

RESURRECTION REALITY

By

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The central theme of the Good News, the resurrection, so explicitly taught in scripture and championed by the apostles, has been diluted with pagan thought until it has almost lost its meaning as the Divine solution to the problem of death.

Jesus did not make light of death nor deny it. It was His enemy, and He faced it with great anguish of spirit and body. He did not view it like so many modern disciples as a “release” from the “prison house of the body.” He did not speak of death as either victory or release, nor did He liken it to the recurrent budding of the flowers in spring.

The common tendency is to say that because Jesus lives we are assured that there is no death, that death is only the door to a larger room, and so on. This is the exact opposite of what Jesus said and did.

To say that resurrection proves that there is no death is to deny a resurrection from the dead. What Jesus promised was not the continuation of something that never died but a return from death, the very reversal of the dissolution of cells and cessation of life.

Evangelists speak of “soul-saving” and maintain that you have an immortal something (the “real” you) that will survive the mortal portion, and therefore, never dies. This would give credence to the original lie of Satan: “You shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). It was belief of this lie that led the first pair to sin, to lose their deathless state and eventually to die. Since that day the human race has been in bondage to the fear of death, and death has been the chief enemy of the race. Great religions have been founded to help man escape the threat of death but all to no avail. Today the fear of death is largely to blame for much of the despair that drives people to the mind-demolishing and self-destroying use of drugs. As Paul said, “If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable” (I Cor. 15:19). If death is all that lies ahead, then life becomes meaningless.

“But now has Christ been risen from the dead” (I Cor. 15:20). He became a mortal flesh-and-blood man to die a mortal human death and thus deliver us from death (Heb. 2:14). Had He not actually died, if it had been only the leaving of the body for some greater spiritual existence, as religions of the East teach, it would have failed completely to serve as an atonement for our sins. The wages of sin is death, and death takes away life. Jesus said, “I lay down my life for the sheep” (I John 10:15). In doing so on our behalf, He took from us the penalty of sin by meeting that penalty in His own death. Death involves the person as a whole. Resurrection is that which gives back life, not only of the spirit but of the entire person.

The resurrection means that Jesus is alive! By resurrection scripture does not mean that Jesus is alive in our memories, nor that something about Him escaped death and therefore continued to live. The Jesus Who was raised is the Jesus Who was put to death on the cross. It was not a mere continuation of spirit but a return from death of the whole man who died. When the apostles witnessed the ascension, it was not a ghost they saw received by the clouds but the One whom they had touched and “handled” and Who

had eaten ordinary food before their eyes. Belief in this is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Paul wrote, “If you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and shall believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved” (Rom. 10:9). To the Colossians Paul wrote that “in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 1:9). He arose in all one piece, a complete “soul” of spirit and body, made gloriously immortal. In fact, scripture declares that He “only has immortality” (I Tim. 6:16).

It is this resurrected Jesus Who abides in us as He promised: “I will come to you” (John 14:8). It is not some other person who is present — it is the risen Christ Who is present through the power of His spirit. He said, “Lo, I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). Paul declares that “The (risen) Lord is the spirit” (II Cor. 3:17). It is because He is alive and seated on David’s throne that He is able to dwell in us through His Holy Spirit.

The resurrection means freedom from sin. Paul writes that if Christ did not rise from the dead we are still in our sins. “For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins. Then they also that have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (I Cor. 15:16–18).

Jesus could not be bound by death because He was not guilty of sin. His death was vicarious; He suffered death for our sins, not for His own, since He had none. Therefore, Peter could say that God had raised Him up, “having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he would beholden of it” (Acts 2:24). This tells us that He was, indeed, a sinless man dying for sinners; therefore, we are free from sin.

By His resurrection Jesus demonstrated the meaning of immortality. He “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (II Tim. 1:10). While we do not know the properties of the *body* of Jesus after the resurrection, He made it clear that it was His *body* and that it was at least as real as the old one. The tomb was empty because resurrection required the body. He appeared with real nail-holes in His hands and feet. “See my hands and my feet,” He said. “That it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you behold me having” (Luke 24:39). The fish He ate on the beach was solid food.

Yet Christians still talk about “soul-salvation,” implying the saving of something immaterial and unknown. We find no such concept in scripture. Paul writes, “For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory” (Phil. 3:20–21). It is in our bodies that we are to be glorified. Note that it does not say that our hope is to go and live in heaven as “immortal souls” but that Jesus will come from heaven to give us glorious bodies, which will be made immortal at that time (I Cor. 15:51–53). The Bible reveals no glorification of the saved apart from their bodies.

Whatever immortality is it means permanence in contrast to the temporal nature of present life. When we realize the true life of immortality, we may see this one as only shadow. Things we now see as “solid” we then may see as only ghosts of the reality of the eternal.

The purpose of God from the beginning was to have man in His image — perfect, obedient, in true mind-to-mind fellowship with Him, enjoying a glorious life in the body fashioned by the Creator for just such life. Jesus is the demonstration of that purpose. One sees in His life what it is to live in constant fellowship with the Father and what it means to be “in the image” of God. The resurrection demonstrates how that becomes possible for eternity. If one desire such a fellowship with the Creator and believes in

Christ's death and resurrection, then there is purpose to live and bring his life into harmony with the One Who is to raise him up and glorify him.

Resurrection is seen by the apostle Peter as the "living hope." A great portion of believers, viewing the corruption, injustice, wickedness and poverty that abounds in the world, look for some earthly/political kingdom as the hope of the future. In it they see all the saints finding satisfaction in a still corrupt and perishing world, while the unsaved are subdued and made to submit to Christ's authority by force. But the great expectation of Jesus and the apostles was His return to raise the dead, to give immortality to the saints and to cleanse the creation of evil by the final judgment. Jesus not only promised to raise up the redeemed, but to raise the unredeemed from the grave also, that they might be judged. They have no hope, for they are not promised life but death.

This gives purpose as well as fulfillment to history. Contrary to the belief of evolutionists and humanists, things are not to continue on and on in the perpetual grind of striving and failing, of searching and suffering, dying and decaying. God's purpose will be fulfilled in a "new earth wherein dwells righteousness" inhabited by His people transformed and made immortal (II Pet. 3:11-13).

If the evangelist tells you that the resurrection of Jesus shows that there is no death, you can be sure that he doesn't understand, or doesn't believe, that the basic issue of the gospel. The faith that saves is grounded in the fact that Jesus actually died, then rose victorious over death. "I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of hades" (Rev. 1:18).

Because He lives. We too may live.

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