

The Relevance of the Resurrection

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When our faith grows in the fertile soil of Scripture our fears fall away and we are filled with hope and confidence. And when our confidence and hope in God overflows, we live differently. That's the power of divine truth and this is why the relevance of Christ's resurrection is so important for us today. The resurrection of Jesus Christ speaks to our real needs and concerns as no other event in human history. It is the solid rock upon which a life of faith and hope, and peace and joy can be built. There are several reasons for this. The resurrection of Jesus Christ

- proved his Sonship
- assures us of forgiveness
- provides power and wisdom for all our present needs
- and it guarantees our ultimate victory over death and our eternal glory.

How do we really know that Jesus is the true Lord and Savior? The answer is his resurrection. No other religious leader of any of the world's religions has ever been proclaimed as a risen Savior. Instead, many have shrines at their grave. They lie there decayed, with nothing remaining except the dust of their bones and their man made religious teachings. The resurrection proves that Jesus was sent by God. The apostle Paul writes that Jesus was

...declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead. (Romans 1:4)

The word "declared" is translated from the Greek word *horizo* from which we get the English word "horizon." Just as the horizon serves as a clear demarcation line, dividing the earth and the sky, so the resurrection of Jesus

marks him off from the rest of humanity. God's mighty deed in raising Jesus from the dead clearly marked him out as the promised Messiah. It proved that he was more than just another religious leader. It powerfully validated both his mission and his message. In fact, in his first sermon Peter says that Jesus' resurrection (and his ensuing exaltation and giving of the holy Spirit) assures us

"that God has made this Jesus...both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36)."

This being true, we are also assured of the effectiveness of his sacrifice and the forgiveness of our sins. In Matthew 26:26-28 where Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, he states that his blood would be shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Christ links our forgiveness with his death. The apostle Paul links the forgiveness of our sins to the blood of Christ as well, in Colossians 1:13, 14. It is because of Christ's death, his being the ultimate and final sacrifice for sin, that we can be forgiven. But what proof do we have that God accepted Christ's sacrifice? The answer is the resurrection. In Romans we read,

[Christ] was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification...Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 4:25-5:1)

Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on account of our justification. It proved that he was a worthy sacrifice to secure our salvation. Therefore, if Jesus is risen from the dead, and he is, then we are justified and made righteous, forgiven of all our sins.

Mark Twain once said, "Man is the only animal that blushes – or needs to." All of us have skeletons in our closet. And in our better moments we all know it and are ashamed. We all know that we are sinners. And no one is free who sins and is not forgiven (John 8:31-34). Without the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins through Christ, all of us would hide and

cringe before God like Adam and Eve did in the Garden.

The story is told of Bill Wilson, who was the Psychology department head at Duke University. A Vietnam war veteran was in the hospital where Wilson served with severe psychological problems due to his involvement in the war. Nothing could be done medically to help this poor man. And he kept drifting further and further away from life. Finally, one day Dr. Wilson walked into this man's room and told him that he had a message for him from God. He said that through faith in Jesus Christ he could be cleansed of all his sins and be reborn. The man started to cry and this was the first emotional response he had made to anyone in many months. The veteran came to faith in Christ and his life turned around 180 degrees!

Not only does Christ's resurrection prove his Sonship, and that our sins are forgiven, it assures us of God's power and wisdom for all of our present needs. As much as we need God's forgiveness for our past sins, we need His power to sin no more! And we need His wisdom to live life with great peace and joy and hope. We need God's wisdom and power today, because we don't just want to be forgiven people, we want to be different people. We want to be better than we are.

So the questions come up, "Can fearful people become confident? Can selfish people become giving? Can immoral people become self-controlled?" The answer is a resounding "Yes"! 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us that,

if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

No one is a clearer example of this truth than the Corinthians themselves. The apostle Paul wrote,

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters,

nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Now, if these people can change, anyone can! In Ephesians, chapter 1, we have a prayer that the eyes of our understanding might be opened, so that we might know the awesome power of God that is available to us for all our pressing needs and to help us walk a Christ like life. The prayer is that might see,

What is the exceeding greatness of His [God's] power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. (Ephesians 1:19-21)

The very same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and exalted him to the right hand of God is ours when we believe! We now have power to overcome temptations and sin. We have power to overcome our fears and anxieties. We now have, through the risen Christ, the power to become the kind of people we have always wanted to be in the depth of our hearts. In fact as Ephesians 3:20 declares, God,

Is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.

And Philippians 4:13 encourages us that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Colossians 1:27 tells us that the riches of the mystery is *Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Our confidence of divine enablement, of living a new kind of life here and now, is the

power of God in Christ, dwelling in us, and this confidence depends on the resurrection of Christ. One of the great tragedies of Christianity today is that it tries to minimize the power that is available to us in Christ. People talk of becoming a Christian as if it meant no more than just making a few superficial changes, like going to church and being a little more religious. But according to the Bible, to become a Christian is to undergo the most radical and profound change possible. In Galatians 2:20, Paul says,

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave His life for me.

Our lives can be different today and tomorrow, because God raised Christ up from the dead. And finally, the resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees us our ultimate victory over death and our eternal glory.

One of the great differences in religions and philosophies concerns their vision of the future. Some religions offer little hope teaching us that if we are perfect and spotless, or if we do enough good works, we may gain eternal life. Then there are the religions that offer the hope of reincarnation, where you keep coming back into life after death as another person, or an animal, or a bug until you get it right and enter Nirvana, which equals no-existence. Then there are the secular humanists that dream of taking control of human destiny by means of social and genetic engineering. Finally we have the atheists, like Philosopher Bertrand Russell who said,

"All our labors of all the ages, all the devotions, all the aspirations, all the noon day brightness of our genius are destined to extinction in the vast death of the universe."

For Russell, there is no hope beyond the grave. Comedian Woody Allen, in an article in Esquire Magazine, jokes about death saying,

"It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens." But Allen's humor can't hide his true fear. Later he says, "The fundamental thing behind all motivation and all activity is the constant struggle against...death. It is stupefying in its terror and it renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless."

As Christians we have been set free from this terror (Hebrews 2:14, 15). We know the promise is true that says,

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

We know that we have eternal life and this life is in Christ (1 John 5:11). We know that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, and that when Christ, our life appears, then we shall appear with him in glory (Romans 4:14-18; Colossians 3:4).

There is a day coming when God will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ. And He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31). Believers have escaped this judgment and look forward to living eternally in the kingdom of God.

What's the relevance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? It is more important than most people ever imagine. Christ's resurrection and its implications make our preoccupation with Easter eggs and bunnies seem absolutely absurd!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ authenticates his ministry and message. It assures us of the forgiveness of our sins and of divine power for godly living. And it guarantees our hope of eternal life and glory. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the solid rock for all of life. It is the only firm foundation to build on in an insecure and unstable world.