

## SERMON NO. NINETEEN

(TOPICAL)

## IMPERATIVES OF THE EMPTY TOMB

Mark 16:1-7 I Cor. 15:57-58

Michaelangelo, the immortal artist, stood in company with his fellow artists one day contemplating a masterful painting of the crucifixion of Christ. He was heard to say, "Why do we fill our churches and art galleries with portrayals of the His crucifixion, as if it all ended there? He is risen, He is alive."

## I. YES, CHRIST IS RISEN

## A. Credible witnesses

1. Testimony of others is accepted as an indispensable source of knowing the truth of much of what we know
  - a. **IN FACT A GREAT DEAL OF WHAT WE BELIEVE TO BE TRUE IS ACCEPTED ON THE TESTIMONY OF OTHERS BECAUSE WE DID NOT OURSELVES SEE IT!**
  - b. The essential matter is to test and verify the credibility of the witnesses who testify
2. Competency
  - a. Were they eyewitnesses? **YES**
  - b. Were they credulous? **NO**
    - (1) Thomas; Peter & John
    - (2) even wrote of themselves that they did not believe He would rise from the dead!
3. Honesty
  - a. **NOTHING TO GAIN & EVERYTHING TO LOSE BY THUS TESTIFYING TO HIS RESURRECTION (life, fortune, etc.)**
  - b. No witnesses ever had more motive for denying what they saw with their own eyes, yet "... we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."
4. Number of witnesses
  - a. apostles, women, 500 brethren who saw Jesus all at once ... alive when Paul wrote I Cor.
  - b. There is a point reached where calling more eyewitnesses becomes ludicrous ... **WELL OVER 500 EYEWITNESSES SHOULD ESTABLISH THE FACT BEYOND ANY REASONABLE DOUBT!**

To doubt the resurrection of Christ is unreasonable and irrational in the light of the evidence for it.

## B. Conversion of enemies

1. A great company of the Hebrew priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 5)
  - a. THESE MEN WOULD HAVE CHECKED ALL THE EVIDENCE BEFORE THEY BECAME FOLLOWERS OF THE NAZARENE!
2. Saul of Tarsus
  - a. If there was ever a man in the first century who knew all arguments against the resurrection of Christ which the Jewish Sanhedrin could ever draw up, that man was the Apostle Paul, and yet in spite of all this he believed and preached it as his central theme in the face of persecution etc.
  - b. Two great unbelieving scholars set out to disprove Christianity . . . one the resurrection, the other the conversion of Saul of Tarsus . . . both met again as Christians
  - c. Also Governor Lew Wallace (author of Ben Hur) and Sir William Ramsay (converted archeologist, etc.)
3. Paul says that some even of Caesar's own household became followers of the Way!

## C. Contemporary history

1. Josephus (says He arose and appeared to His disciples); Tacitus (80 A.D.) Pliny; Suetonius (90 A.D.)
2. These and many other historians confirm the following facts concerning early Christianity of the 1st century
  - a. Christ was a real historic person and founder of Christianity
  - b. He was worshipped as one divine
  - c. Christians met on the 1st day of the week to celebrate the resurrection of their Christ
  - d. They were pure morally and were very influential in society
  - e. Christianity spread with astonishing rapidity
  - f. The church was terribly persecuted but the Christians, by their hope in a resurrection, withstood the persecutions

## D. The Empty Tomb

1. Stands in overwhelming emptiness and silence as one of the most unanswerable points of evidence
2. Even unbelievers admit 3 things about Jesus
  - a. He lived as a historic personage
  - b. He was crucified and buried
  - c. His tomb was empty!

3. Many are the theories as to how it became empty
  - a. Disciples stole body (when heavily guarded by soldiers—would they then die for their own lie!)
  - b. Enemies stole body—why didn't they produce the body later ! ! !
  - c. Jesus did not die but swooned and rolled back the stone—nearly dead from beating then hanged on the cross for 6 hours
4. The answer given by those there and best qualified to know . . .
  - a. Jewish authorities admitted tomb was empty
  - b. Then they bribed soldiers to tell a lie (if were not bribed and was not a lie why did not someone successfully refute the gospel accounts when they were published in the 1st century?)
  - c. Not even a good lie at that . . . "DISCIPLE STOLE THE BODY WHILE WE WERE ASLEEP!" HOW COULD THEY KNOW IF THEY WERE ASLEEP! IMAGINE SOMEONE TESTIFYING LIKE THIS ON THE WITNESS STAND IN OUR COURTS!

UNBELIEVERS SAY CHRIST WAS NOT RAISED FROM THE DEAD . . . I SAY PROVE IT!

THERE STANDS THE EMPTY TOMB IN PALESTINE TODAY!

IN THE N.T. THERE IS HISTORIC EVIDENCE WHICH WOULD BE ACCEPTED BY ANY COURT TODAY!

LET THE UNBELIEVER PRODUCE SOME EVIDENCE . . .

THE QUESTION IS NOT COULD IT—OR COULD IT NOT HAPPEN . . . THE QUESTION IS ONE OF FACT AND EVIDENCE . . . THE QUESTION IS DID IT . . . OR DID IT NOT HAPPEN

THE EVIDENCE SAYS YES IT DID HAPPEN AND THERE IS NO FACTUAL EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY ! ! !

E. The Existence of the Church and its institutions or ordinances

1. The church, the 1st day of the week of the Lord's supper, baptism are all here . . . WHAT IS THE CAUSE BEHIND THESE MONUMENTS
2. If one should doubt that George Washington ever existed and did the mighty feats recorded of him . . . we would not only refer to historical testimony, but to the effects of his life and to the monuments erected in his memory!

DENY THE CREDIBILITY OF THE SCRIPTURE TESTIMONY CONCERNING JESUS, HIS DEATH AND RESUR-

RECTION AND YOU HAVE AN EFFECT (THE CHURCH), WITHOUT AN ADEQUATE CAUSE (THE RESURRECTION).

3. The church of the 1st century and ever afterward accepted the doctrine of the resurrection and practiced the ordinances NOW THE PEOPLE OF THAT TIME WERE FULLY CAPABLE OF CHECKING THE TESTIMONIES OF THE APOSTLES AND OTHER PREACHERS . . . BUT THEY COULD NOT AND DID NOT REFUTE THEIR PREACHING AS BEING LIES!

4. No other truth could have so completely transformed the lives of so many millions through the ages

a. Indeed no other truth has . . . no other religion has!

YES, CHRIST IS ACTUALLY, FACTUALLY, HISTORICALLY RISEN FROM THE DEAD . . . SEEN BY EYEWITNESSES

IF THE EVIDENCE IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO PROVE THE HISTORICITY OF THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST . . . THEN EVIDENCE FROM HISTORY AND EYEWITNESSES IS OF NO VALUE AT ALL TO PROVE ANYTHING IN THIS WORLD! TESTIMONY IS COMPLETELY UNRELIABLE IF IT IS UNRELIABLE IN THIS CASE

THERE IS BETTER EVIDENCE, OF MORE CONVINCING CERTAINTY FOR THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS THAN ANY OTHER FACT OF HISTORY WHICH IS BEYOND OUR IMMEDIATE SENSORY PERCEPTIONS

MOST EVERONE BELIEVES THAT LEE HARVEY OSWALD MURDERED PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY . . . BUT THERE IS NOT NEARLY AS MUCH EVIDENCE FOR IT AS FOR THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

## II. IMPERATIVES OF THE EMPTY TOMB

A. The Bible is God's Word!

1. The Creator of the universe has expressed His nature, His will, His purpose for man.
2. He has demonstrated the unsearchable richness of His love
3. He has demonstrated that He will keep all His promises
4. He has demonstrated that there is POWER for the believer in this Word of His

B. Heaven is as real as the resurrection

1. He has gone to prepare a place of eternal rest and peace for us
2. There will be no tears, no death, no sin, no separation, no war there

3. A real place so glorious that human language is not adequate to fully describe it . . .
- C. Hell is as real as the resurrection
1. There is no rest there day or night
  2. The smoke of their torment goeth up forever and ever
  3. It is the dwelling place of all that is false, ugly, evil
  4. It is a place of conscious remembrance and eternal regret
3. One in practice
4. In obedience to truth revealed, unity . . . in opinion, liberty . . . in all things love
  5. Christ purchased the church with His blood . . . you must be saved by His blood . . . you must be a member of His church . . . to do so you must obey His plan of salvation
- G. One Way of Salvation
1. He, His person, His accomplishment, His atonement, His commands . . . this is the one Way of salvation
  2. No man has ever been given authority to add to or take away from His Word (Gal. 1:8-12)
  3. Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, Be Immersed
  4. Be faithful unto death  
(cf. Luke 16:19-31)
  5. A real place so terrible that human language is not adequate to fully describe it
- D. Man's immortal spirit is as real as the resurrection
1. Man is not just flesh and bone and blood
  2. He is a living soul, created in the spiritual image of God, his Maker
  3. Man is morally free and responsible to make a choice between salvation or condemnation as it is offered to him by God's grace
- E. Christ is coming again just as surely as He came forth alive from the tomb
1. He is coming in time and in history. (not in thought or feeling)
  2. He comes with His angels to judge and render vengeance
  3. No one knows the day nor the hour, but everyone will know when He does come, for every eye will see Him
- F. There is only one church, the universal body of Christ, and that is the one which conforms in belief and practice to the church described in the New Testament
1. One in name
  2. One in doctrine

*Conclusion*

- I. THERE IS DIVINE POWER IN THE RESURRECTION (Phil. 3:9-10)
- A. The power of Christianity is not in the esthetic value of great cathedrals—nor in somber ritual and tradition—nor in emotional singing or heart-rending sermon illustrations
    - 1. THE POWER IS IN THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE TOMB . . . IN TIME AND IN HISTORY
  - B. It gives a hope that is alive (I Peter 1:3)
  - C. It brings joy unspeakable and full of glory (I Jn. 1:1-4)
  - D. It sanctifies or purifies (I Jn. 3—Acts 17:32)
  - E. It gives power to our witness for God (Acts 4:33)
  - F. It gives us a power to be steadfast and to labor (I Cor. 15:58)
- II. AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE RESURRECTION
- A. If Christ be not raised then preaching is foolishness, vain and useless
  - B. If Christ be not raised then faith and hope and love are senseless, vain and silly . . . if there be no life after death, let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!
- III. YOU MUST MAKE A CHOICE, YOU WILL MAKE A CHOICE, YOU HAVE MADE A CHOICE
- A. Our only hope is in Christ and His resurrection
  - B. Gandhi, Joseph Smith, Martin Luther . . . their bones and their tombs are with us to this day . . . there is no hope in them
  - C. Philosophy, science and all the other schemes of men are helpless and hopeless
  - D. Let the so-called scientists and philosophers talk about "pre-historic" this and that all they want—  
AS FOR ME, I WANT MY LIFE HERE AND HERE-AFTER  
FOUNDED ON HISTORIC CERTAINITIES  
I WILL TAKE THE HISTORICAL, EYEWITNESSED RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST OVER "PRE-HISTORIC" GUESSES ANY DAY  
HOW ABOUT YOU?

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

An epilogue is defined: "A concluding section, as of a novel, serving to complete the plan of the work." The twenty-first chapter of John's gospel is his epilogue. It is parallel to the closing verses of the Synoptic Gospels which give the different instances of the "Great Com-