

The Resurrection from the Dead

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One of the most familiar passages in the entire Bible concerning the Lord's Supper is Acts 20:7. We pay this passage a great deal of attention because it provides us with the Scriptural precedent for partaking of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. However, we don't usually spend as much time thinking about what that means.

After all, we know when the actual institution of the Lord's Supper took place. The Passover always took place on a Friday, and the Jews reckoned days from sunset to sunset, so Jesus gathered with His disciples in the upper room after sundown on what we would call Thursday evening. He was arrested after midnight on what we would call Friday morning, crucified about Friday noon, and dead by about 3:00 in the afternoon. If we are to be focused wholly on the Last Supper and the death of our Lord, why do we gather here on Sunday, and not on a Thursday or Friday?

This isn't some oversight on the part of the early Christians or on the part of God. Instead, the time that God selected for us to meet is meant to point us toward one of the crucial things that we ought to remember. Jesus didn't die on the first day of the week, but He was certainly raised from the dead on the first day of the week, and it is the timing of that event that we are commanded to come together to commemorate. So, then, God intends for our very presence here this morning to remind us that we are gathered to remember not just the death of Jesus, but also His resurrection.

For some reason, we tend not to think much about the resurrection. I think that I myself was in law school before the thought even crossed my mind that the resurrection of our Lord was just as spiritually significant as His death. Let's turn our attention this morning, then, to that significance, to the importance of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

The Resurrection Itself

For the first part of this study, let's look at one of the accounts of the resurrection itself. Although the others certainly have value, I want to consider this morning the way that Mark tells the story. His gospel is usually considered to be the earliest of the gospels, and in many ways, his account has the most immediacy. Perhaps more than any of the others, Mark is the one who helps us understand what it was like to be one of the earliest witnesses to the resurrection.

Mark's account begins with his description of the intentions of some of **THE WOMEN** who were followers of Jesus. This depiction appears in Mark 16:1-3. Let's take a moment to consider what the mindset of these women must have been. They were among the witnesses to the crucifixion. They stood there and watched as the man they believed to be the Messiah died the death of a common criminal. This would have been a bewildering moment for all three of them. They had seen Jesus do miracles that no man could do without the help of God. Mary Magdalene had even experienced the miraculous power of Jesus in her own body, when He cast out the seven demons that had possessed her. I'm sure that up until the Roman soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross, they were absolutely convinced that this was the Son of God. But now the Son of God was dead. What happened? Why did God abandon His Holy One so finally and cruelly? Were the Pharisees right after all? Had Jesus been working miracles through the power of Beelzebub and now been struck down? Their minds must have been reeling with confusion, and yet they had come to anoint the One they loved.

Notice also that these women, among Jesus' closest disciples outside of the Twelve, had no expectation of anything out of the ordinary occurring. They came with spices to prepare Jesus' body just as they would have prepared the body of any loved one, and their biggest concern was how to roll away the stone so they could get to the corpse.

However, they begin to realize that matters aren't living up to their expectations when they come to **THE TOMB**. Mark describes this scene in Mark 16:4-5. First of all, the stone that they were worried about, a very large stone that had been sealed into place by the orders of Pilate himself, had been rolled to one side. This would have been every bit as alarming to them as it would be to us to watch a loved one buried, come back in two days, and find that the casket had been dug up. It is probably with a mixture of horror and fear that they come into the tomb. Then, they see a man whom they have never seen before, dressed in a white robe, sitting to the right side of the tomb. The body of Jesus Himself is completely and utterly gone. The three women surely must have thought that the Pharisees had decided to continue their revenge by further mutilating His remains. Either that, or they didn't know what to think.

This fear was not the least allayed by what **THE ANGEL**, for that's what this man in white was, said to them. We read about his words and their results in Mark 16:6-8. First, he tells them not to be alarmed. This is surely proof that there is no marrying nor giving in marriage in heaven, for any husband knows that when your wife is upset about something, the last thing that you do is tell her to calm down! He then proceeds to tell them something terrifying and incomprehensible. Jesus, the man they loved, the One whom they watched die a slow agonizing death, wasn't there, because He had risen from the dead. They could see where He had been, probably because the grave clothes were still there, but there wasn't so much as a trace of the body. The angel then instructs them to bring word of what has happened to Peter and the rest of the disciples and to instruct them to prepare to meet the risen Lord in Galilee.

This does not register. From other accounts, we know that Mary Magdalene doesn't understand that Jesus truly has been raised from the dead until Jesus Himself appears to comfort her. At this point, despite the angel's words, she is

still convinced that Jesus has been body-snatched. The other two women, even though they understand that a miracle has occurred, apparently feel about the way we would if we found ourselves plunged into the middle of a horror movie. They haven't realized that the resurrection of Jesus is a good thing. All they get is that the dead have come back to life, and they're scared to death. A little bit later, the women will pull themselves together and go to the apostles, but for now, that's the last thing on their minds. They flee the tomb of Jesus in terror, and they don't tell a soul.

The Importance of the Resurrection

For people who don't know much about the Bible, or about Christianity beyond the mere fact of Jesus being raised from the dead, this account would probably come as a shock. As grim a time as the day of Jesus' crucifixion was, the day of His resurrection wasn't much happier, at least among those who first experienced it. However, with the advantage of 2000 years' perspective and the help of decades of commentary from inspired authors, we can understand how meaningful and indeed joyful the resurrection was, both in its essence and the way it was received.

First of all, the account of the resurrection is important because it **SHOWS THE THINKING OF THE DISCIPLES**. We already saw the reaction of the women to the news; we see the reaction of the men in Luke 24:10-11. This is extremely important. Everybody in the first century, from the apostles to the chief priests, agreed that the tomb of Jesus was empty. The big question, both then and now, is why it was empty. Did Jesus rise from the dead, as His disciples claimed, or did His disciples steal His body from the tomb, as the Jewish authorities claimed? The biggest flaw to the chief priests' argument is the way the disciples handled the news of the empty tomb. If Peter and the rest meant to run a scam on the rest of the Jewish nation, they would have been selling that scam as hard as they could. From sunrise on on Sunday morning, they would have been telling everybody who would listen that Jesus had risen.

However, that's exactly what they did not do. Jesus' disciples met the news of the resurrection not with immediate acceptance, but with fear and unbelief. When the women finally get their act together and tell the apostles, their amazing news gets laughed off. It takes 40 days of personal appearances from Jesus before His disciples finally get their heads around the fact that He is actually risen. They weren't running a scam. They were blindsided by a miracle.

Second, Jesus' resurrection **PROVES HIS SONSHIP**. Paul makes this observation in Romans 1:3-4. Anybody who cared to study the genealogies could recognize that Jesus was the descendant of David, by blood on His mother's side and by adoption on His earthly father's side. This was probably not an uncommon trait. Today, 12 percent of the men in Central Asia can genetically prove that they are descendants of Genghis Khan, and I suspect that the percentage of descendants of David among the Jews was even higher. Jesus had to be of the line of David to fulfill the Scripture, but that wasn't a high bar to overcome. The high bar was that He also needed to prove that He was the Son of God, and as it turned out, the only thing that would prove that was for Him to rise from the dead through the power of His own indestructible life. There are others in Scripture who were brought back to life by various prophets, but only Jesus was raised without the intervention of some other man of God. His resurrection proved that He was who He claimed to be.

Third, the resurrection of the Son **ASSURES OUR SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION**. Paul makes the opposite point in 1 Corinthians 15:17. All of us here who are Christians are Christians because we believed that if we obeyed the gospel and were baptized for the forgiveness of our sins, those sins would be washed away by His blood. That's a very significant thing to believe, but why do we believe it? What assurance do we have that when we were baptized, we accomplished something more than getting wet? It's not like any of our baptisms were accompanied by a heavenly trumpet fanfare or anything. The reason why we can be assured of our salvation is because Jesus taught that those who believe and are baptized will be saved, and we can be assured that Jesus was teaching the truth because He rose from the dead. It is true that Jesus, when He died on the cross, offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, but lots of men have been killed by other men in gruesome ways, some of which are even worse than crucifixion. How do we know that Jesus' death wasn't just another meaningless cruelty perpetrated by the Roman government? We know it because of all of the men who have been unjustly executed, Jesus is the only one who ever came to life again. When the Bible tells us that Jesus' death is the most significant event of human history, that isn't just talk. It's backed up by the resurrection.

Finally, Jesus' resurrection **FORESHADOWS OUR PHYSICAL RESURRECTION**. This promise appears many times in Scripture, but Paul sums it up succinctly in 1 Corinthians 15:20-22. We usually consider it unhealthy to dwell on the fact, but every one of us here is mortal. No matter how carefully we tend our bodies, unless the Lord returns first, those bodies will fail. No matter how much medical science advances, it will never be able to beat the Grim Reaper. Indeed, the only One who can defeat death is Jesus. God has done some amazing things, but it boggles my mind to think that through His power, the day will come when saints who have been dead for thousands of years will rise from their tombs and live again. Martyrs who have been consumed by the flame and had their ashes scattered on the winds will somehow have their bodies reconstituted. I can't imagine how God will do that, but I know that He will do it, because He gave life to His Son, the firstfruits from the dead. Because Jesus was raised, I can be confident that someday, I will be raised too, and it is to that day that we may all eagerly look. This is the Lord's day, the day of His resurrection, and if we remember only His suffering, our remembrance is incomplete. This is the day of His great triumph too.