

The Resurrection Changes Everything

Nov. 10, 2017

Intro.

There are some events in the history of world which have caused drastic changes in humans' lives. Some of these events are more local and some extend out to embrace various nations, and some have even had influence on the entire population of the earth.

For example, the people of Sutherland Springs, Texas, will never be the same after the mass shooting last Sunday, Nov. 5. And the people of the church will certainly never be the same. I heard that they have decided to raze the church building because it is too difficult for the people who remain to have to go back into the building were most of their fellow church members were either killed or wounded.

Certain individuals in the history of the world have had widespread influence. Alexander the Great, for example, by reason of his vast military conquests brought about the spread of Greek language and culture throughout the Mediterranean countries and as far east as India. The predominance of the Greek language in many of those cultures lasted for 800 years.

And there have been events which have affected most of the people of the earth in one way or another, such as the first and second World Wars of the last century. A couple of the most obvious life-style changing inventions for most of the people on earth has been the Industrial Revolution, which began in Britain about 1760 and spread from there to other parts of the world, and, of course, the invention of the computer which has revolutionized or impacted nearly every aspect of human life.

Yet there is one event in the history of the world which is the most significant event, and it has complete relevance for every person on earth – it is the resurrection from the dead of a Jewish carpenter named Jesus who was from a small town in northern Israel called Nazareth. Often we refer to him as “Jesus of Nazareth.”

What do we mean when we say that Jesus Christ rose from the dead? First of all, let me explain why this man is also often referred to as “Jesus Christ.” The name “Jesus” is derived from the Hebrew word “Joshua” and means “the Lord saves.” The name “Christ” is derived from the Greek language, the word is “cristos,” and it means “anointed one,” the one anointed with the Holy Spirit to proclaim the will of God and do the works of God on earth. The Hebrew term, from which the Greek word came, is “Messiah.” In fact, we often refer to Jesus as “the Messiah,” which in essence means he is the deliverer of God’s people. He came to deliver his people from their sins and the punishment that they deserve from a holy and righteous God for all their selfish failures to live up to God’s high standard of righteousness and holiness.

I think it is necessary to explain these various terms that refer to Jesus so there will be a clearer understanding of why we refer to Jesus by these various designations.

What do we mean when we say that Jesus Christ rose from the dead? We mean that this Jesus, who was a full Jewish man, who had been killed by the Roman government by nailing him to a cross – he died by the instrumentality of crucifixion – then he was buried in a borrowed tomb and a great stone was rolled across the entrance and sealed by the Roman government and a guard of four soldiers was posted because the Jewish authorities had requested such a guard in order to prevent the disciples (i.e., the followers) of Jesus from stealing his body and then claiming that he had risen from the dead.

But what happened is that three days later, on a Sunday morning, there was an earthquake and Jesus came alive and left the tomb. The stone had been rolled away by angels, not to let Jesus out, but so that his disciples could enter and see the empty tomb.

When two of his closest disciples heard from one of the women followers of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, who had gone earlier in the morning to the tomb and the risen Jesus had spoken to her – and when these two disciples, Peter and John, heard what had happen they ran to the tomb and when they entered they saw the grave cloth wrappings that had encased the body of Jesus lying on the stone slab like a cocoon – in the shape of a human body but there was no body inside it! And they saw the head cloth folded up in a corner by itself, separate from the body wrappings.

And so it went over the next 40 days – there were 8 additional encounters of the resurrected Jesus with his disciples. They saw him, they touched him, they were taught by him, he ate a meal with them, and he even cooked them breakfast one day on the shore of Lake Galilee.

So when we say that Jesus Christ was resurrected, that he rose from the dead, we mean that he had been killed, he was dead, he had been buried, and then after three days he came alive again. The point here is that he was raised from the dead physically. It was not some kind of “spiritual” resurrection, like the appearance of a ghost or the spirit of Jesus. No, it was really him. He had risen from the tomb in the very same body in which he had been crucified. In fact, he still bore on his body the wounds, the scars from the cross – in both his wrists and his feet, and he carried the scar of the spear wound that a Roman soldier had cause when he thrust his spear in Jesus’s side to be sure he was really dead. When the soldier pierced his side, blood and water come pouring out. Evidently he had already died. But the piercing of the spear removed any doubt that Jesus had really died.

And so the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate (by the way I saw an inscription on like a stone arch with his name on it at a display from the Israeli museum at the Houston Museum of Art some years ago), allowed a couple of his disciples to remove his body from the cross. They then washed it and anointed in with spices in the custom of the Jews, wrapped it in the burial cloths, and placed it in the tomb of rich man named Joseph of Arimathea.

Having risen from the dead on the third day, Jesus, as I said, appeared on a total of 10 occasions to his disciples, his followers. On one occasion he appeared to more than 500 of them.

These eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection from the dead recorded these events in writing. We have in our possession four separate accounts of these events, written by either the immediate disciples of Christ or close associates of these disciples: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These are historical documents, which along with the accompanying documents consisting mostly of letters written by the apostles of Christ, that is, leaders who were appointed by Christ to communicate the facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and the meaning of these events for humankind – all these documents make up what we call the New Testament. "New Testament" means the new covenant, the new agreement or contract that God has established with humankind by means of the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ.

So when we speak of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and I say that the resurrection changes everything, I am talking about the physical resurrection of Christ from the dead. He is not dead; he is alive.

And this resurrection body that come up from the grave was the same body as had been crucified, but it had also been transformed with a heavenly glory. He could appear in a room and then disappear. So, his body though physically resurrected, had also been clothed with supernatural elements to enhance the glory and power of his resurrected body.

What I have laid out for you are some of the basics when we Christians say that Jesus resurrected from the dead. We believe in his resurrection from the dead in these very specific ways that I have outlined.

The Great Issue

So this resurrection of Jesus from the dead is what Christians believe and confess. This is fundamental to our whole religion. We certainly affirm that if Jesus had not risen from the dead, then our Christians faith is useless, it is devoid of power, it has become just another religious philosophy on the cafeteria line of world religions. But if he really did rise from the dead, this changes everything for everybody in some crucial ways.

There are of course in our world many people who have never heard of Jesus Christ, and there are many others who have heard of him but are not aware that he rose from the dead, and there are others who are aware of the Christian claim that Jesus rose physically from the dead but they reject this claim.

Some would say that it is medically impossible for a man who had been dead for three days to come back to life – to rise up from the grave in the same body in which he was buried.

There are others who try to explain away the reality of what happened – they say, for instance, that another person was substituted for Christ on the cross, or that Jesus didn't really die – he just swooned like he was a dead man, but in the coolness of the tomb he revived. Or as the guards who had been at the tomb were told by the Jewish leaders to say that they had fallen asleep and his disciples came and stole his body while they slept.

So there are basically four groups of people in our world today that we could classify as to how they stand on the issue of Christ's resurrection from the dead:

1. Many have never heard of Christ's resurrection and so are ignorant of this event. **The Ignorant**
2. Some who are aware of the Christian claim that Christ rose bodily from the grave but they are not sure if they believe it, or if it is true, how it affects them. **The Undecided/Uncommitted**
3. Others deny that the resurrection really happened for one reason or another. **The Deniers**
4. Christians who believe that the resurrection really happened. **The Believers**

So, I would like to consider each of these 4 groups of people and ask the question for each one of them, How does the resurrection of Christ change everything for them?

1. Let's take the Deniers first.

They discount, they deny, the reality of Christ's resurrection.

First of all, let's consider the manuscript evidence for the reliability of the New Testament manuscripts.

There is more evidence for the Bible's authenticity than for any literature of antiquity.

The New Testament was written in first century A.D. There are some 25,000 early manuscripts in existence, almost 6,000 of which (many being only recognizable fragments) are Greek texts and the others being early translations of the Greek New Testament. The earliest textual evidence we have was copied not long after the original. In contrast:

- Caesar's *Gallic Wars* was written in the first century B.C. There are only 10 manuscripts in existence. The earliest textual evidence we have was copied 1,000 years after the original.
- Aristotle's *Poetics* was written in the fourth century B.C. There are only 5 manuscripts in existence. The earliest textual evidence we have was copied 1,400 years after the original. (<http://www.icr.org/bible-manuscripts/>)

These documents are replete with descriptions and affirmations of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

So the bottom line is that we have more ancient manuscript evidence of a most reliable nature than for any other event in ancient history. This is a massive peace of evidence that cannot be easily dismissed.

Secondly, for the deniers, consider the fact that almost all the leaders of the early Christian church were martyrs. It is not likely they would have died for what they knew was a lie. They proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ far and wide, even though it put their lives in jeopardy.

Thirdly, there is the testimony of thousands of believers over the centuries who have believed in the resurrected Christ and had their lives completely changed by the power of the living Christ. One example from the first century is a man named Saul of Tarsus, a city in present day Asia Minor. He was a zealous persecutor of the early forming Christian believers, he went from city to city to imprison them, and stood by giving his approval when one of the early followers of Christ named Stephen was stoned to death by an incensed Jewish mob who did not want to hear about the death and resurrection of Christ.

Believers in all centuries and in all cultures can testify that the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives and their faith in the resurrected Jesus Christ has changed them from the inside out, so that in their hearts hatred has been changed to love, revenge has been changed to forgiveness, selfishness has been changed to a sacrificial way of living, greed has been changed to generosity, lust has been changed to self-control, fear has been changed to trust in the living God, anxiety and worry has been changed to peace, and the frustrations and disappointments in life have been absorbed in the great purposes of a sovereign and good God who is working out all things for his glory and for the good of his people.

Another factor that deniers in the resurrection should consider is the existence of the Christian church in the world since the time of Christ. In spite of persecution and mocking, in spite of those who see no relevance or need for the church, it has continued to exist and grow through the centuries so that now around the world committed believers gather every week to worship the resurrected Christ, to be taught from his Word, the Bible, and to fellowship with each other, supporting one another in their joys and hardships.

Finally, I must turn again to the incontrovertible, the undeniable reality of Christ's rising from death. No other religious founder has a historically verifiable resurrection testimony except Jesus Christ. Some religions have stories and myths of their gods, but none of these are objectively verifiable and based on solid historical evidence the way Christ's resurrection is.

For the deniers of the R'n, these factors that confirm the reality of Christ's resurrection present evidence that must be seriously considered.

2. Secondly, let's consider the Ignorant - the millions who have never heard of Christ's resurrection and so are ignorant of this event. It's not that they are ignorant in the sense of being stupid, but they are just uninformed. All of us are uninformed about many subjects and disciplines.

I am, for example, uninformed about many areas of technology. I have friends, male friends, who are uninformed about cooking – they don't have the slightest idea how to go about cooking a full course meal. Most people are uninformed about the histories of other nations besides their own.

And so millions of people in our world today are uninformed, they are ignorant of the fact that Christ rose from the dead. This is new information for them, a new fact, as I believe it is a fact, that they have never heard about. For these people the resurrection of Christ changes everything.

When the apostle Paul, who I mentioned earlier, was preaching the good news of Jesus Christ in ancient Athens, the seat of Greek culture, he informed them of an unknown god to whom they had dedicated an altar. He described for them the righteous creator God who sent his Son, Jesus Christ, as an offering to pay for the sins of those who would believe that God raised his Son from the dead. Let me read you what Paul said to them from Acts 17: 30-31:

The times of ignorance ^(B)God overlooked, but ^(C)now he ^(D)commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed ^(E)a day on which ^(F)he will judge the world ^(G)in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and ^(H)of this he has given assurance to all ^(I)by raising him from the dead.”

What Paul is saying here is that there is a righteous God who will judge the people of the earth, he will bring them into the court of his justice, and judge them for their sins and he will do it through his Son whom he raised from the dead. Jesus Christ will be the judge of all men, the same Jesus whom God raised from the dead.

Paul is saying here that the proof that Jesus will also be the Judge of all men and women is the fact that God raised him from the dead. Jesus had led a perfectly sinless life while on earth and thus was qualified to be the substitutionary sacrifice to take the place of his people – he stood in their place and suffered the wrath of God against their sins in his own innocent body. And we know Christ's sacrifice was sufficient and pleasing to God because God raised him from the dead the reveal that his sacrifice in dying on the cross of crucifixion was full and acceptable payment for the sins of believers.

What I am saying here is that the ignorant know have no excuse. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is proof that he was the Son of God and is worthy to be

followed and worshipped as Lord of all. The resurrection of Jesus changes everything for the ignorant. Having come to the knowledge of Christ's resurrection from the dead, they must now deal with this crucial information. There are only two options available: rejection of Christ's resurrection - rejection by outright denial or rejection by ignoring this fact and continuing on as before. When God raised his Son from the dead he drew a line in the sand for all the peoples of the earth – either believe in the resurrection of my Son from the dead or reject this and go on in your sin and all its consequences. Accept the resurrection of my Son and receive forgiveness of your sins and eternal life in fellowship with God, or reject the resurrection and spend eternity separated from the beauty and glory of God in a place of terrible punishment reserved for the devil and his angels.

For the ignorant, they have nothing to lose and everything to gain by believing in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

3. Let's consider a third category of persons in our world – those who are aware of the Christian claim that Christ rose bodily from the grave but they are not sure if they believe it, or if it is true, how it affects them. **These are the Undecided.**

How should these people respond to Christ's resurrection from the dead? We might call these people "fence riders." They may think the accounts of the life of Jesus is a wonderful story and surely Jesus is a person to be admired and even imitated in his unselfish way of life and compassionate concern for others.

Yet they stay on the fence, they walk along the fence like a cat or a squirrel but unlike a cat or squirrel they will not jump down on one side or the other. They won't commit to believing in Christ's resurrection. They keep the Resurrected Christ at arm's length. They don't want to get too serious about this. They don't want to appear too religious. They rather enjoy their life, their relationship, their traditional values, their inherited religious beliefs that are perhaps all they have ever known. They are comfortable where they are in life and they don't want to change. They don't want to rock the boat. They don't want to upset anybody.

But these people are walking on dangerous ground. Not to believe in the God who resurrected Jesus from the dead is to fly in the face of historical and hard evidence. If Christ really did rise from the dead they must shake off their complacency, their spiritual lethargy, and seek the truth no matter what the cost to themselves, their comfort, or their traditional beliefs.

They cannot afford to be passive about this. They must become proactive. They must investigate further the claims of Christ. If Christ really did rise from the dead, and I am affirming that he did, then they and if fact, all people, will one day have to answer to the resurrected Christ who is also the Judge of all people. Christ will ask them, why did you

not believe in my resurrection? Why did you not believe when the evidence is so strong? Why did you ignore this great fact?

The undecided must decide to accept and embrace the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. When they do, they will enter into a relationship with the living Christ that will transform their lives for the highest good and bring them into worship of the true God, whom to know is to have life eternal, life that will never end, life in the presence of the resurrected Christ, cleansed of all sin, and given the very righteousness of Christ himself.

4. There is a fourth category of people for whom the resurrection of Christ changes everything – it is those who hear of the resurrection, who hear the account of Jesus' holy life and mighty resurrection from the dead, and **they believe it**, embrace it, and fall in submission and worship to the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

For them, a new dawn awakens in the darkness of their previous life. Their guilt and punishment for their sins are wiped away. Their love for ungodliness and evil – their pushed God out of their lives is changed to bowing to Christ's lordship, to confessing him as King, Lord, and Master. They lay down their lives in glad submission to the resurrected Christ's will for their lives as revealed in the pages of the holy Bible.

I don't think you'll ever find a Christian who regrets embracing the resurrected Christ. You will find testimony after testimony of people for whom everything changed for the better when Christ revealed himself to them and drew them unto himself. They have experienced the love of God poured out in their hearts, of daily fellowship with God through his Holy Spirit, and the confident assurance that when this life ends, they will enter into the presence of the risen Christ, awaiting the day of his return to earth, when they will be clothed with resurrection bodies similar to Christ's resurrected body.

Whether a person is a denier of the resurrection of Christ, ignorant of the resurrection of Christ, undecided about the resurrection of Christ, or is a committed believer in the resurrection of Christ, for all these people – if they will come to Christ, if they will believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead and then confess with their mouths this belief – they will be saved – saved from the punishment for their sins in hell, saved from separation from the all beautiful and gracious God – and they will be joined to God, to the Father of Jesus Christ, to Christ himself, and will experience deep and unending fellowship and joy with the living God.

If you have not already done so, won't you come to Christ, believe in his resurrection from the dead, and experience for yourself the joy of his presence and fellowship all the days of your life? If you do that, you will discover that your belief in the resurrected Christ will change everything in your life, and change it for the supreme good. As the scripture says in the Book of Acts 16:31: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

-by Jeff Gregory

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