



Thoughts from the Bible and Books Devotions from The Heidelberg Catechism

University Reformed Church

4930 S. Hagadorn Rd., E. Lansing, MI 48823 - 517.351.6810

Lord's Day 17 - April 27, 2008

45 **Q.** *How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?*

A. First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, so that he might make us share in the righteousness he won for us by his death. Second, by his power we too are already now resurrected to a new life. Third, Christ's resurrection is a guarantee of our glorious resurrection.

There is no Christianity without the resurrection of Jesus. And if there could be Christianity without the resurrection, it would be something other than the Christianity of the Church. It would be a word without weight, an empty slogan detached from historical and intellectual honesty. You can have Jesus and ethics and love without the resurrection, but not Christianity. And even here, apart from the resurrection, the Jesus would not be a Christian Jesus, the ethics would not be Christian ethics, and the love would not be Christian love. In short, there is nothing more crucial to Christianity and nothing more important in history than the resurrection of the Son of God.

Underline the word history in that last sentence. Christianity is an historical religion. We believe and proclaim certain events that happened—really happened, as everyone except madmen and certain New Testament scholars understand things to have really happened. Easter is not about Jesus living on in his teachings or the experience of Jesus coming to life in his disciples. Easter is about a divine Galilean whose heart pumped blood again, whose lungs filled with oxygen again, and whose synapses started firing again. “What was it that within a few days transformed a band of mourners into the spiritual conquerors of the world?” asked J. Gresham Machen in *Christianity and Liberalism*. “It was not the memory of Jesus’ life; it was not the inspiration which came from past contact with Him. But it was the message, ‘He is risen.’ That message alone gave to the disciples a living Saviour; and it alone can give to us a living Saviour to-day.” Our Christian faith stands or falls on the reality of the resurrection. As Christians, we base our lives on a message about the God-Man Jesus who died for our sins,

was buried, and on the third day rose again from the dead. This is history. And if the historical Jesus is something other than the Jesus who died for sins, was buried, and raised to life again, then he was a failure and a fraud and we are mistaken in our devotion to him.

Rewriting the resurrection is a problem for some, but the bigger problem for most churchgoers is ignorance about the implications of the resurrection. Most of us can jubilantly sing *Christ the Lord is Risen Today* without crossing our fingers or resorting to metaphors in our minds, but many haven’t given much thought as to why this is such good news, other than that Jesus lives and as a general rule we like the idea of good people not staying dead. Sometimes this ignorance is the fault of preachers (like me perhaps!) who spend so much time defending the resurrection against skeptics and nay-sayers, they do little to exult in the benefits that are ours through our once-dead-but-now-alive Lord. We spend all our time defending it, that we never realize why it is worth defending. Thankfully, the Catechism can remedy this omission. Answer 45 gives three succinct reasons why the resurrection of the Son of God is good news for us.

First, by his resurrection Jesus Christ has overcome death, so that he might make us share in the righteousness he won for us by his death. 1 Corinthians 15 makes clear that if Jesus has not been raised our “faith is futile” and we “are still in our sins” (v. 17). “But why?” you might ask. “If Jesus died on the cross for our sins, bearing the curse that we deserved, shouldn’t we be free from our sins whether he rose again or not?” In other words, why is the resurrection, and not simply the cross alone, necessary for the

forgiveness of sin? Because without the resurrection nothing has been conquered—not sin, not death, not the devil. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead testifies not only that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom. 1:4) but that the offering of life was an acceptable sacrifice to God. If Jesus had not been raised it would be an indication to us that the work of salvation had not yet been accomplished. Conversely, his being raised indicates the satisfaction of divine justice. The punishment is over. The merit of Christ has proven worthy. The debt has been paid. Death has been vanquished. Sin has been atoned for.

Imagine you are one of six boys in your family. One day, five of you sneak out of your rooms, ride your bikes to the grocery store, steal fireworks and lighters, come home and start blowing stuff up in your driveway. Being naughty and not very bright young boys you light the firecrackers with mom and dad just inside the house. Soon the parental units are both outside and the five of you are in big trouble. But just then, your older brother, who has been learning about sine and cosine in his room, comes to your defense and offers to be punished in your place, even though he had no part in your crime. So Mom and Dad send him to his room and make clear that though the five of you are guilty and your older brother is innocent, he will pay for your sin and merit your forgiveness by going to his room. Now as long as big brother is in his room, you feel as though you are not yet cleared for your crime. Until the door opens and your big brother emerges, you sense that the punishment is still being meted out. You don’t know if this little switcheroo is actually going to work. But once big brother is set free, you rejoice, because now you know your penalty has been paid and Mom and Dad have nothing against you. The empty room indicates the satisfaction of parental justice.

The resurrection means the death of Jesus was enough—enough to atone for sin, enough to reconcile us to God, enough to present us holy in God’s presence. Christ won; sin, death, and the devil lost—that’s the good news of the empty tomb. The resurrection means Christ proved himself righteous to the Father, so that through faith we now can share in his righteousness. That is why Romans 4:25 says Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” The cross and the empty tomb cannot be separated. The two events are dependent upon each other. Together they demonstrate that Christ’s

payment for sin has been accepted and his victory is ours.

Second, by Christ’s power we too are already now resurrected to a new life. Our hope of new life is not just a future goal; it is a present reality. Dozens of times in the New Testament we see the phrase “in Christ.” This little phrase speaks to the glorious union believers have with Christ through faith. Just as by nature we were “in Adam” when he sinned in the garden, so by faith we were “in Christ” when he suffered and died and rose again. We died in his death and we rose again in his resurrection to new life (Rom. 6:5-11). We are not the same people we once were. We who were dead in our trespasses have been made alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:5).

Never forget your union with Christ. We struggle with feelings of guilt and cannot really believe we are justified because we forget that every lash and blow we deserve has already been dealt to us through our Substitute. And the convincing proof of our acquittal has already been demonstrated in the resurrection. Likewise, we struggle with feelings of helplessness and cannot really believe in the prospect of sanctification because we forget that we died to the old self and have spiritual life every bit as real as Christ’s new spiritual body. Because of our “in Christness” new life starts now.

But this new life is not as good as it’s going to get. The third benefit of Christ’s resurrection is that it guarantees our future glorious resurrection. Christ’s resurrection was the firstfruits of a resurrection harvest yet to come (1 Cor. 15:23). It’s not hard to imagine women, like those racing from the empty tomb to tell the disciples he is no longer dead, coming in from the fields with the good news that the first ear of ripe corn had just been plucked and the rest of the splendid harvest was not far behind. “If this corn is good,” we can hear them saying, “the rest of the harvest will be just like it.” Easter confirms that we have new bodies coming. No one knows exactly what the continuity and discontinuity will be like or how God will gather our molecules from the sea and the ground, but he will put us back together again, in some ways just like we are, but in all ways new and better. Therefore, “we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil. 3:20-21).

~ Written by Kevin DeYoung