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## The Verifying of God and the Vindication of Christ

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, May-Jun 1933, Vol. 11-3.*

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

"He hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures."

While it would be possible for us to cite some, and perhaps many fragments of the Scriptures which have a direct bearing upon what is said here, that "He hath been raised again the third day," the Apostle did not mean any particular Scriptures when he said this. He did not intend that those who read what he said should go and look up some Scriptures (which of course would then have been in the Old Testament, because there was no New Testament) bearing upon the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but what he did mean was that the whole of the Scriptures bear upon this thing, that all the Scriptures relate to this great fact which he was stating. "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures"; that is, that all the Scriptures bear upon these things. And we shall remember that in Luke 24 the Lord Jesus, after His resurrection, to certain who journeyed to Emmaus opened the Scriptures, it says in Moses, in the Psalms and in the Prophets, the things concerning Himself, and the things concerning Himself there are specified as the sufferings of Christ, that He should be delivered into the hands of wicked men and they would crucify Him, and He should rise again the third day: so that Moses, which covers the whole of the first section of the Bible, the Psalms the second, and the Prophets the third, had to do with the sufferings, the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and it was in that comprehensive sense that the Apostle wrote these words: "He hath

been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." In a moment we shall come back for the specific value of that to ourselves.

### **God Verifying Himself**

"According to the Scriptures." Now this phrase clearly represents God's verifying of Himself. The Scriptures are the words of God. God hath spoken in all the Scriptures. We are told in the beginning of the letter to the Hebrews that: "God (who) at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets...." So that the Scriptures are the utterance, the sayings, the words of God, and when it says here that something has been "according to the Scriptures" that happening is the verifying of God, and God Who brought about that event, God Who caused it to be, is by it verifying Himself. So that this phrase "according to the Scriptures" represents the verifying of Himself on the part of God: the acts which establish the words.

### **The Vindication of the Lord Jesus**

And then, again, this particular clause represents the vindication of the Lord Jesus: "He hath been raised on the third day." That is the vindication of Christ. Which means that Christ is vindicated in resurrection. That is the point, central, pivotal, the supreme point of everything; the vindication of the Lord Jesus. If He had been crucified, slain, murdered, executed, and been buried and that had been the end, well, what would you have had to vindicate Him? But when God stepped in and raised Him from the dead on the third day Christ was vindicated up to the hilt.

Now very swiftly and briefly I want to gather up these three things in a word or two of practical application to ourselves, because there are here some very serious and momentous implications for the people of God; and we will begin at the end with number three. Christ's vindication by resurrection from the dead. The thing which is of so great importance to us, beloved, is this, that while the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is undoubtedly an historical fact, something which did take place at a certain time in the history of this world, that is not an adequate basis of the vindication of the Lord Jesus. In other words, Christ's vindication is not merely a historical fact, but it is a revealed and experienced truth.

"He appeared" is the word here, and the Apostle tells us elsewhere that He appeared not unto all the people but unto witnesses whom God had before chosen; so that the vindication of the Lord Jesus was brought about by the Risen Christ, as risen becoming revealed, personally, to certain people. They came into what we mean by the revelation of Jesus Christ, which is infinitely more than the story of the historic Jesus. And then not only was He revealed to them but He became in them the Living One in the power of His risen life, and that is the vindication of the Lord Jesus. It requires living witnesses in whom Christ has been revealed and is their life to vindicate the Lord Jesus.

Concerning Lazarus, on hearing of the news of his sickness, the Lord Jesus said: "This sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." And He was not mistaken when Lazarus died, it was not a contradiction of His utterance: "This sickness is not unto death." He meant this sickness is not a sickness unto death but a sickness unto resurrection, but the object in view was this, that the Son of God might be glorified. That is the vindication of the Lord Jesus, and the Lord Jesus is vindicated when He as the Resurrection and the Life has an object in which He can manifest the power of resurrection. So you and I are called to be witnesses to the resurrection, not in the manner of declaring historical facts, or believing that there was a time when

God really did raise the Lord Jesus from the dead so many years ago, but as now being personally in the experience and knowledge of Christ as living, and as the Conqueror of death. And if there is one thing revealed as pre-eminent throughout all the Scriptures, it is God's desire to vindicate His Son.

Then we have a strong basis of hope and confidence when we go into death, not merely physical but the various forms in which death works and abounds - death in our work for the Lord, death in our spiritual experience in deep trial, in great suffering, in various ways - if we are really related to the Lord, God's whole object is to vindicate His Son in the display of the truth that He raised Him from the dead, and make that truth a reality in us. The vindication of the Lord Jesus is God's dearest heart purpose. And so unto witnesses chosen aforetime He makes real the fact of not only Christ now living, but that Christ living now represents God's triumph over death. Then believers are those who have the Divine verification on their side. "According to the Scriptures." It is a great thing to have the verification of God on our side. Perhaps you do not quite grasp what is meant by that. I mean this, that we who believe, we who are in Christ, we who stand with God, stand in line with God's determination to verify Himself, seeing God has spoken, God has said things, God has made promises, God has given certain assurances, God has declared He will do this and that, the Scriptures contain it - we, standing by faith with God, in Christ, He is going to verify Himself in all those Scriptures, and the verifying of Himself relates to us. You see that is what is said here.

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." That means that God verified Himself on our behalf when Christ died for our sins, for all the way through God had been pointing by the Scriptures to that sin-remitting death, that sin-atonement death of the Lord Jesus, that by that Lamb of God the sin of the world would be taken away: God had pointed all along to that, all the way through the Scriptures, and the thing has taken place and Christ has died for our sins according to the Scriptures. We stand by faith on His side, and God in verifying Himself makes good the Scriptures for us. And what is true in dying for our sins according to the Scriptures, is true in this: "...has been raised the third day according to the Scriptures." That is for us also. We come into the good of that because the Scriptures include us in that. "He died for our sins and rose again for *our* justification." He rose that we might know life that is victorious over death, that we might know Him as the One Who has conquered death for us, know Him as our life, indestructible and incorruptible. God is not going to say a thing, and eternity reveal He failed to fulfil it. All the promises of God are in Christ, yea, and in Him, Amen. That is, verily, verily, God fulfils His Word in Christ for us and God verifies His Word in Christ, every promise is established in Christ for us.

There is another side. God is going to verify Himself, every word God has ever said is going to be verified, but for multitudes who do not believe, all that is going to be against them. Their unbelief cannot hinder God from verifying Himself, but the full impact of it will be against them for condemnation. To those who believe the full force of God's eternal faithfulness to His Word is for them, on their side. It is a great thing to recognise that all the Scriptures have to be fulfilled and in their fulfilment God verifies Himself, and that for believers.

One final word in connection with the rest of this passage which we read. There is a challenge here, to living faith. Why did Paul write this fifteenth chapter? Well, for several reasons which we will not stay to mention, but undoubtedly the words with which he opens this section, this new section relative to resurrection, were meant to bring these Corinthians, shall I say, up to scratch, to confront them with the necessity for taking seriously the things that they knew. "Now I made known unto you brethren..." "I make known"; the force of those words if you can get behind the English is this - "Now I want you to recognise what it is that I have said. I want you to recognise that which you received,

the meaning of it, I am bringing it to you with emphasis and with challenge and with fuller explanation." He is calling upon them to take serious account of the gospel which he preached unto them. And you notice a little clause he puts in, a kind of proviso about the whole thing which introduces an element of very serious possibility. He says: "unless" - oh, what a big word that unless is - "except (or unless) ye believed in vain." More literally "Unless from the beginning your faith has been unreal." That is what it means. So he is calling them to reality, he is calling them to a serious recognition of what they had received as the gospel.

There is a good deal in this letter about the possibilities of unreality. There is a chapter which takes them back to Israel in the wilderness and reminds them that all Israel came out of Egypt, passed through the Red Sea, were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, they all partook of the bread from heaven, of the spiritual water from the Rock, but that generation perished in the wilderness, that generation never went through to God's end, it died in the wilderness. And Paul is afraid that there should be unreality: "Lest from the beginning your faith has been unreal." It is a challenge to a living faith, and in this connection specifically with which we are at the moment occupied, a challenge to a living faith that God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead on the third day to be to us the Resurrection and the Life in spiritual experience, to make good all His Word concerning the Lord Jesus in our experience. A living faith in that. A faith which appropriates that, which takes hold of that. A faith which believes in Christ's triumph over death and which makes good, so far as our faith can make anything good, makes good for us the promise, the word of God, "According to the Scriptures." A living faith in what God has done for us. You and I, beloved, need more of that living faith. We want to escape entirely from unreality and a living faith is not a historical faith: a living faith is a faith which comes out of history of what happened in a certain eastern country so many centuries ago and makes good all the spiritual value of that now in our own experience. That is a living faith, and when we focus upon "God raised Him from the dead," "He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures," faith does not just say: "Yes, I believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead," faith makes that a personal possession with a personal value for our present experiment.

The Holy Spirit from the beginning of our history as a child of God is vindicating the Lord Jesus. It is impossible for any soul to be saved without the miracle of resurrection being wrought in them by God the Holy Ghost. We are dead, according to God's Word, in our trespasses and sins, and no amount of preaching can ever raise a soul from the dead; it needs the quickening act of the Holy Ghost, and we have to come and believe God is able to do that and make that good for our salvation, before we can become a saved child of God. What is true of salvation is true all the way along right to the end, that we have by faith to appropriate all the value of God having raised Christ from the dead to be our life. "He that hath the Son hath life."

That has all been a crowding into a little space of a great deal. The Lord open it up to our hearts.