

What Difference Does His Bodily Resurrection Make to Us Now?

Implications of the Bodily Resurrection of Christ¹

John 20:1-31

(April 4, 2010, St Francis REC)
© Rev. Dr. Curtis I. Crenshaw, Th.D.

Introduction

SCENE 1:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Then the Lord God created mankind, male and female, and He gave them dominion over the earth, over all the animal world, and placed him in the garden where they would have fellowship with Himself. There they would enjoy creation at its best. There was only one commandant: do not eat from the true of the knowledge of good and evil, or they would die. But they did eat, and they died. Mankind was now subject to death, both physical and spiritual. They died spiritually immediately when they ate the forbidden fruit, and they died physically later.

¹ I use underlining, bold, and colors to help me preach. In other words, I do not make a separate copy of the sermon just for reading.

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 2

SCENE 2:

When she heard that Jesus was coming, Martha rushed out to see Him. Her first words were:

- “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21).

IMPLICATION: It was an indirect rebuke. She had sent for Jesus to come help her brother, Lazarus of Bethany, who was sick unto death. When Jesus heard about it, He deliberately stayed two more days where He was, making it four days since Lazarus had died.

IMPLICATION: It was too late; her brother was dead. Martha was very upset, and had been mourning for days for her brother, Lazarus. Jesus could have helped while Lazarus was alive, but now that he was dead, it was just too late. Why had He waited so long? She and others knew that the Lord loved Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. It just didn't make sense for Him to delay.

Jesus' response to Martha was that her brother would rise again, but that was some consolation. That was true of everyone, and way off in some future time at the Last Day. That just did not help much now.

SCENE 3:

Mary Magdalene was the first person to the Lord's tomb on Sunday morning after His death on Friday. She had loved the Lord greatly. The one forgiven much loves much, and He had cast seven demons out of her (Luke 8:2). She had watched the Lord crucified (John 19:25). She had seen the crown of

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 3

thorns, the terrible whipping He had endured, the spear thrust in His side, and then had seen Him dismiss His human spirit and die. Now that He was dead, she was crushed. She came to the tomb to mourn, to weep, and to make sense of the past week regarding the incredible miracle regarding Lazarus, Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, then the great reversal of His popularity that ended in His death.

SCENE 4:

I got the news one day when I was home. My mother called me from the retirement home. My Christian grandmother, Mee-Maw, had suddenly had something happen to her as they were paying together that if the Lord took her after her fall, it would be quick. They were rushing her to the hospital, and my mother would go with the ambulance. Later a phone from mother stated that she had died. I wept out loud. A few days later, I viewed her in the casket. I would never talk to her again, or would I? Was the Christian faith just so much pie in the sky by and bye?

SCENE 5:

A parishioner called me from work amid heavy sobbing and crying. "He's dead," she blurted out, "my son has died. They found him at home, and he was not 30 years old. As a pastor, what does one say to a mother at a time like this?"

What do all these things have in common? It is the futility of life, the finality of death, the judgment of death, our hel-

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 4

plessness at the power of death. Death is the grim reaper that levels all of us, before which we must all succumb, that makes all of life meaningless, and there is nothing we can do about it. Beginning with Adam and Eve, we see that the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Death conquers us all. We came from nothing; we’re going to nothing; and the in between therefore has no meaning. No matter how great our lives were, no matter wonderful the accomplishments, no matter how young, or how old, we all die—and that’s it. Or is it?

Let us go back through these events to see the outcome of each.

After Adam and Eve died spiritually and in anticipation of their physical death, they were promised a deliverer:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall crush your head, and you shall crush His heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Thus, for centuries people looked for the Promised One, and surely Martha confessed that Jesus was the Christ. But she thought that the Lord was helpless when someone like her brother had died. Death was the lord from below before whom everyone must bow, right?

Let us continue the story. Martha confessed faith that Jesus was the Christ and that at the Last Day all would rise again, but Jesus had not told her that He would be the resurrection and the life, but “I AM the resurrection and the life.”

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 5

Martha dutifully confessed her faith in Him, but then went her way.

Then we see that the Lord was greatly moved in His human spirit, and grieved, and wept over the death of Lazarus.

The Bible says some wondered that if He could open the eyes of the blind, could He also have kept Lazarus from dying. In those days people were buried in caves, not so much underground, and large stones put in front of the entrance. But no one had a clue what He was about to do. Here is what we read:

Jesus said, "Take ye away the stone." Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, "Lord, by this time he **stinketh**: for he hath been *dead* four days" (John 11:39 KJV).

Now we see what the Lord Jesus is doing. Martha had confessed that He was the coming One, the promised redeemer, but she had not grasped the full import of that. It had been promised in Genesis 3:15 that One would come, and she believed He was the one. Yet in context the Lord God had imposed death on Adam and Eve with the implication that the One to come would overcome death. Moreover, Martha had underestimated who this One to come really was. He was

God of God,
Light of Light,
Very God of very God;
Begotten, not made,
Being of one substance with the Father,
By whom all things were made

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 6

It was He of Whom John wrote in John 1:1-3:

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² The same was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made (John1:1 KJV).

He was God in the flesh, before Whom even death itself must bow! He had deliberately waited those extra days to make a point, waiting until the flesh was rotting, so there would be no mistake that this was divine intervention. Therefore we read:

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"
⁴¹ Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² "And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me." ⁴³ Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "**Lazarus, come forth!**"
⁴⁴ And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go." (John 11:40-44).

He demonstrated that He **IS** the resurrection and the life! As some have said, if He had not specified "Lazarus," all the tombs would have been emptied!

Now this was the last of Jesus' public miracles, and it spread through Judea and to Jerusalem like a tsunami. Jesus

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 7

had decided to go to Jerusalem to challenge His enemies, knowing that they would kill Him as He had prophesied. For several years in His ministry, He had said His hour was not yet, but now He says the time has come. As He entered Jerusalem, filled to capacity with foreign Jews coming to Jerusalem for the annual Passover, the people were in a joyful fury, proclaiming Him the Messiah amid much fanfare. "He is One who can raise the dead!!" Lazarus was with Him, and so the people thronged to see this man who had been dead. As He enters on a Sunday, He cleanses the temple for the second time (at least).

But the people just wanted a political Messiah to rid them of Rome even as people today just want a messiah who will give them a lot of freebies. Take from the Jones to give to the Smiths is the attitude today, which is theft.

Now we come back to Mary Magdalene weeping at the tomb of Jesus who has been dead three days. Surely she had heard of the resurrection of Lazarus and how the Lord had displayed His power of death. But she must **NOT** have thought that He could do the same over His own death, for we see her not expecting the tomb to be empty. She was caught off guard and asked where they had taken His body.

She ran to get Peter and John and told them the tomb was empty. They ran back to see, and wondered. They left Mary Magdalene at the tomb to weep alone.

Think of all that had happened in the preceding days, and surely Mary was aware of these things:

Jesus was dead; she had seen Him die with her own eyes:

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 8

- He had been beaten with a whip with pieces of metal in it.
- A crown of thorns had been placed on His head, the thorns being **a reminder of the curse** in Gen 3 that Adam would be cursed with thorns.
- He had lost much blood.
- He had groaned when they dropped the cross into its hole.
- She had watched Him push down on His feet and pull up with His hands to force air into His lungs and to keep them free of fluid, but when His side pierced with a sword, out came blood and water, confirming that His lungs had filled with fluid and that He had asphyxiated.
- Trained Roman soldiers had testified to His death so that His legs did not need to be broken as the other two who were crucified with Him (which was a prophecy from the Old Testament).

Tomb itself:

No, He was dead alright, make no mistake about that. But now she wonders regarding the tomb itself. The Jews had requested from Pilate to make the tomb secure so no one could steal His body. **Therefore**,

- A heavy stone had been placed over the mouth of the tomb and who could move this without being seen? It would take several men, and even further
...

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 9

- A [Roman seal](#) had been roped over the tomb's stone to enforce with law that no one could enter the tomb. It would be no problem physically to remove a rope lightly attached with wax at both ends, but who would risk going against the authority of Rome under the death penalty?
- A [Roman guard](#) had also been stationed there to keep anyone from tampering with the seal or His body. Who would dare challenge them?
- Surely the [Jews](#) would not steal His body, for they wanted the Roman seal and guard and got these approved from Pilate in the first place.

She pondered furthered:

- He had been placed in the [tomb](#) of Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man. You don't place live people in a tomb, especially with a stone over the mouth, unless they are dead and unless you don't want them disturbed.
- But why did those who took His body leave His [grave cloths](#) behind? After all the beating they gave Him, they would be stuck to His body and difficult to take off. If someone stole His body, it would take longer to take off the cloths than to take the whole body, further exposing themselves to being caught. This is strange, indeed. The linen cloth was neatly wrapped and in its own place. Who would take time to make it neat? Likewise, the head cloth was still in its place. Indeed, He who came forth and altered the conditioned of the

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 10

grave did nothing in haste, but with specific purposes in mind, put the linen cloth neatly where He wanted it. In the Old Testament, **the high priest on the Day of Atonement only wore a linen cloth**, and now **this final High Priest, who had worn the same in fulfillment, took it off, for the FINAL Day of Atonement was over!**

- At the tomb were two “**men**” clothed in white. They were actually angels, like the symbolic angels in the Old Testament tabernacle that overlooked the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant, guarding the presence of God, and like the two angels that guarded Eden to keep Adam and Eve out after they sinned. So there were two of them at the tomb, **guarding the PLACE of propitiation**, the **BODY** of Jesus, but now stating that He had risen.

As Mary Magdalene contemplated these things, it is not difficult to imagine how much agony of soul she must have had.

Her **hope** had died with His death, as it had for all the disciples, who were hiding out in the upper room, fearful that they would be killed next as followers of Jesus. **Faith** had also died, as it had with the others. Hope was buried in the tomb with Jesus. But **love** was still alive, love for Christ. That's why she was there, love; her heart was broken. Though Jesus was gone, she still wished to do something for Him, to be near Him. Not only was He dead, but she did not even have a body to mourn over.

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 11

The “men” at the tomb asked her why she wept but did not answer her at this point about Jesus, for they saw the [Prince of Life](#) approaching. [He](#) would minister to her.

Words are not given to describe what she experienced, for none are appropriate. It is only recorded that [she and the Lord had one brief conversation with one another](#).

We know she was the [first one to whom He revealed Himself](#) (from Mark 16:9), revealing His compassion for the ladies to go to one who grieved so much and was often His companion.

[The first statement was Jesus to Mary](#), asking why she was weeping. She thought he was a [gardener](#) and asked where he had put the body of Jesus.

But [why is there a garden?](#) The world was lost in a garden, and now the world is regained in a [garden](#). The first Adam lost it all, and the Last Adam regained it, so says St. Paul in Romans 5:12ff.

She thought He was the [gardener](#), for the [last image in her mind](#) of Him was on the cross with a crown of thorns, bruised and broken, bleeding, beaten beyond recognition, a hole in His side, head bowed, dead. The last image of someone is graphic. Moreover, her eyes were full of tears, hindering her sight.

THEN in the second statement Jesus calls her name: “[Mary](#).” [Did a gardener know her name?](#) Did a gardener say her name in the tender way that Jesus was accustomed? This time she looked in anticipation, eyes full of tears, hopeful, heart beating fast, lungs suspended, fearful to look but could not help it, could it be. . . . **THERE HE WAS!** Standing, look-

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 12

ing at Her with those compassionate eyes, divine dignity, majestic, sovereign, serene, full of compassion for her – **it was indeed the Lord!**

She felt the agony of soul **instantly** evaporate in the heat of His loving presence and love. Joy enveloped her whole being as she felt her body bathed from head to foot in His grace. She ran to Him and embraced Him. “**Rabboni!**” was all she could say. No other words were necessary as she clung to Him and wept for joy. The Greek has Jesus saying, “Stop clinging to Me,” but it was not rejection of her but later ministry that He had in mind. Never had she thought such joy possible, and **she worshipped Him with every fiber of her being!**

Now let us ask what difference this makes for us, now, in this life. For my Christian grandmother, Mee-Maw, my tears were soon turned to joy, even as I looked into her casket, knowing that she was with the Lord. Therefore, I was able to preach her funeral.

For the Christian lady whose Christian son died at age 29 so unexpectedly, as we both stood looking at him lying in his casket, she said to me, after he had had many health problems, “Is my boy still broken, father.” To which I said, “No, he is fixed forever.”

What does a pastor say to this Christian mother about her Christian son? He says, “**Absent from the body,** present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).” He says, “**I AM the resurrection and the life.**” Moreover, because she believes in the resurrected Lord, and her son did also, she was able to accept

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 13

the Lord's timing and wisdom. Death for us is NOT final; it is anticipatory.

What do we say about the Apostles, hiding like cowards in the upper room, fearing that if their master had been crucified, they would be next? But after they saw, touched, handled, and ate with Jesus after His resurrection, they turned the world upside down. Doubting Thomas became a martyr and the church he founded in India is still there! Cowardly Peter, who denied the Lord three times, thirty years later asked to be crucified upside down, as history tells us, because he was not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as His Lord! How do we explain the existence of the Christian Church, proclaiming the resurrection of Christ, if the whole thing was a hoax, and dying for it?

There was never a discussion at the time of His resurrection if the tomb were empty, only how it got that way. All the enemies of Christ had to do to end Christianity was to produce the body—they could not. A Muslim said to a Christian missionary, "We can take you to the tomb of Mohammed, but you don't even know where Jesus was buried." The missionary replied, "That is precisely the point. Mohammed is dead, Jesus is alive."

We must all do something with the empty tomb. We cannot ignore it, as our culture wants to ignore Christianity in general and especially Jesus in particular. The historical facts demand a response to the empty tomb. The turnaround of the Apostles from cowards to martyrs demands a response. The existence of the Christian Church for all these centuries demand a response.

What Differences Does His Resurrection Make? / 14

Each of us will face death. The empty tomb will either fill your empty life, or it will confront the arrogant life. If you are **not** a Christian, your tomb is filled with death without hope. It is the end of all you know, or so you think. **Now is the time for you to trust in Jesus as your Lord and savior.** But if you are Mary Magdalene, your tomb is empty, your personal pain, your sorrow over the death of loved ones, your empty heart and life, is filled with His empty tomb. **AMEN.**