

TRANSFORMED BY THE RESURRECTION
JOHN 21:15-25

"If you ask where God's glory is most seen, I will not point to creation, nor to providence, but to the raising of Jesus from the dead." [Spurgeon]

We make much of the resurrection. For good reason. It is one of two fundamental pillars of salvation:

- *We are dependent on the cross.* We have sinned and someone needs to die for our sin. And we are the most natural candidate for paying the debt penalty of our sin. And it's not just enough to find someone else to die for us; the One who will die in our place must be perfectly sinless — both in deeds and desires. And that was Jesus.
- *We are dependent on the empty grave.* If Christ was only crucified in our place and not resurrected, then we have no hope of living either. He would be just another dead religious leader. Christ's resurrection is God's exclamation of His acceptance of Christ's death for us. Because He lives, now we have confident hope of life.

Thomas Watson rightly noted the effect of the resurrection for us — "We are more sure to arise out of our graves than out of our beds." This is the hope of the resurrection. He lives. We will live. We will be freed from sin — we will never again sin; we will not even feel the slightest inclination of desire to sin. We will have bodies that are perfected — no more forgetfulness, weight gain, or illness. We will have life that is eternal. All these things and more are a certainty. Praise the Lord for those graces.

But they are all future. What about today? What good is the resurrection for you and me today? Because while we *will* have eternal life, we have to die in this body to get there (or be raptured). So, are the benefits of the resurrection (only) in the future, or are there some benefits today? Now? In this world? There are. The final accounts of the resurrected Christ in John give us a glimpse into the benefits of the resurrection:

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION PROVIDES ETERNAL BENEFITS (WHICH HAVE ALREADY BEGUN).

What is the benefit of the resurrection? Though the words "resurrection," "risen," and "raised from the dead" are not in this passage, the truth of the resurrection dominates these verses. What is the benefit of the resurrection? In these final words of John's Gospel, we find **four glorious benefits** of the resurrection for our lives today (and into eternity).

1. **The Resurrection Provides a **REDEMPTIVE** Solution to **SIN** (vv. 15-17)**
2. **The Resurrection Provides a **WORTHY** Savior to **FOLLOW** (vv. 18-19)**
3. **The Resurrection Provides a **HOPEFUL** Reason to **ENDURE** (vv. 20-23)**
4. **The Resurrection Provides an **INCOMPARABLE** Person to **BELIEVE** (vv. 24-25)**

1. The Resurrection Provides a **REDEMPITIVE** Solution to **SIN** (vv. 15-17)

- Remember the context for these final verses of John:
 - ✓ His resurrection is revealed in 20:1ff — and He appeared to Mary Magdalene (20:11).
 - ✓ He also had appeared already to the disciples twice in 20:19, 26. And then at Galilee (21:4).
 - ✓ He had also had a private meeting with Peter (Mk. 16:7; Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).
 - ✓ Despite Peter's apparent restoration, Peter still seems disconsolate and ready to go back to his fishing career (21:2-3 — he had a plan and he had a **[the]** boat).
 - ✓ Jesus reveals Himself to the disciples by keeping the fish away and then giving them a massive catch (contrast vv. 4, 7, 12). And then they sat down to eat some of that catch (v. 13).
 - ✓ That was the revelation of the resurrected Christ (v. 14). But that's not the end of the account. The revelation of the resurrected Christ continues into v. 15 — **so when they had finished breakfast...** There is more about Jesus and the implications of His resurrection in the continuing story.
- You are probably familiar with the story of the restoration of Peter in John 21 — Jesus begins by calling Peter by his given (birth) name — **Simon**, the name Jesus used when correcting Peter.
 - ✓ In this dialog there are three questions, three answers, and three commissions:
 - ✓ Q1 (v. 15) — **Do you love Me more than these?** Before the cross, Peter had compared himself to the others by saying, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away" (Mt. 26:33). "So, Peter — do you love Me supremely? More than the others, as you claimed?"
 - Peter removed the comparison in his answer and simply said, **Yes Lord, You know that I love You** — he affirmed his love, humbly did not assert greater love, and appealed to X's omniscience.
 - [Much has been made of the different words for love that are used in this passage — *agapaō* (a greater, "divine" love) and *phileō* (a lesser, "human" love), but John uses them interchangeably (e.g., Jn. 20:2 // 21:7, 20; God also love with *phileō* (5:20; 16:27), and we should understand them that way. John is just varying his vocabulary — as also with **sheep, tend, and know.**]
 - Based on Peter's affirmation, Jesus restores him to ministry — **tend my lambs**. It is a reminder that believers in Christ need care (they are defenseless), and the fundamental role is to feed them spiritually. And despite Peter's sin, the Savior has restored Peter to that role.
 - ✓ Q2 (v. 16) — virtually the same as the first Q&A, with stylistic word variations.
 - ✓ Q3 (v. 17) — the same question a third time — here Peter is **grieved** because Jesus asked 3x. (And perhaps reminded him of his three denials). Peter's answer expands to include — **you know all things**, i.e., "You know the thots and intentions of the heart so examine me..." It was as graciously and persistently affirming as his cursing had vehemently denied Christ.

- ✓ Why did Jesus ask this? The three-fold denial of Peter was public and while his sin had been forgiven privately by Christ, the evidence of that forgiveness and the restoration to ministry is made public.
- ✓ He is now positioned to serve Christ — and he never turns back (cf. Acts 4:13, 18-22; 5:27-32, 40-42).
- Let's make two more observations about this interchange:
 - ✓ Peter's sin was a real sin and a greatly significant sin (Mk. 14:70-72) and Jesus caught him in the act (Lk. 22:61). Jesus knew the sin and now He also knew the repentance and Peter was forgiven.
 - ✓ While God is the tender and true shepherd of Israel (Ps. 23:1; 80:1; Jer. 23:3ff) and Christ is the Chief Shepherd of the church (1 Pt. 2:25; 5:4), there are still shepherding responsibilities for God's people (not just Peter, but all Christ's people — cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Pt. 5:2). And all those who will shepherd are sinners who need the forgiveness of Christ.
 - ✓ And that leads to this question...
- *What is the benefit of the resurrection today?*
 - ✓ The benefit of the resurrection is that it defeats death and sin and frees people from sin —
 - There is no more condemnation from God for your sin (Rom. 8:1).
 - There is no more bondage to sin (Rom. 6:7, 12-14) — you don't have to sin.
 - ✓ The benefit of the resurrection is that it enables sinners to be used by God to help others — one sinner leading another sinner to the joy of the Savior, Jesus Christ. The Bible and history are filled with stories of turning sinners into useful servants — e.g., Onesimus (Philemon 11, 16). Cf. 2 Tim. 2:20-21.
 - ✓ And the story of Peter is such a story as that. And Peter's story can be my story and your story because it is the same gospel of Jesus Christ that saved him and saves you and me.
 - ✓ The resurrection is the great answer to our great problem — sin. God redeems it, takes it from us, washes us from it, and uses us for His purposes despite it.

2. The Resurrection Provides a **WORTHY** Savior to **FOLLOW** (vv. 18-19)

- In vv. 18-19, Jesus expands His call to Peter to care for the people (sheep) of Christ by telling Peter something of the circumstances in which he would serve Jesus:
 - ✓ **When you were younger...** — in his youth, Peter was not constrained by others (persecuted).
 - ✓ **When you grow old...** — the idea of **stretching out** his **hands** pictures a prisoner being bound and led where he does not want to go (to his execution).
 - ✓ And then John interprets the words — **signifying by what kind of death...** He is telling us of the reality of Peter's persecution and martyrdom — and Peter is also well-aware of it.
 - ✓ [Aside: just because Peter will die does not mean God is not sovereign: the death **would glorify God**. There is a kind of death that honors God (and one that doesn't).

- ✓ This was not unique to Peter; historians tell us:
 - Matthew was martyred by the sword in Ethiopia.
 - Mark died in Alexandria, after being cruelly dragged through the streets of that city.
 - Luke was hung upon an olive tree in Greece.
 - John was put in a cauldron of boiling oil, but escaped death, and was then banished to Patmos.
 - James, the Greater, was beheaded in Jerusalem.
 - James, the Less, was thrown from a pinnacle of the temple, and then beaten to death with a club.
 - Bartholomew was flayed alive.
 - Andrew was bound to a cross, where he preached to his persecutors until he died.
 - Thomas was run through with a lance in the East Indies.
 - Jude was shot to death with arrows.
 - Matthias was stoned and then beheaded.
 - Barnabas was stoned to death at Salonica (Thessalonica).
 - Paul, after many tortures and persecutions, was beheaded in Rome by the Emperor Nero.
 - Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downward.
 - What Peter was called to was not unusual (and still is not unusual) — persecution still exists.

- What is notable in these two verses is what Jesus says after that promise: ***follow Me***.
 - ✓ “You will die for your allegiance to Me. But follow Me nonetheless.”
 - ✓ To follow means just what it sounds like — continual (vb. is present tense) discipleship.
 - To follow Christ means to be lovingly obedient to Christ (14:23)
 - To follow Christ means to be submissive to His will & direction (Acts 9:15-16; 13:52; 14:22)
 - To follow Christ (in everything), is to pursue spiritual maturity (Mt. 19:21)
 - To follow Christ means to imitate His example — even into suffering (1 Pt. 2:21)
 - ✓ Interestingly, this is not the first time Peter heard this call from Jesus (Jn. 13:36-37).
 - ✓ If the resurrection were not true, then following Jesus would not only be a waste of time, it would be a waste of life and the greatest act of foolishness (1 Cor. 15:19).
 - ✓ There is nothing to be gained from following Jesus and obeying the Word of God if it isn't true, b/c then there would be some other truth about salvation, and we shouldn't waste our time on Jesus.
 - ✓ But it is true (1 Cor. 15:20). Which means that following anyone but Christ is folly.
 - ✓ Don't waste your life — follow Christ wherever He leads.

- So, in vv. 15-19 we have a demonstration of what it means to believe in Jesus:
 - ✓ Like Peter, I believe that I am a sinner who needs forgiveness and that only Christ can forgive (20:31).
 - That forgiveness releases me from the penalty of sin so God is no longer angry with me/my sin.
 - That forgiveness releases me from the power of sin so that I no longer have to sin.

- ✓ Like Peter, I believe that Jesus is worth following and obeying. I want to do what He says to do. (Salvation is a changed life and a new way to live — it's far more than merely "sin insurance.")
- ✓ If you do not yet believe in Jesus Christ, I urge you to believe in Him today — if you have Qs, some talk to me or any of our members about how to trust in Christ and live for Him. ("2 Ways to Live")
- ✓ We are not promised safety by following Christ (you will actually be less safe from a worldly perspective), but we are promised that it is always worth following Jesus.
- ✓ You will never be disappointed by following Jesus (Rom. 9:33; 10:11-12).

3. The Resurrection Provides a HOPEFUL Reason to ENDURE (vv. 20-23)

- Still on the beach, Peter **turned around** and saw John (*the disciple whom Jesus loved*).
- Peter has just been told about a coming death and he gave into the natural temptation — **what about this man?** (We don't know Peter's motive in asking — he may have wanted John also to enjoy the privilege of doing something that brought particular glory to God. His motive may not have been wrong.)
 - ✓ Jesus' answer is clear — **if I want him to remain what is that to you?** In other words, that is not your responsibility, concern, or even need to know. The tone is similar to Job 38-41.
 - ✓ What happens to others and how God orchestrates His sovereign plans in the world (either for the suffering or ease of others) is not Peter's concern (or ours).
 - ✓ Peter *does* have a responsibility though: **you follow Me**. In fact, the emphasis is on **you**. "You just take care of yourself..." (This is not the first time Jesus makes this call: Lk. 9:23-24)
 - ✓ Peter should have a passionate concern, but it is not in knowing the future. His one concern is always simply to be to follow Christ obediently and consistently.

"Peter wants to know what God has planned for John's life. But Jesus wants Peter to mind his own business. He says, 'Don't worry about what others are doing. Just be faithful to what God has shown you, to what God is doing in your life.'" [Stedman]

- ✓ That's a good word for us when we don't know the future or are fearful of persecution (or anything else). Our task is simply to be faithful to Christ. That's the question: "Am I following Jesus?"
- John adds an explanation in v. 23 — Jesus was *not* promising John an Enoch-like exit from this world (or any other way to avoid death). He was only promising Peter martyrdom and calling him to be faithful.
- What is notable in these verses is that God is calling Peter (and others) to suffer to the point of death. *And He is saying that it is worthwhile*. On what basis can Jesus say that? The resurrection.
 - ✓ The words are being spoken directly to Peter from the only one (so far) that has been resurrected from the grave (all other resurrections were temporary).
 - ✓ Jesus looked Peter in the eye and said, "Even when you are martyred, it's not the end...look at Me, the Firstfruits from the dead (1 Cor. 15:23-25)."

- ✓ And note that Peter lived some 30 more years before this promise was fulfilled — it had to always be in the back of his mind — “it’s coming.” But he never wavered from following Christ. *Resurrection!*
 - ✓ In fact, he exhorted others to also persist in following in suffering (1 Pt. 4:12-13; 2:21ff; 1:3-5).
 - ✓ You who know me know I love baseball. One of my more ignominious moments in life was when I convinced myself I could play baseball (and not just be a champion card collector). I went out for the ninth-grade baseball team at Lakeview HS. I went to one practice, realized I was over my head and quit. I walked away and never tried again. I suppose that’s ok with baseball. It’s not ok with Christ. Chesterton said, “The Christian life has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.” Oh friend, there are treasures in Christ. Persist and endure for the hope...
- The life of following Jesus is not always easy; trouble and persecution are promised. But it’s good. It’s good now and it will be good in eternity. Suffering here cannot take away our salvation today or our final salvation tomorrow. The resurrection has secured that hope so that we can endure and persist.

4. The Resurrection Provides an INCOMPARABLE Person to BELIEVE (vv. 24-25)

- John affirms in v. 24 that he wrote this Gospel and that he and his readers *know his testimony is true*.
- And then he adds that he didn’t write everything that could have been written (v. 25).
 - ✓ He is speaking in hyperbole — he means that his Gospel only contains a small sampling of the words and works of Jesus. Jesus lived for 33 years and John’s Gospel can be read in 2-3 hours. So obviously there is much more than can be said!
 - ✓ As an example, consider that John 12-21 is about the passion week of Christ and one post-resurrection appearance about a week later — virtually half the book is about 8 days in Jesus’ life. Much more could have been written about those days, nevermind the entire life of Christ. There is more to Jesus than we know or can know in all the writings of all the books about Him —

Could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made,
 Were every blade of grass on earth a quill And every man a scribe by trade,
 To write the love of God above Would drain the ocean dry,
 Nor could the scroll contain the whole Though stretched from sky to sky.

- But is he writing in hyperbole?
 - ✓ Remember John’s prologue (this is a parallel to it): 1:1-4. John is writing about the incarnation years (1:14), but you cannot separate the deity of Christ from the humanity of Christ.
 - ✓ And to contemplate the deity of Christ will take us a literal eternity and we still will not reach the full depths of understanding this Savior (1:15-16).

- The extensiveness of Christ’s person and majesty implies at least two things:
 - ✓ *You will never reach an end of studying the Savior*; there is always something more delightful to know about Him. Some of you have been married 30, 40, 50+ years — and you are still discovering aspects of each other that you have not previously known. It is that, and infinitely more about Jesus.
 - ✓ *Because of the infinitely massive display of Christ, rejection of Christ is an infinitely terrible sin*. As Christ has been revealed to us with such magnitude (and today revealed as a resurrected Savior), don’t yawn and walk away from Him as though He is inconsequential — a meal to be left unfinished, a ball game to be turned off, a conversation to be ended. He is none of those. He is the incomparable and resurrected Savior. Oh friend, believe in Him and follow Him.

CONCLUSION: In his book, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*, Eckhart Tolle writes,

What humanity needs...is a transformation of consciousness. This consciousness “can flow into what you do and spread into this world” through “three modalities in which you can align your life with the creative power of the universe”—acceptance, enjoyment, and enthusiasm. No wonder Oprah Winfrey tells readers, “Get ready to be awakened.” [Steven Mathewson, *Risen*, 13.]

No. What humanity needs is a resurrected Savior. And that resurrected Savior is our confidence that while we do not yet have the ultimate prize of new bodies and an inability to sin, we do have the down payment on it now. Christ’s resurrection is the source of both our final resurrection and our resurrected living now:

- ✓ His resurrection is foundation of all our spiritual confidence (20:8)
- ✓ His resurrection appearances to the 12 affirm the ability to be at peace, not anxious (20:17, 19, 26)
- ✓ His resurrection appearance to Peter affirms the availability of forgiveness (Lk. 24:34)
- ✓ His resurrection breakfast at the Sea affirms the availability of fellowship (21:12)
- ✓ His resurrection questions of Peter remind us of the centrality of loving Him (21:15-17) & the immense privilege of serving Him by caring for the spiritual needs of others (tend My sheep)
- ✓ His resurrection is for our transformation.

BENEDICTION (Don Dittrich): Mark 16:5-7