

The Resurrection

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I will never forget Selvin. He was a gang member who had come to faith in the slums of Guatemala. Selvin wanted to get married. God had changed him. He was growing in his relationship with God, but he had a big problem. If the gang did not agree to release him, the price for leaving was death. One day, they came to his house and knocked on the door. When he came out, they handed him a pistol and told him to come with them to rob. He handed the gun back to them and said he could not be a part of that kind of living any more. They pointed the gun at his face and asked if this was his final answer. Selvin began to cry and said, "I'm ready to die. I follow Jesus now." The leader then put the gun down and said to him, "We are not going to kill you. We just wanted to make sure you were telling the truth. We will not let liars leave the gang. But you are different and you cannot help us anymore."

I married Selvin and Blanca in 2003 in the ghettos of Guatemala. Though when they met they lived in a cardboard box, they now own a home and have a beautiful family. Our families are still friends today. These kinds of stories should make us reflect. What made him willing to risk his life on earth? The answer is clear: Selvin truly believes the grave is not the end. The Gospel is not just some way to avoid the judgment of God. It is the only way and the promise of eternal life in another world. The way to this other world is through the resurrection of Jesus. So let's connect the dots together. Why did Jesus have to rise from the dead? I want to share three reasons, even though there are many more:

- 1. Jesus resurrected as the greatest proof of Christianity.**
- 2. Jesus resurrected to fix us, and the world.**
- 3. Jesus resurrected to transform us now.**

1. Jesus resurrected from the dead as the greatest proof of Christianity.

Either Jesus rose from the dead, or he did not. Either he is God, or he was not. Either we will live forever, or we will not. Paul does not see a kind of Christianity where you can sort of be a Christian

and not believe in the resurrection. When a group of people in the church at Corinth doubted the resurrection of Jesus, Paul laid out a case for Jesus' resurrection and how important it is for us as Christians. Look at 1 Corinthians 15:12-19:ⁱ

“¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

If Christ did not rise from the dead, our own preaching to you is in vain. If Christ did not rise from the dead, Church services are in vain. If Christ did not rise from the dead, baptisms are in vain. If Christ did not rise from the dead, our faith is totally in vain. If Christ did not rise from the dead, every person who has proclaimed Christ is a false witness. If Christ did not rise from the dead, the scriptures were false because they predicted he would. If Christ did not rise from the dead, all the claims he made are worthless. Children play make believe games, don't they? Let's play marriage. Let's play supermarket. Let's play superheroes. We are not here to play make believe games for grown-up people. We are not here to play church. The Christian gospel is a gospel of the risen Jesus. Look back at the evidence Paul lays out starting in verse 3:

“³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

(1 Corinthians 15:3-9)

Jesus fulfilled very detailed prophecies. Jesus was seen by five hundred people at one time, after rising from the dead. Jesus' resurrection even converted skeptics. Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his unbelieving half-brother, James, and one of his worst enemies, Saul of Tarsus, who we know as the Apostle Paul, and who became the very writer of this letter.

Now, if Christ rose from the dead, several beliefs logically follow. First, Jesus affirmed all kinds of truths in the Old Testament. He quoted almost all the prophets, called Adam and Eve real people and spoke of the coming judgment and the destruction of the world. Why do we have such confidence that this is God's word? Because the Son of God who died and rose taught that it is the word of God. Second, he cannot be treated as only a good teacher. He is not just another religious leader. If I began to say that I was God and that all men can live forever because of me, you would think I was crazy. But Jesus does exactly that. How did his first followers have confidence that he was telling the truth? When a man who rises from the dead tells you anything, you listen. Not only that, they are all willing to die for this belief. Less than one thousand people followed Jesus at his death,

but within 300 years after he was raised from the dead, more than 50% of the Roman Empire claimed to follow Jesus. What was the thing that caused so much of a stir about this carpenter from a small, almost unheard of, Jewish town? Jesus rose from the dead. God has accepted the sacrifice. There is much more that can be said about this, but we will leave that for another day. What else does this resurrection of Jesus mean? Was it only to give proof?

2. Jesus resurrected to fix us, and the world.

We all know something is not right. We always want something bigger and better. We always see the bad. We trust bad people. We don't take care of ourselves. We don't sleep enough. We care too much what other people think. We are angry or sad or anxious and at the wrong times. Before I became a believer, I remember having a terrible sense of purposelessness. I was so empty and was not sure how to fill the emptiness. I had a desire, but I did not even know what it was for. C.S. Lewis, the Oxford Scholar, said it this way: *"If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."* That is exactly what God has told us. God originally designed us for another world. The world has not always been as it is today. There was a time with no evil of any kind. Humanity lost this paradise. We lost the ability to have a perfect relationship with God. We lost the ability to have a perfect relationship with other humans. We lost the ability to have a perfect relationship with other creatures. Roses have thorns. Wind makes tornados. Malaria kills people. Worst of all, humans use their power to hurt other humans. How can we possibly get back to the paradise God created? To answer that, we have to understand what happened to the first people.

Genesis 3 tells the story of how Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan and committed a terrible sin against God. In response, God changes the very nature of his creation. A perfect marriage is now a broken relationship because people's hearts are twisted. Now, roses have thorns and lions eat lambs. A perfect world, is now a cursed world. God says cursed is the ground because of you, Adam. The world you see outside, with every sin, every death, and every catastrophe, is a result of God's punishment on the first people. And as our nature gets passed through every child that is born, death spreads. So, when Jesus dies, he dies for every sin, including the original one. He breaks the curse. In fact, the entire story of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is about how God fulfills his promise to bring people back to himself and restore all things. As one theologian puts it, *"Eden lost in Genesis is Eden restored in Revelation."*

But how will he bring paradise? The answer is the Resurrection. Everything must die, but because Jesus rose so will we and all the creation will be made new. Jesus has risen and that fact changes everything. Jesus rises from the dead, but not like Lazarus. Lazarus in John 12 resurrected to again have a sinful nature. He still got sick. He still battled sin in his heart. He had to die again. Jesus resurrects as the first person to have a new creation body. His body is the body we will have in heaven. Philippians 3:20-21 says it this way:

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

Not only that, but he will restore the original creation and probably make it even better. This is the hope of a new heaven and a new earth revealed in Revelation 21:1-7:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ ⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ ⁶And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.’”

Some people think heaven will be boring. They think we will get tired of being there. First, that is a scary thought because Christians should want to be with God more than anything else. True salvation, as Pastor Tim said last week, should bring a real change. It should cause a desire for a relationship with God. Not only that, but the thought of boredom in heaven really misses the power of the resurrection. The resurrection will change you to the point that you will delight in different things. Many of us have a kind of food that we do not like. Could you imagine that you now craved that food? Could you imagine that all of a sudden, the thing you did not desire became a desire? In the same way, when our nature is transformed through the resurrection, so our hearts will be totally transformed. The hope of the resurrection is the hope that we will live in a new creation where there is no sin, nor death, nor evil. It is a perfect world for perfected people, and the best part is that we will walk and talk with Jesus.

3. Jesus rose from the dead to transform us now.

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:1-4)

That future certainty of the resurrection and the new heaven and the new earth should change us now. When we travel to India, my wife dresses in her Indian clothes before we get there. She gets on the plane in a *kurta* and she eats, sleeps, reads and talks in these new clothes. Her future destination is so certain and sure that she begins to act in the light of it. In the same way, the resurrection should change the way we live now. Our eternity is so secure because of Jesus, that we should live like we are going there. And this is just what Jesus is getting at in Matthew 6:19-21, where he says:

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither

moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus is saying that, since you can store treasures up in heaven, why are you wasting all of your time, money and energy on making your bank account bigger? This is no way to spend life here on earth. Life on earth is a vapor! Invest in heaven!

I want you to imagine a family living on a small island. Slowly the island is sinking into the ocean. The family knows it is only a matter of time before the island will disappear. So they plan to leave it. They know they will never return. The wife is packing and preparing. The children are saying bye to their friends and family. But the father is out trying to buy land on the island! That is what we look like to God. We know this world will end, but we invest more in this world than in the world to come. Jesus says not to do that. The true and blessed hope of heaven must change us. Our treasure must be there, not here.

Discussion questions:

1. Do you think the world we live in is perfect? Is everything the way it should be? Give an example of something that is not right in people, governments or nature.
2. People offer solutions like better education; economic systems like communism or capitalism, or even legislation against hate speech or global warming. Why do these solutions ultimately fail to fix the heart of the problem?
3. How did Jesus fix the problem?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-9. What do you learn about Jesus' resurrection?
5. Read Philippians 3:20-21. What will our resurrection body be like?
6. Read Revelation 21:1-7. What will heaven be like?
7. Read Colossians 3:1-5. How should Jesus' resurrection change us today?

ⁱ All scripture citations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).