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Articles on THE RESURRECTION

By Drs. Vos, Beattie, Edgar and Rev. Francis Palmer

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# The Bible Student

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all things; hold fast that which is good.

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CONTINUING

## The Bible Student and Religious Outlook.

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### Facts.

There seem to have been always two parties to the discussion of the nature of religion, divided by the emphasis placed on doctrine or life. One party depreciates doctrine as relatively unimportant, adopting as its motto the popular couplet of Pope:

"For modes of faith let graceless  
zealots fight,  
His can't be wrong whose life is in  
the right."

The other party conceives its mission to be a strenuous contention for the faith once delivered to the saints and very naturally, therefore, puts eminent emphasis on doctrinal soundness, and preaches a salvation through belief of the truth.

We need not attempt here to adjust the balance between these contending parties. Surely seriously reflecting, thoughtful people need no demonstration to prove that Pope's much quoted deliverance is sophistical enough to be well nigh frivolous, so illogical as to be irrelevant, inasmuch as it patently "begs the question" in each line of its sonorous sophistry. It may be more to the point, however, to suggest that in much discussion, particularly in re-

ligious debate, the difference is often mainly a matter of emphasis and both parties are likely to be extreme; neither wholly right nor yet either wholly wrong.

In the religious sphere this logomachy is as unnecessary as it is unfortunate. What a ceaseless pity it is that devoted disputants cannot preserve the beautiful balance so uniformly characteristic of the Scriptural presentation of themes which form the arena of unending conflict! How significant and suggestive of the peace which might reign, is the striking fact that each party can find in the Scriptures so much to justify its claim!

Christianity is primarily a religion of facts. By this is not meant that it is simply true as opposed to false nor yet practical as contrasted with theory or speculation; but rather that it is strictly and literally *historical*; that it is in the first instance a series of great events world wide in their relations and age long in their influence; that what is called in modern technical statement "historicity," lies at its basis and is fundamental to its integrity.

Occasionally it looks as though in some quarters this truth is not ap-

his fellow-apostles, Christ presented himself again to them, Thomas now being present, and the instant he saw, he cried, "My Lord and my God." Unbelief was transmuted into faith, doubt became doctrine.

If vision convinced Thomas, it had antecedently convinced his fellow-apostles; if Thomas was justified in believing his own eyes, he would have been justified in believing the eyes of his ten fellow-apostles. They could see as well as he; they were as honest as he; and if seeing was believing in the case of the apostles, seeing would be believing in our case also; and, it may be asked, if we can be right in believing our own eyes, why are we not obliged to believe the eyes of our fellow-men who can see as far and as truly as we can? The apostles, out of their own experience, send down the centuries to us the facts which they gathered with their own senses; if the story is incredible, it is because the witnesses are liars or fools; it cannot be discarded on the ground that the event is intrinsically unknowable.

This was clearly perceived and fully acknowledged by Strauss, who said, "If the gospels are really and truly historical, it is impossible to exclude miracles from the life of Christ."

But the wisest of all, He who never made a mistake, put the seal of His approval upon the validity and sufficiency of human testimony when he said, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet believed" (Jno. xx. 29).

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## THE EMPTY TOMB AND THE RISEN JESUS.

PROFESSOR F. R. BEATTIE, PH. D., D. D., LOUISVILLE, KY.

In the teaching and faith of the apostolic age two facts were constantly dwelt on. These were the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The apostles ever preached Christ crucified, and Christ risen. They showed that he died for our sins, and rose again for our justification.

Both the apostolical and doctrinal significance of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead have a large place in apostolic teaching. The fact that Jesus left the tomb is taken to be proof of his divine Messiahship, and the assurance of the resurrection of his

people in due time. If Christ be not risen our faith is vain. If he has risen we too shall rise. And the same fact of an empty tomb becomes a ground of confidence and consolation to those who have the faith of Christ in all ages. In this article a brief and simple study of the empty tomb, and the risen Jesus as the best explanation of that untenanted grave is to be made. In doing so we shall pass various theories to account for the empty tomb under review, and seek to ascertain whether the Gospel narratives do not give the best explanation.

#### I. THE THEFT THEORY.

This theory admits the fact of the death of Jesus, and that his body was laid in the tomb. All the particulars in the Gospel story, which describe the crucifixion, the removal of the body, and the placing of it in a borrowed tomb are admitted as historical.

But it is supposed that some one for some reason stole the body. The hint in the narratives of the Gospel about the expected removal of the body, and the bribing of the guards is used to give color to this superstition. It assumes two forms. One is that the disciples stole the body, so that they might start the report that he had risen as it was foretold by himself he would do. The other supposition is that the Jews stole the body so as to render his resurrection in fulfilment of his own word impossible. In both cases infidelity has shown wonderful powers of imagination in reading the purposes of the disciples and of the Jews in regard to the theft of the body.

Both suppositions are beset with endless difficulties, and call for much more credulity than the fact of the resurrection. Suppose the disciples stole it, the first difficulty would be to get at and get out the body. A heavy stone was over the opening to the tomb, and a Roman watch was set there at the request of the Jewish rulers. Is it reasonable to suppose that these scattered and discouraged disciples would be likely to disturb the body from its burial place? Then if they did succeed in getting it, how could they hide it in Jerusalem, or destroy it without being observed? They were nearly all strangers in Jerusalem, and could hardly be able to secrete a dead body with any hope of escaping discovery? Then in addition if they had been guilty of such a fraud, how came it to pass that when they realized the fact of the resurrection

they became such moral heroes. An act of deceit could hardly produce such moral effects on them.

Then if the Jews stole the body, they would have the same difficulty in getting possession of it in the first instance. The bribery story is scarcely credible, for to sleep on sentinel duty was certain death to a Roman soldier. But, if they had stolen it, they then had it in their possession and could have produced it or shown how they had disposed of it. Then when the story of his resurrection began to be bruited about among his followers they had only to produce the body to silence all these reports. They were never able to do this. The tomb was empty and the body was absent. Hence this explanation fails.

## II. THE SWOON THEORY.

This theory differs from the theft theory in that it first of all questions the reality of his death on the cross. It admits the facts of the trial, and condemnation, and crucifixion of Jesus, but argues that he only fainted or swooned on the cross. This supposition denies the reality of the supernatural, and undertakes to explain the facts naturally. His death consequently cannot be admitted to have actually taken place. The fatigue of the days before his crucifixion, the pain of this particular mode of death all combined to induce the collapse or swoon which overtook him. It was in this state that the Roman soldiers found him when they came to hasten death. They thought he was dead, but as a matter of fact he had only fainted. Then the cool air of the tomb and the odor of the spices used in embalming the body revived him after kind hands had laid the body tenderly in the tomb.

But this theory is full of difficulties and absurdities. First of all the fact of his death is well attested. The Roman soldiers would no doubt make pretty careful examination. Then the spear wound made in his side would have caused death even if he was only in a swoon state when it was inflicted. Then supposing he did revive how could he untie himself from the grave clothes, and how could he get out of the tomb with the stone and the guard there? If it were hard for his disciples to get in to steal the body, it would be far harder for this weak, faint, wounded man to get out of the tomb. In addition, when his followers saw him he was able to walk about, which showed that

his wounds were healed also. This healing could only have been supernatural, and hence the supernatural is not escaped with terms of this theory unless the historicity of the whole narratives is denied. Thus the fact of one risen from the dead is the better explanation of the empty tomb and the absent body.

### III. THE VISION THEORY.

This theory differs from the two already outlined in that it admits the death, it denies the theft, but refuses to assert the resurrection. The body it argues was laid in the grave and never came to life again at all. It is evident that this theory makes a large draft on credulity when it will not admit the fact of an empty tomb at all. The body remained in the grasp of death, either in this tomb or another.

Then the story of the resurrection has to be accounted for. They say that his followers, especially the women were in a highly excited expectant frame of mind. They were worn out, weary and nervous, and with their highly imaginative natures they were ready to see visions and dream dreams about the risen Jesus. Coming in the early twilight of the morning with the mists slowly lifting, and the gardener moving about they fancied that they saw some one like their Lord, and without making careful inquiry they at once began to give currency to the report. And always afterwards all the appearances of Jesus are to be explained in the same way.

This is even a more absurd theory, even though a big book is written to support it. To begin with, the body would surely have turned up somewhere if the resurrection of it had not taken place. Then the women and the disciples were in no frame of mind to expect Jesus to come to life again. The women went to finish the burial offices, and not to see him alive. And the disciples would scarcely believe the report when it first came to their ears. Then they all had the same sort of vision with wonderful uniformity. Then, too, the reality of Jesus' body after the resurrection as tested by Thomas tells against this theory. But above all the empty tomb, and the absent body still call for explanation. Here we have one truly dead and buried, leaving the tomb where his body had been laid out, and appearing to his former associates so that they had no doubt that it was he. This fact best ex-

plains the absent body and the empty tomb.

#### IV. THE HISTORICAL THEORY.

This is to the effect that Jesus was truly dead when placed in the tomb, and that he really rose from the dead. The human spirit and body were parted for a time, and were reunited in their former relation by the fact of the resurrection.

In proof of this we have not only the insufficiency of the negative theories already sketched, but abundant positive proof. This can now be presented only in outline.

First, the prediction of his resurrection by Jesus himself has some force. He predicted this fact in various ways. He also foretold other things, such as the ruin of Jerusalem. These events came to pass. So his resurrection is the natural sequence to his prediction of it.

Secondly, the experience of the Roman guard set to watch the tomb has great value. If the Gospel narrative be taken as historical it clearly implies that these guards saw and heard strange things that night. So much so that they came and reported it to the authorities. Then came the bribery story, and the efforts of the Jews to silence the rumor of his resurrection.

Thirdly, the ten appearances between the resurrection and the ascension have the utmost value. To his followers he thus appeared that they might be valid witnesses. Five times the first day he showed himself. To Mary, then to the other women, to Peter, to the two, and to the ten disciples, he appeared. Five times afterwards are on record. To the eleven Thomas being present, to seven by the Sea of Galilee, to five hundred on a mountain, to James, and at the ascension make up the list. These appearances, or epiphanies, are of indubitable force in proving the reality of the resurrection. And to these may be added the case of Paul as unique.

Fourthly, the New Testament writers invariably assume it to be true. Peter and Paul in their preaching and writing give it almost as much prominence as his death, which indicates that they regarded it as distinctly historical. Had they been setting forth a fiction, they would not have been apt to give it so much prominence in their teaching.

Fifthly, the moral effect on the disciples is one of the most

marked things connected with the resurrection, and one of the strong confirmations of its reality. Their doubt was turned into unwavering faith, and those who had been timid if not cowardly became moral heroes. Had they been conscious that what they taught about the risen Jesus was all a fable, this moral result could not have reasonably taken place.

Sixthly, the early Church laid firm hold of this great fact. Its preaching, its life and its hope was permeated with a belief of its reality. The early apostolic and patristic writings are full of it. The change in the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week indicates its influence. On the tombs of the early Christians, especially in the Catacombs, there are varied monumental evidences of the belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Seventhly, its doctrinal and practical significance in the completeness of the Gospel and its assured hope of eternal life can only be mentioned here. This is a strong consideration. The resurrection of Jesus was necessary to complete his work on earth and prepare him for his reign and intercession in heaven now. And for our hope he has by his resurrection become the first-fruits of them that slept.

Hence the risen Jesus best explains the empty tomb. So he ever liveth to make intercession for us. And we shall be like him when we shall see him as he is.

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### THE PLACE OF THE RESURRECTION IN THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

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The great leader of modern unbelief, Strauss, has declared that the Resurrection is "the centre of the centre, the real heart of Christianity as it has been until now." Christlieb, defending this article of faith, takes the same position when he says, "the dogma of the resurrection is the proof of all other dogmas, the foundation of our Christian life and hope, the soul of the entire apostolic preaching, the corner stone on which the Christian Church is built." The New Testament substantiates such opinion.

The Resurrection is put forward as a fact. Such appears in Christ's argument for its reality (Matt. xxii. 31); and numerous