer. There is no need to go through another human being who arrogates himself to the role of high priest which belongs only to Christ! Christ is our high priest. We can not find a better one. So the ascension and exaltation of Christ meant he was exalted as our high priest.

It also meant that Jesus was exalted as our savior: "God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior..." (Acts 5:31). Jesus came into the world to be our savior. He could not totally fulfill that function, though, until after he lived a life of perfect obedience to God, had died as a perfect sacrifice for our sin, and had been raised by God and exalted to a glorious and powerful position. Now that he has done that Jesus declares that he has all authority and power in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18). Jesus is much more than just an example for us to imitate. We can imitate an example, but we still fail and are lost. What we need is a savior. Christ has been exalted as our savior.

Finally, the ascension meant that Christ was exalted as King. Christ was born to be a king. All of his life he was recognized as a descendent of David's royal lineage. At his death a sign on his cross mockingly called him the King of the Jews. After his resurrection, though, Jesus was exalted by God not only as the King of the Jews, but as the King of Kings. Not everyone recognizes his kingship now, but one day all will have to recognize it. These, then, are the truths we can recognize about Christ as a result of his ascension and exaltation. Let us now turn to another question.

Second, what does the ascension and exaltation of Christ mean for our salvation? For Christians it means that we have a high priest who has made atonement for us in heaven. The letter to the Hebrews explains: "When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). The blood sacrifices of the Old Testament were according to the will of God, but they were not meant to be a permanent answer to the problem of sin. They merely rolled the sins of those people forward as mankind waited for the coming of Christ when he would make the full payment for man's sin. Or to put it another way, the animal sacrifices were like credit. They paid for sins of the worshippers on the credit plan. Jesus came and made the full and final payment. There is no need for blood sacrifice to God today. Instead we need only obey Christ and depend upon his once-for-all sacrifice which he made on the cross of Calvary. There is no need to

crucify Christ all over again as some claim to do in a service called the Mass. Such implies that Jesus has not died once-for-all and once-for-all time. For us, then, the ascension means atonement has been made for our sins in heaven by Christ.

It also means that we have a mediator, an intercessor, and an advocate. Paul declared, "Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?" (Rom. 8:34). If Christ was still dead and in his tomb, he could not intercede for us! The gospel is the declaration that Christ is alive and in heaven and making intercession for his followers. John the apostle explains: "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn. 2:1).

To illustrate what we mean by an advocate, mediator, or intercessor, let me tell a story about the American preacher Moody. He went to visit a family at their home and realized he had left his satchel and umbrella at another house. He asked their young son to go there and get his things for him. The boy gladly did so. While returning, though, he stumbled and broke the umbrella. He was scared. He was afraid to tell Mr. Moody what he had done. He went inside and talked to his mother in the kitchen. He asked her if she would tell his father and have his father tell Mr. Moody. They did. Mr. Moody called very sternly to the young boy and said, "Come here!" He thought for a moment and asked the boy if he had been afraid to tell him about the broken umbrella. "Yes," the boy replied. "So you told your mother who told your father to smooth things over with me, right?" "Yes," the boy replied again.

Then Moody surprised the boy by explaining to him that it was like that with God. When we sin and do things that are wrong, we know God's law says we should be punished. We might even be afraid of the wrath of God, although the Bible also teaches us frequently that God is a loving, merciful God. We sometimes might wish that there was someone to whom we could talk who would understand our weaknesses. That someone would have to be one to whom God would listen. Moody then explained to the boy that that someone was Jesus Christ. Christ is in heaven now to intercede for us. He was human so he understands our difficulties with temptation. Well that boy later became a preacher and he often told of the incident as he preached of Christ who by virtue of his resurrection, ascension, and exaltation is our mediator, intercessor, and advocate.

THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION OF CHRIST - 3

Concerning Christ the Bible says, "God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior" (Acts 5:31). In previous studies we have seen what the ascension and exaltation of Christ meant for him and for our salvation. Third, let us now consider what the ascension meant for the early church.

The ascension of Christ meant an end of the post-resurrection appearances to the early Christians. Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross. After that he was raised from the dead by the power of God. From time to time he appeared to the early disciples and the apostles. The apostles were to be eye witnesses of his resurrection, so this was essential for them. The early disciples were very much dependent upon Christ. They were not very brave men without him. If they were ever going to carry on the work of the church and if the church was ever going to grow to maturity, it was essential that Christ depart. Rather than Jesus just slowly making his post-resurrection appearances further and further apart and finally disappearing, the ascension marked a definite end to these appearances. They knew he was gone until the end of the age when he will usher in the judgment day. They knew they must wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit and then get on with the work of the great commission of carrying this wonderful, marvelous news of salvation in Jesus Christ to the whole world. It is because Jesus has ascended into heaven, is there now in glory, and is going to return some day to judge all mankind that we bring this lesson to you today.

A second thing the ascension of Christ meant for the early church was the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, speaking of his eventual departure from the disciples, said, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (Jn. 16:7). The Counselor, or the Holy Spirit, was sent by Christ after his ascension and exaltation to the right hand of God. Peter explains, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33). The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and enabled them to perform miracles. They could even transfer this power to others through the laying on of hands. They and prophets in the New Testament church were inspired by the Spirit, enabling them to teach the truth and write the New Testament. Once the New Testament was written, though, the church had grown up enough that it did not need to depend upon miracles. The miraculous age ended about the end of the first century. To claim the power to perform miracles today by the power of the Holy Spirit is an attempt to return to the infant/child era of the church. Also such claims have never been verified by scientific and historical examination. But to return to our point, the ascension and exaltation of Christ made possible the coming of the Counselor, the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, what should the ascension and exaltation of Christ mean to us today? For us it means that we should recognize Jesus as Lord, as head of the church, as our high priest, as our savior, and as our king. We must realize the essential and necessary role of Jesus in our salvation. Realizing that Jesus is in heaven, we ought to seek after heavenly and spiritual things. As Paul explained, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:1-2). Because Christ has been raised from the dead and exalted by God, we too can share in his glory if we are faithful to him and are raised from waters of baptism to seek after the spiritual things of Christ. Since Christ is in heaven, we should not waste our lives looking at only earthly things. We should set our mind on things that are above.

There is a cute story about a brother and sister that illustrates this. They were riding on a train in some high mountains. They were so high that the train was in the clouds at times. At one point they got so high that they broke through the top of the clouds. There was nothing above but the sky and nothing below but a sea of beautiful white clouds. The little boy said, "Look, look. We are riding right on top of a cloud." His older sister mocked him: "A cloud ain't nothing but fog. Nobody can ride on a cloud. We have rails under us just the same as always." The little boy's pride was hurt, so he responded, "Jesus can ride on a cloud. I saw a picture of him." The sister again chided the boy: "Yes, but that ain't us!" My point from the story is this. We need to not just look down. In a spiritual and symbolic sense, we need to look above the clouds. As to location we do not know where heaven is, but you understand my point. We need to look above the clouds to heaven where Christ is now. We need to remember him and his teachings. We need to live by the values he has given us. We need to live with a view toward eternity, the resurrection, the judgment day, and our opportunities to go to heaven.]

The ascension and exaltation of Christ means that Christ is coming again someday to judge the world, and we should be prepared for that day. Remember that when Jesus ascended, some angels said to the apostles, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). At the second coming of Christ all will be raised from the dead. We will all be judged and spend eternity in either heaven or hell. How do we know there is a resurrection and an existence after death? We have proof in the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Jesus Christ.

In a grave in a London cemetery, the grave marker of a preacher's wife has the inscription, "Ascended". This preacher, mourning the death of his wife, did not want to write the usual "Died" followed by a date. Later when he died, others remembered what he did for his wife and they had his grave stone carved with the words "Born April 9th, 1830. Ascended, November 28th, 1902." Actually the general resurrection is at the end of time, but our point here is that this man had hope -- hope of eternal life and the resurrection. The source of his hope was that Christ is alive, not dead, and exalted in heaven right now. Do you believe this? If so, put your faith in him and obey his gospel today.

CHRIST AND INTERCESSION

Our recent study has been concentrating on the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. One important truth to be realized from these facts is the role of Jesus Christ in intercession. Because he has been raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God the Father, he is in heaven now in a position to be our mediator and to intercede on our behalf. First let us define what we mean by intercession.

One example of intercession is a story from the life of Abraham (Gen. 18:23-33). The patriarch Abraham had visitors at his home. They appeared like men, so Abraham did not realize they were angels. They told Abraham of the coming destruction of Sodom due to the horrible sins practiced there. Abraham protested against the justice of such an action, asking, "Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous within the city?" (Gen. 18:23). Abraham began to ask if the city might be spared if a certain number of righteous people were in the city. Would the city be spared if fifty righteous individuals were in the city? Yes the city would be spared for that. Would five people make that much difference, though? Would the city be spared if there were forty-five righteous people? The number kept dropping as Abraham begged for the lives of the people in Sodom. Forty, thirty, twenty, and finally ten righteous people would mean Sodom would be spared. Throughout this conversation Abraham was playing the role of an intercessor. Abraham was pleading for the lives of other people. His intercession is very beautiful. Unfortunately not even ten righteous people could be found and Sodom was destroyed for its sin.

Another great example of intercession in the Bible is Moses (Ex. 32:31-32). Moses led the children of Israel out of slavery and bondage in Egypt. While on their way toward the promised land, Moses went up on Mount Sinai to receive the law from God. While he was gone many of the Jewish people began to commit all sorts of sins in their campsite. While in Egypt they had seen the Egyptians worshipping the cow or calf, so they made themselves a golden calf and worshipped it. The Bible seems to imply that many of them were engaging in sexual immorality also. When Moses saw what was going on, he demanded an explanation from Aaron. Aaron made excuses and tried to pass the blame on to the people saying he could not control them. He even tried to pass the blame for the golden calf to the fire in which they refined the gold. A minority who remained faithful stood on the Lord's side with Moses and a battle ensued to remove the cancerous growth from the children of Israel.

The next day Moses rebuked the people for their sin. Moses prayed a great prayer to God, begging God to spare the lives of the children of Israel: "Alas, this people have sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin -- and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Ex. 32:31-32). Moses was willing to sacrifice himself for the children of Israel. He is a good example of one who intercedes in behalf of others out of his love for them. God did not take Moses' life in exchange for the sinful people of Israel. God told Moses each person would be responsible for his or her own sins. We can see in the life of Moses, though, what intercession means.

Abraham and Moses were marvelous intercessors. They were great men. Neither of them was perfect, however. They both made mistakes of which we read about in the Bible. Both of them stand before God in need of forgiveness, in need of intercession for their sins. What mankind needs is a perfect intercessor. We need someone who has no sins of his own, who loves us, who is willing to intercede for us, and to whom God will readily listen. We find that someone in Jesus Christ.

The New Testament speaks of Christ as our intercessor: "Who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?" (Rom. 8:34). This verse really summarizes our whole series of radio addresses in one line. Four things from the life of Christ are mentioned: (1) the death of Christ, (2) the resurrection of Christ, (3) the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God, and (4) the intercession of Christ for us. The intercession of Jesus Christ is a work of Christ that naturally follows and is made possible by his death, resurrection, and exaltation. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews explains that intercession by Christ is a part of his role as eternal high priest for all Christians: "He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

The work of Christ as intercessor can be classified in two ways. First, he pleads our cause before the Father when we stumble and sin. John the apostle explains: "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn. 2:1-2). Our intercessor with the Father is not a minor character in history who has little influence. Rather our mediator is the very beloved Son of God. Surely God will lend a sympathetic ear to what his own Son has to say.

The story is told about the son of one of the American presidents playing the role of intercessor. A group of people were waiting in a room one day, all hoping to gain a hearing from the President. One was a soldier who had lost one of his arms fighting for his country. He struck up a conversation with a boy who turned out to be the son of the President. The boy said he would talk to his father and make sure the old soldier would get an appointment. Later a man came out and asked everyone to leave, saying the President would not receive anyone else that day. Everyone left except the old soldier. When he was asked again to leave, he told about the promise from the President's son. They said, "Well stay then. You are sure to get in to see him." He had an advocate, a mediator, an intercessor -- the son of the President. Likewise if we are faithful to Jesus Christ, we have the best intercessor possible -- the Son of God.

A second part of Christ's work of intercession is a preventive work. Jesus prayed, "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one" (Jn. 17:15). Earlier Jesus told Simon Peter, "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk. 22:32). Jesus wants us to be victorious over temptation to sin. When we do sin, he wants us to repent of that sin and continue to have faith.

Christ has been raised from the dead. God has highly exalted him. Now Christ is at the right hand of God making intercession for us. One could not find a more glorious Lord or better intercessor.

JESUS THE KING OF KINGS - 1

In our series of studies we have examined the resurrection and glorification of Jesus Christ. One consequence of this is that Jesus should be recognized as a king, the King of kings. The kingship of Jesus is a well known theme of the New Testament. Even before Jesus was born an angel told his mother, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk. 1:32-33). With those words, Mary, a young girl from humble origins whose only thought about kings was probably in her wildest dreams or fantasies, a girl who lived in a humble village for which kings cared little, was told that she was going to have a child who would become a king! How thrilling this news must have been to Mary.

When we believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and glorified by the Father, the first title we usually associate with Jesus is that he is the Son of God. Second we identify him as the Christ. Christ, or Messiah, has almost become the last name of Jesus. Although it is not mentioned as much as these two concepts, the kingship of Jesus is vital too. In some countries the conceptions of royalty and kingship are not finely tuned. For example in the United States their democracy means they do not place much importance on royalty. In Britain royalty is very important even though it is mostly that of a figurehead. In Thailand royalty is even more important. The king is the true leader of the country, and he holds a special place in the hearts of many of the people. The king's picture is seen in stores and in homes everywhere in Thailand. Great respect and honor is given to the king. In this study we will look at Jesus as a king, the King of kings. God has exalted him to this role, and we should give him the utmost respect and honor as our heavenly king.

It was realized from the birth of Jesus that he would be a king. Mary was told that her child would not only be a king but that his kingdom and his reign would be an eternal reign with no end. Certainly we see the truth of this. Earthly kings come and go, but Jesus is still honored by millions all over the world as king to this very day 2,000 years after his death. About the time of the birth of Jesus some wise men who studied the stars realized a great king was about to be born. They came to King Herod of the Jews and asked, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" (Mt. 2:2). Herod became very worried and concerned when he heard this.

Many legends have arisen concerning these wise men. They are often called the Magi. This term comes from the Greek and Latin words for wisdom. Tradition says there were three wise men. The Bible is silent on this subject. The song "We Three Kings of Orient Are", then, makes an assumption on silence. Later tradition names these three kings as Melchior, Balthasar, and Caspar, saying one came from India, one from Greece, and one from Egypt. The tradition continues to say that the apostle Thomas baptized them and their bones were eventually deposited in the church building at Constantinople. It takes a pretty gullible person to believe all of this. Curiosity seems to have no limit in prying into matters that the Bible is simply silent upon. It does not matter how many wise men there were, what their names were, or where they came from. Let us not overlook the important truth here -- that a king was about to be born, namely, Jesus. The birth of Jesus took place in Bethlehem, the city of David, so that Jesus could take his rightful position on the throne of David as king. Everything about the birth of Jesus points to his being a king. His kingship was not a kingship of wealth and extravagant luxury, though, because Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger, a feeding trough, and raised by poor peasant parents. Jesus came as the humble lowly king, God's kind of king.

During the ministry of Jesus the possible kingship of Jesus was a question on the minds of many people. For example, Jesus called Philip to follow him. Philip went and told Nathanael. Nathanael said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn. 1:46). He was skeptical about Jesus. He was not going to be an easy man to convince about Jesus, but he went to see this Jesus anyway. When Jesus saw him coming he spoke to him. He told him about seeing him sitting under a fig tree earlier. This was something impossible for Jesus to know unless he had superhuman knowledge. Jesus even knew the heart of Nathanael. Nathanael was impressed so much that he said, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (Jn. 1:49).

In the teachings of Jesus the doctrine of the kingdom of God was constantly on his lips. We usually speak in terms of the church, but in these days before the church was established, Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God. For example he said, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk. 1:15). His parables frequently began with the words, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." If there is a kingdom there must be a king and that king was Jesus. The disciples of Jesus realized he was to be king. They looked forward to his bringing in a kingdom. When Jesus was put to death on the cross there were two thieves crucified with him. One of them even knew about his teachings on the kingdom. One of them apparently believed while on the cross and said to him, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power" (Lk. 23:42). Very clearly, then, throughout the ministry of Jesus it was recognized that he was meant to be a king.

One conclusion we must recognize from this is that Christians are citizens of two kingdoms. All of us are a citizen of some kingdom in this world, whether the nation of India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Pakistan or some other nation. As citizens of our respective nations we owe our loyalty and respect to our countries. We should honor our countries in many ways. If we are a Christian, though, we are a citizen of another kingdom, namely, the kingdom of Jesus Christ. We must obey and honor Jesus Christ as king, giving our respect and highest devotion to him. As Jesus said, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt. 6:33). Are you honoring Christ as king? Are you a loyal subject in his kingdom?

JESUS THE KING OF KINGS - 2

In our last study we saw that even before the birth of Jesus it was predicted that he would be a king. Throughout his ministry it was recognized that he was meant to be king. During the trial and crucifixion of Jesus his claim to be a king was an important issue. When Pilate had Jesus on trial he asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "You have said so" (Mt. 27:11). The answer to modern readers sounds like Jesus was avoiding Pilate's question. Why did he not simply say, "Yes"? Actually his answer was a very straight forward answer in the language of his day. Also Jesus, while admitting to be king, wanted everyone to understand the kind of kingship he claimed. John explains this. Jesus, according to John's gospel, said, "My kingship is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36). Pilate pressed the point, saying, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (Jn. 18:37). Yes, Jesus was a king. Only hours earlier the multitudes in Jerusalem had welcomed him like a king, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Lk. 19:38).

To the soldiers the thought of Jesus as a king was funny. Since he was not a mighty military warrior or a rich nobleman, they ridiculed him as a king. They put a purple robe on him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Mt. 27:29). Then there was the sign on the cross of Jesus. When a prisoner was led to crucifixion in the Roman Empire it was usually done in the midst of four Roman soldiers. The soldier in the front usually carried a sign telling the crime of the prisoner. Later that sign would be attached to the cross. There was such a sign on the cross of Jesus. It was written in three languages so that all who could read would be able to know his crime. What was the "crime" of Jesus? The sign told it: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews" (Mt. 27:37). People watching Jesus die on the cross ridiculed him as a king, saying, "He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him" (Mt. 27:42). Jesus, then, died because of his claim to be the King of the Jews. The people did not understand his type or style of kingship. They thought he had political aspirations. Jesus, however, only wanted to rule over a spiritual kingdom. He only wanted to rule over the hearts and minds of men whose lives were transformed by the love of God.

In the church today "king" is not the most common title we use for Jesus. We more frequently call him the Son of God or the Christ. Nevertheless, king is a valid and important title for Jesus. For example, the apostle Paul and his friends were preaching and teaching in Thessalonica. They were opposed by some in the town and a mob attacked the house where they had been staying. Paul was not there, but the owner of the house Jason was pulled out by the mob and brought before the authorities. Then the accusation was made against Jason and his Christian friends: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them; and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7). This is an essential part of the Christian gospel. "He is Lord of lords and King of kings" (Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

What is the meaning of this lesson for you and me, though. What does it mean to us personally that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords? In a class at Harding Graduate School of Religion I remember a professor trying to define for us exactly what the word "Lord" means. He was saying that it meant more than just boss. To call Jesus Lord is saying more than just calling him the boss. One student protested. He made an emotional appeal that we all should think of Jesus as Lord or boss of our life. The professor agreed. His argument was simply that calling Jesus Lord meant more than that, namely, it recognized the deity of Jesus Christ. It was not an either/or question but a

both/and situation. He then said that there is absolutely nothing wrong with calling upon people to give their submission and commitment to Jesus to make him the total ruler of their life. To call Jesus King or Lord means more than that, but it at least includes that much. It means we must obey him totally. It means we must render honor and service to him in every way.

There is a very good illustration of this in a movie entitled "Chariots of Fire". This movie is about a British athlete in the Olympics many years ago. It is a true story about Eric Liddell. Liddell's father was a missionary in China who was home visiting in Scotland. He was walking to worship services with the family and a family friend, a man who was Eric's trainer for the Olympics. Eric's father was trying to explain to the trainer about the nature of the kingdom of God. He noted that the kingdom of God was not a democracy. "What was it then," the trainer asked, "A dictatorship?" Although the word might be wrongly used, the missionary agreed, but he immediately defined it properly. He said, "Yes, but a kind one" or words to that effect. There is no voting in the kingdom of God as to what is true. We do not decide what is right. We do not even vote to elect Christ king. He is king. The only unanswered question is will we recognize him as king? Will we accept him as king?

As the movie continues Eric Liddell has to take a strong stand on whether or not he will compromise his principles (what he thought Christ would want him to do) or honor his heavenly king. In another beautiful scene in the movie, while other young men are skipping worship services on Sunday in order to run races, Eric Liddell is shown in a church building reading from the scriptures about the kingship of God. In his real life after he won a gold medal in the Olympics, Liddell later went to China as a missionary. He taught in a school and participated in rural evangelism on foot and on bicycle. At the outbreak of World War II he was thrown in a prison camp. The survivors of that camp said he was a wonderful man even there. He organized athletic events, taught hymns, and preached. He died from a brain tumor in prison in 1945. He was a man who recognized that Jesus Christ is the King of kings.

Do you recognize Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords? God the Father does. After Jesus' humiliating death on the cross, God raised Jesus from the grave and exalted him (Acts 2:36). If you realize Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, make him the King and Lord of your life. Put your faith in him and be baptized (immersed) in his name for the forgiveness of your sins, and he will add you to his church.