

The Resurrection of our Lord / April 17, 2022

1 Corinthians 15:20

“But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

A blessed Easter Morning. How important is the resurrection of Jesus? The resurrection of Jesus is so important that every Sunday has become a celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is so important that Sunday has replaced the Sabbath as the primary day of Christian worship. Every Sunday we remember Jesus' resurrection. Every Sunday we celebrate our reconciliation with the heavenly Father in the forgiveness of sin, obtained by His death and proclaimed in His resurrection. Each Sunday we look forward to our share in Christ's resurrection in bodies made new, in a world made new, in which righteousness abounds and everything associated with sin and death are forever gone.

How important is the resurrection of Jesus? There is nothing more important! It is the beginning of God's work of recreating human beings in His image. It is the beginning of the recreation of heaven and earth, in which God will dwell with us as our God, we will live with Him as His people, He will wipe every tear from our eyes and joy and gladness will be forever. Jesus' resurrection affects every aspect of our lives as Christians; the way we live with God and with each other; the way we view life, the way we face death and the way we grieve. Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep, the first-fruits of a new creation without sin and free of death; the first-fruits of our own resurrection and the power by which we live in newness of life.

Nevertheless, it's easy to minimize, or at least miss the importance of the resurrection to the Christian faith. When we die our spirits return to the Father who created them. Isn't that enough? When believers die, don't they already go to heaven? Why do we need a resurrection of the body? Our spirits certainly return to God who created them when we die in Christ. When death comes, we can say with Christ, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." Jesus' death atoned for our sins and propitiated the Father's wrath at sin, and so we can approach death in the confidence that God will receive our spirits in peace and welcome us into His heavenly house. Our spirits will live in God's presence in peace while our bodies rest in the earth. But to be truly alive and to experience life to the fullest, a spirit needs a body. Jesus came that we would have life and have it in abundance. The abundance of life, the fulness of our faith, and the fulfillment of our hope is our share in Christ's resurrection, in bodies fashioned like His that cannot die and are free from sin and all its effects.

Christ won the victory when He cried out from the cross "It is finished," gave up His spirit and died. The effect of His death was immediately seen in the Jerusalem temple. The curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy place, where a sacrifice was offered once a year for the sin of the people, was torn in two from top to bottom. Jesus' death had fulfilled the purpose of the temple and its sacrifices. His sacrifice had truly taken away the guilt of sin, once and forever, for all people.

Also, immediately upon Jesus' death, Matthew tells us that the bodies of many holy people were raised and that for a number of days following, they were seen by many in Jerusalem. Death comes through sin. When sin was atoned, death's power was taken away. God immediately showed the effect of Christ's death and His acceptance of His sacrifice for the atonement of sin, by raising some of the righteous dead. The resurrection of the dead and especially Jesus' resurrection, shows that God accepted Christ's sacrifice. Sin is atoned. God's wrath at sin is appeased. Forgiveness is offered for all to receive. All who receive Jesus, receive forgiveness of sin and the promise of sharing in His resurrection to everlasting life. Death has lost its power over those who believe. When Jesus returns, He will destroy death forever. When Christ returns, all who believe will share in His resurrection and experience life in its fullness.

How important is Jesus' resurrection? Jesus' resurrection gives us hope as we grieve the deaths of fellow believers. Jesus' resurrection transforms our experience of death and grief. The New Testament consistently refers to the death of believers as a sleep. In the book of Acts, the deacon Stephen is stoned to death for his witness to Jesus as the Christ. Luke says, "As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And falling to his knees he cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord do not hold this sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep." When you fall asleep, you eventually wake up. All who sleep in Christ will one day awaken to share in His resurrection to a life without sin, suffering, sorrow and death.

How important is Jesus' resurrection? Jesus' resurrection has changed our terminology about burial places. What used to be referred to as potter's fields, graveyards, or boneyards, places in which bodies were disposed, are now called 'cemeteries' or 'sleeping places,' by Christians. Cemetery is a Greek word that means 'sleeping place'. They are not places of death and despair, they are places of hope and the promise of life in Christ. In Isaiah chapter twenty-six, anticipating Christ's resurrection, the Lord said, "Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead." Christ is the firstborn of the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Jesus' resurrection changes our perspective on death and grief. His resurrection empowers us to view death, not as a dark dead end, but as a sleep, from which God will awaken us when Christ returns.

Jesus' resurrection gives us a real and living hope as we grieve the deaths of fellow believers. In his first letter to the Thessalonians St. Paul said, "We do not want you to be uninformed brothers, about those who sleep, 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." We grieve because we love our departed sisters and brothers and miss them in our daily lives. Grief is not a symptom of a lack of faith. Grief is an expression of love. Jesus wept because He loved His sleeping friend Lazarus and his grieving sisters Martha and Mary. Because of Jesus's resurrection we have a real and living hope of life beyond death. We grieve in the certain hope of sharing in His resurrection. We have confidence in the face of death and hope in our grief, because Jesus has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

How important is Jesus' resurrection? It is the cornerstone of our faith. It is so important that Paul says without it, our faith is empty. The resurrection is the crowning glory of Jesus' work of redeeming us from bondage to sin, the control of the devil and the condemnation of death. The resurrection of Jesus is God's testimony that His sacrifice was accepted and our sins are forgiven. The resurrection of Jesus is our assurance that when death comes to us, we can commit our spirits with Him to the Father in peace. Jesus' resurrection gives us comfort as we grieve the deaths of fellow believers; their bodies sleep in the dust, their spirits rest in God's presence; when Christ returns God will call them and us to rise to a new and eternal life. Jesus' resurrection is our assurance of forgiveness, our hope in the face of death and our confidence of eternal life. A blessed Easter. In Jesus' Name. Amen