



18 LESSON CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Lesson 3

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Who was Jesus Christ? First of all, he was a Jew, and he lived in the land which is now called Israel, which was then part of the Roman Empire. The famous Roman historian Tacitus, wrote about Christians: “Christus, from whom their name is derived, was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberias” (Annals, xv. 44). Here, then, is good evidence about the crucifixion from a historian who was not a Christian.

Witnesses

In the Bible we read that the execution of Jesus was by crucifixion. A Roman soldier also pierced him with a spear to make certain that he was in fact dead (John 19:33,34). The two sympathetic members of the Jewish Council (the “Sanhedrin”), who carried his body to a newly prepared tomb, would be able to testify that he was dead. The apostle Paul writes,

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scripture . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

So the Bible records, not only that he died and was buried, but that he was restored to life again. The news of his resurrection was first given by angels to two women who came to the tomb early on the third day. They said,

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” (Luke 24:5-6)

Such good news spread rapidly. The women hurried to tell the disciples, who at first could not believe that it was true. Afterwards Jesus himself appeared to Mary Magdalene and to Simon Peter, then to two disciples who were walking along the road to Emmaus, near Jerusalem. In Jerusalem Jesus “showed himself to these men (the disciples) and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive” (Acts 1:3). Later on he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom were still alive when Paul was writing (1 Corinthians 15:6).

At first the disciples could not believe their eyes, but Jesus said, “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” No doubt in order to convince the disciples of the reality of his appearance, Jesus then took a piece of grilled fish and ate it before them (Luke 24:39-42). Thomas, who had not believed at first, was invited to put his finger in the wounds in the hands and side of Jesus (John 20:27).

How much we learn from all this! Jesus was declaring that the same body, which was placed lifeless in the tomb, was restored to life. He could be touched and felt—flesh and bones. It really was Jesus himself, risen from the dead.

How can we be sure?

But how can we be sure that the Scriptures are telling us the truth? Is it possible that the disciples invented the whole story because they wanted to believe that Jesus had come back to life? If we read the accounts in the gospels we are presented with a picture of a group of people who after the death of their Lord were entirely without hope. The women had expected to find a lifeless body in the tomb. They could not understand its disappearance. The disciples would not believe the declaration of the angels that Jesus was alive again. Of course they wanted Jesus to come back to life – but for them such an event seemed utterly impossible. It is difficult to believe that they would have invented such a story.

Only a short while before, most of them had forsaken Jesus out of fear. He had died almost alone. Now they began to go about Jerusalem and quite fearlessly preach that he had risen. Only the miracle of resurrection, and the proofs they had seen, could have brought about such a change.

We can also be quite sure that the tomb was in fact empty. If the body was still there, the enemies of Jesus could have simply produced it. It would prove that the disciples were not telling the truth. It could not have been taken away by the Jews themselves because they would have produced it as proof he was not raised from the dead.

If the Jews had not taken the body, could the disciples have taken it and pretended that Jesus was alive? This too is impossible.

The disciples later risked death declaring that Jesus was alive. Can we believe that they risked their lives for something which they knew was not true? The only other explanation of the empty tomb is that which we find in the Bible— that a miraculous resurrection had taken place.

Jesus now

Where is Jesus now? After his resurrection, for 40 days, appeared at various times and talked with his disciples, strengthening their faith. We read in the first chapter of Acts that he was then taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9). We are told that he is now alive for ever more. He is our High Priest at the right hand of God. We can pray to God with confidence through him:

“He was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power.” (2 Corinthians 13:4)

“Because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” (Hebrews 7:24,25)

“But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.” (Hebrews 10:12)

His return

Though Jesus is now in heaven, he will not remain there for ever. When he left the disciples on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem and was taken up into heaven, two angels appeared and said to the disciples:

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)

Jesus will return to the earth, to the same Mount of Olives (see Zechariah 14:4). The same Jesus, whom his disciples could touch and handle, whose body was composed of flesh and bones, will come again. The whole world will be forced to accept the fact of his resurrection, the proof that he is indeed the Son of God.

Those who now follow him and strive to be obedient to his commandments will take part in that victory over death – a victory he achieved by his perfect obedience and his resurrection.

The next lesson will say more about the return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

Summary

- Jesus died and was buried, but he was restored to life by the power of God.
- There is abundant proof of his resurrection. It was the real Jesus who appeared to the disciples.
- He now lives for ever, and will return from heaven to raise the dead.

Questions

To benefit from the study, please read the lesson carefully more than once, then answer the following questions in your own words. Send the answers to your tutor.

C1 After Lazarus died, what hope of a future life did Jesus offer to Martha and Mary (see John chapter 11)? What did Martha herself believe?

C2 What are we told about the resurrected body of Jesus?

Please ask for help if you have any difficulty or to challenge what the lesson teaches.