

The Resurrection – John 20.26-28

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

Thomas answered him: "My Lord and my God!"

Just as Jesus vindicates the righteousness of God through his death, so too, God vindicates Jesus' mission through his resurrection. Jesus went to the cross to satisfy his Father's wrath (Romans 3.25; 9.11; cp. 1 John 2.2). Through this God demonstrates his mercy towards a people chosen to be his very own (Ephesians 1.4; cp. Titus 2.14). Moreover, on the Day of Judgment, after the general resurrection of the dead, the testimony of believers will be a collective witness to the redemptive mission of the Incarnate One. So then, Jesus' resurrection validates God's purpose of redemption, but it is also the assurance of the Christian's salvation. That Jesus was raised from the dead gives the Christian assurance of his own resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.13-15). God, from eternity past, decreed that Jesus' death would atone for man's sin (cp. Ephesians 1.4; 3.11; 2 Timothy 1.9-12); he also decreed that death would be destroyed in the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15.21, 26). Peter writes: *He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and give him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God* (1 Peter 1.20-21). The common confession of the early church embraces a belief in the resurrection to eternal life for all who place their hope in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ: *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; cp. John 20.30, 31; 1 John 1.1-4). Paul's comment on the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15.14 (*If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain*) is a dogma central to the creedal confession of the Christian church. If there is no resurrection from the dead, there can be no church, at least not in a New Testament sense; Christians believe that the risen Christ is himself the head of the church (Colossians 1.18).

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE RESURRECTION

The New Testament is the primary source for the church's doctrine of the resurrection and eternal life. Although the doctrine of life after death is not fully developed in the Old Testament, the topic is not altogether absent. The accounts of Enoch, Elijah and the appearance of the departed Samuel to Saul at Endor suggest that physical death was not the end of life. Job asked the question that troubles every self-aware person: *If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my service I would wait, till my renewal should come* (Job 14.14). Job answers his own question in his response to Bildad: *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me* (Job 19.25-27)! Furthermore, the psalmists make implicit

statements about their belief in the resurrection. For example: *But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me* (Psalm 49.15); or, *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption* (Psalm 16.10). The latter reference has messianic overtones. Regarding the Old Testament believer's hope in the resurrection, George Ladd comments, "the hope is based on confidence in God's power over death, not on a view of something immortal in man. The Psalmists do not reflect on what part of man survives death – his soul or spirit; nor is there any reflection on the nature of life after death. There is merely the confidence that even death cannot destroy the reality of fellowship with the living God" (see G. R. Osborne, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 674).

The texts of the Old Testament are best read in the illuminating light of the New Testament's interpretation. For example, when the prophet Isaiah writes: *He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken* (Isaiah 25.8, ESV), it is Paul's commentary in 1 Corinthians 15.54 that helps us understand how best to interpret Isaiah (cp. Hosea 13.14). Paul, whose Scriptures were the Old Testament, quotes this text to support his argument for the certainty of the resurrection. Though Paul saw with his own eyes the resurrected Jesus (*as to one untimely born as it were*), he reinforces his personal experience with the witness of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15.8).

Daniel's definitive statement about the resurrection is perhaps the most startling Old Testament's testimony; *At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time, but at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever* (Daniel 12.1-3). Jesus' put his own imprimatur to Daniel's vision of the resurrection in John 5.24-29: *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*

JESUS' RESURRECTION: THE VALIDATION OF HIS SALVIFIC MISSION

Though the Pharisees may have believed in the resurrection, not all Jesus' contemporaries were like minded (cp. Matthew 22.23; Acts 23.8). Nonetheless Jesus plainly states that people will be raised from the dead and anyone who disagrees with his proclamation is wrong. When Jesus disputed with the Sadducees regarding the Old Testament affirmation of the resurrection he told them: *You are wrong. ... And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by*

God: *'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' he is not the God of the dead, but of the living*" (Matthew 22.29-32). The resurrection is essential to the New Testament's doctrine of redemption. Of course, the resurrection of believers cannot be understood apart from Jesus' resurrection (Romans 8.29, 31-32). Jesus said: *I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.* (John 11.25; cp. John 5.25-29). There is no resurrection to eternal life except in Jesus. Moreover, in the discourse on his authority as God's son, he said: *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day* (John 5.40; cp. John 14.1-3; 1 John 5.11-13).

Jesus claimed to have the authority over life and death (John 5.24-29). He demonstrated this by raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11.42-44; cp. Mark 5.41). With regard to Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, Jesus said: *"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me"* (John 11.41-42). It is in Jesus' authority over death both in his own resurrection and in lives of believers that his messianic mission is validated: *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 15.56).

Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe in him as the redemptive mediating Son of God. *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life* (John 5.24). He is able to do this because he has innate authority over death (John 5.26). He has the power to give up his life (John 10.18) and he has the power to give life to others (John 3.36). The gospels attest that Jesus arranged the events that would lead to his own crucifixion. Indeed, many of the events of Jesus' ministry were done to fulfill the prophetic pronouncements of the New Testament (e.g., Matthew 4.14; 12.17ff; 26.54). Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, points to us Psalm 16 and helps us to understand that David foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2.25-28, 31; cp. Psalm 16.9-11). Knowing this, we appreciate how Jesus' crucifixion brings glory to God by accomplishing his redemptive purpose (John 17.4) and we understand that his Messianic mission of redemption is confirmed by his resurrection. That Jesus understood this is evident in the priestly prayer recorded by the apostle John: *glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed* (John 17.5).

THE CHRISTIAN'S IDENTITY WITH THE RESURRECTED CHRIST

The believer's identity with Jesus is linked to his hope in the resurrection. The anticipation of his own resurrection from the dead is a testimony to the power of God to save him and is a witness to the resurrection power of Jesus. The believer's life, based on Christ's resurrection power, is evidence in two ways. First, though the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit he enjoys a new found liberty from the despotic rule of sin (Romans 6.12-14). Second, he enjoys a present fellowship with the Triune God. Moreover, he is assured that he will enjoy eternity in God's presence: So we do

not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ... For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home is destroyed; we have a building from God (2 Corinthians 2.16; 5.1 cp. Philippians 3.20; 2 Timothy 1.12; 1 Peter 1.3-5).

Christians may demonstrate their identity with the resurrected Jesus in a variety of ways. Most commonly, they profess their faith in through their participation in the ordinances of the church. First, they identify with him in his death and resurrection through water baptism (Romans 6.1-11). In this rite the believer, by faith, unites himself with Christ's death and resurrection. So intimate is the believer's identification with Jesus that he may affirm with the apostle Paul, *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me* (Galatians 2.20), or as he writes from prison: *I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain* (Philippians 1.19-21).

The Eucharist (Lord's Supper) reminds the believer of his close association with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through participation in the Lord's Supper identifies the believer with the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus. That Jesus' resurrection has a personal application to every Christian is emphasized by Jesus insistence that he would not participate in this meal again until the believer's salvation is consummated in the great day of the Lord: *I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom* (Matthew 26.29).

Thus, Christians celebrate the victory of Christ's mission and the power of his resurrection every time they participate in the ordinances of the church.