



**The Lord Jesus Christ will transform the body of our humiliation
so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory. Phil 3:21**

The Resurrection and the Life

Christians are a people with good news to share, and the font and pinnacle of that good news is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without the resurrection there would be no good news, no Christianity, no church. The resurrection is written in one way or another on every page of the New Testament. It is the belief that empowered the church at its beginning and that has sustained the church through the ages. If Christians ever stop believing in and living from the Lord's resurrection, that will be when the church stops being the church of Jesus Christ.

There is no reason why the joyous certainty of the early church in the resurrection of Christ should not be shared by the church today. It is the spark that set the disciples on fire. The simple followers of Jesus, saddened to death by the crucifixion of their master outside the wall of Jerusalem, were transformed within a short period of time into a jubilant community of believers. They proclaimed that the tomb was empty and that they had seen Jesus, alive again. The only real explanation for this remarkable series of events is that Jesus Christ had really been raised from the dead. It is the burning flame of that truth, the truth that he is truly risen, that can ignite people again with the good news capable of changing the world.

Reflection and discussion

- What thoughts and emotions come to mind in association with resurrection?

- Why does my life need good news? What could good news do for the world?

Beginning of the New Creation

Resurrection does not just describe what happened to Jesus after his death and burial. Resurrection is a past event, a future prospect, and a present reality. Our salvation is based on what God has done for us in human history, and the peak of that history of salvation was reached in Christ's resurrection from the dead. But since Jesus is still risen and alive, the resurrection transforms everything God's people will experience in the future and forms the guarantee of what God has promised for the end of time.

Jesus was the first in the human family to be raised and glorified. His resurrection proclaims a glorious hope for all creation: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor 15:54). We await the day when God will wipe away every tear (Rev 21:4). In him the new creation, promised for the end of the age, has begun. We see in him what God has promised as our destiny—resurrection from the dead and the fullness of life forever.

Most of the Greek world at the time of Jesus believed in the immortality of the soul, that a spiritual aspect of the human person was imprisoned within a mortal body and would be released at death. But Christianity teaches that the risen body of Christ is the archetype for the new humanity of the future.

We will be raised as whole, bodily persons, the same persons as before, with every aspect of life that makes us fully alive retained and perfected. Though dead and physically corrupted, we will be recalled to life by a new act of creation by God on the last day.

God loves all of his creation, and God does not abandon the bodies he has given us. In the resurrection of the dead, the nature of God as Creator and Redeemer becomes one. The natural order of our lives now will be transformed into a supernatural way of life. All the weaknesses and limitations of our present lives will be left behind. Our risen lives of glory will be more real, more vibrant, more alive than ever. The “seed” of our present lives will become the “fruit” of our resurrected lives.

Yet, the resurrection of Jesus is not just good news for our future. In his resurrection the future has already invaded the present. Death can already be mocked as a defeated enemy: “Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor 15:55). The time of forgiveness, restoration, and victory over sin and death, promised by Israel’s prophets and sages for the age to come, has already come upon the earth through Christ’s resurrection. We can draw upon the resources of his power and grace in the here and now. His resurrection offers us a power for living to overcome even the most difficult obstacles and a purpose for living that assures us that what we do is not in vain.

We live our present lives in the interval between Christ’s resurrection and the day of Christ’s coming when the dead will be raised to life. We live now with a mixture of fulfillment and expectation. Jesus Christ is risen; he is alive forever. We can experience his risen presence in countless ways. Yet we await with eager longing for the fulfillment of the hope he has given us, the fullness of life in God’s new creation.

Reflection and discussion

- In what ways do I experience the risen presence of Jesus in my life here and now?

- How does the resurrection inspire me to hope in the future?

The Revolutionary Doctrine of Resurrection

The resurrection—like the cross—is profoundly subversive of the values of the world. Contrary to the way the world views Easter—as a festive holiday legitimating a comfortable, culturally conventional religion—the central doctrine of Christianity is an explosive truth capable of bursting through the sealed tombs and locked doors of society's status quo. In raising Jesus from the dead, God reclaimed creation as his own, after sin, death, and the tragedies of worldly empires had done their destruction. Fiercely opposed by Sadducees and Caesars alike in the first century, the doctrine of resurrection proclaims to the rulers and nobles of this world allegiance to a different sovereign, a singular Lord.

In raising Jesus from the dead, God has seemingly done the impossible. Critics and skeptics through the ages have gone to great lengths in attempting to disprove and ridicule this core of Christian belief. But if the resurrection really happened, it matters profoundly. It made the world a different place and has given us the possibility of becoming a different kind of people. We cannot accept that Jesus Christ was bodily raised from the dead without becoming personally involved in the consequences of that reality.

Resurrection is God's ultimate affirmation that creation matters, that embodied human beings matter. God really does love these flawed, weak, and mortal bodies of ours. So what we do with our bodies and with the bodies of others is of ultimate significance in God's eyes. The bodily life of every person is supremely important and infinitely worthwhile. Resurrection spirituality is not an escape from creation; it is an intense participation in creation. It implies commitment to discipleship and to the worldwide mission Jesus' resurrection launched by inaugurating God's new age.

The resurrection does not just change our belief. It offers us a hope that changes the pattern of our living. Does it matter how we relate to one another—whether we are compassionate, honest, reliable, or generous? If this life were the be-all and end-all, maybe not. But since our lives are charged with the risen life of Christ, our existence is given new purpose and ultimate meaning. Everything we do has eternal significance, and nothing we do in the name of Christ is ever lost or wasted.

Reflection and discussion

- Why is the truth of resurrection so explosive and subversive?
- What does the resurrection commit me to in this world?

Describing an Awesome Mystery

All of the gospels describe the finding of the empty tomb and the first appearances of the risen Jesus as occurring in the early morning hours of the first day of the week. The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week for Judaism. The Lord's Day, the day of resurrection, was the first day, the day God's original creation started, and thus the opening day of God's new creation.

The first day of the week became the day on which Christians would gather for worship and Eucharist. While there was an annual celebration of Easter, the proclamation of Christ's resurrection was never limited to one day a year.

Rather, every Sunday became a little Easter, a celebration of the risen Christ and of the hope we share to be raised with him.

Adoration and worship is the best way to respond to the resurrection. Sacramental symbols, musical praise, and silent homage often convey better than words the truths of this awesome mystery. Human language fails us when trying to describe the risen life. It is like trying to describe a full moon over a white-capped ocean tide to a person born blind, or the magnificence of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to a person who is congenitally deaf. What we will experience in the resurrection is so far beyond what we experience in this life that no words suffice.

The biblical writings challenge us to expand our imagination as they seek to express in human language something we have never experienced. The idea of resurrection is mostly absent from the Old Testament. Only a few passages from its later writings hint at the idea of bodily life after death. But in the New Testament, resurrection permeates its every stratum. Writers struggled to express in human language the reality of Christ's resurrection and the fullness of life we will one day share with him. After reviewing some of the key Old Testament passages, this study will look at the unique contribution of each New Testament author. We begin with Paul's letters and follow with the writings of each of the evangelists. Each writer has a different emphasis and different points to make. But each contributes to the kaleidoscope that is the biblical message of resurrection.

Reflection and discussion

- What have I experienced that is beyond the ability of my words to describe?

- How do I expect to be changed after this study?

Prayer

God of Glory, you have always called your people out of bondage and darkness. You have planted within us a longing for freedom and the fullness of life. Through the resurrection of your Son, you have given the world a reason to hope, and you have begun to create the whole world anew with glory. As I reflect on the explosive truth of the resurrection, help me know that your creation and the bodily lives of your people are supremely important in your eyes. Make me realize that nothing I do is ever lost or wasted when done in union with your Son, our Risen Lord.