

raised with Christ | resurrection & the gospel

three talks linking resurrection and the gospel

Do we live our lives out of gratitude for what Christ has done? Or are our lives lived in relationship with the risen Christ? GRANT THORP looks at how the resurrection effects our lives ...

How do we conceive of the Christian life? Is it a life lived out of gratitude for what Christ has done, or is it a life lived in relationship with the risen Christ?

This was the question posed at a study group I am a part of, and since it was posed it plagued me. From time to time I gave it some thought, but it wasn't until I began to read a book by Dallas Willard called "The Divine Conspiracy" that a few ideas began to come together.

Willard argues in his book that the gospel preached in most evangelical churches these days amounts to a gospel of sin management. We stress that God is into dealing with sin, but say very little about how that affects our life here and now. He asks:

Does Jesus only allow me to make the cut when I die? Or to know what to protest, or how to vote or agitate and organize? It is good to know that when I die all will be well, but is there any good news for life? If I had to choose, I would rather have a car that runs than good insurance on one that doesn't. Can I not have both?

The second step forward in thinking about this question took place when I had to preach the Easter messages in Chapel for Sydney Missionary and Bible College. One of the passages that I spoke on was 1 Corinthians 15 and it struck me how the resurrection was such an integral part of Paul's gospel and yet it is so rarely mentioned by us. If we leave the resurrection out of our gospel it's little wonder we end up with a gospel that is all about God dealing with sin but has little to do with relationship with a living God.

The third step in thinking about this subject happened when I went up to the Katoomba Easter Convention and Philip Jensen was speaking on the resurrection. At that point I had to

concede that the Lord was trying to tell me something and so I decided to prepare a small series on this subject.

The ideas are culled from all of the sources mentioned. There may be one or two original thoughts there but they're fairly dilute. The more I think about this subject the more I'm convinced it represents a much needed paradigm shift in our thinking about, and presentation of the gospel and the Christian life.

It is not enough for us to be talking about the Christian life as Jesus dealing with our sin and our responding in gratitude for what he has done by giving our lives to him. That is right as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough! We need to recognize, as the New Testament does, that the Christian life is also about having a living relationship with the risen Lord Jesus.

Resources

- Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*.
- Philip Jensen's talk at Katoomba Easter Convention 2000
- Anthony Petterson, *Antecedents of the Christian Hope of Resurrection*, Reformed Theological Review Vol 59, No 1, April 2000.
- Paul Beasley-Murray, *The Message of the Resurrection*.

Talk 1 - Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil

1.1 The Distinguished Gentleman

In the Australian Magazine recently they interviewed a man called Ron Foley who was a funeral director. He said: "Death is something people don't talk enough about. It's not taught in school and is seldom broached at home. But it happens to us all." The other side of the picture can be seen in an episode of Dr Finlay where one of the characters says: "It's bad enough we should expect it so soon without talking about it." Both of these attitudes are alive and well in Australia. In Wee Waa everyone would come to funerals but all the young fellows would stand outside the church. They didn't want to get too close to death. Recently I conducted a funeral for a guy recently who didn't know whether to take his kids along to the funeral of his father or not. He wondered if he should shield them from the reality of death.

Death is a reality. We can play hide and seek with it all our life but eventually it will find us. But death is not the last word-resurrection is.

It seems strange starting a series on resurrection with a sermon on death, but resurrection means nothing apart from death. Resurrection from what?

In order to understand resurrection we must first understand death, and to do that we need to go back to Genesis.

1.2 Death and the Garden

Genesis 2:7 says that God made Adam and breathed the breath of life into him and he became a living being. But this life was dependant upon him and subject to God's guidelines. This is made clear in Genesis 2:16,17.

God is like a parent who says "You can live here if you obey my rules. If you want to live by your own rules you can't."

Death is the punishment for failing to live life depending on God and accepting his guidelines. It is this truth the devil denies in Genesis 3:1-4. He

says "You will be like God knowing good and evil" i.e. determining good and evil. Believing the lie they eat and die and are cast out of the garden. They are forced to live under the sentence of death which is the judgement of God.

From this point on in the Bible there has to be a concept of resurrection or else man will live and die under the judgment of God.

As you read through the Bible it's clear that that is the case and we'll trace that teaching in subsequent talks, but it's important to draw some implications from what we've seen so far.

1.3 Death and the Meaning of the Universe

Death renders life meaningless. This is one of the main points the writer of Ecclesiastes makes:

"Like the fool the wise man too must die." (Ecc 2:16)

"I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be foolish or wise." (Ecc 2:18,19).

The writer pushes his readers to the point of despair:

"Be happy young man while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment (I.e. you will die)." (Ecc 11: 9)

Death renders life meaningless futile and dark because it means that judgment is God's last word and our only hope. It's only in Jesus 'the resurrection and the life' that true meaning and hope can be found, and that' God's last word is seen to be one of grace not judgment.

Talk 2 - Resurrection in the Old Testament

2.1 A Doctrine in Dispute

It's clear reading the New Testament that the resurrection was a doctrine in dispute. On the two sides of the debate were the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and one of the lines of difference between them was their belief in the resurrection. The Pharisees accepted it. The Sadducee's who considered themselves the old believers, and based all their beliefs on the Pentateuch, did not. They didn't believe it could be found there. Jesus clearly aligns himself with the Pharisees on this issue as can be seen from Mark 12: 26,27.

Does the Old Testament teach a doctrine of resurrection. Certainly we would expect to see it from a logical point of view as we saw in Talk 1 or else made is under the judgment of God. But is it there?

2.2 Blessings and Curses, Life and Death (Deut 28-30)

As the Israelites were poised to enter the promised land, Moses related to them the blessings and curses of the covenant. If they obeyed the law they would receive God's blessings and live in the land. If they disobeyed they would receive his curses and be scattered among the nations. This was also expressed in terms of life and death.

So:

- Obedience and blessing = life in the land.
- Disobedience and curse = death in exile.

Naturally associated with that is the inference that return from exile = resurrection. We see this expressed in Ezekiel.

2.3 The Valley of Dry Bones

The context of this whole section is related to the Israelites return home from exile.

- 36:8 ‘they will soon come home’
- 36:24 ‘God’s gathering his people is accompanied by his putting his breath within them (as at creation) and giving them a new heart.’

This is pictured in Ezekiel 37 in the Valley of Dry Bones. The valley may be the result of one of Nebuchadnezzar’s whirlwind campaigns, or it may be just a vision. It is clear however that it represents Israel (v 11). God brings the bones together but there is no breath in them (v 8). Finally God gives them breath and they come to life.

2.4 The Righteous will Shine Like the Sun (Daniel 10-12)

The resurrection is not just a metaphor for the return from exile. It also has a personal emphasis as Daniel makes clear. In Daniel 10:1 we see that this final vision occurs in the third year of Cyrus. The exiles have already returned home (Ezra 1:1), but God speaks to David of a resurrection in Daniel 12. This is pictured as those sleeping in the dust of death rising to shine like the brightness of the heavens, and it is spoken about personally to Daniel as him arising to receive his allotted inheritance.

2.5 The God who Gives Life

Death and judgement are not God’s last words. God is a God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but who would rather give life. He is the God who raises the dead to life because of his mighty power and he can do this because of the resurrection of Jesus.

Talk 3 - The Resurrection—The Forgotten Point of the Gospel (1 Cor 15)

3.1 First Things First

There are some things we should never forget-your wife’s birthday and your anniversary are some of them. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul reminds the Corinthians of one thing they should never forget-the gospel he passed on to them. Paul says it has three points:

1. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (v 3)
2. He was buried (v 4)
3. He rose again on the third day (v 4)

This is the gospel Paul handed down and which we shouldn’t forget. Trouble is we do forget it. Not all of it just parts of it. In the circles I move in we’re always talking about Jesus death but we hardly ever talk about his resurrection.

A popular theology text that I consulted devoted 84 out of 1247, to the death of Jesus. It devoted one to his resurrection. To be fair it was briefly mentioned in other contexts, but considering Paul mentions it as one of the key elements of the gospel you would think it would rate better than one page and a few mentions here and there!

The resurrection is the forgotten element in our gospel message and so what Paul has to say to the Corinthians is something we need to hear as well. It's not a case of two out of three ain't bad. It's a case of all or nothing. Take any one element of the gospel away and it ceases to be the gospel. Paul goes on to show why.

3.2 The Significance of the Resurrection

3.2.1 It's the guarantee of sins forgiven (v17)

If there is no resurrection there is no forgiveness of sins. Death is the evidence and penalty for sins. What is the evidence that sin has been dealt with? Life! In raising Jesus from death God is saying that his sacrifice for sin

was effective in dealing with sin.

3.2.2 It is the guarantee of our resurrection (v 18-23)

If Christ didn’t rise then neither will we. He is the first fruits. In Wee Waa when the cotton was ready to be harvested the farmers would send their pickers into the field and the first trailer would be sent to the gin for the church. It was the first fruits. They were picking up on an Old Testament idea. Before the Israelites harvested any of their crop they were to bring a representative sample, the first fruits to the priest as an offering to the Lord. The full harvest could not be made until the first fruits was offered. This is Paul’s point here. He’s saying that Christ’s resurrection is the first fruits of a resurrection harvest of believers. His resurrection guarantees ours.

3.2.3 It is the guarantee of God being all in all (v 22-28)

These verses sound like a hopelessly complicated argument, but the reasoning is pretty clear. What lies behind Paul’s argument is the ongoing reality of death. Although Christ has conquered death through his resurrection, believers still die. Although death has been defeated we’re still in it’s power. And while ever we are in it’s power God is not all in all. God will only be all in all when death, the last enemy is defeated. When will that be? When we are raised.

3.3 Effect of the Resurrection (v 29-34)

There are aspects of this passage that are difficult but the main point Paul is making is clear. He is trying to show that a belief or non-belief in the resurrection will affect how we live here and now. Paul says if he “fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained if the dead are not raised.” If there is no resurrection Paul would have been hanging on to life with white knuckles. If the dead are not raised then the only

logical philosophy of life is “eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” And that the way the Corinthians were living, they were living selfishly and self indulgently as though there were no resurrection and Paul say to them sober up and get their act together because the resurrection is real there is a tomorrow, and they need to get their act together.

3.4 Paul's Gospel and our Gospel

If you deny the resurrection, or leave it out of your gospel, it will have a profound effect on the message and on how we live the Christian life. We do tend to overlook the resurrection.

If you asked most people in our churches to summarize the gospel they would say “Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sin.” But according to Paul that is not the gospel. The gospel has three elements. Leave any one of them out and it ceases to be the gospel.

We do not serve a God whose deeds for us are a matter of history. We serve a god who died but who rose from the dead and who invites us into living relationship with him now.

Talk 4 - Our Resurrection Life (Phil 3, Col 3)

4.1 Gospel of Sin Management

The bumper sticker says it all “Christians aren’t perfect **just forgiven.**” It’s certainly true that Christians aren’t perfect, but are we just forgiven? Is that all that can be said about us? Sadly in many people’s thinking it is. According to Dallas Willard in his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, much of modern day Christendom is committed to a gospel of sin management. He says: “History has brought us to the point where the Christian message is thought to be essentially concerned with how to deal with our sin....Life, our actual existence, is not included in what is now presented as the heart of the Christian message, or it is included only

marginally.”

What we have done is made atonement the whole story. So justification takes the place of regeneration or new life. This is what happens when we leave the resurrection out of our gospel presentation. We need to realize again, or perhaps for the first time, that Jesus is alive and invites us into living relationship with him now. This emphasis is certainly found in Paul.

4.2 'I Want to Know Christ' (Phil 3)

Paul conceives of the Christian life as knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. This is all about forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is ahead (v 13), which is the call of God heavenward. As we live in this way we are to realize that we are citizens of heaven and that one day Jesus will come and transform our lowly bodies so that they might be like his glorious body.

4.3 'You Have been Raised with Christ' (Col 3)

‘The resurrection of believers is not a future event. It has happened. Paul says in Christ we have died to the religion of this world (which consists of endless rules which lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence) and we have been raised with Christ. Our life is now hidden with Christ in God and will be revealed when Christ appears. But although this life is now hidden it should be revealed in our putting to death the earthly nature and replacing it with the new nature which ‘is being renewed in knowledge in the image of it’s creator.’

4.4 Reaping What We Sow

Management experts say ‘Your system is perfectly designed to yield the results you are getting.’ If we preach a gospel of sin management, a gospel that leaves out the resurrection, then we will get Christians who believe Christianity is all about being forgiven. The New

Testament is at pains to tell us that this is not the case. Through his death Jesus forgives us, through his resurrection life he invites us into transforming relationship with himself.

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