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# Title: What is the Resurrection?

Series: Speaking of God

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## Introduction

### What Is the Resurrection?

If Jesus work of salvation for us had ended with his life and death, our faith is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14-19). Even the enemy knows this. William Lane Craig, the prolific Christian apologist, has said that nothing in the Bible has received more critical and skeptical scrutiny than Christ's resurrection. If one were to take account of all of the various heresies and denials throughout Christian history, one will find that the resurrection is at the heart of most controversies. It is also no coincidence that the oldest of the resurrection denials is still among the most prevalent of denials: the disciples stole the body. Today, it is also quite popular to suggest that later followers of Jesus made up the resurrection story hundreds of years later, because for them, he was alive. Episcopal bishop and heretic John Spong is among the most notable propagating this falsehood. Of all of the miracles recorded in the Bible, nothing is bigger than the resurrection. Attack the resurrection, and you've attacked Christianity.

The reason that many, if not most, cannot and will not embrace the resurrection is quite simple: embrace the historical fact of the resurrection and one immediately must embrace all of the other truth claims of Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven a victorious, conquering king. That resurrection has far reaching effect. It is the reason we are sitting here, not just because we meet here because this is the first day of the week and the first day of the week is the day that Jesus rose from the dead. We sit here because we have been regenerated, an act of salvation that gets its power from the resurrection itself. Regeneration is the resurrection in our hearts. We are a new creation. We have the new birth. All of these biblical words and thoughts flow out of the resurrection.

Francis Turretin, a French Puritan, said this: "The work of our conversion is a creation, resurrection, regeneration and the production of a new heart by which God not only gently persuades but powerfully effects in us to will and to do. As however, man can contribute nothing to his creation, resurrection and regeneration, so neither can the sinner contribute anything to his conversion. He ought rather to ascribe it wholly to the grace of God." All roads, whether it is the new birth, the new heart, new life, or new creation, lead to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## The Resurrection in the New Testament

The resurrection is a fact (Matthew 28:6; John 21:14; Acts 2:24,32; 1 Cor. 15:4) . It's surprising how important it is to make this statement in our own evangelicalism. The resurrection is as much a historical fact as George Washington being the first president of the United States. It is too common for one to hear the resurrection being spoken of in terms of "faith". The importance of the resurrection \*does not\* hinge on our faith in the resurrection. The resurrection does not come from our faith. Paul does not say that if Christ is not raised from the dead our faith is vain because he believes our faith gives validity or legitimacy to the resurrection. For Paul, the opposite is true. The resurrection is the external source and life sustenance for our subjective faith. The resurrection is an objective historical event that exists external to my own experience. In fact, not only is it an event that is outside of me, it is an event that makes demands on me. The resurrection CAUSES faith, not vice versa.

All four gospels contain accounts of Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-21:25).

Throughout the book of Acts, the apostles continually speak of Jesus' resurrection, encouraging people to trust in him as the one who is alive and reigning in heaven.

The rest of the New Testament depends entirely on the assumption that Jesus is a living, reigning Savior who is the head of the newly formed church.

## Details of the resurrection

When Jesus rose from the dead, he began a new kind of human life in which he had a perfect body that was no longer subject to weakness, aging, death, or decay.

When Jesus rose from the dead, he had a body that would live eternally, for Jesus had "put on the imperishable"; he had "put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53).

Jesus' new body was a physical body (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:30,39; John 20:27; Acts 10:41).

## Results of the Resurrection

In the resurrection, Christ earned for us a new future life that is like his own (1 Peter 1:3).

Although our bodies are not yet like his new body, our souls have already been made alive with new resurrection power. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 45-49: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ... The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are

of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

This is the language of Genesis. This is the connection between the new creation and the original creation. And Christ’s resurrection is THE event on which the new creation is grounded. All of the new creation flows from the resurrection event. The resurrection is the incursion of a new order into the present order of reality. Time and space are no longer the same because what was and is eternal has beaten back death. The resurrection represents that moment in time when, in the Chronicles of Narnia, C. S. Lewis says, time began working backwards.

Regeneration, then, is the resurrection in miniature. The resurrection is a real event in time and space. And that real time event has everything to do with us being here right now as a regenerated people. Just as the resurrection is the beginning of the New Creation, regeneration is the dawning of a new day.

And regeneration is our participation in the Resurrection itself. Our regeneration places us in the tomb with Christ himself. When Christ died, we died. When the Spirit breathed life into Christ, the Spirit breathed life into us. When Christ walked out of the tomb, we walked out of the tomb.

When were we born again? It’s an interesting question that we tend to reduce to some kind of decision that we make in our lives. Is being born again tied merely to some kind of decision that we make? Of course not. But being born again isn’t merely an experience in our life time. What has happened in the past, unbeknownst to us, has guaranteed our new birth. A real event in time and space moving forward more almost 2000 years CAUSES our new birth. Our regeneration is our participation in the resurrection. Which is why Paul says when Christ died, I died. When Christ arose, I arose (Romans 6:4, 7:4; Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 2:12, 3:1).

This resurrection power helps us live the lives we were made to live (Acts 1:8; Romans 6:11,14; Colossians 3:1-17). Our participation in the resurrection results in us putting to death those things which were of the old creation and putting on the things of the new creation. The resurrection was a real event in real time and space... and it has a direct effect on our life here... in fact, the resurrection \*effects\* this life we have in the body. As we do the put off/put on that we often talk about here at the chapel, keep in mind that this isn’t merely about behavior change. It is first and foremost about the new creation and our life together with the resurrected Christ. Eternal life isn’t just out there at the end of our existence. Eternal life has begun in the here and now with the resurrection and our new lives with each in putting off and putting on... in fact, the context of the wives submitting, the husbands loving, the servants submitting and the masters honoring in the rest of Colossians chapter 3 is about our resurrection lives... this is what eternal life looks like in the here and now.

One other question: did Christ walk out of that tomb before He had new life? The answer as to whether or not regeneration precedes faith is found in Christ’s resurrection. We cannot separate what happens to us in salvation from the historical event itself. Salvation isn’t a concept. It’s an event in real time and real space. We cannot put a wedge between our own regeneration and the resurrection because God treats the two as one and

the same. Our salvation is an event in real time and real space that spans almost two thousand years.

Jesus' resurrection ensures our right standing before God (Romans 4:25; Heb. 1:3).

Jesus' resurrection means we will also experience a resurrection of our own (Romans 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14). The resurrection not only guarantees our regeneration now, but also guarantees that someday, our bodies will match the new creation of our hearts.

In Jesus' resurrection we see a picture of what is to come for us (1 Cor. 15:20,51,53).

## Jesus' Ascension

This may be the most neglected teaching in all of scripture... certainly in the New Testament. There is a reason that the early church made it a part of the annual church calendar by celebrating an Ascension Sunday. They understood the importance of the ascension in terms of all of human history. When we think of Christ's life, we normally think of it in terms of His birth, His death and His resurrection. And when we think of the ascension, more often than not, it is couched in terms of what it meant to the disciples and what it means for us. We think of Christ's absence as being the significance of the ascension. And we talk of Christ's advocacy for us as his primary function in the heavenlies during our lifetimes. This almost seems like a self-serving understanding of Christ returning to the Father and residing in the heavenlies. This may be another byproduct of our self-esteem evangelicalism.

But this is not the primary import of Christ's ascension. We have forgotten that Christ's ascension to His throne in heaven finished His work. Without the ascension, the resurrection would be incomplete. And while we have days on the calendar to remember his birth, death, and resurrection, we neglect to remember the culmination of all that he did. Christ's physical life continues forever in heaven.

When Jesus left the earth, he left for a specific place: heaven (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:3, 9-11). Acts 1 gives the account: "<sup>1</sup>In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, **“you heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”** <sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He said to them, **“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** <sup>9</sup>And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, <sup>11</sup>and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand

looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Christ descended in his incarnation. Christ ascended in His exaltation. When Christ came down, the angels sang from the heavens. When Christ went up, the angels spoke from the ground.

The ascension was an act of the Triune God. Jesus ascended because he had triumphed over death, Satan, and sin and had won salvation for His people. The obedient Christ goes before the Father to present himself victorious and to take His place on His rightful throne. The Spirit takes Christ to the Father... Christ's exalted throne was not seized or demanded. Christ enters the Father's presence of his own will. The Father rewards the Son with exaltation. God has highly exalted Christ and has given Him a name above every name... a name to which all men will bow.

The ascension involved the Shekinah glory – The cloud that takes Christ up shows us the glorification of Christ in the very shekinah glory that had been over the tabernacle and temple in Jerusalem. It's the same shekinah glory that was present with Christ at His Transfiguration, witnessed by Peter, James, and John. The cloud reminds us that the shekinah cloud prefigured Christ's triumph and ascension. As the glory and presence of the Lord rested on the mercy seat-throne in the Holy of Holies, Christ entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple of heaven to sit on His throne and intercede for His people. The ascension to the heavenly temple implies the enthronement of God.

Jesus went to heaven in his ascension. Heaven has a number of different understandings in the Bible, all of which are true at the same time. Heaven is the dwelling of God in His Creation. It is the place where God meets His Creatures. It is also the place where God resides in His Temple, the Sanctuary for His glory. And heaven is where Jesus is ruling and reigning. Once in heaven, Jesus was “exalted at the right hand of God” (Acts 2:33; 1 Cor. 15:25; Phil. 2:9; Rev. 5:12).

The ascension does have some benefits to us in real time and space, other than the comfort provided by the fact that Christ sits on his throne ruling and reigning over His church and making all things new. The ascension inaugurated Christ's heavenly intercession for His people. The ascension also facilitated Christ's giving of The Holy Spirit to His people, through whom all of the benefits of Christ's life and death are applied to His people. In his ascending to the throne and his giving of the Spirit, a new age has dawned. The ascension gave rise to the churches existence on earth as the new creation.

Christ's life provides a pattern for ours (Colossians 3:1-4). And while we're thinking about this thought, we should reiterate that Jesus has a physical body in heaven. Jesus has the same kind of resurrected body that He plans to give us (Philippians 3:21). Jesus is the continuing Incarnation. Jesus' body belongs to the New Creation (Romans 8:20,21). The ascension ties the finite with the infinite.

Christ's ascension forces us to relate to Christ through the Jesus of history in the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. Rather than dealing with Christ as a transcendent, we must see Jesus as THE WORD through His Word. This is why the ascended Christ in Revelation 5 is the Lamb slain. The historical Jesus who invaded our time and our space is the one with whom we have to do.

Christ's ascension lets us know where we will eventually go (Romans 8:19). In the incarnation, God came into our space. In the ascension, man goes into God's space. Or more importantly, man "returns" to God's space. At what point in our humanity was man in God's space? The garden. Man's communion with God was a window to heaven itself. Christ has made this again a reality in the Ascension... a guarantee that at some point, we will be again in God's space physically. In the resurrection AND ascension, Christ became the firstfruits of his people (Acts 2: 33; 1 Cor. 15:20ff). Just as the ascension implies the exaltation of Christ, so too our eventual ascension to Christ to be with him forever implies the vindication of Christ's work in our exaltation.