WHAT IS FAITH?

What Jesus Claimed

by Ernest O'Neill Program 30

Have you faith in God? You may say, "I don't bother with that kind of stuff. it's for old women or for those lame dogs who can't make it through life on their own. No, I don't have faith in God! Faith is a whim of the imagination. It's an emotional aberration. It's an intellectual leap in the dark. I don't bother with that kind of thing."

Well, do you trust that the bank still has the money that you deposited last week? Well, yes, of course you do. Well, isn't that faith? Well, yes, its faith, but it's based on evidence. I've observed the bank over the past number of years, and they've always kept the money sagely so I act on the basis of that.

That is what faith in God is. It's not an emotional whim. It's not an intellectual leap in the dark. it's a belief in a reality based on reasonable evidence. Of course, some of the most reasonable evidence of all that there is a God is the existence of the man called Jesus of Nazareth. You may say, "Now wait a minute! First of all, there are plenty of religious leaders -- all kinds of religious leaders. Jesus is just one among many. Now why do you say that he's proof that there is a God?"

It's because no other religious leader claimed to be the only Son of God. That's what Jesus claimed. No other religious leader claimed that he was actually in existence with God before he came here to earth. No other religious leader claimed that he was personally related to God in a unique way, that he was

actually the only begotten Son of God. Jesus claimed this. No other religious leader actually defeated death. Mohammed died. His bones were buried and could be dug up. Buddha died. His bones were buried, and he could be dug up. Confucius, Zoroaster, whoever you think of as a great religious leader, he was buried and death destroyed him finally in the end.

But this Jesus of Nazareth, he was buried you remember and then on the third day after he was buried, he rose from being dead, and he walked around for over a month. He was seen by more than 500 people at one time. On thirteen different occasions he was seen and was touched and examined by people who testified that he was actually alive and that he was not a ghost.

You may say, "Wait a minute! Haven't we done away with that resurrection story years ago?" No! I think we've tried to. We've tried to say that it isn't historical but, in fact, there is no fact that has been examined so carefully in such a concentrated and detailed, historical and literary and legal way, and yet has remained absolutely unquestioned in regard to its historicity. There is no fact that has been examined so carefully as the fact of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth -no fact of our ancient history or our modern history that has been examined so carefully and has come through so unscathed and so absolutely certain and unquestioned.

You may say, "Well, now aren't there other explanations? I mean, maybe he swooned. Maybe Jesus wasn't dead at all. Maybe he just swooned. Then in the cold darkness of the tomb he was Revived." But don't you think that's a tall story you're asking us to believe -- that this man was so overwhelmed by his wounds, bled away so much blood that he actually swooned on the cross, then was put into that tomb, and lay there for three days? then he got up, had the strength (I don't know where you think he got the

strength from), but he had the strength to unbind the grave clothes that bound him. Then he was able to push the heavy stone away from the tomb. He was then able to create such a sense of aliveness and such a sense of health that he was able to travel over thousands of miles in Palestine, appear at different times in different locations very quickly after one another, and convince everybody that he was alive -- more alive than he had ever been before. He did all these things unaided. It's a taller story than the resurrection itself, surely.

Well, you may way, "Yes, but who knows, maybe the Romans stole his body or maybe the Jews stole his body! Maybe they did that so that the disciples would not continue to say that he was alive." Well, why didn't they produce his body? If the Jews stole his body and they wanted to prove that this man wasn't the Messiah, why didn't they just parade it through the streets of put ti on show in the synagogue and say, "Here he is! His disciples say he's alive and Risen from the dead, that he is the Son of God; but he obviously isn't! Here's his body." Why didn't the Romans do the same thing? Why didn't they say, "They're trying to make this man out to be the King of the Jews. They're trying to make out that we killed the Son of the Creator of the world. Here he is! We are parading him through the streets. Here is your Jesus, the one that you say was resurrected!" In fact, they didn't do that. There was no evidence that they had stole the body.

Some of us say, "Oh, well maybe they put him in the wrong tomb. Maybe they buried him in the wrong tomb. Maybe they went to the wrong tomb on resurrection morning. Maybe they forgot where they'd buried him!" It's very difficult to do that in a private cemetery. There was only one grave in that cemetery, and that's the only one where Jesus was buried. It's very difficult to give any explanation for the empty tomb except the historical one, that actually Jesus did Rise from the dead.

Then you have to account for the appearances -- those amazing appearances over a period of more than a month, thirteen different occasions -- appearing at times to a small group, at times to a large group. Some people say of course, "Oh, they were hallucinations. Everybody that thought that they were him, that's what they did. They just thought they saw him. But Jesus' appearances don't fit any of the rules of hallucinations. In hallucinations you have to want to see the person. For instance, a mother who has lost a boy in the war is wanting to see him. She yearns to see him again and suddenly; she's sitting at the kitchen door and she sees him coming through it in her imagination. But these disciples had given up any hope of seeing Jesus. In fact, two of them were walking along the Road to Emmaus, you remember, and they said, "This is the third day and we thought that he was the one that would restore Jerusalem. But he hasn't." So, they had given up all hope.

Jesus appeared to them even when they had given up hope of seeing him, even when they didn't believe that they would ever see him. Hallucinations usually occur over a long period of time but these occurred just over a short period and then were finished with. Hallucinations are usually seen just by one person or a few at one time. But these appearances of Jesus occurred to many different people on many different occasions in broad day light. They occurred to people like Thomas who were very skeptical and unbelieving and were so sure that Jesus was not alive that he wouldn't believe it until he had actually felt the holes in Jesus' hands and in his side.

Such was the evidence that this man Jesus of Nazareth actually rose from the dead. His appearances and his empty tomb have no other explanation that is not in itself more difficult to believe than the actual resurrection itself. This man Jesus of Nazareth defeated and destroyed death and surely was the Son of the Creator of our world.