

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## Easter Broadcasts: Easter Message (2012)

Imagine the news reports a couple of months after the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. [Please note that references to Scripture passages in the report are in square brackets as they would not have been in the original reports.] They may have read as follows: **"DEATH DEFEATED!**

"Jesus of Nazareth, the alleged prophet who was tried and condemned by Pontius Pilate and cruelly crucified [Matthew 27:1-66, Mark 15:1-47, Luke 23:1-56, John 18:1-19:42], has been seen - alive! The miracle-worker from Galilee who gave the blind sight, made the lame walk, cleansed lepers, made the deaf hear and raised the dead [Matthew 11:5] has surpassed Himself. If the reports are true, and there are many, this Jesus has raised himself from among the dead. It may well be that this man (who was proclaimed as the Son of David when he rode into Jerusalem) [Matthew 21:1-11] is indeed the Messiah predicted by so many of our Holy Scriptures.

"His own disciples have said that he had often spoken of his own death [John 12:33, 18:32] and that he would be raised again on the third day [Matthew 12:40]; but they weren't sure until now as to what he had meant. In fact, the first time he appeared to his disciples, they had thought he was a ghost because he just appeared from nowhere in the place where they were hiding from the authorities [John 20:19].

"There is evidence that shows he was seen by Simon Peter, one of his more impetuous disciples [Luke 24:34]. He was the man who had denied his own master [Matthew 26:69-75, Mark 14:66-72, John 18:15-18, 25-27]. He was then seen by the rest of his chosen followers [John 20:19-23].

"Thomas, sometimes called 'Doubting Thomas', was absent at the time [John 20:24-29]. Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him, was also absent for he, regretting what he had done, had hanged himself [Matthew 27:3-5].

"The risen prophet was also seen of five hundred brethren at once [1 Corinthians 5:6]. No room for ghosts or hallucinations there!

"Besides these, he was seen by Mary Magdalene in the garden [John 20:1-18] - the place where they had laid him in a stone-sealed tomb [Matthew 27:57-61, Mark 15:42-47, Luke 23:50-56, John 19:38-42]. He had instructed her to tell the others that he was going to His Father and their Father - to His God and their God [John 20:17].

"He was also seen by a group of women who say they held him by the feet and worshipped him [Matthew 28:1-10].

"Another two disciples purport to have seen him as they travelled to Emmaus [Mark 16:12-13, Luke 24:13-35]. Apparently, he revealed to them, in all the scriptures, things concerning Himself.

"Then, there was another occasion when the disciples were gathered and the previously-absent Thomas was with them [John 20:26-29]. This disciple, who had once been prepared to die with his master [John 11:6], would not accept that he had risen from the dead until he saw him for himself [John 20:24-25]. He did! Apparently, Jesus showed him the nail prints in his hands and the wound in his side [John 20:27]. Thomas was amazed. He then bowed before Jesus and declared him to be his Lord and his God [John 20:28].

"Apparently, the prophet appeared many other times during the forty days spent on earth after his resurrection. The last time he was seen was when he led the disciples to Bethany [Luke 24:50]. There he lifted up his hands, and blessed them [Luke 24:50]. It was as he blessed them that he was parted from them and carried up into heaven [Luke 24:51].

"Controversy now rages among the Pharisees and Sadducees for the Pharisees believe in the resurrection of the body, but the Sadducees do not [Matthew 22:23]. If the reports about Jesus of Nazareth are true, they lend weight to the argument for resurrection.

"Both Pontius Pilate and Herod are also concerned about these reports as they both had a part in condemning him. Recognising his professed power, they may fear some form of reprisal at his hands.

“The religious leaders who were instrumental in persecuting and condemning him want the prophet’s resurrection swept under the carpet. Rumours have it that they’ve paid the men who guarded the tomb a small fortune for their silence in the matter [Matthew 28:11-15].

“Meanwhile, the disciples of Jesus have lost their fear and are boldly proclaiming the name of the One they believe to be the Son of God. They believe that he died for their sins at the cross and rose again as a proof that they have been made right in the sight of God [Acts 2:14-29].

“No doubt, like many previous religious movements, the whole thing will soon peter out and vanish from the pages of history.”

Well, the message of Jesus Christ, sins forgiven and eternal life have not passed from the pages of history. The Gospel message radically changed the course of history and is still doing so today. The death and resurrection of Christ are two foundational doctrines in this Gospel. Today, we will use 1 Corinthians 15:3-23 as a springboard for our consideration of them.

### **The account of the death and resurrection of Christ**

Firstly, we will consider **the account of the death and resurrection of Christ** found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 where Paul affirms the fact that he had received these truths from the Lord Himself. This shows that the verses quoted here have the full authority of God. As 1 Corinthians 2:13 shows, Paul claims that the things revealed to the Apostles were given by the Spirit of God. The same verse tells us that the very words they used were taught by the same Spirit. So Paul passes on to Christians everywhere the truths that God had first been given to him. This distribution of God’s word is called inspiration. The word has the meaning of being God breathed (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

He then states, “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures...” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The Scriptures spoken of in this context we know, today, as the “Old Testament” of the Bible. So Paul is telling us that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ were predicted in the Old Testament, that is to say, long before the birth of Christ.

This immediately raises the question, “Where in the Old Testament do we find these prophecies?” Well, time forbids that we go to them all; but if we turn to Isaiah 53, we’ll find confirmation of them.

In Isaiah 53:3-7 we read: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

What a remarkable passage of Scripture! In only a few words, it describes the character and work of the Messiah up to the point of His death. Did He die for *our* sins? In the passage, He specifically dies for the transgressions of the Jewish people (Isaiah 53:8); but His death was on behalf of all who have transgressed against God because Paul is (in Corinthians) writing to Jew and Gentile. Furthermore, in the first half of Isaiah 53:10, we read the words, “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin...” Now this definitely covers everyone, because here the root of all our problems is dealt with, namely, sin! Only a sinless sacrifice could be accepted on behalf of the sinner because it is written, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Christ was that sinless One. It was impossible for Him to sin because there was no sin in Him. He voluntarily gave Himself to die for our sin. It is written, “He [that is God] hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). It is also written in 1 Peter 2:24 that He, [His own self], bare our sins in His own body on the tree. He, the just One, died in the place of the unjust. This sets the righteous ground upon which God can forgive sins for it is the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, that cleanses from all sin (1 John 1:7).

We have seen how Christ died for our sins, but what about His resurrection? Returning to Isaiah 53 we read: “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:10-12).

In Isaiah 53:10-12 it is clear that Christ had died; but His days are then lengthened by God and He sees the results of His death upon the cross. This shows that the Saviour who died is alive. Not only is He resurrected, but He is glorified as well. This is confirmed by the words, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong" (Isaiah 53:12). The resurrected and glorified Christ is also active because the "pleasure of the LORD prospers in his hand" (Isaiah 53:10).

In Psalm 16:10-11 we read, "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [or Sheol]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Again we have resurrection and glory. You may say to me that these are the words of David and not of Christ; but if we turn to Acts 13:33-38 we immediately see the words could not have applied to David because he died and he saw corruption. However, they did speak of Jesus, the Holy One, who saw no corruption. We must move on, but if you need further evidence of the suffering and glory of Christ, simply read Psalm 22 at your leisure.

### **Foundational truths of Christianity**

Secondly, the death and resurrection of Christ are **foundational truths of Christianity**. In 1 Corinthians 15:16-18 we read: "For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

If Christ is not raised from among the dead then there is no forgiveness. The resurrection of Christ is the proof that His work on the cross was accepted by God and that the ground upon which God can righteously forgive the repentant sinner has been laid. You may say that God forgave sins before the cross, so why does it have so much prominence? The answer is that the sins forgiven before the sacrifice of Christ were forgiven in lieu of the cross. God was able to forgive sins because He knew that His own Son would die for those sins. Today, we look back to the cross; but its effects are not limited to time - they are eternal.

1 Corinthians 15:16-18 also shows that if Christ is not raised then our faith is empty - it would serve no purpose. Life would be meaningless. Furthermore, we would still be in our sins. There would be no forgiveness; no eternal life; and no blessing from God! There would be no hope at all, just a fearful expectation for God's wrath to fall upon us.

### **Christ could not have been glorified as a man**

Thirdly, without the resurrection **Christ could not have been glorified as a man**. In John 17:4-5 we read part of Jesus' prayer to His Father. In anticipation of His finished work, He says: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Before the world was, Jesus was, eternally, God the Son subsisting with the Father. Such was His *glorious* position. In this prayer, He is asking that the honours that He laid aside when He came into the world be returned to Him, but as a man. There is indeed a Man in the glory! Acts 5:31 tells us that God has exalted Him. He is now a Prince and a Saviour at the right hand of God. He is seated upon the throne of His Father! He has regained all previous honour and more besides.

### **An assertion of life**

Fourthly, because of the resurrection of Christ, we too have eternal life. Therefore, His resurrection is **an assertion of life**. Although, we like Christ may die physically, our bodies will one day be resurrected (in a different form) to dwell in heaven just as His was. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." The verses show how death came into the world through the sinfulness of the first man, Adam. They then show that through the righteous Man, Christ Jesus, there is now resurrection. There is new life!

### **An assurance of our justification**

Fifthly, the resurrection of Christ is **an assurance of our justification**. In Romans 4:24-5:1 we read: "But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." To be justified means to be made righteous. Being righteous, we are fit to enter the presence of God.

### **An absolute proof of future glory**

Sixthly, the resurrection of Christ is **an absolute proof of future glory**. We have already quoted 1 Corinthians 15:23 where we found the words: "But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." So, the risen Christ is the "Firstfruits". He has the first place in resurrection; but many others will follow in His steps when He comes to take believers to Himself. It is written: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first..." (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

I recall an unbelieving politician who once said that he had never heard anything about the resurrected body of believers even after listening to many sermons; but **there is** a clear Biblical description of the kind of body believers will receive in the day of resurrection. It is found in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 where our earthly bodies are likened to a seed planted in death, yet give rise to a glorious body in resurrection. The passage reads: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It [the body] is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Then, in 1 Corinthians 15:49 we read: "And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." We can then turn to 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 where living believers are added: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

Putting it all together, we find that the new bodies will be immortal, incorruptible, spiritual, powerful, heavenly and glorious. The wonder of it is found in Philippians 3:20-21: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." In that day, we shall have a body like that of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself! Hallelujah!

### **Announcement of future judgment**

Finally, we see the death and resurrection of Christ as an **announcement of future judgment**. In Acts 17:31 we read: "Because he [that is, God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." The Man ordained to be the judge is the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son. It is written: "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22).

The world is judged initially during the Great Tribulation period when the wrath of God and the Lamb is poured out; but more specifically just before the setting up of the Kingdom of God upon the earth under the Kingship of Christ for a thousand years. Turning to Revelation 11:15-18 we find: "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever..." The establishment of the kingdom and the judgment that goes with it are found in Daniel 7 and Matthew 13. There is a further judgment of nations at the end of the millennial reign of Christ where nations that rebel against Christ are destroyed (see Psalm 2).

Finally, all the wicked dead are judged at the Great White Throne and are all cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone where there is torment for evermore (Revelation 20:11-15).

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