

Foundations 6: I Believe in Jesus Christ, ...The Third Day He Rose from the Dead

February 20, 2022 Sermon by Stephen Portner

Matthew 28:1-10

28:1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

We are continuing our series on the twelve statements of the Apostles' Creed, which has formed in summary for almost 2000 years the foundation of why we Christians believe what we believe. Each statement is based on Scripture. This week we will focus on the statement, **I believe in Jesus Christ, ...The Third Day He Rose from the Dead.**

The story of that first Easter Day in the gospels can be a little confusing, because “notoriously the accounts of Easter do not fit snugly together. How many women went to the tomb, and how many angels or men did they meet there? Did the disciples meet Jesus in Jerusalem or Galilee or both? And so on. ...surface discrepancies do not mean that nothing happened. Indeed, they are a reasonable indication that something remarkable happened, so remarkable that the first witnesses were bewildered into telling different stories about it.”¹

Rising again from the dead is truly miraculous. It is something only God can do, but rising from the dead was something that had been done before. However, the accounts

¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, p. 53.

of rising from the dead elsewhere in Scripture refer to “resuscitation;” that is, the people who were raised from the dead would eventually die again. There are at least eight different instances in the Bible of resuscitation as a means of rising again from the dead.

1 Kings 17:17-22 – Zarephath widow’s son
2 Kings 4:30-37 – son of a Shunammite woman
2 Kings 13:21 – the bones of a dead man
John 11:38-44 – Lazarus
Acts 20:7-12 – widow of Nain’s son
Matt. 8:28-43 – Jairus’ daughter
Acts 20:7-12 – Eutychus
Acts 9:36-42 – Dorcas

In all these instances, the people were brought again from the dead but the time would come when they would die again. There has only been one who has been raised from the dead, who has been “resurrected”: Jesus the Christ. Resurrection meant rising bodily from the dead and never being subject to death or suffering again. Paul the apostle declares that “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). In other words, Jesus is the prototype of what it means to be resurrected. Those of us who believe in Jesus will likewise be resurrected one day.

According to the Jewish understanding of life after death, we will be in an intermediate place called paradise or Sheol, until all those who believe in the Lord will be raised through resurrection in the last day. This is why it was so confusing to the disciples when Jesus talked about rising again from the dead. They believed in the resurrection, but they believed that it would not occur until the end of time, in the Day of the Resurrection. Jesus would not wait until that day to come. He was resurrected on the third day after his death. He was the first, and the only one so far, to be resurrected from the dead.

Resurrection is not just a rising again of a person’s soul, as is commonly believed today. Resurrection is the rising again of one’s body as well. When Jesus rose from the dead, it was his body that was renewed as well. This is why the Apostle’s Creed refers to “the resurrection of the body.”

When Jesus was resurrected, it wasn’t just his ghost or a spirit or a disembodied soul that was wandering about. It was an actual body, although be it a body that could do some amazing things. Jesus could appear and then disappear at will, even behind locked doors. He could make it so that his body was recognizable and at other times even his closest friends confused him for a gardener or a stranger. He could show people how he died, even offering a disciple to put his fingers in the nail holes and the

wound in his side, yet he felt no pain. Jesus could even eat broiled fish with his resurrection body. Jesus had a body unlike any body we have ever known, and we will be given a body just like it in the resurrection.

Timothy Tennent wrote that there are three things that we learn about the resurrection.

1) First, the resurrection is the public demonstration of God’s victory over sin, death, and hell.

The resurrection of Christ from the dead is central to our faith and to the proclamation of the church. There are those who would say that it is just a metaphor and that it really didn’t happen. But this was of such tremendous import and was so life-changing for the disciples, that they were willing to lay down their lives in order to share it with other people.

Sin placed Jesus on the cross. It was his death that destroyed the power of sin. It was his rising from the dead that proved that death and sin and hell no longer has power over him, and by extension, no power over those who follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and who will be resurrected in the last day as well.

2) Second, the resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee or “firstfruits” of our future bodily resurrection.

God saves more than our souls. God saves all of us – our body, our mind, our soul, and our spirit. And God is not just going to save us, and redeem our bodies; God is going to save the whole cosmos. He will create a new heaven and a new earth. He was the first to be resurrected and those who believe in him will be resurrected too.

3) Third, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is what makes Christianity unique among all world religions.

To *believe* in Jesus does not simply mean to believe that he lived, or to believe that he was a towering ethical teacher, or even to believe that he was a worker of miracles. Most Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists believe all those things about Jesus. The distinctive of the Christian faith is that we believe that Jesus is the risen Lord. ...Buddha is in the grave. Mohammad is in the grave. Confucius is in the grave. Jesus is the risen Lord.²

I would like to add a fourth thing that the resurrection show us:

² Timothy Tennent, Foundations of the Christian Faith, pp. 31, 33.

4) Fourth, the resurrection shows us that we not only have hope in the future after we die, but that it gives us hope for living here and now.

Hope is what you get when you suddenly realize that a different worldview is possible, a worldview in which the rich, the powerful, and the unscrupulous do not after all have the last word. The same worldview shift that is demanded by the resurrection of Jesus is the shift that will enable us to transform the world.³

It is that hope which will be the focus of our last sermon in this series about the statement in the Apostles' Creed regarding our belief in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. So stay tuned.

³ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*. P. 75.