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THE RESURRECTION

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There is usually a point in every battle which beyond all others is vital to the issue. It can be said that if that point is gained or retained all else will follow. When the time comes for us to know more than we do of the recent war we shall find it out, but even now such names as Verdun and Ypres remind us of this special point.

Historians tell us that on the field of Waterloo there was a little village—not much more than a farm-house and its buildings—called Hougomont. Both Napoleon and Wellington realized the vital importance of the place. It was taken and retaken three times during the day. The flower of Napoleon's Army was hurled against it, and one of his generals killed, and it is generally thought that the retention of it by Wellington had a great deal to do with the issue of the day.

Similarly there is a point in Christianity concerning which we may say that if this is safe everything is safe. I refer, of course, to the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Hougomont of Christianity, and it is with a sure insight—I might almost say a spiritual instinct—that the Church in all its branches has during centuries made much of Easter Day. If the resurrection is true, Christianity remains, but if Christ did not rise from the dead, then Christianity falls like a house of cards.

For this reason it is vital that you and I, as Christian workers, should know at least the outline of our position in connection with this great doctrine. We were considering the death of our Lord, and now from another point of view we must look at the resurrection.

We know from the Gospels, that the disciples had lost all hope about their Master's reappearance. Somehow or other, though He had told them when He mentioned His death that He would rise again, they never realized it. It never seemed to cross their minds. Either they did not understand it or they ignored it, and Nicodemus and the women, in their preparations for our Lord's burial, clearly indicate that they never expected to see Him alive again. And yet, as we know, the third day came, and with it the resurrection.

Now I want to speak on two points: The resurrection as a *fact* and the resurrection as a *force*. We want to be sure of the fact, first of all, and then we will try to see what it means for us today.

I. The Fact of the Resurrection

There are several methods of studying the resurrection, and I desire to present to you some of the outstanding and familiar ways of looking at the fact. Why do we believe that Christ arose from the dead?

(1) First of all, *because of His own word*. He said he would rise again, and if His word is trustworthy in other respects then it ought to be regarded as trustworthy here. His veracity is at stake if He did not rise from the dead. The Apostle Peter seems to have had something like this in his mind when he spoke of it being 'Impossible' for our Lord to be holden of death, as though in Christ's case resurrection was the most natural and obvious thing. At any rate this is the resurrection of no ordinary person. It is the resurrection of one whose life is recorded in the Gospels in such a way that we cannot for a moment believe that the death on the cross was a fitting close to such a life. We are always disappointed if a life ends badly. Even in fiction we have a sort of desire, not to say instinct, that the story shall come to a happy close. Ruskin goes as far as to say that no work of fiction should end badly, because we read fiction for recreation. Be that as it may, in ordinary every-day life we do not like to think of a life ending badly, especially one that has commenced well. Now the death of Jesus Christ was no suitable close to such a life, and following the Apostle Peter we may consider that it was not natural for death to hold Jesus Christ. The word of Christ is, therefore, our first reason for believing in the resurrection.

(2) Then we go further and speak of the *body of Christ*. This has been called the argument from common sense. What became of the body of Jesus Christ? That it was taken down dead from the cross, put into a tomb, a stone rolled against it, the stone sealed and the Roman guard of soldiers put over the tomb, these are all matters of historical fact, and yet on the third morning the tomb was empty. What became of the body? So far as I

know, there are only two alternatives. Either the body was taken out of the tomb by human hands or it was raised by supernatural power. With regard to the former, if it was taken out by human hands it must mean the hands of *friends* or of *foes*. As to the friends, could they have done it? As to the foes, would they have done it? The friends were weak and nervous and frightened, and it is unthinkable that they could have overcome the Roman guard and taken out the body without anyone noticing it. With regard to the foes, of course they could have done it, but they wished to avoid any possibility of spreading the report of His resurrection. They remembered His words, and it would not have been to their interest to take out the body. Besides, only seven weeks afterwards Peter preached in that very place, and said, 'You put Him to death, God raised Him from the dead'. If they had the body of Jesus and could have confronted Peter with it, it would have silenced him forever. He could not have said a word more about the resurrection in face of that evidence. And so we believe that neither friends nor foes took the body, and that it was therefore raised by supernatural power.

This is an argument that every writer on the resurrection has to face. During the last twenty years it has fallen to my lot to read most of the books on the resurrection—some of them wise and some otherwise. And invariably, almost instinctively, I have turned to the chapter where the disappearance of the body had to be faced. If it were not so serious a subject, it would be quite easy to cause laughter by telling you of the theories of some of these books as to the disappearance of the body of Jesus Christ. But a few years ago a volume of essays was written on the resurrection, which admitted that the evidence for the empty tomb was adequate. That is all we need.

If then the evidence is adequate, we are satisfied, and we say again, 'What became of the body?' Now, I believe you can ask that question of anybody, and it is correct to call it an argument from common sense. In connection with people who deny or question the resurrection, ask them, 'What did become of the body of Jesus Christ?'

(3) In the third place, we have to notice the evidence from

the *disciples of Christ*. They, as I have said, never expected Him to rise from the dead. When they were first told that He had risen, they disbelieved it, but when once they were convinced that He had risen from the dead, they never doubted it again. Now between the death and the resurrection (only three days) came a marvellous change from gloom to gladness, from disappointment to hope, from sorrow to joy. How do you account for the change in those disciples in so short a time? We are hearing a great deal today about psychology. Here is a study for any psychologist. How can you explain the change in these disciples in the short space of three days? We know well that time is a great healer, and when we lose a loved one, though we never forget him, yet after a while the even tenor of our life has to be continued, we have to go about our duties just as though nothing had happened. Then as the years roll on, though the memory never leaves us, the effects naturally are softened and virtually removed. But in this case of the disciples everything became different in the short space of three days. If these disciples had recovered their equanimity in three or six months or twelve months or two years, one would understand it from the psychological point of view, but here is the unique fact that this transformation took place in three days. How can we account for this change in the disciples? I do not think it is possible to explain it except by reason of the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

(4) The fourth of these arguments is the *existence and continuance of the Church*. I mean by the Church, of course, what all here believe—"The blessed company of all faithful people," the body of Christ. Just as you can trace a river from its mouth to its source, so you can trace the history of Christianity and of the Church until at last you come to a point where a few Christians met together and were united in a society because they believed their Master had been raised from the dead. It is admitted by everyone that this is how the Church commenced. A number of people gathered together, believing that their Master had risen from the dead. And when you trace that society through the centuries, you find the same thing is true everywhere. People were not compelled to be Christians. There was and is no compulsion or

obligation, from the earthly standpoint. Very often Christian profession, especially in the mission field, has meant persecution, ostracism and even death, yet the Church has existed and still continues to exist, and the fact that we meet every first morning of the week is a proof that we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on that day. It is simply impossible to account for the existence and continuance of the Church of Christ unless you believe in the fact of the resurrection, and that is the meaning of the phrase so often quoted, 'The Church of Christ is built on an empty grave.'

(5) My fifth point is this: I want to select from the Church a *special witness*, the man named Saul, or Paul. Let us look at him for a moment. I think we are justified in studying him and singling him out from the rest. He was a man of keen intellect. He was a man of profound feeling. He was a man of genuine conscientiousness. He was a man of determined will. And when you get mind and heart and conscience and will blended as they were in his case you get a real man, and Saul of Tarsus would have come to the front under any circumstances.

This is the man who had felt it necessary to persecute Christians, and if you study his language you will find that the expressions are remarkably strong. He said that he was 'exceedingly mad' against these Christians. We are told that he went into houses and dragged out men and women and put them into prison. And after he had done work of this kind in Jerusalem, he obtained letters of introduction to the authorities in Damascus, 150 miles away, to do the same there. But just before he entered Damascus something happened, and the persecutor became a disciple, and thenceforward for thirty years he preached, suffered and worked for the faith that he had formerly endeavoured to destroy. How do you account for the change in so strong and powerful a character as Saul of Tarsus? You cannot, as far as I can see, account for it except in one way. Sixty years ago, a great scholar in Germany gave himself to the study of this, and after a time he frankly confessed that he could not explain psychologically how Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Saul of Tarsus. Of course he couldn't from his naturalistic point of view.

Since then some people have not been quite so frank in their confession of failure. I had the privilege of a conversation with our late beloved friend, Dr Robert Russell, when we were speaking together in Toronto last April. He told me that during his time in connection with this Institute he was in a store kept by a Jew in Chicago, and after talking to the Jew, he said, 'Well, you and I are looking for the Messiah from different points of view, but I suppose, like Saul of Tarsus, you won't be content until you see Him.' There was a man in the store listening, and the man interposed and said, 'Are you quite sure he did see Him?' 'Well,' said Dr Russell, 'He said he did.' 'Oh,' said this man, 'A doctor told me it was a case of epilepsy.' Said Dr Russell, 'Was that a doctor of medicine?' 'No,' he said, 'z doctor of divinity.' And he mentioned the name. I have the name of the man and of the college with which that man was associated. Well, this was also said some years ago, and Dr Joseph Parker of London, was accustomed to say, 'Well, if that's the case, we must alter our missionary hymn, and instead of singing "Fly Abroad thou Mighty Gospel," sing "Fly Abroad thou Mighty Epilepsy!"' No, No!

There is only one way of accounting for it. 'Have I not seen Jesus Christ, my Lord?' 'It pleased God to reveal his Son in me.' And my point is this: if Saul's conversion was real, the resurrection is true. And if the resurrection is true, Jesus Christ is God.

(6) My sixth point is this: *The argument from experience.* I can understand an old Christian man saying, 'Well, you are doubtless talking learnedly, but I cannot understand these arguments from history and psychology, but I know Jesus Christ is alive. It is not a dead man to whom I pray. It is not a dead man whom I worship. In my sorrow He comforts me. In my sin He assures me of pardon. I know He is alive.' That is the argument from experience. A sceptic once said to an old Christian, 'How do you know that Jesus Christ is alive?' 'I had an hour with Him this morning.' A modern thinker has said that there are only two departments of life about which we can speak with absolute certainty; one is the realm of pure mathematics and the other is the realm of personal experience, and it is the argument from experience which crowns all the others and which to many people is the strongest of all.

These are the six arguments, and so far as the historical positions are concerned, Thomas Arnold of Rugby, no mean judge of history, said that the resurrection is the best attested fact in history.

II. The Force of the Resurrection

This brings me to my next point: *The force of the resurrection.* What did the Apostle mean when he prayed that he might 'know the power of his resurrection'. The resurrection is not only a fact in history; it is something that lasts until today. There are many facts in history about which we may be quite indifferent. The deaths of great men, like Alexander, Plato, Cæsar and very many more, are interesting, but they are not vital to our life. The resurrection is a fact which has present force, and we want to know what this resurrection has to do with every one of us.

(1) In the first place, it is the *guarantee of our forgiveness.* But for the resurrection we should not have known that the death of Jesus Christ was other than an ordinary death. The resurrection was the seal and assurance that that death was for the sins of the whole world. The resurrection is God's reminder to the universe not only of what He thinks about His Son, but of what He thinks of that Son's death for our salvation. The resurrection is never once attributed to Jesus Christ Himself. From the time of the fact of the resurrection right through the Epistles, not once can you find it said that Jesus Christ arose Himself. It is always recorded that God raised Him from the dead. I know that people will at once think of 'I have power to lay it down,' but the word power there means authority, and even that goes on to say, 'This commandment have I received of my Father.' But from the time of the actual event, through Acts and the Epistles, it is always God who raised Christ from the dead. And if someone should wonder about 1 Corinthians 15, where it says Christ 'rose' from the dead, every verse is in the passive—Christ *was raised* from the dead.

Why do we emphasize this? For this reason. Forgive a very simple illustration. If I owed a man today, say, \$100 and I paid him, but obtained no receipt and have no witnesses, if that man were at all unworthy he could come upon me for that money a week hence, and if I could not prove I paid it, I would have to

pay him again. But if I could produce the receipt or witnesses, there would be no further claim on me. Now, with reverence let it be said that the death of Jesus Christ was the payment of the bill, and the resurrection was the receipt for the money. It is as though the apostles said, 'You put Him to death; God raised Him from the dead.' And that is the meaning, surely, of Romans 4:25, 'Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification'. Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead, you and I are sure that our sins are forever blotted out.

(2) In the second place, the power of the resurrection is seen in this, *that it is the source of holiness*. In Romans 1:4, Jesus Christ is said to have been designated Son of God with power by the resurrection. Where do these words come in, 'with power'? I know that many commentators make them adverbial and interpret by 'designated powerfully,' but I never feel quite satisfied about that, because the words are entirely separate in the original. I am inclined to take them just as they are, 'Son of God with power.' He was Son of God long before that. There was no need to designate Him what He was already. But by the resurrection He was designated Son of God with the addition of power for those who are willing to receive Him, and in the 16th verse of that chapter the gospel is said to be the power of God unto salvation. When you turn to other passages, you will easily see that the resurrection is the source of our holiness. In Romans 6 we are told of 'newness of life'; in Romans 7 of 'newness of spirit'; in Romans 8 we are told that we are united to Christ in His death and burial and resurrection. In Ephesians 1, we are told that the very same power that God manifested in raising Christ from the dead is to be ours to quicken us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and thus if we desire to be holy it is because of the living Christ. 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' So that holiness comes through the acceptance by faith of Him Who once was dead and Who now lives at God's right hand.

(3) The third point regarding the power of the resurrection is that it is *the basis of our fellowship*. The apostles never looked back. They always looked up. There was a time when scholars said 'Back to Christ,' but that means only the Christ of Palestine,

and it will not do for us at the present time. It is not 'back to Christ,' but 'up to Christ,' and it is in and through the resurrection that we have our Lord's perpetual presence. You will notice the emphasis in Revelation 1:18, 'I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore.'

We are concerned with the living Christ. A well-known writer has said that there are two features of modern life that are not found in the New Testament—wistfulness and pensiveness. There is nothing wistful about the New Testament Christianity. Each believer was able to say 'I know'. There is nothing pensive about that Christianity. Each one was able to say 'I rejoice'. And these elements of knowledge and joy come from the consciousness that Christ is alive. Christ liveth in the believer. There is no despondency and no gloom in the New Testament believers from the moment of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(4) The fourth point regarding the power is this: the resurrection is *the warrant of Christ's Lordship*. 'To this end Christ both died and rose again; that he might be Lord.' All through the Acts of the Apostles they preach the resurrection. Why? Because it involved the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ rose from the dead, then He is my Master and I am His servant. He is my Lord and I am His follower. Thus the power of the resurrection is this: that Jesus Christ becomes our Lord, and in that Lordship is the secret of everything that is worth knowing and having and enjoying in the Christian life. You remember what Hudson Taylor once said, that 'If Christ is not Lord of all, Christ is not Lord at all,' and it is through the resurrection that He becomes our Lord.

(5) The fifth element of this power is *the prospect that awaits us in the future*. Man is always looking to the future. It looms large upon our vision. Sometimes there is the thought of death. Sometimes there is the thought of 'that undiscovered country; that bourne from which no traveller returns.' Sometimes there is the thought of our loved ones, as in the case of the Thessalonian Christians. All these questions concerning the future are settled by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The prospect

of the future is full of assurance and brightness because He is no longer dead, but alive. 'I am alive for evermore,' He says, 'and have the keys.' The fact that Jesus Christ has the keys of the unseen world is our assurance that all will be well. The apostle argues this very point: 'If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so we believe that those that have been put to sleep by Jesus, God will bring with him.' Resurrection is connected with our Lord; our resurrection with His. Because He lives, we shall live also.

Many of you will recall that centuries ago there was a part of the earth called, because of the danger on the coast, 'The Cape of Storms'. No ship had been known to round that cape and come back. But one intrepid navigator determined to try again. He knew that if he could only round that cape he would open India and the East to his country and to the world. He rounded that cape, and I saw his monument in China a year or so ago. But from the time that he went round that cape its name was changed from the Cape of Storms to the Cape of Good Hope. And until the Lord Jesus Christ died we may say the death was like a cape of storms, but He rounded that cape and how He has 'begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection.' God 'raised him from the dead and gave him glory that our faith and hope might be in God.'

These are the five aspects of the power of the resurrection which I put before you this morning. It is the guarantee of our pardon; it is the fount of our holiness; it is the secret of our fellowship; it is the basis of Christ's Lordship, and it is the assurance of that prospect of resurrection which is associated with the coming of the Lord.

I want to say again, as I draw towards the close, that this matter is vital and practical. This is no question of speculation. If it were only a matter of thought, we should not be concerned with it this morning. This is one of the most vital, if not the most vital, thing in connection with Christianity. I noticed in preparing the Sunday School Lesson for Easter Day that one topic was raised by the Lesson Committee, 'why we observe Easter Day,' and this is the answer that I have been trying to give.

We observe Easter Day because it is a continual testimony to what we believe to be the absolute necessity and the vital importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead for us and our salvation covering the past, the present and the future.

I say again this is no question of speculation. It is real. I read years ago of a young American clergyman, afterwards a great scholar, who, in the commencement of his ministry, announced six sermons on the resurrection. He said that he would discuss the various aspects of the resurrection, and in particular, would examine the witnesses. There happened to be in that city a lawyer, who thought he would like to hear what this clergyman would do. So he went to the first sermon, and the second—indeed he went to them all, and he listened to the clergyman marshalling the evidence just as he would to a law case in the court.

At the close of the last sermon he went up to the clergyman and said, 'I am a lawyer. Your case is incontrovertible.' 'But,' he said, 'it demands a verdict. It is no mere intellectual conflict. There is life in it. If Christ rose from the dead, then Christianity is true, and we must submit to it.' The man was as good as his word, and joined the Church. That is what I mean when I say this is vital and practical, and that is why, I repeat, they preached this in the days of the Acts of the Apostles—preached 'Jesus and the resurrection.'

The Testimony of the Holy Spirit

'But,' someone says, 'that is a long time ago. Now can the fact of the resurrection of 1800 years back become a vital power in our life today?' Permit me to use this illustration—I have used it before in one way or another, but as I think it is to the point, I will use it again. Some years ago, I had the privilege and pleasure of spending my summer vacation in Normandy, and I came into contact with a very interesting French Protestant pastor, who knew English, and we had quite a number of interesting conversations. Among others, I remember this. He said, 'A friend of mine and myself have a real difficulty in connection with our work.' 'What is that,' I said. 'Well,' he said, 'Over in our Faculty of Theology in Paris there are scholars who have been studying the Gospels

for years, and they are not yet certain that Jesus Christ ever lived, while there are some poor people in my parish who are perfectly certain that Jesus lived, from the experience of their own souls.' 'How do you account for the fact,' he said, 'that those able men are not sure that Jesus Christ lived, and these people are certain of it?' I said, 'Do you think it is due to the Holy Spirit?' 'How can that be,' he replied, 'The Holy Spirit does not witness to these people that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, lived in Capernaum, and died in Jerusalem.' 'No,' I said, 'But the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth, and the fact that he does witness to Jesus Christ and not to Plato and Socrates or any of the others is at least a presumption that Jesus Christ is true.' 'I never thought of it in that light,' he said, 'I will speak to my friend about it.' A little afterwards I incorporated this incident in the last chapter of a book, where I dealt with the verification of Christ, and when the book was ready I sent a copy to my French friend, calling attention to that page, feeling sure he would remember that incident. He wrote back and said, 'My friend and I are now convinced that you are right. It is the Holy Spirit.'

As every student knows, scholars are continually talking in technical languages about the Jesus of history and the Christ of experience, and the only way of linking the Jesus of the first century with the Christ of the twentieth is the Holy Spirit. Other religions have their founders, their philosophy, their morality, but not a single religion except the Christian has the Holy Spirit to make real to our souls all that Jesus Christ did centuries ago as historical evidence.

He gives the witness that excels all argument or sign,
 When we have heard it for ourselves we know it is divine;
 And then, oh then, the wail is stilled, the wandering is o'er,
 The rest is gained, the certainty that never wavers more,
 And then the enquiv'ring voice of praise arises loud and strong,
 And life becomes the prelude to the everlasting song.

—*The Moody Monthly*