



CHRIST IN RESURRECTION

Christ Is Risen!

by Desmond Ford

Years ago a communist agitator addressed about a thousand Russian miners. "Religion is the opiate of the people," he shouted. "There is no God. The Bible is only a collection of fables. Jesus was just a Jew, dead and gone long ago."

When he had finished, a young priest mounted the platform and said, "Christ is risen!" From the congregation, people joined his cry, "Christ is risen! Christ is risen!"

"Christ is risen!" is the basis of the Christian hope that one day our loved ones will rise, and we shall rise. Death is not the end. The absolution of forgiveness we experience, because of the gospel, is real, and will last into eternity.

Why the Church Began

What started the Christian church? Why did multitudes throughout the Roman Empire risk social ostracism and martyrdom? You cannot explain the Gulf Stream by saying there was a shower. You cannot explain the Grand Canyon by saying an Indian dragged a stick behind him as he walked. You can't explain the Christian church by saying that a myth or legend transformed brokenhearted, disappointed, disillusioned, depressed men and women—thousands of them.

You have to have a better explanation than myth or legend to account for the fact that in just a matter of decades, the Christian message took fire across that Empire until there were half a million believers—in a place where it was dangerous to be a Christian!

Christians were accused of cannibalism. The Romans thought (misunderstanding the language of the Lord's Supper) that Christians ate their own children. In some places Christians were thrown to the lions. Others were dipped in tar and set alight as lanterns in Nero's beer gardens while rich Romans drank themselves to intoxication. It was dangerous to be a Christian. You had to know what you were doing. What made them do it? "Christ is risen!"

The Church Began at the Place of Crucifixion

It is interesting to remember that the announcement "Christ is risen!" was given in the very place where he was crucified. If I wanted to start a false religion, I would begin at the other end of the earth so I could not be checked out.

When the disciples said, "He is risen!" no one brought forth the body and said, "You're lying!" The tomb was empty, the body gone. Jesus' friends would never have taken it—they knew he was decently interred. If the enemies had had it, they would have presented it. Where was the body of Jesus if he had not risen?

The early Christians did not expect the resurrection of Christ. All the records we have show they were surprised and amazed and could not believe the early reports themselves. The Gospels have the ring of truth when they tell of Mary weeping outside the tomb, of Thomas saying, "Unless I thrust my hand into his side

and feel the nail prints in his hands, I'll not believe." These stories ring true.

What Did Christ Leave in the Tomb?

Speaking of the mourning women, Luke wrote, "They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!'" (Lk 24:2-6).

What did Christ leave behind in the empty tomb? It is important because you and I are afraid of the face of death. We somehow disbelieve that we will die. Other people will die but not us. We cannot picture the last day of our life. (Neither can we think of the *first* day of our life, yet that happened.)

Looking at death is like looking at the sun—you can't endure it! But that sun we dare not gaze upon for long is the same sun by which we see everything else. Unless we can cope with death, we cannot cope with life. Only the person ready to die is ready to live.

I am describing Christians who know they are dead already in Christ; that they are risen already in Christ; that already, in the gracious reckoning of God, they are seated up there in heavenly places with their Lord in perfect righteousness. Nothing can happen down here to remove them, to separate them, "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

Whoever believes has everlasting life right now. Christ has abolished death. Not only has Christ risen, we have risen in him. Though we sleep, we fall at death into the gracious hand of God and will rise as surely as Jesus rose.

Christ Left Fragrant Spices in the Tomb

What did he leave in the tomb? He left fragrant spices behind him in the tomb. Those very precious spices that had been put upon the body of our Lord were left in the empty tomb to tell us that the tomb is not now dank and sour and bitter. The tomb is fragrant with the presence of Christ.

Christ Left Linen Clothes in the Tomb

He also left the linen clothes, so the tomb is no longer bare and drear. In the tomb is the fine white linen of our Lord's righteousness by which we are clothed by faith. You can see battered, threadbare flags hanging in British cathedrals. These are memorials captured from the enemy in wartime, memorials of great victories. The clothes that Christ left behind were like those the High Priest left behind in the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement when he changed into his robes of glory.

Christ's clothes left behind in the tomb tell the

Christian that the tomb has been conquered, the great victory has transpired. When our Lord rolled away the sin of the world just as that stone outside the tomb was rolled away—we were all delivered. When we are with him in faith, his victory is ours!

Christ Left the Burial Facecloth

The burial facecloth was left there. It is meant to dry our tears.

It is not wrong to cry. It is perfectly natural. It is one of nature's safety valves, just like laughter. It is not wrong to cry, but the apostle says, "We do not want you to . . . grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope" (1 Th 4:13). We can smile through our tears, because our Lord is risen from the dead. We can take the facecloth Jesus left behind in the tomb and use it to wipe the tears from our eyes.

Scripture says, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev 21:4). I would not want to be among those who had no tears to wipe away, would you? Would you want to miss out on that part of his ministry to us? Would you want to go through life without problems, without burdens, so that you alone among that heavenly throng will be the one whom the Lord passes by because you have no tears to wipe away?

Christ Left the Angels

What else did our Lord leave behind? He left the angels. When you lose a loved one, the angels are there. They mark the spot. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps 116:15). The angels are there, and what's more, the door is open. The prison of the tomb now has an open door.

The angel said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" (Lk 24:5-6). We are reminded we should never dwell in the darkness of doubt and despair. The Gospels tell us mad men dwelt among the tombs (Mt 8:28). Jesus went through the cemetery and found mad men who had broken their shackles and were possessed by demons—mad men dwelling among tombs.

The empty tomb tells us not to seek the living among the dead; not to dwell in the darkness of doubt and despair. Throughout the record of Christ's resurrection, again and again, that message is sounded because all men, all women find it easy to dwell on the dark side of life.

The Choice Is Ours

There is light enough in the sun for the healthy eye; it is our eyes that are wrong when we dwell in the darkness, the dark side of life. Good and evil are both real; but which will I dwell on? Will I dwell in the darkness of the tomb and be sad? Or will I live in the light of the risen Christ and see that even the dark things of life have been transfigured because of their ultimate outcome?

It's a matter of choice. Unbelief is a choice. We can choose life in Jesus Christ, "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25), if we wish.

Why not make your choice for Christ today!

