

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



April 16, 2017

Why the Resurrection Matters

The concept of a bodily resurrection is not a theological curiosity that can be negotiated away. It is essential to a healthy understanding of the Christian religion.

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? . . . For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Cor. 15:12, 16-17).



The church at Corinth was plagued with a number of problems that prompted a stern letter from Paul. The issues covered all the bases—moral laxity, abuse of worship, a lack of brotherly love. But the most serious problem Paul saved for last: a denial of the resurrection of the body as our ultimate hope. We do not know the particulars of this errant teaching in Corinth, but we do know that Paul saw it as a grave threat that had to be confronted.

There are, of course, many people today who deny a resurrection of our bodies at the end of time, and even more who deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Sadly, this includes quite a few who claim to be Christians. The philosophical reasons may vary, but the con-

clusion is generally the same: A belief that the bodily existence we experience now will cease at death, that we retain no personal identity beyond the grave.

The Bible presents a starkly different picture of the afterlife, and offers compelling reasons for a personal resurrection.

While the idea of a resurrection is dim in the Old Testament, there are several passages that indicate such a belief. Job, for example, clung to hope that “after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:26). Asaph believed that God “will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Psa. 73:24).

The idea comes into sharper focus in the New Testament. Jesus clearly taught a future resurrection of both the good and the evil (Jn. 5:28-29). Paul described his own hope of his mortal body being “swallowed up by life” in a new “tent” (2 Cor. 5:1-4). His account of the Second Coming of Christ and the raising of the dead (1 Thess. 4:15-18) is often read at funerals to remind us all of what lies ahead. And of course, Paul’s

vigorous defense of the resurrection here in 1 Cor. 15 is a powerful assertion of what awaits us at the end.

For Paul, this was not some abstract theological splitting of hairs. The hope of the resurrection gives comfort to the grieving, and restores a sense of justice to the mistreated. It imparts courage in the face of death. The knowledge that I will live on beyond death in a glorious new body reassures me that the paradise that was lost in the beginning will someday be restored. Sin and suffering will *not* win, but God’s goodness *will* triumph.

But how can we be so sure that there will be a final resurrection of the dead? That’s where the resurrection of Jesus comes into play. Paul links the hope of a *future* resurrection with the *past* resurrection of Jesus. The two stand or fall together. We cannot give up one without losing the other.

Which is another way of saying, the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus is THE cardinal doctrine upon which the entire enterprise rests. There is no Christianity without it.

– David King