



MY REDEEMER LIVETH! – Matthew 28:1-15; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

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It is wonderful at Easter to preach once again about the resurrection and the hope it gives us. But as I have been reading comments on Facebook and other media, I have found many ideas about this hope to be a bit nebulous. I've read such things as: "It makes me feel hopeful to see how good can come out of bad", and "As I think about the resurrection, I see that Jesus identifies with those who suffer and offers hope to them that things can get better". These are nice thoughts. We all want to help those who are going through difficult times. But to be honest, I need something a bit more robust to hang on as I live in this broken world.

Thanks be to God, I don't think the hope we have from Easter is this nebulous. The lives of Jesus' disciples were changed forever by His resurrection. They continued to believe in the physical, visible resurrection of Jesus even at great cost to themselves. In many ways, their lives would have been easier if they had given up their belief in this. And yet they held on to it as one of the central tenets of their faith. In fact, Paul said that if the resurrection of Jesus was not true, then there was no point in being a Christian.

*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.
(1 Corinthians 15:14)*

Without the resurrection, we have no reason for faith in Jesus. But with the resurrection, we have something solid on which to build our lives. I believe there are at least five concrete, beneficial consequences of the physical, visible resurrection of Jesus.

1. Validation of Jesus

When the women arrived at the tomb and found Jesus gone, the angels said to them:

*He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen.
(Matthew 28:6)*

Jesus had said many times that He would be killed and then raised to life again – even the religious leaders knew this, which is why they were so anxious to make sure that Jesus’ body stayed in the tomb! They set a seal on the tomb and posted guards there. But they couldn’t stop an earthquake and angels and the resurrection power of God.

When the soldiers came to them with the story of what happened, they panicked. Instead of admitting their mistake, they tried to cover it up by bribing the soldiers to lie about what had happened. Matthew tells us that some people believed the soldiers. But someone among the soldiers and religious leaders obviously leaked the truth about what had happened – otherwise, how would Matthew been able to tell us about it in his Gospel? Cover ups rarely work – the truth will out eventually.

The resurrection validated Jesus’ words. But more than that, it validated Jesus’ identity. Paul tells us:

... he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 1:3,4)

God would not have raised Him from the dead if He had been a blasphemer; someone who wrongly claimed to be God. The fact that God had stepped into the situation and reversed the natural course of death and decay, proved His approval of Jesus and what He had said about Himself. This is why the religious leaders were so anxious to cover up His resurrection – they knew if it was true, they had rejected and killed God’s Son.

Our faith and hope is not based on wishful thinking, but on concrete, provable facts. I don’t have time today to go further into these, however, if you have questions in this area, please talk to me afterwards and I would be happy to discuss it with you and point you to resources which can give you better answers than I can.

2. Assurance of forgiveness

The resurrection validates Jesus’ words and identity, but it also brings some concrete benefits to us – starting with the assurance of forgiveness. In his discussion on the resurrection, Paul asserts:

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. (1 Corinthians 15:17)

The inference is that if Christ HAS been raised, then your faith is NOT futile, and you are NOT still in your sins. Jesus’ resurrection was God’s “stamp of approval” on His sacrifice on the cross. Everything that needed to be done had been done on our behalf and God had accepted it. We used to go shopping at Costco for some of our food. When you leave the building, they ask to see your receipt and they go through it and compare what is on the receipt with what is in your basket. If they don’t agree, then they will have some questions for you! Your receipt proves you have paid for what you are taking out of the store. Jesus’ resurrection proves that Jesus has indeed paid for our sins and God accepted this payment on our behalf.

3. Provision of life

Not only can we be forgiven of our sins because of Jesus' resurrection, but we can also receive new life. In the *Messiah*, the choir sang,

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22)

This is not talking about physical death here, but spiritual death which comes from separation from God and His life within us. God made Adam and Eve to be in communion with Himself, filled with His life, and thus enabled to live as His people in His world. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were separated from God and His life – they died. They became less than what God had created them to be. This separation is passed on to us and by our sin we choose to continue in this state.

But Christ's death and resurrection brought the possibility for us to receive God's life once again. As Paul says in some of my favourite verses in the Bible:

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (Ephesians 2:4,5)

Jesus' life gives us life. Here and now, we can experience the life-giving power of God through the regenerating work of the Spirit. Without God's life, we cannot be the people God created us to be. With God's life we can begin to discover the wonderful life with Him that was always His intention.

4. Defeat of death

Spiritual death ultimately leads to physical death. But when Jesus was physically raised from the dead, he wasn't like Lazarus who would still eventually die like anyone else. Jesus was raised from the dead, never to die again. Death no longer had power over His physical body. And this changed everything. The empty tomb assures us that sickness and suffering, death and disease will not have the final word.

C. S. Lewis wrote:

“He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so. This is the beginning of the New Creation: a new chapter in cosmic history has been opened.”¹

Now, when we die, those who have trusted in God's salvation can know that it is not the end, we will be raised to live with God. But even more than that, one day there will be no more death at all. Paul tells us:

The last enemy to be destroyed is death ... Death is swallowed up in victory. (1 Corinthians 15:26,54)

¹ C. S. Lewis, “Miracles”.

Jesus' victory over sin and death will reach its ultimate conclusion in the new heavens and the new earth in which there will be no more death! Death, that ultimate consequence of sin, will vanish because sin will be no more.

5. Assurance of our Physical Resurrection

The Bible also says that we will rise again in the same way that He rose again – in a physical body. We read:

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep. (1 Corinthians 15:20)

The “firstfruits” are the first pieces of fruit that are harvested. They are both a guarantee of the rest of the harvest, but also an indication of what the rest of the harvest will be like. In our last house we had a big orange tree in the back yard. I remember the first year we lived there, we waited expectantly as the oranges ripened – we could hardly wait to enjoy them all winter long! Finally, the day came when the first fruit was ripe and ready to pick. We cut that first orange open and bit into it – and – it was so sour we could hardly eat it! We thought maybe we hadn't left it on the tree long enough, so we waited longer before harvesting any more but that didn't improve things. That first fruit had been a true indication of what all the oranges would be like.

In the same way, Jesus' resurrection indicates to us what our resurrection will eventually be like. As Christ physically rose again in a renewed body, so, on that final day, we will physically rise again in a renewed body. There will be continuity with our current bodies. When Jesus rose again, the disciples recognised Him, in part because He showed them the scars from His crucifixion. His body wasn't perfect with no indication of His life lived here on earth. However, He was not negatively affected by the scars from His beating and crucifixion. In a way, they were a badge of honour and testament to the suffering God had brought Him through. So too with us – our new bodies will not be completely different to the ones we have now, and they may even bear some scars from our lives here, but they will no longer bring pain or limit us. Some days I really look forward to that!

How is this all going to happen? I have no idea. I am fascinated by the verse from the book of Job that was included in the *Messiah*:

*And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”
(Job 19:26)*

It is thought that Job was the very first book to be written in the Bible, coming from the time of Abraham or even earlier. Their understanding of God at that time was very limited because He had not revealed Himself in the ways that He later would through Abraham, Moses and onwards. And yet, even then, there was a belief in a physical life after death. Yes, the body would decay when it was buried, but in some way, God would make it possible for Job to encounter God in his “flesh” or a physical body after his death.

Jesus' physical resurrection gives us a glimpse of the future God has in store for His people. He doesn't give us all the details about what is going to happen and how He is going to do it, but we know enough to have confidence in our promised future.

Conclusion

Our belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus is one of the foundations of our lives as Christians. Some people cannot believe that God intervenes in our world in such a way as to physically raise someone from the dead. For them, Jesus' resurrection was just a spiritual event – Jesus went back to heaven to be with God when he died and in that way God “raised” Him. They would say that those who thought they saw Jesus after His death were just seeing His spirit or maybe some kind of vision that God gave them to give them hope.

However, if we accept that Jesus physically rose from the dead, then we have so much more than a nebulous hope that good will triumph over evil. We have validation that Jesus was indeed God's Son and that His death was enough to bring us cleansing for our sins. But there's more, because Jesus' resurrection has unleashed God's life, His resurrection life, inaugurating the victory of God over sin and death. This means that we can be renewed by God's life now so that we can begin to live in fellowship with Him. And we are assured that one day we will experience the resurrection and renewal of our physical bodies in the new heaven and the new earth.

This Easter we have so much to celebrate – all because God loves us and wants us to be His people, living in resurrection life with Him forever!