

Three Points of Meditation Upon the Resurrection of Christ

By Peter Barnes

The historian, Philip Schaff, is often cited regarding the resurrection of Christ: ‘Truly, Jesus Christ, the Christ of the Gospels, the Christ of history, the crucified and risen Christ, the divine-human Christ, is the most real, the most certain, the most blessed of all facts. And this fact is an ever-present and growing power which pervades the church and conquers the world, and is its own best evidence, as the sun shining in the heavens. This fact is the only solution of the terrible mystery of sin and death, the only inspiration to a holy life of love to God and man, and only guide to happiness and peace. Systems of human wisdom will come and go, kingdoms and empires will rise and fall, but for all time to come Christ will remain “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” It must be recognised that the apostle sees the resurrection of Christ in ‘all or nothing’ terms: if true, it makes Christianity the best, indeed the only, religion; if false, it transforms it into a giant and miserable hoax (1 Cor.15:12-19).

For now, consider three things, the first being that the resurrection shows – in fact, proves – that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. The liberal English Methodist, Leslie Weatherhead, whose theology resembled psychotherapy more than anything from the New Testament, rejected the historicity of all the miracles of Jesus but then accepted His resurrection. That is like a builder building a house, but then being unable to put together a cardboard box. It makes no sense at all. When the resurrected Christ appeared to Thomas, it all fell into place for the doubting disciple, and he confessed: ‘My Lord and my God’ (John 20:28). Paul told the Roman church that Jesus Christ our Lord was ‘declared to be the Son of God in power ... by His resurrection from the dead’ (Rom.1:4). In seeking to evangelise the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers at Athens, Paul spoke of God who

would ‘judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead’ (Acts 17:31). Ah, it fits – the miracles, the prophecies, the claims to forgive sinners and to judge the whole world, the insights into human nature, the sinlessness. This is the eternal Son of God who speaks the language of God, and His resurrection demonstrates that all this is true.

Secondly, Christ’s resurrection guarantees the future inheritance of His people. Christ told Peter to take up his cross and follow Him, that is, to exchange any hopes of a comfortable life for one of suffering and death. Peter accepted that, and so wrote to his readers: ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you’ (1 Peter 1:3-4). Contrast that to *The Free Man’s Worship*, published in 1903 by Bertrand Russell where he said that there is nothing beyond the grave and everything is doomed to extinction: ‘Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.’ The reason why we are to reject the adulterous philosopher, Russell, and believe the martyred apostle, Peter, is not that Peter sounds better. Rather, it is because it is true. The foundation is not unyielding despair but glorious certainty that Christ rose from the dead. This gives His people a living hope and an everlasting inheritance. Because Christ lives forever, His people will live forever.

Thirdly, this comforts all Christians that there will be a wonderful reunion in the new heaven and new earth of all those who are

bought with the blood of the Lamb. The Christian will see Christ and be made like Him (1 John 3:2). That is the most life-giving of truths; but there is more. Some of the Christians at Thessalonica were bewildered when some of their number died, so Paul wrote to comfort and encourage them: 'we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep' (1 Thess.4:13-14). Will Christians know one another in the new heaven and the new earth? Clearly, the answer is a decided 'yes.' It does not mean that all who played cricket or rugby here on earth will play cricket or rugby in the life to come. It means that all who have repented of sin and rested on Christ for salvation will join

with brothers and sisters who have done likewise, and join in an everlasting communion with each other in glorifying the triune God. One cannot read the book of Acts without seeing this repeated emphasis on Christ risen. An apostle was one who had witnessed the resurrection (Acts 1:22); the resurrection showed that the Father exalted the one whom sinners condemned (Acts 2:24-36); and it was the great claim to the Jerusalem crowds (Acts 4:2, 33). Then, as now, it is the proof that Jesus is the Son of God; the guarantee of our future inheritance; and our comfort that all Christ's people will meet again.

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