

Resurrection!

I just finished reading a biography of Wilfred Grenfell. He was the British missionary physician to the coastal regions of Newfoundland and Labrador of a century ago who left a stunning and enduring legacy of what Christ being lived out in modern humanity looks like. Grenfell's life was one of humble selflessness, love for needy others, aggressive pursuit of justice for those who suffered terribly an unjust society, and extreme self-sacrifice. All Grenfell's adult life, he worked eighteen-hour days, repeatedly taking heavy risks trusting in Christ to protect and sustain him and to provide his needs. He accomplished what dozens of other lives combined couldn't.

I was dismayed, however, to read that it was only in Grenfell's final years, as his wife was dying of cancer, that the realization of resurrection struck him. [Of course, it may have been the biographer who arranged the story of his life that way.] It was his acute awareness of resurrection that enabled him to deal with the loss of his wife, and with his own mortality as well. And it occurred to me, reflecting on this, that we today probably don't let the truth of resurrection grip us and impel us as it should. So this lesson.

I'm going to assume that my readers are convinced of resurrection. I hope it's not necessary to have to argue that. I also assume my readers understand that resurrection, as it's been preached from evangelical pulpits every Easter and many Sundays between, means that death has been defeated. There should be not the slightest hint of any fear of death in the life of a believer. So, my argument here goes in a different direction. It's this: Resurrection must control how we live in the here and now.

Unbelievers are pitiable creatures. They believe that death ends this existence, so their only purpose in life is to pursue happiness because . . . "Hey, this life is all there is, so why not?" (Some unbelievers in the West nowadays believe in reincarnation!) And if unbelievers suffer any hardship that frustrates their sole purpose in life of being happy, they feel cheated. So they're either angry or depressed, or both. They only get this one go-round called life, so they want to squeeze as much pleasure into it as they can. No surprise that they despise death. The lives of unbelievers are tragedies.

But what about those who believe in Jesus? I often hear believers thoughtlessly make this claim: "God gave us life to enjoy it. We're not ascetics, you know." But that's exactly what unbelievers say, that's *their* life philosophy. Believers' lives have *meaning*; believers have a radically different understanding of life. Or, at least, they *should*. And resurrection is the key or central belief that compels it. Consider the following points (not in any order):

- Resurrection means the greatest, most supernal blessing awaits us. It's a new kind of life far greater than anything we can imagine. Our future existence will be wonderful, more so than anything we experience in this life. It's the future, resurrected life that we should desire with daily, joyful anticipation. No pleasurable experience in this life compares to the exceedingly great blessings God holds for us on the other side of death. And no suffering, hardship, sacrifice or loss compares either. It will be worth whatever risks that we take now, and the consequences that may result from our risk-taking. It means being forever in the presence of the infinite Creator God.
- Resurrection means we'll see Jesus in all His splendor and glory. The greatest moment of our life will be to die and be carried into His presence to see Him and to know Him as He is, the exalted God. We'll hear His wisdom when He speaks, we'll delight in His authority, and we'll experience His love in a more tangible, more palpable way than we ever could in this present life. Resurrection is not merely returning from death; it's *to* the presence of Jesus.
- Resurrection means that we can be bold, courageous, and confident in carrying out personal evangelism. There's nothing to fear! Shame? Persecution? Ridicule? Mockery? So what?

Whatever insults (or stones) they throw at us are trivial compared to the blessedness of the resurrected life that awaits us.

- Resurrection means that our thoughts and values, indeed, all that we say and do, should be always with our coming resurrection in view. Our future resurrection is (or should be) the context for how we pursue life *now*. It's the future existence that counts, so we ought to pattern our present life according to it. That means knowing God's Word and living it. It means knowing what Christ was like and living as He did, mimicking His character. It means obeying God's revealed will regardless what loss or sacrifice is entailed. It means we really can deny ourselves, as Christ commanded, because our present life is but a trifling compared to the eternal blessed existence that awaits. The only significance this present life holds is our faithfulness to God and His will. Do we give of ourselves for the sake of Christ and to benefit others? Or not.
- Resurrection means we don't need to have lots of things, or seek thrilling or fulfilling experiences, or know a lot about life and about things going on in our nation or around the world. We only need to know Jesus and His teachings and how to apply them in the here and now. A continual awareness of resurrection detaches us from this world and its values, from a love of sin, and from self-indulgent desires. An awareness of resurrection should fill us with the desire and commitment to live purposefully, according to God's will. Do we get it? The best is yet to come. So nothing else matters. Nothing else!
- Resurrection means accountability. Everyone is raised to life to face judgment for how we lived. It's inescapably part of resurrection. Grace imparted to us, and the promise of the forgiveness of sins don't nullify our responsibilities. Resurrection necessarily means that a judgment is coming. And the judgment will be based on how we served Christ in this life. We've discussed this often in these Sunday School lessons and don't need to pursue it again here, except to remind my readers that judgment awaits. Our service to Christ matters greatly. Resurrection and the accountability that comes with it doesn't only vindicate our sacrifices for Christ, it suffuses them with eternal significance.

In Philippians, Paul wrote, **"For me to live is Christ, to die is gain."** Gain? Yes! Paul understood all that resurrection means. The resurrected life of Christ is to be our life in the here and now, and when we die that future resurrected life surpasses anything we conceivably can experience in this life. So we live this present life conforming to the truth of resurrection. Everything we do in this life is to honor the living Christ, to obey Christ by serving Him, to reveal Christ's lovely character, and to experience Christ's power and love. And the sacrifices and the efforts that our commitment necessarily entails will be justly rewarded at the resurrection. Resurrection is how God vindicates the sacrifices we make for Him and the hardships or suffering that faithfulness requires.

Resurrection is the key to life. It's the creation blessing that had to be postponed due to the entry of sin. It's the thread that runs through all Scripture between the lines of text from Scripture's opening pages to the end; it's there for all who look for it. It's what drove Paul to pursue the radical, committed life that's documented in Scripture for us to imitate.

Resurrection is what it must be that we're trusting in if we say we "believe" in Jesus. And that trust has to be demonstrated to be real by how we pursue our life (or face death, or make real, personal sacrifices). Our *demonstrated* trust in Jesus' promise of resurrection defeats evil and testifies to the world that Christianity is truth. Christianity isn't merely church attendance; that's Roman Catholic heresy. Christianity isn't being passive, as if merely agreeing that certain church doctrines are true is all we need to do; that's Protestant heresy. Christianity is expressing, by how we think and live, the radical new life that's described in Scripture, a life that is made possible by our expectation of resurrection and the powerful, indwelling enablement of the living Christ Himself. Christianity is resurrection life.