

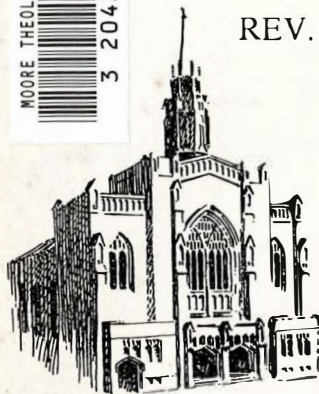
PROOF THAT CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD

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BY THE
REV. GORDON POWELL
M.A., B.D.



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THE FIRST EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE

AT BONDI BEACH, SYDNEY



This is a sermon delivered at the SUNRISE EASTER SERVICE on Bondi Beach, Sydney, Australia, on Sunday, 18th April, 1965.

PROOF THAT CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD

My subject this morning is "Proof that Christ Rose from the Dead." The text is taken from Paul's famous chapter on Immortality in 1st Corinthians, "Now is Christ risen."

To-day hundreds of millions of Christians right round the world will gather for worship on this the most important day in the year. In the great majority of cases Church buildings will not be large enough to accommodate the crowds coming to worship. Why is this day so important? Because, according to our belief, it is the anniversary of the day on which Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

Above this platform is an empty cross—the symbol of our faith. There is no body hanging on that cross now. The empty cross reminds us that Christ won the victory over death. The cross could not hold Him.

Now either it is true or it is false that Jesus rose again from the dead. We don't blame people who find it hard to believe. But if He did not rise from the dead then the whole of Christianity is based on a lie, on a tremendous hoax. In that case Christianity ought to be abolished from the face of the earth because nothing that is false can ever benefit mankind for very long, however attractive it may seem for a time. But if it is true that Jesus rose from the dead, if that could be proved beyond any shadow of a doubt, would that not be most convincing proof that His other claims are also

true? Would it not be the most important fact in history?

In a ten minute sermon I can't give you all the proofs that Christ rose again from the dead. I can only mention a few which I personally have found most convincing. The first is the fact of Christianity in the world today. According to the latest survey there are now some 930,000,000 Christians. Admittedly many may not be church-goers, but they call themselves Christians. The next biggest group are the Mohammedans with 440,000,000, less than half the number of Christians. Hindus, Confucianists and Buddhists follow after that. Why is it that one-third of the human race regard themselves as Christians? Mostly, no doubt, because their parents were Christians and their parents before them. Following it back generation behind generation you come to a certain point in space and a certain point in time.

To explain the fact of Christianity in the world today you have to go back to a city called Jerusalem in the year that somebody called Jesus Christ was crucified. This great new religion began when eleven men who had been shattered by grief a few days before, began to proclaim that Christ had risen from the dead in the very city where 2,000,000 people, gathered for the passover, could check for themselves whether the tomb was empty. Read the Acts of the Apostles and you will see that the central theme of all the first Christian sermons was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It was a terribly dangerous thing for these men to come out publicly on the side of Jesus Christ who had been executed, but they risked their lives to proclaim this tremendous truth of which they now had not the slightest shadow of a doubt—that the Master Whom they had served was no longer dead but alive. "Now is Christ risen from the dead" they shouted to crowds as large

as this one gathered here at Bondi this morning. If they had been proclaiming a lie there were plenty of doubters, plenty of enemies there in Jerusalem who only had to produce the body of Jesus and the whole story would have collapsed completely. But nobody ever produced the dead body of Jesus!

I want now to call to the witness stand as it were six witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can spare only a minute for each, but each has his own importance.

(1) **JAMES.** First I take James who is described in the Bible as "the Lord's brother." (Gal. 1:19). He is important for our purposes this morning because he is not only described in the Bible but he is also referred to by the Jewish historian Josephus who was certainly not a Christian and had no reason to support the Christian cause. Josephus records that James, the brother of Jesus, became the leader of the Christian sect in Jerusalem and he was put to death for his faith. If you doubt the Bible, here is a testimony from a respected secular historian who confirmed that a member of our Lord's own earthly family came to believe that He had risen from the dead and was ready to die for that Truth. That to me is one strong argument in favour of the resurrection.

(2) **PETER.** My second witness is the Apostle Peter, another who died for his Christian faith. He represents all the disciples who were shattered by the death of Jesus. Peter was a broken man, very ashamed of himself for denying Jesus. Who would have blamed him had he gone home to his wife and children and tried to forget all about it? Every returned serviceman knows how strong the pull home would have been. But something happened to change Peter completely and it was cer-

tainly no hallucination. A figure in an hallucination does not prepare a fire on a beach or cook fish on it. Certainly it doesn't eat the fish along with other normal flesh and blood human beings. Something very real happened to Peter to change him from a grief-stricken, broken man into the one who preached the resurrection with such absolute conviction that one day, in the very city where Jesus had been crucified six weeks before, he got 3,000 decisions and another day 5,000 decisions. (Acts 2;41. 4;4).

(3) **PAUL.** Peter was a rough fisherman without much education. Our third witness was a university man, a man with as fine an education as the ancient world could provide. Saul of Tarsus was the arch-enemy of the Christian faith and if anybody would have been determined to produce the body of Jesus it would have been this man. But he could not produce it and one day the risen Christ spoke to him on the road to Damascus and Saul changed his name to Paul. Will anybody argue that the book which has most influenced human history has been the New Testament and Paul wrote half the books in the New Testament!

4. **HANDEL.** My fourth witness is George Frederick Handel whose magnificent music has been a feature of this service. I wonder do you know that he composed the "Messiah" when poverty-stricken and with his right side and his right arm paralysed? Yet he tells us that a great spiritual experience inspired him as he composed his now famous oratorio. When Handel was buried in Westminster Abbey they set over his grave a statue of him composing the music to the words, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." It was faith in the risen Christ which made Handel the man he was and inspired his 'Messiah.' It is this kind of thing which in humbler ways has

happened to millions of believers which makes me so sure that we can say "Now is Christ risen from the dead."

(5) **FRANK MORISON.** My fifth witness is an English lawyer who was also something of a scientist. He did not believe in the resurrection or indeed in any miraculous element in the story of Jesus. Frank Morison set out to write a book called "JESUS, THE LAST PHASE." He determined to set out scientifically the story of the first Easter week without any miraculous element in it, and without any resurrection. But the more he studied history and the more he studied all the facts he could find, the more convinced he was that there was something "strange," to use his own word, about all the circumstances and they could not be explained by normal human events at all. So Frank Morison wrote another book called "WHO MOVED THE STONE?" which has sold hundreds of thousands of copies since 1930 and has brought home to many the truth of the Christian faith—a conviction that the tomb was empty, a conviction that "now is Christ risen from the dead." All we ask is that people honestly examine all the facts and come to their own conclusions. Once you are convinced that Christ is indeed risen from the dead and is with us always, even unto the end of the world, life can never be the same for you again.

(6) **STUDDERT KENNEDY.** My final witness is that inspired young Army Chaplain of World War I, Studdert Kennedy who one night watched the sun sink in a blaze of glory and thought how terrible it would be if the sun never rose again and it were for ever dark. But then he smiled to himself as he realised that even then the sun was rising on other lands and would rise again over the battle-field where he stood. So it is

with the Christian Faith. Dark ages come and you think the Faith is finished. But this kind of night also passes. Studdert Kennedy was inspired to write a magnificent poem on the text, "Now is Christ risen from the dead."

With this poem* I close,

It is finished! It is finished! as the sun sinks down to rest,

And the sky burns blood and amber in the wonder-weaving West,

Where the clouds form golden islands like the island of the Blest,

For the day is nearly done.

But another day is dawning where the winged darkness flies,

And the silver stars keep sentry till another sun shall rise,

For the daylight is eternal and the sunshine never dies,
It is always marching on.

It is finished! It is finished! for the Saviour crucified,
See the soldiers stand in silence where the cruel crowds have cried,

E'en the broken-hearted mother has departed from his side,

For His day is nearly done.

But an empty tomb is waiting, and the East is silver grey,

As the angels of the morning trumpet in another day,
See the wounded God go walking down the world's eternal way,

For His task is never done.

There's an army thronging round Him as He takes the road tonight,

Can't you see your sons and brothers lined before Him
left and right?

Can't you hear their voices calling you to join the host
and fight?

For the God who marches on?



*Poem taken from THE UNUTTERABLE BEAUTY and used by permission of the publishers, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd.



Photograph of Easter Sunrise Service by courtesy Sydney Morning Herald.

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My dear Mary
I have been