

Christmas: Resurrection



David Wilkerson December 5, 2016

We cannot separate Christmas from Christ's resurrection. You may think of the resurrection as an Easter message, but the birth of the child in the manger can't be separated from the man on the cross. God's message to us through both events is one and the same.

As the shepherds gazed on the babe in the manger, they saw a Savior who would redeem all of humankind. When the wise men beheld him, they saw a King who would conquer death. When the prophets looked down to his time, they saw an Emancipator who would open prison doors, unlock chains and set captives free. They all had their vision of who Jesus was and why he came.

Christ was born into a world of darkness and unbelief, when God's people lived under the terrifying grip of the Roman Empire. Israel's religious leaders didn't offer much hope. The Pharisees believed salvation was achievable through works; they convoluted God's laws into a rigid system of impossible performance. The Sadducees didn't even believe in resurrection. Very few people had any vision of an eternal existence. This was the darkness Jesus was born into.

When I look into the manger in Bethlehem, I see resurrection coming. I see King Jesus ushering in a flood tide of eternal life. Christ was fully human at birth—it was Mary's blood that nourished him in the womb and her milk that fed him through infancy—but his birth was also a breaking forth of the eternal. The Bible says, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (Matthew 4:16, KJV).

This light was eternal life—the possibility of resurrection from death. Hosea prophesied of the coming Messiah, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction" (Hosea 13:14). When Jesus came, he fulfilled this prophecy, saying, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

Jesus himself connects his birth to the resurrection: "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should *raise it up again at the last day*. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, *may have everlasting life*: and I will raise him up at the last day" (6:38-40, my emphasis).

Christ said, in essence, "Do you know why I'm here? Do you know why I was born into poverty, why the shepherds adored me, why the wise men brought gifts, why the angels sang that night? It is so you would have everlasting life." Christ's confession points directly to resurrection: graves opening, the dead restored to life, and the ultimate fulfillment of God's everlasting covenant.

Resurrection is the emphasis throughout the New Testament.

The first church leaders accepted Christ's incarnation as a reality. Yet their preaching centered not on that event but on the resurrection. As early as the Upper Room gathering at Pentecost, Peter said, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, *having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it*" (Acts 2:23-24, my emphasis).

Everywhere Paul and the other apostles traveled, their preaching went beyond Christ's incarnation and miracles to proceed to the resurrection:

"They came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (17:1-3).

At Mars Hill in Athens, Paul preached, "He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (17:31).

Paul also preached on resurrection when he appeared before the Roman governor Felix and before King Agrippa. Indeed, without the resurrection, Paul says, all our preaching of Christ's gospel is in vain. He explains why: "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Paul is telling us, in effect, "If this is not all about the resurrection, you can forget about the Christmas message. Why preach the birth of Christ? Why be holy? Why pursue spiritual matters at all? Without the resurrection, we remain dead in our sins. Everything we do is in vain."

This isn't just some abstract theological truth. Here is the point of all our resurrection preaching: JESUS CAME TO GET YOU AND ME. He was born to live and die and rise from the dead—and to raise us to eternal life with him. He came to bring us home to himself for all eternity!

This was the message of the New Testament church. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (15:20). In other words, just as surely as the Spirit raised Christ from the dead, he will raise us up too: "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you" (2 Corinthians 4:14).

As I look into the manger, I see a bridge. Christ is the bridge between earth and heaven, crossing over the abyss of death that separates temporal life and the eternal. One day we're going to cross that bridge, and it will take place in the twinkling of an eye: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Many Christians wonder, "Who will I see first when I'm raised into eternity?"

I'm convinced that when this moment comes, we will all want to see Jesus first. He is Love incarnate—our Savior, Healer and King. Yet I once saw something that made me wonder about others. I walked into our living room to find my wife, Gwen, quietly weeping. She was watching the last home video of our granddaughter, Tiffany, who died of cancer at age 13. She was longing to see Tiffany again.

Make no mistake, Gwen and I will recognize Tiffany when we get to heaven. The Bible says there is no marriage in heaven, but there is love because he is love. All will be one in Christ's body, and we'll recognize each other with a spiritual intuition. Scripture says in that moment we will know even as we are known.

Maybe you didn't grow up with a loving father or mother. Maybe no one in your home knew Jesus or ever showed you his precious love. You wonder, "Who'll be there waiting for me?" I tell you, you have another family—the family of God. I'm convinced there is no one in Christ's body who wasn't prayed for by someone who came before them—an older man or woman, a pastor, a distant relative. You'll be recognized and embraced with the family love that God has prepared for you in eternity.

I believe God has made worlds as yet unconquered.

We're not going to sit idle when we're resurrected. Astronomers have discovered galaxies beyond what we can imagine and planets profoundly larger than the earth. It's nothing for the Creator of this vast universe to resurrect his creatures from death.

Paul Harvey tells the story of an atheist scientist who traveled to college campuses for decades to lecture on how God couldn't possibly exist. Years later this man became a Christian. Whenever he was asked why he converted, he answered with one simple word: "DNA."

Inside every human being is this amazing discovery called DNA. It's a unique identifier so accurate that someone can be proven guilty of a crime if his DNA is found at the scene. DNA is complex, yet it can be taken from something as simple as a strand of hair. In it, scientists have discovered a "genetic code" with billions of bits of information that, linked together, are unique to that person.

Who created this incredible phenomenon that boggles the mind? Who has known the unique genetic code of every human being since Adam and Eve? Only God. He not only numbers every hair on our heads but has impressed our unique DNA into each strand. That's what humbled the atheist scientist: the magnificence of a Creator and his ever-impressive creation.

God knows the DNA of every person who has ever lived—and he knows how to reconstruct it when he raises us up on the last day. This should put to rest all the strange doctrines that have arisen over the years about the resurrection. Some say there can't be a bodily resurrection for people who've been cremated or died gory deaths; they can't conceive of how God would do this. The truth is our imaginations simply can't fathom the glory of God. Our brains are too finite.

We do know that the bodies God brings out of the grave will be changed bodies. Some think we'll be spirits, but the Bible makes clear we will be resurrected bodily. Everything damaged, severed or obliterated will be restored in the twinkling of an eye. Hunched over people will walk straight. The blind will see. Those infirm from birth or killed in wars will be whole. Their DNA will be perfected by their Creator!

I think of the resurrection also when I see sad, lonely people at Christmas.

Whenever I've walked down the street in New York to buy milk or a newspaper, what I've seen breaks my heart. Alcoholic men in their 60's and 70's lay on the sidewalk nodding off. They've spent decades in a hell of their own making, not knowing where they are most days. I see desperate young drug addicts racing to their pusher as he appears. They're sleepwalking through life with no hope, no future, just looking to make their next fix happen. On the corner, I see prostitutes no more than 18 years old, dabbing their eyes as they cry over what has become of their lives.

I want to tell them all: "There is a new world coming—a world without sin, poverty or disease. That's why he came—to bring us to the new world he has created. It's beyond anything we can comprehend. Your King is coming to get you!"

Meanwhile, resurrection life is already available to us—in this life. We have been promised, "As Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

This Christmas season, let us keep a resurrection frame of mind. As Paul exhorts, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him... Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 18).

I know on that day I'll meet a half million converted drug addicts from around the whole earth...scores of addicts and prostitutes who called on Jesus to save and deliver them...and my own family members who have gone before. What a joy it will be. Resurrection—it is why he came!

"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?... Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

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