

BIBLE EMPOWERED TEACHING

Series: Jesus Christ The Son Of God

Lesson 6

JESUS' LIVES!

The totality of Christianity depends on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If Jesus were not raised from the dead, then we, as Christians, are no better in our faith than those world religions that make no mention of Jesus in their religious documents. And those religions that do consider Jesus to be just another good prophet in a line of prophets, are just as valid as Christianity. It is then true, as Paul wrote, *“We are of all men most to be pitied”* (1 Co 15:19). We should be pitied because we believe that our Founder was raised from the dead.

It is imperative that the resurrection of Jesus continues to be the validation of Christianity. It is the resurrection that confirms our faith to be the only faith that is accepted by God because its founder is alive and not dead. The fact that He lives is important because our faith would be null and void if Jesus' body still remained in some hidden tomb in Palestine.

It is this faith that is the unchanging foundation for moral societies. *“For the grace of God ... has appeared to all men, teaching us, that ... we should live sensibly, righteously and godly”* (Ti 2:11,12). If Jesus is still dead somewhere in a tomb outside Jerusalem, then any moral behavior that society would so choose is justified according to the dictates of society. If He is still in the tomb, then any other teacher or philosopher in the world has a right to offer his own code of morals for social behavior. After WW II when Adolf Eichmann was on trial for genocide, he said at the Nuremburg trials in 1945/46 that Hitler's genocide of the Jews was right for the times in Europe. If Jesus were not raised from the dead, then there can be no moral argument against the moral code of Nazi Germany at that time in history. If one would seek to live in adultery, then there is no reason to argue against such on the basis of morals. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, it is every society for itself, and every citizen within society for himself.

But if He is alive from the dead, then everything changes. The destiny of each citizen of this world changes. Humanity is on earth for a purpose beyond the thinking, *“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”* (1 Co 15:32). If Jesus were raised from the dead, then eventually ...

... we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Co 5:10).

A. Early documents of the resurrection:

Luke 24:1-9 is significant. At the tomb of Jesus early on Sunday morning, two men in shining clothes made a profound statement to the women who had come to finalize the burial preparations of the crucified Jesus. The two men said, *“Why do you seek the living among the dead?”* (Lk 24:5). Jesus was “among the dead.” But that was no longer so. And

since He was resurrected early on Sunday, He did not hang around the tomb. He was raised and gone. The history of the world changed from that moment on. When that grave stone rolled away from a borrowed tomb, the world rolled into a new paradigm of history.

Throughout the documents of Matthew, Mark, and John, we are privileged to have written testimonies of men who personally walked with Jesus in preparation for the empty tomb. When the writers of these historical documents recorded the final days of Jesus, they made certain that there was more written information about the final days of Jesus than any other man who has lived on earth. But we must keep in mind that the documents of the ministry of Jesus, and particularly His final days, do not explain the resurrection. They lead us to the resurrection. **It is the resurrection itself that explains the ministry of Jesus and the final days.** Without the resurrection, the witnesses of the ministry of Jesus would be worthless in reference to faith. There would be no reason to believe that Jesus was any more than a clever deceiver if it were not for the resurrection.

B. Prophecy of the resurrection:

Jesus prepared His disciples for the surreal event of His resurrection. His preparation began first with His own statements, and then with a real life illustration through the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11).

A little after midway through His ministry, and after He had called on the twelve disciples to agree with the confession of Peter, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Mt 16:16), Jesus changed in His ministry in reference to His disciples. Matthew explained:

From that time—[the time of the confession of Peter]—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 be raised the third day (Mt 16:21).

Brief revelational lights were being turned on in the disciples' minds even before this paradigm shift in His relational ministry with the twelve. A little more than a year earlier, and upon His first visit to Jerusalem for the Passover, He said to the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem, *“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up”* (Jn 2:19).

Neither the Jews, nor the disciples, understood what Jesus meant in this statement. In fact, it was many years later when John, who was there at the time Jesus made the statement, explained what Jesus meant. Note what John wrote:

Therefore, when He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this. And they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had said (Jn 2:22).

And then there was Jesus' reference to Jonah. "*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Mt 12:40). To the scribes and Pharisees to whom Jesus made this prophecy, the statement was certainly to them senseless talk on the part of Jesus. Nevertheless, as with the disciples, Jesus was also preparing the religious community in Judea for His resurrection that was coming.

It would be from five to six years after the resurrection, and Peter's declaration on Pentecost that Jesus was raised, that "*a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith*" (At 6:7). For these priests of the religious establishment of Jerusalem, it took some time for the fact of the resurrection to sink in. Nevertheless, it finally did, and the result was that many priests in Jerusalem gave up their salaries as priests of Judaism in order to become disciples of Jesus. The extent of their sacrifice indicated that they truly believed that Jesus was raised from the dead.

The crucifixion of Jesus was no accident as some have claimed. Jesus came with the intention of laying down His life, regardless of whether most of the Jews would accept Him as the Messiah (Jn 1:11). He once said to an inquiring audience, "*Therefore, My Father loves Me because I lay down My life so that I may take it up again*" (Jn 10:17). And just in case this was not clear, He continued: "*No one takes it [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again*" (Jn 10:18). And because He took it up again, millions have believed who He said He was. Because of this belief, millions have obeyed the gospel.

C. Centrality of the resurrection:

God would not raise an imposter. Therefore, if Jesus were raised, then we must conclude that He was not an imposter. And if He is not an imposter, then He demands the totality of our lives, for He was the One He said He was, that is, the Son of God.

Jesus, the Son of God, was "*declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead*" (Rm 1:4). The power of the resurrection empowered Jesus to be who He said He was. For this reason, John S. Whale was right: "Belief in the resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian faith; **it is the Christian faith.**" There is no sense in claiming to be a Christian if one does not believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. In fact, there is no reason to claim to be a Christian if Jesus never stepped one foot outside that tomb.

Because the early disciples believed that Jesus was no longer among the dead, their lives were radically changed. The resurrection became the foundation upon which they were moved into all the world. The centrality of their gospel message depended on the resurrection of Jesus, and thus, because Jesus lived, they had a living message of good news.

Though Paul did not personally experience the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, He was convicted by a living Jesus on a road to Damascus. After three days of repentance in the city of Damascus, and finally washing away his sins in baptism, he headed out for Arabia, and then back home to his

family in Cilicia. He wrote to the Corinthians,

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Co 15:3,4).

The gospel of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection, was the central message of the early disciples. This gospel validation of the new faith began with Peter on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. "*This Jesus,*" Peter proclaimed to the thousands on Pentecost, "**God has raised up**" (At 2:32). Paul later wrote that God "*worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places*" (Ep 1:20).

After the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples were disillusioned. They were disheartened and felt as Peter when he said, "*I am going fishing*" (Jn 21:3). But after the resurrection, they were going into all the world (Mt 28:19). The gospel of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection was their motivation to go into all the world. We are Christians today because those early witnesses to the living Jesus went forth and explained to the world what one of them wrote of the resurrected Jesus in 1 John 1:1:

That which was from the beginning, that we have heard, that we have seen with our eyes, that we have looked upon and our hands have handled, we proclaim concerning the Word of Life.

D. Validation of the resurrection:

Theories to explain away the resurrection actually work to validate the resurrection. There have been some very imaginative theories presented throughout history to explain away the resurrection. All these theories have certainly made us research every angle of possibility that Jesus was not actually raised from the dead. The advantage of all these theories, therefore, is that they have forced us to answer every question that someone might present in order to deny the resurrection.

1. The stolen body theory: This was the first objection to the resurrection immediately after the tomb guards discovered that Jesus had escaped their custody (Mt 28:11-15). The cover-up scheme was invented by the religious leaders in Jerusalem who had actually called for the crucifixion of Jesus.

When the comatose guards at Jesus' tomb reported all that had transpired at the tomb, the Jewish elders "*consulted together,*" and then they gave a large sum of money to the guards (Mt 28:12). They then said that the guards were to lie. "*You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept'*" (Mt 28:13).

If these were Roman guards, then sleeping on duty incurred the penalty of death. If the disciples did indeed try to steal the body of Jesus, then there would have been a great deal of noise as they rolled back the large stone at the face of the tomb. And then, if the guards were asleep, how would they have known that it was the disciples who stole the body

of Jesus?

The cover-up scheme of the Jewish elders is actually proof that something transpired at the tomb. Jesus' body was indeed gone, but they had no answer as to why it disappeared. If the disciples had indeed stolen the body, we would certainly assume correctly that when the heat of persecution later came upon the disciples, someone would have confessed that they had actually stolen the body. But James was willing to die for his belief that Jesus was actually raised (At 12:1,2). Stephen was willing to be stoned to death (At 7:59,60). And the early disciples as a whole were scattered out of Jerusalem because of persecution for their belief in the gospel of the resurrection (At 8:4). If the disciples had actually conspired to steal away the body of Jesus, then we would certainly conclude that such a theory was unlikely.

2. The swoon theory: This may be going to extremes in order to generate a possible reason for the disappearance of the body of Jesus. Nevertheless, it is a theory that has been set forth by some in the past concerning the absence of the body in the tomb. It has been argued that Jesus never really died on the cross. He only lapsed into a coma, or fainted, and then revived later in the coolness of the tomb.

This fanciful theory does not take into consideration the presence of the guards on the outside of the tomb. Neither does it give us an answer as to how a person who was so weakened by crucifixion could roll away a possibly two-ton stone from the entrance of the tomb. And then after moving the stone, sneaking past the guards, He somehow had the strength to walk a great distance to be with the disciples in the city. But we know He did not go to the disciples as a wounded man, for the women came early on first day of the week in order to dress His body properly for final rest. If Jesus had regained consciousness in the tomb and gone to the disciples, then there would have been no reason for the women to go to the tomb early on Sunday morning.

The soldiers who crucified Jesus wanted to make sure that Jesus was indeed dead. There was first the breaking of the legs of the two who were crucified with Jesus in order to hasten their death. But they did not break the legs of Jesus, testifying to the fact that they determined that He was already dead. And then to make sure He was dead, a soldier pierced the side of Jesus with a sword (Jn 19:33,34).

3. The vision theory: This is the supposition that the disciples were so anxious for His resurrection that they hallucinated, or saw a vision of Him being alive. Sometimes theories that deny the resurrection become so ridiculous that they need no consideration. But let us suppose that such were possibly true.

If the theory is true, then there are some real problems. The first obvious problem is that the disciples did not expect the resurrection. They did not understand what Jesus meant

when He spoke of His resurrection during His ministry (Jn 2:22). Though Jesus had previously discussed the matter with them, they were despondent after the crucifixion. And despondent people do not conjure up images of Jesus being alive. There is then the testimony of John who wrote many years later of "doubting Thomas" who would not believe unless he had actually put his fingers in the nail holes of Jesus' hands and his hand in His side (See Jn 20:24-29). In conjunction with the testimony of the immediate disciples, Paul added that Jesus appeared at one time to over five hundred people (1 Co 15:6). Did all those people see a vision simultaneously?

Then we must question why the visions ended after the ascension. And if the disciples had actually seen a vision of Jesus, why did not someone in Jerusalem produce the body of Jesus when Peter stood up and proclaimed to several thousand people, "*This Jesus God has raised up*" (At 2:32). If the body of Jesus was produced, this would certainly have been embarrassing and the end of the apostles' claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead. It would have been the end of Christianity before it was started. But no body could be produced. There could be no valid denial of the resurrection if no body could be produced.

Thomas Jefferson was the third president of the United States. He was a complete skeptic in reference to anything ever having happened in history that was supernatural. But he honored the moral teachings of Jesus in the Bible. So what does a true naturalist do in order to separate the moral teachings of Jesus from the supernatural events that surrounded His life on earth?

Jefferson eliminated all references to the supernatural in his Bible. He cut these passages out of the Bible, and then published his own Bible, which Bible was called the "Jefferson Bible." At the close of his Bible, and in reference to the end of the life of Jesus, the Jefferson Bible simply reads, "There they laid Jesus, and rolled a great stone to the mouth of the sepulchre and departed."

We are sure that Jefferson has since changed his mind on this matter. To Jefferson, that was the end of the story about Jesus, but the story did not end there. The fact that thousands believed immediately after the resurrection is the greatest evidence for the resurrection.

Man-made religions that are based on fables are developed over decades. But Christianity came to life in only one day when thousands believed immediately that Jesus was truly raised from the dead. These thousands were willing to go to their death because they believed that He was alive from the dead (See Rv 2:10).