

THE RESURRECTION: A DOCTRINE THAT DIVIDES Acts 22:30-23:11

Acts 21:37-23:11

On this Easter Sunday – the day of each year when the church of Jesus Christ pays particular attention to the notion that Jesus rose from the dead – how **coincidental** that the topic of the resurrection of the dead should be at the heart of today's text!

Now there are **many points** that I desire to make today, so let's just start right in...

1. Paul was no masochist as the text makes it clear that Paul 3 times talked himself out of being hurt:

1. First, in Acts 22:25, he did so by letting a Roman centurion (comparable to an Army captain in our time) know that he was a Roman citizen. This saved him from receiving a flogging, for there was no way the Romans would flog a fellow Roman who had not been sentenced to receive such a beating.
2. Secondly, in Acts 23:5, Paul saved himself further grief by humbly acknowledging his ignorance as to the identity of the high priest at that time. He noted his personal error, even quoting the scripture about how he was to show the priest honor. In doing so he undoubtedly saved himself from greater harm than he had already received.
3. Thirdly, after having perceived that the religious leaders (presumably the Sanhedrin, a body of about 70 Jewish men), here in chapter 23 were divided – some being Pharisees and others Saducees (who did not believe in the resurrection, or in angels, or in spirits (22:8)) – Paul used his own stated belief in the resurrection of the dead as a means of causing further division in that group. In so doing he helped save himself from an attack upon himself.

All of this underscores the fact that **Paul was no masochist**. He may have been beaten a lot of times for his faith in Christ, but he found no pleasure in any of it.

And Jesus was the same. Hebrews 12:1-2

And we are the same. As followers of Jesus we're **not looking for trouble** and we will, if possible, do what we can to avoid trouble. We are not interested in being beaten, ridiculed, persecuted or taken advantage of. We will not deny our Savior, but we are **not desirous of any pain or shame**. It may come our way (like it came Paul's way)...someday...but we will be fine if that day never comes our way.

2. It is not difficult to understand how the Saducees ever came into a place of leadership over Israel. For if you can understand what has happened in **our own day and age** then it is not difficult to understand how these theologically liberal Saducees came into leadership back in Paul's day.

Today, many of the larger - what people call the "MAIN LINE" – denominations are more than a little shaky on the same kinds of issues as the Sadducees were in Paul's day.

I believe I have told you this story before, but some years ago I had a wedding that was to take place at the chapel located on the campus of **Lancaster Theological Seminary**, adjacent to Franklin and Marshall College. As I had never been in the facility before I arrived especially early so as to check things out before the Friday night rehearsal. A bearded fellow whom I would have guessed to be in his mid to late 20s was there and I learned that he was a student at the seminary and that he would be operating the sound for the wedding. As there were only the two of us in the building I said, "I really don't know much about Lancaster Theological Seminary. Would you mind if I asked you a few questions about it?"

"No, go right ahead," the fellow said.

"The Bible. Would the professors here teach that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is true in what it teaches?"

The fellow said, "No, I don't think that is quite what you would hear."

"How about Jesus? Would the professors teach that Jesus was the eternal Son of God, God in the flesh, come to earth to save us from our sins?"

Again the fellow said, "No, I don't think that is quite what you would hear."

"Okay, then how about the issue of getting right with God? Would the professors here teach that Jesus was and is the **only way** of being reconciled with God?"

And again I heard the same answer: "No, I don't think that is quite what you would hear."

The fellow seemed like a **genuinely nice guy** and I sincerely **felt sorry for him**, paying money to get the poor education that he was receiving at the school. So I said, "Man, may I encourage you to get your hands on one of Charles Spurgeon's books – maybe An All Round Ministry or Lectures to My Students – and read what he had to say. It could change your life by opening up an entirely new vista of understanding for you.

Well, just as there have come to be **theologically corrupt** seminaries, denominations and churches in our age, so too back in the days of Paul.

And just as in our day, sometimes these liberal types come into places of prominence. Lancaster Theological Seminary is associated with the United Church of Christ. That denomination, which has become very liberal, owns **BILLIONS** of dollars worth of real estate. **They've ARRIVED.** Why, before he was president, Barack Obama was even a member of one of their churches!

In the same way, some of the more liberal groups of Paul's day had **arrived.** They had become leaders in the nation. And so, along with the more conservative Pharisees, they oversaw what went on in Israel. This only shows us that some things never change.

3. The resurrection of the dead is both a preposterous as well as a Biblical idea. I say preposterous because of the fact that we do not see it in our day. If you kill a fly, you expect that fly to remain dead. If your fish dies, you expect it to remain dead.

Some years ago I was driving on route 230 heading west into Mount Joy, when suddenly a cat ran out in front of me and I hit it. I immediately put on the brakes and looked back in my rear

view mirror. The cat was lying motionless in the road. "Oh great..." I looked over to the right – the direction from which the cat had come – and there was a house and a barn. So I did a U-turn and then drove into the driveway down to where I saw a couple men standing. I got out and told them that I had just hit a cat that had come running out from their place into the road. I made it clear that I was **very sorry** but that there was no way I could have avoided hitting the cat. At that the one man started walking out toward where the cat was lying in the street.

The other fellow then said, "Oh my. I had that happen to one of our dogs a year or two ago, and it ended up that the dog was actually alive. I took that dog to an animal hospital and it ended up costing hundreds and hundreds of dollars to see that dog survive." Just then the fellow that had gone to see the dead cat hollered, "The cat's not dead!"

"What?"

"The cat's not dead."

And with that the second fellow started heading towards the street. I immediately thought, "There is **NO WAY** that I'm forking out hundreds and hundreds of dollars on that cat" and with that I got in my car, turned around and left. Whatever happened in the end to that cat I have no idea.

Well, some cats, as they say, have nine lives!

I just wasn't willing to spend any of my money to help that one move on to another of its nine lives.

But when things **DIE** we are used to them **staying DEAD**. This goes for flies, it goes for fish, it goes for cats and it goes for people.

So **the idea of a resurrection of ANYTHING dead seems rather preposterous**. We don't see it, we have never seen it. It makes for great story telling (everything from Mary Shelly's story about Dr. Frankenstein and his attempt to bring life to the dead to our far more violent The Walking Dead television series), but we don't really believe in it...at least most do not.

Now, let's jump ahead a few chapters...to Acts 26...when Paul will be making his defense before King Agrippa...

Acts 26:4-8

It is interesting to me that Paul would even suggest or imply that the idea of a resurrection from the dead is **not all that incredible**. For it sure seems incredible to me.

But the resurrection of the dead is, when you think about it, as basic as the creation itself.

The Bible teaches "**ex nihilo**" **creation**, meaning **creation out of nothing**. In the middle ages the idea of Spontaneous Generation – life springing out of nothing – came to be accepted because it had been observed that one could place a bell jar on a counter over a piece of fruit and within days small flies might appear: fruit flies or some such things.

In time, this notion was totally abandoned.

But now, in the 21st century, following the writings of people like Stephen Hawking, **a form of spontaneous generation is again being taught**, for life on earth, it is taught, sprang out of nothing, without the direction, design or assistance of any God or outside force.

To any thinking 5th or 8th grader sitting in a public classroom being taught that long ago people believed in "spontaneous generation" until it was disproven, all that student need do is raise their hand and ask, "If there is no such thing as spontaneous generation then how do you explain the origins of life?" If the teacher is an atheistic evolutionist that teacher would have to acknowledge that the student has a point.

So there is **an irony in OUR age** that at the very time when we **should be dismissing** any notions of a resurrection from the dead as being utterly preposterous, we actually live in an age where it can hardly be argued against. For if life can come out of nothing, then why should it be deemed incredible that the dead should come back to life?

But I am willing to leave it as still quite incredible or preposterous.

But one thing it is also and that is **it is a BIBLICAL idea**. For

1. We see it in the confessions of Old Testament saints who believed in God. Job 19:25-26;
2. We see it in the teaching of Christ, for in many places and at many times Jesus taught that there is a future life, that we should labor for future rewards in heaven, and that he would be going away to prepare a place for us. If this life is all there as, none of that makes a bit of sense.
3. We see it in the work of Christ. In John chapter 11 we can read of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. And it is in that context that Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even if he die, **shall live again.**" Isn't that what the resurrection is all about: living again?
4. We see it in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is a lengthy narrative, but if there ever is a Sunday when we SHOULD read it it is most certainly today...John 19:28-20:20
5. We see it in the teachings of the early church. 1 Corinthians 15:12-28

So there is no getting around the idea that a resurrection of the dead is a Biblical idea, as preposterous as it may sound.

4. Lastly, it is a belief in the resurrection of Christ from the dead that is central to our salvation.

Romans 10:9-10

- God created this world out of nothing, but it is **not** a belief in that which brings us salvation.
- Shadrach, Mechach and Abednego all survived being thrown into a fiery furnace (as recorded in the book of Daniel), but it is **not** a belief in that which brings us salvation.
- Jesus walked on water, but it is **not** a belief in that which brings us salvation
- Indeed there are likely a total of a hundred or more miracles mentioned in the Bible, but it is **not** a belief in ANY of them that brings salvation to our souls.

But to believe or not believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead can either save or damn a person's soul. A belief in the resurrection is **the sine quo non of all beliefs.**

Do you believe?

To confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead means salvation for our eternal souls.

It may sound incredible...it may seem preposterous...but if you believe in the God of the Bible, you have no other option before you than to confess and believe in that which marks off the true church from the false today, even as it did back in Paul's day.