

## **CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER**

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**Series: Resurrection Sunday**  
**Number: 1**  
**Text: I Corinthians 15:3-19; John 10:1-30**  
**Date: April 4, 2010 (a.m.)**

**Pastor/Teacher**  
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### **The Third Day He Rose Again From the Dead**

**T**he New Testament does not discuss the sufferings of Christ in either an abstract or a sentimental fashion. Rather, the focus is on the meaning, significance, and purpose of His suffering. The writers of the New Testament clearly indicate, as the late G. C. Berkouwer has written, "that His suffering was not senseless, tragic or hopeless. This becomes especially manifest in the historical fact of his passage from humiliation to exaltation, Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead. It is impossible to separate the fact from the significance of the resurrection, as though the main thing were the idea rather than the historical reality of the resurrection. The Scriptures present the message of Christ's resurrection as being of essential and decisive significance. Again and again the apostolic message calls our attention to both the crucifixion *and* the resurrection. The fact of the cross is followed by the 'but' of the fact of the resurrection. This 'but' expresses the joy and superior power of God's activity in the glorification of the Son of man Acts 2:23; 3:11f.; 4:10; 13:29."<sup>1</sup>

The resurrection of Christ is directly linked to the nature and purpose for his suffering and death. Jesus' suffering was most severe at the end of his life on earth. The people turned away from him—his disciples deserted him—his Father forsook him. There are depths in this suffering that we cannot fathom. Then we think of what happened in Gethsemane and on Golgotha and of the way in which Jesus then put into words what went on in his mind.

Christ's suffering was incomparably severe, because, "He bore . . . the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 15). God's wrath is God's reaction to sin, his holy abhorrence of all that is sinful and of everyone who commits sin. Jesus was willing to experience this wrath.

We must "abhor (ourselves) and humble (ourselves) before God, considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great that he, rather than to leave it unpunished, has punished it in his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, with the bitter and shameful death of the cross." We may thank God for it that he gave us his "only begotten Son for a Mediator and sacrifice for our sins" (liturgy for the Lord's Supper).

If Jesus had been merely human, he would not have been able to perform this ministry of mediation. By the power of his Godhead he was able to bear in his human nature the burden of God's wrath (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 6).

When it is asked why he "had to humble himself even unto death," the answer is that "satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise than by the death of the Son of God" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 16).

It is in line with God's righteousness and the Word of God (Gen. 2:17) that sin calls for the death penalty. God cannot leave sin unpunished. "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Why then did Christ, who knew no sin, die? Paul says: God "hath made him to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21). The apostle implies that he was treated as a sinner in our stead, because our sins were

imputed to him. The church has confessed from the very beginning “that Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3).

He who had to and desired to pay our debt was not spared anything, not even death on the cross. This guarantees the salvation of all his people. This was expressed as follows in the Canons of Dort: “The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin, and is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world” (2.3).<sup>2</sup>

This past week marked the beginning of the holiest week for Christians – when believers reflect on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. This year, there’s something of dust-up among evangelicals over core beliefs about who Jesus was and whether he is the only way to salvation. At the center of the storm is Brian McLaren and his book, A New Kind of Christianity (Harpers, 2010). Time magazine dubbed McLaren, “one of the country’s most influential evangelicals,” and his new book, A New Kind of Christianity, takes aim at some core doctrinal beliefs. National Public Radio recently did a piece on McLaren and reported that “McLaren is rethinking Jesus’ mission on Earth, and even the purpose of the crucifixion. ‘The view of the cross that I was given growing up, in a sense, has a God who needs blood in order to be appeased,’ McLaren says, ‘If this God doesn’t see blood, God can’t forgive.’ McLaren believes that version of God is a misreading of the Bible. ‘God revealed in Christ crucified shows us a vision of God that identifies with the victim rather than the perpetrator, identifies with the one suffering rather than the one inflicting suffering.’ He says. McLaren says modern evangelicalism underplays that Jesus—who spent most of his time with the poor, the sick and the sinners—saved his wrath primarily for hard-core religious leaders. Others, such as Al Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, say McLaren’s view of Jesus and the crucifixion is like a shot to the heart of Christian beliefs. ‘Did Jesus go to the cross as a mere victim? If so, then we have no Gospel, we have no hope of everlasting life,’ Mohler says. ‘Did Jesus go merely as a political prisoner, executed because he had offended the regime? Well, if so, that’s a very interesting chapter of human history, but I’m not going to stake my life on it, much less my hope for eternity.’ Mohler says McLaren and others like him are trying to rewrite the Christian story. And what alarms Mohler is that young believers are attracted to this message. That’s absolutely right, says McLaren. Consider the core evangelical belief that only Christians are going to heaven and everyone else is doomed. That may have rung true for his grandparents’ generation, he says, but not now. ‘A young evangelical, Roman Catholic (or) mainline Protestant growing up in America today, if he goes to college, his roommate might be Hindu,’ he says. ‘His roommate might be Muslim. His roommate might be Buddhist or atheist. So, suddenly the ‘other’ is sleeping across the room.’ McLaren is onto something here, says David Campbell, a professor at Notre Dame and co-author of American Grace: How Religion is Reshaping Our Civic and Political Lives. His surveys show that nearly two-thirds of evangelicals under 35 believe non-Christians can go to heaven, but only 39 percent of those over age 65 believe that. That’s because young evangelicals have grown up in a religiously plural society. ‘And, it’s really hard to condemn someone to eternal damnation on the basis of their religion when you know them well and have come to love them,’ he says. Campbell adds that young believers are more flexible about Christian doctrine in general. ‘We also know that—particularly within the evangelical community—the younger you are, the less likely you are to take the Bible literally, to believe that the Bible is the inerrant ‘word of God,’ as compared to a book of moral precepts,’ he says. Surveys by Campbell and others show young evangelicals differ from their elders in a lot of ways. They pray less often, read the Bible and go to church less often. And they’re more open to culture and social issues, such as evolution and gay rights.”<sup>3</sup>

Christ’s resurrection cannot be properly understood outside the Apostolic framework with its detailed emphasis on the nature of his atoning work on the cross.

## I. THE VERACITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Despite the claims of the outspoken atheist Christopher Hitchens, no serious modern historian or New Testament scholar (even those identified with the infamous *Jesus Seminar*) doubts that Jesus was in fact a real historical figure and that He was crucified.<sup>4</sup> The veracity of Christ's *bodily* resurrection from the dead is evident from the gospel records (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20). Mike Horton correctly notes, "The claims of the disciples are not made on the level of psychology, anthropology, morality, sociology, marketing, or even—at least initially—theology. They are historical claims. The eye-witnesses do not tell us about private experiences that they had, encouraging us to experience the same things: 'You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.' Nor are their claims based on the relevance of the events: 'Jesus changes my life and he can change yours too.' The disciple's witness, unlike much of what we hear in Christian circles, was more like legal testimony than a pitch for a product or an interview on a talk-show. The court was to make its judgment, not on the basis of the psychological or moral impact of these experiences, but on the basis of whether or not these events which the eye-witnesses reported actually took place."<sup>5</sup>

### A. The Recorded Testimonies

The angels (Matthew 28:5-7; Luke 24:7), the Roman guards (Matthew 28:11), the Apostles (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 for a sample listing of Christ's post-resurrection appearances). In the Book of Acts there are over *twenty* references to the resurrection. "The number," declares Wilbur Smith, ". . . will amaze anyone who has not given this particular point serious consideration (see, e.g., 1:1-3, 22; 2:24, 30-33; 3:15, 26; 4:10, 33; 5:30; 10:40, 41; 13:23, 30, 31, 33, 37; 17:3, 18, 31; 26:22, 23)."<sup>6</sup>

## II. THE NECESSITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

"The core of the matter is not reached till it is perceived that the Resurrection of Jesus is not simply an external seal or evidential appendage to the Christian gospel, but enters as a *constitutive element* into the very essence of that Gospel. Its denial or removal would be the mutilation of the Christian doctrine of Redemption, of which it is an integral part."<sup>7</sup>

### A. For the Fulfillment of Prophecy

Christ, on the road to Emmaus, declared to the two disciples, "Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself" (Luke 24:26-27).

## III. THE EFFICACY AND BENEFIT OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Christ is not simply a grandiose display of God's miraculous power. It did demonstrate the power of God (Ephesians 1:19, 20), but it was not done like some Steven Spielberg special effect. Christ's resurrection was the public declaration of our acquittal before God. "Just as our sins and Christ's death are closely related, so there is an intimate relationship between Christ's resurrection and our justification"<sup>8</sup> (cf. Romans 5:9, 19).

### A. Our Justification

Christ's resurrection demonstrates that His death atoned for our sins. Listen to the wisdom of the Dutch Puritan, Wilhelmus à Brakel. "Let such a person go to God and ask the Lord, while pleading upon the resurrection of Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 3:21), 'Are not my sins punished? Has not my guilt been atoned for? Has not my Surety risen from the dead and thus entered into rest? Art not Thou my reconciled God and Father? Am I not at peace with Thee?' May such a person thus wrestle to apply all this to himself on the basis of the promises made to all who receive Christ by faith, until he experiences the power of Christ's resurrection unto his justification and being at peace with God."<sup>9</sup>

## B. Our Sanctification

This is Paul's point in Romans 6:4-5. The same emphasis is stressed in Colossians 3:1. The Christian is to live a new life, one that manifests the reality of the resurrection.

**CONCLUSION:** Brian McLaren wants to affirm Christ's resurrection but he categorically rejects the doctrine that Christ's death was in any way a penal substitutionary atonement. But one is of necessity linked with the other and they cannot be separated. Note our Lord's language in John 10 and 11. It is the first time, since John 3 that Jesus explicitly explains His death. He has certainly mentioned His death in His interactions with the Jews who do not believe, but He did so under the veiled language of "going away." He was going away by means of His death and resurrection. But after He gives the blind man sight—illustrating the sight He came to give the spiritually blind—He immediately explains the nature of His work more clearly. "The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep;" "Therefore the Father loves Me because I lay down My life and take it again. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again;" etc. Then in chapter 11, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, and says, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in Me, though he die yet he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." The resurrection from the dead. There is, then, a structure of Jesus predicting, first in parabolic form, then in the form of a miracle. Jesus was explaining the centrality of these two most important aspects of His work—His atoning death for the sheep, and His representative, bodily resurrection from the dead.<sup>10</sup>

The great Scottish theologian, Hugh Martin, keenly observed, "There was immediate action of Christ in His death and it was official and public action. Private, or personal, or individual lit could not be; for in that case His holiness was at once a legal bar to divine justice smiting Him in death, and a moral bar to His unauthorized parting with His life Himself. It was public and official action. He was not merely charged with a cause, but with an *office*, and with a people in that office to personate; not merely with a cause to maintain, but with the interests of a people whom He should represent, and redeem by representing them. His action was priestly and representative action; representative of persons—of persons definitely, numerically, individually known:--'I know my sheep.' And the representative priestly action *in itself* was simply what Jesus adds:--'And I lay down my life for the sheep.' That is not *result*; result never can in the nature of things express the intrinsic causal action. That is not result: it is Christ's immediate dying action itself. And it is *Redemption*—not removal of bars. The very and immediate action of Christ in dying for His people is intrinsically their *redemption*. He offers Himself to God for them a sacrifice for their sins; and herein He offers them to God with Himself. And it cannot be too emphatically affirmed, or too gratefully believed, or too resolutely contended, that this *is* their redemption—their redemption, efficacious, complete, and infallible. While mere 'removal of bars' is a mockery, and the theory thereof leaves utterly unanswered the question, What did Christ *do* in dying? It recognizes no action, and consequently no priestly action, in the Cross. It overthrows the Priesthood of our Lord."<sup>11</sup> How true! McLaren wants a resurrected Christ minus His Priesthood—which is impossible.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, Studies in Dogmatics: The Work of Christ (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, Concise Reformed Dogmatics (P & R 2008) p. 479-81.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125165061&ps=cprs>

<sup>4</sup> See the massive amount of evidence and documentation by Craig Blomberg, The Historical Reliability of the Gospels (IVP, 1989). He correctly notes that "much skepticism about the gospels' reliability stems from faulty methods used in analyzing the gospels or from faulty presuppositions on which those methods depend," p. XVIII. Cf. D. J. Theron, Evidence of Tradition (rpt. Baker 1957).

<sup>5</sup> M. Horton, In the Face of God: The Dangers & Delights of Spiritual Intimacy (Word, 1996), p. 111. The evidence for the historical existence of Jesus is overwhelming.

<sup>6</sup> W. M. Smith, The Supernaturalness of Christ, (rpt. Baker, 1978), p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> James Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1980), p. 274.

<sup>8</sup> Herman Bavinck, Our Reasonable Faith, (rept. Baker, 1956), p. 370.

<sup>9</sup> W. à Brakel, The Christian's Reasonable Service I (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), p. 632.

<sup>10</sup> I owe this insight to my friend Nick Batzig, cf. <http://www.feedingonechrist.com/death-and-resurrection-in-johns-gospel/>

<sup>11</sup> Hugh Martin, The Atonement (rpt. Knox Press, 1976) p. 102.