

The Resurrection

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Theme: *The Resurrection*
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Copies of This Address May Be Had by
Writing to ERLING C. OLSEN,
c/o Station W M C A, New York, N. Y.

MR. OLSEN : The Easter season of the year more and more impresses upon our minds that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave is an indispensable part of Christianity. Had He not risen, He would have been no Saviour. Have you found in your studies, Dr. Clark, any relation between the resurrection and philosophic principles? I understand your specialty is Greek philosophy. Could you tell us how the proclamation of the resurrection sounded to ancient ears and whether we may expect any changed attitude today?

DR. CLARK : There is a very distinct connection, Mr. Olsen, or, I should say, a distinct antithesis between the principles of ancient philosophy and the idea of a resurrection. All Christians, of course, are familiar with Paul's address to the Stoics and Epicureans in Athens. Although the Athenian philosophers probably listened with ordinary courtesy to the opening part of Paul's speech, the account states that when the philosophers heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, and others more politely dismissed the matter.

MR. OLSEN : That was a natural reaction, no doubt. Even a Christian will admit that a resurrection is an exceptional occurrence and would not be accepted without compelling evidence.

DR. CLARK : What you say, Mr. Olsen, is true as far as it goes. Particularly in the twentieth century, one would

hardly believe in a resurrection without excellent historical evidence. But I am not so sure that the mere improbability of a miraculous event was the reason behind the philosophers' disdain for Paul's teaching.

MR. OLSEN: Well, what else could be the reason?

DR. CLARK: Properly to estimate the mentality of the ancients, Mr. Olsen, one needs some historical perspective. True, the tremendous genius of Plato and Aristotle is unquestioned, except by callow dilettanti who think civilization began when they reached the voting age. But one should recognize both the genius and the superstition of Greece and Rome. It must be remembered that at the time Paul preached on Mars' hill, Greek philosophy was not in its original glory. The Epicureans, for example, believed in many gods, each with a body composed of atoms. These gods resided in the interplanetary spaces and discussed Epicurean philosophy in Greek. The Stoics believed in divination, and educated men like Plutarch, as well as the common people described by Lucian, were very credulous. I think there was a reason deeper than the miraculous for their refusal to consider the resurrection seriously.

MR. OLSEN: There is no use in my trying to guess what you think that reason is. You will have to explain.

DR. CLARK: The idea is this, Mr. Olsen. Ancient philosophy, and most modern philosophy as well, is imbued with the notion that history is of no cosmic importance. Philosophic principles are to be derived from some self-proving axiom, as in Spinozism, or to be assumed as hypotheses after experimental induction. The propositions of philosophy will then refer to what is always true, like the theorems of geometry, or to what happens constantly, like the motions of planets and the life cycles of animals. But the unique event of history is of no significance.

MR. OLSEN: Now I begin to see your meaning. The resurrection is an historical event, and we Christians believe

it to be of utmost significance, while the non-Christian rules out history *a priori*.

DR. CLARK: Exactly so, Mr. Olsen. If you consider Paul's speech, you will see that none but the last of it would seem too strange to a Stoic. The Stoics, even though they supported Roman paganism, believed in a God who did not dwell in human temples. They believed that this most high God controlled nature, and Paul quotes from one of their poets. Such propositions are, like those of geometry, always true; they are not historical events. Even the idea of a judgment at the end of the world was not unfamiliar, though the Stoics had a way of denying that such a judgment was a unique event. But an historical resurrection; that was simply too much. Can anything that happens just once, once for all, be of eternal significance? No, not according to ancient philosophy. The stars are important; the laws of biology are worthy of investigation, and mankind in general need not be altogether despised. But a single event in the life of one man—this cannot be the key to the universe.

MR. OLSEN: It just strikes me, Dr. Clark, that here is a similarity between ancient philosophy as you have described it and modernism as we both know it. Modernists, rather, I should say Liberalists, because I object to the insinuation that Liberalists are modern. I think their theories are as hoary with age as the viewpoints of so-called Fundamentalists. I do not like that term either. So let us call these Modernists by their proper title. They are Liberalists, and we who believe the Scriptures are Conservativists. These Liberalists reject the Christian conception of God because they hold it absurd for God to create a universe and not reveal Himself universally. These Liberalists think of God as the Stoics did, simply as the God of nature universal, who must treat all men alike. Neither of these two groups recognize the abnormality introduced into the world by sin. And it was sin, with the concomitant need for redemption, that led to special, unique acts on God's part to develop His plan of

redemption, culminating in the resurrection of Christ.

DR. CLARK: You have expressed the meaning exactly, Mr. Olsen, and, to put the whole matter in slightly different phraseology, we may say that man is not just an insignificant animal in a vast universal machine. But man is an actor and the world is the stage. The stage scenery may be, in fact, is, most interesting and most wonderfully made; but the primary significance of it all lies not in the scenery but in the play; and this play is the Divine Comedy.

MR. OLSEN: The Divine Comedy—you refer, of course, to Dante.

DR. CLARK: To Dante perhaps; but chiefly to God, the Author of eternal salvation. A play, indeed, in which the Author plays the leading role; and the next to the last act was performed, not in any corner, but amid throngs of people who could bear competent testimony to what was done. Unless there were sufficient evidence for the resurrection, we would be inclined to dismiss it; but, even apart from the long history of God's redemptive activity among the Hebrews, a history which renders the life of Christ antecedently probable, the fact of the resurrection of Christ from the grave is better attested by historical evidence than most other facts of that era. I appeal to fair-mindedness. Apply the same standards of historic investigation to this event as are applied to other events. Do not use two standards, and you will find that the resurrection can be accepted more readily than many of the acts of the Emperor Augustus. If historical canons sustain the resurrection, then adopt a philosophy to fit the facts, rather than adopt a philosophy which requires the denial of history.

MR. OLSEN: After insisting on unbiased treatment of historical evidence, Dr. Clark, you can hardly escape the challenge to produce some of the evidence.

DR. CLARK: *Escape*, did you say? I welcome the opportunity, for the apostles expected conversions as a result of their witness to the resurrection. Giving this evidence was the main part of their Message. Indeed, when a twelfth apostle was to be chosen to replace Judas, eligibility depended on his being a witness of the resurrection. No Christian should try to escape the task of explaining the evidence; I only regret it must be done so briefly.

MR. OLSEN: Very well; let us have the facts.

DR. CLARK: First of all, not to mention the fact that all of five hundred persons saw Jesus alive after the first Easter morning, no less than five contemporary authors have left us written Accounts of the matter. Very few facts of ancient history can boast of five independent sources.

MR. OLSEN: Undoubtedly the five sources are independent of each other; some think their independence amounts to contradiction. For example, one of our New York ministers* says that the discrepancies between the accounts of the resurrection are serious.

DR. CLARK: Yes, Mr. Olsen, I know some of these discrepancies or contradictions, and I have two things to say. First, even if the witnesses do conflict on details, they all agree that Christ rose from the dead. Now, what is done in a law court when witnesses who disagree on details confirm each other on one central point? If some modern religious writers should ever rise to the level of intelligence of an ordinary juror, there would be less talk of these discrepancies. And, in the second place, the witnesses, as a matter of fact, do not disagree even on details. Of course, Matthew says that on the resurrection morning there was an angel outside the tomb; while Mark, on the contrary, says an angel was inside

*Dr. George S. Buttrick of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, in his book "The Christian Fact and Modern Doubt", page 161.

the tomb. But these men who attack the trustworthiness of the Bible should take the trouble to read Luke and find out that there were two angels present.

The number of women who came to the tomb is also supposed to reveal discrepancies. Matthew names two women, Mark names three, Luke says there were at least five, and John names only one. Only by assuming, without warrant, that when Matthew names two, he meant there were no others, and at the same time assuming that the four writers are reporting the exact same visit, which John indicates is not the case, can one claim a contradiction. But the Christian is not depending on doctored evidence. The Christian appeals to the sources; not to gratuitous assumptions.

Mr. OLSEN: But some people say the disciples stole Christ's body from the tomb.

Dr. CLARK: A few people say so, yes; but what evidence do they have? These modern pagans refuse to accept real historical sources, but expect us to believe their unsupported guesses. They say the disciples stole Christ's body, but they do not explain why the disciples should want to steal the body when it was safely reposing in the grave of one of their friends. Nor do these people explain how the apostles could preach the resurrection, knowing that it was untrue, and suffer life-long persecution for their lie, when telling the truth would have immediately ended their suffering.

Mr. OLSEN: Perhaps more people make the claim that the apostles were subject to hallucinations and preached what they thought they saw. What do you think of that, Dr. Clark?

Dr. CLARK: If this were so, Mr. Olsen, why was it that not only the apostles, but at least five hundred people had hallucinations of Christ for forty days and never had another hallucination the rest of their lives? And, further, if the resurrection appearances were

hallucinations, the Pharisees could have gone to the grave, produced the body and squelched Christianity then and there. But, again, this hallucination theory is itself merely an hallucination, unsupported by evidence.

Mr. OLSEN: It appears that you have disposed of several weighty criticisms that have been raised against receiving the fact of the resurrection of Christ. Evidently, believing the physical resurrection of Christ from the dead is not an hallucination, but a conviction based on absolute evidence.

Dr. CLARK: Indeed it is, Mr. Olsen. And it is the Christian who presents real evidence. There are the written Sources; there is the existence of the Christian Church; the celebration of Easter; there is the fact that Christians worship on Sunday instead of on Saturday. Since the early Christians were all Jews, almost without exception, why would they have changed the day of worship unless there had occurred an event of tremendous significance on the first day of the week.

Mr. OLSEN: If you intend that question for me, I verily believe that the early Christians observed the first day of the week because they were eye-witnesses to the fact that Christ was raised from the dead. An event as important as that, transcending all other events of history, demanded that recognition be given to it.

Dr. CLARK: Yes, Mr. Olsen, and, let me repeat, the Christian presents real historical evidence to show that the resurrection is a fact. The pagan replies with guesses, unsupported by any evidence whatever. Unless a man is steeped in religious prejudice; unless he is blinded by his hatred of God, he must go with the evidence. But the natural man, as a matter of fact, does hate God; and after we have presented the evidence, we can only pray that God, with His irresistible grace, may take away the blindness of such an one and lead him into resurrection Light. If

the fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead is established, it is incumbent upon us to receive Christ as the Son of God and our Saviour from sin, as the Bible presents Him. Every individual who has so received Christ comes into possession of an inner conviction, which in itself is an additional undeniable evidence of the resurrection of Christ.

Mr. OLSEN: Your last statement, Dr. Clark, reminds me of an incident that I read of in a British paper the other day. It seems that a student asked her professor how she could definitely know that Christ was raised from the dead. Her professor answered that if the Records of the four Gospels did not satisfy her—"May I suggest that you ask the Lord Himself to reveal to you that He is risen from the dead and exalted at the right hand of God the Father." "But," the student asked: "How can I do that?" "Just ask Him," was the response. A few days later the same student approached her professor and, with a radiant expression said: "I now know that Christ is risen from the dead." "How do you know?" asked the professor. "Because He told me so. I asked Him, and I now have the assurance in my heart that Christ is risen from the dead and He is my Saviour and Lord."