

Easter –Liberation Day

Dr. Luke quotes the apostle Paul as saying as he stood before Felix, the Roman governor of Caesarea, "the true issue of my trial before you today is the resurrection of the dead." (Acts 24:21) The resurrection is still "the true issue" today. The idea of the resurrection is difficult for a lot of modern Westerners and men of ancient faiths.

Charles Templeton, once a prominent Canadian evangelist in the 1950's who turned his back to the faith, has written a novel with the title: Act of God. The plot is centered on an archeologist's discovery in Israel of the bones of Jesus.

In the oldest part of Srinagar, Kashmir, is an ancient tomb; its surface worn smooth, obliterating any subscription it might have carried. Members of the Ahmadiya movement, a sect declared non-Islamic in Pakistan after serious riots there five years ago, believe that the tomb contains the remains of Jesus Christ.

Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908), the founder of the Ahmadiya movement, felt the force of growing Christianity in India. Because the progress of the missionary movement, the Christian faith received more than its share of Ahmad's attention. His aim was to completely discredit the Christian faith through attacking the historicity of the resurrection of Christ.

Ahmad also declared himself Islam's promised Messiah - "a prophet of God." This declaration brought him in conflict with the majority of Muslims, who believe that Jesus was delivered from the wrath of His persecutors, completely escaped the cross, was raised by God to the "fourth heaven," where He still is, and from where He will return before the day of the resurrection. Ahmad felt that this doctrine of Jesus returning to earth is a delusion that must be removed from Muslim thinking.

Ahmad taught that not Jesus Himself was to be expected, but another person was to come. And he had come in the person - Ghulam Ahmad - in the "spirit and power" of Jesus. To prove his point, Ahmad claimed that Jesus didn't die on the cross. He was not buried when taken down, but placed in a large airy sepulchre, where doctors treated His wounds. He escaped from Jerusalem and travelled with Mary and the apostle Thomas to the east. Thomas went to South India, where he died spreading the Gospel, and Jesus and Mary went north. Jesus is supposed to have died there at the age of 120, and buried in Srinagar.

Is the resurrection of Christ a product of the imagination? No! With the apostle Paul we confess 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)

After Christ's gruesome death on the cross, His followers were in despair. Their hopes were shattered. They gathered together out of fear for the Jews. Fear clutched their

hearts. They felt weak and aimless. What happened that changed their weakness and despair into spiritual power and hope? Christ had risen from the dead. On Easter day, the tomb was found empty.

The Ahmadiya sect proudly points to Christ's grave. Christians have never attached importance to Christ's tomb. No streams of pilgrims have gone to the silent grotto, beyond Jerusalem's gate, to pay respect to an ideal or legend. Christ is not in the grave. Why seek the Living One among the dead? He is risen! Jerusalem didn't become a holy place, dedicated to the memory of a great - but dead - teacher. Jerusalem became the place from where the Gospel spread.

Christ came to, the troubled disciples. He dispelled their doubts and fears. Christ's followers became convinced of the fact of the resurrection. The effects of the resurrection were powerful. The resurrected Christ transformed the disillusioned disciples into courageous witnesses. They became bold in their faith in the risen Christ and were ready to give themselves to Him, without any reservation. As the risen Christ appeared to the disciples, He commissioned them. He said, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." (John 20:21)

Christ is alive! This is the ringing message of the Christian faith. What does this mean for us today? The Western world is showing signs of spiritual exhaustion. Cults and sects are mushrooming. Secularism is still slaying its tens of thousands. Strikes in key industries reflect the material and spiritual dissatisfaction of workers. The church seems timid and even hesitant in proclaiming the Gospel.

The Gospel is clear. Apart from Jesus there is no deliverance from the bondage of evil. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." (1 John 5:11) Easter - Liberation Day. In Christ, the victory is already ours. "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Romans 8:37)

Johan D. Tangelder
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