

The Central Importance of Christ's Resurrection



The resurrection of Christ has always been under attack, right from the very beginning when the Jewish religious authorities ordered the Roman soldiers to lie about Christ's resurrection, to the present day where it is once again being denied and ridiculed. As Christians the resurrection of Christ is one of the pillars of our faith, and so in order to remind ourselves of the importance of the resurrection, the hope it brings us and its practical application to our lives, the Sola 5 Chronicles interviewed Rev. Peter Sammons (*Germiston Baptist Church*) on the subject.

Please can you in simple terms, explain why Christ's resurrection from the dead is of central and crucial importance to the Gospel?

I believe the whole of the Christian faith stands or falls on the fact of Christ's resurrection and the veracity of the biblical accounts thereof. If Christ's resurrection was not a fact, consider the following implications:

Firstly, the whole New Testament is unreliable. If the gospel accounts of the resurrection are fictitious, then nothing else in the gospels can be trusted. There is nothing in them that any rational person can believe concerning the incarnation, the life, the

miracles, the teachings, the promises, the death or even the person of Jesus Christ. In short, the core of our faith, the person and work of Jesus Christ, would be a farce!

The book of Acts could not be trusted as an accurate historical account of the early church, written by a respected and trusted historian. It begins fictitiously "He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days" (Acts 1:3) and continues in similar vein with Him appearing to Saul/Paul (Acts 9:1-5; 22:1-11; 26:12-18) and their preaching centering on the fact of the resurrection.

All of the New Testament writers regard the resurrection as fact. Seven out of the nine writers refer to it directly as a fact, not as fiction, a hoax, a myth or a legend. The other two refer to Jesus Christ as being alive, which presupposes a belief in the resurrection.

Secondly, Jesus himself was a liar or mentally ill. That is, of course if you still believe the gospels are giving an accurate account of his words. After all he confidently asserted that he would rise from the dead.

Thirdly, his ministry was a failure. The purpose of His incarnation was to give us life (John 10:10), to raise us up at the last day (John 6:38-40, 44). If he did not rise from the dead, how can he raise us up? If Christ did not rise, then he is dead and so will we be.

Fourthly, there is no "good news". Consider what Peter says in 1 Peter 1:3-6.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials"

If Christ was not raised, then "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" has NOT caused us to "born again" through it. There is NO "living hope" or imperishable inheritance kept in heaven for us. We are NOT being guarded for a salvation ready to be revealed, AND there is no basis for rejoicing in the various trials that cause us grief!

Paul was correct when he said "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Cor 15:14-19).

Without the resurrection, Christ's birth is insignificant, His ascension is a lie, His return is a pipe dream, we have no advocate interceding on our behalf before the throne, we have no hope of life after death, his teachings are mere moralistic philosophy, the Old Testament prophecies are hollow and it's history books are no more significant than any national history.

Without the resurrection, Albert Schweitzer was right in "The Quest for The Historical Jesus" (1906). Jesus is a pathetic spectacle, an immeasurably great man crushed by the wheel of history.

Why should the resurrection be one of the greatest points of hope, comfort and encouragement for Christians?

Because it is the ultimate proof that greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world. He defeated death and him who holds the power of death and thereby freed us from our fear of death (Heb 2:14 &15).

In death, man is at his most powerless while Satan is at his most powerful. Our Lord in His weakest state took on Satan in his most powerful battle zone, went head to head with him and defeated him.

If He has defeated Satan, our worst enemy and death, our last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26, Psalm 89:48), and if death has been swallowed up by victory (1 Cor 15:54) then there is nothing that we need fear.

As Peter says, through the resurrection we have a LIVING HOPE. It is living, because our faith is not mere wishful thinking, positive suggestion or power of positive thinking. It is not adherence to the teachings of some dead religious philosopher or observance of religious rituals and rites. Our faith is a robust faith, a living relationship with the robust conquering, risen, living Christ.

It is a living hope because as we go through the trials and troubles of this life, Peter assures us that through the resurrection of Christ we can rejoice because we know that through them we are being refined.

What difference has Christ's resurrection made in regards to a believer's battle against sin and temptation?

In order to best answer this question we must understand the inseparable link between the Holy Spirit in us and the risen Christ. In John 14 & 16 Jesus' promises of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16&17; 16:7-15) are

wrapped up in His promises that through His resurrection and ascension, He will not leave us as orphans, but will come to us and be with us and IN us (John 14:18-20; 16:16). Thus, the coming of the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost and at the re-birth of every believer since then, is simultaneously a coming of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit who lives in us is the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ (Rom 8:9-11).

Notice how the Romans 8 passage above, flows contextually out of Paul's struggle with sin in Romans 7 and his desperate cry in verse 24 "who will rescue me from this body of death?". The answer comes in the form of verse 25 through to chapter 8. So the key to our struggle with sin and temptation is to be found in the person of the risen Christ working through His indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:5-17).

Eph. 1:18 – 23 says that the power of God for the saints, is the power of God which raised Christ from the dead, using four different Greek words to describe that power (v19). In Philippians 2:13 therefore the power by which God is at work in us to "will and to act according to his good purpose" is the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the power of the resurrection and the risen Christ.

How does Christ's resurrection give a believer confidence in prayer?

Because he ever lives as our permanent high priest, interceding for us (Heb. 7:24&25) Rom 8:34 "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us". Again this ministry of the risen Lord must be understood in connection with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we don't know how or what to pray (Rom 8:26), the Spirit/the risen Christ intercedes for us.

Death is something that almost all people fear, how does Christ's resurrection serve to eliminate this fear of death for believers?

The Apostle Paul in 1 Cor 6:14 tells us that the same power that raised Christ from the dead will also raise us, who believe, from the dead. In 1 Cor 15, he speaks at length about the resurrection of believers from the dead, how should we understand our death and resurrection from dead, in light of what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians?

I will answer these questions together. People naturally fear death because it is

the greatest weapon in Satan's arsenal. It was our first enemy "The day you eat of that fruit you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17) and it is our last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). Death is our universal and common enemy, no one can escape it (Heb. 9:27, Psalm 89:48; James 4:14).

Scripture speaks of two deaths. The first death is physical, universal and inescapable. The second death (Rev. 2:11, Rev 20 & 21) is spiritual and eternal, but it is avoidable through faith in Christ. That is what Jesus meant when he said "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25&26)

The moment Christians die, we enter paradise with our Lord (Luke 23:43). At the final resurrection our bodies will be raised anew, perfected and reunited to our souls. We have this glorious hope through the death and resurrection of Christ

Most Christians don't fear death because they know they will be alive with Him. However, many do fear the process of dying. As Woody Allen said "I'm not afraid of death, I just don't want to be there when it happens". I have news for Woody Allen, he will be there and he ought to be afraid - especially of what comes after it happens (Heb 9:27).

But for Christians, the process of death itself should hold no fear because Jesus is

our "good shepherd" (John 10:11) who lay down His life for us. More than that, He is our "great shepherd" who was brought back from the dead (Heb 13:20) and He is also our chief shepherd" who will appear at our death, to give us the crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4). Therefore, with the Lord as our shepherd (Psalm 23) we need "fear no evil" because we will only walk through the VALLEY of the SHADOW of death and HE WILL BE WITH US, HIS ROD AND HIS STAFF WILL COMFORT US.

As Christians we do not die alone! Christ said I will NEVER leave you nor forsake you, and that means in the process and after the event of death as well.

The sting of death has been removed (1 Cor 15:55-57, Hosea 13:14).

For many Christians the only time we give the resurrection any thought is over the Easter weekend. Why is it of great importance that we daily remember and live in the light of the resurrection of Christ? Please can you list some practical ways we might be able to do this.

It is of great importance because as stated right at the beginning, the whole of the Christian faith stands or falls on the fact of Christ's resurrection and the veracity of the biblical accounts thereof.

Without the fact of the resurrection, the biblical doctrines pop like balloons and are left flat and meaningless, shot down with a simple "so what". Because of the resurrec-

tion: death no longer has dominion, Satan's power is broken down; the sting of death is removed; our final enemy, death is defeated; our hope becomes a living hope, an eternal hope; we have the hope of receiving new resurrection bodies like His; our assurance is given substance; our victory is secure and He is crowned with many crowns.

As to HOW we are to practically remember and live in the light of His resurrection, there is no magical formula, just three suggestions:

1. Daily cultivate your relationship with Him, which is only possible because He is alive
2. As often as possible, realistically evaluate how the resurrection validates everything we do as Christians and as Churches. According to Paul (1 Cor 15:12-19), without the resurrection, our preaching is ineffective (v14), our faith is futile (v14 & 17), our witnessing false (v15 & 16), His forgiveness is meaningless (v17), our future is pointless (v18) and our religion is senseless (v19).
3. Give the resurrection the focus it deserves in our corporate worship services. How often do we begin our services with a liturgy celebrating His being alive?

Thank you, Rev. Sammons for your time in answering these questions. What a joy it is to know that Christ has indeed risen from the dead, and our hope is a living one, let us all strive to focus daily on birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, and all that which it has brought us.