

Jesus, The Resurrection

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At this time of the year all Christianity celebrates the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. I believe it is fitting that a teaching article be dedicated to the subject of the Lord's death and resurrection. Although I have read or heard the story of the resurrection hundreds of times, I shall never tire of it. Here is the story from Matthew's Gospel:

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord had come down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightening, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he is risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He is risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." (Matt 28:1-10 NIV).

This wonderful event, this marvelous victory over death continues to impact all humanity. When I was growing up I always considered the resurrection to be a historical event. But one day, as I read what Jesus told Martha in His conversation with her regarding Lazarus after he had died, my theology was revolutionized:

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."
Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection** and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (Jn 11:23-26 NIV, emphasis added).

Jesus' statement, "I am the resurrection" radically changed my theology! Suddenly I saw that the resurrection wasn't simply an event, it is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ -- the most important person who ever lived fulfilling the most important event that has ever occurred. I now see a new title for the Lord: Jesus, The Resurrection!

After Jesus made that startling statement, "I am the resurrection," He provided immediate proof. Walking to the tomb of Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" and the dead Lazarus resurrected

and came out!

I once heard a preacher say it was a good thing that Jesus didn't just shout, "Come out!" among the tombs or all those in the tombs would have resurrected! I believe that's true. Why? Because they would have to obey the command of The Resurrection.

But even this miraculous event, as dramatic and powerful as it was, was not the full resurrection that Jesus had in mind. No doubt as He stood there raising Lazarus from the dead He was anticipating His own future resurrection -- the ultimate fulfillment of His new title, The Resurrection.

Why Was It Necessary for Jesus to Die?

Jesus' death was in God's Master Plan from the beginning of time. Scripture calls Him, "...the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world." (Rev 13:8 NIV). This was God's secret plan to reconcile fallen man to Himself whom He so loved and who had been alienated from Him by sin. Jesus' death and resurrection culminated God's plan of salvation for mankind.

No doubt Satan viewed the crucifixion of Jesus as his greatest victory ever! Reading the story of Jesus' arrest and trial one can almost see the diabolic characters of Satan's court manipulating the Jewish rulers, Pilate, and the crowds who shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" I can imagine Satan's gleeful victory dance, shouting to the demons, "The very Son of God is now under my control...in **death!** He's mine! He's mine! Now **I'm** the prince of the universe!" But little did he know his greatest defeat was imminent. Little did he know that his diabolic scheme for victory had set in motion the very instrument of his own defeat! It also set in motion the final act of God's Master Plan of Salvation for mankind.

I believe, in one sense, that God viewed the crucifixion as the **beginning** of His eternal family. God saw in Jesus the perfect sacrificial Lamb. God saw Jesus as John the Baptist saw Him when he exclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29 NIV). God saw the obedient Son who, through His death, would bring many to life.

There is a spiritual law that states, "The wages of sin is death..." (Rom 6:23 NIV). Since the sin of Adam no sacrifice had been offered that was powerful enough to wash away sin. Indeed, none was available to man. It was necessary that a full, final and sufficient offering be made -- once, for all mankind. Jesus was uniquely qualified to make that sin offering since His life was not sustained by Adam's sinful blood. No other being in the universe was qualified, only Jesus. None other would suffice.

Jesus' blood came from the Holy Spirit and therefore was not defiled with Adam's sin. And He lived a sinless life. That is why His blood offering was acceptable to the Father for the sins of mankind.

What Did Jesus Accomplish Through His Death and Resurrection?

Jesus' death on the cross triggered a sequence of very

important events in the spirit world. These events are not generally known or understood by many believers. Scripture touches on these events at various places but only obliquely. In the following text I will, as I see it, piece together sequentially the events that took place following Jesus' death, commenting on their significance.

I believe that immediately after his death:

1. Jesus Descended Into the Lower Earthly Regions

Scripture, speaking of Jesus' ascension, says, "...that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions..." (Eph 4:9 NIV). What was down there?

Jesus gives an excellent description of the lower earthly regions in Luke's gospel in the story of the beggar named Lazarus. It is important to know that this story is not a parable. Characters in biblical parables do not have names. Also, Jesus always introduced parables by saying, "It is like" or a similar phrase. But in this case He said, "There was a rich man...and...a beggar named Lazarus..." (Lk 16:19-20). Clearly he is describing a factual event.

"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'..." (Lk 16:22-26 NIV).

Aside from the story, I draw attention to the fact that, 1) the setting, based on Ephesians 4:9 is beneath the earth's surface in the lower, earthly regions, 2) there were two compartments, or divisions, (Hell and Paradise), and that they were, 3) separated by a great gulf.

I believe Jesus descended to this place initially. To which compartment did He go first, and what did He do when He got there?

2. Jesus Preached to the "Dead"

Peter gives us insight into these questions. Peter, speaking of people who had lived in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry, wrote:

But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in the spirit. (I Pet 4:5-6 NIV).
For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the

unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also **he went and preached to the spirits in prison** who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built...." (I Pet 3:18-20 NIV emphasis added).

From the above Scripture it is obvious that Jesus went to preach to those in Hell, for "in prison" and "who disobeyed" certainly doesn't describe the righteous dead who were not disobedient and who were in Paradise with Father Abraham, does it? Peter said this proclamation or preaching was for the purpose of allowing the dead to hear the gospel the same as the living so that all may be judged with equality on the Day of Judgment. As I see it, after he preached,

3. Jesus Stripped Satan of His Power

No doubt Satan was still rejoicing in his "victory" until Jesus showed up to preach to those in Hell. At that moment I'm sure the devil's comprehension of God's eternal plan took a quantum leap! When the preaching was over, Jesus then turned His attention to Satan and his cohorts:

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col 2:15 NIV).

The Knox Bible says "...and the dominions and powers he robbed of their prey." The very thing Satan calculated to be his victory turned out to be his undoing! Jesus triumphed over him **by the cross!** Not only did Satan not win...he lost his power! He was disarmed!

Just imagine this scene! It took place in sight of all in the underworld. Not only did the unrighteous dead witness it, but so did the righteous! Imagine the cheers and shouts of joy on Abraham's side of the great gulf!

4. Jesus Took the Keys of Death and Hell

Up to that moment in time Satan held the authority of death and Hell. He was the Lord of death. But Jesus terminated that situation and stripped him of that title. Jesus, exclaiming His victory to the Apostle John said:

"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! **And I hold the keys of death and Hades.**" (Rev 1:17-18 NIV emphasis added).

In my mind I can see Jesus walking victoriously up to the trembling Satan and saying, "Your reign of death and terror is over. Give me those keys!" as He snatches the keys of death and Hell from Satan's hand.

Then death was forced to loose its hold on Jesus. Death could not hold him. Why? Scripture gives us the answer:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?"

Where, O death is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Co 15:54-57 NIV).

Again, why was death not able to hold Jesus? Because Jesus had no sin! "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 15:56,57 NIV). By this Paul meant that death reigned in power through sin over all mankind. The Mosaic law, that is, God's law, brought the knowledge of sin to man. This was accomplished either through the written word or through man's own conscience. The Mosaic law tried to direct man's behavior in such a way as to live above sin. This was impossible for every human being except Jesus. Jesus was the only one who was capable of perfectly fulfilling the Law because He was sinless. Thus, death was powerless to hold Him.

Never before had death held one who was sinless. All whom death had previously devoured were sons of Adam -- sinners every one. Sinners by birth all; sinners by evil deeds many. But now death, in its insatiable appetite, has devoured One without sin, One without Adam's sinful blood. Death had no choice but to loose its cold grip on Jesus. Death could not hold the Lord of Life! Jesus conquered death for us! Hallelujah!

5. Jesus Crossed Over to Paradise

Having preached to the dead, gained the eternal victory over Satan, death and Hell, Jesus then crossed over the great gulf to the cheering souls in Father Abraham's Paradise. The repentant thief on the cross was there full of joy waiting for Him. He had gleefully watched the victory battle from the other side. For Jesus had told him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Lk 23:43 NIV). He then moved to:

6. Set the Captives Free!

In my mind I can see Jesus grasping Adam by the hand, looking up and shouting, "Let's break out of here and go to the Father!" as He lead the captives up through the earth back to the Father. He Himself went back to the tomb to reclaim His physical body. There the awesome power of God raised His body to life as an angel rolled the stone away for Him. There was a tremendous earthquake when He rose from the dead. The lower earthly region suffered a violent, permanent change. It no longer held the thousands of souls of the righteous dead. Nor could it hold the Lord of Life any longer.

This is why it says:

"When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (Eph 4:8 NIV).

As Jesus and the captives broke through the earth on their way to the Father, Jesus left some of the saints behind briefly to go into Jerusalem to tell of the great victory they had witnessed:

The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. (Matt 27:52-53 NIV).

Logic suggests that these had to be people who had died recently, otherwise they would have been unknown to the people in the city. What a powerful testimony to Jesus, The Resurrection!

Today, paradise, or the place of the righteous dead, is in heaven, for Paul says, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8 KJV). That former place beneath the earth where the righteous dead were held is now empty. Only hell remains there.

7. Jesus Made A Brief Stop At the Tomb

Shortly after His resurrection, Jesus stopped briefly to greet the women as they left the tomb. The Gospel of John records this moving scene:

...but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (Jn 20:11-17 NIV).

8. Jesus Ascended and Entered the True Holy of Holies

Having won the eternal redemption for mankind, having defeated Satan and stripped him of his powers, Jesus then had a final mission to accomplish. This act finalized eternally the redemption of mankind. He must offer the blood that was spilled on Calvary before the Father as the eternal, sufficient, perfect sacrifice for sin. When Jesus ascended back to heaven, he entered the true Holy of Holies bearing His own sinless blood as a sin offering for mankind:

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of

this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. (Heb 9:11-12 NIV).

Hallelujah! Finally a sin offering has been made that is eternally acceptable to the Father -- an offering that has power to wash away all sin! And no offering for sin has to be made ever again.

These are the events that followed Jesus' crucifixion as I see them. They are not widely taught, but I believe that an understanding of these events is vital for us as Christians to fully appreciate the great victory Jesus purchased for us.

What Was the Significance of These Events to Man?

Before Jesus died and resurrected no one had ever been born again because it was not possible. Regarding the sequence of events in time, the way of rebirth was not open until after Jesus' resurrection. Look at the first thing Jesus did with His disciples in His first appearance to them after His resurrection:

... when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"...he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (Jn 20:19-22 NIV).

It is my belief that these disciples were the first people ever to be born again...a highly significant event for all believers. The door of rebirth is now open to whosoever will receive Jesus as Savior! Note when Jesus said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" in John, chapter 20, this is not to be confused with the Acts, chapter two "Baptism into the Holy Spirit" which happened weeks later.

How Did the Father Respond to His Son's Work?

Paul, speaking of the humility and glory of Jesus, describes the Father's great pleasure with Jesus' humility and obedience:

Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:6-11 NIV).

No, there is no other name higher than that of Jesus. God has decreed it. This entire series of events, beginning with that dreadful scene at the cross, victory over Satan, death and Hell, the liberation of the captives, Jesus' resurrection, the offering of His own blood to pay the final wages of sin, and culminating with the rebirth of the first believers, pleased the Father immeasurably!

Let us enter this season of the celebration of our Lord's resurrection with a new sense of worship and renewed appreciation for the mighty works Jesus accomplished for us through His death and resurrection.

Thank you, Jesus, for You truly are the Resurrection and the Life!

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