

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very heart of Christianity. In 1 Corinthians 15 St. Paul reasoned, «If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith....We are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.» In that same chapter he says «If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen sleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.» But then Paul triumphantly declares, «But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep» (1 Cor. 15:14-20).

THE FIRST EASTER

What do we mean by the resurrection of Christ? Jesus Christ came into this world to die as our substitute for our sins. The sinless Son of God came to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). On that first Good Friday, Jesus was crucified. We know he died because one of the Roman soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear to ensure his death. Some of his disciples then buried his body in a new tomb (John 19:30-42).

While Jesus was alive, he had predicted that he would rise from the dead. He challenged his enemies: «Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.» He was speaking about his body (John 2:19-22). Jesus also told his disciples many times that he would be killed by the leaders in Jerusalem, but be raised to life on the third day. The leaders who killed Jesus were aware of this prediction that he would rise from the dead. Although they did not believe it, they wanted to ensure that it would not happen, so they set a guard around the tomb. In Matthew 27:62-66 we read, «The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, «After three days I will rise again.» So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body, and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.' Take a guard,' Pilate answered. 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.»

Did the strategy of the chief priests and Pharisees succeed? No! Despite their efforts, Jesus rose from the dead. Remember how Jesus had said to Martha, «I am the resurrection and the life»? During his ministry on earth, Jesus brought a number of people to life from the dead, including Martha's brother Lazarus, who had been dead for four days (John 11). But the resurrection of Jesus Christ was different. It was not just resuscitation, as was the case with Lazarus, who later died again. On the third day Jesus was raised from the dead with a transformed body that was clothed with immortality and glory. His resurrection body could appear and disappear, go through material objects, and ascend to and descend from heaven.

On Easter morning some women and apostles went to Jesus' tomb, expecting to find his body. But the tomb was empty, and the angel at the tomb told them, «He is not here; he has risen!» Later they saw their risen Lord face to face. The gospels record these events, but the earliest written report concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ was written by St. Paul within twenty-five years of Christ's death in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8: «For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.» Later St. Luke the historian wrote in his introduction to the book of Acts, «After [Jesus'] suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over

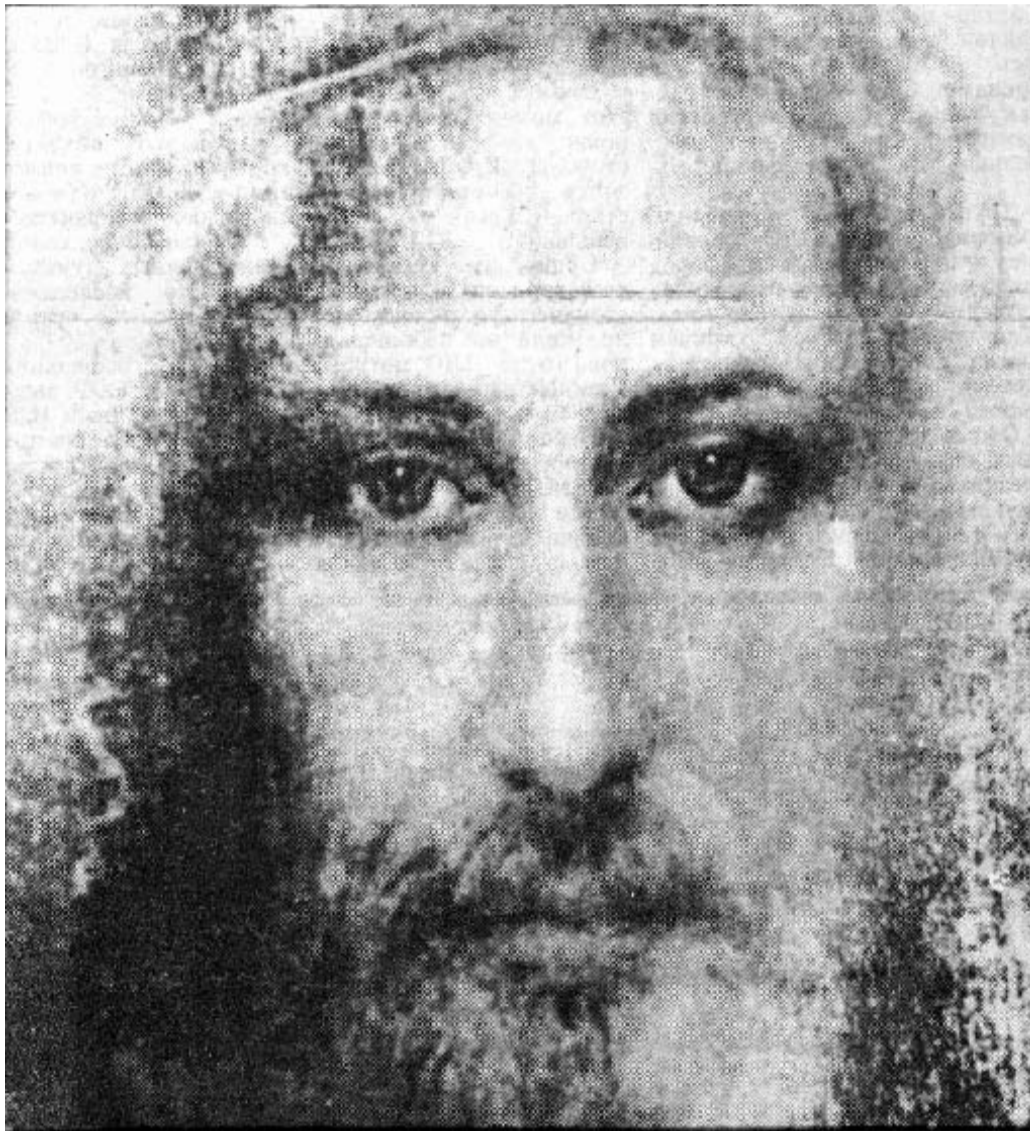
a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God» (Acts 1:3).

Because of the miracle of Christ's resurrection, Jesus' depressed and disappointed disciples were instantly transformed. They began to preach the gospel with power, and the resurrection of Jesus was at the heart of their preaching. Why? Without the resurrection, there is no Christianity. These disciples of Jesus willingly suffered martyrdom for their faith. The enemies of the gospel were totally unable to refute this central claim of the gospel. They could not produce the body of Jesus Christ and put a stop to Christianity. The Jewish believers, meanwhile, were so impressed by this miracle that they began to wor-

spite of all textual and historical evidence, such people refuse to believe in the resurrection because they trust in the ultimate authority of fallen human reason rather than in God's Holy Scriptures.

Although they may be members of churches, such people are really pagans who are without hope. St. Paul speaks about them in 1 Thessalonians 4:13: «Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.» They are «without hope and without God in the world,» Paul says in Ephesians 2:12. They will not believe the New Testament, which declares the resurrection of Christ with great clarity.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST



HOW DOES THE RESURRECTION AFFECT US?

If we believe in the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament, what significance does the resurrection have for us?

1. *In the resurrection of Jesus Christ we see the clear demonstration of the power of the true God.* Ephesians 1:19-21 tells us that it is the power of our heavenly Father that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

2. *The resurrection proves that Jesus Christ is God.* That is exactly what God the Father wanted to communicate to us, as we read in Romans 1:4. The Jews crucified Jesus Christ because, to them, he was blaspheming when he said that he was the Son of God, equal to the Father. The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates the truth that he is who he said he was.

3. *Our salvation depends on our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* In Romans 10:9, we are told how to be saved. It says that «if you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.» This means that you cannot be a Christian unless you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This should tell us that even if some people are in churches, if they reject the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they are not Christians.

4. *The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates to us that all the teachings of Jesus Christ are true.* Everything Jesus taught was true, including his great promise in John 6:40, «Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.» Jesus' teachings concerning his person, his work, heaven, hell, and the future judgment are all true.

5. *The resurrection of Jesus Christ secured our justification.* «Christ died for our sins and he was raised for our justification,» Paul says in Romans 4:25.

6. *Our own resurrection depends completely on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* Read 1 Thessalonians 4:14: «We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.» There are a number of other verses concerning this, including 2 Corinthians 4:14, and others.

7. *The power for our Christian life in the present is the power of his resurrection.* We read about this in Ephesians 1:19-21, as well as in Romans 6:4: «We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.» People ask me, «How can we live this Christian life?» We can live it by the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

8. *The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates that this Jesus Christ is going to be the appointed judge of all the wicked people in the world.* In Acts 17:31, Paul told the Athenians, «For he [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.» We see the same idea in John 5:22 where Jesus said, «Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.» In verses 27-29 he continued, «And he has given him authority to judge, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.»

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ship on the day of Christ's resurrection, Sunday, rather than on Saturday, as their custom had been.

UNBELIEF AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Many people do not believe in the resurrection. Even in New Testament times we find those who refused to believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees were materialists who did not believe in resurrection as the Pharisees did. Even in the church, some people did not believe in the resurrection. St. Paul wrote concerning this in 1 Corinthians 15. In 2 Timothy 2:17-18 Hymenaeus and Philetus were mentioned by Paul as people who did not really believe in the resurrection of the body.

Therefore, unbelief in the resurrection is not a recent idea, but especially beginning in the latter part of the seventeenth century, some in the church began to question putting faith in miracles, particularly in the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ. In England deists like John Toland refused to believe in the resurrection. Rationalists like H. S. Reimarus refused to believe in miracles, and questioned the authority of the Bible and the church. The theologian David Strauss systematically denied any miracles in his work, *Life of Jesus*, and in the twentieth century Karl Barth, along with Rudolf Bultmann, also denied the resurrection of the body. Today most liberal churches deny the resurrection as well as any miracle as recorded in the New Testament.

Such people deny the resurrection. They do not say it is not historical, or it is not recorded in the text of the New Testament. They deny it simply out of unbelief. They reason that normally the dead do not rise, and therefore Jesus could not rise from the dead. In

