



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 27:62–28:15

Gospel of Matthew

“The Resurrection of Christ and Christianity”

TRANSCRIPT

Now will you turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 27 in verse 62, where we begin the Scripture reading for today? We want to read the resurrection account that Matthew the Apostle has given us in his Gospel. Matthew chapter 27:62,

“Now the next day that followed, the day of preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate saying, Sir we remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive after three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure unto the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen fro the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go you're way, make it as sure as ye can.”

Incidentally, I think what he means when he says, you have a watch, is not you have your own watch, but rather that you have a watch; you will have the privilege of seeing that the Roman soldiers watch. Because we see in a moment they do talk about the governors and the fact that they will make it right with the governors in case something happens. Verse 66:

“So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch. In the end of the Sabbath (that expression is better rendered “after the Sabbath;” the Greek word, *hospes*, which is used there in this case seems to clearly mean that, and the commentators and others generally agree. After the Sabbath, as it begin to dawn toward the first day of the week came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightening, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did shake and became as dead man, And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen form the dead” and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy: and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshiped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave much money unto the soldiers, (as I comment in the *Believer’s Bible Bulletin* it’s a rather

ironic thing that one of the apostles, Judas Iscariot, betrays our Lord for 30 pieces of silver, a relatively small sum, whereas it takes a whole lot of money to bribe Roman soldiers to tell a falsehood) saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you (that makes it plain that these soldiers were Roman soldiers and they naturally were a little disturbed because what they were saying and what they were going to say is that we were sleeping on the job and that was a capital offense for a Roman guard to do that, so they were probably a little nervous taking that money as usually happens when you take money under false pretenses. It tends to make you a little bit nervous. Tension tends to grip you). So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.”

Later on I was planning on making a comment. I’ll make it now. You notice as you read through the Gospel of Matthew, you notice it begins with the account of the virgin birth of our Lord, and it concludes with the resurrection account, and it’s almost as if one of the purposes that Matthew the Apostle had was answering certain Jewish fables that were being promulgated in his day, the day that he wrote this Gospel. One of them was the story of the birth of our Lord, which undoubtedly, in the hands of the unbelievers, became an account that was really a blasphemy. In fact, just a few years ago, in speaking with someone, a friend of mine speaking with someone about the virgin birth received the retort, well really the whole problem is that Mary and Joseph just got in a little bit of trouble, and that accounts for the story of the virgin birth.

Matthew begins his Gospel by refuting that, pointing out that it was truly a virgin birth. Our Lord was born of the Spirit. And then it would be natural for this other story to arise, his disciples

came and stole him away, and so at the conclusion of his Gospel, he gives the lie to that Jewish fable, and I'm sure the Gentiles participated in this, too, about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

This is the Word of God, may the Lord enable us to give proper response to it in obedience and faith.

Every Sunday in the Christian church is really a testimony to the resurrection of Christ. Every Sunday that comes around is a fresh testimony to the resurrection, because there are individuals who gather together in his name and offer their petitions to him, listen to his Word and ultimately, through that ministry, come to the worship of him as if he were still alive.

We meet on the first day of the week, because it is the first day of the week that he arose from the dead. The early church evidently began to meet on the first day of the week, because it was the day of resurrection and the day of his appearances to them as we learn from John chapter 20. And so the day of the resurrection is celebrated every Sunday, and that is why it is so wrong in some ways for us to reserve one day out of the year and call it Easter Sunday, as if that's the day that we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Every Sunday in which we meet we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is risen, and really we should not forget that.

Now having said all of that, I apologize that I did not arrange this series of messages in such a way that the message on the resurrection falls on Easter Sunday. That was a mistake on my part, I realize that. So with that apology and that justification we turn to the subject of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus is peculiar to Christianity. It is important, incidentally, that we recognize that when we use the term, the resurrection, we are using it in the sense of the bodily resurrection. James Denney, Professor of Theology at the University Glasgow in the earlier part of the 20th century said, “If we do not speak of the bodily resurrection then we should not speak of resurrection at all.” And Professor Denney was right, because when we use the term resurrection, we are speaking of bodily resurrection, not the living on of the influence of our

Lord, but we are speaking about his resurrection in bodily form, and in his case in glorified bodily form.

The resurrection is peculiar to Christianity. The three great religions we could call Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity, but it is only in Christianity that we have a doctrine of resurrection. Judaism has as it's father Abraham, and he died somewhere around 1900 B.C., but no resurrection has ever been claimed for Abraham. His tomb has been carefully preserved for almost four thousand years in Hebron and southern Palestine and it is now covered with a Mohammedan mosque. Most of the students of archaeology believe that that is probably the genuine burial place of the great patriarch, but no resurrection in the sense in which our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead exists in Judaism.

In Mohammedanism the same situation prevails. Mohammad died June 8, 632 in Medina, and today many people visit the shrine, the tomb of the prophet, but no Mohammedan claims a bodily resurrection for Mohammad. So far as their own testimony is concerned Mohammad is dead and that is it.

Even in other ancient religions such as Buddhism there is no claim of the resurrection. In the ancient accounts of the death of Buddha, it is said that he died with that utter passing away in which nothing ever remains behind. So the bodily resurrection is peculiar to Christianity.

There is an old story about Bishop Talleyrand who became a very prominent political figure in the French Revolution who had once been a bishop but turned skeptic, and there was a movement in France during those days to establish a new religion to take the place of Christianity, because they recognized that their own philosophy of life was directly opposed by Christianity, as all humanism is opposed by Christianity. And some spoke to Talleyrand and said they were amazed of how difficult it was to start a new religion, even though its tenets were based on good works, good things. And Talleyrand said, surely it cannot be so difficult as you think. They said what do you mean? He said, well after all, all you have to do is announce that you are going to be resurrected, get yourself

crucified, put to death, and then rise again on the day on which you predicted you would, and be resurrected, and you will find it is no problem at all to start a new religion.

Now not only is the bodily resurrection peculiar to Christianity but it is an essential fact of Christianity. You know as I have said to you many times, I avidly read the comic strip for entertainment every day. My wife thinks that I cannot really have a happy day if I don't begin by doing that, and so she likes to bring the paper in and put it by my breakfast plate so I will start off on the right foot [laughter]. And Peanuts is one of the columns that I read, and about ten or twelve years ago it was a day like this, and Lucy is looking out of the window. The rain is pouring down and Linus—the theologian of the strip [laughter]—is listening, and Lucy says, “Boy look at it rain! What if it floods the whole world?”

And Linus said it will never do that. In the 9th chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that it would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow, and she looks out and the rain is pouring down just like it is here and she says, you've taken a great load off of my mind. And he said, sound theology has a way of doing that. [Laughter]. I have always liked that because it is so true; sound theology does have a way of taking a load off of your mind.

The bodily resurrection is essential to Christianity and in fact we do not have any faith of a risen Savior at all if this fact of the resurrection has not taken place. Now I don't mind singing the hymn that we sang, the first hymn, but I have never really liked the logic of it. “You ask me how I know that he lives? He lives within my heart”—I always feel a let down at that. I am looking for some good reason why he may be alive, and instead, the hymn writer turns to something within the realm of human heart as a kind of a subjective thing, but fortunately, we do have the Word of God, and we do not have to rely upon human feelings.

We do know Christ is raised from the dead, and we do have experiences that confirm that fact, but ultimately the reason that we know it is through the testimony through the Word of God and the testimony of the Holy Spirit within our hearts who has brought conviction to us that the majesty of the Word of God is evidence that it proceeds from God. Only God can prove God and

fortunately, through the testimony of the Holy Spirit, he brings conviction to his saints. This is why we know the things that we know.

We don't know them because we have given you eight good reasons for something. That only gives us what we could call probable truth, or extremely probable truth or overwhelming probability of truth, but no sure truth. Certainty can come from God alone and only his saints know the certainty of the truths of the Word of God by virtue of the testimony of the Spirit.

Now there was a theologian who also had a way of taking loads off people's minds who pointed out that the evidence is of the truths of the Word of God are significant, they don't bring us certainty, but they are important. They do sweep away some objections that we may have falsely in our minds. I had a number of them before I became a Christian. I discovered they were groundless. They weren't good objections. There were much better objections that I was ignorant of, so the testimonies to the evidences of the truths of Christianity helped to sweep away a lot of false things that I had in my mind, many of them given to me by my college professors.

And furthermore the evidences are very helpful for Christians confirming them in the fact that the Holy Spirit has implanted within our heart that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead through the Scriptures and the evidences tend to confirm the testimony that we have. So I want you to understand, when I speak on the resurrection this morning, it is not for the desire to convince you through historical evidence that the Lord Jesus rules from the dead, that is impossible.

Now mind you, there is no fact of ancient history that has the documentation that the resurrection has, no fact of ancient history has the documentation that the resurrection has. No fact of ancient history has so much different documentation. Remember that the New Testament is composed of the testimonies not only of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but of also of the testimonies of each of the individuals who had acquaintance with the risen Christ, and remember, too, that our Gospel circulated separately over a lengthy period of time. These were separate testimonies, and the individual testimonies were singular and separate as well.

It’s a travesty for us in the Christian church, too, to think of the resurrection as something like spring. We often hear ministers say that on Easter Sunday. When the bulbs are out and the shrubs and the trees are beginning to bud and blossom, we tend to say the resurrection is illustrated by what we see in nature. But that of course is ridiculous, because every spring has it’s autumn, and every sign of life in the spring in the fall has it’s sign of death, and the resurrection is not like that. The resurrection, it is true, it is an insistence in our Lord’s overcoming of death, but in his overcoming it is an eternal overcoming. We are not looking for an autumn or a fall or a winter thereafter, but our Lord has been raised from the dead.

I have also said in the *Believer’s Bible Bulletin* that the resurrection is misunderstood by its friends and attacked by its enemies. There are some people who are friends of Christianity who nevertheless misunderstand the nature of the resurrection. I have given you the testimony I think of one of the presidents of the National Council of Churches who said as a representative of the Protestant churches that are members of that organization that he half-believed in the resurrection and he half-didn’t believe in the resurrection. Now that is a great testimony for the friend of Christianity.

H. G. Wells, well you might expect what he might say. He said the story always affected him as it were a kind of happy ending tacked onto an essentially tragic novel, the resurrection account.

A. M. Ramsey, who became the archbishop of the Canterbury said, before he became the archbishop of Canterbury—I don’t think his views changed when he became the archbishop—that the things that are found in this account of Matthew such as the angel coming down, the earthquake, the stone being rolled back and the things that happened to the guard, why all of these things were simply embellishments to the truth. They were the editor’s embroidery. That is, he took accounts that were oral accounts and embroidered them with the story of the earthquake and the other things that happened. And he went on to say that if these things were embroidered in the written accounts, they likely had already been embroidered into the oral accounts, and therefore the oral accounts—you got



the impression—didn’t really say anything about a bodily resurrection at all. Sometimes the friends of Christianity are its worst enemies.

Now it is with a great deal of relief that you turned to the Matthean account and read what it says. In the 27th chapter he speaks of the sealing of the sepulcher, and in order to briefly summarize this, you’ll remember that the chief priests and elders went to Pilate to ask him to be sure to secure the tomb in order that he might not, not rise from the dead, they didn’t expect that, but they did not want some of the disciples come and take the body away and then say he did rise from the dead like he said.

So Pilate said you have a watch, and I think he meant by that he had the right to the Roman watch, and the Roman soldiers under the direction of the Jewish leaders made the tomb as secure as they could. Incidentally when they say the last error will be worse than the first they meant simply that the claim to sonship and the claim to messiahship was a bad error, but the last error would be a claim for resurrection in bodily form, and that would be worse than the other error—that is the accounts and the claims of his eternal sonship or his sonship and his messiahship.

So that’s what they did, and I think I have always smiled at this, because all that they accomplish is what they did not really want to accomplish for as a result of getting the guards at the tomb of our Lord and stationing them there, they only widened the testimony to the strange events that happened at his resurrection. The Old Testament says God makes the wrath of men to praise him, and that’s what happened. So the result is that the Roman soldiers go into the chief priests and they tell them what happened and so there is further testimony to the miraculous and supernatural events that happened. If they had just kept quiet, they wouldn’t have had further testimony to the truth.

Coming to the 28th chapter I think another thing that you notice immediately is that this chapter is a kind of model of the indirect and discreet way in which the Bible indicates an event that cannot be described. Now how would the Christian church today treat the resurrection? Why they

would run immediately to the media, the newspapers, the television, every kind of possibility of emblazing and sensational a way of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

But the Bible does not do that. There is no sensationalism. There is none of the glamorizing of what happened. The truth is allowed to speak for itself. Now the women were out at the tomb first. Now do not think they were there because they expected a resurrection. They came out like a lot of people to attend Good Friday services: mourning and doleful, because the Lord Jesus had died. As a matter of fact, Mark tells us as they made their way out, the thing that was on their mind was who is going to roll away the stone from the sepulcher. It was a ton-size stone and even several women could not have possibly moved it, so they were concerned about getting someone to roll the stone back so that they could go into the sepulcher and finish the burial preparation of the body of the Lord Jesus. They do not go out because they believe the resurrection. It's just the opposite; they go out fully convinced that his body is still in the grave, and they want to minister to him and finish the last of the burial rights.

But nevertheless the remarkable thing happens, and it is to the women that our Lord appears first. Now that is a puzzle isn't it? But remember, the women were there at the cross of our Lord. Most of the disciples with the exception of John had scattered, and John had scattered for a while, and evidently had slumped back to the cross. The women were there, and furthermore it was specifically stated that at the burial that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were over there, observing the things that took place in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, so our Lord appears to the women first.

I once asked my wife a number of years ago why do you think the Lord appeared to the women first? He said, I guess it's because he thought they would broadcast it. [Laughter]. Well, that may be the reason but it's not really stated in the Word of God. I think that God has a sense of humor. I do believe that with all my heart, and I think that the fact that Mary Magdalene is the first witness to the resurrection is one of the comic stories of the Bible.

Remember, Mary Magdalene is the one out of whom went seven devils. In other words she had been around the bend. She had a loose shingle on her roof [laughter] or however you want to speak about it before she became to know the Lord Jesus. It was well known; everybody knew that she was strange. And so it is Mary Magdalene that our Lord appears, and it is Mary Magdalene who goes back in to tell the disciples that the body is not there. Now can you not imagine Peter and John when they heard that? Neither one believes in the resurrection at the moment, and here is Mary Magdalene claiming that Jesus has been raised from the dead. His body is no longer there. I can just imagine the things that they said behind her back, and if there were psychiatrists then she would surely have been thought to be a prime case for their work. But the Lord did appear to the women first.

Now the reason I think that this is true or made necessary is that the men had been disappointed, discouraged, and defeated, and as someone had said they had gone into hiding like wounded animals to lick their wounds, because after all it was a tragic thing for them that the Lord Jesus had been placed in that grave, after having been put to death by the Romans and by the Jewish leaders because our Lord was no ordinary person. If he had come and only given them great teaching, it would not have made a great deal of difference if he had died. Other great teachers have died like Socrates, Plato, and other men. It would have just meant that another leader of the teaching movement has been removed from the scene, but the teaching goes on. So if our Lord had claimed only to be a teacher it would not have been such a tragic thing for him to die and for his body to be placed in a grave.

But remember the Lord Jesus is not like Socrates; he is not like Plato; he is not like a great teacher. He has advanced that claim that he can authoritatively close the gap between God and men. He has said in effect, that I am the mediator between God and men and that through me there is a forgiveness of sin, and furthermore, I have overcome death. So if the Romans and the Jews can take the body of the Lord Jesus and throw it into a sepulcher and it remain there, then all of the foundation of the teaching ministry of our Lord is destroyed. And so you can see why the men were

upset and disturbed over what had happened since they really did not comprehend what he meant when he said he would rise again on the third day.

Martha said, I know that you will rise again at the last day; that was their comprehension. They did not really understand. It was only when John finally went in to that sepulcher and took a look at the grave clothes that he himself said afterwards, I saw and I believed. Up until that time he did not believe. So we do then find that our Lord appears to the women because the women were the most available.

Now they were on their way out to the sepulcher and evidently as they arrived at the sepulcher, the earthquake occurred. The angel from the Lord descended from heaven he came he rolled back the stone from the sepulcher, and he was sitting upon it as they arrived at the sepulcher. Someone had said the earth, which trembled with sorrow at his death leaped with joy at his resurrection. It was a sign of divine intervention again in the affairs of men: the resurrection.

The stone was rolled back, and I think that is the first witness that we have in this account. It was a ton-size stone as I said it could not have been removed before an armed guard, it certainly could not have been removed by the women. It was a supernatural thing. The Roman soldiers who were there became fearful. They began to shake. They fell like dead men, utterly unnerved their heart. Heaving, they collapsed like a sack of meal or like men who just received a right cross on the button as they move in for a blow themselves, and so they fell.

Now we read, and the angel answered and said unto the women, fear not, for I know that ye seek Jesus. I can just imagine the women were there trembling, too with what they had seen. So stop fearing, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen like he said. So here is the second witness the witness of the empty tomb. The Gospels do not contain the first account of the empty tomb nor do they contain the only account.

There are people who say, you know, I just do not accept the witness of the empty tomb. You often hear people say that; I don't believe in the resurrection. If I say to them that the tomb was empty, they say I just don't accept the empty tomb. They think they have accomplished a highly

intelligent act which demonstrates the fact that they are very intellectual when they deny the empty tomb. But wait a minute. There is no question whatsoever that the early church believed that there was an empty tomb and that our Lord had been raised from the dead and there is ample testimony to it. Over 500 people had actual acquaintance with the risen Christ, according to the Apostle Paul. There is no question whatsoever the resurrection was believed by the early church.

Now your responsibility does not end when you say, I do not believe in the resurrection. You are required, if you are an intelligent person, if you are an intellectual (as you intend to say that you are when you deny the resurrection), you are responsible to explain the belief of the early church. How then did the early church become so convinced that the Lord Jesus arose from the dead? You see, it's not enough to deny. You must explain the evident truth that the early church believed. So if you think that you are able to by behind the intellectual statement, I just do not accept the testimony of the empty tomb, you only betray the fact that you are not a very intelligent person, and do not know much about the Scriptures at all.

Now other men have recognized exactly what I am saying. They have realized that they are responsible to explain the belief of the early church, and so they have some theories. Some have said, well the disciples came and stole the body away. Now wait a minute, where did the enemies of the Lord Jesus wish the body? Why of course, they wished it to stay in the grave; that is why they put a guard there.

What about the friends of our Lord, these disciples? So far as we know, not a single person believed in the resurrection. Not a single person. Therefore, to claim that some of the disciples came and stole the body away in order to create a belief in the resurrection is contrary to all of the accounts. And furthermore, if you can manage to surmount that, what you then are faced with is that these apostles who proclaimed and promulgated to the four corners of our world that the Lord Jesus was alive are therefore liars and imposters. And they have given us the holiest teaching, the finest set of principles for moral living that the world has ever seen, but at the same time, they were imposters and liars, and in addition, everyone of them went to their death believing this viewpoint.

No one ever among those apostles—no one ever came and said, I was really wrong, I was lying all the time. They not only went to their death but they lost everything that they had. Many of them were martyred for the faith. Now if you can believe something like that, then the believing of something is not your problem. It's obvious it is much simpler to believe the resurrection account testimony than to believe something so incredible as that someone came and stole the body away of the disciples.

Well others have seen the weakness of that theory, like Kirsopp Lake, who was professor of New Testament at Harvard University many years ago. He said the answer to the problem is that they went to the wrong tomb. After all, the women were emotional. Their eyes were tear-dimmed, and so it was early in the morning. And they went out, and they just went to the wrong tomb.

Well what about the angel? Well it was a little boy who happened to be out there. Can you imagine now a little boy happened to be out there just at dawn sitting on the stone near the Lord in the cemetery? Well that is the last place in the world you would expect to find a little boy, I know [laughter]. But the account makes very definite reference to the fact and this is why it is made in verse 61 in chapter 27. It is the women who knew precisely where the body of our Lord had been placed.

Furthermore, you have the problem of explaining the angel's words. The angel said, come see the place where the Lord lay. Why Professor Lake, were the angels also mistaken about where the body of the Lord Jesus was? So as a result of this, very few have followed Professor Lake.

It was also said in ancient times—and this theory has been revived in recent times by Hugh Schoenfield. That is, that the Lord Jesus really did not die; he only swooned or he was drugged, and they placed him in the grave. And after a time, he managed to get out of the grave, and he never really died. Now of course that is possible. Twenty years ago in *Time Magazine* in the September 8th issue this appeared. “Abracadabra” was the title of it under miscellany. In Banderma, Turkey, as seven of his relatives fainted, 108 year old Hochi Mustaffif stepped out of his grave toward the end of the funeral rites, denounced his family for “trying to bury me before my time,” and walked out of the cemetery.

It's possible for a person to swoon and to be in a state that appears to be death. Even physicians have been mistaken. But now wait a minute, what do we have then? Well we have the problem of our Lord getting out of the sepulcher to start with. A ton-size stone, that would be impossible for a person who has been pierced as he has, wounded in his hands, wounded in his legs, wounded in his side, weak as he was. It would be impossible for him to get out of the sepulcher. And furthermore, if he got out of the sepulcher, this weak, emaciated, stumbling person with wounds all over him, and he convinces the apostles that he is the resurrected Christ, and he has overcome death, and they preach him to the four corners of the world. What a theory.

I don't think there has ever been a satisfactory to the witness of the empty tomb. I was very happy, not that it proves anything, but I am very happy to see that Professor Bonnenberg, one of the best-known of the current crop of international theologians, has confessed, too, that there is no satisfactory answer to the testimony of the empty tomb.

Well the angel said come see where the Lord lay, and that's a further testimony, because obviously you couldn't tell the place where he was laying unless there were grave clothes left there, and so this is Matthew's testimony to the fact that the grave clothes were still there. John tells us a good bit more about this, for John tells us when the disciples came to the tomb—you remember Peter raced out to the tomb with John, and John out ran him because John was a whole lot younger than Peter—and so John took a look in and then Peter, as was his custom, he went right down in and took a look and called John.

And John went into the sepulcher, and he saw the linen clothes as they were lying, and then he saw the napkin which had been about our Lord's head still in its annular shape. It was still in its rounded shape. The body evidently had been swiftly dematerialized or something like that, and had come out of the folds that were surrounding it, and our Lord had left the garments there. And John, when he looked at it, saw it was impossible for the situation to be as it was, and he not truly raised from the dead. Now it was the Holy Spirit that brought him conviction, but it was confirmation to

his faith. The testimony of the grave clothes—this, too, was a testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

We read in our later part of the section of the appearances to the apostle, and of course this is a further testimony to our Lord’s resurrection putting all of the Gospel accounts together, they saw him, they touched him, they heard him—10 times in a 40 day period of time they actually saw our Lord. He appeared to them. Well how shall we explain this testimony? Joseph Klaussner said, they just had hallucinations. They thought that they saw him.

One of the German commentators said, it was like telegrams that came from heaven to them. These were telegrams from heaven. They are like the visions that a lot of Christians think they have. I have heard all kinds of visions: lights flashing; icicles running up and down your back; looking over in the corner and seeing Jesus and some words that he speaks. All of these in my opinion are false, but then I cannot prove that they are false. In this case however our Lord appeared to over 500 people; 500 people had hallucinations? Business is getting better for psychologists and psychiatrists.

Furthermore, is it not strange that these hallucinations which began at the same time go on for six weeks, and they stop at the end of that six-week period of time, and nobody has any hallucinations after that time. Psychiatrists and psychologists were considerably more effective in those days and they were able to successfully treat all of their patients. No, it is impossible to explain the personal appearances by hallucination.

I have a good friend in Charleston, South Carolina. He has been a state senator. He is a very close friend of mine. He is descended from the Huguenots. Even his name is like that. It sounds like it is Le-ga-ray, but he pronounces it Le-gree—Charlestonians have a different way of pronouncing things; it’s not always the best, incidentally, but that’s the way they do it. Alan is a very well-known businessman in Charleston and is a politician—has been all his life. He is a Christian man, and he frequently, because he is a lawyer, frequently teaches the resurrection.

He says he learned his lesson from a man by the name of T. Austin Smythe, also a very prominent man in Charleston. You recognize where Smythe came from; it is the Charlestonian



variety of Smith, but we don't like to be common, it's Smythe. Well Mr. Smythe was a lawyer also in the city and a descendent of Thomas Smythe, who was one of the finest, one of the most intelligent of the southern Presbyterian ministers, pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston. Thomas Smythe's works are found in ten volumes; a very learned man. T. Austin Smythe was related to him—I think he was his grandson—and Mr. Austin Smythe and my friend both teach the resurrection like a lawyer would.

And they have a habit when the resurrection comes up, they call the various witnesses to the stand, individually: Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, Thomas and so on and then like lawyers, after all of the testimony is in, they say, now you can see of course that there may be some difference in their testimony. That accounts for the problems of the testimonies in the New Testament; no one has ever completely satisfactorily put together all of the resurrection appearances for the simple reason we don't have enough data to do that. We are confident the Bible will be justified, but it's like an accident on the street corner. When you see an accident and eight people see it, they will see it differently, but they all agree on one thing: there was an accident. Somebody was hurt. The ambulance came, and some people were taken to the hospital.

Now in the case of the resurrection, we have all of this vast testimony to the fact of the resurrection. We have all of the testimony that we should need, and all of the testimony give us ample reason for believing that the biblical account has it's justification, but the truthfulness of the account only comes to those to whom the ministry of the Holy Spirit has come in confirmation of the majesty of the Word of God and it's truthfulness. So that our assurance of truth ultimately rests in the Holy Spirit alone, not in the adequacy of our explanation of what happened.

Well what follows is the bribing of the soldiers. I have often wanted to be a lawyer and to effectively set up a scene in which we have the men on the witness stand, and the attorney for the prosecution seeking to show there was no real resurrection, speaks to these Roman soldiers and says, now what happened? And they all say why some of his disciples came and stole away his body. Are you sure of that? Where were you standing? What did you see? We saw them come we saw them take

away his body. And I can imagine the attorney for the defense, a Christian man, and he gets up. He walks over to the soldiers and says, now this is very important you understand, because the belief of a lot of people hinges upon this, who say they have really seen the Lord Jesus in his resurrection, and tell us again what happened. Well just what I told you, some of his disciples came and stole him away. Who were they? Well we are not exactly sure, it was kind of dark, but nevertheless we saw them come and take the body away. Absolutely certain? Yes we are absolutely certain. Oh, and incidentally what were you doing while they took the body away? Oh, we were sleeping. You can imagine what a good case that would be. Someone came and stole him away while we slept. How ridiculous can a claim be. [Laughter]

Well let me close because time is up. The resurrection is a fact because it is written in God's Word, which is our principium, and Christians believe the Bible gives us the truth of God. Is it an important fact? Well, we think it is important. It is the proof of the defeat of death and the proof of the forgiveness of sins. After all, when our Lord was resurrected, it was the evidence that the father had accepted the work of the Son, and that that work truly procures for us the forgiveness of sins. We look at the cross, it has been said, and we see atonement made. We look at the resurrection and we see atonement accepted by God.

It is also a principle and pattern of a joyous life with one who can still the storms, who can release the demons, who can bind up the wounds, who can open the graves, who can cancel guilt, and who can comfort aching hearts and who can convey peace.

There is a lovely story of C. T. Studd who was a very well-known missionary in the past generation or so. And Mr. Studd was once traveling to China on a ship whose captain was an ardent infidel. He often had Christians on his ship, incidentally, and he loved to seek out the Christian missionaries, particularly, and throw questions to them which simple missionaries could not understand.

So when he found out that Mr. Studd was also a Christian missionary going back to China, he thought he would begin his usual line of ridicule, but instead of arguing with him, Mr. Studd just

put his arm around his shoulders and said, “But my friend, I have a peace that passes all understanding, and a joy that nothing can take away.” And the captain replied, finally, “You’re a lucky dog.” And according to the story, it was not just a few days later that he became a rejoicing believer in the Lord Jesus through the testimony of C. T. Studd.

The remarkable thing about the resurrection to me as a Christian is also what it ultimately means by way of my own spiritual life. Now when I lived in Charleston—Charleston is a place like Tyler, Texas. It is an ideal place for the growing of azaleas and camellias. The soil is adequate, the temperature is adequate, all of the climatic conditions are good, and of course, being a Charlestonian, I like to try to grow camellias in Dallas. It is very difficult. My little scrawny plants—when my Charleston friends come, I don’t tell them I grow them, I don’t want them to laugh at me—because you see this climate is not suited for it and this soil is not suited for it. The alkaline soil in my part of Dallas is so bad it is remarkable that anything grows upon it.

Now when the resurrection life floods the life of a believer, it’s like taking a plant out of these conditions in which it does not really grow like it should and placing it in a climate which is adequate for the kind of plant. And the eternal life that we possess through the resurrected Christ in which we share so fills us and moves us and transforms us, just as a plant planted in the proper environment grows and abounds in it’s physical growth. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus is the principle and pattern of the joyous life, which when we reach heaven will manifest itself in it’s ultimate fullness.

The resurrection also is the pledge of the judgment to come. Remember, the apostle preaching in Athens says that he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man in whom he has ordained, and he has given assurance in that he has raised him from the dead. There are people who have been indifferent to the claims of Christ. They have been antagonistic to the claims of Christ. They have refused to bow down before the authority of the Lord Jesus, but the day is coming, the second Easter of his coming again, when those who have

refused to bow down before him will bow down before him, when those whose eyes have refused to see the resurrection will see the resurrected Christ.

And when those who have shaken their fists at him will have to open their hands in adoration, but not salvation, of this one who is the Lord of glory. For the time is coming when everyone under the earth on the earth shall acknowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

And so if you are sitting in this audience this morning and you have never acknowledged our Lord Jesus as the one who has been raised from the dead, there will come a day when you will recognize that. When your eyes will be open to see the resurrected Christ. When your fists which have been clinched, perhaps only, allegorically, but clinched in opposition to him, will have to open and acknowledge he is Lord, and to those knees which have refused to bend to his authority will bend before his authority.

May God speak to your heart that you respond to the gospel before that time recognizing that our Lord Jesus has given an atonement for sinners. You are a sinner. Salvation is preached and the forgiveness of sins through this great Savior who has died and then raised from the dead. May God through the Holy Spirit bring to your heart the sense of the truthfulness of the Word of God, and the sense that the testimony to the saving work of Christ is the basis upon which a true happy and sin forgiven life may exist. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege of proclaiming a Savior that has been raised from the dead. And again, O Father, we do ask that if there are some who have not responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ, O Father, through the Holy Spirit, bring conviction of sin, of righteousness of judgment. Bring conviction of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus for the sins of human beings. Bring them to a sense of their own need, and O God, bring them to the foot of the cross before it is too late.

May grace mercy and peace go with us, and as we go, we go in the sense that we have fellowship with one, who while at one point was dead is now alive forever more.

“The Resurrection of Christ and Christianity” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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We pray in his name. Amen