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EVIDENCE THAT JESUS IS ALIVE TODAY

Background

The Christian faith is unlike all other faiths. This is evident, for example, in the unique way that Christian believers can know assurance of forgiveness of sins (see Unit 9), and can know personally the reality of *abiding in Christ*, having life in him. In this closing Study we stress the uniqueness of our faith, and the universality of its claims. These arise from the living person of Jesus Christ (*Yeshua* the Messiah), whose life, claims, teaching and actions (as well as the apostolic witness to him) have eternal significance because he is alive now – not a dead teacher, but actually reigning in glory, true God and true Man, the second person of the Holy Trinity.

If Jesus Christ had not been raised from the dead (leaving behind an empty tomb, as he did) there would be no Christianity today, and none of the benefits of his life, miracles, suffering and death would be available to anyone now.

We have touched briefly on this theme elsewhere in these Studies, especially in Unit 14 (Death – Physical). But it is essential for our own witness that we have a clear grasp of the evidence which we can present confidently to others.

We will never ‘argue’ anyone into becoming a believer, but it is our duty and privilege to declare and to witness to certain facts. From the outset, our faith has been *historical*, meaning followers of ‘the Way’ have known that certain things have *really happened in certain times and places*, which are attested by those who were physically there and observed what occurred. So there are essential historical

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claims that we can make with confidence, and they are an important part of our presentation of the good news. These facts were recorded (orally and in writing) and could have been disproved if they had been untrue. It is scarcely credible that anyone would have been willing to have been tortured and risk being judicially murdered for a tissue of lies and fabrication of their own devising! Yet in effect this is what those who deny the reality of the resurrection ask people to believe. The futility of a belief system which denies the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is made clear in 1 Corinthians **15:19**.

The Old Testament

It would be surprising if the OT did not prepare the people of God for the most momentous event in history.

Old Testament saints anticipated a resurrection of their bodies. See Job **19:26–27**; Psalm **49:15**; **71:20**; see also John **11:24**. It is interesting that Matthew **27:51** records that at the death of Jesus many holy people who had died were raised to life.

The resurrection of the Messiah was prophesied in Psalm **16:8–11** (see Acts **2:25–31**). In Psalm **22** (from the opening of which our Lord quoted on the cross) we can see the victory and dominion of the Messiah. See also Isaiah chapter **53**, Acts **17:2–3**; **26:22–23**. Nevertheless, John **20:9** records that even at the time of discovering the empty tomb there were disciples who did not yet understand from Scripture (the Old Testament) that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

The New Testament

The centrality and the absolutely vital character of the historical claim that Jesus rose from the dead is clearly asserted by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians **15**. The whole chapter should be read. The saving death, burial and resurrection are all linked in the opening verses. (1–5). Then

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begins a record of many eyewitnesses: Cephas (Peter) and the twelve (v. 5); then 'over five hundred brothers at one time'. Importantly, from the point of view of contemporary historical verification, it is stated that the 'majority' of those people who had seen Jesus after his death were still alive (v. 6). Then James and other apostles are cited as witnesses (v. 7), followed by Paul himself. That is an extremely impressive assembly of witnesses who were perfectly able to testify to the personal experience of seeing Jesus alive after his death and burial. Any sceptic could have asked them exactly what they saw and, again we note that witnessing to what they had seen was an extremely risky business. Why would they have taken such a risk if they were lying?

In the Gospels and Acts we have a wealth of further eyewitness evidence.

Matthew **28:1–20**; Mark **16:9–20** (even if an addition to Mark, this is still inspired Holy Scripture); Luke **24:1–53**; John **20:1–21:25**.

Acts **1:1-9** records conversation between the risen Lord and disciples prior to the Ascension and Pentecost. In the course of that conversation, the disciples show by their questioning that they have a clear hope and expectation of Jesus' return to rule Israel (see v. 6). Jesus does not rebuke them or deny that their hope is valid. He explains to them that the Father knows. This, like all the other passages cited, has a very clear 'ring of truth', in that this is precisely the kind of concern which expectant Jews, the Lord's disciples, would have had.

The restoration of Peter, following his denial of Christ, is so characteristic of the same Lord Jesus to whom the Gospels testify concerning the *whole* of Jesus' earthly ministry: the compassion, the opportunity given for repentance, and the re-commissioning of Peter.

The appearance of Jesus to the women, again, is so clearly the Lord himself. He asked Mary, one of the many witnesses, not to cling to him (John **20:17**). How consistent and understandable that was, in the light of the Ascension which was to follow. She and the other believers would be

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able to know the Spirit's presence and power soon after that.

Again and again, the 'ring of truth' is there in every encounter between the risen Lord Jesus and the people who saw him in his risen body. All of this is historical fact based on contemporaneous eyewitness accounts by many people – of both sexes and from many walks of life.

Personal testimony evidence in every age, including the present day

There are countless published testimonies by people today and in the past who have recorded personal encounters with Jesus Christ – often through experiences of changed lives, answered prayer, extraordinary 'co-incidences', signs and miracles. Some have visions and dreams. Some people may hear an audible or an inner 'voice'. Some of these kinds of encounter may require confirmation before action is based on them, but *every* true Christian has encountered the same Lord Jesus who died and is now alive, for we live in him and he dwells in his people.

Conclusion

In closing, we note that the significance of the resurrection extends far beyond the matter of proof that there is life after death. Here are just a few key things which flow from the well-attested resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, all of which are of great significance to every believer:

(1) In raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father vindicated him. (See Hebrews **10:12**.) The verdicts of the Jewish and Roman courts have been overturned by God. Jesus was not blaspheming when he claimed to be divine, he was telling the truth. He was not committing treason in the matter of kingship. He really *is* the King of kings.

(2) In the resurrection of Jesus, the new creation has begun and believers are part of God's new creation. (See 2 Corinthians **5:17**.)

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(3) Everything Jesus ever said and did was true and remains true. He is the way, the truth and the life (see John **14:6**). All that he foretold will really happen. He will return to judge the living and the dead (see John **5:22**).

(4) His sacrifice for our sins has been accepted, so we can be forgiven on the basis of faith in him. (See again Hebrews **10:12–39**.)