

Resurrection : Part 1

Introduction

Jesus came to earth to fulfil three roles, as prophet, priest and king.

- As prophet he spoke the words of God
- As priest he offered his life as atonement for sin and continues to intercede between God and man
- As King he came to defeat the enemies of sin and death. Not in the way that was expected, but he did establish himself as King.

John 19 : 17-22

- Jesus is mocked as the “King of the Jews”.
- No-one really believed he was the promised Messiah, least of all the religious leaders of the time.
- Even his closest disciples did not fully understand what Jesus was trying to do in establishing the Kingdom of God and himself as head of that Kingdom.

Revelation 19 : 11-16

- What a change!
- Jesus is “King of Kings and Lord and Lord of Lords”
- No more mocking, this is fact
- Riding on a white horse, leading the armies of God, carrying a sceptre all indicative of Kingship

Hebrews 12 : 2

- Jesus is now enthroned at the right hand of God
- The early church had no doubt at all that he was Lord and King

Q : What happened in between John 19 and Revelation 19 ? What changed that so clearly established Jesus as Lord and King ?

A : The Resurrection. The fact that he raised from the dead and in so doing defeated death, the ultimate enemy of mankind, established Jesus as King.

Part 1 : Centrality of the Resurrection in early Christian belief

1. Resurrection was a key component of the Gospel message

Romans 1 : 1-5

- Important components of the gospel here according to Paul :
 - Jesus was declared to be the Son of God through the Resurrection
 - We receive grace through him, and
 - His kingdom is open to all people, including gentiles.

1 Corinthians 15 : 1-5

- Once again Paul highlights as part of the gospel message that Jesus died for our sins and that he was raised
- We are saved by this gospel

2 Timothy 2 : 8-10

- The Gospel is based on the fact that Jesus died and was raised again
- That is an integral part of the salvation that is in Christ

Acts 2 : 29 – 36

- Throughout the book of Acts, the account of Jesus includes his resurrection as a central theme

Without the resurrection, we have no gospel – no good news announcement about Jesus if he had not raised from the dead.

Meaning of this word “gospel”

In the Roman Empire, the word gospel referred to a proclamation of good news about the Empire or Emperor. Events such as the Emperor’s birthday or military victories were announced as “Gospel”.

In using this same word, the early Christians were announcing that Jesus rather than Caesar was King, and that God’s Kingdom was greater than the Kingdom of Rome. That took some courage, and we will see the reason for that courage in a moment.

2. Resurrection was the main source of Christian hope

Colossians 1 : 3-5 ; 1 Thessalonians 4 : 13-14

- We read a lot about hope in the New Testament
- The persecuted church needed to hold on to hope in the face of persecution and death
- The early church knew all about death, often violent painful death - they coped with it through focusing on the sure hope (anticipation) of the Resurrection
- Its OK to grieve but we need not grieve as the world does because we have the hope of the Resurrection and of being re-united with other believers who have died
- *Note : the early Christian hope was not a kind of “I hope to win the lottery one day”- it was more of a sure expectation*

This sure hope also gave the early church courage. They could face death confidently because they knew that they would walk right through it and out the other side.

3. Resurrection was one of the elementary teachings

Hebrews 6 : 1-3

- The resurrection was one of the elementary teachings in the early church
- Should be no different for us today
- In the same category as basics such as faith, repentance and baptism
- Are you as eager and as confident to speak about the Resurrection as you are to speak about faith, repentance and baptism ?

*Resurrection is like the engine of the car, not an optional extra like remote controlled mirrors or leather seats.
It drives the theme of redemption through Jesus.*

One reason why the Resurrection has become such a controversial and difficult topic is that there are many different religious beliefs of what happens to us when we die. Even in the larger Christian community, there are many different views on life after death.

Popular notion is that when we die we go to heaven to live in eternity with God in some kind of disembodied spiritual existence. This view has been heavily influenced by the Greek philosopher Plato who taught that physical material is the source of all evil and that the sooner we rid ourselves of our physical bodies and enter an eternal spiritual existence the better.

But this is not Resurrection as spoken of in the Bible.

Meaning of the word Resurrection (“Anastasis” in Greek)

- Refers to new bodily life after death
- Resurrection meant bodies brought to life again
- “Spiritual resurrection” is a contradiction in terms, like speaking of a “square circle”
- There is no doubt that the word Resurrection as used in the Bible involves physical bodies

Signposts in a mist ...

We do not know all the answers about God now and are not meant to (1 Corinthians 13 : 9-12).

Reading the scriptures about the resurrection is like looking at signposts that point into a bright mist - they point us in the right direction without providing a full picture of the final destination. Resurrection language is rich in metaphor, symbols and imagery that are difficult to understand, especially if we try to interpret individual resurrection scriptures separately from the others. But the scriptures when taken together provide clear enough pointers and teach us enough about the nature of the hope that we as Christians have and about the type of lives we should live in the present age, in anticipation of the final Resurrection.