

Introduction

Titles are tricky. At least, for me. I want them to be snappy, arousing some interest, giving an idea of what to expect – things not always easy to reconcile. Back in the old days, quite often the title itself was a minor booklet. Subtitles, I find, come to the rescue. A bit.

The two ‘undervalued themes’ in the title are, as the subtitle makes clear, Christ’s resurrection (leading to the believer’s resurrection) and Christ’s kingdom. (As a working definition, I take this ‘kingdom’ to be the time of Christ’s reign, Christ as King, the final overthrow of evil, and the ultimate triumph of God and his people). These two themes – resurrection and kingdom – are, in my view, undervalued by most believers today; they seem to border on being non-issues for them. About twenty years ago, a lady of my vintage told me how refreshing it was to hear a discourse on the Second Coming: ‘We never hear it these days!’ Is it because, unlike the early believers, we have become comfortable in this world?¹

I say ‘undervalued’, but this needs a more nuanced explanation, especially with regard to ‘kingdom’. Some sections of Christendom make much of ‘kingdom’, but do so in terms of church-triumphalism, or the wielding of political power by the church for revolution or social improvement, or the saving of the planet from environmental destruction, and so on.² William Blake’s *Jerusalem* encapsulates one aspect of it:

¹ In my early days as a believer (mid to late 1950s), the second coming of Christ was a much-discussed subject, arousing much passion. Alas, the group I belonged to was pre-occupied with fitting Middle-Eastern political events and personalities into Scripture. Nevertheless, we were, at least in this regard, interested in Christ’s return.

² See, for example, N.T. Wright: *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, SPCK, London, 2003. See also the final chapters of Sharon James: *How Christianity Transformed the World*, Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 2021 and *The Lies We Are Told...*, Christian Focus

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*And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!*

*And did the countenance divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark satanic mills?*

*Bring me my bow of burning gold:
Bring me my arrows of desire:
Bring me my spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!*

*I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green & pleasant land.*

This is not what Scripture means by the kingdom of Christ.

Confusion over the kingdom is nothing new. Christ met it in his day. He not only met it; he confronted it head-on. The prophets had repeatedly spoken of the coming Messiah, the King, the one who would establish his kingdom, and many Jews of Christ's day were looking out for the fulfilment of those prophecies (Luke 1:67-79; 2:25-38; 23:51, for instance).³ This expectation, and curiosity about it, was longstanding. Christ told his disciples:

Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it (Luke 10:23-24).

Publications, Fearn, 2022, for post-millennialism based on old-covenant texts, heyday-Puritan prophetic dreams (ignoring late Puritans who had to live with defeat), Jonathan Edwards, selective C.H.Spurgeon, and (very heavily) on Iain Murray: *The Puritan Hope*, Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1971. For my brief reply, see Appendix 1.

³ See my series of sermons 'The Watershed of the Ages' on my sermonaudio.com page.

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Peter could later write:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

So far, so good. But the Jews of Christ's day were expecting those prophecies to be fulfilled in the restoration of something very like Solomon's kingdom, a resurgence of the temple, a glorious nation arising out of deliverance from Roman occupation, that humiliation which had lasted for well-nigh a century. These dreams were wild, badly mistaken, and Christ told them so. Take, for example, his kingdom-parables of Matthew 13: the kingdom would not be a renewed Jewish kingdom like Solomon's: indeed, it wouldn't be Jewish, at all. The kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to others (Matt. 21:43)! How wrong could these Jews be!

Other Jews thought of the kingdom in terms of material prosperity. They, too, were wrong. Facing the crowds who were flocking to him after his miraculous feeding of the thousands, Jesus, knowing what was in their minds and hearts, preached what might well be considered his most challenging sermon – on the necessity of eating his flesh and drinking his blood:

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself... The next day... Jesus [told] them: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves' (John 6:15,22,26).

With these words, Christ launched into his devastating discourse, a discourse which had dramatic consequences, with thousands turning away from him, determined to have nothing more to do with him. If he wasn't going to be a material Santa Claus handing out goodies right, left and centre, if he was

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unequivocally demanding spiritual life, if that was what it was all about, goodbye!

Again, take John 8. When Christ told the Jews that they were slaves, they, thinking in political, economic and social terms, deeply offended by his remarks, responded with vigour:

We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say: ‘You will become free’?

Never enslaved to anyone? How could they say such a thing? They knew full well that, even as they were loud in their protest and denial, they were under the power of Rome (John 11:48; 18:31), and had been, as I say, for a century.

In any case, Christ immediately disabused them. As he explained, membership of his kingdom would spell freedom from the true and eternal slavery; slavery to the devil and sin, not slavery to the Romans, or whatever, is the real bondage gripping men:

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin... If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:31-36).

It was not just the unbelieving Jews who were mistaken about the kingdom – even Christ’s own disciples, those who had been with him throughout his ministry, could think of the kingdom in no other way than the restoration of the majesty of Solomon’s day, the restoration of Israel’s military, political and economic power, with the overthrow of the Roman occupation.⁴ Take the way the two on the Emmaus road opened their hearts to their

⁴ Earthly kingship in Christ’s day meant a culture of despotism and tyranny – more like Germany under Hitler and Russia under Stalin. In the West, we have virtually lost the concept of kingship which was current in Christ’s day. In the UK, we have had a constitutional monarchy (virtually toothless) for over 300 years. The US threw off even constitutional monarchy in the late 18th century.

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unrecognised companion, explaining why they were so depressed:

Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people... our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.

By ‘the redemption of Israel’ they did not mean ‘salvation from sin’; they meant the triumph of the Messiah in his restoration of the kingdom for Israel, the renaissance of the temple, and deliverance of the nation from Roman captivity. Despite the plain and repeated teaching that Christ had given them about his sufferings (Luke 9:21-22,43-45; 13:33; 18:31-34; 22:15, for instance), they simply could not shake off their triumphalist expectations. Christ’s response on the Emmaus road was blunt: his kingdom was not one of old-covenant kingly and priestly power and display, nor of military and economic prowess, but quite the opposite.⁵ His kingdom would be one of weakness, of suffering, of rejection. Indeed, shocking as it must have sounded, the Messiah – he, himself – had come to die:

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?... And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to

⁵ For instance: ‘Many who are first will be last, and the last first’ (Matt. 19:30). ‘The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted’ (Matt. 23:11-12). ‘If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him’ (John 13:14-16). ‘God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God’ (1 Cor. 1:27-29). And so on.

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them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:19-27).

But, as they listened to the truth he unfolded, their cloud of depression lifted:

Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures? (Luke 24:32).

As Christ later explained to his gathered disciples, real kingdom work – which was what they were going to be engaged in – would be very different to the old covenant:

[Christ] said to them: ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled’. Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them: ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high’ (Luke 24:44-49).⁶

This, of course, was all of a piece with Christ’s great commission:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

⁶ Indeed, as already noted, Christ had long since told the Jewish leaders, his kingdom would not a Jewish affair: ‘The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits’ (Matt. 21:43). Christ, of course, was referring to the body of believers (1 Pet. 2:9-10). The AV’s ‘The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof’ must not be interpreted as a reference to England, Scotland or America. As before, see my *Battle* for the very costly consequences of that foolish mistake.

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Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

Instead of conquest through victory in war (Ex. 23:20-30; Num. 33:50-53; Josh. 10:14,42, for instance), in the new covenant the aim would be the glory of God in the conversion of sinners. Of course, without trust in Christ sinners would perish, but these last days would be the days of John 3:16. That would be kingdom work.

Nevertheless, even after such clear explanations, during the days leading up to Pentecost, Christ still had to disabuse his disciples about the kingdom:

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

He gave them strict instructions accompanied by a promise of enormous importance:

[Christ] ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said: ‘You heard from me; for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’ (Acts 1:4-5).

And still the disciples could not let go of their mistaken ideas:

So when they had come together, they asked him: ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6).

So, yet again, Christ set them on the right course:

He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ (Acts 1:7-8).

As we continue to read on in Acts, we see that the penny finally dropped. Take James’ words at the *ekklēsia* meeting in

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Jerusalem,⁷ called to discuss issues raised by the advance of the gospel – the advance of the kingdom – among the Gentiles; they are very significant in showing how the believers had come to re-interpret the prophets:

Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old’ (Acts 15:14-18, quoting Amos 9:11-12).

In short, Christ’s kingdom is utterly different to any and every earthly kingdom. At this point, Daniel 2 should be read, culminating in:

In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure (Dan. 2:44-45).

The Lord’s classic statement before Pilate should have settled the issue once and for all:

My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world (John 18:36).

Yet, notwithstanding all this weight of teaching and experience, years later Paul still found it necessary to correct the Corinthian believers over the way the kingdom would be advanced:

⁷ A meeting of the Jerusalem *ekklēsia*, please note, not a Church Council (talk about reading back into Scripture!) (see my *Battle*).

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I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete (2 Cor. 10:2-6).

I leave it there – for now. All I wanted to do at this stage was to make the case that mistakes over the kingdom are nothing new. Such misunderstanding seems almost endemic among believers. And that misunderstanding – or, to add yet another ingredient to the mix – that neglect of the theme of the kingdom, is part of the background to the publishing of this present work.⁸

As for the second ‘theme’ – resurrection – I am not neutral; I take the biblical account of Christ’s physical resurrection for granted. Moreover, I do not try to bring the witnesses’ accounts into a simple order, nor do I set about providing evidence to support those accounts.⁹ There is no shortage of material for those who wish to pursue such questions, but I am concerned with looking at what the Bible says about the way Christ’s resurrection affected, changed – turned upside down, more like – the lives of the first believers: how the resurrection revolutionised the way they thought, how they lived, how and what they preached, and the hope it gave them when facing bereavement and death. No mean list!

⁸ For all their many errors, Jehovah Witnesses with their ‘kingdom hall’ put to shame those evangelicals who describe their meeting house as ‘a church’.

⁹ Just to say in passing, the variety in the witnesses’ accounts, far from damaging their testimony, is perfectly natural and serves only to strengthen it. It is just what we would expect – and get – when several witnesses testify about a road accident, for instance. What is more, if all the witnesses of the resurrection had given precisely the same account in exact detail, the cry of ‘Conspiracy!’ would brought the plaster from the ceiling!

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What is more, I do not write in any antiquarian or academic spirit. As I have made clear in my previous works, I am a preacher; it can be no surprise, therefore, that in this book I have a pastoral and polemical intent. What is more, I intend to spell that purpose out.

Let me digress for a moment to say just a little more about this important matter. In quoting the following, I am not for a moment suggesting that my work can hold an academic candle to Alister McGrath's; I simply want to point up the contrast between my approach and that of the academic/publishing world. The publication of a book was proposed; McGrath explained the stance he and his publishers would adopt:

I would write an introduction to Christian theology, not any specific form of Christian theology. The work would include discussion of Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelical approaches to theology, treating all with respect and ensuring that they were properly represented; but it would not commend or adopt any of the specific views. It would be descriptive not prescriptive, allowing its users to understand what had been thought rather than telling them what to think. It would let them make up their own minds on core theological questions, rather than direct them to predetermined conclusions.¹⁰

Decidedly, that is not my approach. Indeed, McGrath and his publishers have offered a false dichotomy: in writing on spiritual matters, the choice is not either/or, but one of three. The alternatives are not simply 'descriptive': some say this, and others say that; you pay your money and take your choice; and 'prescriptive': I am telling you what it is, and you have to believe it, especially since I am telling you what the favoured Confession (Westminster, 1689 or whatever) says. There is a third way – the scriptural way: this is what Scripture says – at least, as I see it – and you need to weigh it against Scripture in the spirit of Acts 17:11; the Berean Jews 'received the word

¹⁰ Alister McGrath: *Through a Glass Darkly: Journeys through Science, Faith & Doubt – a Memoir*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2020, pp116-117.

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[that is, the preaching of Paul and Silas] with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so’.

This third way is my approach. If you find what I write contradicts Scripture, reject what I write; if, however, you find it is right according to Scripture – as you see Scripture, of course – then believe it. Moreover, we all need to turn the truth into action: ‘If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them’ (John 13:17). Christ did not close his great Sermon on the Mount¹¹ with the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24-27) in order to provide material for Sunday-school teachers. Christ’s encomium still stands: ‘Blessed... are those who hear the word of God and keep it’ (Luke 11:28). And James was clear enough: it is good to hear and know what Scripture says – no doubt about that! – but it is the doing of it that counts (Jas. 1:19-25; 2:8-9). A lecture informs; preaching informs us in order to make us feel in order to make us act. Mary, Christ’s mother, spelled it out: ‘Do whatever he tells you’ (John 2:5).

And that is the spirit in which I write, that is the end I look for – in myself and others.

* * *

I am convinced that when it comes to thinking about the resurrection and the kingdom, most contemporary believers – and I include myself – are very different to the first believers, that we fall far short of them: Christ’s resurrection and the kingdom do not play the vital role in our lives which they played in theirs. That being so, I have written this book in order to do what I can to help believers – and, once again, I include myself¹² – to recover what the first believers had in this regard; namely, the new-covenant attitude to Christ’s resurrection and kingdom. Let me stress this: I am not writing in detail about the

¹¹ For more on this, see my *Smoke*.

¹² Writing on a subject always clarifies it for me. Trying to teach others, explaining to others, is a far better way to learn than listening to a monologue. Hence the value of mutual discussion over an open Bible (Heb. 10:24-25). See my *Sowed; Priesthood*.

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resurrection and the kingdom. My concern is with the ways in which both resurrection and kingdom affected the life of the early *ekklēsia*, and contrasting that with the experience of many of us today.

Let me be specific. Take that which the Bible calls the believer's 'blessed hope', which will become a reality at 'the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (Tit. 2:13). Sadly, most contemporary believers, by concentrating on the intermediate state – the immediate blessed condition after death of the believer in heaven with Christ – have effectively diminished this 'blessed hope'. They have reduced their own, personal resurrection at the second coming of Christ to a kind of tack-on, an after-thought, a postscript or epilogue, or even an interruption, a massive invasion, of the bliss already being enjoyed – leading to what? A more-or-less continuance of the same! Post-millennialism does something similar by encouraging believers to think about a flourishing earthly kingdom *before* Christ's return.

Christendom, which has deeply infected us all, must carry a large measure of responsibility for all this: as it has played havoc with so much else in the gospel, so it has done much to ruin (or, at least, severely reduce or diminish) the resurrection – in the first place, the resurrection of Christ – and, intimately associated with it, the resurrection of the believer.

Diminish the resurrection? Surely not! Let me justify my claim.

At best, for most believers today, the resurrection of Christ is something to think and sing about for an hour or so on a Christendom-designated¹³ Sunday in early Spring. Forelocks can be pulled to it on 'ordinary' Sunday mornings, yes, but it really comes into its own on this high day in the Christendom

¹³ In the seventh century, in order to settle a long-standing, heated quarrel about the date on which Easter should be observed, delegates at the Synod of Whitby devised a formula (in accordance with the Roman system) which is still used today – by most in Christendom, that is; the Orthodox and some Catholics opt for another day.

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calendar – Easter Sunday. Truth to tell, the resurrection of Christ – and, therefore, their own resurrection – is of little practical consequence for most believers. Indeed, for many, a special church service, with officials and church furniture bedecked with flowers and material of selected colours, Easter eggs, Easter biscuits, Easter cards, furry bunnies and fluffy chicks, and all the rest of the Christendom paraphernalia, smother the bodily resurrection of Christ. Christendom rules OK!¹⁴

The first believers, however, living as they did before Christendom had been invented, saw Christ's resurrection in a very different light. No chocolate cream-filled eggs or special biscuits for them! Christ's resurrection, to them, was the greatest event imaginable, towering above all else. They had come to see the resurrection as the fulfilment of long-awaited prophecy. Further, the resurrection was a solid, hard-nosed, hard-edged fact – now a doctrine – something to be preached, and preached by believers in their confrontation of the hostile cultures with which they were surrounded – Jewish, Greek and Roman – even though this would inevitably take them into ridicule, ostracism, pain and worse.

Let me correct myself. It wasn't so much that the first believers preached the doctrine of resurrection. I don't know as they ever did what so many Reformed men have done and still do – namely, preach doctrine (often, see above, delivered as a painstaking intellectual, formal lecture or essay): they preached the resurrected Christ, the resurrected Christ as King: 'What we proclaim is... Jesus Christ as Lord' (2 Cor. 4:5). That was what got them into trouble. Christ was not only lord; he was the Lord, the one and only Lord, the one to whom every knee would have to bow (Phil. 2:9-11).

¹⁴ Christendom has not yet reduced the 'celebration' of Christ's resurrection to the same level of childishness and carnality as it has Christ's incarnation, but who knows if the two may not run neck and neck in the coming years? For more on Christendom, see Appendix 2 in my *Relationship*. See also my *Pastor*.

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What is more, the resurrection of Christ, leading as it inevitably did to the assurance of their own resurrection, also served as a massive stimulus for them to live a life of holiness and gospel service. And, of course, as stated earlier, it was the foundation of their ‘blessed hope’.¹⁵ As Christ, just before his death, had declared:

Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live (John 14:19).

Let that sink in!

As John Calvin stated in his *Commentary* on the verse, believers are here taught to appreciate that ‘the life of Christ is the cause of our life’. As Paul put it:

If [that is, since] the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you (Rom. 8:11).¹⁶

Devastating stuff!

In short, the resurrection of Christ was of such importance to the first believers, that it is impossible to overstate its significance, its consequence in their lives. Paul expressed it in this way when writing to the believers in Corinth:

God [who] raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power (1 Cor. 6:14).

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 [that is, believers who have died] have perished. If in

¹⁵ Recently, when preaching on John 8:56, I challenged us all with the fact that Abraham ‘longed for the anticipated’ day of Christ: do we, as believers, long for the appearance of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ in his second coming? See the sermon ‘Longing Anticipation’ on my sermonaudio.com page.

¹⁶ Some view this statement as a reference to progressive sanctification. The fact is, Christ’s resurrection plays a key role in both the believer’s progressive sanctification and his ‘blessed hope’. See later.

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Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:17-19).

The blunt truth is that if Christ has not been raised, the apostles were downright liars, their preaching was useless waffle, the believer's faith is pointless, utterly misguided, based on a glaring fabrication, and the believer is still a slave of sin and ruined by it; moreover, he is left without a glimmer of hope; when he dies he snuffs it, worms feed on him (Job 19:26), and he moulders to dust in the ground – as Christ himself did! And that's the end of it!

The New Testament never tires of making the point; it constantly puts all its eggs in the one basket; all or nothing: if Christ is not raised, no believer is saved (Rom. 10:9), no believer is justified (Rom. 4:25), no believer has new life (Rom. 6:4), no believer is united to Christ (Rom. 7:4), no believer spiritually seated with Christ in glory even now (Eph. 2:6), no believer will himself be reunited with his body when it is raised from the dead (2 Cor. 4:14), no believer is or will be delivered from God's wrath (1 Thess. 1:10), but his trust is in a gospel which is a lie (2 Tim. 2:8), and every believer is wasting his existence depending on a delusion (1 Pet. 1:21). And so on.

The first believers saw all that, and more; no wonder, then, that the resurrection was of prime importance to them. The question is, does the resurrection *consciously* play such a role in our lives?

There is another issue – somewhat more nuanced. Most believers – and, yet again, I include myself – when they do try to think deeply about the resurrection, draw conclusions which are far too limited. There is more to Christ's resurrection than victory over death, for instance. It is that, of course. But that is not enough to account for the new-covenant emphasis on the resurrection. Nor should Christ's resurrection be limited to vindicating his work on the cross. It certainly did that! Again, it clearly and publicly showed that the Father was well-pleased – fully satisfied – with his Son's life and sacrifice, and that his wrath towards his elect had been completely and utterly

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propitiated by his Son's sufferings. Yes, indeed. And, of course, it is gloriously true, as Paul so powerfully concluded his argument on Abraham's faith, by saying that the patriarch's:

...faith was 'counted to him as righteousness'. But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rom. 4:22-25).¹⁷

But – and here comes the nuance I referred to – even all this (right though it is) does not exhaust the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ.

This is the point. I am afraid that many believers have reduced the resurrection and lost immensely by it. They have thought of

¹⁷ But many limit the 'raised for our justification' as to mean 'raised in order to authenticate the fact that he had wrought our justification on the cross'. I am convinced this is a mistake. I quote from my *Imputed*: 'Paul used *dia* twice: "delivered up for (*dia*) our trespasses and raised for (*dia*) our justification". The same weight, surely, must be given in each case. In my view, it is far too weak to say that Christ was raised from the dead simply to vindicate his work, or give proof of the justification he had accomplished for his people on the cross, or to demonstrate that God was being fair to Christ in that since he had earned the pardon, so it was only right that he should be raised. The apostle used *dia*, "for", "on account of", in both parts of the sentence. Christ was delivered up *dia* our offences, and was raised *dia* our justification. The apostle clearly attributes the same weight and power to the resurrection as he does to the death of Christ as far as justification goes. Writing to believers, Paul could say that Christ died for our sins, on account of our sins, to deal with our sins, in order to deliver us from our offences, and likewise he was raised for our justification, on account of our justification, in order to justify us. This passage, I suggest, on its own, drives a coach and horses through the passive-obedience-only view. "Vindication" for the second *dia* is woefully inadequate. The truth is, union with Christ is the key to this entire discussion, and union with Christ involves union with him in his death *and* resurrection (Rom. 6:4-8)'. See my *Imputed* for my argument show that Christ's life of active obedience to the law plays a vital role in the believer's justification: that justification is not confined to Christ's passive obedience – his death on the cross.

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it in somewhat negative terms; the time has long passed for them to wake up to the positive. In this work I want to do something to encourage that shift.

No doubt some will be thinking that I am, yet again, up to my old tricks and overstating the case. If so, perhaps a contemporary illustration might help some to re-think. We have all met – and probably used – the phrase ‘from the cradle to grave’. Many believers talk, think – and not a few preach and write – in such terms. Take Tim Keller, in a recent book:

Life is a journey, and finding and knowing God is fundamental to that journey. When a new child is born, when we approach marriage, and when we find ourselves facing death – either in old age or much earlier – it tends to concentrate the mind... The most fundamental transition any human being can make is what the Bible refers to as the new birth (John 3:1-8), or becoming a ‘new creation’ (2 Cor.5:17)... We [Keller and his wife] want to help readers facing major life changes to think about what constitutes the truly changed life... We start with birth..., move into marriage, and conclude with death.¹⁸

I am not nitpicking when I say that although, of course, there is truth in this, it is far from the whole truth. Death is not the end – no, not for any man, believer or unbeliever. Far from it! In this work, I am primarily concerned with the believer. Death is certainly not the end for the believer. *But nor is the intermediate state.* The end for the believer is the return of Christ, which will bring about the believer’s own resurrection to be forever with Christ and the enjoyment of eternal bliss. And all this is guaranteed and accomplished by the resurrection of Christ himself.

Scripturally speaking, there are two fixed points for the believer. The first is his election to everlasting salvation in God’s decree

¹⁸ Opening in Timothy Keller: *On Death*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2020. I have omitted his reference to infant sprinkling because the rite is totally unscriptural and, alas, has had dire eternal consequences for untold millions.

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in eternity past. Here is a sample of scriptural extracts which declare it:

As many as were appointed to eternal life believed (Acts 13:48).

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified (Rom. 8:28-30).

[The Father] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will... (Eph. 1:4-5).

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Thess. 2:13).

[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began (2 Tim. 1:9).

To those who are elect... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood (2 Pet. 1:1-2).

Of his own [eternal] will [the Father] brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (Jas. 1:18).

The second fixed point for the believer is not his death; nor is it the intermediate state. Rather, it is his everlasting bliss in the new heavens and the new earth in the eternal kingdom of Christ which will be fully established after the general resurrection of all the dead, followed by the final judgment, at Christ's return.¹⁹ I supply no passages at this point to prove it; that is one of the main purposes of the rest of the book.

¹⁹ The final fixed point for the unbeliever is eternal damnation.

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In order to try to break through the stubborn crust of centuries of Christendom to get back to the days of the first believers – those men and women who were deeply conscious that Christ had risen – I intend to be fulsome in quoting Scripture. It is all we have; it is all we need. What is more, when they apply to various aspects of what I want to say, some extracts will be repeated. I make no apology for this. It shows the air the first believers breathed, the atmosphere in which they lived and died. It shows us what we have lost and what we must regain.

Just think: What argument could an early believer use to convince a pagan that Christ was truly God, truly King? His lowly birth? The way his parents were forced to carry him as a babe in arms while fleeing as refugees to Egypt to escape the child's slaughter under Herod? His hidden life in a carpenter's shed in an obscure village, miles from any place of importance? And when he did go public, his rejection by the bulk of Jews, not least the Jewish leaders, the theologians, the politicians of clout? What about his betrayal and desertion? His tragic trial? His ignominious death? Burial? Would the rehearsal this – however polished the lecture, however professionally illustrated the PowerPoint – have convinced any Jew, any Roman (who, inevitably, thought in terms of military and political power), any Greek (who, inevitably, thought in terms of philosophy), or any other pagan (like the Romans and Greeks, soaked in a multiplicity of gods, governed by the occult and witchcraft)? Surely not! It must have been – it could only have been – the passionate and effective preaching of Christ in his resurrection. Yes, his miraculous powers, of course – but what greater miracle than his resurrection? And in the ultimate? His return as Judge – the King bringing in his kingdom in all its glory.

The recovery of that is what I write for: may my little book contribute to it.