

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 8: THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Lesson 26

The Theological Significance of the Resurrection

What the Resurrection Proves, Secures, and Guarantees

The Father's 'Amen' to the Son's 'It Is Finished'

Key Texts: Romans 1:4; Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:12–28; Ephesians 1:19–21; Philippians 3:10

“But Now Christ Has Been Raised from the Dead, the First Fruits of Those Who Are Asleep”

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

Lesson 25 established the historical factuality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ: the empty tomb, the post-resurrection appearances, the early creedal witness of 1 Corinthians 15, and the failure of every naturalistic alternative. That historical foundation is indispensable, and it is the necessary presupposition of everything this lesson will examine. But the fact of the resurrection, the empty tomb, the risen appearances, does not interpret itself. The question that the historical fact demands is the theological question: What does it mean? What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ prove? What does it secure? What does it guarantee? These are not questions about whether the resurrection happened but about why it matters that it happened, about the comprehensive weight of theological significance that the New Testament places upon this one historical event.

The New Testament's answer to the question of the resurrection's significance is so comprehensive that no single lesson can exhaust it. But the major themes can be identified and examined with the precision that the texts demand. The resurrection of Jesus Christ: vindicates His identity as the Son of God (Romans 1:4); confirms the acceptance of His atoning sacrifice by the Father (Romans 4:25, the Father's 'Amen' to *tetelestai*); defeats death and establishes the new-creation order (1 Corinthians 15:20–26); secures the justification of all those for whom Christ died (Romans 4:25); grounds the believer's future bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20–23); inaugurates the new creation with Christ as its firstborn (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5); and establishes Christ's universal cosmic lordship (Ephesians 1:19–21). Together these themes constitute the most comprehensive theological significance of any single event in the history of the universe.

This lesson works through these major themes in six sections, moving from the resurrection as vindication (what it declares about the Person) through the resurrection as confirmation of the atonement (what it declares about the completed work) to the resurrection as the ground of justification (what it secures for the believer) to the resurrection as the defeat of death (what it conquers) to the resurrection as the inauguration of the new creation (what it begins) to the resurrection as the ground of the believer's hope for bodily resurrection (what it guarantees for the future). The goal throughout is not theological abstraction but pastoral depth: the congregation that understands the theological significance of the resurrection will not merely affirm it as a historical fact and a theological requirement but will receive it as the most personally transforming and the most doxologically demanding reality in the gospel.

I. THE RESURRECTION AS VINDICATION: WHO CHRIST IS DECLARED TO BE

Romans 1:4, The Son of God in Power, Designated by the Resurrection from the Dead

A. Romans 1:4 and the Declaration of Sonship

The first and most foundational theological significance of the resurrection is its function as the divine vindication of Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Romans 1:3–4 provides the most precise formulation: “concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord” (NASB 1995). The key phrase is “declared the Son of God with power” (ἀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει, *horisthentos huiou theou en dunamei*), the word ἀρισθέντος (*horisthentos*) means ‘designated,’ ‘appointed,’ or ‘declared’ rather than ‘made’ or ‘constituted.’ The resurrection does not make Jesus the Son of God in a sense He was not before; it publicly declares and demonstrates the Sonship that He possessed eternally.

The contrast Paul draws between the two stages of the Son's existence is between the mode of the Son's manifestation in weakness (born of the seed of David according to the flesh, the full humiliation of the incarnation, the voluntary limitation of the kenosis) and the mode of the Son's manifestation in power (designated Son of God with power by the resurrection). The resurrection is the public, cosmic, irrefutable demonstration that the one who was born of a woman, lived under the law, suffered and died under Roman execution, was not merely a remarkable human teacher but the eternal Son of God whose power over death is the definitive proof of His divine identity. If Jesus had remained in the tomb, the claims He made for Himself during His ministry, ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ (John 11:25), ‘Before Abraham was born, I am’ (John 8:58), ‘I and the Father are one’ (John 10:30), would be the claims of a dead man, however impressive. The resurrection is the divine confirmation that these claims are true.

B. The Resurrection as the Answer to the Charges of the Crucifixion

The resurrection also functions as the divine reversal of the verdict of the crucifixion. Jesus was crucified as a condemned criminal, under the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13: ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’), having been declared a blasphemer by the Sanhedrin and a political threat by Pilate. From the perspective of every human tribunal that evaluated His case, the crucifixion was the definitive verdict: guilty, condemned, accursed. The resurrection is the divine tribunal's reversal of every human verdict: the one whom the Sanhedrin condemned as a blasphemer is vindicated by God as His Son; the one whom Pilate condemned as a political criminal is declared Lord by the divine decree of the resurrection; the one who died under the curse of the law has risen beyond the reach of the law's curse, demonstrating that the bearing of the curse was not defeat but the deliberate, completed, victorious execution of the redemptive purpose.

II. THE RESURRECTION AS CONFIRMATION: THE FATHER'S AMEN TO TETELESTAI

Romans 4:25, Raised Because of Our Justification

A. The Logic of Romans 4:25

The second theological significance of the resurrection is its function as the divine confirmation of the completed atoning work. The relationship between the cross and the resurrection is not merely sequential (first one, then the other) but logical and theological: the resurrection is the Father's declaration that the Son's atoning sacrifice has been accepted, that the penalty has been fully paid, and that the redemptive work declared finished in *tetelestai* has been accepted by the divine justice it was designed to satisfy. Romans 4:25 provides the clearest formulation: "He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (NASB 1995). The verse is structurally parallel and theologically precise: the death is 'because of our transgressions' (διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν, *dia ta parapōmata hēmōn*) and the resurrection is 'because of our justification' (διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν, *dia tēn dikaiōsin hēmōn*).

The preposition *διά* (*dia*) with the accusative can express either cause ('because of') or purpose ('for the sake of'). The most theologically illuminating reading of the parallel takes the resurrection as both caused by and purposed for our justification: Christ was raised because the atoning work that accomplishes our justification has been completed and accepted by the Father, and His resurrection is itself the means by which the benefits of the justification are applied and certified. The resurrection is not merely the sequel to the atonement; it is the divine validation of the atonement. The cross could be seen, from the perspective of the first century, as a failed messianic movement ending in humiliating execution. The resurrection removes that interpretation permanently: the cross was not the failure of the messianic mission but its triumphant completion, validated by the God who raised the crucified Messiah from the dead.

B. The Resurrection as Priestly Acceptance

The Old Testament analogy illuminates the theological logic of Romans 4:25 with particular clarity. In the Levitical sacrificial system, the offering of the sacrifice was not the end of the atoning act; the atonement was complete only when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place and presented the blood of the sacrifice before the divine presence. The priest's emergence from the Holy of Holies alive was the sign that the sacrifice had been accepted and the atonement accomplished. The resurrection of Christ is the antitype of this high-priestly emergence: the one who offered Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice enters the divine presence through the resurrection and ascension, presenting His own blood (Hebrews 9:12: 'through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption', NASB 1995), and the Father's acceptance of the offering is declared in the

resurrection itself. The resurrection is the high priest's emergence from the Most Holy Place: the sacrifice has been accepted, the atonement is complete, and the redemption is eternal.

*"He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification." |
"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep."*

ROMANS 4:25; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20, NASB 1995

III. THE RESURRECTION AND JUSTIFICATION: THE LEGAL GROUND OF THE BELIEVER'S ACCEPTANCE

The Living Christ as the Present Ground of the Justified Sinner's Standing Before God

A. The Resurrection and the Continuing Validity of the Justifying Work

The resurrection's connection to the believer's justification is not merely historical (the cross accomplished it) but present and ongoing. Romans 5:10 makes this explicit: "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (NASB 1995). The reconciliation was accomplished through the death; the ongoing salvation, the continuing application and the final completion of the salvific work, is secured by His life. The risen, living Christ is the present guarantee of the believer's standing before God: not merely the historical cross but the living Mediator who presents the completed cross continually before the Father as the ground of the believer's acceptance.

Romans 8:34 draws the explicit connection between the resurrection and the continuing advocacy that secures the believer's justification: "who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (NASB 1995). The ground of the believer's security against condemnation is not merely the past event of the cross (though that is foundational) but the present reality of the risen Christ at the right hand of the Father, interceding on the basis of the completed atonement. The resurrection is what makes the intercession possible: the one who intercedes must be alive, and He lives, having been raised from the dead, never to die again, to make intercession forever (Hebrews 7:25).

B. The Resurrection as the Ground of Assurance

The resurrection grounds the believer's assurance of justification in a way that the cross alone cannot. The cross establishes the objective fact of the atonement; the resurrection establishes the permanent validity of the atonement and the living presence of the Mediator who continues to apply its benefits. The believer who doubts their justification, who wonders whether the penalty has really been paid and whether their standing before God is truly secure, is directed not merely to the historical cross but to the risen, living, interceding Christ. The one who justified you by His death continues to

sustain your justification by His life. The resurrection is the guarantee that tetelestai is not the declaration of a dead Redeemer but the permanently valid declaration of the living Lord who rose from the dead and who ever lives to make intercession for those He redeemed.

IV. THE RESURRECTION AS THE DEFEAT OF DEATH

1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 54–57, Death Is Swallowed Up in Victory

A. Death as the Last Enemy

The fourth theological significance of the resurrection is its function as the decisive defeat of death, the last and the most comprehensive enemy of the human creature. 1 Corinthians 15:26 identifies death with stark precision: “The last enemy that will be abolished is death” (NASB 1995). Death is not merely a biological event; it is a theological reality, the consequence of sin (Romans 5:12: ‘through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin’, NASB 1995), the sign of sin’s dominion over the human creature, and the ultimate expression of the divine judgment against human rebellion. Every human being who has ever lived has died or will die; death is the universal horizon of all human existence. It is the enemy that no human power, wisdom, or virtue can defeat. Only the resurrection of Jesus Christ confronts death on its own terms and defeats it definitively.

1 Corinthians 15:54–57 provides the doxological climax of Paul’s resurrection argument, citing Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 to declare the death of death in the death of Christ and the resurrection: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (NASB 1995). The taunting address to death, ‘Where is your victory? Where is your sting?’, is only possible because the resurrection has made the question answerable: death’s victory has been swallowed up, its sting has been removed, and the victory belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ who rose from the dead. The resurrection is not merely the survival of death but its conquest: Christ did not escape death but entered it, defeated it from within, and emerged from it in the transforming power of the resurrection life.

B. The Mechanism of the Defeat

How does the resurrection defeat death? Hebrews 2:14–15 provides the theological explanation: “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (NASB 1995). The mechanism is paradoxical: Christ defeats death by dying. The incarnate Son takes on the flesh and blood of those who were subject to death, submits to death voluntarily, and in so doing ‘renders

powerless' (καταργήση, katargēsēi, 'to render idle,' 'to nullify,' 'to abolish') the one who held the power of death. Death's power over the human creature was rooted in sin's legal claim: the sinner's guilt gave death its right over the sinner. The cross removes the legal claim by bearing the penalty; the resurrection demonstrates that the claim has been permanently removed by raising the Substitute from the death He willingly entered. Death can no longer hold those for whom Christ bore its sting, because the sting has been removed at the cross and the removal has been demonstrated in the resurrection.

V. THE RESURRECTION AS THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW CREATION

First Fruits, Firstborn from the Dead, The Age to Come Has Broken Into the Present Age

A. The First Fruits Metaphor

The fifth theological significance of the resurrection is its function as the inauguration of the new creation, the beginning of the age to come breaking into the present age, the first decisive incursion of the eschatological reality into the time-bound, death-bound world of the present order. 1 Corinthians 15:20 provides the decisive image: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep" (NASB 1995). The image of 'first fruits' (ἀπαρχή, aparchē) is drawn from the Old Testament agricultural practice of offering the first portion of the harvest to God as a pledge and a guarantee of the full harvest to follow. The first fruits and the full harvest are the same crop; the first fruits are not different in kind from what follows but are the beginning of the same thing, the pledge that the rest will come.

The risen Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection harvest: His resurrection is not different in kind from the resurrection of believers that will follow but is the beginning of the same resurrection reality, the pledge that the full harvest of the general resurrection will certainly come. He has not risen so that He alone may enjoy the resurrection life; He has risen as the representative of the many who will follow. The resurrection of Christ is therefore not merely His personal victory over death but the inauguration of the eschatological resurrection that will encompass all who are in Him. The new creation has begun in the body of the risen Christ; and the age that began in the garden tomb on the first day of the week will be completed when every one of His people shares the resurrection life He already possesses.

B. Firstborn from the Dead and the New Creation

Colossians 1:18 adds the 'firstborn' title to the resurrection imagery: Christ is 'the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything' (NASB 1995). The firstborn

metaphor (from the Old Testament's primogeniture tradition) establishes Christ as the one who holds the position of supreme authority and inheritance within the resurrection order. He is not merely the first to rise but the one in whom the resurrection is given its definitive shape and its ultimate eschatological significance. And the purpose of the firstborn dignity is stated with inclusive sweep: 'so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything', the resurrection establishes Christ's primacy not merely over the realm of the dead but over all of creation, which is being renewed and restored in Him.

Revelation 1:5 adds the doxological dimension: Christ is 'the firstborn of the dead' who 'loves us and released us from our sins by His blood' (NASB 1995). The firstborn title is here connected explicitly to the atoning work, establishing the inseparability of the cross and the resurrection in the New Testament's account of the new creation: the one who inaugurates the new creation by His resurrection is the same one who purchased the members of the new creation by His blood. The new creation begins in the resurrection of the Redeemer and encompasses all those whom He redeemed.

VI. DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: THE RESURRECTION AS THE GROUND OF THE BELIEVER'S HOPE

The Guarantee of Future Bodily Resurrection and the Most Personally Transforming Promise in the Gospel

The sixth and most personally pastoral theological significance of the resurrection is its function as the guarantee of the believer's own future bodily resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:21–23 provides the most direct formulation: "For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming" (NASB 1995). The first fruits guarantee the harvest; the resurrection of Christ guarantees the resurrection of all who are in Christ. The relationship between Christ's resurrection and the believer's resurrection is not merely analogical (His resurrection illustrates what ours will be like) but causal (His resurrection is the basis and the guarantee of ours).

Philippians 3:20–21 provides the most eschatologically precise statement of the believer's resurrection hope: "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (NASB 1995). The transformation promised is specific: conformity with 'the body of His glory', the resurrection body that Christ already possesses. The believer's resurrection is not a general hope for 'life after death' in some spiritual or immaterial sense; it is the specific, bodily, transforming conformity to the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Christ is not merely a past event to be

remembered and proclaimed; it is the present guarantee and the future shape of the believer's own resurrection.

Ephesians 1:19–21 grounds all of these dimensions of the resurrection's significance in the comprehensive power of God: "and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come" (NASB 1995). The power that raised Jesus from the dead, the incomparably great power of the God who conquered death, is the same power that works in and toward those who believe. The resurrection is not only what God did for Christ; it is the measure of the power that God exercises toward His people. The believer who understands the theological significance of the resurrection will understand their own life to be lived in the power of the one who conquered death, sustained by the one who rose from the dead and who will raise them in the same power at the last day. To the one who was raised by the glory of the Father and who will raise us by that same glory, to Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Key Texts: *Romans 1:3–4; Romans 4:25; Romans 5:10; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 54–57; Ephesians 1:19–21; Philippians 3:20–21; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 2:14–15; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:12; Revelation 1:5*

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Vindication (Romans 1:4)	The resurrection's function as the divine public declaration that Jesus is who He claimed to be, the Son of God. Romans 1:4: 'declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.' The verb <i>horisthentos</i> ('declared,' 'designated') indicates not the making of the Son but the public demonstration of the Sonship He eternally possessed. The resurrection reverses the verdicts of every human tribunal that condemned Jesus (the Sanhedrin: blasphemer; Pilate: political criminal; the law: cursed) by the divine declaration that the crucified one is the Son of God. It is the definitive answer to the question posed at the crucifixion: 'If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross' (Matthew 27:40), He did not come down; He rose.
Father's Amen to Tetelestai	The metaphorical description of the resurrection as the Father's divine confirmation and acceptance of the Son's completed atoning work. When Jesus cried 'It is finished!' (<i>tetelestai</i> , John 19:30) from the cross, the declaration was

Term	Definition
	made by one who had not yet risen; the Father's raising of the Son from the dead is the divine 'Amen', the confirmation that the sacrifice was accepted, the penalty was fully paid, and the atoning work was complete and effective. Grounded in Romans 4:25 ('raised because of our justification') and the Old Testament high-priestly analogy (Hebrews 9:12): the priest's emergence from the Holy of Holies alive signifies the acceptance of the sacrifice.
Romans 4:25 and Justification	The verse that most directly connects the resurrection to the believer's justification: 'He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.' The parallel structure (delivered/raised; transgressions/justification) establishes both the causal connection between sin and the death and the causal connection between the resurrection and the justification. The resurrection is caused by (because the justifying work is completed and accepted) and purposed for (so that the justified may receive the full benefit) the believer's justification. The risen Christ is both the evidence of the completed justifying work and the living Mediator through whom the benefits are continuously applied.
First Fruits (Aparchē)	The Old Testament agricultural image applied to the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23. In the Old Testament, the first fruits (רישית, reshit / ביכור, bikkurim) were the first portion of the harvest offered to God as a pledge and guarantee of the full harvest. The first fruits and the harvest are the same crop; the first fruits are not different in kind but are the beginning and guarantee of what follows. Applied to Christ: His resurrection is the same resurrection reality that will encompass all who are in Him at His coming. The first fruits metaphor establishes both the continuity (same resurrection life) and the sequence (His resurrection first; believers' resurrection at His coming) of the eschatological resurrection harvest.
Firstborn from the Dead	The title applied to Christ's resurrection in Colossians 1:18 ('the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything') and Revelation 1:5 ('the firstborn of the dead'). Draws on the Old Testament primogeniture tradition in which the firstborn holds the position of supreme authority and inheritance. As the firstborn from the dead, Christ holds the supreme position within the resurrection order, exercises primacy over all creation, and possesses the resurrection life in its fullest form as the one in whom the new creation has begun. The purpose clause of Colossians 1:18 ('so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything') establishes the universal scope of the resurrection's authority.
Defeat of Death (1 Corinthians 15:26)	The theological reality that the resurrection of Christ constitutes the decisive, definitive victory over death as the last enemy of the human creature. Death is not merely biological but theological, the consequence of sin (Romans 5:12), the sign of sin's dominion, the expression of divine judgment against human rebellion. Christ defeats death by entering it voluntarily, removing the legal

Term	Definition
	ground of its claim (the sinner's guilt) through the cross, and rising from it in the power of indestructible life. Hebrews 2:14–15: through death He 'renders powerless' (katargēsēi, 'to nullify,' 'to abolish') him who had the power of death. The taunt of 1 Corinthians 15:54–57 ('O death, where is your victory? Where is your sting?') is possible only because the resurrection has answered it.
Inaugural Eschatology	The theological framework that understands the resurrection of Christ as the decisive inauguration of the eschatological new creation within the present age, the beginning of the 'age to come' breaking into 'this present age.' The resurrection is not merely the conclusion of Christ's earthly ministry but the beginning of the new creation order. In Christ, the new creation has arrived; in the resurrection, the future has become present. The first-fruits image (1 Corinthians 15:20) and the firstborn title (Colossians 1:18) both establish this inaugural dimension: Christ's resurrection is the beginning and the guarantee of the eschatological resurrection reality, not an isolated miracle unrelated to the cosmic renewal that awaits the full harvest.
Horisthentos (Romans 1:4)	Greek: 'declared,' 'designated,' 'appointed.' Aorist passive participle of horizein ('to determine,' 'to set a boundary,' 'to designate'). Used in Romans 1:4 for the resurrection's function as the divine designation of Jesus as Son of God: 'declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.' Crucially, horisthentos does not mean 'made' or 'constituted' (as if the resurrection created the Sonship). It means 'publicly declared,' 'designated with authority,' 'openly demonstrated', the Sonship was eternally possessed; the resurrection publicly and irrefutably demonstrates it. The same verb is used in Acts 10:42 and 17:31 for the divine appointment of Christ as judge.
Katargesai (Hebrews 2:14)	Greek: 'to render powerless,' 'to abolish,' 'to nullify,' 'to render inoperative.' Used in Hebrews 2:14 for the effect of Christ's death on the one who had the power of death: 'through death He might render powerless (katargēsēi) him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.' The verb does not mean 'annihilate' (the devil continues to exist and to operate) but 'to strip of operative power,' 'to make effectively inert.' The devil's power over death was rooted in the legal claim of sin's guilt; the cross removes the legal claim, and the resurrection demonstrates its permanent removal by raising Christ beyond the reach of death.
Romans 5:10: Saved by His Life	The verse that distinguishes the accomplishment of reconciliation through the death from the ongoing application of salvation through the resurrection life: 'For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.' The reconciliation was accomplished once for all through the death; the ongoing 'saved' (sōthēsometha, future passive) is secured through His risen life. The living Christ is not merely the historical cause of the salvation but the present,

Term	Definition
	active guarantor of its completion. The resurrection is therefore not only a past event that validates the cross but a present reality that sustains the believer's standing before God through the continual intercession of the living Mediator.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the resurrection has theological significance that reaches far beyond the annual celebration of Easter Sunday, that it is the event that proves, secures, and guarantees the most comprehensive range of salvific realities that the gospel announces. It vindicates the identity of the one in whom we believe; it confirms that the atoning sacrifice has been accepted; it grounds the justification of the ungodly on a permanent, living foundation; it defeats the last enemy of the human creature; it inaugurates the new creation of which the believer is a member; and it guarantees the bodily resurrection of every person who is in Christ. The congregation that understands the resurrection in this theological depth will not merely affirm it as a historical fact but will receive it as the most comprehensive and the most personally transforming event in the history of the world.

We must also believe that Romans 4:25's connection between the resurrection and the believer's justification is not a theological technicality but a pastoral lifeline. The risen, living Christ is the present ground of the justified sinner's standing before God. The cross accomplished the justification; the resurrection certifies and sustains it. The believer who doubts their justification is directed not only to the past event of the cross but to the present reality of the risen Christ who lives to make intercession, who is at the right hand of the Father, and who 'is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him' (Hebrews 7:25, NASB 1995).

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the resurrection produce in you the specific theological courage that it is designed to produce. The resurrection of Jesus Christ means that the last enemy has been defeated, that the one reality before which every human being stands helpless has been conquered by the one in whom believers are united. Death remains a present reality; it will claim every believer's body in the natural course of life. But death has lost its theological ultimacy: it no longer holds the power it once held, because the one who rose from the dead has stripped it of the legal ground of its claim. The believer who knows the resurrection in this theological depth will face death not with the vague hope that something good is beyond it but with the specific, grounded confidence of those who know that the firstfruits has already risen and that the full harvest is certain.

Desire also the worship that the resurrection demands, the taunting joy of 1 Corinthians 15:55 ('O death, where is your victory? Where is your sting?') as the corporate posture of the community that knows it has been raised with Christ and awaits the transformation of its humble body into conformity with the body of His glory. This is not the triumphalism of those who have escaped suffering; it is the hope of those who, in the midst of suffering and death, know that the decisive battle has already been won.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Preach the theological significance of the resurrection throughout the year, not only at Easter. The resurrection is not an annual celebration but the permanent ground of the believer's standing before God, the present reality of the living Mediator's intercession, the ongoing defeat of death, and the inaugurated new creation. Every Sunday is a resurrection day; every sermon preached in the name of the risen Christ is a proclamation of the risen One. The theological themes of this lesson, vindication, confirmation of the atonement, justification, defeat of death, new creation, future resurrection, are themes for every season of the Christian year, not for Easter Sunday alone.
- Use the first-fruits image (1 Corinthians 15:20) in your funeral ministry to ground the congregation's hope in the bodily resurrection of Christ as the guarantee of the bodily resurrection of believers. The bereaved congregation does not need the general comfort of 'they are in a better place now'; it needs the specific, christologically grounded comfort of 'Christ has been raised as the first fruits of those who are asleep, and the full harvest will come.' The resurrection hope is more specific, more grounded, and more personally consoling than any alternative account of what happens after death precisely because it is grounded in a historical event and not in philosophical speculation.
- Teach Romans 4:25 as the resurrection's most direct connection to the justification of the believer. The congregation that understands 'raised because of our justification' will understand that the resurrection is not merely an apologetic credential ('it proves that Jesus is who He claimed to be') but a soteriological reality ('it is the Father's seal of approval on the atoning work that justifies us'). Every time a believer doubts their standing before God, they are directed not only to the cross but to the empty tomb: the resurrection is the Father's declaration that the sacrifice has been accepted and the justification secured.
- Preach 1 Corinthians 15:54–57 as the ground of the Christian's defiant joy in the face of death. The taunt of death ('Where is your victory? Where is your sting?') is not wishful thinking; it is the theologically grounded declaration of those who know that the sting has been removed at the cross and the removal has been demonstrated in the resurrection. A sermon on this passage that grounds the defiant joy in the specific mechanism of the defeat (the sting of death is sin; the power of sin is the law; Christ has borne the penalty of the law and risen beyond its reach) will give the congregation the most specific, most theologically robust, and most

personally empowering account of the Christian's relationship to death available in all of Scripture.

- Connect the resurrection's significance to the weekly worship of the congregation. The New Testament church gathered on the first day of the week in explicit commemoration of the resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10). Every Sunday service is a weekly declaration that the resurrection has happened and that its significance shapes the entire life of the community that gathers in the name of the risen Lord. A brief, regular liturgical acknowledgment of this resurrection significance, perhaps as an opening call to worship that invokes the risen Christ specifically, will shape the congregation's weekly worship with the theological depth that the resurrection deserves.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. The lesson argues that the resurrection has theological significance far beyond its historical factuality, that it vindicates, confirms, secures, defeats, inaugurates, and guarantees a comprehensive range of salvific realities. Before working through the lesson in detail: which of these dimensions of the resurrection's significance is most central to your current preaching and pastoral practice, and which is most underdeveloped? What specific pastoral situations in your congregation have most pressed you toward one dimension or another of the resurrection's theological significance?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

2. Read Romans 4:18–25. Identify the specific parallel structure of verse 25 ('delivered over because of our transgressions / raised because of our justification'). What does the preposition *dia* ('because of') in each clause establish about the causal relationship between: (a) our transgressions and the death; (b) our justification and the resurrection? How does the Abraham narrative of verses 18–22 (faith in the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that do not exist) prepare for the resurrection statement of verse 25?

3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–26. Identify Paul's series of conditional consequences in verses 13–19 ('if Christ has not been raised, then...') and list each consequence. What does the comprehensive scope of the consequences reveal about the relationship between the resurrection and the entire structure of the Christian gospel? Identify the specific term Paul uses for Christ's resurrection in verse 20 ('first fruits') and explain what the agricultural image establishes about the relationship between His resurrection and the future resurrection of believers. What is 'the last enemy' of verse 26?

4. Read 1 Corinthians 15:54–57. Identify the two Old Testament texts Paul cites (Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14) and explain how the taunting address to death ('O death, where is your victory? Where is your sting?') presupposes and flows from the resurrection. What is 'the sting of death' (v. 56), and what is 'the power of sin' (v. 56)? How does verse 57 ('thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ') identify the specific agency and the specific means of the defeat?
5. Read Ephesians 1:15–23. What specific description does Paul give of the power that raised Christ from the dead (vv. 19–20)? How does Paul connect this power to the experience of believers (v. 19: 'toward us who believe')? What is the specific position to which Christ is raised by the resurrection (v. 20–21), and what is the scope of the authority that this position entails? How does verse 22–23 describe the relationship between Christ's resurrection-exaltation and His headship over the church?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

6. The lesson argues that the resurrection is the Father's 'Amen' to the Son's 'It is finished', the divine confirmation that the atoning sacrifice has been accepted. How does the Old Testament high-priestly analogy (the priest's emergence from the Holy of Holies alive as the sign of the sacrifice's acceptance) illuminate the theological relationship between the cross and the resurrection? What specifically would be missing from the gospel if the cross were followed not by the resurrection but by the ongoing mortality of a still-dead Christ?
7. The lesson distinguishes between the resurrection as the accomplishment of justification (the cross) and the resurrection as the ongoing ground of the believer's continuing justification (Romans 5:10: 'saved by His life'). How does the distinction between what the cross accomplished and what the risen life sustains shape the believer's assurance? What specifically does the living, interceding Christ provide that the past event of the cross alone cannot provide? How does Hebrews 7:25 ('He always lives to make intercession for them') ground the ongoing salvific significance of the resurrection?
8. The lesson presents the first-fruits image of 1 Corinthians 15:20 as establishing both the continuity (same resurrection life) and the sequence (His first; ours at His coming) of the resurrection. How does the first-fruits metaphor specifically refute the interpretation of Christ's resurrection as an isolated miracle unrelated to the future resurrection of believers? What would be the pastoral consequences of a theology that emphasized Christ's resurrection without connecting it causally to the believer's future bodily resurrection?
9. The lesson argues that the resurrection defeats death by removing the legal ground of its claim, the sinner's guilt, through the cross, and then demonstrating the permanent removal by the resurrection. How does Hebrews 2:14–15's description of the mechanism of the defeat (through death, rendering powerless the one who had the power of death) inform this understanding? In what

sense does death remain a present reality for believers (they still die) and in what sense has its power been definitively defeated (it cannot hold them)?

10. The lesson identifies the resurrection as the ‘inauguration of the new creation’, the beginning of the eschatological age breaking into the present age. How does the first-fruits image (1 Corinthians 15:20) and the firstborn title (Colossians 1:18) together establish the resurrection as an inaugural rather than a terminal event, a beginning rather than an end? What specific dimensions of the ‘new creation’ are already present in the resurrection of Christ, and what dimensions remain future awaiting the full harvest?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

11. The lesson recommends using the first-fruits image in funeral ministry to ground the congregation’s hope in the bodily resurrection of Christ as the guarantee of believers’ bodily resurrection. Draft a three to four paragraph section of a funeral sermon that uses 1 Corinthians 15:20–23 as its primary text, grounds the resurrection hope in the historical factuality of Christ’s bodily resurrection (Lesson 25), and communicates the specific pastoral consolation of the first-fruits guarantee to the bereaved. What is the specific hope you are offering, and what is the christological ground of that hope?

12. The lesson recommends teaching Romans 4:25 as the resurrection’s most direct connection to the justification of the believer. Think of a specific member of your congregation who doubts their justification, who wonders whether they are really forgiven, whether God truly accepts them, whether their standing before God is secure. How would you use Romans 4:25 (‘raised because of our justification’) and Romans 5:10 (‘saved by His life’) to address their doubt specifically? What would you say, and what would you be most careful not to say?

13. The lesson recommends preaching 1 Corinthians 15:54–57 as the ground of the Christian’s defiant joy in the face of death. Have you ever preached this passage? If so, how did you ground the defiant joy in the specific mechanism of the defeat (sin as the sting, the law as sin’s power, Christ as the one who bore the penalty of the law and rose beyond its reach)? If not, design the main point and two major moves of a sermon on this passage that would communicate the defiant, theologically grounded, resurrection-shaped joy that the passage demands.

14. This lesson completes the systematic theological portion of Unit 8’s engagement with the resurrection. Lesson 27 will address the believer’s personal participation in the resurrection through union with Christ. How does the comprehensive theological significance of the resurrection established in this lesson, vindication, confirmation of the atonement, justification, defeat of death, new creation, future resurrection, prepare the ground for the more personal and participatory dimensions that Lesson 27 will address? Which of the six theological dimensions developed in this

lesson do you anticipate will be most directly relevant to the believer's experience of union with the risen Christ?

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this lesson's prayer time with a reading of 1 Corinthians 15:12–22, Paul's compressed theological argument moving from the conditional despair of the non-resurrection hypothesis ('if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless') to the triumphant declaration of the resurrection reality ('But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep'). Let the group inhabit the conditional before receiving the declaration: feel the weight of 'if Christ has not been raised', the faith that is worthless, the preaching that is vain, the sins that are not forgiven, the dead in Christ who have perished, the hope that is most pitiable. And then receive the 'But now' (nyni de) with the full force of the adversative: not the hypothetical but the actual; not the if but the is; not the worst-case scenario but the glorious historical reality. Christ has been raised. The first fruits has appeared. The harvest is guaranteed.

Spend time in worship structured around each of the six theological dimensions of the resurrection's significance examined in this lesson. Adore the risen Christ as the vindicated Son of God, the one whom every human tribunal condemned and whom the divine tribunal declared to be the Son of God with power. Adore Him as the confirmation of the completed atonement, the Father's Amen to tetelestai, the high priest who has emerged from the Most Holy Place with His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. Adore Him as the ground of the believer's justification, the living Mediator who always lives to make intercession, who presents the completed work before the Father as the permanent ground of the believer's acceptance. Adore Him as the defeater of death, the one who entered death voluntarily, stripped the devil of his power, and rose beyond death's reach, never to die again. Adore Him as the firstborn from the dead, the inaugurator of the new creation whose first fruits declares the full harvest certain. And adore Him as the guarantee of the believer's own bodily resurrection, the one who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.

Pray with specific thanksgiving for the pastoral resources the resurrection provides. Bring before the Father those in your congregation who are facing their own death or the death of a loved one: receive for them the first-fruits promise, that Christ has been raised and they will follow. Bring before the Father those who doubt their justification: receive for them the Romans 4:25 assurance, that the one who was raised for their justification is alive and interceding. Bring before the Father those who live in fear of death: receive for them the Hebrews 2:14–15 liberation, that the one who rendered powerless the one who had the power of death has freed them from lifelong slavery to that fear.

Close with the doxological climax of 1 Corinthians 15, spoken together as the corporate declaration of those who live in the light of the risen Christ:

"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? ... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 CORINTHIANS 15:55, 57, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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