



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 20:1-20

"John's Testimony to the Resurrection"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] This morning we are turning to the 20th chapter of the Gospel of John as we draw near the conclusion of our exposition of this magnificent book which is so strong on the sovereignty of our great triune God. In some ways I am not looking forward to at all to the finishing of this book. It is such a magnificent treatise. And in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ shines forth so magnificently that I really hate to come to the end of it. We're coming near the climax of the ministry of the Lord and in verse 1 through verse 10 this morning we're going to read John's testimony to the resurrection.

"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him. (That little plural pronoun "we" is very interesting for a number of reasons but one of the reasons touches the legitimacy and reliability of these gospel accounts. When you read the Markan gospel account you notice that it was more than one woman who went out to the tomb, and consequently some New Testament scholars have suggested that the Johannine account is a different account and is actually in some contradiction to

the account in Mark. For here we read specifically only of Mary Magdalene. But this little "we" in verse 2 indicates that more than one person went out to the sepulcher with Mary. So we are, I think, justified in assuming that the others mentioned in Mark also were with her. "And we know not where they have laid him.") Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher. (The other disciple is no doubt the Apostle John, who was so far as we can tell considerably younger than the Apostle Peter. And if it is true that the Johannine literature is to be dated near the end of the first century, he was a relatively young man, perhaps even in his late teens at this point. So he outran Peter to the sepulcher just as if Mr. Prier and I were running I would outrun him, of course. [Laughter] Verse 5,) And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. (Now in order to keep from making this point when we come to the message I'd like for you to notice that little word "saw" in verse 5. It is a word that means essentially "to glance" or to take a quick look. "And he stooping down and looking in saw the linen clothes lying, yet went he not in. Now we continue.) Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie; (Now this verb, translated also by "see" is a different word. This is the word from which we get the English word theorize or theory. So consequently it suggests more than just a simple glance and some perhaps some pondering over what he was seeing. So we can see Peter standing before the garments that had been left by our Lord and thinking about what that might mean.) And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulcher, and he saw (This is a third verb, also translated "see." But in the original text three different verbs. This one often means to see with comprehension. And that's probably the force of it here. And he saw,) and believed. (And one might, of course, at this point say, "Do you mean to say that the apostles who had been with our Lord for three years, who had heard all of his teaching, who had even heard him prophesy that he would go to Jerusalem, suffer, die, be buried, and be raised again on the third day, had been told that at least three times and they still did not

believe.) So that would have been a natural question to ask and John answers it here by saying, "Yes, they did not believe until afterwards.) For as yet they knew not the Scripture. (Now they had heard our Lord speak, and they had no doubt read the Scriptures that prophesied that the Messiah must rise again from the dead. But they did not know them in the sense of having some understanding of them.) For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home."

And of course the implication is they now understand, to some extent, what has happened when Jesus Christ on the first day of the week rose again from the dead. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege that is ours on this the first day of the week and the first day of 1984. We look forward with anticipation to 1984. Others have looked forward to 1984 with trepidation. We look forward with anticipation. We thank Thee that 1984 is in the hands of our sovereign God, just as 1949 or any other of the days of the life of this universe. And we recognize that our times also are in Thy hands. And therefore, Lord, we have reason to be at peace with Thee and with the experiences of life. And today we ask, Lord, that Thou would be with us through this year. May the sense of Thy presence go with us. We know that Thy presence is with the saints of God. May we, Lord, live in the light of that. And may we also learn to rely upon Thee through the 365 or so days of this year.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for the promises of the word of God. And Lord, may it be the experience of each one of us in the year to come that we advance in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And if it should be Thy will that we should be here at the end of this year we ask that we may be able to look back upon 1984 as a year of spiritual advance for each of us. There is much land yet to be possessed. And O God, by Thy grace, may we have the experience of appropriating some of it.

We commit to Thee the ministry of the word of God from Believers Chapel and all of its outreach, these radio ministries about which we've just been speaking, may Lord there be many who tune in and hear and respond to the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And for the other ministries, too, may Thy hand of spiritual blessing be upon them in power. We commit the sick, the feeble, the puzzled. For those Lord who have great needs, and there are many in our congregation who do have great needs, give Lord that which will satisfy their need and at the same time increase their appreciation of Thee. We pray for all who are mentioned on our calendar of concern particularly, be with each one of them. Bless Lord in the singing of the hymn, in the ministry of the word that follows. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Now we are turning to John chapter 20 today and we are looking at verse 1 through verse 10. And I think that if we were to ask John the Apostle how did you come to believe that Jesus Christ arose from the dead. That this is precisely what he would say to us, what he has written here in verse 1 through verse 10. And so this is really John's testimony to the resurrection. And that's the subject for the message in the next few moments.

When we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ we sometimes tend to think that the resurrection is something that is added to the message of the gospel. The importance of it can hardly, however, be overestimated. When we read of the preaching of the apostles in the Book of Acts, Luke says that they preached Jesus and the resurrection. And one of the reasons that they preached Jesus and the resurrection is simply the resurrection is the vindication of the faith in the believers in Christ. And it is also the vindication of their conviction that Israel rebelled against the Lord in the crucifixion of their Messiah. And so they preached the resurrection as the vindication of the apostles and disciples and also the vindication of the charge laid against the nation that they have crucified their Messiah.

So we do not think of the resurrection as an epilogue or as an appendix to the faith. It is the faith in the sense that it is through the resurrection that we come to understand the true significance of what happened on the day of Calvary. As Moberly said many years ago, "Easter is the

interpretation of Good Friday." The date of the triumph of our Lord is the date of Good Friday. But it is on Easter day that the fruits of the shedding of the blood begin to be gathered in. And so we look at the resurrection as part of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and as a very important part of it, because it demonstrates to us the importance of the work that he did by the Father. And also it demonstrates the vindication of the New Testament attitude toward the death of Christ.

The resurrection, of course, is important for other reasons. And we'll mention some of them later on. But in general we could say that we could have no assurance that there is a good God apart from the resurrection. Incidentally, that conviction comes only from Christianity. There is no reason whatsoever to believe that God is good apart from Christianity. It also is the vindication of the belief that this is a moral universe in which moral principles prevail. And also, it is the vindication of the conviction that there is another alternative to stark pessimism as a philosophy of life. Hardy said that "Behind the universe there is a vase of imbecility." And one might think that he was right were it not for the fact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This assures us that the enterprise of the Lord will ultimately flourish in the earth. It assures of the fact that there is an invisible world and that immortality is a fact. Jesus Christ has come from the dead to continue his ministry both here upon the earth and now in heaven at the right hand of the throne of God.

After the death of our Lord, contrary to what you might expect, the apostles have gone off in hiding like wounded animals. They had gone to their holes and their dens of their homes and they were licking their wounds wondering what had really transpired in the ministry of Jesus. Of course, one might say, well all men ultimately die. And so why be so shocked by the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Well the apostles of course had heard him say things that were things that no man could possibly say. And therefore in his case, death and the conclusion of his life, was more of a shattering experience for them, because he had made such magnificent promises. He had made promises, for example, that he could overcome. He had made promises that the gates of hell should not prevail against those who believed and trusted in him. But now it appeared that the gates of hell had overcome. And it also appeared that he had not overcome death at all, but death had overcome him.

So the apostles lacking in understanding of the truths of the word of God are disturbed, and troubled, and depressed, and despairing. One sense that as you read the 24th chapter of the Gospel of Luke and they utter that discouraging word, "But we thought it should have been he who would redeem Israel." So the resurrection then is something that was a magnificent change of the atmosphere of the life of the believers. This whole passage moves toward the statement of verse 8, "And he saw and he believed."

Now we read, "The first day of the week the women went out to the tomb." Evidently they intended to finish some of the specific rites that were done in the case of people who had been buried, because our Lord had been buried very hurriedly. And so there were certain things that they wanted to do in order to finish the work of burying him. They did not think that he would rise from the dead. They were asking who was going to move the stone from the entrance to the tomb. So they were totally surprised by what happened. And they came and they discovered that the stone had been rolled away from the sepulcher. And Mary rushes back to Peter and to John and says, "They've taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher and we know not where they have laid him."

As I mentioned previously that little pronoun "we" is very important, because it does indicate that there were others with Mary. You know it is possible and many have had this attitude toward the New Testament, it is possible. I think that there are some questions one might reasonably ask about this viewpoint, but it is possible to hold that the facts of the New Testament are true but some of the details may not be true. In fact, many very learned and very spiritual men have had a view of Christianity that accords with that. And so we can say, at least, that there are many Christian people who have believed that the Scriptures do contain some minor and incidental contradictions or at least things that can hardly be harmonized very easily. But yet the truths of the word of God have adequate testimony. And therefore we can believe the essence of the teaching of the word of God. For example, such frequently turn to this incident and say, "You see, John says that Mary went out to the tomb, the other says Mary was accompanied by others." For example, in Mark chapter 16 when Mark describes this particular event he says when the Sabbath was passed,

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome had brought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him. So there were at least three with Mary, but they are not mentioned here.

But John says, "And we know where they have laid him." So that would indicate that there are others with Mary when she came. It reminds of a story that illustrates this point quite well. A history class was studying the French Revolution and was asked to investigate and report on the vote by which King Louis XVI was condemned to death. And after they had done their research the professor asked the class, "Well, what did you discover from your research?" Well nearly half the class reported that the vote was unanimous. But some others in the class said, "Well from our research we discovered that there was a majority of one." Then a few others in the class said, "Well our conclusions are different from both of these other conclusions, because our research has reached the conclusion that the majority was 145 in a vote of 721. So unanimous, majority of 1, majority of 145 and a vote of 721 participants. And at first sight it might seem that these are hopelessly contradictory conclusions. But as it turned out they all three were correct. Because the complete story is this, three votes were taken, not simply one. The first was the issue of the King's guilt. And the answer was unanimous, 721 voted he was guilty. The second was to decide the penalty, and a majority of 145 out of the 721 decided that he should be put to death. And then a third vote was taken on when he should be put to death. Should he put to death immediately? And by a majority of one it was voted that he should be put to death immediately. So the three votes were all true, and they might appear to be outwardly contradictory but actually they harmonized with the whole story.

Now I think we shall ultimately find that that is what the Bible gives us, that which is actually true in all of the things that it teaches. And so I regard this as an instance of an implicit harmony between the Markan account and the Johannine account. I am sure, of course, that there are some things that we will never in our flesh here be able to harmonize, because we don't have all of the facts. But we have so many beautiful harmonizations of things that I'm quite confident we can leave the harmonization of everything with the Lord God. And when we get to heaven we shall discover that the Scriptures are reliable and without error.

Now, "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark."

Some have suggested and some modern scholars of some significance that this statement by John who likes the symbolical aspect of things, this statement of John that things were still dark was intended by John to suggest the state of the whole spiritual and moral realm before the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They come and they discover that the stone has been taken away from the sepulcher. Professor C. K. Barrett, one of the contemporary New Testament scholars who has spent a great part of his life studying the Johannine literature contends that this statement, "Seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher," is worded in such a way as to suggest that it was done supernaturally. Well we know from other accounts that that is true, and John may well have intended us to understand it that way. So they come and they evidently took a look inside the sepulcher and they saw nothing but the clothes there, or else they didn't bother to do that and they just simply saw the stone rolled away and they came running back saying, "They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him." Now, it is interesting, is it not as you look at these words you can sense that this statement not of what they saw but of what they inferred from what they saw. They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher and we know not where they have laid him. Now, she gave a message, or they gave a message not of what they saw but of what they inferred from what they saw. Well, there is another error in this too and that is Mary identifies our Lord with his body, and one must not make that identification. "They have taken away the Lord," because they have taken away his body. Even if that were true, that would not necessarily mean that they had taken away the Lord. But of course we do speak that way and we speak of our Christian friends when they have died and their bodies are still with us, we speak of them as if it is they. But it [is] well for us to remember that it is not really they, and when we have memorial services, and when we have bodies that are still with us before burial; it is not really the person. The person, the moment we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and become a member of the family of God and then when we die, our spirits go immediately to be with the Lord. And so we cannot really say it is they, it is their body which they lived in as a tabernacle or a house for a time. But it is not they.



But Mary says, perhaps in the popular language, "They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him." Well, nothing is left but to go and inform the apostles of what has happened. And so she ran and she came first to Simon Peter. Now I don't know where Peter was in the city of Jerusalem, whether he was in Number 16 Beersheba Street or Number 14 Gad Street, we don't know. But evidently she came to Peter's house first. She knocked on the door. It was still early in the morning, and I can just imagine the apostle stumbling to the door wondering what in the world is the matter. And when he saw Mary being even more disturbed. And then hearing the surprising message, and when she said, "I'm going to tell John," he said, "I'll go with you." And so he threw on some clothes over his Van Heusen pajamas and the two of them went over to Number 43 Beersheba Street or wherever he happened to live. And they knocked on the door and they told to John again the message that Mary had. "They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him." And John and Peter together decide that they're going out to the tomb.

So they went out and they ran, of course, and John being the younger of the two outran the older apostle. And he reached the sepulcher first. And as he reached the sepulcher, and we're just going to assume it was a sepulcher something like the one you see when you go to Jerusalem today. There is no evidence, of course, that that which you see today in the city of Jerusalem is the place in which our Lord was put. But it probably was a sepulcher similar to it. The stone has been cut away so that it is a kind of perpendicular stone. And then the tomb is excavated and it is dug out. The stone is cut out. And inside there is a little path in which you go down, and on one side there is a ledge where a body could be placed. And usually at the end of the ledge there is a raised little place about like a half step upon which the head would be put. So we'll just assume it was something like that.

And when John arrived he looked and his eyes caught some of the cloths that had been placed around the body of our Lord, and he said, "Oh that Mary, she's done it again." And you can just see the disconsolate look that comes over his face or the surprise and disappointment. And I

can see him kind of kicking a stone and Peter arriving about this time huffing and puffing a bit, like Mr. Prier would be. Then Peter the impulsive disciple he goes right down into the sepulcher and stands and looks, somewhat uncomprehendingly evidently, and what he sees is well he sees the cloths that had been wrapped around the body of our Lord from the shoulder down lying. And then he saw the napkin or the headdress that had been put around the head because it was usually wrapped separately, lying on the ledge. That is, as he says here in another place. So he saw the linen clothes lying and the napkin which was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes but wrapped together in a place by itself.

Now remember when the Lord was buried, as was the custom among the Jews, he was buried but first the body would be washed. And then it would be wrapped in cloths, and between the cloths there would be placed the spices. And in fact in verse 39 of chapter 19 we read, "And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight." And then back in chapter 11 verse 44 we read with reference to Lazarus, "And that was dead came forth bound hand and foot with grave clothes. And his face was bound about with a napkin." So in the case of Lazarus he was buried in much the same way.

Now of course you must remember that when the cloths were wrapped around the body, the spices were put between the cloth as the body was wrapped. So that would mean that there would be considerable weight within the cloths that were about the body. Therefore, when John and Peter came in and they saw the linen clothes lying you would expect to see, and this is evidently what they did see, those that had been about the body, because of the weight involved, they would now be flat because the body was not within the folds. But that around the head, not having that kind of weight, and being much smaller, we are not surprised to read in verse 7, "But wrapped together in a place by itself." Now, that Greek word is a word that means, "It still retained its twirled shape" or its "annular shape." In other words, there was not enough weight in the cloth that was over the head of

our Lord to cause it to collapse. And so it still retained the form that it had as our Lord's body was lying upon the ledge. So the others had collapsed but this still retained its annular shape.

Now someone might say, "Well did not perhaps someone come in and steal the body away?" That, of course, is one of the theories that circulated after our Lord's resurrection was preached. Someone came in, some of his disciples, and stole the body away. Well if they had come to steal the body of our Lord away, they would not leave the cloths there. And furthermore, since some of the spices were powdery spices there would be the inevitable evidence of the unwrapping of the cloths around the body of our Lord. So you see, what is intended here is a testimony to the resurrection of our Lord. And it was so impressive to John that in his gospel he regards this as sufficient evidence for belief in the resurrection. For we read that when Peter finally said, "Hey John, come here. Let me show you something." And John went down into the sepulcher and saw that the body was not really there he adds, "I saw and I believed."

So what were the things that he saw? Well, he saw the linen clothes lying. And incidentally, it's unnecessary to speak of the position unless there was something unusual about them. And I would suggest that the reasonable solution is that the spices were still in the folds. And then he saw that the napkin was wrapped together by its place, its round shape still had been retained. So evidently as John looked at it he sensed that the body had been swiftly dematerialized, had passed through those garments, and the Lord was gone in resurrection. And the folds around the body had collapsed, that around the head still retained its rounded shape.

Now, I suggest also to you that that is what John intends for us to understand, because twice in the remainder of this chapter he will say that Jesus' body had the power to enter a room when the doors were closed. Notice the 19th verse, "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." And verse 26, "And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you." So John expects us to understand, it would

seem, that the body of our Lord had been swiftly dematerialized, had passed through those cloths that were about in the resurrection. And if we ask what did he believe when he saw? Well it's plain that he believed in the resurrection of the body. For he adds in the 9th verse, "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead."

And if he did not believe in the resurrection he and Peter would most likely have organized a search. As we say out west, he would have organized a posse and they would have gone on looking for those who had stolen away the body of our Lord. But he did not, because evidently the Holy Spirit brought home to him the truths concerning the resurrection of Christ. And it's at this point that he comes to faith in his resurrection. He saw with spiritual perception and he believed. Mark 9:9, 10 and other places where he had been told that Jesus would rise from the dead come alive to him at this point. He had not yet learned to apply the Old Testament Scriptures to the New Testament events during the earthly ministry of our Lord. But now he learns how to apply the Scripture to the events of our Lord's life and ministry. And then, of course, many years later he wrote this magnificent gospel in which he applied a number of texts of the Old Testament to the ministry of our Lord.

There are, of course, a number of testimonies to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Many think that it's proper to base our faith upon the things that we call the evidences of the resurrection. For example, the empty tomb; no one has adequately explained the empty tomb. I don't think it can be explained except by the conviction that Jesus rose again from the dead. The theory that the early Jews spread that someone of his disciples came and stole the body away while we slept, that is while the Roman guard slept, does not stand up to investigation. In the first place how can anyone who was sleeping know what was done with anything. And then, of course, the theory that they went to the wrong tomb because they were not there at the time of the cross is not to be substantiated because the women were there, and the women knew where he had been buried. And furthermore, the angel said, "Come see the place where the Lord lay." And it's unlikely that modern scholars know the place of the burial of our Lord better than the angels who were there at that time, at least

so it seems to me." There is also the witness of the personal appearances. They have, of course, been attempted to be explained by things like, well he really didn't die, he just swooned. That has never been satisfactorily adduced as an explanation of the resurrection. These men went to their graves believing in the bodily resurrection of our Lord when it cost them often their lives.

Or the theory that men had hallucinations, how does that satisfy when they had so many hallucinations over a period of about forty days. And five hundred people had hallucinations. And then at the end of the forty period of time the hallucinations suddenly stopped. That seems strange to say the least. And then there is the witness of the early church, which was convinced of the resurrection of our Lord and often gave their lives for that view. There is the witness of the New Testament, who would have bothered to write a New Testament in which it is said our Lord said he would rise from the dead, and the apostles said he would rise again from the dead, when he didn't really rise again from the dead. It's amazing how much faith unbelievers can have.

And then there is the testimony of the Lord's Day itself. The early church met on Saturday, the day of the Sabbath. But following the resurrection suddenly the believing body begins to meet on the first day of the week. What can account for that change in the light of the teaching of the Old Testament concerning the Sabbath day? Or how can we account for Christian experiences down through the centuries. No, there is no explanation of the events our Lord's death, and burial, and purported resurrection that can be harmonized with the facts of the Bible except the theory that he rose again from the dead in bodily fashion.

Now, let me conclude by just pointing out some of the reasons why the resurrection is important. Now I'd like for you at this point, if you will, to turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and we'll take a look at what Paul says concerning the resurrection of our Lord. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and we'll just look at verse 12 through verse 19. Now, the apostle is writing a letter to the believers in the city of Corinth. And they had a peculiar view. They, of course, were taught by the philosophy that they had learned when they were growing up, that the body was the source of a great deal of the evil and sin of human beings. And so it was desirable for an individual to be released

from his body. And so the idea of a resurrection of a body threw in the face of the philosophy that they had been taught. And so it's not surprising that some of them had questions about the resurrection.

Now Paul is seeking to counter some of that, and he writes in the 12th verse of 1 Corinthians 15,

"Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. 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 in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

Oh the imperative necessity of the resurrection, otherwise our faith is vain. Now when Paul says our faith is vain in verse 14 he uses a word that really means "empty." Our faith is empty, that is that content of our faith upon which we rested the historical fact of his death, burial, and resurrection if he did not raise, then our faith does not have any objective content. It is empty. And if it is empty, and if our faith is empty, oh well that has a great deal to do with what we believe about God's love and God's power. Because if it is true that our faith is empty, it does not really rest upon historical fact of our Lord's resurrection, then we cannot trust his love. And we cannot trust his power.

There is an old story which I read many years ago in one of the books by one of my teachers, and in this book he spoke about how King Clovis one of the Barbarians was listening to the story of the death and the resurrection of our Lord. And hearing the unfolding of the death of our Lord as the testimony was being given, suddenly, according to the story, King Clovis reached for his

sword and he drew his sword out and he said, "Oh, if only I had been there with my Franks we would have charged up the slopes of Calvary and smashed those Romans and saved him." And of course, if that is really true that our Lord was there and there is no resurrection, even though he said he would be raised from the dead, then we cannot trust the love of God. If God watching Calvary did nothing when the only holy, righteous man whoever lived suffers at the hands of Israel and the Romans, if he did nothing then as my teacher said, "We're back where Huxley was." I cannot see one shadow or twiddle of evidence that God is love.

And then furthermore we have no assurance that God is a God of power. You cannot trust his power. If he said that Jesus Christ would go to the cross and would die and be buried and be raised again from the dead, and if our Lord said that he would do that, and if he did not do it, if in reality in this great struggle between heaven and hell, hell actually won in this place shouting out on the day of the cross, "We win, we win, we have defeated God," then we have no assurance whatsoever of the power of God working on our behalf. And if I may be allowed to say this, I know it's a little off the point, but it's not entirely off the point, that is why we preach and teach so fervently the fact that our God is a God who cannot be frustrated in his purposes. Ultimately that is the struggle between Arminianism and the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. It ultimately has to do with the nature of God himself. Is he a God who in his purposes and designs accomplishes all his purposes and all his designs? We say, I say that he does. My opponents, of whose Christianity I do not have any fundamental doubt in many cases, they say no he can be frustrated. I say if that is so your God is not the kind of God that I worship. So if Jesus Christ did not arise from the dead when he said he would, when the Scriptures said he would, we cannot trust the power of God.

And then furthermore, Paul says in verse 17, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." Now he uses a different word here for vain in the Authorized Version. He uses a word that means something like your purposes are not reached satisfactorily. That is, the intended goal is not reached. That's the meaning of the Greek preposition *mataios* that is used here. So in verse 17 he says, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith does not do for you what you thought

it would do, you thought it would bring you the forgiveness of sins by believing in our Lord, but it has not reached its intended goal. You are still in your sins."

Now, in the modern world we don't worry about our sins, that is outwardly. In fact, one man said, "Modern man is not worrying about his sins still as about their forgiveness." But the facts are that men do worry about their sins even when they don't want to. There is a story in Carlisle which he imagines a man trying to run away from his own shadow. And over and over again he turns around and it's still there, the black thing continues to dog him as he runs. And finally as he flees wildly away from his shadow and he reaches the state where he's so tired that he's panting and practically deadbeat he says, "God, God, I can't get away from it. I can't." Well that's like a man and his sin, he can never get away from his sin. "There is no peace saith my God to the wicked." And there is no peace whatsoever to any man who does not ultimately come to a resting confidence in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if he has not been raised from the dead we have no assurance of the forgiveness of our sins.

And then Paul says in verse 18, "Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." In other words, when we fall asleep thinking, we fall asleep into the arms of our Lord Jesus Christ, if we think that when our eyes close in death that our spiritual eyes shall open upon the face of our Lord, we discover that instead of opening upon the face of the Lord we open in eternal perishing if Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead. And we are of all men most miserable if the hope that we have of the forgiveness of sins and of heaven is a hope that is only an earthly hope.

There was a great Welsh saint by the name of Christmas Evans. He lived many generations ago. When the day came for him [to] die he was lying in his bed. He called his friends in and he told them goodbye, and then he turned to the wall. And in a moment or a little while suddenly they saw him wave his hand triumphantly and say, "Drive on, Drive on." And he died. There's been testimony of many people who died that at the point of death they have had some sense of the



presence of the Lord, and evidently he thought that he saw the chariots come to drive him home to heaven. I'm not prepared to doubt that they were not there.

On the grass market in Edinburgh behind the castle many of the covenanters were put to death. It's one of the storied places of the city of Edinburgh and for believers it's one of the really holy places, because many of the saints of God gave up their lives on that place. And there was one young covenanter, just a young fellow, who was on the scaffold, and just before the axe was to fall upon his head he shouted out, "The angels, they've come to carry me to Jesus' bosom." It was probably one of the ways by which God comforted him as he gave up his life in testimony to the faith.

So we end by saying that we all face an inevitable decision. Is the evidence credible? Yes, the stone is gone and with it the darkness forever. The angel said, "He is not here for he is risen as he said." Paul cried, "Now, is Christ risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fall asleep." And if we have by the grace of God, through the internal objective testimony of the Holy Spirit been brought to a confidence in the reliability of the word of God and have had it tested by the evidence and feel secure by God's grace that God raised him from the dead, we have a hope that is most secure for time and for eternity. That ultimate testimony is something that only the Holy Spirit gives. We may test it, but ultimately it is a divine testimony for in the final analysis the strongest testimony that can ever be given to anything is the testimony of God. That's what Christians have, the testimony of God, that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead in bodily form, and that he is coming again and will receive the saints to himself. And if you are able to say, "I believe truly by the grace of God that Jesus Christ died and has been raised from the dead," then you can affirm with Savonarola the Italian friar who gave up his life for Jesus Christ. "They may kill me if they please, but they may never, never tear the living Christ from my heart." May God in his wonderful grace bring you to the confidence in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that comes through the Scriptures and the testimony, the internal objective testimony of the Holy Spirit.

“John’s Testimony to the Resurrection” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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If you're here this morning and you've never believed in Christ we invite you to come to him. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. We invite you to come to a sovereign God whose purposes cannot be overcome, one in whose love and in whose power you can trust for time and for eternity. Come to him. Believe in him. Receive as a free gift eternal life. Come to Christ.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these magnificent testimonies in the word of God. We thank Thee for the beloved apostle who leaned on Jesus' breast, whom Jesus loved. We thank Thee for the faithfulness of the proclamation of the word. And O Father, do that same old work that Thou didst do in the hearts of the disciples and apostles many hundreds of years ago today.

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**