

“Basic Truth” series, #9

Understanding the Resurrection¹

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The Resurrection Vindicates Christ’s Claims and Predictions

What would you think of a man who, in every visible respect, appeared ordinary yet claimed to be the Son of God? What if he also claimed to be deserving of equal honor with God? What if he even claimed to have God’s power and authority to forgive sin? Prior to His death and resurrection, Jesus shocked people by making many such claims of personal deity, power, and authority (cf. Matt. 16:15-17; Mark 2:10-11; Luke 22:69-70; John 5:21-23; 8:58; 10:30).

In addition to His claims of deity and authority, Jesus repeatedly predicted His own death and resurrection (cf. Matt. 17:22-23; 20:17-19; John 2:18-22). Jesus’ claims were so unbelievable that most people rejected Him. Even when He rose from the dead and appeared to many witnesses (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8), most refused to believe. But Jesus’ true disciples saw His resurrection as the vindication of all of His claims and the fulfillment of His predictions. These were not naive people who were persuaded to believe something that was false. They simply recognized the fact that Jesus *did* rise from the dead, and so proved to the world that everything He said about Himself was true.

The Resurrection of Christ was the Coronation of Christ

The writers of the New Testament saw the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, particularly as it concerned the coming of the Messiah as King. This becomes evident in Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost following the dramatic out-pouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:22-36).

Peter was not attempting to prove that the resurrection occurred. He spoke of that event as being publicly known and irrefutable, saying, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (v. 32). His point was to show these Jews, from their own Old Testament Scriptures, that the resurrection of the Christ *had* to occur. He was telling the same people who only weeks earlier were screaming, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” (Luke 23:21), that Jesus, whom they had murdered, was now risen and seated in heaven as their King and their Savior! He was the One to whom they owed all obedience and worship (cf. Luke 4:8; Deuteronomy 6:13). He was the One who would destroy all who persisted in their rebellion against Him (cf. Luke 19:27; Ps. 2).

Paul opened his letter to the Romans by making a similar reference to the resurrection of Christ and its bearing on His power and authority (cf. Romans 1:4). He described the same event again in Philippians 2:8-11. In Ephesians 1 he relates resurrection to power and authority like this:

These are in accordance with the strength of His might which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come (vv. 19-21).

Many Jews on the Day of Pentecost came to the shocking realization that Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah receiving a kingdom (e.g., Daniel 7:13-14) were written about the resurrection of Jesus. As Luke records, they were “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37). They were stunned, grieved, deeply convicted by the sudden realization that they had crucified their Messiah—the promised Ruler who now held sovereign authority over their lives. This is what prompted 3,000 of these rebels to repent and be baptized in the name of Christ (Acts 2:41).

A Source of Hope for Believers

The resurrection of Christ should be a great source of terror for all who persist in their rebellion against God (cf. Acts 17:30-31). On the other hand, the resurrection of Christ provides a great source of hope for believers. Christians are assured in the Bible that Christ’s bodily resurrection is certain proof of their own future bodily resurrection. Perhaps the most compelling passage is 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 where Jesus is said to be “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

The word “firstfruits” refers to something that is a sample of what is sure to come. Adam proved to be the “firstfruits” of death for all who were in him (that is, all of humanity). Christ, on the other hand, was the “firstfruits” of eternal life for all who are in Him (that is, all believers).

Paul sums up the Christian’s great hope in his letter to the Philippians:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Phil. 3:20-21).

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