

## The Resurrection of Christ

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(1740-1778)

Augustus Montague Toplady (1740-1778), was educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Dublin, he was converted through a Methodist lay preacher, took Anglican orders in 1762, and later became vicar of Broadhembury, Devon. In 1775 he assumed the pastorate of the French Calvinist chapel in London. He was a powerful preacher and a vigorous Calvinist, bitterly opposed to John Wesley. He wrote the *Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England* (2 vols., 1774) and *The Church of England Vindicated from the Charge of Arminianism* (1769). His fame rests, however, on his hymns, e.g., "A debtor to mercy alone"; "A sovereign Protector I have"; "From whence this fear and unbelief?"; and especially "Rock of Ages" (appended to an article calculating the "National Debt" in terms of sin). This article is taken from Toplady's own manuscripts.

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". JOHN ii. 19.

We have been considering the most awful and affecting transaction that ever came to pass; I mean the death and crucifixion of the Lord of Glory. But here we are presented with a brighter scene, and reminded us of that joyful and ever-memorable morning, when our Omnipotent Redeemer burst the inclosure of the tomb; when the sepulchre could no longer detain its illustrious prisoner; and when the Sun of Righteousness, who had so lately set in darkness, triumphantly emerged from His sad, though short eclipse, and rose to set no more.

According to our blessed Lord's own prediction, related in the above Scripture, when pointing to Himself, He says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up;" meaning His own body; and intimated that the Jews should be permitted, in some sense, to destroy it, but that He would raise it up in three days.

The reason why the Son of God styled His body a temple was, because, as the temple of Jerusalem was built by direction of God Himself, so was the human nature of Christ. Hence He is represented in the Psalms, as saying to the Father, "a body hast *Thou* prepared Me;" and His manifestation in the flesh, was in consequence of His Father's appointment, as well as of His own voluntary engagements.

As the temple was solemnly consecrated and set apart for the worship and service of God, so was the humanity of Christ. During the whole time of His continuance on earth, His life was one continued series of devotion and obedience. It is a peculiar part of His

character, and what can be said of no one else that ever lived, that He did no sin, but on the contrary, perfectly fulfilled all righteousness, and always did the things that pleased the Father. As God, though present everywhere, was *more immediately* present in the temple, so the human nature of Christ was the immediate habitation of the Deity; for in Him, as the apostle says, dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. But, though the Jewish temple was, in a peculiar manner, the seat of the divine residence, yet God was in no sense *united* to that temple; whereas, between the Deity and the human nature of Christ, there was an incomprehensible union; by virtue of which, He was God and man in one person. His indwelling divinity manifested itself in every word He spake, and in every miracle He wrought; and this it was, namely, His Godhead, which imparted infinite merit and efficacy to His obedience, sufferings, and intercession, as Mediator.

The temple of Jerusalem was supposed to be guarded, in a particular manner, by angels; neither is it unlikely, that hosts of those exalted spirits should hold their invisible stations in a place where God Himself vouchsafed to give such special manifestations of His presence. Christ, likewise, as man, through the whole course of His humiliation below, was attended by angels, who were the servants of His will, and the guardians of His person. Hence David prophesied concerning Him, "God shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, to keep Thee in all Thy ways; and in their hands shall they bear Thee up." Accordingly we find, that after His temptation in the wilderness, angels came and ministered unto Him; and, during His agony in the garden, an angel appeared to strengthen Him. When He rose from the dead, an angel descended to roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre: and when He was ascended into heaven, He was, no doubt, escorted to His throne by myriads of exulting angels.

The temple was a building of unequalled beauty and magnificence: and the Psalmist, speaking of Christ as to His human nature, says of Him, "Thou art fairer than the children of men": and indeed it is reasonable to think, that the body of Christ, which was formed by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, and which was taken into union with the Godhead, must have been transcendently fair and beautiful.

It is true that the prophet Isaiah, foretelling the sufferings of Christ, and the treatment He should meet with, says, "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." And elsewhere, "that His countenance was marred more than any man's, and His form than the sons of men." But this refers to His appearance under His sufferings, when He was emaciated with fasting, oppressed with grief, and disfigured with wounds; when, to use the words of Jeremiah, "His face was foul with weeping, and on His eyelids sat the shadow of death."

The temple was a type of Christ, as it was a place where prayer was made, and sacrifices were offered; so, in His human nature, the blessed Redeemer offered Himself up in sacrifice for our sins, and now intercedes for us at the right hand of God. As the temple was the place to which all the Jews were to resort, and in which they were to present their addresses to the Majesty of Heaven, Christ, in like manner, is He to whom we draw near by faith; in whose name we are to pray; and on whose availing merits we are to depend for every blessing, both of grace and glory.

Our Lord's prediction was, that the Jews should be permitted to *destroy* this temple; that is, to put Him to death. This they often attempted to do, during the course of His public ministry; and at last, they effected their design.

As I largely considered the circumstances of His crucifixion in my last discourse, and shewed what methods of unexampled cruelty they took *to* destroy Him; I shall not repeat here what has been said already; but pass on to the declaration of Christ, that, after the Jews *had* destroyed the temple of His body, He would raise it again in three days. It is observable that Christ speaks of *Himself* as the person by whose power He should be raised from the dead. "Destroy this temple, and in three days *I* will raise it up." This is one of the many proofs which the Scriptures give us of His true and proper divinity. No power, inferior to that of God, can raise the dead; only that almighty energy which *gave* life at first, can *restore* it when lost. If therefore Christ was the author of His own resurrection, it unavoidably follows, that, in point of omnipotency, and consequently in point of Deity, He must be equal to the Father and the Blessed Spirit.

As in His life, which was spent in teaching mankind the way to safety and happiness, He acted as the *prophet* of His church; and, in His *death*, by which our sins are expiated, and our salvation secured, He acted as the *priest* of His church; so by His *rising again*, he manifested the truth of His *kingly* office. He proved Himself to be, what the apostle calls him, the Prince of Life; that the keys of the grave were in His own keeping, and demonstrated His ability to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by Him.

The great event of His Resurrection, so fundamental to our faith and happiness, was foretold both by the prophets, who prophesied of His Incarnation; and by our Lord Himself, long before He suffered. The Psalmist, speaking in the person of the Mediator, said, "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell"; that is, in the state of the dead; "neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." To the same effect is that passage in the 110th Psalm, relative to the Messiah; "He shall drink of the brook by the way, therefore shall He lift up His head." By His "*drinking of the brook*," is meant, that He should be overwhelmed with the most bitter and unprecedented sufferings; and by "*lifting up His head*," is signified, that He should rise superior to all His afflictions; and particularly that He should evidence the divinity of His person, the infinite merit of His atonement, and the truth of His doctrines, by raising Himself from the bed of death, and triumphing over the king of terrors in his own dominions.

And as His resurrection was prophesied of, so was it also variously typified under the Old Testament dispensation. Isaac was, in this respect, a type of Him. When he was bound and laid upon the altar, and Abraham's hand was lifted to slay him, he was suddenly relieved by a voice from heaven; and therefore, Isaac is said, by the apostle, to have risen from the dead, in a figurative sense. And it is observable, that this, his deliverance from impending death, happened on the *third* day after his father had received a command to slay him.

In like manner, Joseph's release from the dungeon, and advancement to the regency of Egypt; King Hezekiah, who went up well to the temple on the third day after death was

threatened him; the miraculous deliverance of Daniel from the lion's den; and the return of the children of Israel to Jerusalem after the Babylonish captivity; were all so many types of the resurrection of Christ. To which we may add the prophet Jonas, who was another. Our Lord Himself made particular mention of him; and observed, that as Jonas was three days and nights in the whale's belly, just so long, and no longer, should the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth. And, as the *death* of Christ was typified, under the law, by several of the Jewish rites; so also was His resurrection. Thus, for instance, we read in the 14th chapter of Leviticus, that, in order to the legal purification of a leper, two live birds were to be brought to the priest; one of the birds was to be killed, and the other let go. By that which was killed, Christ was shadowed forth as a dying Redeemer; by that which was let go, He was typified as a rising conqueror, in both which capacities it was requisite He should be found, in order to *our* being cleansed from the leprosy of sin.

The resurrection of Christ, as it was, in itself, the most glorious event that ever came to pass, was also productive of the utmost advantage to us. It serves to confirm and strengthen our faith in Him, as the true Messiah and Saviour of sinners. He was buried in a cavern hewn within a rock, which had but one way for entrance, and that, blocked up with a stone of prodigious weight and size. The stone was likewise *sealed* for the greater security, and a watch, or company, consisting of sixty soldiers, was set to guard the sepulchre, night and day; notwithstanding all which obstructions, He raised again the temple of His body, which the Jews thought they had destroyed; and every precaution they took, in hope to prevent His rising, only added to the glory of His triumph, and, as the apostle's words are, "declared Him to be the Son of God with power."

His resurrection is matter of endless consolation to believers, as it was a proof that the sacrifice of Himself, which He offered to God, and the atonement He made for our offences, was accepted in the court of heaven.

Temporal death, no less than eternal, is the wages of sin; and, Christ being sinless, could not have died, if He had not graciously taken our sins upon Himself, and engaged to expiate them. And, as He *died* in a public capacity, as our substitute, so He *rose again* in a public capacity, as our representative. He was delivered for our offences, says St. Paul, and raised again for our justification; inasmuch as He thereby gave the finishing hand to our redemption, and proved that His sufferings answered the end for which He underwent them; and that by them, our transgressions were cancelled, and our iniquities done away. Whereas, supposing Christ had not risen, we could have had no solid reason to conclude that He had fully satisfied His Father's justice for the sins of men. The merit of His death, and His reconciliation of His people unto God, could only be evidenced by the release of Christ, their Surety, from the prison of the tomb.

The resurrection of Christ is a motive to holiness. Hence the apostle says, "If ye be risen with Christ," that is spiritually so, "seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God"; and elsewhere he thus argues. "We are buried with Him, by baptism, into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the

Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." "Knowing," says St. Paul, "that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him; for in that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise also reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The resurrection of Christ was an earnest of *our* resurrection in the day of judgment. So sure as Christ received His body again, so sure shall we receive ours, when the last trumpet summons the earth and sea to give up their dead. Now, says the apostle, is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by Adam came death; by man, that is, by the Man Christ Jesus, came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, as temporal death devolved on all through disobedience; even so in Christ shall all be made alive; all, wicked and righteous, shall be quickened and raised up by His power, from the dust of the earth.

As Christ, after He left His tomb, ascended into heaven, and took possession of His glory; so shall all who trust in Him, be glorified together *with* Him. Their souls are glorified immediately after death; their souls and bodies shall be glorified conjointly in the resurrection of the just; for, as it is in scripture, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again; even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with Him;" which exactly harmonizes with that magnificent prophecy, Isa. xxvi. 19, where Christ is represented as saying to the church, "Thy dead men shall live; together with (or as it may be rendered, *as sure as*) My dead body, shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth her dead."

Hence we are said to be joint-heirs with Christ; that is, to be heirs of the same glory which He is invested with, and of which all His people shall shortly be partakers; and, as the apostle says, "If the spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by His spirit, which dwelleth in you." So that, whether believers look back on their Saviour's resurrection, or, by faith, look forward to their own, they will have the utmost reason to break out into the apostle's triumphant song, "O death, where is thy sting; O grave, where is thy victory?" The ground of which rejoicing is contained in that promise of the Lord, who says, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

As the human nature of Christ was, in the highest sense, a temple of God, so, in a subordinate sense, are the bodies of those that believe in Him. They are temples of His, not by nature, but by grace. Adam, in the state of innocence, was, by creation, a temple holy to the Lord, and continued such, till by transgression he fell. From that moment the living temple was desecrated and profaned; darkness took place of light: sanctity was exchanged for impurity; and the heart of man, from being an habitation of God, became like Rome, the mystic Babylon, "the hold of every foul spirit, and the cage of every unclean and hateful bird." But, in regeneration, the tables are happily reversed: God's converted people return to Him, their first husband; and are made to say, with the church in Isaiah, "Lord, Thou wilt ordain peace for us; for Thou also hast wrought all our

works in us: O Lord our God, other Lords beside Thee have had dominion over us; by Thee will we make mention of Thy name only." Thus, through the efficacious influence of God's Holy Spirit, apostate man is brought back to his first love; and restored to his proper owner. The temple is consecrated anew, the idols are dethroned, and God resumes His seat. Impenitence, unbelief, and the love of sin, fall before the ark of divine grace, while repentance, faith, and sanctification, with all the other fruits of the Holy Ghost are implanted, take root, and spring up to everlasting life.

To those in whom this grand spiritual revolution has begun to be affected, are those declarations of the apostle addressed, 1 Cor. iii. 16. "Know ye not, that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" And again, Eph. ii. 22. "You also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

If not only Christ's *natural* body, but likewise every member of His *mystic* body is thus a temple *sacred* to God, and *inhabited* by Him; what an effectual motive is this, to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world; talk we of the *dignity of human nature*? Alas! It is little more than an empty name, till we are restored to the image of God. There our baseness ends; and *there* true dignity begins; for, what excellence can equal the resemblance of God? And can we experience real dignity till our hearts are *the residence of Deity*? — Again, talk we of man's "natural obligations to virtue?" I grant, that we have, by nature, so much light left us as to distinguish, in many instances, between moral good and moral evil: I grant, likewise, that we are by the law of nature, bound to avoid the one and pursue the other; and, if all did so, it would be better for society, and conduce to the happiness of man's life below. But still, to be "temples of God," is something higher, and something more: it is the *soul's* conformity to the great source of good and *mental* subjection to the Spirit of grace. When He takes possession of the heart, and we experience the guidance and government of Him that created us; *then* we are temples of His building — are the seats of His spiritual empire, and our cry is, with Paul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" or, with Augustine. "Lord, work in me that which Thou commandest, and then command what thou wilt."

Prudential motives may induce us to the performance of actions which have the appearance of virtue; but virtue is then only virtue indeed; righteousness is then only truly such, when it flows from a principle of love to God, wrought in the soul by His renewing grace. And where love to Him is thus wrought *there*, obedience will surely follow: for, to be temples of God implies a *peculiar relation* to God; even such a relation to Him as cannot possibly consist with a life of wilful iniquity. This the apostle more than intimates, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20, "What! Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's". And elsewhere, 2 Cor. vi. 16, 17, "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people; wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord; and touch not the unclean thing." Thus the saints are temples, and this is the consequence of their being such. But, as

our Saviour foretells, that the temple of *His* body would be *destroyed*, or put to death; so will the temple of the believer's body be shortly taken down, and return to dust.

When the Christian has run the race set before him, and finished the work appointed for him to do, the earthly house of his present tabernacle will be dissolved, and thrown aside: the veil of the temple being rent in twain, and the temple itself reduced to a mass of inanimate clay, the soul that lodged in it flies to the holy of holies, and *travelling out from the body, gets home* to the Lord.

But, as one said once upon his deathbed, "To die is not to be lost." Short is the victory of the grave. Every departing saint may, with a little variation, adopt the triumphant words of our blessed Master, and say to sickness, say to pain, say to death itself, "Destroy this temple; but, at the appointed season, God, to whom it belongs, will raise it up." This was the language of Job, and Job's support; "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body," that is, though my frame will be destroyed, and moulder away, one part after another, "yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold"; these very eyes which I now have, shall see Him, "and not another's; though my reins be consumed within me." He who built the bodies of His people, knows and observes every particle of their dust; and will rebuild them more glorious than at first: for, if that which was done away, was, in many respects glorious; when it is put together again, to remain forever, will exceed in glory.

When the bodies of God's elect have slept the time allotted, the Lord will suddenly come to His temples, He himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Of this the ancient Jewish church had as positive assurances given them, as we have under the gospel. Thus Isa. xliii. 5, 6. "Fear not, for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west. I will say to the south, Give up; and to the north, Keep not back; bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth." "As for me," says David, "I shall behold thy presence in righteousness, and when I wake up after thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it."

When God calls home His people to glory, they may, without presumption, sing as the Psalmist did on another occasion, "I will lay me down to sleep in peace, and to take my rest; for thou, O Lord, makest me to dwell in safety."

Death is a long sleep; but, to them, it is a *sweet* sleep, and a *safe* one: though their flesh sees corruption, it rests in hope, and their dust is precious, for it was ransomed by the blood of Christ, sanctified by the Spirit of God, and is part of the Saviour's mystic body: for which reasons it shall not be lost, but will rise from the bed of death incorruptible, when the morning of the resurrection dawns, and the trumpet sounds.

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