

Resurrection

“You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here.’ And the women came out and ran away from the tomb because they were frightened out of their wits; and they said nothing ...for they were afraid” (Mark 16:6-8, Jerusalem Bible). The New English Bible puts it this way, **“They they went out and ran away from the tomb, beside themselves with terror.”** The Living Bible has it like this: the women were **“trembling, too frightened to talk.”** The standard commentaries empty this text of meaning, saying the women were “overcome with awe.” Baloney! They were terror-struck, scared out of their minds. Why? Most of us will never know, until it’s too late.

Every Easter season, year after year, pulpits in America deliver another homily on the evidences for the resurrection. Or dispense the fact that Jesus’ claims to be deity were vindicated by His resurrection. Or hand out the usual assurances that Jesus’ resurrection guarantees our future resurrection. But these concepts don’t transform us. We’ve heard about the resurrection of Christ so often in our churches that it ceased having any meaning. It’s just another of the church’s dogmas, probably important to theologians, missionaries and monks.

But those women at the tomb, those who actually experienced it, were scared out of their minds. Because suddenly these women were confronted by the fact that God isn’t someone abstract, someone we can read about but who lives way off in some invisible place beyond us. No, He is real, *very* real, and He’s intervening in our world in ways totally outside anything we would expect or could imagine. All the routines to which they’d become accustomed for the past 3 years, Jesus teaching wonderful things, His working great miracles, His lovely Person . . . all these suddenly became irrelevant. Because, miracle of miracles, He was dead, but now He’s alive! Nobody ever came back from the dead. But here was Jesus, alive again. They were terror-struck because the Creator God had just visited them. They had just had an encounter with the living, Sovereign Ruler of the universe. And every mortal’s response is to be filled with dread.

The resurrection of Christ Jesus doesn’t merely mean all His moral and spiritual teachings are true. It doesn’t merely vindicate His claims as to His Person and His atoning work. It doesn’t merely prove that God exists and that Christianity is true. It doesn’t merely mean we should rejoice that we too will one day be raised from the dead. It doesn’t merely mean any of these things – although all of these things certainly are absolutely true. The resurrection of Christ is the most central and important event in the history of the whole world. It’s the most profound event that ever happened in this entire cosmos. It’s the single most important truth confronting every person who ever lived. If we were to grasp the deep truth of the resurrection, we too would be filled with terror. That’s because . . . *No one* has an encounter with the living God and isn’t filled with fear.

When we’re gripped with the reality of God (and here I mean the holy One of Israel who reveals Himself in the Bible, and not some make-believe god of our imagination), we’re suddenly confronted by the fact that a transcending reality exists that’s far greater than the world we daily inhabit. And our lives don’t even come close to the standard of God’s extreme holiness. So we’re condemned, not merely by the chastening Word of God but by the awareness of the terrible chasm that exists between our inveterate sinfulness and God’s surpassing goodness. Suddenly it’s obvious to us, it’s totally clear that the lives we lead are preliminary, and that another existence, one that’s as transcending and other-worldly as God is, awaits us. A whole new and radically different order or kind of existence is there on the other side of death. This means we’re not here to enjoy life as it pleases us, to pursue lives oblivious to spiritual realities. No. We’re here on probation. The resurrection of Christ does all this. When we reflect on the resurrection of Christ, we’re encountering the fact of a living and holy God from whom we can neither hide nor pretend He’s not there.

In evangelical churches, the resurrection of Christ is like an appendix to the cross. It emerges from the shadows every Easter, only to vanish again from the pulpit except as a phrase repeatedly attached to the Gospel. Evangelical preaching emphasizes the cross almost to the total exclusion of the role of resurrection. Resurrection thus is unwittingly kept from us, preventing us from having the kind of encounter with God that changes lives.

Yet without resurrection, the work of salvation is incomplete. Our justification depends entirely on the resurrection of Christ. **“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification”** (Romans 4:25). So does our regeneration and new life depend on His resurrection. **“We have been born anew to a living hope through the**

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). We have been gifted with the Spirit only because of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:32-33). His substitutionary death on the cross makes us eligible for union with Christ, the central and key aspect of salvation, but it’s His resurrection – and our participation in it – that makes it effectual in us. **“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:6). It’s entirely – *and only* – because of His resurrection that we have eternal life (see Colossians 3:1-4, especially **“Since then you have been raised with Christ . . . when Christ your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory”**). And it’s the power of Christ’s resurrection that enables us to serve God: **“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection”** (Philippians 3:10; also Ephesians 1:19-20). Our sanctification, even, depends on Christ’s resurrection (Romans 6:1-14). Moreover, neither baptism nor the Lord’s Supper can be understood apart from His resurrection. Just as the obedient and righteous life that the Incarnate Son led is a necessary component of our salvation, His resurrection is an absolutely essential component of our salvation. Resurrection somehow is also the way that God dealt with cosmic evil. Jesus isn’t just our Savior. It is a *risen* Christ who saves us.

Consider the absolute necessity of the resurrection of Christ. It was of course necessary for the crucified Son of God. Preachers develop this every Easter, and we needn’t repeat that here. But it was also necessary for us. We have forgiveness of sins thanks to the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. But that doesn’t make us fit to be in God’s holy presence, because we still have a sin nature. By union with Christ we experience His death, and therefore the death of our sin nature (Romans 6). But that still doesn’t do it. We’re simply morally at zero; it doesn’t make us holy. It’s His resurrection and our union with Him, so that we experience the benefits of His resurrection, which makes us holy and fit to be in God’s presence. When we’re glorified, our sin nature will actually be removed and we’ll be imbued with the life and holiness of the resurrected Christ. The resurrection was absolutely essential for God to fulfill His creation purposes in the presence of evil. With infinite wisdom and perfect omniscience, even before creating, God knew that no other option existed than the terrible one of sending the Son to an agonizing death on a cross followed by a resurrection.

Something else to think about: **“So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. . . it is raised a spiritual body”** (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). God has a whole new, qualitatively different kind of existence, a new world, a new heavens and new earth, in store for us believers in Christ. In God’s wise agenda for His creation, in His holy stewardship of history, He is saving the best and most ultimate form of existence for the future. The best is yet to come. God’s intent to bless His beloved creatures is beyond our wildest dreams. This has to impel us to commit to being godly people and to make life here and now count for Christ. No longer can belief in Christ be something we simply add to our life; Christ has to be the center and totality of a new-found life based on the Word of God – or else we’re basically denying the truth of Christ’s resurrection.

Consider also that the resurrection of Christ has utmost importance to unbelievers. It has deep epistemological significance because it actually occurred in time and space. It’s a historical event. This means that there’s no excuse whatsoever for unbelief. It makes the refusal to believe in Christ or to believe the Scriptures, the refusal to acknowledge God’s existence, the refusal to believe in life beyond the grave or in any spiritual truth, grounds for condemnation. The resurrection of Christ necessarily puts the lie to Marxism, Darwinism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and all other notions, ideas and religions contrary to biblical Christianity. It’s the duty of the Church to make this undeniable truth known.

Dear reader, the resurrection of Christ isn’t something to be celebrated at Easter. When Paul tells Timothy, **“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my Gospel”** (2 Timothy 2:8), he wants Timothy to reflect *continually* on the resurrection of Christ. Paul really wants *us* to continually remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead. It’s something we need to meditate on every day. It’s the resurrection that makes God real in our lives. It’s what fills us with the fear of God that moves us to live righteously and to serve Him. It’s the resurrection of Christ that provides the hope and the enablement we need to get us through the difficult parts of life. It’s the resurrection of Christ that fills life with purpose and meaning. It keeps us focused on the very reason we’re here. It is that important.

“So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy” (Matthew 28:8). Nothing can make life more filled with joy than contemplating the resurrection of Christ and the sheer depth and scope of its meaning for us. The joy of the resurrected Lord Jesus is for us for now and forever.