

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	50		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	John 11:25, 26; Acts 2:23, 24		
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CHRIST OUR LIFE

There is a popular hymn, one that most of you, if not all of you, have sung. It is the hymn “He Lives.” In many ways, it is a fine Christian hymn – but it does contain a phrase in the chorus that, in my opinion, is absolutely deplorable. It is the very last line, “You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.” Speaking apologetically, this is a weak defense of the resurrection of Christ! Perhaps the writer of the hymn, Alfred H. Ackley, intended otherwise, but as it stands, this sentiment has been (and still is) used to interpret the resurrection of Christ in *ONLY* a spiritual sense. Note the words of B. B. Warfield as he describes this type of *unmiraculous Christianity*. “Accordingly, we have now for more than a whole generation been told over and over again, and with ever-increasing stridency of voice, that it makes no manner of difference whether Jesus rose from the dead or not. The main fact, we are told, is not whether the body that was laid in the tomb was resuscitated. Of what religious value, we are asked, can that purely physical fact be to any man? The main fact is that Jesus – that Jesus who lived in the world a life of such transcendent attractiveness, going about doing good, and by His unshaken and unshakable faith in providence revealed to men the love of a Father-God – this Jesus, though He underwent the inevitable experience of change which men call death, yet still lives. Lives! – lives in His Church; or at least lives in that heaven to which He pointed us as the home of our Father, and to which we may all follow Him from the evils of this life; or in any event lives in the influence which His beautiful and inspiring life still exerts upon His followers and through them in the world. This, this, we are told, is the fact of real religious value; the only fact upon which the religious emotions can take hold; by which the religious life can be quickened; and through which we may be impelled to religious effort and strengthened in religious endurance.”¹ Peter understood the resurrection in an entirely different light than that suggested by the hymn, “He Lives.”

- I. **THE HISTORICAL FACT: “WHOM GOD RAISED UP.”** Christianity is built upon an *historical* event. It was not something that was invented; it was something that *happened*. Note how this is recorded in the pages of the New Testament. The Gospel writers recorded the resurrection as historical fact. They do not attempt to *prove* it or *explain* it. They simply state what they saw and heard and what happened to them. The account in John 20:1-9 is typical. Here we read of three individuals at the empty tomb: Mary Magalene, Peter, and John. Mary concluded that someone had stolen the body. She “saw” (the word is *blepo*, to glance at, see quickly) from the outside of the tomb.² Peter “saw” (the word is *theoreo*, a close examination). He looked at all the details very carefully but remained puzzled. John “saw” (the word is *eidon*, to look), and *believed*. He understood the *meaning* of the empty tomb and immediately came to the conviction that Jesus was alive. All three saw (1) that the stone was rolled away (not to let Jesus out but to let witnesses in), and (2) they saw the tomb was empty and the grave clothes lying undisturbed.
- II. **THE DIVINE APPROVAL: “FREEING HIM FROM THE AGONY OF DEATH.”** What does this mean?
 - A. **The Atoning Sacrifice of Christ was Valid.** The Father placed His “amen” on the Son’s “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30). “Jesus laid His sacrifice before the Father’s Throne. The Father

accepted it and raised Him from the dead.”³ Richard Gaffin, one of my professors at Westminster, makes this important point: “It is, then, not only meaningful but necessary to speak of the resurrection as the redemption of Christ. The resurrection is nothing if not his deliverance from the power and curse of death which was in force until the moment of being raised. Here too the adamic factor is pivotal. The resurrection is the salvation of Jesus as the last Adam; it and no other event in his experience is the point of *his* transition from wrath to grace. This does not at all imply that Paul compromises the absolute necessity and intrinsic efficacy of Christ’s death (as an atonement). It does mean, however, that he does not confuse the ransom price, no matter how sublime and precious, with what is secured by its payment. To Paul’s way of thinking, as long as Christ remains dead, Satan and sin are triumphant, or, more broadly, the dominion of the old aeon remains unbroken. Strictly speaking, not Christ’s death, but his resurrection (that is, his exaltation) marks the completion of the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption.”⁴

- B. *The Basis For Our Acceptance With God Secured.* This is Paul’s point in Rom. 4:24, 25. Christ’s resurrection is the basis for our future bodily resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15). It means that Christ’s righteousness is ours by faith.

NOTE: The resurrection of Christ is **not** the ground of the forgiveness of sin. Our sins were blotted out by Christ’s death, by the shedding of His blood; Jesus rose from the dead to *guarantee* our justification.⁵ Furthermore, as Donald Guthrie has rightly observed, there is a sense in which the astonishing development of an exalted view of Christ can be traced back to the impetus of the resurrection. Yet, as he goes on to remark, the resurrection without the ascension would be incomplete; demonstrating the conquest of death, but not exaltation. Is it then possible that this latter aspect of the resurrection-exaltation complex – the ascension of Jesus – can have provided the decisive impetus to the worship of Jesus that the resurrection appearances alone leave unexplained? When we turn to the account of the significance of the ascension in Peter’s speech in Acts 2 we appear to be offered an affirmative answer to this question. We shall first examine, then, the claim made by the Pentecost speech with respect to the ascension; and subsequently we shall have to enquire whether what Luke attributes to Peter can plausibly be defended as representative of the early church’s view of the import of the exaltation of Jesus.⁶

- III. **THE PERFECT VICTORY: “BECAUSE IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR DEATH TO KEEP ITS HOLD ON HIM.”** Christ conquered death. Why was it impossible for death to hold Him? To answer this, consider the question: Why did Jesus go to the cross to die in the first place?⁷ The New Testament declares that Christ **died** for sinners (Rom. 5:6, 8; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 2:24; Heb. 9:28). This was the reason for His coming (Mark 10:45). His death was to atone for sins. Now what is the penalty for sin? Death (1 Cor. 15:56). When the Lord Jesus died, He died for sinners. He blotted out our transgressions (Isa. 53:5, 11). Once the power of sin had been broken, *Death* had no grounds for holding Him. He was sinless – He died representatively, and therefore sin and death have been conquered by Him. James Orr, in his masterful book on the resurrection of Jesus, has a chapter entitled “Doctrinal Bearings of The Resurrection,” where he writes: “In New Testament Scripture, it will not be disputed that these two things are always taken together – the Death and the Resurrection of Christ – the one as essentially connected with, and completed in, the other. ‘It is Christ Jesus that died,’ says St. Paul, ‘yea, rather, that was raised from the dead’ (Romans 8:34). ‘Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification’ (Romans 4:25). ‘Who through Him,’ says St. Peter, ‘are believers in God, which raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory; so that your faith and hope might be in God’ (1 Peter 1:21). ‘The God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, with the blood of the everlasting covenant’ (Hebrews 13:20), we read in Hebrews. ‘I am the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore’ (Revelation 1:18), says the Lord in the Apocalypse. What is the nature of this connexion? The answer to this question turns on the manner in which the death of Christ itself is conceived, and

on the point the teaching of the New Testament is again sufficiently explicit. The Cross is the decisive meeting-place between man's sin and God's grace."⁸

CONCLUSION: Christianity stands or falls with the historical facts recorded in the New Testament. These historical facts (the birth, deeds, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth) constitute its substance, and as Warfield concludes, "to be indifferent to them is to be indifferent to the substance of Christianity."⁹ Christ **is** risen from the dead. He **has** conquered sin and death. What does this mean to us? The resurrection of Christ gives *authority, power, confidence* and *urgency* to the preaching of the Gospel. We have a message to give to a lost and perishing world – and we have the Great Shepherd of the sheep, risen and alive to guide us (Heb. 13:20, 21).

ENDNOTES

¹ B. B. Warfield, *The Savior of the World* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1992), p. 200.

² Because the gospels report the resurrection narratives with variations at points, some New Testament scholars say that the accounts are in conflict with one another and are therefore suspect. These critics are effectively answered by John Wenham in his book, *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict* (Zondervan, 1984).

³ Thomas C. Vander Heuvel, "Preaching the Resurrection," in *The Outlook* vol. 43, No. 4, Apr. 1993. I am indebted to Vander Heuvel for the major outline of this sermon.

⁴ R. B. Gaffin, *The Centrality of The Resurrection: A Study of Paul's Soteriology* (Baker, 1978), p. 116.

⁵ Cf. the excellent discussion on Rom. 4:25 by John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 155-157.

⁶ M. M. B. Turner, "The Spirit of Christ and Christology" in *Christ The Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. H. H. Rowdon (IVP, 1986), p. 174.

⁷ Please note the language of v. 23. The death of Christ was no accident. Jesus was not caught up in circumstances over which He had no control (cf. John 10:18). The death of Christ was according to "God's set purpose and foreknowledge" (NIV). The word "foreknowledge" does **not** simply refer to God's knowledge of future events. Note that this is grouped with the word "God's set purpose," or as the KJV has it, "determinate counsel." Note also the little word "and" that joins the two terms. The construction of the phrase in the Greek text follows what is known as the Granville Sharp rule. This grammatical rule states that when two singular nouns are joined by the conjunction *kai* and governed by the definite article "the," they refer to the **same thing**. The set purpose and foreknowledge of God each express the same idea: The sovereign decree of God which He purposed before the creation of the world (Jn. 17:24 and Eph. 1:4).

⁸ James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1980), p. 275.

⁹ Warfield, *op. cit.*, p. 139.