

INCREDIBLE BUT ESSENTIAL

By

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The fearful apprehension which pervades our society cannot get a grip on one who believes the whole gospel. That's because the future is already secured by the central event of the gospel, the resurrection.

This is the neglected element in the church today, in preaching, in evangelism and in most of the contacts Christians have with the world. In recent weeks I have been in several different church services and heard a number of speakers, missionaries and evangelistic exhortations, yet not even on time has there been any reference to the resurrection, either Christ's or ours.

When it was time to select an apostle to replace Judas, the two qualifications given in Acts 1:23, 24 were that he must have been a companion of Jesus and that he be able to be a witness of His resurrection. The emphasis of the early church was not the death of Jesus, but His resurrection from death.

When Paul made his defense before King Agrippa, he said that he was being judged "for the hope of the promise made of God" to the twelve tribes, and that it was "by the resurrection of the dead" that he was "to proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:6-23). The idea of resurrection was repugnant to the Greek and Roman religious concepts. Paul asked the king, "Why is it judged incredible with you, if God raises the dead?" (Acts 26:8). Resurrection is still incredible to the world which opts for faith in mystical spiritual immortality.

Jesus was met with opposition to the resurrection on all sides. The Sadducees thought they had a perfect argument against resurrection when they asked Him whose wife of the seven husbands that a certain woman had would she be in the resurrection (Luke 20:27-33). Jesus brushed aside their argument on the basis that in the resurrection people will not marry, even as angels do not marry. He then gave proof of the resurrection in verses 37 and 38. "But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 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, for to him all are alive." The point of His statement is that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must be raised in order to be among the living.

To the Greeks in Athens, Paul declared that they could be assured of judgment because God had raised Christ from the dead (Acts 17:31). The wicked cannot escape judgment by death, for they will be raised up to give account to the Creator. The penalty then is final and irrevocable death. This explains the picture in Revelation 6 of the unsaved seeking to hide from the face and wrath of the Lamb. This is one reason why the world rejects the resurrection.

The triumph of Jesus over death was the very center and basis of the faith and preaching of the apostles. This tells us that death is the problem that every person faces and the only solution to it is a resurrection, except for those saints alive at the coming of Jesus. This means a return from the dead, not the escape into some spiritual existence as

is presented in much of modern religion, including popular TV evangelists and the advocates of reincarnation and other Eastern mystical religions.

On a recent Sunday I heard two speakers on evangelism. Each of them emphasized the question of the lost being able to enter heaven, but neither of them mentioned the issue of life and death. While Jesus warned that unrepentant sinners would be barred from the kingdom of heaven, his emphasis was on their ultimate doom and destruction in the fire of Gehenna. Man was created a “living soul”. The penalty for his rebellion (sin) is death. Therefore, the issue is life or death — not *where* one will live, but whether one will *live* or *die*.

It is because of resurrection, His resurrection and the assurance of a resurrection of our own, that we can take seriously the statement of Jesus that we gain life by losing it, that if we lose life for His sake we gain it, that even if we die, we shall live.

Resurrection is the only doctrine that gives purpose to the human race. It is true that the death of Jesus made it possible for man to be justified before God, but such justification is ultimately meaningful only if man is to live, and life is possible only by resurrection from death. When we view modern drama, we usually see people who are caught in the web of sin and suffering and seeking a way out. The solutions are inevitably flawed, giving only momentary release from the dilemma, because there is no assurance of a final goal. Still marring the scene is the fear of death and the murky atmosphere of final failure. No wonder suicide is the choice of so many.

The solution God gives is resurrection. Jesus knew He would be rejected, tortured and crucified. His message was to be twisted, His compassion turned to suffering and His life taken in the most disgraceful manner. But He also knew that He would rise to life immortal, and that all the defeat, failure, suffering and sorrow would be turned to victory through His resurrection.

What many Christians apparently do not realize is that the world about us deliberately avoids any consideration of a resurrection to face the Creator. Modern writers view the world without any thought of resurrection. Resurrection has no place in their world view. If they give any thought to life after death, it is usually on the level of the pagan belief in an immortal spirit-life that does not involve resurrection of the person.

After the Civil War Robert Ingersoll wrote, “The world has steadily grown better, and there is more justice, more charity, more kindness, more goodness in the world today than ever before.” He predicted that in a few years all the world would reach the zenith of peace and happiness. We all know how mistaken he was. The world is defined in scripture as “evil” (Gal. 1:4) and can be expected to become more so until the coming of Jesus. Then there is to be the restoration of perfection. Peter spoke of Jesus being received into heaven “until the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21). Paul explained that the whole creation “groans and travails in pain together until now” and waits for the revealing of the sons of God. We too, he writes, “groan within ourselves waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:19–23). It is by resurrection from death, a resurrection of body and spirit, the whole man — like that of Christ — that will usher in the perfect and eternal state of redeemed man.

The force of the Christian message is no stronger than the realization of the resurrection hope. Paul wrote that he was willing to give up everything else that he might know Christ “and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, becoming conformed unto his death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection

from the dead” (Phil. 3:10, 11). In contrast to Paul the modern church has abandoned the power of the resurrection to depend on methodology, organization, appealing personalities, “exciting” activities and manipulative promotion.

Because of lack of conviction in the resurrection, the faith that Jesus is alive, many believers look for signs and something to stir their emotions, something “real” — meaning something that can be seen or heard or felt. There are plenty of churches offering such “realities,” but the harvest from such efforts may fall short of the resurrection to eternal life.

Resurrection is not only the main ingredient in the gospel of hope, it is the one thing without which there can be nothing else! “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain...then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (I Cor. 15:13, 14, 18).

“But now has Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep” (I Cor. 15:20).

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