

Getting Involved With the Resurrection

Text: Philippians 3:7–11.

At dawn, on a distant Sunday morning, a band of grieving women, on their way to visit the grave of Jesus of Nazareth, came upon an incredible sight. They found the stone rolled away from the entrance of a deserted tomb (Luke 24:1–3).¹ Suddenly, they were confronted by two men in “dazzling clothing” who spoke these words: “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen” (24:4–6a).

“He is not here”: These words sum up the hope and glory of the Christian faith (1 Peter 1:3, 21). Christianity centers on a blood-stained cross and an empty tomb. The resurrection lies at the very heart of all that we are, believe, and do as followers of Christ.

Unfortunately, some people have found the doctrine of the resurrection to be more of an embarrassment than a cause of celebration. The apostle Paul found this to be true in His own day. His proclamation of the resurrection was met with sneers (Acts 17:32), with jeers (Acts 26:24), and with angry fears (Acts 23:9). The same occurs today. We *must* take the resurrection seriously if we believe in God and His Word. According to 1 Corinthians 15:16, 17, if Christ was not raised, then preaching is worthless, faith is vain, we are still in our sins, and we are of all men most to be pitied. We must believe in the resurrection as a fact of history, and we are also to participate in it (see Philippians 3:7–11). Our belief should make a difference in our lives. We must demon-

strate our faith in the resurrection by the way we live.

The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:10, 11: “. . . being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” The word translated “attain,” *καταντάω* (*katantaō*), means “to reach a condition or goal, . . . arrive at.”² “To attain to the resurrection” is to become a partaker of it, that is, to tie it in with our own lives. Paul was not speaking just of the resurrection in the hereafter. He was also talking about the total identification of the believer with Christ’s resurrection in this present life. How do we become participants in the resurrection? How do we get involved with it here and now? The Scriptures suggest a number of ways.

THROUGH THE LORD’S DAY ASSEMBLY

Jesus was raised on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9). On that first Sunday of His resurrection appearances, Jesus met with the assembled disciples (Luke 24:33, 36). From that time until this present moment, Christians have come together on the first day of every week to celebrate the resurrection and worship the risen Lord (see Acts 20:7). Because the Lord was raised on Sunday, early Christians spoke of it as “the Lord’s Day.” Ignatius (A.D. 20–117) wrote a letter in which he explained why Christians regularly assembled on Sunday for worship:

²Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 523.

¹The parallel accounts are in Mark 16:2–4 and John 20:1.

... therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death.³

The resurrection of Christ is to be commemorated weekly in the assembly of disciples as we partake of the Lord's Supper. In the early church, believers came together each first day of the week to celebrate Christ's victory over the grave. What Jesus did was so colossal, so stunning, and so unprecedented that every first day of the week was eternally touched with its glory! Coming together every Sunday is one way we participate in and identify with the resurrection. When we assemble, the risen Lord is among us (see Matthew 18:20). In partaking of the Lord's Supper, we commune with a risen, reigning Lord. Weekly observance of the Lord's Supper makes the resurrection real in our own lives. That is why faithful attendance at the Lord's Day assembly is so important: It ties us to the resurrection and unleashes the power of the resurrection in our lives.

THROUGH BAPTISM

When we are baptized, we participate in the resurrection (Romans 6:3, 4). Baptism is an act by which we identify with Christ and His return from the dead. We are "united" with Him in baptism, Paul said in Romans 6:5. In baptism, we are so closely identified with Christ that what happened to Him happens to us. Before baptism, we are dead in our transgressions; but in the act of baptism, we die to sin and are buried with Christ to be raised to live a new life (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12, 13).

Tragically, many people have missed this great truth about baptism. They have failed to see that it is in the act of baptism that we get involved with the resurrection and actually become resurrected people. In Romans 4:25 we are told that Christ was raised so we could be justified from our sins. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:17 remind us that without the resurrection there could be no forgiveness or justification of sins. It is in baptism, then, that the blessings made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ become ours.

Baptism is not optional for the one who wants to receive these blessings. It is the time and the place that we identify ourselves with the resurrection of Christ. In baptism we re-create the "form" of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in our own lives (Romans 6:17). Before being baptized, we were dead; now we have newness of life because we got involved with the resurrection when we obeyed Christ in baptism.

THROUGH CHANGED LIVES

We must demonstrate our involvement with the resurrection by our lives. It is not enough just to believe that a man named "Jesus" was raised from the dead one Sunday morning twenty centuries ago. The resurrection must make a practical difference in our lives. It is tragic that many who profess to follow Christ are living as if He were still dead. Their basic attitudes, values, and lifestyles are not really different in any substantial way from those of their unbelieving neighbors.

Colossians 3:1-4 says that those who are "raised up with Christ" must "keep seeking the things above." When we get involved with the resurrection, we must live changed lives. We have a new direction: to seek those things that are above (3:1). Christians are not raised up from baptism to continue being the same persons as before. We have a new nature, a new purpose, and a new destination. We also have a new perspective. We are told, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (3:2). We must no longer live as though this life were all that matters. Instead, we must learn to see this world against the background of eternity. If we really begin to live the resurrection, it will give us a new standard of values, a new way of judging what is happening, a new sense of proportion. If we really begin to live the resurrection, we will set giving above getting, serving above ruling, and forgiving above avenging. We will learn to look at life as it appears to God, not as it appears to those around us.

When we begin to live the resurrection, we have a new relationship with God. "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (3:3). The risen Christ takes up His abode in each Christian (see Galatians 2:20). We have a new attitude toward death because "Christ . . . is our life" (Colossians 3:4a). The fact that Christ was raised from the dead means we will be raised

³Ignatius *Magnesianus* 9.

also, and we “will be revealed with Him in glory” (3:4b). We live and die in the hope of the resurrection, when Christ, “by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21; NIV). We do not have to fear death or grieve over it as do those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). That explains why early Christians could face fire, sword, persecution, and death with songs in their hearts. They lived and died in the hope of the resurrection.

Legends are told of the famous Twelfth Legion of the Roman army, called the “thundering legion.” This event took place during the bitter winter of A.D. 320 at Sebaste, in Armenia. An edict was read in the camp, proclaiming that every soldier must hail Caesar as lord and burn incense in his honor. Forty of these soldiers were Christians; and they refused to sacrifice, saying that Christ alone is Lord and that they would not value their physical bodies above their immortal souls. In punishment, they were beaten, their sides were rent with iron hooks, and then they were imprisoned. After some days, still resolute, they were sentenced to be stripped of their uniforms and marched out into the bitterly cold night to die on a frozen pond. As they marched they prayed, “Lord, we are forty who are engaged in this combat. Grant that we may

be forty crowned, and that not one be wanting to this sacred number.”

The guards continued trying to persuade the men to sacrifice and provided a warm bath for any who would submit. Only one was overcome by this temptation and left; but a sentinel who was shaken by the devotion of these men threw off his clothes and joined the thirty-nine, making their number forty again.⁴ He was drawn by the power of the hope of the resurrection he had seen in the lives of these men whose involvement in the resurrection had changed their attitude toward death!

CONCLUSION

The resurrection is real. On a far away Judean morning, two angels really did greet the women at the entrance of an empty tomb with the words “He is not here, for He has risen . . .” (Matthew 28:6). We are called to participate in that victory—not only in the life to come, but in this life as well. Do you believe in the reality of the resurrection? Are you involved with it in your daily life? If you have not been resurrected with Christ, decide now to be buried with Him in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

⁴Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Principal Saints* (London: John Murphy, 1815), 107–10.