

The Resurrection of Jesus that we are celebrating today is the single most important event in the history of mankind. It is a fixed point in time and space and has such incredible revelations for each of us. There are three important facets that we must consider; its importance, its proof and its doctrine.

If you are to look at the Old Testament teachings, you will find many prophecies concerning the nature of the Messiah and his actions. No one except Jesus has ever fulfilled all of them. Indeed, there are cash prizes on offer from various sources to anyone who can show that any individual except for Jesus, living or dead, has fulfilled just half of those prophecies. And of these prophecies, the final one is the sign of Jonah, that the Messiah would be buried and would rise again. Clearly then, Jesus' Resurrection is the final proof that he is who he claimed to be, the Messiah. Furthermore, since he offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins, if He were not raised then the sacrifice would have been unacceptable, and we would still be in our sins. As St. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins".

Clearly, then, it is important that Christ rose for us, but what proof is there that Christ did rise? Well the majority of the proofs are found in the various Gospel narratives of the Resurrection. Unfortunately there were no witnesses to the Resurrection; no-one *actually* saw it happen. All we have are the witnesses of events which took place immediately after the Resurrection.

The primary fact is that the tomb was empty. An empty tomb means one of two things:- either someone had moved Christ's body for some reason, or alternatively he was risen! Now, we have not only the account of Mary Magdalene but also of Peter and John. These two disciples - on being told of its vacancy - ran to the tomb; John outrunning Peter. However, notice that Peter didn't stop running, or turn back. He continued on and, on arrival, went straight in to the tomb; he didn't fear the grave as Mary and John had when they waited outside. And we don't need to fear the grave any more because Christ has lain in it and has overcome it. Indeed, we must go through the grave to Christ to enter into his glory.

Now look at the position of the grave clothes. They were lying there, carefully folded. This is evidence that the body wasn't stolen. Robbers had been known to take the clothes and leave the body, or alternatively to take both, but never to steal a body unclothed. Furthermore, even if this was the case, what sort of robber would go to the trouble of carefully folding the garments first?

Christ had laid aside his grave clothes because he had no need of them any more. Death no longer has any dominion over him. Contrast this with the raising of Lazarus, a miracle that has caused a lot of theological problems over the years. Lazarus came out of the tomb wearing his grave clothes, symbolic of the fact that he would one day need them again. Christ, on the other hand, was raised to immortal life. He had no need of grave clothes any more, instead he is now clothed in glory.

The Doctrine of the Resurrection is found in the fifteenth chapter of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, widely accepted to be one of the first pieces of New Testament literature actually written down. It forms the foundation on which all of our belief is based. Remove that and the whole of Christianity falls - as do all our hopes for eternity. Paul's basic argument is twofold. If Christ didn't rise from the dead then there is no resurrection. Hence the Gospel that we preach is wrong, our faith is rendered void and those who have died have indeed perished. BUT (argues Paul), Christ DID rise from the dead and that is the guarantee that all who have died in Christ will be raised. As death came through the action of one man (Adam) so too has eternal life come through one man, Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection, then, is the guarantee of four great truths. Firstly it proves that truth is stronger than falsehood. Jesus was the means by which God's truth came to men. Man sought to destroy that truth, but the Resurrection is the proof of the indestructibility of the truth of God.

The Resurrection also proves that good is stronger than evil. Jesus was God's goodness incarnate which man's sin sought to eliminate, but couldn't.. It proves that life is stronger than death. Man tried to eliminate the life of Jesus once and for all, but we can see that the life which is in Christ cannot be destroyed.

And finally, it proves that love is stronger than hate. The contest in Jerusalem that we have contemplated this week was one between the hatred of men and the love of God. Man sought to break that love on the cross, but God's love is stronger than man's hate and can defeat it.

On Good Friday, the disciples thought it was all over. But Christ has now risen. Now is his work complete.