

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines
 Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24
 16 | The Work of Christ, cont.

The Work of Christ - Resurrection, Ascension, and (Coming) Judgment

Last Week - Christ's Humiliation - in his birth, life, and death

Exaltation, in 5 ways:

Q. 52. How was Christ exalted in his resurrection? A. Christ was exalted in his resurrection, in that, not having seen corruption in death, (of which it was not possible for him to be held,) and having the very same body in which he suffered, with the essential properties thereof, (but without mortality, and other common infirmities belonging to this life,) really united to his soul, he rose again from the dead the third day by his own power; whereby he declared himself to be the Son of God, to have satisfied divine justice, to have vanquished death, and him that had the power of it, and to be Lord of quick and dead: all which he did as a public person, the head of his church, for their justification, quickening in grace, support against enemies, and to assure them of their resurrection from the dead at the last day.

Q. 53. How was Christ exalted in his ascension? A. Christ was exalted in his ascension, in that having after his resurrection often appeared unto and conversed with his apostles, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and giving them commission to preach the gospel to all nations, forty days after his resurrection, he, in our nature, and as our head, triumphing over enemies, visibly went up into the highest heavens, there to receive gifts for men, to raise up our affections thither, and to prepare a place for us, where himself is, and shall continue till his second coming at the end of the world.

Q. 54. How is Christ exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God? A. Christ is exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God, in that as God-man he is advanced to the highest favor with God the Father, with all fullness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth; and doth gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies; furnisheth his ministers and people with gifts and graces, and maketh intercession for them.

Q. 55. How doth Christ make intercession? A. Christ maketh intercession, by his appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven, in the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth, declaring his will to have it applied to all believers; answering all accusations against them, and procuring for them quiet of conscience, notwithstanding daily failings, access with boldness to the throne of grace, and acceptance of their persons and services.

Q. 56. How is Christ to be exalted in his coming again to judge the world?

A. Christ is to be exalted in his coming again to judge the world, in that he, who was unjustly judged and condemned by wicked men, shall come again at the last day in great power, and in the full manifestation of his own glory, and of his Father's, with all his holy angels, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, to judge the world in righteousness.

*****THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST*****

from N.T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope*

What did the word "resurrection" mean in the ancient world?

To the ancient world: "the ancient world - with the exception of the Jews - was adamant that dead people did not rise again; and the Jews did not believe that anyone *had* done so or that anyone *would* do so all by themselves in advance of the general resurrection." - 35

- **Ancient pagans:** "the road to the underworld ran only one way" - 35
 - Resurrection, to them, "was used to denote new bodily life *after* whatever sort of life after death there might be. . . whether to deny it or to affirm it [resurrection always meant] a **two-step** narrative in which resurrection, meaning new bodily life, would be preceded by an interim period of bodily death." - 36 - always meant Life *after* life after death.
 - "Everybody knew about ghosts, spirits, visions, hallucinations, and so on. Most people in the ancient world believed in some such things. They were quite clear that that wasn't what they meant by *resurrection*. . . **Resurrection meant bodies.**" - 36
- **Ancient Jews** - most, except the Sadducees, believed God would raise his people on the last day, as a form of vindication.

7 Ways in which "Resurrection" gets Re-defined in Christianity

1. *E Pluribus Unum* - of all the backgrounds of those who became Christian, and of all the other debates, Christians were totally unified and unanimous on what resurrection meant, and that it occupied "not just center stage, but the whole stage" - 42
2. **From circumference to the center** - there is no Christianity without it
3. **From a vague prediction to sharpened certainty** that it will be a "transformed body"
4. **The Split** - the coming of "the end" happened "to one person in the middle of history in advance of its great, final occurrence, anticipating and guaranteeing the final resurrection of God's people at the end of history." - 45
5. **Collaborative** - "to work with Jesus and thereby to anticipate the final resurrection, in personal and political life, in mission and holiness, transforming the present, as far as they were able, in the light of that future." - 46
6. **New Metaphor** - not of the restoration of Israel as it was used before, but now of new life and the renewal of human beings in general - along with the return from exile
7. **Messiah because of Resurrection** - the Jewish Messiah was expected to battle against wicked pagans, rebuild or cleanse the Temple, and bring God's justice to the world - and it seemed that all of these had failed....until the resurrection

What Exactly Happened at the 1st Easter?

Four distinct features of the Easter accounts that argue for historicity:

1. No biblical echoes
2. Presence of the women
3. Portrait of Jesus - transformed, and yet not magically transfigured, or shining like a star. No OT predictions saw a transformed body in this way.
4. No mention of believers' future hope - it's about Jesus reigning now, in this world!

Other possible explanations?

Nobody expected this type of resurrection, and they had other ways to make sense of other experiences - like hallucinations or ghosts - none of which would have been confused with a resurrection.

Notable occurrences:

1. Jesus' grave did *not* become a shrine, as expected of a martyr

2. Early church's emphasis on the first day of the week
3. Disciples acted on a belief they could never have dreamt up, and that only brought them suffering and death.

Thus, "**the crucifixion of Jesus was the end of all their [Jewish disciples'] hopes.** Nobody dreamed of saying, 'Oh, that's all right - he'll be back again in a few days.' Nor did anybody say, 'Well, at least he's now in heaven with God.' They were not looking for that sort of kingdom. After all, Jesus himself had taught them to pray that God's kingdom would come 'on earth as in heaven.' What they said - and again this has the ring of first-century truth - was, 'We had hoped that he was the one who would redeem Israel' (Luke 24:21), with the implication, 'but they crucified him, so he can't have been.' The cross, we note, already had a symbolic meaning throughout the Roman world, long before it had a new one for the Christians. it meant: we Romans run this place, and if you get in our way we'll obliterate you - and do it pretty nastily too. **Crucifixion meant that the kingdom hadn't come, not that it had.** Crucifixion of a would-be Messiah meant that he wasn't the Messiah, not that he was. When Jesus was crucified, every single disciple knew what it meant: we backed the wrong horse. The game is over. . . They knew they were lucky to escape with their own lives." - 39-40

Six Ways the NT Describes Jesus' Redemption

1. **Firstfruits (1Cor. 15)** - the offering of the firstfruits signifies the great harvest still to come. . . the point of the firstfruits is that there will be many, many more.
2. **The Victorious Battle** - Jesus, having been raised bodily (remember: that's the only way he defeats death and so can properly reign over the world), establishes his kingdom by subduing all possible enemies.
3. **Citizens of heaven, colonizing earth (Phil. 3:20-1)** - Jesus will come *from* heaven *to* earth to change our bodies and our world, transformed to be like his
4. **God will be all in all (1Cor. 15:28)** - "God intends to flood the universe with himself, as though the universe, the entire cosmos, was designed as a receptacle for his love."
5. **New birth (Rom. 8)** - new creation from the womb of the old, to include all of creation

6. **The Marriage of Heaven and Earth** - "The New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven like a bride adorned for her husband . . . It is not we who go to heaven, it is heaven that comes to earth; indeed, it is the church itself, the heavenly Jerusalem, that comes down to earth. This is the ultimate rejection of all types of Gnosticism, of every worldview that sees the final goal as the separation of the world from God, of the physical from the spiritual, of earth from heaven. It is the final answer to the Lord's Prayer, that God's kingdom will come and his will be done on earth as in heaven. . . . This doesn't mean that God will wipe the slate clean and start again. **If that were so, there would be no celebration, no conquest of death, no long preparation now at last complete.**" - 104-5

The Redemption of our Bodies - What it is and Why it Matters

- **All about Jesus** - "[Early Christians] believed that God was going to do for the whole cosmos what he had done for Jesus at Easter." - 93
 - "The risen Jesus is both the *model* for the Christian's future body and the *means* by which it comes about. Similarly in Colossians 3:1-4: when the Messiah appears, the one who is your life, then you too will appear with him in glory. Paul does not say 'one day you will go to be with him.' No, you already possess life in him. This new life, which the Christian possess secretly, invisible to the world, will burst forth into full bodily reality and visibility." - 149
- **What's "Heaven"?** - "heaven is the place where *God's purposes for the future are stored up*. It isn't where they are meant to stay so that one would need to go to heaven to enjoy them; it is where they are kept safe against the day when they will become a reality on earth." - 151
- **What kind of body? Clarifying 1Corinthians 15** - the problem is not the material, but the source or energy or power of that material. We will lose our currently "corruptible physicality" and inherit an "incorruptible physicality" animated by God's Spirit rather than flesh and blood. Thus, Paul can conclude his discussion on the resurrection (1Cor. 15) by urging them to God's work NOW because they know it is not in vain, it will be reaffirmed and completed in the future.
- **Resurrection was always closely linked to our doctrines of creation and justice/final judgment. Why?**

Our Taste of Resurrection Now

- "'God's kingdom' in the preaching of Jesus refers not to postmortem destiny, not to our escape from this world into another one, but to God's sovereign rule coming 'on earth as it is in heaven'. . . . The wonderful description in Revelation 4 and 5 of the twenty-four elders casting their crowns before the throne of God and the lamb, beside the sea of glass, is not, despite one of Charles Wesley's great hymns, a picture of the last day, with all the redeemed in heaven at last. It is a picture of *present* reality, **the heavenly dimension of our present life**. Heaven, in the Bible, is not a future destiny but the other, hidden, dimension of our ordinary life - God's dimension, if you like. God made heaven and earth; at the last he will remake both and join them together." - 19
- "The Christian doctrine of the resurrection, as part of God's new creation, gives **more value, not less, to the present world and to our present bodies**. . . . What we do in the present matters enormously. Paul speaks of the future resurrection as a major motive for treating our bodies properly in the present time (1Cor. 6:14), and as the reason for not sitting back and waiting for it all to happen (1Cor. 15:58)." - 26
- **Motive for courage now** - "[This belief] is far more powerful and revolutionary than the Platonic one. It was people who believed robustly in the resurrection, not people who compromised and went in for a mere spiritualized survival, who stood up against Caesar in the first centuries of the Christian Era. A piety that sees death as the moment of 'going home at last,' the time when we are 'called to God's eternal peace,' has no quarrel with powermongers who want to carve up the world to suit their own ends. Resurrection, by contrast, has always come with a **strong view of God's justice and of God as the good creator**. Those twin beliefs give rise not to a meek acquiescence to injustice in the world but to a **robust determination** to oppose it. English evangelicals gave up believing in the urgent imperative to improve society (such as we find with Wilberforce in the late 18th and 19th centuries) about the same time that they gave up believing robustly in resurrection and settled for a disembodied heaven instead." - 26-7
 - *The Opposite of the "Opiate of the Masses"* - **Resurrection is not the redescription of death; it is its overthrow and, with that, the overthrow of those whose power depends on it**. . . . Resurrection was never a way of settling down and becoming respectable . . . It was the Gnostics, who

translated the language of resurrection into a private spirituality and a dualistic cosmology who escaped persecution. Which emperor would have sleepless nights worrying that his subjects were reading the Gospel of Thomas? Resurrection was always bound to get you into trouble, and it regularly did." - 50

- **Already-not yet and the Lord's Prayer** - "The whole book thus attempts to reflect the Lord's Prayer itself when it says, 'Thy kingdom come, on earth as in heaven.' That remains one of the most powerful and revolutionary sentences we can ever say. As I see it, the prayer was powerfully answered on the first Easter and will finally be answered fully when heaven and earth are joined in the new Jerusalem. Easter was when Hope in person surprised the whole world by coming forward from the future into the present. . . . Our task in the present . . . **is to live as resurrection people in between Easter and the final day, which our Christian life, corporate and individual, in both worship and mission, is a sign of the first and a foretaste of the second.**" - 30