

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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

Officials from the American intelligence community recently told a Senate hearing that computer networks across the United States face a threat of cyberattack from hostile governments, hackers, and terrorists. "It's hard to overemphasize its significance," Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said. "These capabilities put all sectors of our country at risk—from government and private networks to critical infrastructures." And cyberattack is far from the only threat, according to the annual intelligence review. Other reasons for angst:

- Terrorism and organized crime from decentralized enemies;
- Nuclear weapons in the hands of hostile regimes from North Korea to Iran;
- Attacks on interests in outer space vital for communications, surveillance, and navigation;
- Pandemics caused by mutating pathogens;
- Threats to our supplies of food, water, energy, and minerals;
- Economic deterioration caused by a crisis in Europe.

Despite our relative prosperity, our emphasis on self-esteem, our investments in personal and financial security, our boundless expenditures on health and fitness, our industries of fun and entertainment, we are a nation gripped by fear, angst, and uncertainty. Followers of Jesus Christ, of all people, have reason *not* to despair. On the night of the Lord's impending departure, however, despair was in the air. "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace," Jesus told his disciples in the upper room. "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Have peace. Take heart. In the world. Amid tribulation. Don't fear or despair. Why? Because Christ has overcome the world. How?<sup>1</sup> The resurrection of Christ declares it to be so. What is the significance of Christ's resurrection? What does it prove? The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is clearly portrayed in the New Testament as a *historical* event. The four Gospels give accounts of the appearances of the risen Christ to various followers. It was the basis of the church's faith and indeed of its very existence (1 Corinthians 15:3-19). If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then the Christian faith is absolutely worthless. "This argument of the Apostle Paul," declares Colin Brown, "is not an argument from *what may be* to *what must be*, or from necessity to fact. It is, rather, a stark recognition of the futility of Christianity if Christ has not been raised from the dead."<sup>2</sup> The Apostle Paul reasons hypothetically in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. If Christ is not raised then neither will believers be. "Such a denial, if true, means that Paul's preaching is empty (v. 14) and the faith of his hearers empty and futile (vv. 14, 17). It means that believers are still in their sins (v. 17), that those who are dead have perished (v. 18) and that those who are living are objects for special pity (v. 19). On the other hand, he can reverse the line of argument by reasoning directly from a denial of the resurrection of believers to a denial of the resurrection of Christ (vv. 13, 15, 16.)"<sup>3</sup> The resurrection of Christ is then, in a very real sense, absolutely decisive for Christianity. What kind of Christianity would we have without the Resurrection? Many people today hardly think about such things. To them Christianity is simply a set of moral teachings or standards that have little, if anything, to do with dogmas like those set forth in the Apostle's Creed. But think about it. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then why did the Apostles go throughout the then known world preaching (and being exiled and killed) that He did rise from the dead? If Jesus did not rise from the dead, what are we to conclude about His teachings and claims? "We have in the Gospels," declared

Machen, “an account of a Person who was entirely unique. He was totally different from other men in His moral purity and strength. Yet He made the most stupendous claims – claims that place Him beyond the bounds of sanity unless the claims were true. The claims are true if the resurrection really happened; they are a hopeless puzzle if the resurrection did not happen.”<sup>4</sup>

## I. THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul’s references to the resurrection of Christ are numerous (Romans 1:4; 6:4-10; 8:11, 34; 10:9; 14:9, 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:3-8, 12-23, 32, 57; 2 Corinthians 4:14; 5:15; 13:4; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:20; 4:10; Philippians 2:9; 3:10; Colossians 2:12; 3:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:14; 1 Timothy 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:8, 11). Some have argued that although Paul had a lot to say about the resurrection of Christ, this was not central to his preaching. Paul’s preaching focused on fallen man’s need for restoration or justification and, indeed, justification is critical to understanding Paul’s thought. But the resurrection is critical to this concern. “For Paul, the resurrection stands in the centre of the gospel as a gospel of justification – of deliverance from the guilt of sin. To him, the one religious question which overshadows in importance all others is the question: ‘How shall a sinful man become righteous in the sight of God?’ Now if the resurrection of Christ had nothing to contribute towards the solution of this one stupendous problem, then (whatever significance in other connections might belong to it) it could scarcely be said to be of the heart of the gospel. It would have to recede into the shadow of the cross.”<sup>5</sup>

## II. PAUL’S PREACHING: THE THESSALONIANS

These epistles have long been recognized as among the earliest of Paul’s writings and rich in unfolding the theme of the Coming of the Lord.

### A. The Thrust of Paul’s Preaching to Gentiles

When addressing a Jewish audience, the Apostle would appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures and preach Jesus as the promised Messiah. But in preaching to strictly Gentiles whose knowledge of the revelation of God in the Old Testament was, with very few exceptions, absolutely non-existent, Paul appealed to their conscience. He preached Jesus as the One through whom God would judge the world (cf. Acts 17:24-31; 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10). Thus the Second Advent becomes an evangelistic tool in the hands of the Apostle to the Gentiles.

### B. The Second Advent and the Resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14)

The Christians at Thessalonica believed in the resurrection of Christ. Paul did not need to labor that point. The problem with the Thessalonians was that they did see the importance of this doctrine and what Christ’s resurrection implies.

### C. Consolations from Christ’s Resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17)

The Thessalonians labored under the mistaken impression that those who die *before* the Second Coming lose out and do not share in the glories accompanying Christ’s return. To correct the misunderstanding, Paul introduces what he has to say with the expression, “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant.”<sup>6</sup> Paul brings them quick consolation in telling them that those who have *fallen asleep* (a Christian euphemism for death) will not miss out. They will be raised by the Lord and will return with Him (verse 14). Note how the Apostle unfolds this theme. He declares that those who are alive and are left unto the coming of Christ shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. The Lord Jesus will come with a *shout*,<sup>7</sup> and with an archangel’s voice, and with a blast of the trumpet of God which will pierce even the grave. The dead in Christ rise to meet their coming Lord and those who are alive are *caught up*<sup>8</sup> to meet Him in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord (verse 17).

This passage speaks great comfort to believers. It speaks of a bliss that we cannot begin to imagine. It speaks of eternal bliss and of eternal judgment. Christ Jesus, who died and rose from the dead, has ascended on high where He sits at the right hand of the Father. One day He shall rise from His throne

and shall return to this earth. The Apostle Paul was certain of this. Christ will assuredly come and bring destruction (1 Thess. 5:3) upon all who are appointed unto wrath (1 Thess. 5:9) and joyous rest and salvation to all those who call upon His name (1 Thess. 5:1). Meanwhile, His people are to be found alert and self-controlled, being active in our Christian faith (1 Thess. 5:6-11).

### III. CHRIST'S OWN PREDICTIONS OF HIS RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus is something that our Lord made reference to over and over again during his public ministry. Early in his ministry, immediately after the cleansing of the temple, our Lord said to the Jews of Jerusalem, "Destroy this temple, and in three days, I will raise it up.... He spoke of the temple of His body" (John 2:19,21). During the second period of His Galilean ministry, after the healing of the demoniac, He declared, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth: (Matt. 12:40). Immediately following Peter's great confession, we read that "Jesus began to show unto His disciples how that . . . the third day He must be raised up" (Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). This prophecy was repeated immediately after the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:23; Mark 9:31). Just before Passion Week, our Lord emphatically once again predicted that, on "the third day" He should be raised up (Matthew 20:19; Mark 10:34; Luke 18:33). Once during Passion Week, following the Lord's supper, He revealed His unwavering faith in this stupendous miracle, speaking of events to take place, "after I am raised up" (Matthew 26:32; Mark 14:28).

### IV. THE RESURRECTION IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

"All four of the Gospels," writes Wilbur Smith, "conclude with the supernatural event in our Lord's life, climaxing in the Ascension."<sup>9</sup> The burial of Christ is recorded in Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42. The actual Resurrection itself is recorded in Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-13. The appearances of our Lord during the forty days immediately following His Resurrection are recorded in Matthew 28:9-20; Mark 16:9-20; Luke 24:12-53; John 20:14-21,25. As the four Gospels conclude with an account of Christ's appearances, so the book of Acts opens with a brief reference to these appearances (Acts 1:3-11). "More space is devoted in the gospels to an account of Christ's Resurrection than to any other one aspect of our Lord's entire life, except His trial and crucifixion."<sup>10</sup>

### V. THE DOCTRINAL SIGNIFICANCE

The New Testament emphatically teaches that the death of Christ is the *only* means of salvation (cf. Matthew 20:28; 26:26-28; John 3:14-16). Redemption could only be accomplished by the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. How does the resurrection relate to this? Is there any vital connection? The New Testament *always* places the death and resurrection of Christ together (cf. Romans 8:34; 4:25; 1 Peter 1:21; 3:18-22; Hebrews 13:20; Revelation 1:18).

#### A. The Connection is Essential to Christ's Work as Redeemer.

The *resurrection* is the natural and necessary *completion* of the work of redemption. Christ's death as an atonement for sins would not be secured if He had remained subject to death and corruption (cf. Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19 where Jesus links His death with His resurrection). The resurrection was bodily. Redemption includes the redemption of the body.

#### B. The Connection is Essential to the Father's Seal on Christ as Redeemer.

The resurrection declared that the Father had accepted Christ's work on behalf of sinners. It was a public demonstration of Christ's divine Sonship and Messiahship (Romans 1:4). "The ground of acceptance," said James Orr, "was the obedience unto death upon the cross, but it was the resurrection which gave the joyful confidence that the work had accomplished its result."<sup>11</sup>

C. The Connection Essential to Christ as the Risen and Exalted Lord of All.

The resurrection along with the ascension constitutes Christ's exaltation (Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20-22; 3:9,10; Hebrews 4:14; 10:12; 1 Peter 3:21-22). In Acts 2:33 the resurrection and exaltation are connected with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

**CONCLUSION:** The New Testament attaches tremendous significance to the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was not a resuscitation. Jesus did not resume His former life after experiencing a *clinical death*. "Such resuscitations are well documented both in ancient literature and today. Such were the revivals performed by Elijah on the widow of Sarepta's child (1 Kings 17:17-24), and by Jesus on Lazarus (John 11:17-44) and the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-16). A resuscitation is excellent news for the patient and family. But it is not "good news" that affects everyone else. It does not begin a religion. It does not transform the lives of others across the ages. It is not what is being claimed by the first Christians."<sup>12</sup>

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Chris Castaldo, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/files/2013/the-death-of-despair>

<sup>2</sup> C. Brown, *That You May Believe: Miracles and Faith Then and Now* (Eerdmans, 1985), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> R.B. Gaffin, Jr. *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Baker, 1978), p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> J.G. Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World* (Eerdmans, 1947), p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> G. Vos, *Grace & Glory* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), p. 157. He goes on to add, "As a matter of fact, this frequently takes place in our minds when we think of the forgiveness of sins. That justification depends on the cross is one of the common-places of our evangelical belief; so much so that we hardly deem it necessary to ask whether the resurrection perhaps may not have an equally important bearing on this great concern of our souls with the righteousness of God."

<sup>6</sup> This is a phrase Paul uses elsewhere (cf. Romans 1:13; 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1, 2 Corinthians 1:8). It is a polite way of saying, "You are very uninformed!"

<sup>7</sup> The word KELEUMA was used of a ship's master shouting orders to the crew or of a commander giving orders to his troops. It denotes a loud authoritative cry, often uttered in the thick of great excitement. Cf. F. Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Zondervan, 1982), p. 599.

<sup>8</sup> This is where our concept of rapture comes from. The word HARPAZŌ means to snatch up, to seize and carry off with swiftess. We have been bombarded over the last few decades with books and preachers proclaiming the rapture of the church as preceding the great tribulation. The respected New Testament scholar, Leon Morris, issued this caution: "This is the only place in the New Testament which speaks unambiguously of the rapture (there are other places which may justly be held to refer to it when it is established by this passage, but none which is sufficient to establish it). Therefore we must not be unduly dogmatic about it. Had we an abundance of detail recorded we could say a great deal. But we have no more than a few simple facts, and we must not read our pet theories into them." *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Eerdmans, 1959), p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> W.M. Smith, *The Supernaturalness of Christ* (Baker, 1974), p. 191.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> J. Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1980), p. 278.

<sup>12</sup> L.T. Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (Harper Collins, 1996), p. 134.