

MANY INFALLIBLE PROOFS

A few weeks ago, T.V. viewers had the doubtful privilege of watching the Bishop of Durham being interviewed by Sir David Frost, and heard him reel off a list of things in the N.T. in which he can't believe.

Apparently, the Bishop does not believe that wise men brought gifts to the baby Jesus, or that a star guided them to the crib; nor is he too sure about there having been "No room at the Inn." The Bishop does not believe in the "virgin birth" of Christ: nor does he believe in hell (predictably he thinks that we create our own hell here on earth); nor does he believe in the "Second Coming" of Christ; nor does he believe that anyone will be prevented from entry into heaven; nor does he believe in the resurrection of Christ. David Frost rightly remarked that his eminence seemed more and more to believe in less and less. In the first place one wonders why the Bishop stays in a job, and accepts a large salary, for upholding a religion which, according to the Bishop, is based upon a Book completely untrustworthy. In the second place one wonders how the Church of England can tolerate one of its Bishops to, year after year, pour doubt and scorn upon the Holy Scriptures, not only in the privacy of his own home but from the housetops, and now on T.V. However, when one remembers the homosexuality amongst its clergy, then one can understand its acceptance of a Bishop parading his numerous doubts upon the Bible's integrity.

In all walks of life, these days, whether it be religion, or politics, or business etc. it is generally true that one will only "hit the headlines" by being controversial or involved in scandal. Perhaps the Bishop realises that if it were not for the fact that he was "controversial" he would not have much chance of being interviewed on T.V., or enjoying all the attention he currently receives from the media.

Clearly, space will not allow comment upon all of the items listed by the Bishop, but perhaps a few remarks upon his rejection of the **resurrection of Christ** is called for: since the resurrection of our Lord forms the basis and very bedrock of Christianity. If Jesus did not rise from the dead He must still be lying buried somewhere: and if this is true it means that He ranks with all the other good men who are buried somewhere; but is no better than they are. It is Christ's resurrection from the dead more than anything else, that sets Him apart from all other men. This makes Christ entirely unique and places Christianity on a plane infinitely higher than all other forms of world religion.

THE PREDICTIONS

While not privy to knowing exactly why the Bishop disbelieves in the resurrection of Christ, it would seem obvious to even a small child that if Jesus was put to death

(and surely the Bishop believes that Jesus died) and was later found to be alive: He must have been brought back from the dead, i.e. resurrected. We might not understand it, or be able to explain it: but we surely must accept it.

First of all, anyone who denies the resurrection (and the Bishop is certainly not alone in this) must, as a consequence, disregard all O.T. prophecy (the scriptures). Paul said that **“Christ died for our sins ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES. And that He was buried, AND THAT HE ROSE AGAIN THE THIRD DAY, ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES.”** (1 Cor. 15:3). The “Scriptures” (which had predicted Christ’s death, burial and RESURRECTION) were, of course, the O.T. and Paul continually made reference to these O.T. prophecies. For example, (on the present theme), the apostle in his discourse in the synagogue at Antioch (in Pisidia) recounted to his audience how Christ (God’s Messiah) was slain and laid in a tomb. **“But”,** says Paul, **“God raised Him from the dead. And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem who are His witnesses to the people”**. Paul continues, and shows that this Christ was the fulfilment of **“God’s promise made to the Fathers.”** Concerning this promise, **“God hath fulfilled the same unto us, their children IN THAT HE RAISED UP JESUS AGAIN,** as it is written in the second Psalm, **‘Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee’**. And as concerning **THAT HE RAISED HIM UP FROM THE DEAD,** now no more to return to corruption He said on this wise, **‘I will give you the sure mercies of David’**. Wherefore He saith also in another Psalm, **‘Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption’** (Acts 13:15). And so, Paul sees the resurrection portrayed in these three quotations from the O.T. (i.e. Ps. 2:7; Is. 55:3 & Ps. 16:10). The first one; **“This day have I begotten Thee”** refers to the day Jesus rose from the tomb and became **“the first begotten from the dead.”** These are examples but there are others. For instance, Paul similarly discerned the resurrection of the dead in the words of Hosea, when the prophet said, **“I will ransom them from the power of the grave: I will redeem them from death: O death I will be thy plagues: O grave I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.”** Paul, recognising that that prediction had been fulfilled (when Christ conquered death and the grave) echoed the prophet and declared, **“O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?”** (1 Cor. 15:55). And so, if we reject the resurrection, we reject O.T. prophecy.

In the second place, those who deny the resurrection, are in effect, repudiating the many predictions that Jesus, Himself, made to the effect that He would rise from the tomb: e.g. **“From that time forth Jesus began to show unto His disciples how that He must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the Elders and Chief Priests and Scribes, and BE KILLED, and be RAISED AGAIN the third day.”** (Matt. 16:21). Jesus repeated this prophecy several times, predicting that He **“would be crucified and THE THIRD DAY RISE AGAIN”** (Matt. 20:19). Jesus also advised His disciples that **“AFTER HE HAD RISEN”** He would rendezvous with them in Galilee (Matt. 26:32). Jesus also challenged the Jewish leaders with these words: **“Destroy this temple (His body) and in three days I WILL RAISE IT UP.”** (John 2:19). He also said, **“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”** (Matt. 12:40). These examples could be multiplied, and show that not only was Christ’s resurrection foretold in the O.T. but that Jesus forecast it personally, and even named the day: the third day. If Jesus did not rise from the dead He was a false prophet. And so, those who do not believe that He rose, accuse Him, wittingly or otherwise, of being a great deceiver.

When Jesus was accosted by the Sadducees (for the Sadducees, like the Bishop, did not believe in the resurrection of the dead) and was presented with that hypothetical scenario of the woman who had married seven brothers. He replied, **“Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures or the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry**

nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But, as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead but of the living.” (Matt. 22:29). Thus, all who deny the resurrection err on at least two counts: (1) they don’t know the scriptures (O.T.), and (2) they don’t know the power of God. Surely if anyone seriously reflects upon the obvious power of God, they must inevitably come to the conclusion that it would be a fairly simple matter for God to raise the dead.

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In the Acts of the Apostles (Chap. 1) the writer, Luke, describes how (in Luke’s gospel) he had chronicled **“All that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Spirit had given commandment to the apostles whom He had chosen: to whom also He SHOWED HIMSELF ALIVE after His passion by MANY INFALLIBLE PROOFS, being seen of them forty days, and speaking the things pertaining unto the kingdom of God.”** (Acts 1:1-3). “Infallible Proofs” comes from a Greek word *Teknerion* which Thayer defines as “That from which something is plainly and surely known; an indubitable evidence; a proof.” The proof was not merely a reasonable proof, but so certain that any doubt was impossible. Luke had, of course, already described some of these proofs in the latter chapters of the gospel bearing his name. Jesus did not hide himself away after His resurrection but **SHOWED HIMSELF ALIVE** after His passion by many infallible proofs. Those who reject the resurrection quite often feel obliged to try and discredit the apostles and their testimony, describing them as simple-minded, naive and suffering from delusions brought on by the excitement and keen anticipation of the expected resurrection.

Nothing could be further from the truth: for the apostles did not wait around the tomb on the third day, in excited expectancy of Christ’s emergence. Indeed they did not believe that He would arise at all (John 20:25; Luke 24) and even when the news of His rising was brought to them they dismissed it **“as idle tales”**. In any case the question of sudden delusion or hallucination does not arise, for the apostles, and a great many others, had ample opportunity to observe Jesus at very close quarters, over an extensive period of time (of nearly six weeks) prior to His ascension into heaven. Thus it was impossible for them to have been deceived. Quite apart from the nail prints in His hands, they had travelled and lived intimately with Jesus for the past three years, and would quickly have recognised an imposter. We are also told that during these forty days, Jesus spoke to them **“things pertaining unto the Kingdom of God”** and this, an imposter would have been unable to do. In short, Jesus took up exactly where He left off prior to His arrest and crucifixion.

It should be born in mind that Jesus made at least a dozen recorded appearances. He appeared to **Mary Magdalene** (Mark 16:9): to **the women** returning home (Matt. 28:9): to the **two disciples** going to Emmaus (Mark 16:12): to the apostle **Peter** (Luke 24:34): to the **ten apostles** in the Upper Room (Luke 24:36): to the **eleven apostles** in the Upper Room (Mark 16:14): to **Thomas** (John 20:27): to **seven apostles** at the sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-3): to the **eleven apostles** on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16) to **five hundred brethren** at one time (1 Cor. 15:6); to **James** (1 Cor. 15:7) and to the **apostle Paul** (1 Cor. 15:8). Recognition of a person may not always be easy, especially if only given a brief glance, or if seen at dusk, or seen from a great distance, but Jesus showed Himself, as we have seen, to many, in different locations, on separate occasions giving ample and **infallible proof** that He had conquered death and the grave. To perhaps the greatest doubter of them all (and Thomas does not appear to have been expecting Jesus to rise) Jesus said, **“Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thine hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing.”** (John 20:27).

CONSEQUENCES IF THE DEAD RISE NOT

Well over 100 years ago David King said, "Jesus and the resurrection ever held the foreground in apostolic preaching. With the Modern it is not so. Jesus remains; but the resurrection is kept in the rear and in many instances, almost, if not entirely, forgotten. This results from Jewish and Heathen leaven." Disbelief in the resurrection has, I suppose, manifested itself in every generation and 2,000 years ago, **even when the apostles were present** (as eye-witnesses of Christ's triumph over the grave), Paul had the same problem. Evidently there were some brethren in Corinth causing great concern by their assertions that the dead rise not. The response of Paul was to give us that wonderful fifteenth chapter of his first epistle to that congregation. Paul said that the resurrection formed a vital part of the gospel he had been preaching i.e. that Christ died, and was buried. **"And that He rose again the 3rd day according to the scriptures. And that He was seen of Cephas, then the twelve. After that He was seen of above 500 brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that He was seen of James: then the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as one born out of due time."**

Many of the 500 witnesses (who had seen Christ simultaneously) were still alive and could be questioned by any doubters. Paul emphasises the ramifications of unbelief and says, **"But if there be no resurrection of the dead then is Christ not risen and then is our preaching vain (worthless) and your faith is also vain. 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. If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable. BUT NOW IS CHRIST RISEN FROM THE DEAD and become the first fruits of them that slept If (after the manner of men) I have fought with beasts at Ephesus what advantage is it to me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die."** Surely Paul has said it all, and forcefully described the futility of the Christian faith, if Christ is still in His grave: i.e. Christians should pack it all in: eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow they will all die.

CONCLUSION

Space is slipping away. How can we sum up? As mentioned earlier, the resurrection is the doctrinal sheet-anchor of Christianity for without it, little is left. Enemies of Christ know this and try to discredit the evidence. Likewise, it was for this reason that Jesus **"showed Himself alive"** to many witnesses: yet leaving room for faith in those who did not see Him. As Jesus said to Thomas, **"Because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed; but blessed are they that have not seen Me and yet have believed."** Clearly much more virtue attaches to the latter. Some say that we can discard the "virgin birth", the miracles and the resurrection from the "Christian Story" without destroying its essential message, but this is patently a fallacy and such a gospel would be an insipid and pointless charade: "vain" as Paul described it. Christ then would rank merely as a good man but with no hope to offer beyond the grave. **"But,"** says Peter, the resurrection brings hope, for God, **"according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope BY THE RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ from the dead."** (1 Peter 1:3).

Those who deny the resurrection of Christ are, in effect, declaring to the world that God's word is a collection of myths and fancies and can not be trusted. This is a very dangerous thing to do: and how anyone claiming to be a Christian can do it, is a mystery. In rejecting the resurrection they (1) renounce O.T. prophecy: (2) they discard the predictions of Jesus Himself, that He would rise the third day; (3) they repudiate the testimony of the many witnesses who saw Him alive by **"many infallible proofs"** including Peter, James and Paul: and (4) they apparently ignore the incredible impact the resurrection had upon the disciples: transforming them instantly from a despondent and frightened huddle (locking themselves up for fear) to a powerful force of fearless missionaries, quite ready to die for their cause.

It is difficult to understand why the Bishop, or anyone else, has trouble believing the resurrection. After all, if God made the world and all it contains: and made man: to resurrect man from the dead would not seem to be too difficult. As Paul said to king Agrippa, **“Why should it be thought an incredible thing with you, that God should raise the dead?”** (Acts 26:8). Why indeed.

EDITOR