

No Death, No Resurrection!

Striking words, aren't they? No death...no resurrection! Especially in a culture that avoids the word death as much as possible they do tend to grab your attention. And Christians all over the world will celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! It is at this time of the year that we ponder, re-live, and celebrate the events that happened 2000 years ago. The week of passion where Jesus was crucified and then raised from the dead! There is of course much to celebrate. But to really get the full impact and meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ for our lives as Christians, it is essential to follow the events leading up to the Lord's resurrection. We must look at both the emphasis on death as well as resurrection found in the New Testament.

First, in the gospel accounts leading up to the last days in the life of Jesus, the Lord was rejected, crucified, and then raised. The path our Lord followed was a tremendously painful process. Moreover Jesus said that if we were to be his disciples we would have to do the same. It is still the order for us today as well. The Christian life starts with a tremendous negative...deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus. Obviously this does involve pain, sorrow, and disappointment. Following Jesus and dying with Him involves pain. No death, no resurrection. 'No pain...no gain', is a much aligned saying but it is profoundly true. We have to go through the cross to get to the resurrection. Many seekers today are being offered a gospel without cost, a gospel of cheap grace! But all true followers of Christ must face the cross.

Never forget that first and foremost in the New Testament is the emphasis and importance of the death of Jesus on the cross! The cross is the central theme and focus of the New Testament. Not miracles, not might and power, but death on

the cross!! The Apostle Paul exclaims, "***I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives within me!***" (Galatians 2:20) Or, "***May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.***" (Galatians 6:14) What do these words mean to us today? Are we Christians supposed to be masochists who enjoy pain, suffering, and torture? Why is Paul bragging about being crucified with Christ?

The Bible clearly shows that there is a particular sequence to the way we as Christians should receive Jesus and identify ourselves with Christ, His death, and His resurrection. Paul throughout his writings underlines the significance of our identity with Christ. In fact one of his favorite expressions is to be, 'in Christ'. So of prime importance is the fact that being a Christian involves a personal and vital identification with Christ. In Romans chapter 6 Paul writes, "***Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.***" (Romans 6:3-4) According to Paul our initial baptism into Christ was a funeral of sorts. Paul says when we receive Christ we are buried and dead with Christ!! But to be raised from the dead you must be dead!

Paul can boast of being dead and crucified with Christ because he knows that what follows is glorious resurrection into newness of life! The emphasis in the context here is not on a future resurrection but a moment by moment aspect of being raised with Christ in our present experience! But it is a tremendous negative, being dead with Christ leads to the most glorious positive...Resurrection life! Jesus said, "***I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live!***"

Now let us consider this 'moment by moment' aspect and how it applies to our lives. Simply put, to be a true disciple of Christ we must live moment by moment considering ourselves dead to sin but alive to God! There must be a daily rejection of anything that will quench the Spirit of life in us. Look at Romans 6:11, "**count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus...offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life**"! In other words, live as though you have been brought back from the dead and raised to live again! Wow!!!!

Resurrection life is now ours (in the present tense) but how is this accomplished specifically? Paul continues in the incredible 8th chapter of Romans with the answer! The Spirit gives life...the Spirit is life!! The Greek word for spirit found in the New Testament '**pneuma**', unfortunately conjures up images of ghosts, shadowy figures and the like. Connotations of something disembodied, immaterial, or total antitheses to matter and body are implied and this is unhelpful. To really understand what is meant by the word 'spirit' let us go to the Old Testament for a moment. It is very exciting to take note that the Hebrew word for Spirit is '**ruach**'! The very essence of the word means strong wind or breath. It always implies something living compared with something dead, something moving, the opposite of something stagnant. God's Spirit is the **divine energy of life**! That is why the experience of the Spirit is described as a rebirth to true life, a drink of living water, a foretaste of glory divine! The word of God says if you are 'in Christ' you are a new creation by the energizing life-giving Spirit of God!! And it is by that life-giving power that we can be raised and walk in newness of life!

The life-giving Spirit of God initiates a new beginning, a well springing up into everlasting life. The late Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones (renowned surgeon and Biblical expositor), once categorized the Spirit as a stimulant!!! And the Spirit, moment by moment, can energize and empower us to live in

resurrection power throughout the normal course of our daily lives.

Being raised with Christ has also has profound social implications. All those who are "in Christ" are "one body". This new humanity in Christ completely destroys social boundaries and this equality in Christ creates a new social reality! Walking in newness of life involves a new way of treating one another by walking in humility, peace, and love!! In short, being raised with Christ involves a new identity, and a new way of viewing life. "Old things are passed away"!

We have emphasized the moment by moment aspect of being raised with Christ. But hallelujah, the future resurrection & hope for Christians is certain as well! ***"If the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells within you!"*** (Romans 8:11) Also, ***"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory which shall be revealed in us"*** (Romans 8:18) Paul goes on in the context of this chapter to point out that we and all creation await with eager longing to be set free from our bondage to decay and futility. There is a future glory that awaits us!

Therefore we have this tension within us. We have the down payment, (so to speak) of the Spirit within us. A mere foretaste of the coming kingdom of glory! The new creation of all things is already being experienced now. And yet we inwardly groan and anticipate the future and final resurrection of our bodies. It is a 'tug-o'-war' that will not end without death followed by resurrection!

I want to leave you with this illustration. The more a sick patient detects the signs of returning health, the more restless and expectant he will be. That is the tension that

Christians have to live with while in this world. The hope that anchors us is not so much what we are lacking but what *we have already received!*

May we at this special time of the year pause and reflect upon our true identity and union with Christ. May we also, moment by moment, take up our crosses and follow Jesus through death to be raised and to walk in glorious newness of life! And while we celebrate in worship our Lord who died and was raised to live forevermore, let us always remember our death with Christ and walk in newness of life by the life-giving power of the Spirit! Amen!!

**Written by
David Arivett**

**Copyright 2003
Songs Of David**