

THE RESURRECTION RETURNS 1: “SIN & GUILT CAN BE FORGIVEN”

“The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of humanity...OR...it is the most important fact of history.” Josh McDowell

The factual nature of the Resurrection is not the subject of this sermon or this series; yet, all that will be said in the next three weeks depends essentially upon that fact. For though many claim disbelief in the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus, no one has yet proven it did not happen. According to Josh McDowell’s extensive research in his classic book; “Evidence that Demands a Verdict”; “there is more physical, and material evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth than there is for the whole birth, life, death and record of the great Julius Caesar”!

The factual nature of the Resurrection is essential to this series though, because of what we say as Christians. We often repeat the “Apostles Creed”; which states, *“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. (And I believe) in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; (and I believe He) was conceived by the Holy Ghost, (and I believe He was) born of the Virgin Mary, (and I believe He) suffered under Pontius Pilate, (and I believe He) was crucified, dead, and buried; (and I believe) he descended into hell...(AND I BELIEVE THAT ON) **the third day he rose again from the dead;**...*

How many times have you said it? How many times have you read it? How long since you memorized it? This is what we say we believe...but do we; do we really believe it?

By our very presence here week after week, we are affirming our belief in the Resurrection of Jesus. Is that just some mental mathematic we do to appease the memory of a parent or grandparent, or do we really believe it?

Is affirming a belief in the resurrection just some ‘church thing’ we do because of the peer pressure of everybody else reciting the creed? Do we really believe in the

resurrection, or is it just another 'religious hoop we jump through' to keep mom and dad off our case or a nagging spouse off our back? There would literally be no such thing as Christianity, no such thing as faith, no such thing as the Church; were the Resurrection of Jesus not true and factual.

The resurrection is essential to our faith, but it is also an historical fact! Here is the problem that I want to address in the next three weeks; "We say we believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, but we often live like we don't." We have people wallowing in the cesspool of sin; bound by guilt and unforgiveness, because we say we believe in the resurrection, but often live like we don't. We have people whose faith won't support them in difficult times, and whose hope is pitifully inadequate, because we say we believe in the resurrection, but, often live like we don't. We are all people facing death and some of us are facing hell, who have no hope of anything but fear and despair; because we say we believe in the resurrection, but we live like we don't!

And we are apparently not alone; the Corinthian Christians were experiencing a similar problem. We'll look at part of their story from Paul's first letter, in the 15th chapter, over the next three weeks. Listen:

"If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins." I Corinthians 15: 16-17

This is why it's so important to consider the 'returns of the resurrection', what is ours because of the resurrection, what we receive by believing in God, trusting in Jesus, accepting the factuality of the resurrection. If there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, we are still dead in our sins, and our faith is a fanciful, imaginary, worthless crutch that props up our pathetic lives! You see why it's important? Then, let's look a little deeper.

There are really only two facts I want to highlight today. Here is the first:

1. THE FACT THAT JESUS DIED ESTABLISHED HIM AS THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB

OF GOD.

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!’” John 1: 29

To understand these two facts we’ve got to start at the beginning, I promise to be brief. God created the whole human race and endowed us all with an amazing (some would say tragic) gift, called free will. We have the right to choose to follow God, or follow our own will, laws, urges, and desires. The Bible fairly graciously reminds us that all of us have chosen to sin, and as a natural consequence of that choice, fall short of God’s glory. We are sinful people, by nature, by willful choice and unfortunately also by habit. Our sinfulness creates a separation between a holy God, and an unholy humanity. God didn’t resign Himself to live with this broken fellowship forever. He tried to show through the elaborate system of laws and sacrifices, that none of us could bridge that chasm by keeping the law, and we still prove that every day. So in a last ditch effort, God sent His only Son, to come to earth, to teach us how to love God and each other, to model for us what true humanity was created to be, and ultimately to die on a cross, not just at the hands of some angry Roman soldiers, and hypocritical Jewish Pharisees, but as a fulfillment of God’s heart desire to reconcile and restore the perfect relationship begun in the garden of Eden. Because Jesus died on the cross, the system of sacrificing has come to an end. We now gain access to God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. Let me give you the second point, and then a couple other things to consider:

2. THE FACT THAT JESUS WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD ESTABLISHED HIM AS THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.

“For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of His Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life.” Rom. 5:10

I don’t think he is talking about the life Jesus lived before his death, but the life Jesus ‘lives’ now, following His death. Maybe it’s splitting hairs to think there is any

difference between these two facts, but I think there might be. I'm not sure how to say it, but let me try to tell you what I'm thinking. I believe Jesus died on a cross to cancel the consequences of our past sins, but rose from the dead to fashion a way for us to live above the power of the future sins we'll inevitably face. Like the old Black preacher I've quoted here so many times: "God didn't fix me up so I couldn't sin, just so I couldn't sin and enjoy it."

I know and am fully cognizant that the death and resurrection of Jesus are often used interchangeably to refer to the whole experience that makes salvation and forgiveness possible. I understand that, but for my purpose today, I want to separate the two.

I believe that one of the returns we can receive as a result of the resurrection is to have our past sins forgiven, and to have our future sins diminished in power, and consequence. Maybe you have not sinned since the day you were saved, but I have, and I know others have too. I'm grateful for a conscience that won't let me get away with continual sin, but I am constantly living in the hope that as we continue to mature, we might sin less, and be more faithful. I know I've still a Mount Everest to climb, but I don't climb alone, and neither do you.

Speaking of these returns as primarily God's doings through Christ's resurrection, might lead one to believe that we have no role here, but let me be clear. God made forgiveness **possible**, but it's up to each one of us to make it **personal!** God made the power to overcome sin, guilt and temptation possible, but it is still our daily choice to make it personal. It's easy to say we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but quite another to really live like we do!

We can't say we believe in the Resurrection, and continue to live in Sin. Well, I guess we can, but we'll never know the personal return of forgiveness and salvation while knowingly and defiantly living in sin. We can't try to redefine what God has called

sin, by applying some cultural or societal norm as if that can change God's definition. It's not my place to redefine my sin, or define your sin, or reconfigure our sin based on some formula or standard that makes us feel better about ourselves, or does less harm to our fragile self-esteem. God has set the rules, invited us to play, and we can't change them. But because of and as a result of the resurrection, we have a means to deal with the consequences when we break those rules.

You and I both see this reality everyday, and we don't often have to look much further than our mirror. We'd like to think that we are good enough in our own right, or that the good we do outweighs the bad we do; therefore God will be obliged to let us into His holy presence and perfect heaven. But remember that chasm? We'd like to think that growing up in this or some other church, attending Sunday School, even perfectly, ought to be enough to convince God of our sincerity, but sincerity going the wrong direction will never get us to the desired goal. We'd like to think that giving a little money, or serving on a committee, or showing up for church is all that it will take to convince God that we want to be a Christian, but it takes something more.

Living under a cloud of guilt, because of unforgiven sin, is a tragic way to live. I don't so often see people sulking around convicted and cowering because of the effects of their sin; it happens occasionally, but not as often as you'd think. I much more often see people living in willful defiance of the reality of their sin. I see that in my mirror too. We don't easily want to admit or honestly face the brutal facts of our sinful reality, so we deny, or ignore, or block God's voice with a hundred other distractions.

It's so much easier to put on a happy face, and pretend that everything is fine; but we know better. I so much more often see my self-sufficient self, thinking I can deal with my own problems, I can pull myself up by my own bootstraps, I can fix this problem, but I can't, and neither can you. We are sinners; let's settle that fact, ok? We may have

asked God for forgiveness 1000 times, but today finds us once again face to face with the reality that were we to meet God before days end, we're not sure...

Let me also be crystal clear. I'm not trying to manipulate some emotional response or altar call, and I don't want anyone of you to doubt your forgiveness or salvation if you have settled this issue. Another return from the resurrection is the awesome assurance that if we honestly have confessed our sins; legitimately repented and extended restitution; and humbly received God's forgiveness...we are forgiven, and we can live guilt free, worry free, fear free; in the knowledge that our eternal life insurance is paid up, and if we die today, we go directly to be forever with Jesus! AMEN? If that is your reality, don't doubt it!

"Now this wonderful truth – that God declared him (Abraham) to be righteous – wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was for us, too, assuring us that God will also declare us to be righteous if we believe in God, who brought Jesus our Lord back from the dead. He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised from the dead to keep us right with God." Rom. 4: 23-24

Bishop Fulton Sheen used to use this example. Suppose you were tried and convicted of killing someone. You approach the gallows knowing that in a few minutes you will be hung. They slip the noose around your neck. But then the crowd, which had been facing you suddenly, turns around. The man you were supposed to have killed is standing right there. You shout out "he is not dead. He is alive—and I am free!"

Something just like that has happened to you and me with Jesus' Resurrection. Like Peter we have betrayed Jesus. It is our own sins that caused his death. He accepted them on his own shoulders when he died. But now he is alive and we know we are not condemned, but forgiven. Yes, the Resurrection means forgiveness. When we hold on to the elements of betrayal or hurt or sin or despair, we do so because then we

think we have control over them. We hold on to them even when they lead to death, because that cycle - that routine - seems manageable to us. How tragic. We say we believe in the Resurrection, but we continue to live unforgiven. How tragic.

The Resurrection makes breaking that pattern possible. The resurrection means letting go of our pain, our hurt, our unforgiveness, our fear. That is why the earliest witnesses of the Resurrection were scared. Let's be honest, we are all scared of forgiveness. Forgiveness means we must change. Forgiveness means we start all over again. Forgiveness means we let go of the past and live hopefully into the future.

In conclusion, if the Resurrection can occur, then forgiveness can also occur. Resurrection changes the order of things **physically**. Forgiveness changes the order of things **spiritually**. The Resurrection returns...us to God! AMEN

THE RESURRECTION RETURNS 1: "SIN & GUILT CAN BE FORGIVEN"

"If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins." I Corinthians 15: 16-17

**1. THE FACT THAT JESUS DIED ESTABLISHED HIM AS THE _____
LAMB OF GOD.**

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!’” John 1: 29

**2. THE FACT THAT JESUS WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD ESTABLISHED
HIM AS THE _____ OF THE WORLD.**

“For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of His Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life.” Rom. 5:10

God made forgiveness _____, but it’s up to each one of us to make it _____!

“Now this wonderful truth – that God declared him (Abraham) to be righteous – wasn’t just for Abraham’s benefit. It was for us, too, assuring us that God will also declare us to be righteous if we believe in God, who brought Jesus our Lord back from the dead. He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised from the dead to keep us right with God.” Rom. 4: 23-24

Resurrection changes the order of things _____.

Forgiveness changes the order of things _____.