

**"THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRISTIANITY"**

Mark 16:1-8

Holman Hunt, a surrealistic artist, painted the interior of a carpenter's shop, with Joseph and the boy Jesus working. Mary was also present. As Jesus paused in His work and stopped to stretch Himself, the sun made a shadow of the Cross on the wall. Another of his pictures is a popular engraving which depicts the infant Jesus running with outstretched arms to His mother, the shadow of the Cross being cast by His form as He runs. Both pictures are spectacular in form, but their underlying idea is assuredly true. If we read the Gospels just as they stand, it is clear that the death of Jesus Christ was really in view from the outset of His earthly appearance.

W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Christianity is Christ*

As Jesus hung there from the cross that first Good Friday, all hope was dashed; for those who were waiting for Him to raise up an army and defeat the Roman dogs; it had gone up in a puff of smoke; all the possibilities of the Messiah establishing a kingdom seemed irrelevant as life drained out of

Him on that dark day. And so after He suffered, after the soldiers gambled for his clothes, after the soldier stuck a spear in his side and water and blood came out, after He cried with a loud voice and breathed His last, Christianity died that day. And it was taken down off the Cross, it was put in a borrowed tomb and the stone was rolled in front of that tomb and it died. Christianity died that "Bad" Friday and it was buried in a tomb. So there, end of story.

It was looking so good just a few days before when the people gathered on the road to Jerusalem and He rode on a donkey and the people took off their cloaks and garments and laid them on the road and someone saw the palm trees and went and tore off the branches and it caught on so that others began to do the same thing and those people were really getting into the parade, the celebration and they even cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Hosanna in the highest heaven!” and in uttering that one word, “Hosanna” which means “save, now” they wanted to see some action, some move forward in their yearning, their centuries of waiting for the one who would come and rescue them and make life better, easier, happier. So this one that they had put all their hopes in was dead. But He had said, He had prophesied that He would come back to life three days after His death, He had said it not once, not twice, but three times. And all His apostles heard Him say it. And so they put Him in a tomb.... But He told them He would come back to life and how many of the apostles waited at the tomb to see if He would do what He said- None. And what about the number of His followers who believed in the resurrection before it happened- well you too can do the math. And so he was in the borrowed tomb dead. So what kind of odds do you think a street-corner bookie would have given the day after the crucifixion on the possibility that Jesus’ name would be known in the year 2009? I think I can get someone to give you better odds that He'll rise

from the dead. (Max Lucado, *He Chose the Nails*, p. 130) Christianity died that "Bad" Friday.

But something happened on the way, as scripture calls it, on the first day of the week, Sunday.... There was an empty niche. It was found in a garden in Jerusalem. It was Joseph of Arimathea's lovely garden and Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome found it on the first day of the week. They had come to the tomb where Jesus had been laid after He had been taken down from the cross that first "Bad" Friday. They had gone there to anoint Jesus' body and as they made their way there on that first day of the week early in the morning it dawned on them, no pun intended, that they would not be able to roll away the large stone at the entrance that kept people and animals out. But when they arrived they found that the large stone had already been rolled back. They looked inside and there, sitting on the right side was a young man dressed in a white robe. They were startled, they were alarmed.

But the young man dressed in white, the angel, said to them, "Do not be alarmed; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him." "He is not here!" The women were challenged by the angel to go tell his disciples and Peter that He is going ahead of them to Galilee and there they would see him, just as He told them. And we read in John's Gospel that the women hurried and told the great news and disciples raced to the empty tomb and Peter and John, the other disciple whom Jesus loved, returned to Jerusalem in the darkness of the morning to share that He had risen. And on that first Easter Sunday Christianity was resurrected because Christ was resurrected from the dead.

Friends, there is no other religion in the world that has the ending, or shall I say the beginning as does the Christian religion. There is no other religion in the world who can say that the central figure died, was buried and rose three days later.

There is no other religion on the face of this earth that can say that its key leader was able to take away the sins of the world as a result of its leader's death and resurrection.

I want to share with you some thoughts as to what is at stake in the empty niche at Joseph's garden.

**The truth of the resurrection- He rose from the dead.** Jesus is whom He said He was otherwise He was a lunatic, a liar and a fraud all wrapped into one. The evidence for the Resurrection is indisputable. James S. Stewart in his book, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* writes, "Divergences of details may certainly be found in the various Gospel accounts of this supreme event. But these, so far from shaking and destroying the credibility of the narratives, actually enhance it. Think of the circumstances. Here were the disciples, caught up into a whirl of stupendous amazement and bewilderment by the discovery that their Lord was still alive.

Here were the other eyewitnesses of the event- Mary Magdalene and others—living through a time of supreme emotion and excitement. Is it to be wondered at that, when at a later day the evangelists came to gather the memories of these crowded, glorious hours and to set them down in their Gospels, some differences of detail should have appeared? Does that detract in the smallest degree from the value of their evidence? On the contrary, we should have had far more reason to be uneasy if such differences had not been there. For then it would have been hard to resist the conclusion that the various accounts had been deliberately harmonized. A good illustration of the way in which such surface variations as we find here are bound to come into reports of stirring and exciting events is provided by the experience of World War I; eyewitnesses of one particular incident would describe it each in his own way. The Gospel evidence for the resurrection of Jesus bears the marks of reality and authenticity on the very

face of it. It is the witness of [people] who were themselves utterly convinced, and from first to last it carries conviction." (pf. 175)

There was not only the conviction of those who knew Him the best, His disciples and followers who believed. But there was another proof- **the preaching of the resurrection that began in Jerusalem by the apostles, that evidence convinced thousands**. Friends, if what the apostles were preaching was not true, then why were not the enemies of this new movement able to come to the forefront and disprove them? There were those who wanted to see this movement go away like some kind of a bad nightmare. If they could disprove and discredit this new upstart religion they would have lost no time doing so. But it never happened. If Jesus had had never risen from the dead it would have been obviously easy to prove that He had not risen- but they never challenged this truth. The facts remained unchallenged because they were above challenge.

Acts 6:1 says, "Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number," and Acts 16:5 says, "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily." The movement, the church was growing. The resurrection gospel was incontestable.

And finally, **take note of the unbelievable transformation of the disciples themselves.** These followers, whom, after the crucifixion of Christ, went into hiding, for fear of their own lives once they had seen the risen Lord, and the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, they came out from hiding with a passion and a conviction that took many of them to their own deaths, preaching the truth of the Gospel and the hope that it brought to the world. The idea that the disciples, having seen their master die on a cross, fabricating a tale of his return to them, is negated and made absurd by the very lives of the followers themselves. It has been said, "Inventions do not transform characters, nor do men endure martyrdom for impostures."

(James S. Stewart) The very lives of Jesus' followers preached volumes of the truth of His resurrection.

And so today we celebrate the empty niche, the empty tomb because He is risen. For the Christ and Christianity that died that "Bad" Friday, no, that first Good Friday, was resurrected three days later. Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Amen.

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Introduction: Holman Hunt, a surrealistic artist...

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It looked so good just a few days before when then people gathered on the road to Jerusalem as He rode on a donkey...

Something happened on the way... the first day of the week...

An empty niche... found in a garden in Jerusalem

"He is not here!"

Some thoughts as to what is at stake in the empty niche at Joseph's garden?

**The \_\_\_\_\_ of the resurrection- He rose from the dead**

**Another proof- the preaching of the resurrection began in Jerusalem by the apostles, that evidence convinced \_\_\_\_\_**

Acts 6:1; 16:5

**Take note of the unbelievable \_\_\_\_\_ of the disciples  
Themselves**

Conclusion: The Christ and Christianity that died that "Bad" Friday was resurrected three day later. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed.