WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 42
Eyewitness Reports of Jesus Resurrection
by Ernest O'Neill

Has anyone ever visited our planet from outer space? That is, has there ever been a human being who could prove to us that he actually came from beyond space? Is there anyone who has gone far out into space, far beyond where our satellites go or where our space shots go? Is there anyone who has ever gone as far as the person that made our universe and come back and told us what He is like?

Yes. Yes there is. It's not fantasy. It's not space fiction. There was a man that we all know of from our school days that actually did that. The man is called Jesus. If you say, "Ah, listen. I've heard about that mythological figure before." He is not a mythological figure. Homer may have created mythological figures, but Jesus is a real person who actually lived in the first century.

If you say, "Why do you say that?" it's because some of our most reliable history tells in detail of his life. What reliable history? The reliable history that is gathered together in the books we know as the New Testament, or are gathered together in that book we call the Bible.

You may say, "That isn't reliable history. That's myth. It's ethics and myth. It's religion. It's what my old grandmother used to throw at me to keep me in line." No, it isn't. It's reliable history. Why do I say it? Because when you begin to examine it and compare it with the Greek and Roman histories, you find that it is far more reliable and has far more claim to our belief than any of them.

Why? Because many of them were written years after the events. These things were written at the time of the events by people who observed the events. In other words, they were written by people like Peter, James and John who were alive at the time.

If you say, "Why believe them?" Because they suffered for what they believed. They wrote about this man, Jesus. That was the very thing that caused them to be crucified and caused them, their children and their wives to be led into lion arenas and crucified on crucifixion hills.

If you say, "Well, lots of people have died for something they thought was true." Yes, these men died for something they believed was true and they knew, they knew that this thing was true. If you say, "Well, lots of people think that. There are people in psych wards today who think they're Napoleon." Yes, but they have obvious symptoms of imbalance in their personalities, you'd agree.

They have psychological imbalance that is obvious to everybody, but these men did not make an impression as psychologically imbalanced men. They have made an impression on the world as men of integrity, men of honesty, men of balance, men to be followed as far as an example of living is concerned. In other words, the men that wrote about this person, Jesus, are people that you tend to respect and you tend to trust.

Moreover, people will die for what they think is true, but they will not die for what they know to be a lie. So, these men would not die for a lie that they made up. Whatever they said, they believed with all their heart. If you say, "Well, I mean, maybe it was just in their little village that it all took place." No, this thing was not done in a corner.

This man Jesus did not live in just a little village. He lived all over the land of Palestine and he was known by the Roman officials. In fact, they troubled him. Many other people, including Tacitus and Tertullian, including Josephus and Porphyry and Celsus, including Pliny and many other Greek and Roman writers wrote about this man Jesus and obviously knew that he was alive.

If you say, "Well, is there any other reason for believing that these men wrote the truth? Maybe they made it up? Maybe they exaggerated? Maybe they wanted to become famous so they took an ordinary man that they followed for a while, and they made him out to be something that he wasn't."

Yes, but do you see that the accounts that they wrote of him, particularly of his resurrection from the dead, were circulating while thousands of other people were still alive who had observed him. You could see a real problem there.

If these things had not been written about until hundreds of years later, then maybe everybody would have died whoever knew the man Jesus. But, that's not so. These records started to be circulated as early as 48 A.D. He only died in 29 A.D., just barely 20 years earlier.

Now, obviously, there were lots of people still alive who still knew him and could check it out and could say, "Yes, this was true", or "No, this was untrue". So, there are many strong reasons for believing that what we have in the New Testament is actually true history.

What these men -- Peter, James and John, Mark and the others -- wrote about actually did take place, because there is a logical, psychological and philosophical impossibility in them making up a lie for which they then suffered crucifixion and death, and

somehow pulling the wool over the eyes of thousands of people who were alive at the same time and observed the same things as them. There is an impossibility about that.

You may say, "Well, yes, maybe it does seem that they wrote what they actually saw. Maybe they can be believed. Maybe they are reliable, but that happened years and years ago. Now, how can we know that what we have in these books that you talk about as the New Testament, how can we be sure that what we have is what they wrote?"

"After all, this is 1993, soon to be 2000. These are the nineties. This is near the end of the twentieth century. Now, what you're talking about took place at the beginning of the first century. That is 20 centuries ago. Now, how can we be sure that what we have as the historical record of those days is what they actually wrote?"

"I mean, maybe you're right. Maybe they did write history. Maybe they did write what they observed, but how can we be sure that that has survived down through 2,000 years? I mean, after all, you know how books get lost. You know how books get changed. What's to prevent somebody getting in on the act about 2,000 years ago, or 1500 years ago, or a thousand years ago, and switching the whole history all around so that what we've got is just myth?"

Of course, that kind of thing could have happened in the case of people like Buddha. In fact, he lived about 500 B.C. or earlier, and the first books about him did not appear until five hundred years later. So, of course, during those five hundred years, anybody could have made up any stories about Buddha.

Lots of people that knew him would long ago have been dead, and nobody could have contradicted them. In fact, that's what

you require for the formation of a myth. You require time. You need the passage of time between when the man actually lived and when the books about him were actually produced. So, many of us wonder that about this man Jesus.

Now, let's face it. It's 2,000 years since this man lived. Now, maybe the writers did write truth about him, but how can we be sure that what we have in this Bible is actually what they wrote? Is there any way of being sure that what we have in the New Testament is what they wrote in the first century?

In other words, what about the transmission of the history? Maybe the original history was correct, but can you be sure that the transmission of that history down to our day, down to our present era, has been reliable? Let's talk a little about that tomorrow.