

1Corinthians 15:12-20

The Practical Effects of the Resurrection of Christ

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept – v. 20.

This paragraph in this chapter of 1Cor. 15 shows us how much importance the Apostle Paul assigned to the truth of Christ's resurrection. Basically what he's saying is that apart from the truth of Christ's resurrection our religion could be stamped as null and void. It becomes empty and meaningless. It does nothing for us except perhaps to deceive us. Look at the things that are declared to be vain apart from the resurrection of Christ.

Our preaching is vain v. 14; your faith is also vain – v. 14; And as a result of vain preaching which leads to vain faith the Apostles are found to be false witnesses – v. 15; your faith is vain he says again in v. 17 and as a result of vain faith ye are yet in your sins and those that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished – v. 18.

It's no wonder that those that major in Christian apologetics have said that the absence of the resurrection effectively kills Christianity. I can still remember as a young Christian going to hear Josh McDowell who was a popular Christian apologist who use to go to secular college campuses to defend the truths of Christianity. And he would make the remark that if you want to kill Christianity then all you have to do is disprove the resurrection of Christ.

He would go on to cite examples of certain intellectuals who would devote themselves to that very task. What heroes they would be in ridding the world of this pesty religion of Christianity if they could simply demonstrate that Christ did not rise from the dead. But in the instances that Josh McDowell would cite there would inevitably be a scholarly attempt to disprove the resurrection which would invariably lead to the conversion of the skeptical scholar who had devoted his time and energy to disproving it.

The devil is certainly aware of the importance of such a truth. And that is why even in Paul's time there were those that denied the resurrection. *how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? – v. 12.* And in writing to Timothy he notes in 2Tim. 2:18 *Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.* The resurrection even in Paul's day was being denied or was being perverted.

And even before Paul we find the example of the Sadducees in Christ's time who denied the supernatural and said there was no resurrection. Can you see them standing before Christ reciting a hypothetical example of a man who dies and leaves his wife to his brother who in turn dies and leaves her to his brother and so on down the line seven times? *Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?* – they want to know as if to suggest that God apparently had never thought of such a dilemma and since we know God must be wiser than that – that God could not possibly be so unwise as to overlook this dilemma there must not be any resurrection.

I love Christ's answer to them. Mt 22:29 *Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.* Christ is saying to them in essence that they were lost. They didn't understand the scriptures aright and they obviously had never been the recipients of God's power and so they were still stuck in the rationale that characterizes every lost sinner which is a rationale that vainly searches for ways to explain away God and explain away God's power.

And so after Paul's emphasis on what's at stake in this matter of the resurrection of Christ he then goes on to declare the truth that he knew from scriptures and that he knew from his own experience of the resurrected Christ. Look at 1Cor. 15:20 *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.* That's good preaching on Paul's part. Preaching, you see, is the simple declaration of the truth. And Paul sets it forth very simply when he says *But now Christ is risen from the dead.*

When I think on this statement of Paul and the truth behind it pertaining to the resurrection, it reminds me that there is a sense in which we have a great advantage in our day pertaining to this doctrine but there's another sense in which we seem to have a disadvantage.

The advantage we have is the advantage of historic orthodoxy. This doctrine of the resurrection and the resurrection of Christ has a long history of being recognized as the truth that we affirm. We know that this is what the Bible teaches and we know that Christians throughout the ages have understood this to be what the Bible teaches. It's a wonderful advantage to compare our knowledge to the knowledge of preceding generations and when we do so we find it easy to affirm that this is the truth.

The disadvantage we have is that the resurrection of Christ occurred so many years ago that we are sometimes tempted to treat it as if it was some kind of myth. There's a remoteness to it that that can leave us sadly unaffected by it. And this certainly stands in contrast to the early church. The church in Paul's day was energized by the certain truth that Christ was risen. I'm not so sure that we find ourselves as energized by that truth today as we should be. And this phenomenon of the early church being so deeply effected and the modern church being so little effected raises a question in my mind that I want to endeavor to answer this morning. And the question is simply this:

How Should the Glorious Truth of Christ's Resurrection Effect Us Today?

I. The Resurrection of Christ Should Have a Sobering Effect on Us

When Paul preached to the scholarly philosophy club at Mars hill in Athens who loved to tell and hear new things he declared to them how God was now commanding all men everywhere to repent *Because (Acts 17:31) he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by [that] man whom he hath ordained; [whereof] he hath given assurance unto all [men], in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, one may argue, gives us assurance of many things. It gives us assurance that Christ's claim to be the Son of God is a valid claim. So Paul writes to the Romans in Rom. 1:4 that Christ was *declared [to be] the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*

So we gain assurance of Christ's identity and we gain assurance that Christ is the man ordained to be the judge of the world (Acts 17:31). Both of these truths ought to be sobering truths to the every child of Adam. In other words they ought to be truths that have the impact of sobering men from the drunken stupor they find themselves in by the spirit of this world. It ought to have the impact of making men and women (and children for that matter) serious about the things of God.

Unfortunately for the men at Athens we go on to read in v. 32 *And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this [matter].* They either scoffed at the issue or they decided that the jury was still out on the matter so to speak. In other words they would search for a way to deny it at a later time.

Pride and worldliness often times lead to mocking and denials. That's not always the case but it usually is when you're dealing with men, like the Athenians, who think they're smart. I'm reminded of another occasion in Acts 24:25 where Paul reasoned with Felix of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come and we read in that verse how Felix trembled.

And a couple of chapters later when Paul is giving his defense before Festus and Agrippa and he spoke to them of the resurrection of Christ, Festus was so disturbed by Paul's words that at one point he could not refrain from blurting out *Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.* To which Paul replies *I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*

This is why I say the truth of the resurrection ought to have a sobering effect on men which is tantamount to saying that it's something that ought to be taken seriously in a day and age when nothing is taken seriously. The resurrection of Christ, you see, gives us assurance that there's a coming day of judgment. And judgment ought to be taken seriously.

Death, you see – physical death, is not the end. There are those who desperately want to believe that it is. If I can go to my grave and escape having to answer to Christ then I can live a life of sin that strives to gain every unlawful pleasure and then escape from God through death.

But if God raised Christ from the dead then it follows that God can raise all men from the dead and this, in fact, is the picture that is given to us in Rev. 20:12 *And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*

Doesn't such a scene show very clearly that death is not an escape from God? There is coming a judgment day and the reality of that day ought to make us very sober and serious. I can remember as a very young Christian that I learned that I preferred to meet my unsaved friends at funerals rather than their usual social gatherings.

Religion, you know, is a very popular topic of discussion at social gatherings. Men and women are content to drink their beer and smoke their pot and discuss religion. And I initially thought as a young Christian that I was enjoying tremendous witnessing opportunities by attending these social gatherings and speaking for Christ. The trouble was that in that particular social situation nobody was serious. Everything was small talk no matter what the subject of discussion happened to be.

And then it happened that the wife of one of those men quite unexpectedly died at a very young age. If my memory serves me right her death came on through complications that developed in what was supposed to have been a routine surgery. What a contrast the scene of that funeral was to the usual scenes of drugs and drunkenness. Now everyone was sober and everyone was in search of explanations. And I remember having more meaningful conversations with my unsaved friends in that setting than I had ever had in the settings of drunken frivolity that usually characterized their get-togethers.

And that's how the resurrection of Christ should effect us today. And if the world is going to scoff and ridicule let's be sure at the very least that as Christians we don't find ourselves so drunk with the spirit of the world that we fail to take the matter of judgment seriously. It is a serious issue. The eternal destinies of souls are stake. Men will be judged by their works and men will be turned into hell and we ought to make it our business to prepare ourselves for that day by learning to read our titles to heaven as clearly as we can. The truth of that day and everything that pertains to that day is a sealed reality – sealed by the truth that Christ is risen from the dead.

So we find a sobering effect to the resurrection of Christ. How should the resurrection of Christ effect us today? It should effect us by making us sober or serious concerning righteousness, temperance and judgment to come. But would you consider with me next that:

II. The Resurrection of Christ Should Have a Motivating Effect on Us

And the first thing we find ourselves motivated to do is to worship Christ. Again the words of Paul in Rom. 1:4,5 where he tells us that Christ was *declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name.*

There is much in that statement that applies to you and me. The risen Christ, you see, is the source from which you and I have received grace that has led us to the obedience of faith. This is the difference between us and the mockers at Athens in Acts 17. This is the difference between us and the mockers and scoffers of this present world. We have

received grace. And in the reception of this grace we have been raised, spiritually speaking, from spiritual death to spiritual life. And the evidence of this spiritual life is that we find ourselves compelled to worship our risen Savior. We believe in him and we believe in his gospel. We believe in his sinless life and in his atoning death. And we believe that on account of these things the grave could not hold him. He must come forth triumphantly from the tomb.

Like doubting Thomas of old we find ourselves compelled upon seeing the risen Christ with the eye of faith to bow before him and exclaim *My Lord and my God* (Jn. 20:28). What a blessing to make such a confession to the saving of our souls. We know, of course, and anticipate the day when every knee will bow to him and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Unfortunately such a confession will be made to the damnation of souls who put off their confession until that judgment day but the point is that because Christ was willing to die for our sins *God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Phil. 2:9-11).

So the impact of the resurrection upon us today is that we find ourselves compelled to worship him. Indeed we designate the first day of the week as the day that we meet to corporately worship him because he rose from the dead on the first day of the week.

But not only do we find ourselves compelled to worship him but the resurrection also motivates us to preach the gospel. I said in my introduction that we have both an advantage and disadvantage regarding the resurrection of Christ. Our advantage is that there's no doubt about the truth of our doctrine. Our disadvantage is that this historic event at times seems too distant from us.

To those who were near the actual time of the event, they manifested incredible zeal when it came to the matter of giving out the gospel. You may recall that when we studied the book of Acts a few years ago this was a point that I emphasized again and again. It wasn't because those early Christians were wiser that they showed such zeal. It wasn't because they had mastered effective training techniques for witnessing that they were so zealous. No, it was simply because they were convinced with certainty in their hearts that Christ was indeed risen from the dead.

And so you couldn't silence them. You could oppress them and indeed they were oppressed. They were made to flee their homes we discover in Acts 8 but that circumstance didn't silence them. You could imprison them. And before his conversion Paul, who was then Saul of Tarsus, did oversee the task of committing many of them to prison. But it didn't do any good. It didn't keep the gospel from being spread. You could even have some of them put to death. And we have the account of the death of Stephen and we have the account of the death of James and the imprisonment of Peter with the intent of having him put to death as well.

None of those things could suppress the zeal of the early church and so we read in Acts 8:3,4 *As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*

What an incredible picture is given to us in the space of these couple of verses. Think of what that really would have been like. You're forced to leave your home. You're forced to leave your job. You're robbed of any earthly security. You don't know where you're going to sleep. You don't know where your next meal is going to come from. You pretty well do know that you're facing some difficult challenges ahead. But those very terrible circumstances don't prove to be what dominates the hearts of those early Christians. What dominates their hearts is the reality that their Savior is risen from the dead and that the gospel, therefore, of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the absolute truth.

Oh that the truth of the resurrection of Christ would so reach our hearts today and have the same impact on us today. How I loathe having to admit that this glorious truth of Christ's resurrection becomes a mere part of my creed – something that I give assent to and yet something that all too often is not vital to my life.

The need under such circumstances is obviously for revival and that early church was in a period of revival. Revival amounts to a renewal in the heart-felt reality of the truths that we affirm. And I should just say here, since we're on the subject now of motivation, that the resurrection of Christ can and should motivate us to pray for revival – to pray that the Spirit of God would so move on our hearts that we would find our zeal raised again from near death.

How does the resurrection of Christ effect us today? We've seen that it has a sobering effect on our lives and we've seen that it has a motivational impact on our lives. Would you consider finally:

III. The Resurrection of Christ Should Have a Consoling Effect on Our Lives

Notice again from 1Cor. 15 the words of v. 20 *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.* Christ has become the firstfruits of them that slept which means that he's gone before and we're to follow. He's risen from the dead and so will we rise from the dead.

Isn't it good to know in this sin-cursed and vain world that death is not the end? *My sheep hear my voice, Christ says in Jn. 10:27 and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

What hope this promise holds out to us. And in 2Tim. 1:10 *But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

Christ has abolished death. Of course, in order to understand such a statement you need to know exactly what death truly is. Death, you see, is not merely the cessation of our

physical existence as we know it in this world. Death is not simply a severing of the soul from the body. Death is separation from God. And death being abolished means that separation from God is abolished for the believer in Christ. We will never be separated from God. And though our bodies may for a time be laid in graves that does not separate us from God. God still takes a vital interest in those bodies laid in graves. Those bodies are still united to Christ and therefore must eventually be reunited with their souls and then joined to Christ.

This is why when we sorrow over the loss of a loved one we sorrow not as the world sorrows – we sorrow not as those who have no hope. We do have hope and our hope is made certain by the glorious truth that our Savior is risen from the dead. The thing you must ask yourself, therefore, is this – Is Christ risen from the dead? Is that really true or are we following cunningly devised fables? Is this doctrine a fictitious crutch that we lean upon in a desperate attempt to console ourselves during times of bereavement – or is Christ truly risen from the dead? Most gladly and most certainly do we affirm with Paul the words of v. 20 *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.*

So we're impacted by the consolation that the resurrection of Christ affords us. Life as we know it now is not the end. The truth is that the best to come yet awaits us. This is what should keep us a forward looking people. There are those, you know, who work so hard to cling to the days of the past. They filter things through their memories in such a way as to delude themselves into thinking that the days behind them were the good old days and if only I could somehow bring back those good old days. Maybe if I drive a car from the 60's and listen to the oldies station that plays music from that period – maybe if I dress the way I use to dress I can recapture those happy days of the past.

The whole effort is delusional. I am quite happy to anticipate what our shorter catechism teaches us – that at our resurrection we will be raised up in glory and openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment and be made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God forever. That's rock solid because it's certified by Christ's resurrection.

And we experience the consoling effect of the resurrection in knowing that this life is not the end. Could I just mention in closing that the resurrection consoles us also in that it vindicates the gospel that we believe. In Rom. 4:25 we read with regard to Christ that he *was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*. His resurrection certifies our salvation. His resurrection means that the doctrine of justification by faith is true. It also means that his atoning death was successful and our sins really were washed away and we really did become God's purchased possession and his burning anger against us truly was appeased.

What a blessing to be able to affirm these glorious gospel truths by something as rock solid as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so I wonder today as we bring our meeting to a close – how has the resurrection of Jesus Christ impacted your life? Has it impacted your life? It should – especially if you're a believer. It should have a sobering effect on you

testifying as it does that there is coming a day of judgment. It should have a motivational effect on you testifying as it does that Christ is the Son of God and his gospel is true. And it should have a consoling impact on you – making you realize that life as we know it in this sin-cursed world is not the end and that Christ's atoning sacrifice was indeed successful in all that it was meant to accomplish.

What a practical and useful doctrine the doctrine of the resurrection becomes. I trust that you can affirm it not simply as a part of your creed but as something that has had a radical and transformational effect on your life.