

# Herald

**ANTIPAS**

*"Antipas, My faithful witness" (Rev 2:13)*

No 7

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## ***THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST***

*Personal, Historical, Physical*

*Nico van der Walt*

### **A BIBLICAL FUNDAMENTAL**

*"He has risen! He is not here," is the triumphant announcement of the angel beside the empty grave of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 16:6). If there is one truth that the New Testament seeks to engrave upon the reader's heart, it is that Christ has risen - personally, physically and historically.*

The resurrection is dealt with at some length in all four Gospels. And in the Acts of the Apostles it is constantly the focal point of their preaching (e.g. Acts 2:29-32; 3:15; 5:30). This is no wonder, because they had been instructed specifically to do so (Luke 24:46-48) and clearly understood it to be of top priority. Thus, the man to take Judas Iscariot's place had to have been one of their company during Jesus Christ's entire ministry - and his task would be to "... become a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:22). It is therefore no surprise to find the resurrection as a recurrent theme in the apostolic epistles, where its role in the doctrine of salvation is carefully worked out. *Without a doubt the apostles witnessed of a personal, physical and historical resurrection - and regarded it, together with the cross and Pentecost, as the essence of the gospel.*

### **MODERNISTIC VIEWS**

In spite of the unmistakable testimony of the New Testament, many contemporary theologians redefine the resurrection of Christ in an attempt to eradicate the supernatural in the Christian faith. According to them He did not rise personally, physically and historically, but merely in the hearts, memories and dedicated lives of the early church - as, for instance, a Verdi 'lives on' in the opera houses of the world. This view is gaining ground in our day. And to the extent that denominations lose the will and the ability to apply doctrinal discipline, it is being openly expounded. The average churchgoer is however hardly aware of it, as these theologians continue to use the same Biblical language - yet redefining the contents of the old well-known words and concepts of the pulpit. But the discerning listener knows that the clues to deception are often only found in hearing what is not being said.

### **WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?**

There are mainly three reasons why the resurrection of Christ - personally, physically and historically - is of vital importance, and why we so preach and believe.

□ *Firstly, it is the irrefutable confirmation of Jesus Christ's personal claims.*

During the days of his humiliation our Lord unashamedly made many astonishing claims. More than once did He say that He was the Son of God and God the Son; that he was the Messiah and the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies; and that He was the Judge of the world.

If these claims were not true, nothing He said could ever be trusted - least of all His promises. In fact, it would be difficult not to consider Him as one deranged.

It is true that His claims were confirmed by many breathtaking signs and wonders. But then He was crucified - and who could help but doubt? Was this the end of one more madman and his delusions of grandeur? Certainly this is what troubled those men on their way to Emmaus: "... *we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel*" (Luke 24:21).

Then on the third day came the greatest, the ultimate sign! This was exactly what the Lord had promised long before (John 2:18-22). His resurrection was the absolute proof of His divine authority and mission. Understanding the significance of this, is what made the men of Emmaus get up and run 12 kilometres back to Jerusalem: "*It is true! The Lord has risen ...*" (Luke 24:34). They understood the implication: *He*

*is exactly who and what He had claimed to be!*

□ *Secondly, it is the unfailing guarantee that Jesus Christ's mediatory work on behalf of sinners was totally accepted by the Father.*

Have my sins really been atoned for? Can I really meet death and all it entails with confidence? The New Testament answer is an emphatic: 'Yes, if you have fled into Christ - then certainly!' Why? Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead!

The Jews waited for centuries for the Messiah, "... *the Christ of God, the Chosen One.*" (Luke 23:35). In spite of their initial excitement about Jesus of Nazareth, the people gradually became disillusioned, because He did not bring about a new political dispensation as they were hoping He would. The crucifixion, the sign of the curse of God (Deut 21:23), dealt their expectations the final blow. And yet, as they were mocking Him, daring Him to come down from the cross, they were probably still hoping for some dramatic display of godly power ... but He died!

*The resurrection, however, is God's act of election.* By this act the Father proclaimed that the Son had successfully completed what He had been sent to do (Acts 17:31; Rom 1:4). All the requirements of justice have been met; those entrusted to the Son have been irreversibly redeemed!

*Without the resurrection we have no assurance that the work of Christ carries any weight with God.*

□ *Thirdly, the resurrection was Jesus Christ's entry into the next, absolutely essential phase of His work of redemption.*

Whereas the legal basis for the salvation of believers was finalised on the cross, their redemption will only reach culmination with their glorification. It is with the latter aspect that Christ in His glorified state is still concerned.

How does He accomplish what is still to be done here on earth? He does so through the operation of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:23-36). Of this there is ample evidence in the New Testament.

Christ is occupied with this work in all his capacities: As *Prophet*, He is Lord of the harvest who sends out workers into the fields to proclaim the Gospel to all the nations (Matt 9:36-38). As *Priest*, He intercedes with the Father for all believers, in order to save them 'into completeness' (lit. translation of the Greek text in Heb 7:25; see also Isa 53:12; Rom 8:34; Heb 9:24; 1John 2:1). As *King*, He subjects His enemies, and will eventually judge them (Acts 17:30-31; 1Cor 15:24-28; Eph 1:20-23).

*Every Christian knows that the Lord had to die so that sinners could be saved, but how many know that it*

*was equally essential that He should live again!*

## **WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION IT WAS ALL IN VAIN**

Everything hinges on the question: *did Christ truly rise - personally, physically and historically?*

In 1Cor 15:12-19 Paul sets out what the implications would have been, had Christ not risen from the dead. In the light of the above, his shattering conclusions are unassailable. If Christ were still in the grave:

*The preaching of the apostles was without content and therefore useless* (v.14). Then converts believed a lie and trusted a dead redeemer. Moreover, all preaching ever since has been futile and misleading.

*Our faith is useless* (v. 14). The hand I stretched out to take hold of Christ found only emptiness; the anchor I experience in Him, is an illusion; the rebirth and justification which I claim, is a sham; the glorification I expect, a mere mirage, my cross-bearing and self-denial a waste of time!

*We are still slaves of sin* (v.17). Eph 2:4-10 may be my boast, but verses 1-3 are in truth my state - dead spiritually, a slave to my flesh, the world and the devil, and under the

wrath of God. I may as well have believed in Plato or Ghandi!

*The apostles were false witnesses* (v. 15). Christ's resurrection was, after all, the heart of their preaching. If they were wrong, everything collapses, and the New Testament is the biggest hoax of all time!

*Those of whom we believe that they have died in Christ, are lost* (v. 18). Why? Because Christ's atoning sacrifice on behalf of sinners was never accepted by the Father!

"Wait", you say, "we still have His inspiring teaching and excellent example! Think of the loss if there were no Sermon on the Mount! Jesus Christ may not be alive in a literal sense, but He certainly lives on in our memories and noble deeds!"

Such an argument holds no consolation for Paul. His response is simply, *"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men"* (v. 19). Why so? To him (and remember, he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) the advantage of having a better world *is totally eclipsed by his all-absorbing need for redemption, deliverance from God's wrath and the inheritance of eternal bliss!*

The apostle can come to one conclusion only: *"If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'"* One thing is certain: to Paul Christianity was not about a better world, but about a blessed hereafter!

## THE HISTORICITY OF THE RESURRECTION

It is therefore of vital importance to know whether Jesus Christ actually rose again - personally, physically, historically. How are we to verify this, how shall we know?

There is irrefutable historical proof. An historical fact can normally be verified in any one of four ways: the evidence of eyewitnesses; the existence of institutional bodies formed as result of the fact; customs and traditions, the origins of which can be traced to it; and physical evidence, such as ruins and the suchlike. There is more than enough evidence under the first three of the above categories to confirm the historicity of the resurrection. The fact that no relics remain is just as well, as it would certainly have led to idolatry (as in the case of the bronze snake, Num 21:9; 2Kings 18:4).

There were many *eyewitnesses*. This is the point made by Paul in 1Cor 15:5-8. To bear witness to the resurrection was after all the focal point of the apostles' calling. Moreover, many others also saw the risen Christ: as many as five hundred of the believers at once (1Cor 15:6). Lesser evidence would surely satisfy any judge! The apostles are naturally no longer with us. But their writings are! And a diversity of documents from various writers, mutually confirming one another, serve to

establish an historical fact.

The church has been in existence as an *institutional establishment* (with the resurrection as one of the central pillars of faith) for twenty centuries - growing, indestructible and thriving under persecution.

From the beginning the Lord's Supper, Baptism and the Sabbath have been *universal customs* of the church everywhere - and in each of these, the resurrection is commemorated.

## PERSONAL ENCOUNTER

This is all very well, but intellectual conviction is not enough on its own. We need inner conviction. There is after all, a Thomas in each of us. In order to really believe, someone has to have had a personal encounter with the risen Lord.

God in His goodness meets this need. This is what Jesus promises in John 20:29 when He says that people will believe, like Thomas, but without having seen. And after the resurrection people experienced exactly this. That is why Peter writes: *"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."* (1Pet 1:8-9).

In a mysterious manner the Holy Spirit works through the Word to

impart the gift of faith and the inner conviction that Christ is everything that the Gospel says He is - also that He rose from the dead. And who can deny that millions down through the ages, of every class and from practically every society have had this experience, with life-transforming implications? There are a thousand things in life that we can neither see nor explain, but no-one questions them as empiric fact. Who can for instance, argue with gravity?

## HOW DOES THE RESURRECTION AFFECT MY LIFE HERE AND NOW?

□ Modernistic theologians say that Jesus rose again only in the memories of the early church. There was indeed a time when the disciples of Jesus only had memories of him, nothing more. This lasted for three days - between the cross and the resurrection. It is significant that during those three days they were the most disheartened and visionless people in all Palestine. But the moment they realised that death could not hold Him, all that changed. They were impelled thenceforth to live implacably motivated lives - the most dynamic and influential in the history of mankind.

*Let it be noted that memories could not console them - only the certain knowledge that He had risen!*

This is precisely the reason why

churches that lack an active awareness of a risen, ruling, returning King lose vitality. Strip a church of its blessed hope (Tit 2:13) and it immediately becomes lethargic and unfocused. Death and fossilization await it. The devastating effect of the theology of unbelief is there for all to see!

❑ The resurrection is however, not merely of, shall we say, emotionally inspiring value. No! There is much more to it than that. The apostle says in Phil 3:10 that "to know the power of Christ's resurrection" is the ambition of his life. Scripture teaches that there is an unbreakable bond between the resurrection of the Lord (and accordingly the risen Lord) and my spiritual life here and now. *The risen Christ reigns in them that belong to Him - and the effect is drastic, conscious and perceivable!*

What are the effects? Paul develops this theme in Rom 6 and Eph 1:19-2:10.

In Rom 6 he says that the believer has not only been crucified with Christ, but he has also risen with Him; which is only another way of saying that the risen Christ works a 'resurrection life' in the believer. The consequence of this is that the believer can in no way persist in sinning, but lives a new life (v 4) - one in which he rules over sin.

## WHAT DOES THE

## RESURRECTION MEAN TO ME IN THE HEREAFTER?

❑ *If the resurrection of Christ is the focus of my faith and if I experience the power of it in my life, then I have every reason to be sure of my own future resurrection and immortality!*

According to 2Tim 1:10 Christ, through His resurrection, destroyed death and brought to light life and immortality. And 1Cor 15:20-23 assures us that there is an unbreakable bond between His resurrection and that of all who are in Him. See also Rom 8:11.

His resurrection and ours are merely two phases of the same process - the perfection of God's new humanity. He is the Firstborn, and nothing can prevent His church from following Him in due course!

Somewhere C.S. Lewis says something to this effect: *"By His resurrection Christ forced open a door locked since the death of the first man. He fought the King of Death and was victorious - and since then, everything is different."*

❑ *If the resurrection of Christ is the focus of my faith and if I experience the power of it in my life, then I have every reason to be sure that the Father will accept me with the same acceptance with which He accepted the Son.*

All will rise and live forever (John 5:28-29), but all will not be

accepted. For those who are in Christ however, there will be no condemnation, but glorious, loving acceptance!

In Rom 8:31-34 Paul, as it were, challenges the whole world to prove Saul, the murderer, guilty. Whence his confidence? He bases it on the fact of God's redeeming initiative and Christ's atonement. 'Who', he argues, 'can condemn me while I have such a Mediator? I have fled into Him; I hide in Him. By faith I am united to Him. What is true of Him, is true of me. Who would find me guilty, must first find Him guilty. No, I do not fear that God will cast me off! He accepted the sacrifice of my Substitute, sealing His acceptance by raising Him from the dead - He will accept me too!'

Is the resurrection of Christ the bedrock of your faith? Is it as important to you as the cross? Is it the cornerstone of your blessed hope?



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**PUBLISHERS**

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P.O. Box 263435, Three Rivers, 1935, South Africa

Tel: +27 (0)16 423 3639 or +27 (0)16 423 3391; Fax: +27 (0)16 454  
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**Antipas Reformed Baptist Church** (in the Vaal Triangle, South Africa)

P.O. Box 263435, Three Rivers, 1935, South Africa

Tel: +27 (0)16 423 3639; Fax: +27 (0)16 454 0387

and

**Antipas Reformed Baptist Church** (in Pretoria, South Africa)

P.O. Box 12371, Queenswood, 0121, South Africa

Tel & Fax: +27 (0)12 329 3012

Nico van der Walt is a congregational pastor and teacher in Pretoria. He subscribes to the historically respected and internationally recognised 1689 Baptist Confession - like most Reformed Baptists worldwide.

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