

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages		Pastor/Teacher
Text:	1 Corinthians 15:12-19		Gary L. W. Johnson
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THE 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 sufferings. 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 **the** cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, a point underscored by the Apostle Paul – “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless² and so is your faith” (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

“In short, the whole theology of the New Testament stands or falls by this resurrection event. “The entire New Testament,” writes Carl Henry, “was written within and from the perspective of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.” “Without it,” says Murray J. Harris, “the New Testament loses its soul and the Christian faith its central pillar.” The Cross on Calvary’s hill is the central focus of the New Testament, but it is never viewed apart from the Resurrection, as though it made sufficient sense (let alone a sufficient gospel!) in and of itself. As we shall see later in this chapter, the Cross is incomprehensible without the Resurrection, for the Resurrection explains and validates the Cross. Indeed, what the Cross won for us the Resurrection made available to us, and thus the Resurrection is as necessary for our salvation as the Cross. Consequently, we can never move straight from Jesus’ death to His work in our individual hearts and lives, passing directly from atonement to justification and short-circuiting or bypassing the Easter event and the empty tomb. There is no salvation in a Good Friday that has no Easter Sunday following it.”³

It bears repeating, “IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED, YOUR FAITH IS FUTILE; YOU ARE STILL IN YOUR SINS.”

- 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.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). Belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus has always had its critics – even those who call themselves “Christian.” One noted critic declared: “Today we stumble over

the claim because we find it incredible, missing the real scandal of saying about Jesus, *He is risen!* The church has failed generations of would-be followers of Jesus by confusing the transrational with the irrational. They come to Easter service believing that they must believe the impossible in order to feel the implausible. Before they can sing the *Hallelujah Chorus*, they must check their brain at the door. God's *yes* to Jesus is assumed to be a *no* to the laws of the physical universe. Tears of joy are then, by definition, the counterfeit symbols of sentimentality. Why not say it as plainly as the renowned biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan: *I do not think that anyone, anywhere, at any time brings dead people back to life.*"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

It is nearly universally accepted by historians that the disciples genuinely believed they had encountered the resurrected Jesus, even if they were mistaken in their belief. For instance, Gerd Lüdemann, who denies the historicity of the resurrection, nonetheless states, "It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ." The reason for this consensus is the persecution endured by the apostles for their belief in the resurrection. The apostles were repeatedly beaten and imprisoned. We have good historical evidence that James, Peter, and Paul were all executed for their faith, and church tradition maintains that as many as eleven of the twelve apostles were eventually martyred. Given the suffering that the apostles faced, it is difficult to maintain that they knew the resurrection to be a hoax. What would their motivation have been if they knew for certain that they had invented the resurrection stories?⁷

- 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."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: 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 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 changed 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."¹¹

"Glorious victory – over the Fall of Adam and all its tragic consequences; that is the far-reaching significance of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ! The 16th century Scottish Reformer, John Knox, considered the resurrection of Christ to be *the chief article of our faith.* John Calvin writes: 'Nevertheless [after having discussed the marvelous achievements of his death], we are said to *have been born anew to a living hope* not through his death but *through his resurrection* [1 Peter 1:3p]. For as he, in rising again, came forth victor over death, so the victory of our faith over death lies in his resurrection alone. Paul's words better express its nature: *He was put to death for our sins, and raised for our justification* [Rom. 4:25]. This is as if he had said: *Sin was taken away by his death; righteousness was revived and restored by his resurrection . . .* But because by rising again he obtained the victor's prize – that there might be resurrection and life – Paul rightly contends that *faith is annulled and the gospel empty and deceiving if Christ's resurrection is not fixed in our hearts* [1 Cor. 15:17p].' These two realities, Christ's death and his resurrection must always be held together in order to comprehend the significance of either, and in sum, the significance of the whole Christ event. Calvin notes this interconnection: 'So then, let us remember that whenever mention is made of his death alone, we are to understand at the same time what belongs to his resurrection. Also, the same synecdoche applies to the word *resurrection*; we are to understand it as including what has to do especially with his death.' Hence, the victorious resurrection of the Lord, following his atoning death, exercises never-ceasing, life-giving influence in many different directions: it is the firm foundation of Christianity – our forgiveness for the past, our strength for the present, and our hope for the future. Its wide, reviving, and restoring range can be considered under four points: (i) sins are eternally paid for in full: believers are justified; (ii) it is the power of our regeneration, and sanctification; (iii) it is the power and model of our glorification; and (iv) it is the overcoming of the decay of time."¹²

ENDNOTES

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

² The word translated “useless” in the NIV is *kenos*. It means empty, without consent, basis, truth or power, without result or profit, an illusion or delusion. Paul uses the word here and elsewhere (f. 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. The literal meaning is “empty.” Figuratively *kenos* can mean “senseless,” “worthless,” or “ineffective.” In Acts 4:25, Luke stresses with the psalmist the senselessness of plotting something not in accord with God’s purposes. The only time *kenodoxia* (a “passion for empty personal glory”) appears in the NT is in Philippians 2:3, used there in sharp contrast with humility. It is good to know as we humble ourselves to follow Jesus that our “labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58). In Christ there are no empty, meaningless lives. Cf. L. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Zondervan, 1985), p. 609.

³ Peter Lewis, *The Glory of Christ* (Moody, 1997), p. 358.

⁴ 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.

⁵ R. R. Meyers, *Saving Jesus From The Church: How to Stop Worshipping Christ and Start Following Jesus* (Harper One, 2009), p. 77. The title is most revealing. It is the very same nonsense that J. G. Machen had to battle 100 years ago. “Jesus was not for Paul merely an example for faith; He was primarily the object of faith. The religion of Paul did not consist in having faith in God like the faith which Jesus had in God; it consisted rather in having faith *in Jesus*. An appeal to the example of Jesus is not indeed absent from the Pauline Epistles, and certainly it was not absent from Paul’s life. The example of Jesus was found by Paul, moreover, not merely in the acts of incarnation and atonement but even in the daily life of Jesus in Palestine. Exaggeration with regard to this matter should be avoided. Plainly Paul knew far more about the life of Jesus than in the Epistles he has seen fit to tell; plainly the Epistles do not begin to contain all the instruction which Paul had given to the Churches at the commencement of their Christian life. But even after exaggerations have been avoided, the fact is significant enough. The plain fact is that imitation of Jesus, important though it was for Paul, was swallowed up by something far more important still. Not the example of Jesus, but the redeeming work of Jesus, was the primary thing for Paul.” *Christianity and Liberalism* (rept. Eerdmans, 1946), p. 81.

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

⁷ cf. Neil Shenvi, *4 Points of Evidence for the Resurrection* (Crossway, 2023, March 31, 2023), p. 5.

⁸ James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (rpt. Klock & Klock 1980), p. 274.

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

¹⁰ W. à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* 1 (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), p. 632.

¹¹ M. Horton, *In the Face of God: The Dangers & Delights of Spiritual Intimacy* (Word, 1996), p. 111.

¹² D. Kelly, *Systematic Theology II* (Mentor Books, 2014), p. 477.