

Thank You for Jesus Christ, our Savior, that He is not dead, but that He is alive.

One day He is going to come back. He ever lives to make intercession for us.

Thank You, Lord. We pray that the truth of the resurrection might be deeply implanted in our hearts. We thank You in Jesus' name. Amen.

In our last time together we talked a little bit about the events of that final week leading to the resurrection and dealt with Matthew 28. Now, in your Bibles turn to 1 Corinthians 15. Those of you who are listening and writing and able to think at the same time will want to know what is on the board up here. We will not get to it until the second hour this morning, but I will want you to know what happened that first day in terms of the appearances of Jesus Christ. There are five according to the Bible. If there are any more, they just are not mentioned.

As you know, 1 Corinthians 15 is called the Resurrection Chapter. If you are interested in really studying this chapter (I do not know if you are or if you are not. Maybe someday in the future, but you can make a little note on your notes anyways), there is a whole book on this one chapter, by Spiros Zodhiates. You are not responsible for this, of course, but I leave it for your mutual benefit. It is a great volume—one whole, huge, thick book on 1 Corinthians 15 by Spiros Zodhiates, which deals with the text phrase by phrase. It is an excellent study of this chapter, which will hopefully answer most of your questions. Let us take a look at the text.

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how 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 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Not only did Jesus predict that He would rise on the third day (not after three days), but so do all the New Testament writers confirm that He rose on the third day. Any part of a day, makes a Jewish day.

Do you have to believe that Jesus rose from the dead in order to be a Christian? We mentioned it last time from Romans 10:9-10: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” You must believe that Jesus arose from the dead in order to be a true Christian. Here again is confirmation of that. Paul says, “Here is the gospel. Christ died for our sins. He was buried and He rose again.”

Allow me to touch on a sideline for a second. The gospel is not simply that Christ died. The gospel is that Christ died for our sins. It is not just His death, but the purpose of His death that we believe.

And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.

(1 Corinthians 15:5)

Cephas is the Aramaic name of Peter, who was of the twelve. This verse is referring to the first appearances of our Lord that very first day—that Sunday.

After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once;  
of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are  
fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:6)

Now, 1 Corinthians, was written about AD 51 or 52, which would put it about 20 years after the Resurrection. Obviously there were people still living who were there. They were eyewitnesses, but some of them have fallen asleep (i.e., died).

After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And  
last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.  
For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called  
an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the  
grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which [was  
bestowed] upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more  
abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which  
was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach,  
and so ye believed. (1 Corinthians 15:7-11)

Now, you know when I read this today I thought, “This sounds like Pastor Chuck.” Do you want a little tip to know how his sermons are organized? Listen for the word “now.” When he says, “Now,” it means that he is moving to the next point. Here Paul does the same thing:

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.

(1 Corinthians 15:12-13)

Remember that the word “Christ” (*Christos*, the anointed one) all the way through here is the word for “Messiah.” The very fact of the Messiah rising from the dead has been a part of Jewish rabbinical tradition. Although many rabbis today deny it, the evidence of this is overwhelming. Even in the orthodox Hassidic branch, you will find no disagreement. It is so strong that even the Lubivitzers, who are having a field day today, are more popular today than ever. They are Hassidic Jews, with whom I lived with for about eight years. These Hassidic Jews believe that Rabbi Snearson, who died a year and a half ago, was the Messiah. He never went to Israel. He lived in Brooklyn, New York, and died in his nineties. He claimed to be able to do miracles. People would line up in long lines outside of his residence to have him appear and to touch them and pray for them. It was very interesting. They believe that he is going to rise from the dead because they believe that the Bible teaches that the Messiah must rise from the dead. They are actually building him a lovely home in Israel, so that he will have a place to stay when he rises from the dead. You may think that is strange, and it certainly is, but I say on this point is that it proves that among Orthodox Jews there is still the belief that Messiah must be resurrected from the dead.

Where do they get that? That is the issue. I have heard people say, rather naively, “Nowhere in the Bible does it say that.” Oh yes, it does. As a matter of fact, it was the basis of Peter’s first sermon that began the church of Jesus Christ. The church of Jesus Christ was built on the

resurrection. The resurrection was the theme of apostolic preaching. “Christ is not dead!” “He is alive.” “He rose again from the dead.”

Now, we are digressing a moment off of 1 Corinthians 15. Let us see if you know this. I would advise you to really know it. Amen? That is called a gentle clue that you might see it again.

Put your finger in Psalm 16, and another finger in Acts 2. Now Peter began his message from the Book of Joel, talking about Armageddon and the salvation of Israel. Then he goes on and discusses the death of Christ. After telling them by wicked hands He was crucified and slain, Peter said:

Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death:  
because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For  
David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always  
before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be  
moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad;  
moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not  
leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to  
see corruption. (Acts 20:24-27)

The Greek word used here for “hell” is *hades*. In the Old Testament the word for grave is *sheol*. If you translated it into Greek, the word is *hades*, meaning “unseen,” or “the place of the unseen.” *Hades* is translated “hell” in the New Testament. It could also be translated “grave,” or “the place of the departed.” We have another word for hell also, *Gehenna*, which probably refers the final hell, the lake of fire.

You say, “Wait a minute. Why would he go to hell?” Well, that is one of the problems there because if you do not know that *hades* translates *sheol*, you will make a mistake. He is talking about David dying, and his body going to the grave (*sheol*, or *hades*), and that he is in a place of the departed. According to Jesus, we have a clarification of this. Both righteous and wicked in the Old Testament, when they die, go to the same place. One event happens to all. There is one place for all according to Ecclesiastes. All wicked and righteous go to the same place, *sheol*, meaning, “grave,” or *hades*, meaning “the place of the unseen”—we cannot see it.

Now in Luke 16, Jesus said that in *hades* (*sheol* in Hebrew) there was a division made between the righteous and the wicked. There was a great gulf fixed between the two, so that you cannot pass over from one side to the other, but you could communicate, interestingly. Those who were on the side of the wicked were in torment and in pain, according to what Jesus said. Those who were on the side of the righteous were in Abraham’s bosom and had much blessing. The story of rich man and Lazarus is a great one. Some of us believe that when Jesus died, between the time of His death and resurrection (those two and half days or so), He descended into the lower parts of the earth, namely *hades*, or *sheol*. He proclaimed the gospel of judgment to those who had refused to believe in the Messiah. One text that speaks of this is 1 Peter 3:18-20. Another is, “He took captive a host of captives” (Ephesians 4:8-10). He took captive a host of captives, namely Old Testament saints and took them to heaven. Now in the New Testament, everybody in *hades* is wicked. There are no righteous there. When a believer dies now, he is absent from the body and present with the Lord. Hebrews 12:22 tells us that he joins the Old Testament saints as well who are in heaven, Mount Zion, heavenly Jerusalem, the City of our God. It is very interesting, class. Before the cross, believer and unbeliever alike go to *sheol*. There, is a great gulf fixed between the two. Between the death of Christ and the resurrection, He descends into that area, and

preaches a gospel of judgment to those who had rejected the Messiah. As they will see for the first time that it was real. Messiah will be there and will take captive all the Old Testament saints to lead them up on high, as the Bible says. Now, all believers who die are immediately present with the Lord with regard to their soul. Their body, on the other hand, goes to the grave.

There is another view on this. I do not often tell you many views held by liberals or non-believers, because I do not really care about them, but Bible teachers do disagree about this. The other view is that the phrase, “He descended to the lower parts of the earth,” is just referring to His leaving the glory of heaven and becoming a man, coming to earth. When it says, “taking a host of captives captive,” the captives in this view are sin, death, and hell. That is referring to His cross, and then His ascension. “He ascended up on high.” They do not believe that He went down to the grave, as it were, or to the place of *hades*. I do not think that the second view answers all the questions. The first view is more correct, in my opinion.

Now, I say all of that to help us understand Psalm 16. David said, “I will not leave my soul in hades. Neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One....” He is not talking about himself, but about the Messiah, the Holy One. “You will not allow your Holy One to see corruption.” Corruption is set into the physical body on the fourth day, and so that is why it is very important to believe what the Bible teaches. Jesus arose from the dead on the third day. A Jew will tell you that if He rose on the fourth day (after three days were over), then He violates the promise of God concerning the resurrection of the Messiah. You have got to watch these Jewish rabbis, because they are constantly looking for a way to tear down the Christian message. It is true that Jesus said, “As Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the belly of the earth three days and three nights,” but it does not really say, “Three days and three nights at the end of it.” It just says, “So shall He be in the belly of the earth,” which is a Jewish

idiom. It is used in the Book of Esther and we know that Esther was told that she could come and appear before Ahasuerus after three days and three nights. Now, the actual text says that it was on the third day when she came, because any part of a day and any part of a night is a Jewish day or night.

It is important to understand that you cannot have Him being resurrected after three days and three nights because it violates the promise of God that the body of the resurrected Messiah would not see corruption (which occurs on the fourth day).

Peter said, “The Holy One will not see corruption.” Then he finished Psalm 16: “Thou hast made known to me the ways of life. Thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.”

Men [and] brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. (Acts 2:29)

I was just at his sepulcher about three or four weeks ago. It is right near the Upper Room on Mount Zion. The Temple complex is just to the east (not too many feet away). His tomb is still there; his sepulcher is still there. Therefore, the passage cannot mean that David is some sort of holy one, because his body saw corruption.

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne. (Acts 2:30)

What promise is that? Psalm 132:11, says, “Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.”

He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. (Acts 2:31-32)

This is a powerful thing when you look at the resurrection. We do not have Christianity without the resurrection. All those guys (who come with white shirts and long ties and riding bicycles) that try to tell you that it was just an apparition, or just an appearance, and that Christ lives on in our hearts, are speaking baloney. Now it is true that Christ lives in our hearts by our faith in Him and all of that. It is a spiritual presence, but the truth is that He rose again from the dead in His physical body. “This same Jesus who was taken up from you shall so come again in like manner as you have seen Him go.” It is heresy to deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that heresy is throughout mainline denominations today.

A study not too long ago done by *Redbook Magazine* noted that only 11% of preachers in mainline denominations believe that the resurrection was a literal body resurrection. Most of them said that the resurrection is when He comes into our hearts. Well, I am afraid they are wrong. Is everybody clear on this?

Back to 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?  
(1 Corinthians 15:12)

Do you know what Jews were in that category? The Sadducees.

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. (1 Corinthians 15:13-14)

The faith would be empty. This is an interesting point, and maybe you need to make a note to yourself or underline it. If Jesus Christ, our blessed Messiah, never rose from the dead then our preaching is totally empty. A lot of empty-headed preaching is going on around this country. If you do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead, your preaching is a colossal waste of time. I told that to one gentleman who was listening to a liberal preacher who did not believe in the bodily resurrection.

It says that our faith is also vain if Christ was not raised. Do you understand that you cannot be a true genuine believer and not believe that Jesus arose from the dead? Your faith is empty. There is nothing there.

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. (1 Corinthians 15:15-18)

It would have been a pipe dream for all the believers in the Lord Jesus, if He did not come back from the dead.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most  
miserable. (1 Corinthians 15:19)

I read this one day and realized that probably ninety-five percent of Christendom around the world is right in that verse. If their only hope is in this life, then it is a sad thing. Oh how the Lord can help you in this life. I was talking to a gentleman who was really blowing it most of the time. He had a lot of addiction problems—all kinds of stuff. The guy really knows the Lord, but he is just having a hard time. Sometimes life can be a bummer as we try to live for the Lord. There might be all kinds of problems hitting you from all different sides. It is great to know that the hope we have is not in this life. You have to stop and think about the application of that. I remember telling him one day, “You know if the Rapture happens in the next five minutes, your conversation is rather boring.” He started laughing and I laughed with him. It is easy to let your present problems dominate your mind and to forget what it is that we have come to believe as the true gospel of Jesus Christ, that the true gospel is dealing with the future, and not now.

We know that the Lord helps us to get through life. He gives us wonderful resources: His word and the power of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the way people are talking, you would think that their hope is in this life and not the one that is beyond the grave. The older you get the more you think about life beyond the grave.

It occurred to me that I have lived longer than the average life span in this country in 1900. I am getting to be an old dude. Let me just say 50 was a good year—I remember it well. I was alive at Pearl Harbor, and that should tell you something.

Circle, underline, or write in your notes never to forget 1 Corinthians 15:20.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits  
of them that slept. (1 Corinthians 15:20)

I love the phrase, “But now....” It appears so many times in the New Testament epistles. It is a favorite tool of the apostle Paul. He talks about something very dismal and then all of a sudden, “But now.” “But now is Messiah risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept.”

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection  
of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be  
made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the  
firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then  
cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to  
God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and  
all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all  
enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is  
death. (1 Corinthians 15:21-26)

After the millennium no one will ever die again.

For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. (1 Corinthians 15:27)

The Jehovah Witnesses use this passage to teach Christ's subordination to the Father, which is true in His earthly ministry. This particular text is teaching that in His exaltation and glory He is excepted. He is the exception to everything being submitted to the father, which means that He must be equal to the Father otherwise you could not read it that way.

There are seven reasons to believe. You could probably bring a lot more out of this, and there are a lot of sub-points that we will look at. Let us start with the authority of the Bible. There is no other place to start. Concerning the authority of the Bible, there are two things that I want you to know. It is based on two things: on sound evidence (not on hearsay or fairy tales), and on many eyewitnesses.

There is a famous case in British legal history. The details of this are in Josh McDowell's book if you are interested in pursuing it. Lord Lindhurst said, "I know pretty well what evidence is, and I tell you such evidence as that for the Resurrection has never broken down yet." It is based on sound evidence. Christians are not afraid to deal with it. It is the main issue of Christianity.

Now in the early church, Christians were being killed, as you probably know, and persecuted heavily. The persecution started pretty early, even with Saul persecuting the church. It got heavy during the Roman Empire. There were, what we call, ten general persecutions of Christians. The

first one happened under Nero in the AD sixties. Nero actually burned Rome in AD 64 and blamed it on the Christians. An empire-wide purging of Christians had begun by Nero, who used to light living Christians on fire in order to make light for the orgies in his gardens. He loved to hear their screaming and yelling as they burned to death. He was a wicked man. One of his officers in the area that we know of as Turkey today, a man named Pliny, wrote a letter to Nero, in which he said, “For every one of these Christians we kill, there are ten to take their place.” That is why Tertullian, the great church leader, about AD 200, wrote, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

Now Jesus said to Peter at Caesarea Philippi, “Thou art Peter, but upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hades will not overtake it (or prevail against it).” Now there are two views of that passage. The first view is that the Christians are on the attack knocking down the door of hell. “Watch out devil, we are going to get you,” the evangelist screams. I suggest that you do not accept that view if I were you. Michael the archangel, who has a lot more power than you, did not take the devil on, but said, “The Lord rebuke you, Satan.” You had better leave that in the hands of the Lord. Do not to take on Satan. You need the armor of God to defend yourself against all of Satan’s strategies, wiles, and temptations. I believe that the first view is incorrect. The gates of hades does not mean that the church should bombard hades to overtake hell, even though that is preached by thousands of preachers. This view is totally wrong. What is the gateway into hades? What is the door way that leads into hell? Death. We know that in Revelation. Remember the two riders, death and hades following. The second death is explained in that they will cast all these people into the lake of fire. There are a lot of interesting things. Now, both death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. Death is the doorway into hades. Look at the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16.

The point of it is that death will not overtake or prevail against the church, because the true church is being assembled in heaven (Hebrews 12:22). There is a church in heaven. All those believers who have died are already up there. That is where the big praise gathering is taking place—the one to which we cannot wait to go. Down here we just have churches, local ones with lots of trouble. Churches have more trouble than you can shake a stick at. They can get into anger and bitterness and resentment of one another. They can tear each other apart. If it was not for the grace of God, we would probably kill each other every Sunday. The true church is in heaven; the universal body of Christ is not on earth, but in heaven. There are only local churches on earth and let us hope that they are composed of members who are in the true church.

When we die, now we are really doing church! This is so important to understand in your theology, application, and the way you think about things. This is very important to understand that death for Christians does not overtake the church. It does not destroy it. It does not wipe it out. That was a wonderful promise, because of the Resurrection.

The Resurrection is the crucial issue of it all—of everything that we believe. It is not damaging for a Christian to hear somebody attack the Resurrection. We would love to have them investigate it. We are not afraid of somebody investigating the Resurrection at all. There is more evidence of the Resurrection than any other fact in history prior to the printing press. Of course, after the printing press you can reduplicate pages, of course, but clear until AD 1450, the Resurrection of Jesus has more written historical matters related to it than anything else. We are not afraid of evidence, because the evidence is everywhere.

We are going to talk about some of that, but one of the most important things are eyewitnesses.

How many witnesses does it take to validate the truthfulness of something that was seen or heard?

Two or three. Now, notice in our courtrooms today, they always want to know whether the person actually saw it. Did you see that? Did you hear that? An eyewitness in court, has to actually have been there and not heard it through somebody else. They cannot report what somebody else told them, which is what all the accusations against Jesus were at the trial. They were all being reported, but who was actually there to hear and see it? We have a number of eyewitnesses.

Let us look at Luke 1:1-4, and then we will give you a little break. Talk about eyewitnesses, Luke says that his whole account is based on it.

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, [in chronological order] most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. (Luke 1:1-4)

How do you prove to somebody the certainty of a past event in which they were not present?

Have you ever studied this in history? There is only one way to establish the validity of a historical fact when you were not present, and that is through eyewitnesses.

That is the problem that we have in our court trials today. A hundred years from now, people will be looking back, and will only look to eyewitnesses to determine the truthfulness of something

said or done. You see, when you come to the matter of the Resurrection, we do not need to put our head in the sand or crawl through the door and act very sheepishly like we are just whistling in the dark here—just believing, and hoping it is true. No, Christianity is built on sound evidence. It is built on eyewitnesses, of which there are plenty.

Now, nineteen-hundred years removed, we have to figure out whether we are going to believe the eyewitnesses. Do you know that there are fewer eyewitnesses to the life of George Washington than there are to Jesus Christ? Do not tell me you are really going to believe that there was somebody named George? What gives you the idea that he was the president of our country? You read it in some book? Where did *they* get it? The same tactics that critics use with the Bible could be used with anything. For sake of the argument, let us say that the Bible is not the word of God. Let us say that it is just a book from history. We have to establish that the historicity of it is reliable and authentic? How do you establish that? How do you establish that in any book in this world? The answer is you take the dates, names, places and events and figure out if there is any supporting evidence to it, from the time period being described.

For instance, we know that Herodotus, the great Greek historian, has a lot of exaggerations in his book. We know that many ancient books lied, because they wanted to be more important than their previous ancestors. We have to do what everybody is required to do with information pertaining to a time prior than their own. We did not see it. We are being told about it by somebody's book. Who are the eyewitnesses behind the places, dates, and names, of the event?

I do not know if you have really gotten this in your head or not, but this is very serious with me. I have debated this on college campuses for many years. It bothers me at how loose we are now. We are much more loose in our commitment to the evidence behind the Bible today than we ever

have been in the past. I do not know why this is the case. It is like if anything is cerebral it must not be from God, as if we use our heads and think, “That must be carnal, but to let your heart run wild, that must be spiritual.” Please, get a hold of yourself. We renew our minds daily in the word of God. God never asks you to check your brains off at the door. He wants you to think. God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Do not ever stop thinking and questioning and asking. I think it is very important. If you have any doubts or questions in your mind, ask them. There are legitimate questions that we have concerning a lot of things about which we need to think and keep asking. When it comes to the Bible, we have nothing to be afraid of.

I want you to know that if I found out that the Philistines never existed and the Bible made it up, I would have a very serious problem with everything I believe. You see, a lot of Christians say, “Oh that doesn’t really matter. If you just believe in Jesus with all your heart....” Well I can believe in Buddha with all my heart. What are you trying to say? Look folks, it is either true or it is not true. Do you really believe? Believing is not just becoming emotionally committed. There are a whole bunch of Christians that look like they are really cool. But is it true or not? If it is true and it is genuine, upon what credible basis do you believe this?

Understand that almost every cult and every religious deviation is questioning one thing: the authority of the Bible. Let them do it, my Bible still stands. I am not afraid of any of it (e.g., the dates, names, and places). All of this confirms the Bible’s validity over and over again.

I remember when they used to laugh, in my time, about an ancient fortress called Hazor that was burned with fire. They did not know where it was. They could not find it. We visit it now, and it is a monstrous fortress area like Megiddo itself. The evidence proved that it was burned, exactly

as the Bible states. This goes on and on and on. Do not fear anything about the Bible. The Bible is the most authentic, historically accurate, and reliable document in all of ancient history. Nothing is comparable to it. Do not let anybody delude you to think differently. If you want to challenge it, then challenge anything you want in it. Any place. Any name. Any king. Any empire. Any location.

Do you know the Bible is the only accurate map book from the ancient world? There are many people who work with maps and love to study the ancient maps and different things that people have drawn. Let me tell you something. These people are amazed at the Bible's accuracy. They do not understand it. How could anyone be so precise about boundaries, borders, lakes, seas, and rivers? How can it be? It is very possibly the word of God. You know that is one possibility that you are going to have to keep out there.

What is the first reason to believe that Jesus rose from the dead? The authority of the Bible, and do not forget it.

[[This editorial break represents a fifteen-minute intermission.]]

The second line of evidence for belief in the Resurrection has been and still is the absence of the body of Jesus from a closely guarded tomb. Be careful here. I am going to talk about this on the next page, but this point does not at all need to prove which tomb it is. It is just whatever tomb the Bible is talking about—wherever it is located.

I have noticed how many Christians get messed up right here. They miss the point. They want to argue about which tomb, but that is not necessary. The second line of evidence is in the Bible; it is the absence of the body of Jesus from the closely guarded tomb—wherever it was. Let me show you what I mean.

Go to Matthew 27. By the way, this is still a powerful way to present the gospel to somebody who does not believe in the Resurrection—if they are willing to listen. A lot of people do not want to listen. Jesus says, “He who wills to do My will, will know of the doctrine.” A lot of us are not willing. We put people on or argue with them or whatever. When you find somebody who is really open and interested, then use these arguments. I have done it many times.

First, it was shocking to the Romans. It was quite an embarrassment to them. Is it not quite obvious that they could not produce the body? If you wanted to kill Christianity, it would be the simplest way. After all, they were in charge of protecting it. The absence of the body from a closely guarded tomb is evidence of the Resurrection.

Now the next day, that followed the day of the 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 sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make

it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure,  
sealing the stone, and setting a watch. (Matthew 27:62-66)

If anyone were to break that seal, by the way, under Roman law, it is the immediate death penalty. Any soldiers under whose command the seal was broken are also executed. This will help you to explain something.

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 large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. (Matthew 28:11-13)

It is interesting that this is the same thing that is being said today by scholars that disciples stole the body. It is a very simple answer. Hugh Schonfield wrote *The Passover Plot* in the fifties, in which he said that Jesus faked it. Jesus swooned on the cross and acted like He was dead. Then the disciples stole the body and He never rose from the dead. It is even a big long book. Well, anybody that knows the Roman watch, the Roman guard, and the condition of the disciples, knows that Schonfield's view is absolutely stupid. It almost does not deserve an answer if you are that ignorant. It is impossible that the disciples stole the body. It is totally impossible.

Do you think that eleven guys, minus Judas, who all forsook Jesus at the cross, would, a couple of days later, become super-heroes, or Mighty Power Rangers able to overcome four Roman

soldiers at a watch. Remember, these men were capable of defending a hundred foot square against one hundred men? No, I do not think so.

As a matter of fact, I do not believe that eleven men, even if they were pretty strong, could have pushed the stone up away from the door, because when Mark tells us the stone was rolled away, he uses a Greek word which means “rolled up.” If you know anything about first century tombs, you would know that all of them need to be “rolled up.” There is a little ledge built into the rock in front of the opening so that when you roll the stone, you are rolling it down, and it locks in there. To push it up is extremely hard. Up until recent times, most of the stones in front of those tombs, though fairly good size and unmovable by ten or eleven men, were not adequate in describing this tomb, because it was a family tomb. Now Joseph of Arimathaea had it prepared for himself, and we had not really discovered a tomb like that in first century AD Jerusalem until a few years ago.

Across from the King David Hotel (you can look right at the citadel of the Western Wall of the Old City), in the backyard of several office buildings is a sepulcher. It is a family sepulcher from the first century AD and the stone is still there. They even invite you to try and move it. It is not as high as I am tall, and is about eight inches thick with rough texture. It is shaped like a huge cylinder—a wheel which you roll down to close and roll up to open. They had to use machinery to get it out of there, but now it sits there where you can go and practice trying to move it. We would get eleven of our biggest men (after all maybe the disciples were huge Jews), and the eleven men could not even budge it. It never even blinked. It did not move at all, and they were totally embarrassed. A lot of other people came over and tried. You know, it is interesting to watch what happened to the tour group as they were doing this. After they finished, I said, “Well

what do you think?” This one guy turned to me and said, “The disciples couldn’t have stolen the body.” I said, “That’s right.”

When you talk about the Resurrection, we do not need to run away from the truth. We just let people explore the evidence and go after it however they want.

Remember that the absence of the body of Jesus was also startling to the women. “Where have you taken Him?” “If you know where you’ve taken Him please tell us so we can go get....” The absence of the body from a closely guarded tomb! Those women ministered to Him. They knew Him quite well, and they knew that He was dead. They knew that He had been buried. Then they knew His body was gone.

The crowning blow to this argument is that the disciples did not believe the women when they told them about it. You mean to tell me they got together, mustered their courage and said, “Oh it must really be true. We will go down and roll the stone away.”

“Don’t need to, the stone is already gone.”

“It’s already rolled away.”

“Well, how did they roll it away?”

“An Angel of the Lord rolled it away.”

Do you understand that wherever you go on this you are going to get messed up? The truth of the matter is that they did not believe the women and Jesus had to rebuke them that same night for their hardness of heart and unbelief because they did not believe the women. Did the disciples steal the body? No, they did not steal the body. I will tell you another thing. The Romans did not steal the body and neither did the chief priests and scribes, because they wanted to find that body and kill the movement of Christianity. It spread like wildfire.

The third reason to believe the resurrection is the attempt of the Sanhedrin to explain what happened. I have already mentioned this. They never questioned the report of the guard. Never. They did not even check it out themselves. They knew that they would not have been there if it had not happened. Think it over, class.

What about the grave clothes? How do you figure that one? They were all there. As a matter of fact, the napkin at the head was folded. It was like somebody came out of it, saying, “I don’t want to leave a mess here,” and just folded it back up and put it at the head. That was God’s little way of letting the whole world know that He was resurrected. Remember that when John saw it and He immediately believed. He knew it, because if anyone had come to steal the body, the unraveled grave clothes would have been a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes in between those wrappings. It would have left on unbelievably large, gooey mess. If you have ever seen that done, you would know that it is a mess. It is a terrible mess. It would be stacked up and stinking. Yet here are the grave clothes neatly there, and only the body is gone. The head piece folded neatly to show you that there is no problem. No wonder John, kneeling down and looking at that, knew that it was true. He was gone. He rose from the dead. No one could have done that, except the Son of God. No one could have. Did they take it to the cleaners to get all the oil off it? No, they

do not even save those because they are unclean. It has been on a dead body. You cannot even touch it.

Do you understand that the whole evidence is unbelievable? The Sanhedrin knew. These guys would not be there, this Roman guard, unless something had happened. Do not you think that Roman guard told them about the grave clothes? Sure they did. They would have easily told them every detail of it, trying to escape execution. They say, “You have to do something. We set this up for you. We put the guard there. Now what are you going to do?” as they appeal to the Sanhedrin. “The only thing we know now is to say that the disciples stole the body.” They hoped that Pilate would believe that.

If that is not enough, the fourth evidence is that these same guys who supposedly stole the body are back in Jerusalem preaching that Jesus is alive and are willing to die for it. I do not know about you, but I know something about fakes and charlatans. They do not die for error; they only die for the truth. You are not willing to suffer for a trumped up scheme. It was true. There was a definite change in their attitude and in their response. As I said, they all forsake Him and fled as Matthew 26:56 says. They did not believe He would rise from the dead, as Luke 24 tells us. Now we see this new courage in their witness.

There was an old gentleman on our tour group a couple of weeks ago, and I took him to the torture chamber where the apostles were beaten in Acts 5. It is below Caiaphas’ house, where the Sanhedrin met. I explained to him how those little notches and holes in the upper part of the rock is where they tied their hands up and stretched them. The ones on the pillars is where they would tie their feet. They had them spread-eagle, and then used a cat-o-nine-tails to whip their back. The cat-o-nine-tails was made of pieces of bone which were tied up in leather strips. When it was

whipped, it would have lacerated the person's back. Most men died under it, and after being beaten, the Bible says that the apostles went out praising the Lord and thanking God that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name's sake. Did they then go home and hide? Any Jew will tell you, who is a guide worth his money, that it is a miracle they were able to walk back to the temple area. Most people could not walk for days—if they even survived it. These guys went right back to the temple mount. It was not that far, but they walked right back to the temple mount and kept preaching. Their backs were lacerated so bad that it would have exposed the bones, but these guys said, "Praise the Lord. Let's go back; let's let them know that it's the truth."

The actions of the apostles after the resurrection are a proof that He is alive. You would not do that unless you really believed it. "What if they kill us, guys? Let's go back. He rose from the dead, and because He lives, we shall also live. Let's go back!" All of them were tortured and killed except John. Every last one of them was tortured because of their faith and their refusal to back down. "He arose from the dead. He's alive. You do what you want to me."

Jesus said, "Do not ever fear him who can kill your body. You fear Him who can cast both body and soul into hell." This old gentleman is looking at that as I am explaining it to him. He turned to me and with little tears coming down his face, and said, "A man wouldn't do that unless it was true." He said, "This is really true, isn't it?" I said, "Yep, it really is."

Now, a lot of people are willing to die for something. We know that in World War II, the Japanese pilots did that. By the way, Iran is training pilots who are going to be suicidal. Islam teaches that if you kill Jews or Christians and you are killed in the process, you are instantaneously rewarded with eternal life. That is the argument which a lot of people use, but that is not our argument. Our argument is not that somebody was raised in all of this and believed

it all his life. No, the disciples did not believe right up to the night of the Resurrection. It is a miraculous change in a short period of time that is unexplainable.

The fifth evidence is the appearance of Jesus after His resurrection. We know from Acts 1:3 that it extended over a forty day period. People say, “Why was He here for forty days before He ascended?” The answer is, “To give many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3). The Bible does not leave anything up to conjecture or human opinion, but it clearly presents the evidence as though this was all going to be in a court of law. Luke said, “By many eyewitnesses we give you proof that proves the certainty of these things we have told you.”

These appearances were given to different people in different situations at different locations, as 1 Corinthians 15 affirms. We know that His body was examined carefully by the apostles. Jesus invited them, “Touch Me and see. A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see Me have” (Luke 24). First John 1:1 says that our hands have handled Him and touched Him.

Now, those appearances are very important, especially those on the first day. Here they are:

First, we know from John 20:1-17 (the story that we read you last time) that Mary Magdalene was first. She did not even know that it was Jesus when she first talked to Him because He just called her, “Woman.” When He said her name, “Mary,” there was something in way that He said it that made her know that it was Him. She turned around, and there He was. She threw her arms around Him. And so, Mary was the first one, a woman out of whom He had cast seven devils.

Second, we have the women in Matthew 28:9-10, who meet Him on the road. They throw their arms around Him too, hanging on for dear life. We mentioned that last week.

Third, we have Peter in Luke 24:34. The report was given, by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, that He has also been seen by Peter. There are a lot of reasons for that. Peter appears to be the spokesman that God used. He is the leader of the apostles, and the spokesman on the Day of Pentecost. Can you think of another reason why He might have done it? Peter denied Him. He sort of embarrassed Peter, in front of the other disciples. Peter said, "I'm going fishing." "Lovest thou Me more than these? You said you did Peter. Do you now?" Peter got grieved when He did it the third time. Jesus even told Peter how he was going to die. Peter said, "What is this guy going to do?" as he pointed to John. Jesus said, "I'll take care of that" (My translation). You can read it later. Jesus said, "Don't you worry about him. You just follow Me." He first appeared to Peter, and so if that was the third time, as John 21 says, that He appeared to His disciples, then it had to take place after He appeared to Peter that first day. Peter had some problems adjusting, and accepting that he could ever be used.

Is there anybody here that has come to know the Lord, but because of something you have done, you think you may be disqualified? All of you should raise your hands, because you all have done something. Were it not for His grace, none of us would be able to serve the Lord. How sweet of the Lord to go to Peter first before the other guys. "Peter, it's okay. I forgive you." Apparently it took a few days for Peter to really get the fact that he is forgiven through his brain. This is a great story.

The disciples that night, minus Thomas and Judas, were rebuked by them for their hardness of heart. Thomas was eight days later and Jesus said, "Behold My hands and feet." Then Thomas fell at his knees and said, "My Lord and my God." Jesus then said, "Blessed are you because you have seen and believe, but blessed are those who never seen and yet still believe."

The sixth evidence is the acceptance of the garden tomb in Jerusalem as the place where Jesus was buried. This one is a little shaky. First, if you are a Catholic, you do not agree with this. Second, if you have a little Jewish background and understanding, you probably do not believe it either, but let me kind of deal with it for a moment.

Go to John 19 so that we can look at the facts from the Bible first.

Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and  
in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.  
There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation  
[day]; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand. (John 19:41-42)

How do you have a garden in a dry and barren desert land? You need water, and in front of the garden tomb is a cistern that holds 250,000 gallons of water. It is one of three systems in ancient Jerusalem. We know there was water available there, and that is why it is a powerful argument. A giant cistern of water holding 250,000 gallons below the ground is right in front of the garden tomb. It is to the left as you come out of the tomb.

If I ask you about the evidence of an ancient garden, you are going to tell me about the cistern, right? Number two, you are going to tell me about the ancient wine press. There is an ancient wine press right in front of the garden tomb, which tells us that there was a vineyard there. We know that there was a garden there at the time of Christ (nineteen-hundred years ago).

But is that the location? It is still a problem. Joseph took the body of Jesus, and wrapped it in a linen cloth.

And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. (Matthew 27:60)

This is a very significant point about the burial of Jesus. A lot of graves are like our graves. They are in the ground—in dirt. The decay process is a factor here. Whether it is an animal being buried or a human being buried. We have instrumentation today, modern technology, where we could go into an ancient grave and detect whether or not any bodies of animals or humans had ever been in that grave. We can detect that, and as you might imagine, that has been done to the garden tomb. The reason why you can do it to the garden tomb is that it also was carved out of rock as a lot of tombs are in Jerusalem (because there is a lot of rock around). Because it is out of rock, it is easy to discern whether there is any (animal or human) decay in the tomb. There is no evidence—no trace at all—of any plant, animal or human decay in that tomb when it was discovered. They argue that that is proof of the resurrection.

I told you that this is one controversial point. Now what would be your answer? Suppose you are playing the devil's advocate. You are an unbeliever. What would you say to this evidence? It just means the tomb was never used or the body could have been stolen. That is all it means. All we know is that there was no animal, plant or human decay in this tomb. That is all we know.

We do know that the tomb was prepared for somebody other than who used it, according to the Bible. It was Joseph's "own new tomb." Now the garden tomb is a family tomb. The father is

always on a ledge, carved out of the rock. There is a ledge. You lay the body, and they dig it out so that the body does not roll off. There is a ledge of rock, as it were. They would just dig it down a little bit. So it is like a bench, and that is where the body of the father would be placed in a family tomb. There is a ledge there that prohibits the body from rolling off. The interesting thing about this tomb, when it was uncovered, is that at the end of it, the father's spot is knocked out. The ledge, which was dug out by hand, was extended ten to twelve inches longer. It was almost ten to twelve inches longer. Let us be very accurate here. The only thing that the evidence means is that whoever originally bought the tomb for his family was not the one that was placed there. It could have been that he died somewhere else and they never brought him back. It could be that they decided another member of the family should have it. Whoever it was, he was taller than the man for whom it was originally prepared. The body would have been longer.

The reason why some men make a point of this, is—remember when He was in Jericho? Zacchaeus, who was a little man, had to climb a tree to see Him, but the crowds he could easily see and Jesus was always noticeable in a crowd. Tradition (and I do not know whether it is legend or history, but I imagine it) says that Jesus was taller than the average Jew, who were normally quite short at that period of time. He was taller. That is the reason why in the Gospels, when you are reading stories, it seems like everybody is seeing Him quite easily. Some believe, and it was an early church tradition that He was tall—probably more than six feet tall—which was unusual for Jews of that time period.

Do you understand why I say it is questionable evidence? I can knock this thing apart myself without too much trouble, but it is interesting. If all these things are true, then it becomes quite interesting.

The other thing that we learn in John 19:41, is in the section that says that in the place where He was crucified there was a garden and in the garden a new sepulcher wherein was never a man yet laid. In the other passage, all we know is that it was a new tomb that was prepared for a man who was giving to someone else. Here it makes it clear that nobody in the family has been in that place yet. That is why you can trace it for the corruption decay issue, because it is made out of rock.

Another problem is in Mark 16:4 where we are told that when they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away, for it was very great. The “very great” means that it was larger than the normal stones. About a hundred to two hundred yards north of this garden tomb are the sepulchers called the King of Judah Sepulchers. They are first century tombs and I have been there and I have crawled in them. They have smaller openings and smaller rocks in front of them. Now the rock that went in front of this garden tomb is no longer there, but the trough in which it would roll is there, and it is on an incline.

This is the verse (Mark 16:4), where the Greek word for “rolled away” in English is “rolled up.” We know it was an incline, and in front of the current garden tomb there was a very clear incline.

The place where He was crucified is related to this as well. Near the garden, a lot of people like to this place where you can see the pictures of that what looks like a skull (at least the bridge of the nose and what looks like two eye sockets). Please do not believe that. I know it brings people a lot of wonderful vibrations in their heart and they sing the song, “On a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross.” The Bible does not say that he was crucified on a hill. The song says that, but the Bible does not. First, that area that shows the skull is a part of Mount Moriah. It goes all the way over. It was cut out and a road was made there shortly after the time of Christ. Whatever skull you see, and boy you have got to strain to see it, is nonsense. The place of the skull is referring to

actual human skulls that were always left there by Jews when they stoned people. The execution method of the Jews was stoning. The Roman method was crucifixion. How do Romans crucify? Well we know that from Roman history, it was always on the ground and always on the main highways and on the other side of the road from where there are residential dwellings. The north side of Jerusalem is a main road going east and west. The crucifixion would have been on the north side of that road. It would have been on the ground. It was the Place of the Skull, *Golgotha*, where people were stoned. There is no doubt that that was where Stephen was stoned. This would also explain the presence on the side of that hill of the church of Saint Stephen which commemorated the martyrdom of Stephen at the Place of the Skull.

There is a lot of evidence there to prove that this is the place. If it is the place where He died, it is still the same hill—Mount Moriah—where Abraham offered Isaac, but the exact location is unknown. It is all the same hill, and to keep the biblical type, it would be nice to know that He died where Abraham offered Isaac, I suppose. Otherwise it messes up a lot of our sermons where we have taught that.

The veil of the Temple was rent from top to bottom and was seen. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher (the location that the Catholic Church has within the present wall of Jerusalem, but outside the wall of Jesus' day) and the Garden Tomb, could not have possibly seen temple veil being rent.

We also know that the Bible says that Jesus was crucified on a tree. The whole idea of the cross is questionable. The very word cross is referring to a beam of wood. What probably occurred was that a large beam of wood upon which the body would be hanged was nailed up to a tree exactly the way the Bible says in detail.

What kind of tree do you suppose would you have nailed that beam to? An olive tree. The only one you could have done it to. The only one that could have sustained and held a body in that area. Where are the olive trees? Mount of Olives. Is that not interesting? There might be a connection. Yes, I happen to believe that Jesus probably died on the Mount of Olives. A beam was put up on a tree, the other two guys on the other side, which would also explain some location problems about the soldier who came out. We will save that one for another day, but it is interesting to me, that that is the place where you could have easily looked right down, saw the temple rent.

Frankly, I think that is pretty exciting, because we not only have many gardens here, but we also have sepulchers of Jews who were buried. They are only buried on Mount Olives. There is just too much there. I think that is where He died. The Garden of Gethsemane is also in the same general area.

There is one more reason to believe in the resurrection, and that is the assurance in the believer's heart. Unfortunately, though it looks like a simple point at the bottom, it is a very involved point. A pretty powerful one that will come out different than I would guess any of you would understand at this point, unless you have heard this already. It is extremely unusual, but there is a point in the Bible about how to know the truthfulness of this, and that is, to me, one of the greatest blessings you could ever receive. We are going to wait until next time.

Father, thank you again, that we do have a sure word of prophecy. Thank you that we have a word that we can rely on. Thank You that Jesus arose from the dead. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

