

The significance of the Resurrection

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Can you imagine what it must have been like for the followers of Jesus on Saturday, the day after Jesus had been crucified? All was lost. Jesus was dead. They had given up everything to follow Jesus. Everything in them had sensed that He was truly who He said He was. They believed with all of their hearts that He was the promised Messiah and Savior who had been prophesied about all the way back to the early chapters of Genesis.

Yes, they had run away when Jesus was arrested. Yes, they feared death as much as the next person, but they truly believed. Every verse of prophecy that had been foretold about the Messiah came true in the life of Jesus Christ.

For those who had ears to hear and eyes to see, there was no mistaking that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah. Truly the Savior had come . . . and now He was dead. Even though Jesus had warned them, it was as if they never saw it coming (John 2:18-22; Matthew 12:39-40; Matthew 16:21; Matthew 27:62-64).

They were familiar with the prophecies. They had heard Jesus' words about his upcoming death, burial and resurrection, but in the midst of the struggle and devastation they had "forgotten" the truth that they had built their lives upon.

So many times we do the same. Life has suddenly become so difficult that we focus our attention on the storm that rages around us and we forget the rock that is our ultimate security (Matthew 7:24-27). We forget the promises of Christ and the character of God. We begin to worry and doubt like one who has no God, but that is not who we are. That is not whose we are.

Saturday must have been so difficult for Jesus' disciples, but we must remember that we can never truly evaluate a situation until we can view it from Sunday's perspective. We can never know the truth about a situation until we have heard God's perspective.

We read the story of Easter morning in Luke 23:54 – 24:12.

“It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.’ ⁸ And they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.”

We are familiar with Easter, the celebration of Christ’s resurrection, but theologically and practically speaking what is so significant about Christ’s resurrection? Christ died on the cross to pay for our sin, so that we could be forgiven, but what did the resurrection accomplish? We find much of the answer to this question when we look to the writings of Luke.

Luke wrote the book of Luke to a man named Theophilus; his reason for writing was to bring together the true details of the *“things which are most surely believed among us”*. Luke worked to gather the details of the true stories that had been handed down from eyewitnesses and their ministers of the word. It was done so *“that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught”* (Luke 1:1-4). Luke then proceeds to record teachings, miracles, crucifixion, the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, the Promised Messiah.

In Luke’s second writing, the Acts of the Apostles, he begins with the ascension and continues with the story of the followers of Jesus in the early church. In the book of Acts the primary responsibility of the Apostles was to be witnesses of what they had seen. Because of this, Jesus gave them *“many proofs appearing to them for 40 days”* after his resurrection. Jesus then sent them out *“to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the world”*. They were not sent out to establish a new systematic theology. They were not scholars or philosophers. They were common men who were supposed to tell what they had seen and explain what it meant. They had seen Jesus do many things, but their primary testimony was to that of His resurrection. This was one primary factor when the disciples looked for a replacement for Judas in Acts 1:21-22, it had to be one who had been with them since the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He had to join them in their task of being eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life, ministry, death and resurrection.

They would testify to Jesus' coming to earth, to his sinlessness, to His miracles, to His being the Son of God, to His dying for the sins of man, but all of these would be proven by Christ's resurrection.

As we look to the writings of the early church the resurrection of Christ is the proof that everything else about Christ is true. Romans 1:4 tells us how Jesus was declared to be the Son of God . . . by His resurrection from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul notes that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ are the issues of "first importance" in the faith.

Jesus was alive! It did not happen in secret where there would be no witnesses. The Apostle Paul writes in Acts 15:3-6, *"He (Jesus) appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive."*

Jesus is the Savior, the Messiah, the King, the Christ, and it all hinges on the fact that he was raised from the dead. Throughout the book of Acts, the Apostles defend themselves before the Sanhedrin, the priests, the government officials, to non-believers by appealing to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to which they were eyewitnesses (Acts 4.10-11). Even their sermons focused on Jesus and His resurrection. It was the key. We see this in Acts 2, 3, 4 and 5. Many had claimed to be great teachers. Many had proclaimed themselves the promised messiah. Thousands had been crucified by the Romans. But none had ever been raised from the dead.

The death of Jesus was essential because it paid the price for our sin, but crucifixion itself would not have been out of the ordinary for Jesus' day. Thousands were crucified by the Romans. Yes, it was savage and barbaric, but it alone did not bear testimony that sin had been forgiven and that death had been conquered. It was only through the resurrection of Christ that we know that penalty for sin had been paid in full and that death had been conquered. Romans 6:9 says, *"We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him."*

It is similar to the story in Mark 2:6-12. In this story Jesus is teaching in a home in Capernaum. The house is so filled with people that no one else can enter. Outside the house stand four men who have brought their paralytic friend to see Jesus. Because of the crowd they cannot approach Jesus. They then decide to climb up on the roof, dig a hole and lower their friend through the roof down to Jesus. In response Jesus forgives the paralytic.

At the same time, there were teachers of the law sitting in the room watching. At this point they began to question in their hearts, *"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*⁸ *And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts?"*⁹ *Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'?*¹⁰ *But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—*¹¹ *"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home."*

The resurrection is much the same. Jesus had paid the price for our sins, but how could we truly know that our sins had been forgiven and that sin had been conquered? The answer . . . Christ's resurrection. Because of this, the Gospel was preached focusing on Jesus Christ and his death, burial and resurrection.

In John 11:25-26 Jesus 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. Do you believe this?"*

Our confidence is in that fact that our heavenly Father who raised Jesus from the dead is able to raise us from the dead. Christ's resurrection has proven his dominion over death and sin and promised salvation through Jesus Christ. This is the answer to man's greatest need. We no longer have to be afraid. Many make promises in our world but then cannot keep them. We can stand in full confidence that our God who has now resurrected Christ and who has seated Him at the right hand of the throne of God will keep His promise and resurrect all who belong to Him.

"If 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." (Romans 8:11)

"God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power." (1 Corinthians 6:14)

This resurrection power is not only for salvation, it is also our hope as we live the Christian life. May God give us understanding to know, *"What is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places"* (Ephesians 1:17-21).

Today, let us humble ourselves before God, repent from our sin and rest in the power of Christ and His resurrection.