

What is the "Good News" of salvation we are to proclaim?

A Consideration of First Corinthians chapter fifteen.

True, it is his death that fully paid for our sins

"For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified . . . Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; (Heb 10:14, 19, 20).

But the resurrection is the assurance that that death was sufficient, and accepted as full payment -- that God's holiness has been fully satisfied. It was not the resurrection that made our justification possible. It was the efficacy and totality of the redemption, and the resulting justification, that made the resurrection possible.

"Therefore also IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom 4:23 - 25 NASB). Our transgressions made the delivering up to death necessary, the justification wrought by that death made the resurrection possible.

The words, "*and was buried*" serve a very important purpose, though the burial was not a necessity for salvation in itself. It serves as the answer to two great and important heresies about the gospel. On the one hand it rules out the teaching that it was the "spiritual death" of Christ (when He cried "*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*") which is the basis for our redemption.¹ One does not bury a spirit! On the other hand it guards against the teaching of the "Jehovah's Witnesses" that the man Jesus is forever dead and that His body was miraculously removed from the tomb so it would not be a "stumbling block" to the disciples' faith. It was the body which was buried that was raised from the dead. A spirit does not have to be brought out of a tomb!

1 Cor. 15:3, 4 set forth what Christ did, verses 5 - 9 are not giving further information about what happened to Christ making possible our salvation, but proof that it happened. Verses 1, 2, 13 - 20 emphasize the absolute necessity of the resurrection of Christ. The rest of the chapter goes on to further considerations about resurrection.

Notice that the gospel which Paul preached -- by which men are saved, and wherein they stand (vs. 1, 2) is specifically said to be that Christ was raised from the dead. (1 Cor. 15:11 - 19)

¹On pages 12 and 13 of his booklet "The Blood of Christ" Mr. Bob Thieme states very dogmatically, "When His spiritual death was complete, Jesus Christ shouted, 'Tetelestai!' Obviously He could not have spoken if He were physically dead! And certainly if He was still physically alive on the cross after salvation was complete, **HIS PHYSICAL DEATH COULD HAVE NOTHING WHATEVER TO DO WITH THE PAYMENT FOR SIN!** ... Jesus Christ was the only One who died twice on a Roman cross, and **ONLY HIS UNIQUE SPIRITUAL DEATH PAID FOR THE SINS OF MANKIND.**" (Emphasis mine)

In partial answer to this argument, it is even more obvious that, if Christ is going to say at all, to living men, that redemption is finished He must say it just before He dies. He could hardly be expected to die and then shout from the cross, "It is finished!"

*“Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.
 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?
 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:
 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.
 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.
 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:
 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.
 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.
 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”*

(1 Cor. 15:11 – 19)

The clear teaching here is that if the message is not about a risen Savior, it is not good news, and to believe such a limited message would not save the soul. Notice carefully that these saints addressed have believed in vain if they do not hold fast the message Paul preached, specifically referring to the resurrection. *“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain”* (1 Cor 15:1, 2).

How can one believe, truly believe, and still not be saved? Is not salvation by faith alone? Is it possible to believe in vain? Paul does not even hint that these men did not believe that Christ died for their sins, it was the resurrection that was in question. In verse fourteen he clarifies the matter. A man may truly believe, but believe the wrong message, and not be saved. This would happen if they did not believe the whole message, specifically including the resurrection of Christ. *“And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain”* (1 Cor 15:14).

The resurrection of Christ in the Old Testament.

Christ's resurrection is said to be according to the (Old Testament ²) Scriptures. Just what place does it have there? Is it ever found in salvation passages, where it may be expected to be part of the good news later to be proclaimed?

The resurrection of Christ is indeed included in several Old Testament passages which deal specifically with what Christ would accomplish at His death. To name a few:

In Psalm 22, after he has died (v. 15), He cries out, *“My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him”* (Psalm 22:25).

In Isaiah 53, after He is *“cut off out of the land of the living”* (v. 8) and buried (v. 9), *“-- he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand”* (Isaiah 53:10).

One of the indications that the Old Testament sacrificial system was not, in itself, intended to solve the sin problem is the fact that not one of the animals used in the Old

²While Paul's writings are Scripture, it is Old Testament Scripture which is in view in this passage, not Paul's own writings.

Testament offerings was raised from the dead. Even though they gave their life for sin the payment was not sufficient for all, as was Christ's (John 1:29), nor able to take away the sins of any (Heb.10:4, 11). Thus they had to be repeated over and over. ³

However the resurrection of Christ, as the antitype, is prominently illustrated in several of the types. To briefly point out a few:

In Genesis twenty two Isaac, typical of Christ in this story, went willingly to the place of sacrifice. ⁴ After the sacrifice was accomplished (through the lamb replacing him briefly in the type - so that even he was raised from the dead only "in a figure" -- Heb. 11:19) he came down from that death -- **alive!** This aspect of the story is emphasized in Hebrews eleven. *"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure"* (Hebrews 11:17 - 19).

When he met with Goliath, David was typical of Christ going down into the valley of death (no one expected to see him alive again). There, as the one already anointed to be Israel's king, he accomplished, by himself, a redemption for Israel and came back **alive** with the fruits of victory in his hand. He was then acclaimed by some, but when he was rejected by the king and those in authority he withdrew to the wilderness for a time, gathering some of the lowliest and most miserable men to himself outside the camp (1 Sam. 22:2. Compare Heb. 13:13). When he came as their king, he reigned well for many years and then put down a final rebellion (see Rev. 20:7 - 10). The typology here is very detailed and clear. If David had died in the battle his purpose and his courage would be exemplary, and he might have inspired Israel to fight harder, but they would still face Goliath. The full deliverance of Israel depended on the fact that he came forth **alive**.

Two passages are worthy of special mention. In both of them the type is split so that it may more fully typify what Christ later did for our salvation.

In Leviticus sixteen, two goats are chosen, both of them typifying Christ. ⁵ One goat is slain, picturing the death of Christ. The other, the "scapegoat," **lives** and bears some of the blood of the slain goat away into the wilderness.

Another type presented a bit earlier in Leviticus is especially clear on this theme. In the cleansing of the leper, it took two birds to accomplish it. Two live birds were selected. One of them was slain over "running water" (Lev. 14:5. It is translated "living water" in the NASB margin, referring to either a running stream or an artesian well) which surely hints at the association of life with that death. The other bird was sprinkled with the blood of the dead one

³ The sacrifice of Christ did take sins away, perfecting forever those who are sanctified (set apart to Him -- Heb. 10:14). Therefore there is no more need for either the repeated sacrifices of the Old Testament economy, or the continuing, ("perpetual") sacrifice of Christ in the Catholic Mass.

⁴ Isaac was approximately 25 at the time (according to Josephus at least). He was old enough and strong enough to carry the wood for the offering to the top of the mountain. Only the two of them were present (Gen. 22:5). So if he had not been willing to be the sacrificial victim his 125 year old father could not even have caught him, much less bound him to an altar!

⁵The idea that the "scapegoat" typifies Satan is a serious fallacy of Seventh Day Adventism.

and set free, **alive**, to bear the blood out into the open field (v. 53) and thence, being a bird and **alive**, into the heavens.

The resurrection of Christ in the Gospels.

When Christ prophesied His coming death He included also His resurrection:

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day . . . And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry" (Matt. 16:21; 17:23).

"Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:22).

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said" (John 2:19- 22).

In Luke twenty four, a chapter taken up totally with Christ's resurrection and the events flowing out of it, the disciples do not yet believe the total "good news," for they do not believe He has been raised from the dead (Luke 24:11, 25). They are not rejoicing, nor are they evidently aware, yet, of the full significance of what Christ's death has accomplished. In His conversation with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus He reproaches them for not believing all that the prophets have spoken. He specified where their faith fell short by reminding them that the Messiah was not only to suffer but (in resurrection) enter into His glory (vs. 25, 26). Like Paul, later, He referred them to the (Old Testament) Scriptures in this matter. It was when they were convinced that the resurrection had taken place that the message became good news, and brought the assurance and rejoicing that good news brings. How very different was their return to Jerusalem (vs. 32 - 35) from their homeward walk earlier (vs. 14, 17)!

The resurrection message of the twelve apostles in Acts.

The resurrection was a very definite and important part of the message of the twelve in early Acts:

"Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:22).

"Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2).

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33).

A significant passage from the epistle to the Hebrews.

"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

Peter's testimony. We will limit this to two verses. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (1 Pet 1:3 KJV) -- or, as it is in the NASB, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (1 Pet 1:3 NASB).

And the other verse, *"Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God"* (1 Peter 1:21).

Paul's message in Acts

The resurrection of Christ was central to Paul's message in Acts:

"Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18).

"And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter" (Acts 17:32). If belief in the resurrection is not a part of the gospel that saves, and a man may be saved without believing it, why didn't Paul merely omit the resurrection from his message, to avoid their mocking antagonism, and just tell them that Christ died for their sins?

"But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (Acts 25:19).

"And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15).

Paul's message in his epistles.

Paul's epistles are full of the resurrection of Christ as the assurance of our own resurrection (2 Cor. 4:14) and the basis for our position in the heavenlies. If Christ be not risen, then we are still in the tomb with Him rather than in the heavenlies. It is the demonstration of *"the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe"* (Eph. 1:19, 20). Our walk (Rom. 6:4; 7:4) as well as our deliverance from the tyranny of the flesh (Rom. 6:8 - 13) and the Law (Rom. 7:4) are dependent on His resurrection. It is because He is risen, and we are risen with Him, that we are urged to set our affections on things above (Col. 3:1, 2). Much else could be said along this line.

The resurrection is certainly a part of what Paul calls "my gospel" (2 Tim. 2:8). But is it a part of the gospel whereby we must be saved?

One passage seems to settle the matter:

"But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:6 - 10).

That the confession with the mouth is not a work, but the natural outpouring of a heart which has been truly converted, is evident from all the host of Pauline Scripture which tells us salvation is not by works. However, this outpouring has to do specifically with the fact that Christ has been raised from the dead, and it is linked with being saved.

An evaluation.

This matter should not be a source of division among those who know and believe the Word of God, for we do all believe that Christ is risen! Perhaps this issue is as much a matter of theological quibble as anything. We need to think it through together in loving respect for one another and careful attention to the total scriptural content understood, of course, in context.

However, are we to say that men who believe that Christ died for their sins, but do not believe He is risen, are to be saved? Are we to insist that the fact that Christ died for our sins, coupled with the fiction that He is still dead (whether arrived at from our neglect to include the resurrection in our message or a denial of it when it is proclaimed) is good news? When the resurrection was such a vital part of the testimony of both the twelve and of Paul are we to make it any less a vital part of our own preaching? Are we to insist that the resurrection, as a great and miraculous fact accomplished in fulfillment of Old Testament and early New testament Scripture, is to be no more a part of the gospel than the confirming testimony of those who witnessed it? Are we to find fault with those evangelists who say with Paul *"I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, . . . wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved . . . how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures"* (1 Cor. 15:1 - 4)?

Let us fearlessly proclaim a crucified and risen Lord and let the good news do its wonderful work in the hearts of sinful men!

--- William P Heath

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