

IMPLICARTIONS OF THE RESURRECTION

By

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There is a strange and deadly alienation between the commonly accepted doctrine of eternal life and the scriptural doctrine of resurrection. Once a year there is a celebration called Easter in which songs, sermons and pageantry affirm that Christ rose from the dead, but this fact seems to have little relation to the business of the church and the individual theology and lives of its members.

The apostles preached the resurrection as the basis and motivation of faith and life of every Christian. The hearers were struck by the affirmation that Jesus had died, but was now alive! Peter wrote that God “begot us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (I Peter 1:3). Paul insisted that the gospel concerns the fact that Christ died and was “raised on the third day according to the scriptures,” then gave a profound argument to show that if Christ has not been raised the whole business of Christian faith is worthless, the dead have simply perished and there is not hope (I Cor. 15:4–19).

The fact of Christ’s resurrection is one thing, but to apply it to faith and life is another. It is when we understand the implication of the resurrection that we come to know its power!

First, it is the concrete evidence of the authenticity of Jesus Himself. He promised to die and live again. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again...he spoke of the temple of his body” (John 2:19, 21). He claimed to have power over life. “For as the Father has life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself” (John 5:26).

Had Christ not come forth from the grave complete—body and all—He would have been forgotten as an imposter and false prophet. The fact that He was dead but came back to life, immortal and never to die again, gives assurance that He spoke the truth in everything He taught and promised, and assurance that He is living today in power and authority over His creation (Rev. 1:17–18).

A young man just having been baptized gave a testimony of his faith to the congregation, saying, “I want you to know that I didn’t do this because it feels good, but because it’s true.” Our faith is not founded on subjective feeling, but on the historic fact that Jesus Christ died and arose again.

Second, the resurrection of Jesus is the phenomenon that gives Christians the present access to transforming power, the power to live a new and transcendent life while still continuing to live under the pressure of all the world’s evil.

Paul repeatedly spoke of the hope of the bodily resurrection, but also wrote of the “power of the resurrection” that we can know in the present life. To the Romans, in that magnificent chapter that describes and explains the meaning of baptism, Paul wrote: “We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death, that like a Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). Resurrection begins for the Christian at baptism, when he is raised to “newness of life” (CF. verse 6, 7, 10 and 11). He is raised out of the grip of the world’s

glue that had him adhering to its false promises, its alluring fashion and its enticing hope of pleasure and power. Jesus was tempted with all this. Even some of His apostles were eager for Him to grab the golden opportunity to ride the world's merry-go-round of false achievement. Had He taken that course he would not have been crucified. He could have been successful, popular, powerful in the world, but bound to it. Although the primary purpose of His death was to meet the penalty of sin for us, He was also demonstrating that to please God and fulfill His purpose one must give up the world; he must not be bound to it but rise above it.

To be in Christ is to be in His same position to the world: free from its sin, its ambitions, its goals, its value system and its purposes. To be raised with Christ is to see the whole world as he saw it.

Paul wrote that the glory of God's mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Christ is alive today by a resurrection, and not only alive in Heaven where He is King of kings, but also in the lives of all believers. His presence with us produces a confidence and motivation to live a new life as He has described and directed, and empowers us to do it.

Third, the resurrection of Jesus is a demonstration of what is to happen to every Christian in obtaining eternal life. Here is where modern theology is strangely alienated from Scripture. It is an amazing inconsistency of the church, which is supposed to be the ground and pillar of the truth, that it can so greatly emphasize the resurrection once a year and then relegate it to oblivion the rest of the time, while allowing mystical and pagan concepts of life-after-death to prevail. Children are told that if they are good they will go to heaven at death to enjoy eternal life. The bereaved are told that their loved ones are not dead but already have passed to their reward and are reunited with other deceased saints in heaven. Both believer and unbeliever accepts the general view that at death one merely shucks off the body, forgets it forever, and enters into a full-orbed relationship with the spirit world either in eternal bliss or eternal sorrow. This was the teaching of Plato more than three hundred years before Christ.

In refuting the Platonic doctrine Jesus insisted that the life He offered was through a resurrection from the grave. This was the thrust of His argument with the Sadducees, when He said, "But as touching the dead, that they are raised; have you not read in the book of Moses, in the place concerning the bush, how God spoke unto him, saying I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living: you do err greatly" (Mark 12:26-27). Jesus contends that in order for God to be the God of the living, these men of the past must be raised from the dead.

Jesus repeatedly assured the disciples that He would raise them up in the body. "And this is the will of Him that sent me, that of all that which he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day" (John 6:39). If He intended for us to believe that we could realize a heavenly and eternal reward without the resurrection of the body, then we ask why didn't He say as much, and why did He consistently link eternal life with a bodily resurrection?

Many devout believers see in Paul's expression, "to depart and be with Christ," a basis for the instant reward of life at the moment of death. There is not space here to discuss this text, but it may be said unequivocally that in Paul's New Testament letters the only hope he ever promised was in a resurrection. In each instance where he

addressed the question of what had happened to the saints who had died, the only hope he offered was a resurrection.

In the great resurrection chapter, I Corinthians 15, written specifically to give hope and comfort to the saints, Paul said that if there is no resurrection of the dead, “then they that have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (Vs.18). He then affirmed that Christ “has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep” (Vs. 20). Our abundant assurance is that since Christ is the first-fruits, we who are the remainder of the harvest will also be raised, so that Christ’s resurrection is the demonstration and guarantee of our own future resurrection and glorification.

The resurrection is not a mere assertion of continuous life as a spiritual entity. It is a future even in history in which we are to be total persons, body, mind, spirit, and given eternal qualities by God’s grace. It takes place at the second coming of Christ, “at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (I Cor. 15:52). It is then, and not until then, that we may realize the reality of immortality. “For this mortal must put on (future tense) immortality” (Vs. 52).

When Paul wrote to comfort the saints of Thessalonica who were grieved over their brothers who had died, he had a perfect opportunity to say something like we often hear today: “Your loved ones have gone to their reward. They are not dead, but enjoying life in heaven.” But there was none of this. Instead, he plainly said that they have fallen asleep and the reason we should not sorrow is because they will be raised from the dead when Jesus comes. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (I Thess. 4:16).

Believers are already “raised to walk in newness of life,” with minds set, not on the things of earth, but on the things above where Christ is (Col. 3:1–2). As Paul wrote, we are “waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Phil. 3:21, Rom. 8:24).

Fourth, the resurrection of Christ certifies that great theological truth, that death is due to sin. Christ had no sin of his own, but He died when He assumed the guilt of OUR sins. That penalty being paid, death could not hold Him, for He was without personal sin. All whose sins are forgiven through Christ have the promise that death will not hold them. Of the church Jesus said, “The gates of hades shall not prevail against it,” meaning that while the saints may die and go to hades (death and the grave) such death will not prevail, for Christ will raise them up.

Christ’s resurrection was seen by the world as a surprise ending to His career. But with God there are no surprises. His purpose in creation was to have man—the whole man—in his image. Man is of value only as he fulfills God’s purpose. God promises to complete His purpose by raising Christians from the dead in bodies that are incorruptible, glorious, powerful and in complete submission to Him.

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