



A Fresh Study for Easter, 1913

*The Resurrection of Jesus
From the Dead*

*By
Gross Alexander, S.T.D.*



A NEW STUDY

OF THE

RESURRECTION OF JESUS
FROM THE DEAD

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION BODY OF JESUS
AND
THE PURPOSES AND MEANINGS OF THE RESURRECTION

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THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

A STUDY FOR EASTER

BY GROSS ALEXANDER

LET me be frank at the outset, and admit that, at one time, I had very serious misgivings as to the actual occurrence of the resurrection of Jesus, if not a positive indisposition to believe it. This was due to three causes. First, there were the inherent difficulties of the resurrection itself and all that it involved. Second, there was the difficulty of harmonizing the inconsistencies and discrepancies of the different accounts to be found in the New Testament. Third, while I had no difficulty in believing in miracles when the reason was adequate and the evidence sufficient, I could not see an adequate reason for this particular miracle—the most stupendous of all miracles. The life, the teaching, and the work of Jesus seemed complete without it; and it seemed improbable that so great a miracle should, so to speak, be thrown away. Not only did it seem to be unnecessary, it seemed to be inconsistent with two of the most striking facts in the life of Jesus. It seemed to render unreasonable that unique dread of death which Jesus showed again and again, but especially in the inscrutable agony of Gethsemane. For, if he was so soon to return to life, why should death seem so full of terror for him? It seemed to discount, also, his own interpretation of the meaning and value of his death, on which, especially during the latter part of his ministry, he laid such insistent emphasis. For I could not see how his death could mean so much, if he was so soon to return to life. But upon

maturer study of it, the historical evidence was found to be independently convincing, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, it was confirmed by the discovery of adequate reasons for the fact itself.

In this paper an attempt will be made to give, in a brief résumé, some of the historical evidence and some of the reasons for the resurrection of Jesus.

I

THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE.

This will be found to be direct and indirect.

I. THE DIRECT EVIDENCE.

In the way of direct evidence the fact of the resurrection of Jesus is definitely attested, in the form of historical narration, by five of the writers and in six of the books of the New Testament.¹ Besides this, it is referred to as a matter of everybody's knowledge, as a matter of course, and cited as a fact and factor in the very foundation of Christianity, by the other writers of the New Testament, in the way of instruction or exhortation. It underlies, as an organic part of the fabric of Christianity, the whole of the New Testament.

There are four distinct records of the resurrection of Jesus in the four Gospels. These betray no dependence on each other or even knowledge of each other. So far from it, they really differ to the point of discrepancy. Indeed, some persons, not only among critical students but even among general readers, have found it hard to believe the fact of the resurrection recorded in common by them all, because of the apparent inconsistencies and even apparent contradictions, in some of the details, which they see no way of harmonizing. Since these four accounts are so entirely independent, it would be interesting and helpful, if it were possible in one article, to examine each one of them in detail. At any rate, let us give special attention to one or two of them.

LUKE'S GOSPEL.

Luke, the author of the third Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles, is the most painstaking historical writer of the New

¹The four Gospels, the Acts, and 1 Corinthians.

Testament. The brief preface to his Gospel has attracted attention and elicited admiration from the early periods to our own day for its dignified common sense, its brief but comprehensive description of the true method of historical research, and its literary balance and beauty. In this preface he modestly but distinctly declares of himself that in collecting the materials for his history, so far from picking up floating reports, adopting, without examination, oral traditions, or following unquestioningly and uncritically even the written accounts, current in his time, he had applied a new method to the writing of the history of Jesus. Of this method he gives a graphic and impressive description: He says that he had *traced the course*² of the events; that he had traced the course of the events *from the beginning*;³ that he had traced the course of *all*⁴ the events from the beginning; that he had traced the course of all the events *accurately*⁵ from the beginning. So much as to his method of research and the collection of his materials.

As to his sources, he says (not that he was himself an eyewitness, but) that his materials were derived from those who were eyewitnesses.⁶ His words are: "Even as they who were *eyewitnesses* from the beginning delivered them to *us*." Now who *were* eyewitnesses from the beginning but the apostles themselves? And to whom does Luke say these eyewitnesses handed down these things but *to us*, including himself?⁷

Moreover, he proceeds to give a statement of his *purpose* in composing his narrative. It is that his reader might thoroughly understand *the certainty* of those things in which he had been instructed—*ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς τὴν ἀσφάλειαν*. It is difficult to see how the

²παρηκολουθηκότι=had followed alongside their course, as one follows along the bank of a stream.

³ἄνωθεν. ⁴πᾶσιν. ⁵ἀκριβῶς=with minuteness and exactness.

⁶"He had received the details of the Gospel history from those who could be described as eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word." (Harnack, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. xiii.)

⁷καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἀπόπται. For these reasons it is difficult to understand why Professor McGiffert says with such positiveness that this writer does not lay claim to have gained this information from any one of the apostles or to have stood in such relation to any of the leading Christians of the first generation as to have independent and first-hand knowledge of Christ's life. (*Apostolic Age*, 577.)

author could have made out a stronger case for the trustworthiness of his record.

The history which he then proceeds to give is in the true historical spirit and in the use of the historical method. In the first place, for example, he fixes the dates by reference to well-known events in the contemporary world. Compare Luke 1: 5 and 2: 1, 2, where he fixes the dates of the principal events of the preliminary history of the Christian movement. But when he comes to the beginning of the open public ministry of Jesus, as he does in the first verses of the third chapter, he fixes the date by reference to six different rulers of the time. "Here the chronological situation is *scientifically* determined," says Harnack. And he is correct in thus fixing the dates and in stating and collocating the facts of contemporary history. This, in the nature of the case, finds ampler illustration in the other book of which he is author, namely, *The Acts of the Apostles*. In this, the points of contact with contemporary history and with political, social, and religious conditions, as well as with the details of geography, etc., are very many, so that it affords a greater number and variety of tests than almost any other document, of any kind, that has come down to us from antiquity. And every test only confirms the veracity and accuracy of the narrative.

Sir William Ramsey, in his brilliant work, *St. Paul, the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*, classes "the author of Acts among the historians of the first rank," and the book itself among "historical works of the highest order, in which a writer commands excellent means of knowledge, either through personal acquaintance or through access to original authorities, and brings to the treatment of his subject, genius, literary skill, and sympathetic historical insight into human character and the movement of events." (Pp. 2-4.) And see, further, pages 383-390.

And here is Harnack's estimate of the book of Acts:

The magnitude and difficulty of the task which Luke set himself in his "Acts of the Apostles," and the ability and skill with which he has mastered this task, cannot easily be overrated. Direct touch with the recorded facts—this alone explains such a history as it is. (*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. xiii, xv.)

Another great scholar says:

The Acts of the Apostles, in the multiplicity and variety of its details, probably affords greater means of testing its general character for truth than

any other ancient narrative in existence [italics mine]; and in my opinion it satisfies the tests fully.⁸

This conscientious and careful writer, then, whose sources were "eyewitnesses," whose investigations were carefully and accurately made, whose aim was the attainment of "certainty," and whose veracity is, in the second of his books, verifiable, and is established by many and minute tests—this writer gives in the closing part of his Gospel an account of the empty tomb,⁹ the appearance of the risen Lord to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, and his conversation with them;¹⁰ his appearance to Peter,¹¹ and to the Eleven and those who were with them.¹²

Why Luke did not record other appearances also, in his Gospel, it is not possible to say with certainty. But it can by no means be inferred *that he did not know of others*. For he cites others and adduces other testimony in his second book,

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

Here he declares that Jesus showed himself to the disciples alive, after his passion, through *many* proofs, letting himself be seen by them from time to time through the *space of forty days*. Furthermore, his account of the ascension is quite full and circumstantial, while in his Gospel it is barely said that Jesus left them. In other words, it appears from what he says in the book of Acts that he knew much more about the resurrection of Jesus than he has told in his Gospel. From which it appears, also, that it was not the plan of Luke, and perhaps not of any of the writers, to give an exhaustive and orderly statement of all the appearances of Jesus, or a cumulative and complete presentation of the evidence for his resurrection, such as a law court would require or the critical scholarship of our day would desire.

After Luke had written the first book of his history of the origins of Christianity, he quietly and almost incidentally writes in his second book that Jesus by *many* tokens (appearances) showed himself to be still living (*ζῶντα*) after his passion and death. The order of the words should be noted in the Greek of this sentence (Acts 1:3). It is significant.

⁸Bishop Lightfoot, in *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 184.

⁹Luke 24: 1-3. ¹⁰Luke 24: 13-23. ¹¹Luke 24: 34, 35. ¹²Luke 24: 36-43.

But this is not by any means all that he says on the subject in the book of Acts. The testimony, attestation, to the resurrection of Jesus which he incidentally produces in the book of Acts has not been sufficiently appreciated. It should be noted that the testimonies given in the book of Acts are the very earliest on record, and they were given in public and under the searchlight of the situation at the time, immediately after the resurrection, several years earlier than the writing of the record of the four Gospels, and entirely independent of them all. If we had only this record in Acts, and Paul's in 1 Corinthians, it would be amply sufficient to convince an open-minded, unprejudiced, unsophisticated reader.

For example, he quotes the positive, direct, personal testimony of Peter, as given by Peter himself on various occasions of the first importance. In Acts 2: 32, Peter says in the presence of a great multitude of people, "This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we, all, are witnesses." Again (Acts 3: 15) Peter says, in the presence of all the people (*πᾶς ὁ λαός*), as is explicitly said, "Whom God raised up from the dead, whereof we [we disciples who are here present] are witnesses." In Acts 4: 33 the writer includes the other apostles besides Peter in his statement, saying, "With great power the apostles kept on giving¹⁸ their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

In two instances Peter's personal testimony is given in the presence of the solemn assembly of the Sanhedrin, which would give it the significance and weight of a judicial proceeding. In Acts 4: 10, Peter is quoted as saying in answer to a question and in language that fairly vibrates with passion:

"Heads of the people and councilors, since we are put on trial before you to-day for an act of mercy done to a helpless man, then let it be known to you, and to all the people of Israel as well, that this unfortunate man stands here before you restored to perfect health by virtue of the name of Jesus Messiah, the Nazarene, the one whom you put to death on a cross, whom God raised from the dead—by Him, I repeat, this man stands here in your presence, sound and well."

That language has the ring of reality, of certainty, and of intense conviction. And *once more*, arraigned at the bar of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5: 30-32), Peter says, "The God of our fathers

¹⁸The imperfect tense has this sense, *ἀπεδίδουν*.

has raised from death Jesus whom you put to death by hanging. And we, who are here on trial before you, are witnesses of these things." And yet again, under very different circumstances and after the lapse of considerable time, Peter gives his testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, in the house of Cornelius, the Roman: "This man, who had been put to death by crucifixion, God raised up on the third day."¹⁴

And according to the statements of this careful and conscientious historian, people, by the thousand, who were in a position to know the general situation, and to cross-examine the witnesses, if they had any doubt as to their testimony, accepted this testimony, and on the strength of it, with a devotion and fervor that counted nothing too dear to be risked or lost, committed themselves to a new life and a new order.

This writer goes on to record at length in this second book of the history that *upon the testimony of these eyewitnesses* to the resurrection of Jesus, a movement, incomparably the greatest and most revolutionary this world has ever known, had its beginnings, and that within the lifetime of himself and his contemporaries it had spread over the Roman world from beyond the Jordan on the east to the Tiber on the west.

It should be borne in mind that these several instances of the testimony of eyewitnesses of the resurrection and *its effect in the establishment of Christianity* are recorded by the same writer whose conscientiousness and carefulness are so graphically indicated in the preface to his first book, and whose veracity has been tested and established by so many and searching tests in his second book. For even those who doubt Luke's authorship are agreed that the third Gospel and the book of Acts were written by the same person.¹⁵

THE TESTIMONY OF ST. PAUL.

Omitting, for lack of space, the consideration of the accounts of the resurrection to be found in the other Gospels, let us give our attention to the testimony of an eyewitness who is not mentioned in the Gospels. It is the testimony of one of the most remarkable

¹⁴Acts 10: 39, 40.

¹⁵For example, see McGiffert's *Apostolic Age*, pp. 433, 578.

men of the race. Fortunately, we know much of his history as well as of his inner life, from his letters, which really give incidentally the materials for an autobiography. He was a man of very keen and courageous conscientiousness, of intense moral earnestness, of unyielding firmness of conviction, of uncompromising conservatism. And he was the most conscientious, determined, and persistent *opponent* of the new faith in the ancient world. He spent some years of his life in a systematic effort to exterminate the followers of Jesus from the face of the earth.

But, notwithstanding all this, he suddenly changed and became, himself, a convert and a disciple of Jesus; and from the hour of his conversion he became, and, to the end of his life, continued to be, the most passionate lover and the most devoted servant of Jesus and the most active and untiring champion and propagator of Christianity that its history has ever known. This change he himself ascribes to his personal knowledge of the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. That is to say, he had come in contact with such evidence for the resurrection of Jesus as to produce this revulsion. But this was not all—*at the same time*, it produced in him the ethical miracle of the purest character and the most self-obliterating altruism—but One—that the world has ever seen.

He not only ascribes the fact of his conversion to his knowledge of the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, he has given and left on record an explicit and formal statement of his testimony; and that, let it be borne in mind, for the avowed purpose of proving the fact of the resurrection of Jesus to and for certain members of one of the apostolic churches who did not grasp the significance of the resurrection of Jesus.

This testimony of Paul, let it also be noted, is given, not in one of his letters of which the genuineness has been questioned, but in one which, on both external and internal evidence, is accepted as genuine by practically all critics. It is the remarkable passage to be found in 1 Corinthians 15: 1-8.

In this short paragraph Paul does two things: (1) He reports and records the fact that various other persons had seen Jesus after his resurrection. The tone of the passage seems to imply that this fact could still be tested, and to suggest that he had tested it. At any rate, he practically says that at the time when he wrote this Letter to the Corinthians any one, who wished to

do so, might even then test his statement concerning the five hundred witnesses who saw Jesus at one time. For, when he says that most of the five hundred witnesses were still living, what does he mean if not that these could be seen and questioned, if anybody doubted his statement and desired confirmation of it?

(2) The other thing that Paul does in the passage, is to bear his personal testimony to the fact that Jesus after his resurrection had appeared to himself. As has already been said, it was this fact that had brought about what would otherwise have been a simple impossibility, namely, the complete change of this man of iron mold and unalterable convictions from an attitude of sincere, conscientious, and irreconcilable hostility and hate, into one of the most utter and even abject submission, the most passionate and profound devotion, and the most tireless and joyful service. Is it possible that he could have been mistaken?

Now, this appearance of Jesus to Paul cannot be regarded as a subjective vision, such as he seems to have had at later times. For he explicitly declares that the appearance of Jesus to him, which he records in this place along with other appearances to other witnesses, was *the last*¹⁶ of all his bodily appearances; and therefore it separates all these from all subsequent visions, such as that mentioned in Acts 18: 9. These later visions were doubtless similar in nature to the vision of the man of Macedonia who besought him to come to their relief¹⁷; and to that of the angel mentioned as standing by Paul during the shipwreck on the Mediterranean.¹⁸ These were of the nature of dreams; probably they *were dreams*. For it is distinctly stated that in each of these cases the occurrence was *at night*.¹⁹

But this is not the only place where Paul states that he had seen Jesus after his resurrection. The other place is 1 Corinthians 9: 1, and it has a distinct significance. He was opposed at Corinth by men who called in question his apostolic authority, partly on the ground of his peculiar way of interpreting the Gospel: "What right had he to make a new interpretation of the Gospel, since he had no apostolic authority as the Eleven had, with whom (it was alleged) he was at variance?" Aware that he had this

¹⁶ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων. ¹⁷Acts 16: 9. ¹⁸Acts 27: 23.

¹⁹Acts 16: 9: διὰ νυκτός. Acts 18: 9: ἐν νυκτί. Acts 27: 23: ταύτη τῇ νυκτί.

hostile attitude to reckon with, he declares, by way of vindicating his apostolic authority, *that he had seen the Lord Jesus*. And it is certain that here he meant more than a mere subjective vision. Otherwise his opponents might have answered very pertinently, "What is a mere mental vision compared to such actual sight of him and association with him as the Eleven had?" It was to protect himself against such an attack that he here declares he had seen the Lord. He knew that the Eleven, and that Peter, in particular, whom these opponents adopted as their champion, had seen the risen Saviour with the eyes of the body, and he meant to claim for himself the same thing.²⁰

The question naturally suggests itself why Paul did not say in others, in all, of his epistles as he did in that to the Corinthians, that he had seen Jesus after his resurrection. It was simply because in no other church but that at Corinth had any question arisen about the resurrection, or any need for such statement.

In a similar way, he gives a full formal statement of the nature, cosmical relations, and redemptive significance of Christ only in the Epistle to the Colossians, for the reason that in no other of the churches had the necessity for such statement arisen. In the other epistles the doctrine of the Person of Christ, which is declared in a formal and comprehensive way in Colossians, is taken for granted, and referred to in incidental ways in connection with the discussion of other subjects, as, for example, in the Epistle to the Philippians, in exhorting them to humility.²¹ In the same way the fact of the resurrection of Jesus is *assumed* in all the other epistles and *expounded* in its larger spiritual significance. There was no need or occasion for a statement of the evidence for it.

2. THE INDIRECT EVIDENCE.

There is also indirect evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, which is of great weight. According to the accounts, the disciples immediately after the death of Jesus were the most unnerved, disheartened, and hopeless of men. It would be difficult to imagine how it could be otherwise in their situation. But in a very short time they had suddenly rebounded from the depths to the heights, and they exhibit a confidence, a courage, an enthusiasm,

²⁰Compare Bruce, *Apologetics*, p. 396.

²¹Phil. 2: 6-9.

a buoyancy, an ecstasy, which rendered them absolutely oblivious of all danger, and strangers to all fear. The assurance and courage with which this handful of simple, humble people faced the world, as vividly sketched in the first chapters of Acts, make it one of the most moving and sublime passages in human history. Our deadening familiarity with it has rendered us insensible to its power.

Sure that their lost Lord, Jesus, had come back to them in power and glory, they went forward at once, *masters of the situation*, without the thought of danger or the feeling of fear. And through their convincing and somehow compelling testimony to the resurrection of their Lord, they were enabled to convince thousands of others of it, and, in short, to introduce and establish on *the ground of this fact* an absolutely new order in the world, and to start a New Society among men with new inspirations, new ideals, new moral principles, new moral energies, new standards of moral character, and a new spiritual dynamic, which, from those beginnings among humble and unlearned men, went on until it revolutionized the moral condition of the Roman Empire and of the world—a Society *worthy* of being called the Kingdom of God on earth.

Now this sudden revolution in the disciples and the revolution which was wrought through them, *can* be satisfactorily accounted for by that to which in the records it is ascribed, namely, the absolute assurance of the disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead. And nothing can account for this dynamic assurance *but the fact*. Only this assurance could have *worked* so sudden and so complete a change in the disciples and through them in the world; and only the fact of the resurrection can explain this assurance.

Weiss, speaking of Baur, says:

The greatest critic of our century has acknowledged that, for the disciples, the resurrection of Jesus had become a firm and incontestable certainty, and that for them this fact of their consciousness had all the reality of an historical event. But the same critic has had to renounce any hope of explaining the phenomenon.²²

Here, then, is the crux: The problem is to account for this "consciousness" in the disciples and its effect upon them, in a

²²Weiss, *Life of Christ*, iii. p. 383.

way that leaves out the fact of the resurrection, or, in other words, to *explain* away the fact, while admitting what nobody denies—the disciples' *consciousness of the fact*.

This brings us to consider some of the theories that have, from time to time, been devised to explain, apart from the resurrection of Jesus, the belief—or the “consciousness”—of the disciples.

THE SWOON THEORY.

There is, first, the theory that Jesus did not really die but only swooned and was thought to be dead.

But in the first place, the sources bear unwavering testimony to the fact that he *was dead*. Pilate ordered that *an examination* be made as to whether he was really dead. The centurion reported to Pilate that he was dead.²⁸ But even after this, a Roman soldier drove his spear into the side of Jesus's body, piercing the heart.

In the second place, even if he had revived and come to life in the tomb, he could never have escaped from it, sealed as it was by order of Pilate, and guarded by the Roman soldiers.

But in the third place, supposing that he *did* revive from a temporary swoon or “state of suspended animation,” and that he *did* escape alone and unaided from the sealed and guarded tomb in a natural way, he could never in that exhausted condition have made the impression on his disciples, which they had at the time and all through their after history—that he was the glorious conqueror over death and the grave, and the Prince of Life. As Strauss has well said, “such a resurrection could only have *weakened* the impression he had made on them while living, and could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm and have elevated their reverence into worship.” Furthermore, if Jesus himself, after having escaped from the tomb in some way, appeared to his disciples for the purpose of producing on them the impression that he had been raised from the dead according to his promises to them, then there was, of course, the consciousness on his part of a deliberate deception and a stupendous *lie*—which is absolutely irreconcilable with his character and absolutely inconceivable. But, once again, on this swoon hypothesis, he must have continued to live on in a natural way, until at some time, and in

²⁸This statement is found in the earliest Gospel, that of Mark, 15: 44, 45.

some way, he died a natural death. Well, where did he live? How did he live? When did he die? How did he die? Where did he die? Who will suggest an answer to these questions? And who is there that can think of *Jesus* as hiding out and skulking about until his natural death in order to keep up the stupendous fraud of a pretended resurrection? But suppose that after reviving he did not appear to his disciples at all. There would have been nothing to produce in them a belief in his resurrection.

For these reasons the swoon theory is utterly groundless and impossible. Jesus did not swoon. He was not in a state of suspended animation when laid in the tomb. He was dead.

And yet, and yet, on the morning of the third day the body was gone—of *that* there can be no *reasonable* doubt. Of course, unreasonable men may unreasonably doubt anything—or everything, as some unreasonably do.

The records again bear unanimous testimony that the tomb was empty.²⁴ But the records are otherwise in confusion and so are untrustworthy on all points, so we are told. But their statements that the tomb was empty are capable of verification. For if the tomb had not been empty, that is, if the body of Jesus *was still there*, it would have been the most natural thing in the world for the authorities, who not only had possession of the tomb but were strictly guarding it, *to produce the body*, and in this way have made short work with this brazen fraud about the resurrection. They would have been incredible and impossible idiots not to have produced the body of Jesus—if it had been producible. If only they *had* produced the body of Jesus, that would have finished the whole business of Christianity for good and all, at a single master stroke; and certain gentlemen of the present day would have been saved the trouble. But, alas! they did not produce the body! However, they are not to blame; for the body had produced itself—in another and very unexpected way—and they were left in the lurch.

But how? How is the absence of the body of Jesus to be accounted for?

The disciples and friends of Jesus could not have removed it,

(1) Because, taking Matthew's account of the guard of Roman soldiers to be true, they could not have eluded the guard.

²⁴Mark 16: 6; Luke 24: 2, 3; Matt. 28: 6; John 20: 2, 5-8.

(2) "It is incredible that the disciples, who did not believe their Master would rise from the dead, should, at once, while smitten and despondent, have conceived the colossal fraud of stealing the body and deceiving the world."²⁵ They were stunned with disappointment, they were dazed and helpless. They were in no condition to concoct and carry out deliberate schemes for relieving their embarrassment by deceiving the public.

(3) But, even if they had removed the body, it would have been, of course, for the purpose of deliberate deception; and they would have had a consciousness of fraud which would have been irreconcilable with their subsequent heroic bearing through many years of severe trials and sufferings. It is psychologically impossible that the disciples, with the haunting consciousness of being deceivers, should have gone before the world with the courage and the enthusiasm and the joy which they exhibited, and should have succeeded in conquering the world *by means of a conscious lie!*

(4) But, even if the disciples had removed the body (in the face of all these impossibilities), the authorities, by subjecting them to the rack, could easily have compelled them to produce it, and *no doubt would have done so*, in order to refute the report of the resurrection and throttle the new and noisome movement.

As to his enemies, they could have had no *motive* for disposing of the body; for the absence of the body would favor and support the claim of the resurrection. It was altogether to their interest that the body should be at hand. But, if for any reason, conceivable or inconceivable, they had taken away the body, they would as a means of self-preservation have produced it to stay the progress of the pestiferous new sect. The resurrection of Jesus, then, cannot be explained away on the hypothesis of a swoon. No more can it be explained away on the hypothesis that, though he was dead, his body was secretly removed from the tomb in order to furnish ground for the claim of his resurrection.

THE VISION HYPOTHESIS.

Another theory is what is called the vision theory. It is that, owing to the state of mental agitation in which the death of their Master left them, it was natural and easy for the disciples, in

²⁵Gilbert, *Student's Life of Jesus*, p. 402.

brooding over the matter, to fancy that they saw him; and thus they either had visions of him or believed they had. Of course they were mistaken, but they were honestly mistaken.

In the first place, though the disciples were in a state of mental agitation, it was not a condition of the sort to produce subjective visions of the dead Jesus restored to life and health. It is when men are in a state of hopeful and buoyant expectancy that they are likely to think they see what they are eagerly *expecting*. Loving, longing, hopeful, sanguine expectancy is a stimulus to the imagination; and under this stimulation, it is possible for people to believe they see the things which they so long to see. This is a matter of such common experience and observation that it scarcely needs to be proved. But we know that the disciples of Jesus were not in a mood of eager hopefulness and expectancy. On the contrary, they were in a state of utter dejection and despair. "We had hoped"—but, he was dead, and their hope was dead. His friends carefully and lovingly but sorrowfully prepared his body for burial *in the usual way* and laid it away in a tomb, and it had been closed with a great stone! Nothing could show their utter abandonment of hope more conclusively than this.

Only the few women, true to "the eternal womanly," at the first flush of dawn, on the day after the long and lonesome Sabbath, went to the tomb, where their hearts were buried with Jesus, to put more spices on his body. And how like woman it was to go without first having secured help for removing the great stone!²⁶ This problem seemed to dawn on them as they neared the tomb.²⁷ But this was only the tribute of the love of woman, which lives on after hope is dead—as to-day we often see in our cemeteries the lone figure of some bereaved woman, clad in mourning, placing flowers on the grave of a dead loved one.

And the disciples—they were appalled, dazed, and knew not what to do; and, like men, they did nothing. Even when the report reached their ears that the Lord was risen, instead of responding to it with eager joy, *as the vision theory would require*, it sounded to them as mere nonsense.²⁸ And when he

²⁶This is the record in each of the four Gospels: Matt. 27: 60; Mark 15: 46; Luke 23: 53; John 19: 42.

²⁷Mark 16: 3: "Who will roll away the stone for us?"

²⁸This is exactly the meaning of *λόγος* in modern Greek.

actually appeared to them, still they *would not* at first believe that it *was* Jesus. We are told by that careful and conscientious historian, Luke, that, "while they were still talking about these things [namely, the report of the two to whom he had appeared on the way to Emmaus], he stood in their midst in person. But they were terrified and affrighted and thought they were looking on a ghost."²⁰ The disciples were in a state of gloom and despair and were in no condition or mood to create, or to fancy they saw, visions of their Lord, risen and restored to them. They were in a condition the very opposite of this—a condition more likely to stimulate hallucinations, if any at all, of his form hanging on the cross, or of his mangled and ghastly corpse. We know that it is "such stuff *our* dreams are made of," just after we have watched the dying and seen the death and witnessed the burial of one in whom our hearts and happiness were wrapped up. And what are hallucinations but dreamings while we are awake? Dreams are the hallucinations men have when they are asleep. Hallucinations are the dreams which (some) men have when they are awake. When we are asleep and see visions, we call them dreams. When we are awake and see visions, they are called hallucinations. At any rate, if the disciples had any hallucinations at that time, they would almost certainly have been of this ghastly sort. However, the record has it, not that they *did have hallucinations* of this sort or of any sort, but that when they saw the actual risen body of Jesus, they took *it* for a hallucination, for a "vision" of a ghost. They took that *reality* which they were in a condition rendering them incapable of *expecting* to see, for a vision of a ghostly unreality, which, by the very fact of their so taking it, they showed they *were* more likely in a condition to *imagine*. This is the record of Luke; and it is exactly in accord with observed psychological facts and well-known psychological experiences.

But the vision theory involves another thing which is improbable and unbelievable. We know there are individuals here and there among persons of hysterical temperament, who in certain moods see or seem to see what is not there to be seen; in other words, they see visions. But that a considerable number of

²⁰Luke 24: 36, 37.

people, just the people who happened to be disciples of Jesus, *should be thus peculiarly constituted*, should have this hysterical temperament, and further, that each one of the number should have the same hallucination, the same delusion, of seeing the same vision of what had absolutely no existence—this is a little too much to ask us to believe. And yet this is what Strauss professed to believe and would have us believe. But we are not quite so credulous as Strauss. *Credat Judaeus Apella—et Straussius*. Moreover, this theory of Strauss *does not account for the absence of the body* of Jesus from the tomb—the very crux of the whole situation.

There is another theory to this effect: The apostles were unwilling to believe that Jesus no longer lived. They could not believe that death was the end of an exceptional spirit like his. They had this conviction so strong (!) that in their eagerness to convince others, they went so far as to say they had seen Jesus.³⁰ This theory is a pure fabric of the imagination with nothing in the records or the circumstances to support it. It has not even the virtue of being clever. It is stupid.

The attempt has been made to show that after the disciples had recovered from the first shock of disappointment and grief, they began to *reflect* on the meaning of the events that had taken place,³¹ and on the words of Jesus, and as a result of this process of reflection, it *gradually* dawned on them that he had risen to “the eternal heavenly life,” and in this confidence they went forth preaching in his name.³²

In the first place, there was no time for recovering from disappointment and grief and for that necessarily slow process of “reflection.” According to the records, especially the stirring account given in the first five chapters of Acts, in less than three days the disciples had rebounded to the extreme of unbounded enthusiasm.

In the second place, what happened was not the quiet effect of the slow and uncertain process of reflection. It had the suddenness and the overwhelming power of a sunburst out of a storm-cloud. Nothing else could have produced the buoyancy, and the

³⁰Martineau, *Seat of Authority in Religion*, pp. 363-377.

³¹One cannot help asking, What events?

³²See Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, ii. pp. 266f.

abandon of courage which impelled them to undertake the insane enterprise which they did undertake, and which, somehow or other, they *accomplished!*

But if, in the third place, his disciples had been left to suppose, or to infer, or to hope, that he was still living, just as other men spiritually survive death, that is, that he was only not extinct, there would have been no inspiration in this vague and general belief and hope, certainly not the dynamic inspiration which so suddenly and so completely transformed them and empowered them for the undertaking and achievement of transforming the world.

The evidence for the fact of the resurrection of the body of Jesus, apart from *a priori* considerations and assumptions, remains convincing. It has not been successfully set aside, though many of the acutest intellects from Celsus to Strauss have done their utmost to break its force.

THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S BODY AFTER RESURRECTION.

As to the nature of the resurrection body of Jesus, it belongs to that realm of mystery into which we cannot penetrate. According to the records, he did not meet and dwell with his disciples in the same manner as before his death. Evidently his body was not of the same nature as before. We have two facts to reckon with. (1) His post-resurrection body was of a different nature. It was no longer subject to the law of gravitation. It was lighter than air. It became visible in a room whose doors were closed. (2) And yet the body which he had before, which had been crucified on the cross, and which had been laid in the tomb, *was no longer there*. It had disappeared. How are we to reconcile these two facts? How are we to dispose of *these two bodies?*

We shall get light on this perplexing problem by recalling what Paul says on the subject of the general resurrection in the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. He lays it down as a self-evident and fundamental principle that the natural body of flesh and blood has nothing in common with the conditions in the heavenly and glorified kingdom of God. He prefaces his remark with words of significant emphasis. "Now this I lay down as an axiomatic and essential principle—that flesh and blood *cannot* have any

part in the kingdom of God. Consequently the bodies of those who are still living at the time of the parousia shall *pass through a change* and shall become spiritual bodies. For as surely as there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."³³ It should be remembered, that when Paul said this, he was not writing concerning the body of Jesus, but of general principles. But how and where did Paul get this conception of a spiritual body and of the organic difference between the natural body and the spiritual body? It is most probable that he got it from *seeing the resurrection body of Jesus*. This gave him an actual example of the spiritual body. The inference I here make is from what Paul declares concerning the spiritual body of the glorified saints to the resurrection body of Jesus. But this is only an inference, for the body of Jesus is not here mentioned by Paul. It would be a great deal clearer and more certain, if he had explicitly brought the risen body of Jesus into his discussion here as the explicit standard and norm. But that is precisely what he *does* do in a passage in another of his epistles, written years after that to the Corinthians, showing that this was one of the fixed and unchanging factors of his thought. In the Epistle to the Philippians he says :

But the commonwealth of which we are citizens is in heaven; from whence also we are anxiously waiting for a Saviour, even the Lord Jesus Christ, and [in order to fit *us* for that kingdom in heaven] he will, by the mighty working of his power to subdue all things unto himself, *change the fashion of this body of ours, which we have now in our state of humiliation, so that it shall be conformed to the body which he has in his glory.*³⁴

This seems to me conclusive. And from all this the conclusion is not strained but easy and natural, namely, that the natural body of Jesus, the body of flesh and blood which was laid in the tomb, was, in and through the process of resurrection, "CHANGED," *not destroyed and replaced by another body*, but "changed," changed *into* that "spiritual body," which had the peculiar properties of which I have spoken, which appeared, from time to time, to the disciples, and which appeared in due time, and "last of all," to our Paul. In the resurrection of Jesus his body was *changed* from one of flesh and blood into one that was spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal, in such a way, that *there was no trace left* of the

³³This is paraphrased to make the meaning clearer than a close translation could do.

³⁴Philippians 3: 20, 21.

corruptible body of flesh and blood which had been laid in the grave.

This will reconcile the two otherwise irreconcilable facts of the record, namely, that the natural body of Jesus which was laid in the tomb, had utterly disappeared; and that the body which was raised from the tomb was a "changed" one, different in nature from the other, and "fashioned" into the resurrection body "by the working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead."⁸⁵

But some one will say, "How can these things be? I don't understand it. I can't comprehend it." If you were to show to some one who had *never* in all his life seen it, a hard, dry, dead grain of wheat, and then show him a soft, velvety, green, living creature bursting right up out of the ground, and tell him that the dead grain had been "changed" and "fashioned" into this new and living thing of beauty and glory, he would undoubtedly say, "I don't understand it. I can't comprehend it. How can it be?" And if he had been highly culturized and his faculty of faith thereby paralyzed, he just would not, or could not, believe it.

"Thou fool, that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or some other grain, but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him." The old body of the grain of wheat has disappeared, it is no longer there in its grave. The new, "changed," transfigured, glorified body *has* appeared. How the transition was effected belongs to that region of mystery into which we may not penetrate. But *the transition was made*. There are not two bodies. *The same body* disappeared *out of* one form *into* the other form. So, also, was it with the resurrection of the dead Jesus.

If you were to show an egg to a person who had never seen one, and tell him that inscrutably hidden in the formless pulp of the egg there are the body, the bones, the feathers, the wings, the legs, the head, the heart, the liver, the bowels, the eyes, the mouth, the tongue, it may chance of a mocking bird, or some other bird; and more wonderful still, an undiscoverable, inscrutable "vital impulse," and that if you kept the egg warm for a certain time, the contents of that egg would "change" into a *perfect living crea-*

⁸⁵Ephesians 1: 20. Only in this connection can the meaning and force and majesty of this struggling passage be appreciated.

ture, that would break its own shell, and creep out, and run about, and see, and eat, and fly, and soar, and sing, he too would say with a shrug of his shoulders and a shake of his head, "How can these things be?"

There be many who say they do not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. If they mean that they do not believe that the body of Jesus was, after the resurrection, still identically the same *unchanged body of flesh and blood* that was laid in the tomb, then I do not believe in his physical resurrection either, nor does St. Paul, and we all fully agree with Paul. Now, then, we understand each other. So let us have peace.

But the gentlemen who are still in the bondage of scienceism, or "modern thought," will say, "But the evolution of the blade from the wheat grain, and of the bird from the egg, is according to a law of nature, and the resurrection of a dead man is not." How do you know that? Where did you get that information? There may be "laws of nature" which you do not yet know; and the resurrection of the dead may be in accordance with one of these as yet undiscovered laws. As Augustine has profoundly observed, "A miracle is not contrary to nature but only to *what we know* of nature." And another seer, not speaking in the interest of religion, theology, or miracles, has said, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are *dreamed of* in your philosophy." And so say all the seers. But scientists, at least those who are not also seers, see only what they see.

II

THE MEANING OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

As Dr. Bruce observes, "All naturalistic attempts to explain away the resurrection of Jesus, up to this date, have turned out failures. The physical resurrection remains."⁸⁶ The historical evidence, direct and indirect, for the resurrection of Jesus stands. It stands without the aid of dogmatic support, and in spite of philosophical denials. If, however, we can discover the significance of the resurrection and find sufficient reasons for it, this will strengthen our confidence in the result of the historical investigation.

⁸⁶*Apologetics*, p. 397.

What, then, would have been the situation if Jesus had not risen from the dead?

The followers of Jesus were few in number. They were without power. They were without resources. They were without learning. They were without prestige of any sort. They were peasants and women, ignorant, obscure, unknown. The world was not friendly toward them. Jews and Romans had united to destroy their Lord and Leader; they had succeeded, and all was lost. The world did not even pity them in their desolation. It despised them, and they knew it, alas! too well. They, on the other hand, with the loss of their Leader, had lost courage and were in hopeless and helpless perplexity. The death of their Lord was the death of their hope.

If things had remained in this condition, the followers of Jesus would have accepted the verdict of fate. They would have separated from each other, they would have returned to their homes, and they would have resumed their several occupations. They would have had no gospel to preach, no glad tidings to proclaim. The events recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles* could never have taken place. Paul would never have been converted. His gospel would never have been preached, and his work of thirty years in evangelizing the strategic centers of the Roman Empire would never have been done. His Epistles would never have been penned. The four Gospels would never have been written. Christianity would never have been established. The renovation of humanity would never have taken place. The Kingdom of God would have shared the fate of other utopian dreams, and the world would still be festering in the rottenness and wretchedness described by Tacitus and Juvenal and witnessed till this good day in those parts of India, and China, and Africa, for example, where His name and power are still unknown.

The same view has been strongly expressed by a great German:

All evidences go to prove that belief in the Messiah would have died out without the living Jesus; and by the return of the apostles to the synagogue and to Judaism, the gold of the words of Jesus would have been buried in the dust of oblivion. . . . For a time Galilee would have preserved some truth and some fiction about him; but his cause would have produced no religious inspiration *and no Paul*. The evidence that Jesus was alive was necessary after an earthly defeat and downfall so unexampled; and the evidence that he was alive was given by his own impulsion and by the will of God. The Chris-

tianity of to-day owes to this evidence its Lord and also its own existence. Though much has fallen away, the secure faith-fortress of the resurrection of Jesus remains. (Keim: *Jesus of Nazareth*, vi. 364, 365.)

If, then, it was of any importance that Christianity be established in the world, it was of *equal importance* that Jesus should rise from the dead.

But if it is true that without the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity would never have been propagated or established in the world, it follows inevitably that the fact of its survival and its existence in the world to-day is a most potent proof of his resurrection, *even for us of this day*.

This alone, then, would be a sufficient reason for the resurrection of Jesus.

But this by no means exhausts its meaning. The resurrection becomes for faith the triumphant credential and apologetic of his mission and of his self-consciousness of a unique relation to God and to the race of men, as well as the vindication and interpretation of his unique death:

1. In his attitude and relation toward the race of men as the supreme and final Revealer of God and the authoritative Teacher of truth and duty: "No man knoweth the Father except the Son."⁸⁷ "It was said to the people under the old dispensation, . . . but I say unto you."⁸⁸

2. His oft-expressed consciousness of being the plenipotentiary of God on earth, which was indeed the presupposition on which all his teaching and his entire attitude were based: "All things have been committed to me by my Father."⁸⁹ "But that ye may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins," etc.⁴⁰

3. His oft-repeated expression of his consciousness of an inner, essential, organic relation to God, in his own person, and in addition to what he says about being God's plenipotentiary on earth. This comes out incidentally in other ways, but specifically and explicitly in his habitual self-designation as the Son. The bearing of the resurrection on this relation of Jesus to God the Father is specifically brought out by Paul in the Introduction to his Epistle

⁸⁷Matt. 11: 27. Luke 10: 22.

⁸⁸Matt. 5: 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44. ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω: Six times in this one place.

⁸⁹Matt. 11: 27. Luke 10: 22. ⁴⁰Mark 2: 10.

to the Romans. Referring to Jesus, Paul says, "Who, as to his human nature, was born of the seed of David, but who was miraculously marked out by his resurrection from the dead, as being the Son of God, in keeping with the spirit of holiness that was in him throughout his earthly life." Jesus during his earthly ministry had the consciousness of being *the* Son of God, and he often expressed this consciousness himself. And in bringing about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God the Father, from above, for his part, and on his side, furnished miraculous proof—quite apart from, and independently of, all that Jesus had said on the subject—that Jesus *was* his Son, even as he had during his earthly life expressed the consciousness of being. The raising of Jesus from the dead was the stamp and seal of God's own approval and vindication of all that Jesus had said about himself as the Son of God. This, says Paul, was one of the specific purposes and meanings of the resurrection of Jesus.

4. His consciousness of the unique significance of his death and of the manner of his death. He looked forward to it as, in some sense, the goal; he deliberately prepared for it; and with complete volitional freedom, though with intense shrinking and dread, he submitted to it.⁴¹ Now, for one thing, we know that the death of Jesus and, particularly, the manner of it, was not only a crushing problem to his followers, before the resurrection; it was to the Jews a reeking and shrieking offense and scandal. To Paul, it was the insuperable stumbling-block in the way of believing that Jesus was Messiah. To him it was unthinkable that one who had been repudiated and put out of the way as Jesus had been, should be the Messiah of God. But in the light which the resurrection flashed back on the cross, its meaning burst upon him; and the cross, which had been to him the hated symbol at once of a colossal imposture and a fathomless and deserved degradation, was transfigured. It now became to him the central glory from which everything else borrowed its light and took its meaning: "God forbid that I should glory save in THE CROSS of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴² "We proclaim Christ CRUCIFIED, the power of God and the wisdom of God."⁴³ The resurrection, then, was to Paul the interpretation, as it was the vindication, of the crucifixion; and

⁴¹All this is in the Synoptic Gospels. ⁴²Gal. 6: 14. ⁴³1 Cor. 1: 23, 24.

it occupied this place and had this meaning and appeal in all his preaching and ministry. Through the same Tragedy of the Cross, in which Jesus wrought atonement for sin and sinners, he was released from the flesh and from the limitations of a mere human person and presence; and by his resurrection, which was, with his death, part of the one "Great Transaction," he "became Life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15: 45), through whose inworking power, as the "Spirit of Life" (Rom. 8: 2), believers are delivered from the inward power and rule of sin. Thus the double work of sin—its guilt and its power—is undone through the double potency of the One Divine Event.

And the resurrection of Jesus has this other and wider meaning, a meaning which is, at last, the highest and most essential of all. His resurrection was not merely the reappearance of Jesus on earth after death, in his "spiritual body." He lives—but he lives now *as a Spirit*, everywhere present and operative. This includes, not only his exaltation, so often brought out in the Epistles, but also the attainment of the possession of divine, spiritual power for imparting spiritual life to men. All this is assumed as fundamental in all the Epistles of St. Paul. It is the very atmosphere of the Epistles. It is declared in a specific way and in specific terms as a part or a sequence of the resurrection, in Ephesians 1: 19-23. Jesus Christ is now not only Lord of all, he is the Source and Giver of spiritual life for men. He not only lives, and is alive for evermore, he lives in believers, and believers have life and live in him.⁴⁴

As Deissmann says, in his recent book on *St. Paul*: "The living Christ is the Spirit. As Spirit, the Living One is not removed and confined beyond the stars, but is present on this earth, where he lives and rules among his own. 'The last Adam (Christ) became a life-giving spirit.'⁴⁵ 'The Lord is the Spirit.'⁴⁶ In numerous passages Paul makes statements about Christ and about the Spirit in precisely equivalent terms. This is especially noticeable in the parallelism of the mystical formula, 'in Christ' and 'in the Spirit.' The latter, which occurs nineteen times in Paul, is con-

⁴⁴Compare W. N. Clarke, *Outline of Christian Theology*, p. 363.

⁴⁵1 Cor. 15: 45, πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν.

⁴⁶2 Cor. 3: 17.

nected in nearly all these places with the specifically Pauline fundamental notions, as in the phrase, 'in Christ.'"⁴⁷

And lastly, the resurrection of Jesus is the supreme and final proof of immortality. "Whatever happened at the grave of Jesus, one thing is certain," as Harnack says. "This grave was the birthplace of the indestructible belief that death is vanquished, and that there is a life eternal. The certainty of the resurrection and of a life eternal which is bound up with the grave in Joseph's garden has not perished and will not perish. On that certainty we base those hopes of personal participation in an eternal life which make our earthly life worth living."⁴⁸

Nashville, Tenn.

⁴⁷Deissmann, *St. Paul*, pp. 125, 127. ⁴⁸*What Is Christianity?* p. 175.