

The Meaning of the Resurrection

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Introduction.

- A. Of all the holidays in the American calendar, Easter is one of the most innocuous. Supposedly, it exists to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In reality, the way that most celebrate Easter has much more to do with the rituals of the pagan goddess Astra than anything in the Bible. All the eggs and bunnies and flowers were originally pagan fertility symbols that got mashed together with some Christian doctrine to create a combination holiday that would be acceptable to the Germanic pagans of 1500 years ago.
- B. It's tough to take seriously any holiday that's built around eggs and bunnies and flowers, and some of this pastel springtime giddiness ends up attaching itself to the way that we think of the resurrection of the Christ as well. It reminds me of a Burger King in Columbia, MO back when I was growing up there. Just like most fast-food restaurants do, it had one of those little sign boards with the removable letters underneath the main "Burger King" sign. For the two weeks before Easter, that little sign board read, "HE IS RISEN." For the remaining 50 weeks of the year, it went back to proclaiming the glories of Whoppers and Croissances.
- C. Sometimes, we treat the resurrection in the same way. We give it happy mindless surface attention for a week or two, then ignore it for the rest of the year in favor of whatever meaningless things we think are more important. Of course, that wasn't the original reaction. Look with me at Mark 16:6-8. The disciples of Jesus didn't go skipping merrily away from the empty tomb. They fled in fear. They were terrified because they saw that the rules of life and death had changed out from under them. In truth, the disciples were right to be afraid. The resurrection was an awesome display of power that has changed our lives in ways almost too profound to grasp. Let's consider these things this morning, as we look at the meaning of the resurrection.

I. Jesus.

- A. The first thing that the resurrection means is that **JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD**. Consider Paul's testimony to this effect in Romans 1:3-4. Jesus, of course, has the most unique lineage that the world has ever seen. He was half born of the seed of David through His mother Mary, but half born of His Father in heaven. The David side of things was easy to prove. In those days, the Jewish genealogical records still existed in the temple. Anybody could have examined those records and traced Jesus' roots back to the great Israelite king. However, there were no records to prove that He was the Son of God, nor could there be. Instead, Jesus proved that in the simplest way possible: by being impossible to keep dead. Men had died before. Men had even been raised from the dead before by various of God's prophets. Jesus' resurrection, though, was different. No other human raised Him. Instead, He was raised through what Hebrews calls "the power of an indestructible life."
- B. Because we know that Jesus is the Son of God, we also know a number of other things. First, Jesus' resurrection proves the existence of God. There is a Supreme Being with wisdom and power infinitely greater than our own, and we see both in the empty tomb. Second, it shows that the Bible is God's word. The resurrection of Jesus is the central miracle of all of Scripture. Without it, Christianity doesn't make any sense, but with it, we have confirmation that everything else the word describes is also true.
- C. As part of that, the resurrection drives home the point that **JESUS IS LORD**. Take, for instance, the message of Romans 14:9. The resurrected Jesus, and none other, can lay claim to the title of Lord of the living and the dead. That makes Him Lord of every one of us. This isn't a very American idea. We don't have human kings and lords in this country, so we have trouble understanding what having a Lord means for us. What it means for us is that we are under authority. We are set beneath a Man whose word is law, and more than law. In America, if enough people don't like the leaders, we vote them out and elect new ones in their place. The resurrection tells us that there is no voting out Jesus. Power enough to raise someone from the dead is too much power for us to either defeat or escape. Power like that compels us to obedience, and indeed the Bible tells us that everyone will obey. Either now or at the end of the world, everyone will bow the knee to Jesus.
- D. The resurrection also tells each one of us that **I BELONG TO JESUS**. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. We are compelled by what Christ has done to serve Him. This compulsion starts with His death, but it is only strengthened by His resurrection. When someone dies for us, we acknowledge a debt there. That's why we celebrate Memorial Day every year: to honor the men who died for our country, and when we visit battlefields and military cemeteries, we do so as a token of what we owe. However, that kind of honor is not enough for what Jesus did. Jesus died to save our lives, yes, but He also arose from the grave and told us how He expects us to live. We literally owe our lives to Him, and He has returned to collect on the debt we owe. If all we do for Him is treat Easter like Memorial Day, and show up once a year to pay our respects, we're not doing enough. We're not giving His death and resurrection the honor they deserve. Instead, those two things together compel us to live for Him, not in some annual ceremony, but in every moment and every day of our lives. If that's not what we want to do, too bad. Jesus has the right to demand it and the power to compel it.

II. Us.

- A. However, just as the resurrection has much to say about Jesus and our relation to Him, so it also tells us a lot about ourselves. First, each of us learns from the resurrection that **I WILL BE RAISED**. That's the point of 1 Corinthians 15:20-22. The resurrection of Christ isn't just a display of power. It is also a prophecy. That's what Paul is getting at when He calls Jesus the firstfruits of those who have died. Those of us who are gardeners know what that means. Every year, there's that first tomato, or first pepper, or first strawberry, and it's a promise that all those other fruits that are still green on the plant will ripen too. Likewise, Jesus is the first man to complete God's plan for mankind. We are not designed to live for a few decades and then die in futility. We are designed to live eternally, and the resurrection proves we will be raised to do exactly that.
- B. If that is so, it changes the way we live our entire lives. It's like this: let's say Joe gives me \$1000, tells me it's mine to spend, but warns me that whatever I have left at the end of the day, I have to give back to him. I promise you, friends, by sundown, every last dime of that \$1000 would be gone. Now, let's say that Joe comes to me, gives me the same \$1000, but places no restriction on when I can spend it. Being the kind of man I am, I'd send that money straight to my bank account and keep it there. What I did with that money would be totally changed by the fact that I got to keep it. Likewise, what we do with our lives ought to be completely changed by the knowledge that we can hold onto them, and we know that from the resurrection.
- C. This idea, that I ought to use my life wisely if I can hold on to it, is only reinforced by the truth that **I WILL BE JUDGED**. This too is something that we learn from the resurrection. Paul tells us how in part of the sermon on Mars Hill, recorded for us in Acts 17:31. Jesus rising from the dead is proof that we will be judged. Here's how the proof works: Throughout His ministry, Jesus constantly taught a standard of righteous living. He said that God would reward the good who obeyed that standard, but punish the wicked who flouted it. Obviously, this is not something that happens uniformly on earth. God doesn't sit at His heavenly computer with His finger poised over the "Smite" button, waiting to squish every person who dares to sin. It's true that sin is often punished on earth, but there are sinners who live joyously until the end of their days, and there are righteous people who have to fight through disaster after disaster throughout their whole lives. What the resurrection shows is that even after we die, there is going to be another forum for justice. There is going to be another day, in which God is going to balance the scales. He is going to give to the righteous what they deserve and to the wicked what they deserve, to everyone, worldwide. No exceptions.
- D. That's a pretty classic example of good news/bad news. That's good news for me because it means that I may be vindicated and exalted by God. On the other hand, it's bad news because **I MAY BE CONDEMNED**. This is not a popular notion. Most folks in the "Christian" community these days prefer to believe in a warm fuzzy God, sort of like a heavenly Easter Bunny, who only gives people nice things and would never, ever do anything unpleasant to anybody. That's not the way the resurrection and judgment to follow are going to work. Jesus Himself explains in John 5:28-29. In a sense, the day of judgment is going to be self-sorting. Everybody who spent their lives doing good is going to awaken to a resurrection of life, but those who wickedly lived for themselves will awaken to a resurrection of judgment and condemnation. The warm-fuzzy-God folks have it half right. On that day, a lot of folks are going to heaven, but there are also going to be a lot of folks going to hell, too. If we don't live up to God's standard here, we're going to be in the wrong line.
- E. There are many in the religious world who are willing to admit even this much. However, they have a nasty habit of ascribing to God a much more lenient standard than He will actually use. They say that obviously people like Hitler should end up in hell, and murderers and rapists and other really bad folks, but not people like my neighbor Marge who's really sweet and takes good care of her flowers, even though she's never been to church in her life. They act like God is going to let people into heaven for being nice instead of being righteous. Problem is, that's not the way God works. God's standard is 100% righteousness, all the time, and if we don't live up to that standard, we earn eternal death for ourselves. Who earns eternal death in that way? Everybody. Look at Romans 3:23. All have sinned, and sin is the one thing God can't tolerate. The resurrection of Jesus warns us that unless we find salvation, we face the certainty of everlasting torment.
- F. Now, if the impact of the resurrection of Jesus stopped there, it would be one of the darkest moments in human history. I'd much rather pass into oblivion when I die than be raised to be cast into the lake of fire. Thankfully, the meaning of the resurrection DOESN'T stop there. The resurrection also means that each one of us can say, "**I MAY BE SAVED**." Paul explains the analogy in Romans 6:3-4. After He was crucified, Jesus had a problem. He was dead. Likewise, we have a problem. We are spiritually dead in our sins. Because He was dead, Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Once we recognize that we are dead, we imitate that burial. We allow ourselves to be immersed in the watery grave of baptism. The Bible teaches that as we come up out of the water, we are cleansed from our sins by His power so that we need no longer fear eternal punishment. That's not something we can tell by experience. When I was baptized, there was no sensation of my sins departing. Then how can we know? Simple! We know that God can and does raise us from our spiritual tombs because He raised Christ from a physical tomb. Just as Jesus was given new life, so too are we. The miracle of His physical resurrection foreshadows the miracle of our spiritual resurrection.

Conclusion. If you want to have that resurrection in Jesus, come to Him today.