

CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED!

Easter morning, March 29, 1970 I formally preached my first sermon after surrendering to preach the Gospel. My message has not changed and today I am taking I Corinthians 15 as my text, the same passage I used forty-six years ago.

I. THE IRREFUTABLE CONFESSION

I Corinthians 15:1-4

The creedal message of the early church is housed in verses 1-4. There are those who mock our belief in the facts of the Gospel. However, I want to share with you a few facts that make our belief irrefutable.

First of all, there are those skeptics who say our documentation cannot be reliable because of the time lapse between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the writings that declare it so. I happen to believe the New Testament writers probably wrote their Gospels earlier than modern scoffers declare. However, to play the Devil's advocate, I will go along with their dates. Even the most skeptical will admit the Gospel of Mark was the first Gospel written, which took place in 70 AD (I believe it was probably more like 60 AD, but we will go with their date). Ground zero for Christ's death is somewhere between 30 to 33 AD. Most will agree with 30 AD. Doing the math, we see the first Gospel was recorded at the very latest, 40 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Matthew wrote his Gospel in 80 AD, 50 years after the event of the cross and resurrection, followed by Luke in 85 AD, 5 years later. Then the latest Gospel was written by John in 95 AD, 65 years later.

To borrow the words of the man born blind who was given his sight by Jesus, "...Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is..." (John 9:30). Here is why we find ourselves astounded that some refuse to see these documents as reliable. Many of the World War II veterans have written their memoirs as late as the 1990s, some 45 to 50 years after the ending of the war, yet no one questions their authenticity of writings that are true, but not sacred. The earliest source known for any biographical writings on the life of Alexander the Great was not written until 350 years after his death. The largest and best histories of Alexander the Great are written by Plutarch of Chaeronea, entitled, "History of Alexander the Great of Macedonia, a Life of Alexander." This volume was not written until 425 years after the death of Alexander! The other most believed reliable history of Alexander is by Arrian of Nicomedia, entitled, "Anabasis." This was written 450 years after the death of Alexander. Herein is a marvelous thing! No one questions his military strategy called the Phalanx. No one questions if he conquered

the known world and died at 33 years of age. Yet the most reliable records were not written until 425 to 450 years after his death!

Paul uses the most ancient creed of the early church. It has since morphed into what is called the Apostle's Creed. "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." (I Corinthians 15:3,4). This was the confessional statement used by believers who, although many could not read nor write, they could memorize these words. According to investigative scholarship this creed was inculcated within days of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul is telling us that in the very first phase of his discipleship he was taught this truth. I Corinthians 15 was written in 55 AD, only 25 years after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is estimated that Paul came to Christ within 2 years of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Soon he went to Arabia for three years, came out of the desert experience and met with Peter for 15 days (Galatians 1:15-18). In the timeline, it is now 5 years after the cross. He ministered for 14 more years and then went up to Jerusalem and met with James, Peter (Cephas) and John who are the perceived "pillars of the church" (Galatians 2:1,9). Approximately 19 years beyond the cross Paul says of this famous meeting, "And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain" (Galatians 2:2). In other words, he was checking with those closest to Jesus to check the message he was preaching, i.e., the Gospel: "...that Christ died...was buried...He rose again..." (I Corinthians 15:3,4). Paul then gives us this declaration of veracity, "But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me" (Galatians 2:6). Not only did James, Peter and John concur with the Gospel message, they gave to Paul and Barnabas (who was with Paul) the covenant right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:9).

II. THE INCONTESTABLE CONVERSION

I Corinthians 15:5-19

In this passage Paul explains how that he once persecuted the church and now by the grace of God he was changed. How do we know it was Jesus to whom Paul referred? I would submit to you that Paul presents 513 eyewitnesses in these verses. Before we discuss this, may I bring to your attention that before Christ was raised, He did indeed die. Not only the Bible, but also secular history of that era has recorded this event as incontestable. Flavius Josephus, who worked for the Romans, Tacitus, a Roman historian, The Roman Lucian, Mara bar Serapion and finally even the Jewish Talmud discusses the documented death of Jesus.

Paul contends that they cannot be false witnesses of the resurrections of Jesus or everything they believe is in question. But for those of us who believe,

there is no question. The infamous atheist New Testament scholar (which is a contradiction in terms) , Gerd Lüdemann, has even admitted, “It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus death in which Jesus appeared to them as Christ.” Now the obvious question we ask is if this is so, how does he remain an unbeliever? Here is his pathetic “out”: he believes the disciples hallucinated! Dr. Gary Collins is an expert on the human mind. Dr. Collins holds a P.H.D. in clinical psychology from Purdue, has been a professor of psychology at a major mid-western university, written 30 books on psychology and was the president of a national association of psychologists and counselors. Here is what he says about the possibility of 513 people hallucinating: “Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature only one person can see a given hallucination at a time. They certainly aren’t something which can be seen by a group of people. Neither is it possible that one person could somehow induce an hallucination in somebody else. Since an hallucination exists only in this subjective, personal sense, it is obvious that others cannot witness it.” Dr. Collins commenting on the passage in I Corinthians 15:6, said, “Five hundred people having the same hallucination at the same time would be a bigger miracle than the resurrection itself!”

III. THE INEXORABLE CONTINUITY

I Corinthians 15:20-26; 35-57

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an unyielding, unalterable truth that creates a chain reaction that continues to this very day. Because Christ has risen from the dead, we who believe shall also, most assuredly, rise too. And as we shall see in our final point, because Christ has risen, my whole lifestyle is affected, or “infected” in a very good sense of the word.

IV. THE INFECTIOUS COMPOSURE

I Corinthians 15:27-34, 58

We now are standing in the shoes of the martyrs who died in sweet composure, knowing that death is never final for the believer. Pliny the Younger, in 112 AD wrote these words in a letter to Emperor Trajan in reference to the Christians: “They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up.” We can remain steadfast, unmoveable and always abounding because we, in fact, do see our Savior as much more than a Prophet, Priest or King; we see Him as God. Titus 2:13 defines our Lord as “...The great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ!” The world has a tendency to see Jesus as the

highest order of man, but He is so much more than that. In conclusion, compare Romans 10: 9, 10 and 13 with the passage Paul was quoting from in Joel 2:32.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.