

Sunday 1st April 2018

Last Sunday, at the Soul Food Sunday Cafe we showed a video clip of the testimony of Lee Strobel. Google his name and open the Utube clips and view them, 'The case for Christ.' He refers to an early creed from the Bible. A creed is a systemized statement of foundational truths that were taught in the earliest days of the Christian Church. The creed he speaks about is found in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 1-7. Lee points out that at the time that this creed was written down, the witnesses of the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were still alive, and this is one clue that is strong evidence of its factuality.

There are other factors which are internal evidences for its authenticity, and it is these we will look at briefly today.

Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians is a chapter about the resurrection of Jesus. In it, the apostle Paul says that if the resurrection is not factual, then faith is void and there is no hope. It is therefore an important passage to check out!

The language of verses 3 to 7 are of a style that would have been familiar to the early church people. It was the form of language used when the Rabbis were teaching factual information. Similar writing occurs in 1 Corinthians 11 verses 23 to 25, where Paul is reporting the institution of the Lord's Supper. The language is that of stating facts, not opinions or teachings.

There are four phrases in the passage 15.1-7 which follow the form described. Each begins with 'that' or a form of 'that.'

V.3 That Christ died for our sins.

V.4 That He was buried.

V.4 That He was raised.

V.5 That He appeared to Peter.

The first three statements are added to in this way, 'that these things happened according to Scripture.' In this way, the claim is that for Jesus to die, be buried and raised to life again was not only consistent with the flow of Biblical revelation, but was the fulfillment of the plan of God for salvation first declared after Adam and Eve fell from grace. In other words, the creed shows that the events of the first Easter were not something pulled out of the hat by God at the last moment, but were all part of God's plan formed before time began and consistent with all that had gone before in OT days. Therefore, we should not be surprised by these events

1. The first statement presented as a fact to be accepted, believed and acted upon is that, 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.'

This is the event spoken of in Genesis 3.15. The Cross was the crushing of the serpents head and the bruising of the heel of the offspring of the woman. The idea of one dying in

the place of another is a consistent theme in the Old Testament. Abraham is sent to offer up Isaac, but at the last moment, a ram is found caught in the bushes, and God tells Abraham to offer that instead of his son. We find this in Genesis 22. The very telling verse is v8, where Abraham tells Isaac that God would Himself provide a lamb for the sacrifice. It is easy to see this from our vantage point as a reference to Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

The Passover in Exodus 12 has a lamb slain to cover the Hebrews safely when the destroying angel comes to kill the first born. The lamb dies in the place of the first born.

The OT ceremonies of sacrifices and offerings are also pointers to a great event which was to come. The blood of goats and bulls, Hebrews tells us, had to be offered year after year to deal with sin. Part of the sacrifices for the Day of Atonement, Lev. 16, was the two goats. One was killed for the penalty of sin. The other, the scape goat, was sent off into the wilderness for the removal of sin to the land of forgetfulness. However the day was to come when a perfect sacrifice would be offered by the perfect priest in the perfect temple, and Christ was the sacrifice, and the Priest who offered His own Blood to God in heaven.

The historical passages of the Old Testament are not the only place we find the idea of atonement made by one on behalf of another. The classic passage considered to be a foundation of this creed is Isaiah 53, especially verse 5.

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

There are many more passages which lend weight to support this understanding of what happened on the Cross. It comes down to this, that Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for our sins, and as He died, we were set free from sin's penalty, and Christ bore the punishment, condemnation, guilt and death that was our due,

2. That he was buried.

We know the story of Jesus burial. The Gospel accounts give us the story. He was buried in a borrowed tomb. When Joseph came to ask for the body of Jesus, Pilate was surprised that He was dead so soon, so sent to ask for an account from the head of the execution squad. The news came back that Jesus was dead and further-more his body had been stabbed with a spear and that water and clotted blood had come out. This was a sure sign of death. Joseph and Nicodemus took Jesus body, and wrapped it in cloth with 75 pounds of spices and while a group of women followed the funeral rites, they placed him in a tomb.

Jesus was dead. This was witnessed and testified to by Roman soldiers, experts in their trade, the two high officials who did the rites, and a group of women who followed all this.

3. That He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures.
Once again, the author of the creed is not looking to a proof text, but to the whole sweep of the Old Testament. There are more difficulties regarding this as there are few Scriptures which are as graphic in terms of Resurrection as they are to the suffering of Christ.

However, it is clear that in the immediate aftermath of the resurrection of Christ, His saying about destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days, as found in John 2v19 and the other Gospels, finds its explanation.

Further to this, Psalm 16 v 9-11 says,

‘.....you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.’

And Psalm 110.1. These verses are taken of witnessing to the resurrection of the Messiah. The tense of the verb in John’s passage is such that it is saying that Jesus is raised and is still alive.

4. That He appeared to Peter.
Such is the importance of the resurrection of Jesus that the statement of its fact is underlined by the evidence of eye witness accounts.

This completes the creedal part of this text, but such was the importance of the resurrection to Paul, that he adds that there were many other eye witness encounters to the risen Christ. It is interesting that all the accounts of meeting Christ raised and in bodily form come within the forty days before He ascended to heaven. After that time when He was no longer present in bodily form, all other visible encounters have been spoken of as mystical encounters, dreams and visions.

It is important that we understand that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is factual, and can stand up to historical, critical and textual scrutiny. This means that we are confronted with a living Saviour, not a myth, a dream or a bit of wishful thinking.

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, the title of the John Owen essay is correct. The title is, ‘The death of death in the death of Christ.’ The sting of sin is defeated. Sin can be forgiven, and because Christ is risen, He will raise His believing people from the dead, to live with Him forever.