

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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The Mercies of God and Christ's Resurrection (Part I)

Carl Sagan gained an international reputation as one of the world's most recognized scientists due to his exposure on national television programs like *The Tonight Show*. His *NY Times* best seller *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage* also became an award-winning television series. He published more than 600 scientific papers and articles and authored over 20 books. He was outspoken in his criticism of religion, believing that evolution could account for all life forms. He was especially a zealous advocate in promoting the universal search for extra-terrestrial intelligence (SETI). He wrote the novel *Contact*, which was the basis for the movie in 1997 with Jodie Foster. His wife, Ann Druyan wrote a piece on her husband for *The Committee for Skeptical Inquiry* in which she eulogized her late husband and continued to advocate his views - especially on religion. "When my husband died, because he was so famous and known for not being a believer, many people would come up to me-it still sometimes happens-and ask me if Carl changed at the end and converted to a belief in an afterlife. They also frequently ask me if I think I will see him again. Carl faced his death with unflagging courage and never sought refuge in illusions. The tragedy was that we knew we would never see each other again. I don't ever expect to be reunited with Carl. But, the great thing is that when we were together, for nearly twenty years, we lived with a vivid appreciation of how brief and precious life is. We never trivialized the meaning of death by pretending it was anything other than a final parting. Every single moment that we were alive and we were together was miraculous-not miraculous in the sense of inexplicable or supernatural. We knew we were beneficiaries of chance... . That pure chance could be so generous and so kind... . That we could find each other, as Carl wrote so beautifully in *Cosmos*, you know, in the vastness of space and the immensity of time... . That we could be together for twenty years. That is something which sustains me and it's much more meaningful... . The way he treated me and the way I treated him, the way we took care of each other and our family, while he lived. That is so much more important than the idea I will see him someday. I don't think I'll ever see Carl again. But I saw him. We saw each other. We found each other in the cosmos, and that was wonderful. Now Carl's fever raged. I kept kissing him and rubbing my face against his burning, unshaven cheek. The heat of his skin was oddly reassuring. I wanted to do it enough so that his vibrant, physical self would become an indelibly etched sensory memory....I sit surrounded by cartons of mail from people all over the planet who mourn Carl's loss. Many of them credit him with their awakenings. Some of them say that Carl's example has inspired them to work for science and reason against the forces of superstition and fundamentalism. These thoughts comfort me and lift me up out of my heartache. They allow me to feel, without resorting to the supernatural, that Carl lives.¹" Patrick Chan in a perceptive analysis of Druyan's reflections wrote, "Given Druyan's worldview, love itself is a sort of illusion foisted upon us to achieve the continuation of our species. Shouldn't she refuse to take "refuge" in such an "illusion"? Shouldn't she face the truth head-on, flinty-eyed and stone-faced? Given Druyan's worldview, not to mention Sagan himself saying stuff like we are nothing more than a collection of atoms, how is Druyan's panegyric for Sagan substantively different than a little child mourning the loss of a sandcastle as the tides wash it away? What's telling is how Druyan's words expose her longing for that which is lasting and everlasting. She lives knowing all things must end, yet she yearns for more. Some may think there's an achingly beautiful, enchanting quality to Druyan's words. But to me her words are at best like moss decorating dead wood. Or worse, like sirens

calling to Odysseus. Where's the allure when the truth steals away life and love? Fairy tales tell of princesses kissing frogs who turn into Prince Charming to wed and live happily ever after. That's enchanting. But how would it be enchanting to learn we're all just frogs, and there's no Prince Charming?² Ann Druyan fits perfectly the description the Apostle Paul gave us in I Thess. 4:13 - those who grieve because they have no hope. Paul tells the Thessalonians that their hope for those who they loved and have now died (fallen asleep) is ground in Jesus' death and resurrection. The 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)."³ The resurrection of Christ, is *the* cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, a point underscored by the Apostle Paul—"if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless⁴ and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

I. THE VERACITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

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.⁵ 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).

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)."⁶

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."⁷

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"⁸ (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."⁹

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: Michael Horton, in one of his many books, writes as follows: "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 changed 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."¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ *Ann Druyan Talks About Science, Religion, Wonder, Awe...and Carl Sagan* (Vol. 27.6 Nov/Dec 2003)

² <http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2013/03/happily-never-after.html>

³ G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Work of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 181.

⁴ The word translated "useless" in the NIV, and "vain" in the ESV, is KENOS. It means empty, without content, basis, truth or power, without result or profit, an illusion or delusion. Paul uses the word here and elsewhere (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 2:16) to suggest that under certain circumstances, certain things would be pointless, fruitless, or in vain.

⁵ See the massive amount of evidence and documentation by Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (IVP, 1987). 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.

⁶ W. M. Smith, *The Supernaturalness of Christ*, (rpt. Baker, 1978), p. 192.

⁷ James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1980), p. 274.

⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, (rpt. Baker, 1956), p. 370.

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

¹⁰ M. Horton, *In the Face of God: The Dangers & Delights of Spiritual Intimacy* (Word, 1996), p. 111.