

**Intro:**

A modern denier of the resurrection makes this bold claim.

The Church's fixation on the death of Jesus as the universal saving act must end, and the place of the cross must be reimagined in Christian faith. Why? Because of the cult of suffering and the vindictive God behind it. — Alan Jones<sup>1</sup>

This man is not the first to make such a statement.

- From the very first, the chief priests paid men to testify the disciples had stolen the body (Mt 28.11-15)
- In 1965, a man named Hugh Schonfield published a book called *The Passover Plot*, claiming that Jesus planned to fake his own death and stage a resurrection. An editorial in 1994, commenting on this book, said:

“Twenty-eight years after all the hurrah, the book today is *out of print* and *out of stock*. ... Bernard Geis Associates, the original publisher, once thriving in the hot glow of rave reviews, is now *out of business*. Random House, the USA distributor, told me this month that they *no longer even have a record* of the book in their files. The Commonwealth of World Citizens, an organization Schonfield once founded, is *now kaput*. And Hugh Schonfield himself ... is *dead*.<sup>1</sup>

- Others claim that Jesus did not bodily rise from the tomb, the resurrection was ‘immaterial’ and ‘spiritual’. [But can a ‘spook’ eat fish and honeycomb? (Lk 24.41-43)]

There are other theories, but our purpose this morning isn't to catalogue unbelief. I mention these to put our message today into context.

Beyond question, the apostles believed in the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

- Peter and Paul both declared that the body of Jesus, though dead, did not suffer decay, but was instead raised from the dead.

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**Peter, on Pentecost: Acts 2:29** “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.<sup>30</sup> “And so,

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<sup>1</sup> Daryl E. Witmer, “Schonfield vs. Easter and the Invincibility of Scripture”, *Bible and Spade* (1994) Volume 7 (Associates for Biblical Research, 1994; 2004). 7:17.

because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE,<sup>31</sup> he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.<sup>32</sup> “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

**Paul, in Antioch of Pisidia: Acts 13:35** “Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*, ‘YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.’<sup>36</sup> “For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay;<sup>37</sup> but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

It can be said that the fact of the resurrection is the central fact of the Christian faith. Everything hinges on this. All the doctrines of Christianity — incarnation, impeccability (sinlessness), vicarious atonement (substitutionary), imputed righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ, everything Christianity holds dear is proven by the fact of the resurrection — *none of them can be surely believed* if there is no resurrection.

When we are confronted by the claims of Christianity, we are called to walk in a new way of life. We are called to repent of our sins [turn away from] and to walk in submission to the law of Christ, fulfilling the will of God.

Without a resurrection, there would be no point, and no certainty of power – we are saved from sin by Christ’s substitutionary death, but what certainty would we have if there were no resurrection?

Our text for today’s message comes from the beginning of Luke’s gospel:

Read Lk 1.1-4

Our message is entitled *Things Most Surely Believed*. Our message today calls you to believe what the apostle’s believed.

**Proposition:** The apostolic message proclaimed the bodily resurrection of the living Christ as the central proof that the gospel is true – you can have no gospel and no forgiveness of sin without it.

## I. The careful work of Luke, apostolic understudy

### A. Biographical note

1. Luke is probably a Gentile
2. Luke is a doctor
3. Luke is a close companion of the apostle Paul and (apparently) works under the apostle’s supervision

B. Bibliographical background (1-2)

1. Many previous writings
  - a. Matthew, certainly
  - b. Some say Mark, but I doubt it
  - c. Certainly not John
  - d. Perhaps others had written their own experiences or parts to play, little vignettes, not whole gospels
2. Subject: the things accomplished among us (the work of Christ among the people)
3. Subject a matter of eyewitness testimony (see 1 Cor 15.5-8)
  - a. Peter
  - b. The twelve
  - c. Five hundred at once
  - d. James
  - e. The apostles
  - f. Paul

Note that we individual and collective testimony – at the time of writing significant corroboration is possible. Many alive who have seen what Luke writes.

C. Careful methodology (3)

1. Full and careful investigation
  - a. As a doctor (though with significantly less medical information than is known today), Luke is a singularly prepared man for this task
  - b. A man of learning, prepared for investigative study
    - 1) Collection of manuscripts
    - 2) Interview of eyewitnesses
    - 3) Evaluation and prioritization of data

Luke's testimony is not haphazard or mere hearsay. It is a testimony based on carefully researched evidence.

- Someone today might scoff at this: “Self-testimony!”
- But note that Luke is writing in AD 57 (approx), just 27 years from the crucifixion, with many eyewitnesses still able to corroborate his details.

2. Orderly writing

- a. Luke’s plan is to write out the results of his research carefully
- b. “In order” does not necessarily mean “consecutive order”, but according to a definite plan

D. Definite purpose (4)

1. Written to a definite person, perhaps a Christian who is a public official (‘most noble’)
2. Written to establish ‘the certainty’ (4) of those things ‘most surely believed’ (1)

The gospel, then is written to provide careful documentation to establish the faith of a particular disciple.

So... what are those things? Let’s consider an outline of the teaching of Luke:

## II. The central teachings of Luke, a comprehensive gospel

- A. The miraculous nature of the virgin birth (Lk 1.5-2.52)
- B. The prophetic, genealogical, and spiritual qualifications of Jesus the Messiah (3.1-4.13)
  1. John’s preaching
  2. Jesus’ baptism
  3. Jesus’ genealogy
  4. Jesus’ temptation
- C. The self-authenticating ministry of Jesus Christ in Galilee (4.14-9.50)
  1. Supernatural power
  2. Spiritual teaching

- D. The determined march on Jerusalem (Lk 9.51-19.27)
  - 1. Material that is mostly unique to Luke
  - 2. Jesus breaks with Galilee and heads to Jerusalem, the center of opposition to him
  - 3. Jesus experiences the rejection of many along the way
  - 4. Jesus teaches his disciples the implications of this rejection (but they aren't able to understand)
- E. The triumphant week in the holy city (Lk 19.28-21.38)
  - 1. Hosanna! Riding on a donkey
  - 2. Cleansing the temple
  - 3. Challenging the officials
- F. Arrest and crucifixion (Lk 22-23)
- G. Resurrection (Lk 24)
  - 1. Appears to the women (1-12)
  - 2. Appears to Peter (34)
  - 3. Appears to two on way to Emmaus (13-35)
  - 4. Appears to the gathering (36-49)
  - 5. The Ascension [40 days later] (50-53)

These are the things most certainly believed, capped by the resurrection.
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### **III. The certain faith of saints, regenerated souls**

- A. The tomb was empty – the grave clothes visible and intact, the head cloth deliberately folded and laid to one side
- B. The apostles touched the Lord's resurrected body (see esp. Jn 20.27 and 1 Jn 1.1)
- C. Jesus' resurrection body had flesh and bones (Lk 24.39)
- D. Jesus ate after the resurrection (Lk 24.42-43)

E. Jesus' body retained the scars of crucifixion

One preacher told the story of a visit to an insane asylum where a woman asked him, 'What will be in heaven made by the hands of man?' He thought she was crazy, but then realized she was saner than he thought when she said, 'The scars in the hands of Jesus.'

F. Jesus' body was physically recognizable

G. Jesus could be seen and heard

H. The New Testament speaks of the resurrected body being the same as the crucified and buried body (1 Cor 15.3-4)

"The famous Headmaster of Rugby, Thomas Arnold, a distinguished historian, said, 'I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort to the understanding of a fair inquirer than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.'"<sup>2</sup>

'One of the greatest Greek scholars of modern times was Brooke Foss Westcott, for nearly 30 years the Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. In 1879, when over 50 years of age, Westcott gave it as his frank opinion that, 'It is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the Resurrection of Christ.'<sup>3</sup>

On Friday evening, Debbi, Maureen, the kids and I watched the Charlton Heston version of *Ben Hur*. Although the movie won 11 Academy Awards, it has many inadequacies. The movie, however, is based on a novel written by Lew Wallace.

- Wallace had been a Union general during the Civil War.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Arnold: *Sermons on Christian Life* (6th ed. London, 1859), p. 324, quoted in Wilbur M. Smith, "The Need for a Vigorous Apologetic in the Present Battle for the Christian Faith", *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1943; 2002). 100:540-541.

<sup>3</sup> B. F. Westcott: *The Gospel of the Resurrection* (4th ed. London, 1879), p. 137, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.540.

- He was the governor of the territory of New Mexico at the time he wrote the book.
- He had been challenged by Robert Ingersol, noted atheist, to investigate the claims of Christianity with a view to disproving them.
- When he did, he was confronted with the evidence for the resurrection, repented and believed in Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion:**

**Proposition:** The apostolic message proclaimed the bodily resurrection of the living Christ as the central proof that the gospel is true – you can have no gospel and no forgiveness of sin without it.

Do you have forgiveness of sin?

Do you believe the gospel?