

1Cor. 15:12-20

The Importance of the Resurrection

And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain – v. 14

Even before Paul had left the scene of time, the doctrine of the resurrection was under attack from within the church. *How say some among you – Paul asks in v. 12 that there is no resurrection of the dead?* This denial was not something new. During the days of Christ's earthly ministry there was a sect of the Jews known as the Sadducees that denied the doctrine of the resurrection. So we read in Mt 22:23 *The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection...*

We might understand the pagan rejection of such a doctrine. It shouldn't strike us as strange that the proud Greek philosophers mocked when Paul raised the issue with them (Acts 17:32). After all, when you think about it, the resurrection is a rather incredible phenomenon – man rising from the dead? It takes no faith but is readily affirmed by sight that when a man dies his soul departs and his body through decay begins to return to dust. It's a miracle of the highest magnitude for that process to be reversed and for a dead man to come back to life. Death is commonplace – resurrections are not and so from the perspective of the pagan who walks by sight his skepticism would be understandable.

But the Jews should have known better. They had learned of the greatness of their God because the oracles of God had been committed to them and they had a heritage of supernatural miracles. It was because they didn't understand the scriptures nor the power of God that they would question and deny such a doctrine according to Christ.

Those in the church should have known better also. And so Paul demonstrates to them in vv. 13-19 just how much of the Christian's doctrine and experience depended on the validity of the doctrine of the resurrection. *If there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead*, Paul says in v. 13 *then is Christ not risen*.

1Co 15:14 *And if Christ be not risen, then [is] our preaching vain, and your faith [is] also vain*. And if Christ be not risen from the dead, Paul goes on to say in v. 15, then he and the other Apostles are judged to be false witnesses. And if Christ be not risen from the dead, Paul says in v. 17 *your faith is vain and ye are yet in your sins*. Not only so, but *those that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished* he says in v. 18. You begin to get the picture that the doctrine of the resurrection was not, in Paul's estimation, merely some realm of insignificant and speculative theological hair-splitting. All that Paul stood for and hoped in was dependent upon the truth of that doctrine.

Some time ago when we studied the book of Acts you may recall that I emphasized repeatedly that the secret to the power and zeal of the early church was not found in the brilliance of their scholarship or in the depth of their theological knowledge although I believe that the early apostles were intelligent and did know their theology. The secret of their power and zeal, however, was found more in the depth of their convictions that Christ was indeed risen from the dead.

And because those early Christians believed that they served a risen Savior you could not silence them or stop them. You could persecute them and chase them from their homes – you could arrest and imprison them and even have some of them put to death but you could stop them or silence them, so deeply were they convinced of what Paul writes in v. 20 *But now is Christ risen from the dead.*

It's a simple and yet profound and incomprehensible truth – Christ is risen from the dead and we too shall rise from the dead and all that are in the graves, according to Christ, will rise from the dead *they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation* (Jn. 5:29). It's not a question this morning as to whether or not each one here will rise from the dead. The question, rather, is which resurrection will apply to you – the resurrection of life or the resurrection of damnation.

With so much at stake for the Christian – his faith, his hope, his zeal, his assurance etc. what I would like to do this morning is to consider some of the practical ramifications of this glorious truth in the life of the Christian. As glorious and incomprehensible as the doctrine of the resurrection is, we discover that it's also a very practical doctrine that will effect the Christian in a number of ways. And so what I want to consider this morning is simply:

The Importance of the Resurrection

This is our theme. Would you consider with me first of all how:

I. The Resurrection Shapes Our Focus

It shapes our focus in at least a couple of ways. It teaches us to look beyond this sin-cursed and transient world. Look at what Paul says in verse 19: *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.* Now I'll grant you that the gospel of Christ does minister to our present needs and to our present situations. We find the grace and wisdom from God to take on challenges and to submit to things that we often times don't understand. The resurrection and ascension of Christ into heaven, you see, teaches us that Christ is on the throne right now and that He rules and reigns over the affairs of this universe and that He will see His cause through and the cause of redemption will triumph in the end.

So I'm not denying, nor is Paul denying that there isn't any present benefit to the gospel of Christ. What he is denying, however, is that the gospel only applies to this present evil world. If God's purpose in grace went no further than to enable us to cope with the trials and misfortunes of this life then our religion really would be as Karl Marx called it *an opium for the masses* – or as pagans sometimes refer to it as a crutch for weaklings to lean upon.

One of the reasons that the gospel of Christ can equip us for dealing with the trials and challenges of life is because the gospel does indeed teach us to look beyond what we see

and experience in this sin-cursed world. It's forward look into eternity, you could say, carries a present benefit. A few years ago I remember listening to a reporter for National Public Radio. She was giving her testimony regarding her conversion to Judaism. And in the course of her testimony she shared that her Rabbi saw no value or benefit in speculating about the hereafter. He was entirely focused on the here and now and was teaching his new convert to be focused the same way. That Rabbi would certainly fall into the category of men that were addressed by Christ when He said *Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God* (Mt. 22:29).

That kind of religion, according to Paul, will eventually leave a person not merely miserable – but *most miserable*, as he puts it. Young's literal translation of this verse is interesting. He translates it this way *if in this life we have hope in Christ only, of all men we are most to be pitied*. What a miserable religion – even the Christian religion, if it begins in this world which at its best is vanity and ends in this world as well. Our time in this world is so short and the existence of this world is so clearly temporal. I take that to be the meaning behind any legitimate science of global warming. It demonstrates that this world is temporal.

Thank God this morning that your existence is not tied to this current world. Christ has demonstrated through His resurrection that there's so much more in the world to come. We strive and we strain in this world to walk with Christ and to follow His commands. And one of the things that motivates us to strive and to strain is the wonderful truth that the day is coming in which we'll be openly acknowledged and acquitted before God's throne and we'll be made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

So the resurrection shapes our focus that way. We groan within while we wait for redemption to run its course and be consummated and we anticipate the arrival of a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness will have complete sway. There will be no room in the world to come to argue about right and wrong. There will be no sanctioning of sin. There will be no need for prolonged efforts to overturn the most hideous laws that allow murder and that sanction things that are abominable to God and to His people. The very thought of such a world to come should minister to your souls the immediate benefit of patience – patience to endure all that is wrong in the current state of things.

But the resurrection also shapes our focus in another way. It teaches us when we are to gather for worship. I am well aware of the fact that this day is marked on our calendars as a day to remember and celebrate the resurrection. And we're being told what the Pope is doing today and Rick Warren, that popular evangelical compromiser, will be on the Fox News Network today giving his thoughts about the resurrection of Christ. And just as the Christians in the days of Constantine managed to take the pagan holiday that celebrated the arrival of winter and converted it into a Christian holiday that commemorated the incarnation of Christ so today the tradition continues that took the pagan holiday that celebrated the arrival of Spring and converted it into a holiday that commemorates the resurrection of Christ.

We're not here this morning on account of that tradition. We're here rather because of the Apostolic tradition which is strongly implied in Scripture which teaches us that the first generation of Christians met on the first day of the week on account of the resurrection of Christ.

So we read in Ac 20:7 *And upon the first [day] of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.* Some have tried to argue that this meeting day was governed merely by expedience. Paul, after all, had to depart on the morrow the verse says. A closer look at the passage, however, shows us that Paul abode in Troas for 7 days before this meeting. He could have preached on any number of occasions before the occasion of our text but he waited for the first day of the week.

And in 1Cor. 16:1,2 we discover that the offering was taken on the first day of the week. And in Rev. 1 we're told that the Apostle John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. Dabney makes the observation that *The Christians did not for several hundred years apply the word Sabbath to the first day of the week, but always used it distinctly to indicate the Jewish seventh day. Their own sacred day, the first day, was called by them the Lord's day, as they said, because it was dedicated to the honor of Christ, and because it was the head, crown, and chief of all the days. They also called it Sunday because, according to their interpretation of Gen. 1:3, the sun was created on the first day of the week; but still more, because on that day the brighter Sun of Righteousness arose from the dead, with healing in His beams.*

We meet on the first day of every week, then, because Christ is risen from the dead. That's why we met last Sunday – that's why we'll meet next Sunday. We glory in the truth that our Savior is risen and bless God for all that the resurrection of Christ brings to mind. These are a couple of ways, then, that show how the resurrection of Christ shapes our focus. Would you consider next how:

II. The Resurrection of Christ Gives Us Our Power

I made mention earlier of the zeal of the early church. They were driven by the truth that Christ rose from the dead. One of the things that I dread in our day is that the passing of so much time since the resurrection makes it easy for us to reduce the resurrection of Christ to a mere religious dogma. We affirm the truth of it because it's part of our creed but unfortunately the reality of it seems at times to be so distant from us. This condition of being governed by a mere dogma rather than reality underscores the need for a fresh infusion of resurrection power into our hearts. This is why we pray for revival. In revival nothing new is added to the church doctrinally but the church gains a renewed sense and a renewed appreciation of the truth of her doctrine.

And when we gain that renewed appreciation of the truth then we also recapture the zeal that characterized the early church. Now regarding resurrection power we should note what we have affirmed many times which is that nothing short of resurrection power brought us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Among the things that Paul prays for the saints at Ephesus is that they would be given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ that they might know in their experience *the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places* (Eph. 1:19,20).

Underscore the phrase *who believe, according to the working of his mighty power*. It took a supernatural act of power to bring rebellious and willfully blind sinners to the place where they would believe. Apart from that power we would have continued to resist and we would have hugged our sins all the way to hell. The sinner is so in love with his sin that he views it as his death to have to give up his sin. This is the mark of a man or a woman who is spiritually dead. They wouldn't dream of giving up sin in order to embrace Christ.

To those who have gained a saving interest in Christ – they have been the recipients of nothing short of resurrection power. We've given another name to this resurrection power – we refer to it as effectual calling. What is effectual calling? (Q31) *Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.*

So resurrection power has been ministered to your soul already as a believer in Christ. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is that they would yet know the exceeding greatness of that power. That power, you see, is durable power. It didn't simply raise you and then leave you. It raised you and set you forward in the pursuit of holiness. It is by this power, ministered by the Holy Ghost that we die more and more to sin and live more and more unto God. It is in this power that we wage spiritual warfare against principalities and powers.

But we should note here also that not only does resurrection power work in us but it is also to work through us. Think of that familiar resurrection scene in Jn. 11 where Christ calls Lazarus from the grave after Lazarus was in the tomb for 4 days. *Lazarus, come forth* Christ commands in Jn. 11:43. And in the very next verse we're told *And he that was dead came forth.*

It was following this incident that Christ would say a couple of chapters later in 14:12 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater [works] than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.* I have often found this verse most perplexing and challenging. We're to do greater works? We're to do something greater than call Lazarus from the grave?

It's what Christ has plainly said. And what this means is that you and I are to work miracles. You and I are to work resurrections. You and I are to call sinners from spiritual death to spiritual life. The question that naturally arises is – how? How are we to work such miracles? How are we to do the greater works? And the answer is that we're to do them the same way Christ did them by simply giving out the word of God. We are given a

more vivid picture of this phenomenon in Ezek 37. This is that chapter where Ezekiel is taken to the valley of the dry bones. {**Ezek. 37:1-10**}.

So I prophesied as I was commanded – v. 7 tells us. This is how you and I do the greater works. We prophesy as we're commanded. Or to use the language of Christ's commission – we take this gospel into all the world *and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world* (Mt. 28:19,20).

Do you see how the power in this commission is traceable to the risen Christ? It's because of the promise of His presence that we can expect also the blessing of His power. So the resurrection shapes our focus. It teaches us to look beyond this world. It provides the occasion for meeting on the first day of the week. It also gives us our power – power that has been and is wrought in us and power that should be wrought in us and through us. Consider finally how:

III. The Resurrection Gives Certitude to Our Hopes

Our hope for heaven is grounded in Christ being the Son of God and the Son of Man. We have no doubt that He was a man. Unless you subscribe to the heretical notion that He only seemed to be a man but in fact was never actually a man you are able to affirm His humanity. Even those who don't believe in Him but at least see the historical veracity of His existence as a person acknowledge His humanity. They may call Him a great teacher or an important religious figure. They may call Him merely a Jewish Reformer – all of these limited views of His person will acknowledge His humanity.

But our hope for heaven and our hope for sins forgiven and our hope for acceptance with God depends not only on Christ being a man – He must indeed be a man if He is going to represent men – but He must also be God. A mere man could not render an acceptable sacrifice to God. Even a perfect man could not have His obedience counted for the obedience of others. The nature of such a redeemer would have to be that He was both God and man.

How do we know that Christ meets such a qualification? Paul writes to the Romans in Rom. 1:4 that Christ was *declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*. The resurrection, in other words, vindicated His identity as the Son of God and the Son of man. This is what gives certitude to our hope that we're following and worshipping the right person.

It was the sight of the living Christ that swept away the unbelief of doubting Thomas. *Then saith he to Thomas we read in Jn. 20:27 Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

It was the risen Son of God that convinced Thomas that Christ was indeed His Lord and God. So the resurrection gives certitude to our hope that we're following the right person

in following Christ. It also gives certitude to our hope that Christ's atoning death was acceptable to God. A Savior in the grave, you see, could be no Savior at all. A Savior in the grave would indicate that Christ had received the wages for sin and that the grave could have a just claim on Him.

It's interesting to note in this respect the marked contrast between Christ and every other famous religious personage. There is no founder of any false religion who has found a way to escape the grave. Only of Christ can it be said – *Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus my Savior, He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord.*

His resurrection, then, certifies the success of His atoning death. His resurrection proves that He was the propitiation for our sins. His resurrection proves that He has redeemed us. His resurrection proves that we are reconciled to Him and His resurrection proves that redemption will be consummated and a new heaven and new earth will be ushered in. His resurrection, you could say then – proves His person, proves His work and proves His promises.

This is why we trust Him. This is why we worship Him. This is why we commit the well-being of our souls to Him. The fact that He's risen and that He's a living Savior vindicates His claims and leads us to rejoice in the sure hope of our own resurrection from the grave.

I think you can see, then, that the doctrine of the resurrection is not merely some speculative theological hair-splitting notion. Apart from this glorious truth are preaching is vain, our faith is vain, we find ourselves miserable and we're really wasting our time. Apart from this truth we would have to conclude that we are still in our sins. But thank God this morning that we can affirm by faith what Paul affirms in v. 20 *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.*

I trust this morning that this truth will be a living truth in your soul. I hope you'll gain the practical benefit that comes from it. It shapes our focus, it empowers our lives and it ministers assurance to our souls. May we go from God's house this morning with our focus rightly placed and with our zeal inspired to pursue Christ and to labor for the extension of His Kingdom.