

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Resurrection Sunday		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	1		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	1 Corinthians 15:3-19; John 10:1-30		
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THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD

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).¹ 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).² 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. Horton notes: “A lodestar for the Christian hope is 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul not only treats the resurrection of believers as belonging to the same event (though in two stages) as that of their forerunner, Jesus Christ, but also considers the way in which the renewal of all things takes place. Even now, the resurrection of the dead in the age to come is being partly realized in the present by the renewal of the inner person (regeneration). Those who were *dead in trespasses and sins* are already raised spiritually and are seated with Christ (cf. Eph. 2:1-6; Rom 6). In 1 Corinthians 15:26, 51-55, Paul makes it clear that there is an order to this renewal: first spiritual resurrection, and then bodily resurrection, completing the total renewal of believers. As is also taught in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, the *outer self* is wasting away while the *inner self* is being renewed day by day in the image of Christ (cf. Rom 8:9-30; 2 Tim 1:10; Col. 3:1-17). In 1 Corinthians 15:50 Paul says, *Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable*. Yet notice the comparison: *As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust. . . . Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven* (vv. 48-49).”³

- 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.⁴ 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 eyewitnesses 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 disciples’ 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 eyewitnesses reported actually took place.”⁵
 - 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 Note the repeated use of the word *vain*. “*If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain. Then is ara*, an inferential particle. It implies that what follows is the necessary logical consequence of the preceding. *Vain* (*kenon*) comes first with emphasis. The word means *empty*. If there is no resurrection of Christ behind it, the preaching, which he has shown to be not peculiar to himself, but common to all the apostles (verse 11), has no content, no substance. It is the resurrection which shows that God is in it, and if the resurrection did not take place then the whole thing is a sham. *Preaching* is *kērugma* (see note on i. 21). It denotes not the act of

preaching, but the content of preaching, the thing preached, the message. The word-order in the latter part of the verse is *vain also your faith*, which again puts the stress on *vain*. The faith of the Corinthians depended on the gospel which had elicited it. If that gospel was a sham, then so was the faith it produced.”⁸

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.”⁹ (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.”¹⁰

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: There are self-professed evangelicals who want to affirm Christ’s resurrection, but categorically reject 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.¹¹ 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 it 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.”¹² How true! Some self-professed evangelicals want a resurrected Christ minus His Priesthood – which is impossible.

ENDNOTES

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

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

³ M. S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on The Way* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 916.

⁴ 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).

⁵ 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.

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 L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to The Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Eerdmans, 1958), p. 210.

⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (rpt. Baker, 1956), p. 370.

¹⁰ W. á Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service I* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), p. 632.

¹¹ I owe this insight to my friend Nick Batzig, cf. <http://www.feedingonchrist.com/death-and-resurrection-in-johns-gospel/>

¹² Hugh Martin, *The Atonement* (rpt. Knox Press, 1976), p. 102.