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B1102 – January 9, 2011
The Fact Of The Resurrection

Last week we finished the Death of the King and we finished the extent of the atonement. Each one of these events challenges our understanding of certain categories. With the Birth of the King you have two people coming to the claim of the virgin birth and one accepts and one rejects; the one who accepts has a worldview that's Biblical; whose categories of God, man and nature are shaped by Scripture, the virgin birth is natural in that worldview. But the person who comes with categories shaped by paganism, the Continuity of Being, evolutionary type worldview, the virgin birth doesn't fit.

When we dealt with the Life of the King we said the confrontation is with revelation, can God reveal Himself to man? And people come to the gospels with one of two worldviews, either that God does reveal Himself to man, God does speak and therefore it's not strange that the things that are reported in the gospel narratives in fact happened. On the other hand we have the skeptics who argue that on the basis of their worldview the reported events in the gospel narratives could never have happened; therefore the gospels are just stories manufactured by spin doctors of the early church.

The third event we came to was the Death of the King and we said fundamental to understanding the cross of Christ is that we have a Biblical view of God's justice, what holiness is like. And if that isn't there, then the cross of Christ doesn't have any substantial meaning. It's the death of a martyr, He died for His cause, He's a great example to follow, but whatever it is, He didn't die for my sins.

But the thing to remember in this is how it's perceived by non-Christians. The gospel is impossible to communicate apart from the Holy Spirit opening hearts. You can have all the arguments you want to. That's not to say we

shouldn't have an argument because obviously if we're sloppy in the presentation of the gospel, we're projecting a false image of the gospel too. By having a sloppy presentation it casts doubt on the truthfulness and the validity of the gospel. We don't want to be idiots when we witness. But it's impossible for us to finally save people, the Holy Spirit has to do His work.

Now we're going to look at the Resurrection of the King. We're going to look at some of the texts, but before we get to the texts I want to go through some quotes. This is the fourth event in the Confrontation with the King. There's actually five. The fifth one is the Ascension of the King and the Day of Pentecost. But today we're opening up the resurrection. Let's think about the uniqueness of the resurrection. No other religion believes in a virgin birth and "No other religious or leader or founder ever claimed to rise from the dead in an utterly new body. Moses' body was buried and did not rise (Deut. 34:5-6; cf. Jude 1:16). Buddha died as any other man, and so did Mohammed. Indeed, as Dr. Wilbur Smith says, 'All the millions and millions of Jews, Buddhists, and Mohammedans agree that their founders have never come up out of the dust of the earth in resurrection.'" Here again we are at another unique thing. You want to master the things that set Christianity apart from the world around you, and understand that these are where the battle lines are drawn, these are the confrontations and they are non-negotiable, these cannot be compromised, they cannot be re-interpreted. This is where the gospel goes head to head with unbelief.

What I'm going to try to do here is lead us in our thinking into what is going on with the resurrection claim, so that if you do get involved in a discussion over the resurrection, you will be prepared to know where the issue is because there is a little maneuver unbelief can use that you don't want to get outmaneuvered by. So I'm going to try to cover that maneuver.

The first thing about the resurrection is simply *the fact of the resurrection*, the claim that Jesus Christ historically rose from the dead. It has always been present from the earliest days of the Christian church. But pay attention when people talk about the resurrection of Christ. A liberal pastor can talk about the resurrection and yet he doesn't mean anything near what you think he means. He can use the buzz words just like you can, just like I can, and mean something totally different. There are churches in this town that I can take you to and I guarantee you can listen to the person preaching

and you will think you're hearing the gospel, and I can show you, if you listen to enough of the guy they don't believe it at all; not at all, they're talking about something utterly different. It's very deceitful. So I want to show you how the deceitfulness works.

Here is Richard Niebuhr; he was a liberal professor, brother of another liberal, Reinhold. And if you attended a Christian college or university in the 50's or 60's and you had to take some religion courses I almost guarantee you read one of these two guys. Richard Niebuhr, he says, "The intense analysis of the NT produced by the great age of historical investigation has emphasized, among other things, this fact that belief in Jesus as the risen Lord informs every part of the early church's thought." Note the word "early," the "early" church's thought. So here is a scholar, who is a liberal, who admits that all the records in the NT and early church fathers bear witness to the fact that they believed the resurrection, the physical resurrection was central. "*But...*" "But the rise of historical criticism has also made it increasingly difficult for theologians and biblical scholars to accept the NT order of thought." What does he mean by that? Let's unpack that sentence. This is a very common assertion so let's talk about it.

You'll get this in Time Magazine, in the newspapers, on talk shows, in interviews, it's a common idea; "the rise of historical criticism has made it increasingly difficult for theologians and biblical scholars to accept the NT order of thought." Let's start with "the NT order of thought." What does he mean by "the NT order of thought?" What he means is the Biblical framework. Did the Apostle Paul and Jesus believe in sin as defined by the Mosaic Law Code? Did they believe in the necessity of blood atonement? Did they believe in the necessity of personal faith? Did they believe that there was a sovereign God who controls history? Did they believe that God's word formed history? Yes, and that's what he means by "the NT order of thought." The whole Biblical framework. These guys know this. What I'm teaching is not something I invented.

"But" he said "the rise of historical criticism has also made it increasingly difficult ... to accept." So let's go to the verb, "accept" the NT order of thought. What does that mean? Accept it as true, believe it. Why is it difficult to believe the NT order of thought? Because of "the rise of historical criticism." So let's take this one step back, "the rise of historical criticism," what's

historical criticism? Historical criticism shows up in the Christian discussions here as the belief that we can't *prima fascia* accept the biblical text, that we have to develop some historical, empirical canon of investigation by which to measure the Scriptures. We can't stand on the authority of Scripture and interpret archeology, manuscript evidence, geology, biology, and all the rest of it on the authority of Scripture, instead of doing that I go over and I build another authority and I say on the basis of this empirical test and this historical criteria I build my authority structure and then I bring in the Bible and say, does it fit?

And I look at it piece by piece. I begin to dissect it, this fits, this doesn't, this fits, this doesn't. We go through the pieces and pick the things that fit our criteria and reject the ones that don't. That's what 99% of people do and that's what we're talking about here. What he means by "the rise of historical criticism" is the complete grounding of scholarship on a pagan foundation. That's what he means, and after that grand act, then we find, lo and behold, it's difficult to accept the Bible. No kidding! This is why, you've heard me again, and I know because I've heard the criticism, people say why do you get into this and why do you get into that, why do you deal with this? This is why, because as long as we permit biology, archeology, history, science, physics, whatever, all the other things, psychology, as long as all these things are grounded first on the claims of unbelief, and we admit that is a sound basis for investigation, then we can never get the Scriptures to fit. The groundwork is already set to blow the Bible away. You cannot, after accepting the pagan base as true convince the world to believe the Bible. And that's what these people are saying. We have our pagan base of rationalism and empiricism and then we come to the Bible and say, "the NT order of thought" - we can't accept that. It doesn't fit. And this guy is not a light weight. He's a leading scholarly authority on the Christian faith in the 20th century. There's only about five or six guys of this stature. Guess who they've influenced and educated? The guys that have gotten their PhD's in the seminaries, the guys who are now on the faculty who teach the preachers. This is what happened, the infiltration occurred on that level and we've lost it, the church is way gone.

"The rise of historical criticism has also made it increasingly difficult for theologians and biblical scholars to accept the NT order of thought," and before we leave that sentence I want to make one concluding remark; that's

why when we attack and run our counterattack, we don't go for symptoms. We go for the foundation. You've got to get down to the root level of these things or you're just picking at symptoms and they will eat you alive. I've seen it a thousand times. It goes on every day. Somebody says, I've got this friend and they were raised in a rural, conservative Christian home and now they're coming to me with Jesus was a good man, he did some good things, he founded a new religion but they all lead to God. And the people that come to me want some answers. What do I say to this guy? I've got to prove to him the Bible is really true and they're grasping because their friend has fallen off the deep end. And they just want to prove to their friend the Bible is true. Throw a few statistics at them. It will never work. You can forget it. The problem is much deeper than that. The problem is their whole category of God is screwed up and you have to get down to the root, you can't just sit there and pick at the fruit. Their categories are warped way back with who God is. And until that root is dealt with you can pick off fruit all day long and you'll never touch them.

So watch, here's more of Niebuhr. "They [liberals] have felt obligated to remove the resurrection of Jesus from its central position and to place it on the periphery of Christian teaching and proclamation, because the primitive resurrection faith conflicts disastrously with modern canons of historicity." What does he mean by "modern canons of historicity?" Let's take that term, what is a "canon of historicity?" A canon is used here in the sense of a law, or a principle. What is historicity? That it was historically real. So what he's saying is that the principles of interpreting history militate against accepting any kind of a resurrection. Why? Because on an empirical basis how many resurrections have you observed? How many resurrections has anybody observed in Western society? When did anybody ever take a camera, when did anybody ever record anything like this before? This is a unique claim, it never happened before. Yeah, no kidding, that's the point!

But once you say this is our criteria of historicity; empiricism and you've made that the base of determining what is historical and what is mythological, well then, of course you can't accept the resurrection, it's invalidated from the get go. You've excluded it from the very start of the discussion. So don't be intimidated when somebody says well, the canon of historicity doesn't accept that, I mean, no thinking person accepts that. You have to correct them at that point; no thinking person *that operates on a*

pagan basis accepts that. Ooh, hmmm, why, what do you mean by that, now you're going to call me names now? No, I'm just labeling things for what they are. If you start out with a naturalistic presupposition and that's paganism, and you're saying that you're a smart person; I believe that, you're rationally consistent, but you're rationally consistent with a pagan premise. Since I don't accept the pagan premise I don't have a problem with the resurrection; you have a problem with the resurrection, but it's not because it's irrational, it's because it's inconsistent with your starting point. That's why you've got a problem with resurrection. So don't get pushed into a corner here, use it to come back to the other person. They've got to justify their position. You don't have to be nasty about it, you can be very gracious, just keep asking questions. What do you believe about this then? That's the important thing. Stay in the discussion.

Let me show you more of what unbelief is doing here so when we get to the text of Scripture we're looking for things in the text that are going to help us. This is a little exercise and a hint that's helped me a lot over the years so that I've never been afraid to go to the Scriptures to find answers. I've learned to have enough confidence, God has encouraged me enough in the Scriptures that no matter who I run into, no matter what the argument is, I have the courage to sit there and listen to it and try to understand it, because if I understand what they're saying, and it raises questions in my mind and I know where to go to get the answers. So I come back to the Scriptures and often times it's a blessing because it causes me to go to the text more seriously than I ever did before to find the answer to this question. And ask God to illuminate that portion of Scripture, and you grow. Most of us grow by getting kicked in the you-know-what; that's how God the Holy Spirit works. That's how He's worked in the Church. He hasn't worked in the Church when everybody was nice and happy. He has to bring in the wolves, and they bite us you know where. And then finally we come to the Savior and we say, hey, we need some answers here, and we dig in and go deeper and He shows us the answers were always there, we just needed a kick in the rear to open His book and find them.

Let's look from the other side, from the biblical side. "...all such attempts 'to remove the resurrection of Jesus from its central position reverse the true cause-effect of the Church's origin. These unbelieving attempts try to make the Church the originator of the 'primitive resurrection faith' instead of

making the resurrection the originating cause of the Church.” Let me explain this. Every college campus I know today outside of a few orthodox Christian ones are teaching this. Every newspaper writer who has ever studied in these classes thinks this way. The deal is that you have the early church as a group of human beings and they put a spin on history, and the spin is what you get in the NT, so that the NT is not what really happened, it’s just the spin the early Christians put on what really happened. So the NT account of the resurrection is how the early Christians interpreted what happened in their lives. It was such a momentous thing to meet this Jewish carpenter who was executed, that it was like living all over again, like having a new life. And they wrote the NT to reflect their religious experience of what it was like to live a new life.

Whereas what we believe is the reverse, that you have the factual revelation of God, this is His-story, history, and out of that because of the resurrection you have the Church empowered to write the NT. That’s the sequence of events, and they’re exactly opposite. So remember which came first, the revelation of God or the religious experience. These guys are saying the religious experience came first, then came the text, and there never was a factual experience. We believe there was a factual experience that was the basis of the writings of the NT. Let’s go to some of the key NT texts. Let’s go to the classic one, 1 Cor 15. First we’ll do this and then we’ll touch on a number of other passages.

1 Cor 15:3, this is Paul, who got this message after Christ rose from the dead. He wasn’t around the tomb when Jesus rode from the dead, so either Paul got the doctrine of resurrection indirectly through the apostles or on the Damascus Road when he saw the Lord. But let’s think about this in the light of modern man who argues that this is a spin, this is a spin story. Now if it’s a spin story watch what happens here in the 1 Cor 15 text. Look at verse 3, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” What Scriptures? What are the Scriptures here, NT or OT? The OT. Aha! So in what frame of reference was Paul approaching the whole issue of Christ’s death on the cross? The OT. He says “according to the Scriptures,” we’re not making this up, check the OT Scriptures. Verse 4 “and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” What Scriptures? NT or OT? OT again. It’s easy to find the death of the Messiah in the OT. It’s a little harder

to find the resurrection. You know, it's interesting in the OT, why do you suppose it says there's going to be a resurrection on the third day. It's difficult but it comes from a couple of smaller prophets, Hosea and Jonah, and it involves quite a thoughtful reflection on what they said.

Verse 5, "and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep." Now if Paul said that, what challenge do you think is imbedded in verse 6 to his audience? If you doubt me, if you doubt what I'm telling you, I dare you to do what? Go talk to the eyewitnesses, they're still around, check it out, did I make up the story? So it's an interesting appeal using evidence, go check it out for yourself, he's saying. There are people who are still alive who saw Him, go talk to them. There were over five hundred of these people that saw this, go set an interview.

Verse 7, "then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles." Now in verse 5, 6 and 7 he's carefully witnessed to a sequence of appearances, so not only... is it not saying He appeared to James and the apostles and Cephas and the twelve, he says He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to this person, then to that person. So not only is he claiming that these people saw Jesus, but he says I know the sequence, boom, boom, boom. Does this sound credible? Does this sound like a spin story? The more details you put in a story the easier it is to discount. All you have to find is one little error. Verse 8, "and last of all, as it were, to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

Verse 12, "Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you" by the way, that means the Church, that's not the people outside the Church, the people inside the Church, how come among you in the Church you "say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" 13 "But if there is no resurrection of the dead," and watch the logic, he says okay, let's start with your premise, there's no resurrection of the dead, let's see where that leads, "if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised," right. If you can't have resurrection as a general principle, then you can't have a specific instance of resurrection. So if there's no resurrection, then Jesus couldn't have risen, 14 "and if Christ has not been raised then our

preaching is vain, and your faith also is vain.” What does he mean there? Vain? He means we preach an empty message and you put your faith in an empty message. What a stupid thing to do. Besides looking like a moron what a waste of time.

And now look what he says in verse 15, we covered this when we were dealing with inerrancy, “Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.” This should sound the death knell to the idea this is a spin story. Let’s think about this, the Church made this up. What is one of the Ten Commandments? “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” Are we going to say that this Jew Paul, a persecutor of the church, a leader in Judaism who is very aware of the Ten Commandments is not violating the Ten Commandments to generate this spin story? For them to create a spin about something that God supposedly did and He didn’t do it, that’s bearing false witness against whom? Against God.

So any liberal today who’s saying the Church is making up the story is accusing these Jews against their Judaistic background of violating one of the Ten Commandments. Try that on your friends that say I believe the Bible errors and all. It has to be all or nothing; these guys are putting their lives on the line and here it is; this is a classic reference. 1 Cor 15:15 is a classic verse to come to because it shows you the mentality of the Apostles in the middle of the war against the gospel. They were willing to say that if this is not true, I am an impostor, I’ve violated the Ten Commandments, I bear false witness against my God.

Verse 16, “For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have only hoped in Christ in this life [only] we are of all men most to be pitied.” Why do you suppose he said that? Think about that one. Here’s the resurrection, in eternity, and here’s time and here’s death. Why does he say that we, of all people, are to be pitied if that part of the message is false? Why are we to be pitied? Because what’s happening over here? We are not participating in all the goody things that the world offers. Frankly many times we’re not really enjoying ourselves because of the priorities of our faith. We’re denying ourselves temporal fulfillments, and how foolish if the whole

message is wrong. And more seriously, what he's also saying by implication is that this life in eternity is being shaped by what we're doing now. We're setting up what our lives are going to look like in eternity, a very sobering thought, by what we're obeying and disobeying now.

Then he says later on, verse 32, he goes through this argument several times, then he comes down, and put this one down along with verse 15, this is another classic. "If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus," in other words, if I'm just spinning up a story, "I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus" probably the rioting crowds, whatever it was he put himself in harm's way for the gospel! "what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." The apostles weren't stupid. So many people have this idea that these guys were little kooky old men or something, wandering around in the ancient world. They knew how to have fun; they knew what was going on over in Corinth. Come on, these guys weren't born yesterday. And they said look, if this isn't true, then hey, let's just go to Corinth and get in on the fun.

Do you know who's to be pitied? The stupid fools who think it's false and still preach it. If I wasn't a fundamentalist Christian I'd be an atheist, I certainly wouldn't be a liberal preacher, what an idiot. I like all the good things of the Christian religion but I know it's phony. Would you accept that in any other area of your life? I like driving my crummy car, I like living in my house that's falling apart, it gives me a good feeling. I preach this old religion that doesn't make sense, but I like it. That's the importance of the historicity claims of the gospel and central to that is the historicity of the resurrection.

Now we want to go to two passages. Luke 24:31, This is the Emmaus Road, and what you want to notice here with this Emmaus Road incident is that Luke seems fascinated with the resurrection, just like he seems fascinated with Mary's pregnancy. Of all the four Gospel writers it's Luke that interviewed people who had eyewitness data involving strange bodily anomalies. Why is that? Who was Luke? A medical doctor. So he uses his natural bent. God called him to be a medical doctor so he had a natural interest; he liked to investigate these kinds of things. So he reports on these topics. A resurrection, think a medical doctor would be interested in that? Sure, I've seen lots of dead bodies, I'd like to investigate one that came back

to life. The guys are going down the road talking to Jesus, walking, and He started conversing with them, and then all of a sudden, verse 31, “Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.” This isn’t a spirit that they’re seeing, this isn’t something that was just an appearance, it was a physical person walking down the road with them, they weren’t dreaming this, He disappeared. It’s pretty awesome to think that whatever abilities the resurrection body has, think about this, it has the ability to appear and disappear. Boy, wouldn’t you have fun if you could appear and disappear, evidently this is one of the characteristics of the resurrection body.

Let’s go to John because John is supposed to be the spookiest Gospel writer, and in spite of all that look what he does in John 20. This is that famous section that you sometimes hear on Easter, about doubting Thomas. Verse 19, “When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week,” notice the day of the week, Sunday, “and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst,” how’d He get through, it says the doors were shut. Apparently it can go through walls without opening them; wouldn’t that be fun to be able to go through physical walls in a physical resurrection body. It’s something physical but there’s something different about the physics. So He’s in the room now “and he said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’” Verse 20, “And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side,” to identify Himself, “The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus therefore said to them again, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’” Verse 24, “But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.” Then verse 25, “The other disciples therefore were saying to him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But Thomas said to them, ‘Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails,’ notice what Thomas wanted to do, I want to “put my finger into the place of the nails, and [I want to] put my hand into His side, otherwise I will not believe.” Do you think His wounds were big enough? This shows you how big the wounds were; put your finger right in the sword wound. I want to do that. I want to put my hand, my whole hand in His side; these are big mortal wounds that the Lord had. But Thomas says I want to do that and if I can’t, I won’t believe. So here’s the empiricist. But Thomas has a good point here, and the Holy Spirit used Thomas to teach the rest of the Church something about this resurrection body, that it was not a disembodied spirit that appeared. He’s

not a ghost. Verse 26, “And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, ‘Peace be with you.’” Again notice the state of the doors, notice they’re faithfully reported in verse 26, see these little details, the Gospel writers put them in here. The doors were shut, and all of a sudden He’s standing there in the middle of them. Verse 27, “Then Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing.’” Now if you had been Thomas and you were sitting there, besides getting over the shock of suddenly He was here and you didn’t believe that He did these kind of things, what would you have thought when He turned to you and quoted what you had said when He wasn’t around, apparently. I think that’d about spook me out as much as just seeing all of a sudden He appears in the room, now He’s telling me what I said the other day. Gee, I’d better watch what I say, He may be listening. Then He challenges the rest of the Church Age in verse 29, “Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.’” We don’t have the opportunity to touch Him, but we believe. We’re part of those that are blessed for believing having not seen.

Turn to Acts 1:3, here’s Luke again, the historian, and he says “To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” How long did they spend with a resurrected person? 40 days. That’s not exactly 40 seconds, that’s more than a month. Think they had some opportunities over 40 days to ask a few questions? Watch Him eat a few meals? Watch Him take a few naps? Touch Him? Talk to Him? Yeah, forty days worth. And notice in verse 3 Luke reports, “many convincing proofs,” does this sound like these guys are putting a spin on it. It doesn’t quite sound like a spin story. I mean if this is a spin story somebody took a lot of time to write it, it’d be the greatest spin story of all time.

For next week, look at the argument in Luke 20:27, I want you to read that, it’s just a small passage and try to reason out on a piece of paper the logic that Jesus is using. It’s tough; this is not a simple passage. Jesus is proving the resurrection from a strange passage in Exod 3, and I think it’ll challenge you to put the framework to work. Next week we’ll go on with the argument for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

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