

## **The Apostle's Creed: On the Third Day He Rose Again**

**1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

**By [J. Ligon Duncan](#)**

We are continuing our studies in the Apostles' Creed. We come this morning to that statement of the Creed in the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the third day He rose again from the dead according to the Scriptures. I wanted to start this morning by saying that I disagreed with Dr. Duncan on some aspect of this point of the Creed. Many of you will remember that last week in my absence he said he disagreed with me on something; I'm still not sure what. But if I were to say that I disagreed with anything to do with the resurrection I think I would be in big trouble. Let's read together a wonderful statement of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as we find it in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. Hear the Word of God:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which you also are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. And that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit 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 did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His Holy and inerrant Word. Let's pray.

*Our Father in heaven, bless now we pray this time together as we look into this wonderful doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Now, suppose an archaeologist digging in the sands of Palestine, somewhere

outside of Jerusalem, were to discover a skeleton, bones, skull and claim that it was Jesus of Nazareth. Would it make any difference? Would it make any difference to the way you live? Would it undermine everything that you believe in because it probably will happen. No, it's going to happen one day; I'm sure of it. One day some archaeologist will claim that he has discovered the bones of Jesus. Will it make any difference? Does it really matter?

After all, don't we sing that hymn, "He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me and He talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives, He lives, salvation to impart. You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart." That's a terrible hymn. I know it may be your favorite hymn but, you understand, those words are awful because the basis on which I know He lives, is not just some feeling in my heart. I know He lives because the tomb is empty. We have solid empirical proof that would stand up in a court of law that Jesus rose from the dead. Let me ask you again. If somebody claims to find the bones of Jesus in some tomb in Jerusalem, and it probably will happen, will it make any difference? After all, there are some—hopefully not in here—who believe that Elvis lives in their hearts. And I assure you, Elvis is dead. And there are some who believe that Stonewall Jackson lives in their hearts, and I assure you, he's dead too. So let's look at the evidence, first of all for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

## **I. The evidence of Jesus' resurrection.**

When we talk about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we are talking about an event in space and time; we're talking about a literal resurrection. I put it that way because the *Creed* says "on the third day." Having died on Friday afternoon, buried before sundown, the first day; Saturday being the second day; He has risen some time early on Sunday morning, the third day. What's the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead? I want to put it this way because when we see the evidence, and we remind ourselves of the evidence, we will go away this morning with our hearts skipping a beat because of the sure validity that Jesus rose from the dead. The tomb was empty. No one could produce the body of Jesus. For more than a month afterwards, they kept on meeting Jesus—alive. Having died, having been buried, they kept on seeing Him in groups--on one occasion 500. Within weeks of Jesus' death and resurrection, there were apostles prepared to lay down their lives because they believed this truth. Let's go back and examine it in detail.

Let's begin at the tomb. It's called the empty tomb, but that is not altogether accurate. Although the body was gone, the grave cloths were still there. When Peter went to the tomb on that Sunday morning, he saw linen cloths lying there and a face cloth which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Moments later, John comes running into the tomb and confirms it. He saw the linen cloths lying in that peculiar fashion. Eastern burials required that the trunk and arms and legs be tightly wrapped in

linen cloth layered with fragrant spices and gummy substances like myrrh to bind everything together. When Peter and John came to the tomb, what they saw was consistent with a body passing through the cloths, and the cloths just collapsing where the body had been. They had not been touched.

There are the witnesses. Firstly, Mark tells us in Mark 16:9: "When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first of all to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had driven seven demons." Then He appears to a group of women, somewhere between the tomb and the city. Then later that day, He appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Was it Luke and was it his wife perhaps? They talk with Him. He opens the Old Testament to them, shows them all the things concerning Himself. They eat with Him in a house in Emmaus. They rush back to Jerusalem after supper, but before they got there, Jesus had appeared to Simon. While they were still talking, Jesus appeared to the disciples. Thomas, not being there; Judas of course, not being there; and says to them, "Peace be with you." A week later, when Thomas was actually with them, Jesus appears again saying the same words. You remember Thomas refusing to believe until he thrust his hand in Jesus' side. Some time after that, Jesus appeared to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberius. Paul says that sometime in the following weeks He appeared to more than 500 brethren at the same time. You know, hallucinations may occur to one person in one place at one time, but not in 500 people in the same time in the same place. And Paul says He appeared to James, the half-brother of Jesus. Matthew recalls the eleven disciples going to a mountain in Galilee where Jesus came to them. And finally, Luke records that after seven weeks, He had them meet in the vicinity of Bethany where, after giving them some instructions, He left them, being taken up into heaven in a cloud—the ascension. We'll come to that next week.

There it is--the case for the resurrection. Look around you in this congregation. Turn your heads around and have a look at what 500 plus people looks like. That's how many witnesses we have in the New Testament of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

## **II. The case against the resurrection.**

What's the case against the resurrection? Well, it assumes, of course, that all of these witnesses are liars. True, these statements are written by Matthew and Mark and Luke and John, and at the writing of at least the first gospel, many of these witnesses were still alive and could have displaced whatever it was the gospel writers had said. There are many explanations, many theories.

### **The first one is the swoon theory.**

Jesus fainted on the cross. He was taken down, put in the tomb, and in the coolness of the tomb, He comes to and walks out and disappears and then

appears again as though alive from the dead. That's the theory. It was first put in the 18th century and revived in 1965 by Hugh Schonfeld in his 1965 publication, *The Passover Plot*. Let's think about it. At the cross, the Centurion went to Pilate and assured Pilate that He was dead. Then a soldier pierces Jesus' side to insure that He was dead. He was put through a complex burial ritual and Pilate, because he thought that there would be a claim that Jesus would rise from the dead, set a guard to watch the tomb and set a seal upon the stone of the tomb. It is said that to move that stone away would require 12 men to roll it back. It was one thing to roll it down over the opening, it was another thing entirely to roll it back up the hill again.

### **The theft theory.**

Someone stole the body. OK, who stole the body? The authorities, perhaps. Which authorities? Was it the Jewish authorities or the Roman authorities? Why would the Jewish authorities steal the body of Jesus? The last thing they wanted was for Christians to go about saying that Jesus had risen from the dead. And why would the Roman authorities do it? They had set a guard to watch the tomb and a seal across the tomb to ensure this very thing. According to some, a guard of soldiers could be up to sixty men. It would require that if the body were stolen, perhaps all sixty of them fell asleep knowing that the penalty for falling asleep on duty, under Roman law, was execution. Perhaps the disciples stole the body. And we're asked to believe that within weeks some of them are prepared to lay down their lives for something they *knew* wasn't true.

### **The projection theory.**

This will appeal to those of you with a psychological counseling bent. It was first propounded by Hegel anticipating Freudian wish projection. It goes something like this: the disciples so longed for the resurrection of Jesus that it was self-fulfilling. In the heightened emotional state of that last week in Jerusalem it was self-fulfilling. But look at the evidence. The disciples actually didn't believe in the resurrection. Thomas had to be persuaded to put his hand into the side of Jesus. When the women came back from the tomb saying that they had seen the risen Jesus, the disciples didn't believe them. Mark 16:14 reads: "Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table and He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen." Now that one won't stand either.

### **The mislaid theory.**

Blake, in 1907, first propounded this view saying that actually what happened was that the women went to the wrong tomb. It was early in the morning, Luke says, they went to the tomb. There were lots of tombs, they all looked the same. They went to the wrong one and they saw a gardener, and the gardener says,

“Are you looking for Jesus? You’re looking for Him in the wrong place; He is not here. He is over there.” Hysterical women—that’s the view—that’s what it’s saying. But think about it for a minute. Within thirty minutes, Peter and John are going to the same tomb. When the gospels have carefully recorded that not only did they know which tomb it was but that they had carefully noted which way it was that Jesus was laid in the tomb. And had they gone to the wrong tomb, wouldn’t it have been the easiest thing in the world for the Jewish or Roman authorities to go to that garden and say, “Look, you went to the wrong tomb. This is the tomb.” And they would open it and there would be the body of Jesus. Wouldn’t that be a simple thing to do? No, my friends, Jesus rose from the dead; the evidence is compelling. Frank Morrison, in the 1920s, a journalist commissioned to write a book to disprove the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, after carefully examining all the evidence, writes a book called *Who Moved the Stone?* Morrison came to the conclusion that the evidence was compelling that Jesus rose from the dead. There’s a missing person. The body is gone and no one, absolutely no one, could produce the body. And within weeks, there are disciples prepared to give their lives because they were so certain that Jesus had risen from the dead.

### **III. The consequences of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.**

What are the consequences of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead? It validates His deity. It says to us that His claim to be the Son of God, to be the Lord of glory, to be the divine Messiah, to be the suffering servant of Yahweh, Jehovah, was true. That when He said, “I and My Father are one” He was speaking the truth and here is the evidence of it. Here is how He backs it up.

It says to us that every word that Jesus ever spoke is true. His claim that the Old Testament Scriptures were the word of God and cannot be broken is true. That you can open up the Bible at any place, on any page, to any verse, and know with absolute certainty that it is the very infallible and inerrant word of God because Jesus rose from the dead.

It validates His teaching. It validates His moral teaching, His ethical teaching, His doctrinal teaching—everything that He ever said. Every word that ever came out of His mouth is true.

It attests to the fact that His work is finished. His work as the servant of the Lord, His office as mediator of the covenant, as our substitute, as our sin bearer, as He went to the cross of Calvary, as He lay down His life on behalf of sinners like you and me, as God poured out His wrath upon Him in our place, standing where we should have stood.

The resurrection is like God the Father saying, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” The work is finished, that there is no more need for sacrifices on Jewish

altars to be slain. The veil of the Temple was rent from top to bottom because the work of the Mediator is done and complete and finished once for all.

The resurrection of Jesus attests to the Father's corroboration of all that He has done. It demonstrates His rule. It demonstrates that He is King, that He is sovereign. He is sovereign over the grave, sovereign over death, sovereign over the devil, sovereign over all of the forces of darkness. It attests to the fact that Jesus reigns supreme. That death cannot hold Him, that the grave cannot bind Him. He lives.

And He lives more than just in my heart. He lives in my heart by His spirit, too; but He lives because He sits at God's right hand in glory. The body of Jesus ascended into the clouds. Somewhere in this vast universe and beyond, there is the physical body of Jesus. That's our claim. That's the Bible's message. And the whole truth of the gospel hangs on it. Our very salvation hangs on it, the forgiveness of our sins hangs on it. It attests to the material nature of eternal life. That what we can expect as the people of God whose sins have been forgiven, who have been drawn into union and fellowship with Christ, that what we can expect is also a physical resurrection. That the resurrection of Jesus is but the first fruits of them that sleep.

Many of you have laid dear, dear friends in the ground. Friends who knew the Lord, friends who love Jesus Christ, they're buried in parts of this city somewhere. And there is coming a day—this doctrine validates it—when Jesus will come again on the clouds of heaven with angels and archangels and the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise.

That's what the resurrection means; that's what this glorious truth stands for. This resurrection is but the first fruits of a great harvest of souls. The answer to the skeptic who asks, "What do you know for sure about life after death anyway? Have you ever been there?" Has anyone ever come back to tell us?" And the Christian reply is, "Yes, someone has come back to tell us. Someone has come back and said that there is life after death. And that someone is Jesus."

Reckon with it. Confirm and affirm that truth in your hearts this morning. "On the third day He rose again from the dead according to the Scriptures."

The question is: Do you believe it?

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