

Series: Resurrection Experiences

Text: Acts 9

Message #4 (of 4)

THE RESURRECTION AND THE APOSTLE PAUL

INTRODUCTION

1. The truth of the resurrection of Christ was believed by Peter and John on Resurrection Sunday. Both saw Jesus in His glorified flesh, alive from the dead, never to die again. Peter actually saw Jesus twice, once alone and once in the company of others. Thomas had heard about the resurrection from trusted friends and followers of Christ, but for a week he refused to believe, not wanting to place his faith in something that might ultimately prove to be false. But he too was allowed to see the resurrected Lord and all doubt and defiant unbelief melted away into a grand declaration of confident faith, “My Lord and my God!”
2. Because Jesus is alive, it makes all the difference to believers of all ages. The deity of Christ depends on it. Our hope and salvation depend on it. The divine plan for the ages, to rescue lost and condemned sinners and to grant to them complete forgiveness of sin and to restore to them a face-to-face relationship with their Creator and Savior, all designed to bring great glory to God – depend on the resurrection. Without it the whole thing crumbles into a meaningless existence that ends in the purposeless darkness of nothingness. (There’s something solid to hang your hopes)!
3. The followers of Jesus know He has risen and they believe that the message of the resurrection is central to all that they believe about Jesus. But the resurrection is a problem for those who refuse to believe in Jesus. The resurrection sets Him apart and demands that we give attention to Him. So the world looks for ways to debunk the resurrection. We are in the midst of some of that right now. According to Dan Brown and *The Da Vinci Code*, the deity of Christ, including His resurrection, was nothing more than a conspiracy by the Roman Church to perpetuate the myth of Christianity. Jesus was a mere human, who was married to Mary Magdalene, had a child, was crucified, but never rose from the dead. Mary and her child went off to Gaul (France) and started a royal dynasty. The supposed myth of His deity was said to have been contrived at a

church council in A.D. 325, adopted by a narrow margin. Actually, the new theories are really old theories that were proven to be heretical theories centuries ago, but since few know church history, these theories have made their way back and people assume this is new stuff that deserves a hearing. Will we ever learn?

4. There was a man named Saul (we know him as the Apostle Paul) who also had issues with the resurrection of Jesus. He was making every effort possible to expose this apparent errant teaching about this one called the Christ. Let's find out what happened to him.

I. PAUL'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE RESURRECTED CHRIST (Acts 9) Because of that encounter ...

A. His mission was altered (vv. 1-6)

1. Paul hated Christ and all that He stood for. He believed that it was his loyalty to God that ignited this hatred toward Jesus and His followers, so he felt vindicated in the incarceration and execution of those who would propagate the message of Jesus as the Son of God. One line in Acts 7 grabs my attention. It was the account of the stoning of Stephen. It is verse 58. The depth of Saul's hatred is mentioned again in 8:1.
2. Chapter 9 begins with a further description of his bitter hatred toward the followers of Christ. (Paul gives commentary on this later in Acts 26:9-11). On his way to further stamp out this "heresy" something happened that changed everything. The resurrected Lord stops Saul dead in his tracks and the Lord speaks. Saul does not see Him, but he hears Him loud and clear. This threatening, murderous persecutor of the church becomes a broken, blind, passive servant of the very One he was trying to destroy! His mission was forever altered right there in the middle of the road!

B. His vision was altered (8-9, 18)

1. Literally, this fully alert hater of the church was stricken blind, and then a few days later received back his sight. That is not all that earth-shaking. There have been many people who could see quite well, who temporarily lost sight and then regained it. Other than maybe being more grateful for eyesight, not much else changed.
2. What is interesting here is found in what could and could not be seen. With full sight, Saul was blind to the truth of Jesus. But with physical eyes blinded, for the first time

he saw who Jesus really was. When His vision returned, what he saw was quite different than what he had seen earlier. His vision concerning the church, Jesus, and other Jews like himself – all of that was dramatically altered. He was a different man as a result of this encounter with the resurrected Lord. That is always true.

C. His destiny was altered (v. 15)

1. Paul was well on his way to making a name for himself as a distinguished teacher of the law and a zealot for Judaism. He was a rising star. Of the Pharisees, he was among the brightest and the best. Pursuing believers in Jesus was an additional highlight on his already impressive resume. But in one moment, the pursuer becomes the pursued, the enemy becomes his friend and the friend becomes his enemy.
2. Verse 15 is amazing. What Saul was fighting to extinguish, he now was called upon to make known. He would now receive and endure what he had so violently given out to others. The name he sought to destroy would be the same for which he would give his very life.
3. The experience of Paul is the experience of all believers. Before our encounter with the risen Christ, we were on mission to promote ourselves. We think we can see, but we are hopelessly blind. (A phone call came this week from a man who wanted some counsel. He did not understand how God could allow him to have financial problems when he had faithfully attended church for 11 years. Surely God owed him a reward for his church attendance)! We so often figure we deserve the best. We want nothing to do with that which will cost us our lives. But when Jesus seeks us out, we loath ourselves and we suddenly love Him; we see clearly for the first time with new eyes; we willingly give our lives for the sake of the One who gave Himself for us. God always initiates the contact in salvation. Perhaps nowhere else is it more clearly stated than in Paul's words to **Titus (3:3-5)**! To get a better idea of what this looks like, let's turn a few pages to Acts 13.

II. PAUL'S PROCLAMATION OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST (Acts 13:16b-41)

A. The resurrection was God's plan through the ages

1. This is a great sermon. Paul takes his Jewish brothers on a guided, albeit abbreviated tour through their history. He cites the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings, the

establishment of Saul and then David as successive Kings of Israel, and then shows that link with Jesus Christ.

2. We pick up the sermon at verse 23 as Paul explains to them who Jesus is and what the Jews did to Him. Paul speaks of his death and burial, and then he gives us verse 30, “But God raised him from the dead.”
3. Paul supports and affirms the truth of the resurrection by quoting the OT scriptures. He makes his case, that even the great King David died and was buried and his body decayed, but not so with Jesus! The Lord saw no corruption, for He is alive! And what does that resurrection mean to those who heard Paul’s sermon?

B. The resurrection was God’s provision for salvation

1. Verses 38-39 call for a response. “Let it be known to you...” (As one author has written, “This miraculous conversion, without human involvement at its occurrence, is an example of the extent and power of saving, sovereign grace.” (See **1 Timothy 1:13-17**).
2. Faith in this living Lord Jesus Christ results in the forgiveness of sins and freedom from the condemnation that was already laid upon us by the Law of Moses. Because of the resurrection of Christ, provision is available for our sins to be forgiven, our lives to be set free from sin and death and we become participants of the wonderful grace of God, which spares us from judgment and grants to us eternal life!
3. Do you understand why Paul would preach such a message on the resurrection of Christ? Now, it was not easy to preach the resurrection. It was costly. Many rejected the message. Some heckled and contradicted the message. Some tried to do the very things to Paul that he had done to others before he met the Lord Jesus. What kept him going when there was opposition on every side?

III. PAUL’S HOPE IN THE RESURRECTED CHRIST (1 Corinthians 15; selected)

A. The resurrection and Paul’s testimony concerning the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-11) (Paul’s hope in the resurrected Christ shows up in his testimony)

1. The Gospel is not the Gospel without Jesus as God dying for our sins and being raised from the dead. There is no good news in a partial Gospel. A half Gospel is no Gospel at all. As wonderful as the death of Christ is to us who know that only by His sacrifice

could our sins be atoned, yet without the resurrection, that truth is merely a noble act, but not a redeeming one. Do you understand why?

2. Without the resurrection there is no hope because there is no life after the grave. If Jesus, as God did not rise from the dead, certainly we as mere mortals would remain dead as well. But Jesus did not remain dead and He promised life to all who would place their trust in Him! Paul made sure that those to whom he preached knew that Jesus had risen from the dead. That is an indispensable part of the Gospel.

B. The resurrection and Paul's steadfastness in the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:58) (**The resurrection was the anchor for his steadfastness in the Gospel**)

1. It was the truth of the resurrection that kept Paul going. As Paul faced the enormous trials such as those mentioned in 2 Corinthians 4 and 11, he did so with the good confidence of the truth of the resurrection of Christ.
2. Knowing that our Savior ever lives and intercedes for us allows us to be steadfast and immovable, to abound in the work of the Lord and to be certain that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

C. The resurrection and Paul's hope through the Gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:10) (**The resurrection was absolute foundation for his hope**).

1. There are several places that we could turn in Paul's letters that would make the point. This passage is as good as any. The Thessalonian letters were among Paul's earliest epistles, and the Thessalonian church appears to have been among Paul's favorite churches. They were a wonderful congregation. As he reviewed his relationship with them and their relationship with Christ, he wrote the following.
2. "For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the **living** and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom **he raised from the dead**, Jesus, who delivers from the wrath to come." A dead Jesus cannot deliver us from God's wrath, but a risen Jesus can! For His sacrifice was acceptable, a propitiation for our sin. His resurrection is our hope that we too will rise again!

CONCLUSION

1. Though none of us has had a Damascus Road salvation experience, nevertheless, when

we came to faith in Christ, our whole life was changed. Our mission, our vision, our destiny, all made 180 degree turns. The resurrection of Christ is an integral part of our story. It is the truth that keeps us going and gives us cause to stand. The resurrection of Christ is our hope, our central focus, our beacon of light in the darkest of circumstances. We have every reason to live with confidence and hope and certainty because of the living Lord Jesus. Take away His resurrection and we have nothing, but with it, and with our faith in Him, we have everything! (at least all that we need)!

2. Where is your hope? What is the central focus of your life? What drives you during the day? What motivates you to keep going through the darkest of nights? What gives you hope when you look death in the eye? For Paul, it was Christ – the living Christ, the resurrected Christ, the Lord Jesus who loved us and loves us still, who died and rose again, who paid the full price for our sin and extended to us forgiveness from that sin and a new covering of His righteousness, who ascended into heaven and promised to return ... this Jesus lives! Do you know Him?
3. Closing illustrations – John Newton and Augustine – in MacArthur, *Acts 1-12*, pp. 263-264.