

## STUDY FOURTEEN

# The Work of Christ—3

## THE RESURRECTION

### Introduction

Whilst the atonement is vital to redemptive proclamation it is quite clear from the New Testament that the primary facet of the proclamation was the lordship of Christ. Whilst this is clearly seen in the Acts of the Apostles, as also the Epistles (see Acts 2:36; 3:15; 4:10–12; 5:30–31; 10:36; Rom. 10:9; 14:9; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:9; etc.), yet the lordship is related to the resurrection. We might say that it is the *practical* thing that is preached. It certainly gives *rationality* to the cross in that the cross is not defeat. However, it is more than that because the cross is given *purpose*, that is, it has its point in the defeat of sin—a theme clearly enunciated in the Epistles and more than implied in the book of Acts. Romans 10:9 clearly teaches (as Rom. 14:8–9) that the resurrection and lordship are powerfully linked. No resurrection, no lordship. Probably in this sense all biblical theologians (n.b. modern ‘biblical’ theology) will accept the resurrection as indispensable to true lordship. The problem, however, lies in the following area of debate.

Does resurrection imply *bodily* resurrection of Christ? Whilst all agree that he rose (each in his particular sense of understanding), yet all do not agree on the *manner* of rising. It must not be thought that the *how* of the rising is not related to the *why* of it. Those who view the rising as being a spiritual one, and the story of the resurrection of Christ's flesh as a biblical myth, will feel bodily resurrection no necessity, and so irrelevant—an indifferent matter. However, some must oppose such a notion as bodily resurrection, not as irrelevant but as unacceptable in the light of their terms of reference. Yet again the one who contends for bodily resurrection does so because he feels in some way that it is related: (i) to the forgiveness of sins (and so redemption); and (ii) to the 'adoption', that is, the ultimate redemption of the present physical body. Note, however, that both contend that only by *faith* does one apprehend the resurrection—not otherwise. What is debated, then, is not the *fact* of resurrection but the *nature* of it. However, it must also be borne in mind that the fact of the resurrection is not posited by existential theologians as an objective fact in history, but as something known by or in the existential encounter.

### **An Enquiry into the Resurrection**

It ought to be said primarily that rationalistic theology commences with the presupposition that there is no supernatural. Whilst we admit the word 'supernatural' is a difficult word to understand, we are bound to say that the frame of thinking and the terms of reference in the Bible are those of the supernatural. That is, we have references to angels, demons, visitations from heaven, miracles of all kinds, and gifts which are exercised in what seems to be

the supernatural realm. History, too, is a linear matter, a succession of events, sometimes causes and effects, sometimes interrupted by supernatural acts and events. Thus in this realm of thinking, a virgin birth, the healing of a blind man and the resurrection of Jesus' body are all consistent with the supernatural. Rationalism, in rejecting supernaturalism, is begging the question. It is not a case even of the supernatural being proven, but of considering its place in the scheme of the Bible. Some rationalism has explained or rationalised the supernatural, calling it 'myths' and suggesting that the truths conveyed by such 'myths' are truths and that the 'myths' were not meant to be taken as objective historical realities.

It will be seen then that there are two ways of viewing the Scriptures, and in particular those relating to the resurrection:

- (a) They will be viewed as myths clothing the deeper spiritual truth of a resurrection which is not an actual event—that is, an actual historical event—but 'the life of the Risen One . . . made manifest in the proclamation of that life by the church'.
- (b) They will be thought of as actual events in history—objective happenings which, whilst only truly understood by faith, nevertheless as happenings are able to be examined and apprehended by reason, and so be the basis for faith.

The various events related to the resurrection must fit into the one or the other of these two views. The argument for the former is valid if indeed the use of myth were truly related to the culture pattern of the Jews of that day, and if it were a truly honest attempt to convey a spiritual truth through such a medium. It is questionable, however,

whether in fact this expedient was used. The accounts seem to involve the whole nature of apostolic doctrine. Whilst it may be argued that these descriptions were *later* rationalisations or explanations of an event which could only be known in the realm of faith and did not need an objective truth, if this were so then the accounts are not *factually* true, but only 'spiritually' true. This is scarcely satisfactory. Whilst textual evidence may as yet be thought inadmissible—for example, the lateness of Luke's and John's Gospels and the possibility of concocted accounts—yet the whole thrust of these accounts seems to represent the mind of the church, and also its faith; the thought of forgery or concoction (even with the best of motives) is utterly foreign to the ethos of the apostolic church, with its high moral tempo and insistence upon the truth.

When it comes to the actual events it is to be admitted that an immediate reconciliation of the accounts is not simple. Such have been attempted and a reconciliation is not impossible. However, each Gospel account must be accepted in the light of the aim or thesis of that particular Gospel. However difficult a reconciliation may be, the fact remains that this great work of Christ—and all of his work on earth is in plain history—is essential to all doctrine relating to the atonement and the present and future life of the redeemed. History attests that it was so for the church and continues to be so when truly taught.

### **The Work of the Resurrection**

#### ***The Fact and Indispensability of the Resurrection***

The synoptic Gospels make it clear that Jesus anticipated and taught that he would be resurrected. In Mark

8:31 this announcement is made after the declaration of his Messiahship. This is repeated in Mark 9:31 and 10:34. It is also stated clearly in Mark 9:9 in relation to the transfiguration. Without doubt reference is made, time and again, to the ultimate kingdom when the disciples, and others, will sit down in the Messianic banquet, at the triumph of Messiah; and so many references are made to eternal life and eternal punishment, that the resurrection cannot be excluded.

However, it is his own resurrection to which he refers in the references given above. Following his resurrection it is clear that the women and the disciples are not expecting this event to happen or have happened. 'We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel', said the disciples on the road to Emmaus, '[but] it is now the third day'. This was the day he said he would rise. Luke 24:26, 46 make it clear that his resurrection was indispensable.

### *The Events and Nature of the Resurrection*

Without doubt Christ died. The Scriptures state this (as in Rom. 6:10; 1 Cor. 15:3; Acts 17:3), but even these references speak in the same breath of his resurrection. His death was not having his life taken from him, for he had authority to both lay it down and take it up again (John 10:17-18). Certainly he surrendered up his spirit. The body was dead, and being partially embalmed was placed in the tomb late Friday, but before sundown, meaning it was in the grave on Friday, Saturday, and the beginning of Sunday, thus being there three days, according to Jewish reckoning.

Acts 2:24-31 shows Peter claiming that God raised him up, 'having loosed the pangs of death', that is, 'setting him free' from death's pangs. Also that he did not see

corruption, that is, that his body did not corrupt or decay. This is a mystery. First Peter 3:18 says, ‘put to death in [as regards] the flesh, but made alive in [as regards] the spirit’, that is, he did not die in his spirit, but his death became the springboard for his resurrection. Romans 1:4 suggests that the spirit which was his—of holiness—would not allow corruption to hold or retain him. He, himself, arose. That he did is borne out by Acts 2:24, for this shows that it was impossible for him to be held by death. Romans 6:9 speaks of death as having dominion over him, yet whilst he submitted to its dominion he was stronger than it and rose (Rom. 6:10). Acts 2:24, 32, 3:15, Romans 6:4 and others speak of him as being raised by the Father. This was an attestation of his obedience, holiness and God’s purpose of, for, and in the resurrection. Passages such as Acts 17:3, 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 and others speak of him as raising himself.

His resurrection was not resuscitation of the body. His body bore the marks of his crucifixion (Luke 24:39; John 20:20). He ate and drank with the disciples (Luke 24:41–43; cf. John 21:13–14; Acts 10:40–41). He was in company with the disciples (on and off) for forty days (Acts 1:3). His body was truly a body, and appeared as nothing else to those who saw him (Luke 24:39; John 30:20; Matt. 28:9). Nevertheless his body could appear or disappear and could pass through a door or walls (John 20:19, 26 where ‘came and stood’ indicates coming to the room).

Without doubt, the sight of Jesus made it clear that he had risen from the tomb.

We see that, whereas in the crucifixion Christ had borne the sins of the world and so death had come upon him, yet in the resurrection he is stronger than death,

which means he has defeated sin and death upon the cross, as well as him who had the power of death, that is, Satan (Heb. 2:14–15).

*The Significance of the Resurrection*

The apostles were clear in their proclamation that the resurrection was greatly significant. To their contemporaries it was self-evident that if he had risen he was no less than Messiah and Son of God, Lord of death and life, remitter of sins. It was the resurrection which made the impact rather than a rationale of the cross. The benefits of the resurrection can be summed up as follows:

- (a) Man is freed from sin, and is justified (Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:17). Thus,
- (b) Man is legally resurrected, especially as he is baptised into the death and so expects a resurrection (Rom. 6:1–5; cf. 8:21–23; 1 Cor. 15:51f.).
- (c) Death is defeated and man is already raised (Rom. 6:10–11; Col. 3:1; Eph. 2:6). However, he will yet be raised bodily (1 Cor. 15:46f.). Now death has no sting. First Peter 1:3–4 speaks of the hope of the future resurrection.
- (d) Man's regeneration or new birth is contingent upon the resurrection (1 Pet. 1:4; cf. Eph. 2:6).
- (e) Man now has moral power for living (Eph. 1:19f.; Phil. 3:10–14; Col. 3:1ff.).
- (f) It is the basis of the ascension and reigning of Messiah, therefore his resurrection assures of present protection and aid by him.

- (g) The final transformation (or conformation) of the present 'body of humiliation' will be because of Christ's resurrection, and his insistence of our being in that likeness.
- (h) It goes without saying that the resurrection not only completes and authenticates the cross, but is indeed very much part of it.
- (i) It indicates to man that his body—as Christ's—will have new and amazing properties when it is a 'body of glory'. Christ's body is the first-fruits of a great harvest of the resurrected. Thus all eschatology hinges on the resurrection, whereby sin and death is defeated, and the kingdom comes with power. Fallen humanity may not inherit this kingdom in its fulfilment, but only glorified flesh.



THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST