

The Resurrection Credible

By C. H. Spurgeon

“Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” — Acts 26:8.

Concerning the souls of our believing friends who have departed this life we suffer no distress, we feel sure that they are where Jesus is, and behold his glory, according to our Lord’s own memorable prayer. We know but very little of the disembodied state, but we know quite enough to rest certain beyond all doubt that —

*“They are supremely blest,
Have done with sin,
and care, and woe,
And with their Savior rest.”*

Our main trouble is about their bodies, which we have committed to the dark and lonesome grave. We cannot reconcile ourselves to the facts that their dear faces are being stripped of all their beauty by the fingers of decay, and that all the insignia of their manhood should be fading into corruption. It seems hard that the hands and feet, and all the goodly fabric of their noble forms, should be dissolved into dust, and broken into an utter ruin. We cannot stand at the grave without tears; even the perfect Man could not restrain his weeping at Lazarus’ tomb. It is a sorrowful thought that our friends are dead, nor can we ever regard the grave with love. We cannot say that we take pleasure in the catacomb and the vault. We still regret, and feel it natural to do so, that so dreadful a ban has fallen upon our race as that it should be “appointed unto all men once to die.” God sent it as a penalty, and we cannot rejoice in it.

The glorious doctrine of the resurrection is intended to take away this cause of sorrow. We need have no trouble about the body, any more than we have concerning the soul. Faith being exercised upon immortality relieves us of all trembling as to the spirits of the just; and the same faith, if exercised upon resurrection, will with equal certainty efface all hopeless grief with regard to the body; for, though apparently destroyed, the body will live again — it has not gone to annihilation. That very frame which we lay in the dust shall but sleep there for a while, and, at the trump of the archangel, it shall awaken in superior beauty, clothed with attributes unknown to it while here. The Lord’s love to his people is a love towards their entire manhood, he chose them not as disembodied spirits, but as men and women arrayed in flesh and blood. The love of Jesus Christ towards his chosen is not an affection for their better nature merely, but towards that also which we are wont to think their inferior part; for in his book all their members were written, he keepeth all their bones, and the very hairs of their head are all numbered. Did he not assume our perfect manhood?

He took into union with his Deity a human soul, but he also assumed a human body; and in that fact he gave us evidence of his affinity to our perfect manhood, to our flesh, and to our blood, as well as to our mind and to our spirit. Moreover, our Redeemer has perfectly ransomed both soul and body. It was not partial redemption which our kinsman effected for us. We know that our Redeemer liveth, not only with respect to our spirit, but with regard to our body; so that though the worm shall devour its skin and flesh, yet shall it rise again because he has redeemed it from the power of death, and ransomed it from the prison of the grave.

The whole manhood of the Christian has already been sanctified. It is not merely that with his spirit he serves his God, but he yields his members to be instruments unto righteousness to the glory of his heavenly father. “Know ye not,” says the apostle, “that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, surely that which has been a temple of the Holy Ghost shall not be ultimately destroyed. It may be taken down, as the tabernacle was in the wilderness, but taken down to be put up again: or, to use another form of the same figure, the tabernacle may go, but only that the temple may follow. “We know that if this earthly house of our tabernacle were dissolved we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” My brethren, it would not be a complete victory over sin and Satan, if the Savior left a part of his people in the grave; it would not look as if he had destroyed all the worlds of the devil if he only emancipated their spirits. There shall not be a bone, nor a piece of a bone, of any one of Christ’s people left in the charnel house at the last. Death shall not have a solitary trophy to show: his prison-house shall be utterly rifled of all the spoil which he has gathered from our humanity. The Lord Jesus in all things shall have the pre-eminence, and even as to our materialism he shall vanquish death and the grave, leading our

captivity captive. It is a joy to think that, as Christ has redeemed the entire man, and sanctified the entire man, and will be honored in the salvation of the entire man, so our complete manhood shall have it in its power to glorify him.

The hands with which we sinned shall be lifted in eternal adoration; the eyes which have gazed on evil shall behold the King in his beauty. Not merely shall the mind which now loves the Lord be perpetually knit to him, and the spirit which contemplates him will delight for ever in him, and be in communion with him; but this very body which has been a clog and hindrance to the spirit, and been an arch rebel against the sovereignty of Christ, shall yield him homage with voice, and hand, and brain, and ear, and eye. We look to the time of resurrection for the accomplishment of our adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body.

How, this being our hope, though we believe and rejoice in it in a measure, we have, nevertheless, to confess that, sometimes, questions suggest themselves, and the evil heart of unbelief cries, "Can it be true? Is it possible?" At such times the question of our text is exceedingly needful, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?"

How are we to meet the demands of the case?

We would REMOVE THE DIFFICULTY. We make no empty boast, the matter is simple. Read the text again with due emphasis, and it is done. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that GOD should raise the dead?" It might seem incredible that the dead should be raised, but why should it seem incredible that GOD, the Almighty, the Infinite, should raise the dead? Grant a God, and no difficulties remain. Grant that God is, and that he is omnipotent: grant that he has said the dead shall be raised, and belief is no longer hard but inevitable. Impossibility and incredulity — both vanish in the presence of God.

I believe this is the only way in which the difficulties of faith should be met: it is of no use to run to reason for weapons against unbelief, the Word of God is the true defense of faith. It is foolish to build with wood and hay when solid stones may be had. If my heavenly Father makes a promise, or reveals a truth, am I not to believe him till I have asked the philosophers about it? Is God's word only true when finite reason approves of it? After all, is man's judgment the ultimatum, and is God's word only to be taken when we can see for ourselves, and therefore have no need of revelation at all? Far from us be this spirit. Let God be true, and every man a liar. We are not staggered when the wise men mock at us, but we fall back upon "thus saith the Lord." One word from God outweighs for us a library of human lore. To the Christian, God's spoken word stands in the stead of all reason. Our logic is, "God has said it," and this is our rhetoric too. If God declares that the dead shall be raised, it is not a thing incredible to us.

Difficulty is not in the dictionary of the Godhead. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Heap up the difficulties, if you like, make the doctrine more and more hard for reason to compass, so long as it contains no self-evident contradiction and inconsistency, we rejoice in the opportunity to believe great things concerning a Great God.

When Paul uttered our text he was speaking to a Jew, he was addressing Agrippa, one to whom he could say, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest!" It was, therefore, good reasoning to use with Agrippa, to say, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" For first, as a Jew, Agrippa had the testimony of Job — "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

He had, also, the testimony of David, who, in the sixteenth Psalm, says, "My flesh also shall rest in hope." He had the testimony of Isaiah in the twenty-sixth chapter and the nineteenth verse, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."

He had the testimony of Daniel in his twelfth chapter, second and third verses, where the prophet says, "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." And then again, in Hosea 8:14, Agrippa had another testimony where the Lord declares "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.” Thus God had plainly promised resurrection in the Old Testament Scriptures, and that fact should be quite enough for Agrippa. If the Lord has said it, it is no longer doubtful.

To us as Christians there has been granted yet fuller evidence. Remember how our Lord has spoken concerning resurrection: with no bated breath has he declared his intention to raise the dead. Remarkable is that passage in John 5:28, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” And so in chapter 6:40, “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

The Holy Ghost has spoken the same truth by the apostles. In that precious and most blessed eighth chapter of the Romans, we have a testimony in the eleventh verse, “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” I read you just now the passage from the first of Thessalonians, which is very full indeed, where we are bidden not to sorrow as those that are without hope; and you have in the Philippians the third chapter and twenty-first verse, another proof, “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” I scarcely need remind you of that grand chapter of massive argument, Corinthians the fifteenth. Beyond all doubt the testimony of the Holy Ghost is that the dead shall rise; and granted that there is an Almighty God, we find no difficulty in accepting the doctrine and entertaining the blessed hope.

At the same time it may be well to look around us, and note what helps the Lord has appointed for our faith. I am quite certain, dear friends, that there are many wonders in the world which we should not have believed by mere report, if we had not come across them by experience and observation. The electric telegraph, though it be but an invention of man, would have been as hard to believe in a thousand years ago as the resurrection of the dead is now. Who in the days of packhorses would have believed in flashing a message from England to America? When our missionaries in tropical countries have told the natives of the formation of ice, and that persons could walk across frozen water, and of ships that have been surrounded by mountains of ice in the open sea, the water becoming solid and hard as a rock all around them, the natives have refused to believe such absurd reports. Everything is wonderful till we are used to it, and resurrection owes the incredible portion of its marvel to the fact of our never having come across it in our observation — that is all. After the resurrection, we shall regard it as a divine display of power as familiar to us as creation and providence now are. I have no doubt we shall adore and bless God, and wonder at resurrection forever, but it will be in the same sense in which every devout mind wonders at creation now. We shall grow accustomed to this new work of God when we have entered upon our longer life. We were only born but yesterday, and have seen little as yet. God’s works require far more than our few earthy years of observation, and when we have entered into eternity, are out of our minority, and have come of age, that which astounds us now will have become a familiar theme for praise.

Will resurrection be a greater wonder than creation? You believe that God spoke the world out of nothing. He said, “Let it be,” and the world was. To create out of nothing is quite as marvelous as to call together scattered particles and refashion them into what they were before. Either work requires omnipotence, but if there be any choice between them, the resurrection is the easier work of the two. If it did not happen so often, the birth of every child into the world would astound us. We should consider a birth to be, as indeed it is, a most transcendent manifestation of divine power. It is only because we know it and see it so commonly that we do not behold the wonder-working hand of God in human births and in our continued existence. The thing, I say, only staggers us because we have not become familiar with it as yet: there are other deeds of God which are quite as marvelous.

Remember, too, that there is one thing which, though you have not seen, you have received on credible evidence, which is a part of historic truth, namely, that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. He is to you the cause of your resurrection, the type of it, the foretaste of it, the guarantee of it. As surely as he rose you shall rise. He proved the resurrection possible by rising, nay, he proved it certain because he is the representative man; and, in rising, he rose for all who are represented by him. “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” The rising of our Lord from the tomb should forever sweep away every

doubt as to the rising of his people. “For if the dead rise not, then is Christ not raised,” but because he lives, we shall live also.

Remember also, my brethren and sisters, that you who are Christians have already experienced within yourselves as great a work as the resurrection, for you have risen from the dead as to your innermost nature. You were dead in trespasses and sins, and you have been quickened into newness of life. Of course the unconverted here will see nothing in this. The unregenerate man will even ask me what this means, and to him it can be no argument, for it is a matter of experience which one man cannot explain to his fellow. To know it ye must yourselves be born again. But, believers, ye have already passed through a resurrection from the grave of sin, and from the rottenness and corruption of evil passions and impure desires, and this resurrection God has wrought in you by a power equal to that which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. To you the quickening of your spiritual nature is an assured proof that the Lord will also quicken your mortal bodies.

The whole matter is this—that our persuasion of the certainty of the general resurrection rests upon faith in God and his word. It is both idle and needless to look elsewhere. If men will not believe the declaration of God, they must be left to give an account to him of their unbelief. My hearer, if thou art one of God’s elect, thou wilt believe thy God, for God gives faith to all his chosen. If thou dost reject the divine testimony, thou givest evidence that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and thou wilt perish in it unless grace prevents. The gospel and the doctrine of the resurrection were opened up to men in all their glory to put a division between the precious and the vile. “He that is of God,” saith the apostle, “heareth God’s words.”

True faith is the visible mark of secret election. He that believeth in Christ gives evidence of God’s grace towards him, but he that believes not gives sure proof that he has not received the grace of God. “But ye believe not,” said Christ, “because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” Therefore this truth and other Christian truths are to be held up, maintained, and delivered fully to the whole of mankind to put a division between them, to separate the Israelites from the Egyptians, the seed of the woman from the seed of the serpent. Those whom God has chosen are known by their believing in what God has said; while those who remain unbelieving perish in their sin, condemned by the truth which they wilfully reject.

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