

THE RESURRECTION CLARIFIES CONFUSION THE CROSS CAUSES ON THE CHARACTER OF GOD

INTRODUCTION: Last Sunday, I introduced my Easter Sunday sermon with the thought that although we know the resurrection of Jesus **should be** important to us, we may not know why it is important. A reason I gave last week was because there is a **command connected** to the resurrection of Jesus.

What was the command? **Repent!**

What does **repent mean**? Change our mind in such a way that it changes our direction and how we live.

What do we need to change our mind **about**? About why Jesus came...and died...and rose again!

Why do we need to change our mind **about Jesus**? Because God has made Jesus the Judge—and we will all stand before Him some day!

How will Jesus judge us? **In righteousness**—meaning perfection. That means **the way** Jesus judges us will be **perfect**—there will be no **errors or favoritism**. It also means that **the standard** by which we are judged is righteousness—meaning **perfection**. We are not compared to **other people**—and our good and bad works are not weighed and compared against each other.

Instead, God compares us to His Son! If we are **sin-free like Jesus is—if we are perfect**—we are allowed into heaven. If not, we are **not allowed in**.

We are **all in trouble** then, aren't we!? **NO ONE** is going to get in because "there is none righteous; no, not one" (Rom 3:10) and "...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

But God in His love and wisdom, came up with a wonderful plan whereby **imperfect people like us**—disqualified from heaven because of our sin—can have our sin removed and be **qualified for entrance** into Heaven.

What was **God's plan**? God's plan involved the crucifixion—and resurrection—of Jesus! We often connect the crucifixion and resurrection together in our minds because the Bible does. But imagine what it would be like **not to know**—as Paul Harvey used to put it—"the rest of the story."

Imagine what it would have been like to be one of the twelve disciples...or one of the women who followed Jesus...or part of the crowd that was there when He fed the multitudes with 5 loaves and 2 fishes...or part of the crowd gathered at the cross...or being one of the soldiers who crucified Jesus.

Without **knowing about...or believing in...or having yet experienced** the resurrection of Jesus, I believe the cross would have caused a lot of confusion regarding who God is—and what God could do. That is what we are going to focus on this morning—how the resurrection **clarifies confusion that the cross causes** on the character of God.

1. Confusion the cross causes regarding the power of God

So how would the cross cause confusion regarding the power of God? I think the best way to understand this is to look at the power Jesus demonstrated **throughout His time on earth**—and His **absence of power immediately** before and **while on** the cross.

A. Demonstration of power before the cross

Think with me about some of the things you would have seen Jesus do as one of His followers. There are obviously way more than we can get to, but I do want to look at several. Please turn to Luke 4; follow along as I read verses 33-36. I'm going to be going through some of these rather quickly, but we are staying in Luke so that should help.

--The people were obviously amazed at the power Jesus demonstrated by casting out this demon.

Now turn to Luke 5:12-13. No question in the mind of the leper as to whether or not Jesus could heal!

--You don't need to turn there, but in Luke 7:11-16, Jesus brings back to life the dead son of a widow!

Turn now to Luke 8:22-25. The disciples were amazed that the winds and water obeyed the voice of Jesus!

--In Luke 9:12-17, Jesus feeds the 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fishes

In Luke 11, Jesus cast a demon out of another man. In Luke 13, He healed a woman who had an infirmity for 18 years. In Luke 14, He healed a man. In Luke 17, Jesus healed 10 lepers. In Luke 18, He healed a blind man.

We aren't going to turn there, but many of us are familiar with Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead in John 11. Remember what Mary said to Jesus before He brought Lazarus back to life? "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:32).

Hard not to get the picture! Jesus demonstrated He had the ability to make the *lame* to walk...and the *blind* to see...and the *deaf* to hear. He also had the power to *cast out demons*...and *multiply fish and bread*...and calm the sea...and walk on water...and bring the *dead back to life*!

But when it came to the cross, there seemed to be an *absence of power*.

B. Absence of power at the cross

Notice on your outline what took place in the garden of Gethsemane when Judas betrayed Him.

Mt 26:50-53 "And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. ⁵¹ And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. ⁵² Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. ⁵³ Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?"

--Jesus is saying, 'Don't you get it? I could get out of this predicament in a heartbeat; all I have to do is ask the Father and—boom—I'll have 12 legions of angels—meaning roughly 72,000—here to get us out of this!

Why didn't Jesus *do* that? We have the answer in **Mt 26:54** "But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" 'I came to die—that was the plan all along—and if I fail to do that, the Scriptures will not be fulfilled.'

The disciples were not the only ones *who questioned why* Jesus did not demonstrate His power and save Himself. Let's turn to Luke 23:35-37 (read). In other words, 'Exercise your power as the Son of God and the King of the Jews and put an end to this mockery and torture—if you are indeed the Son of God!'

--Now turn to Luke 24 where we have the account of the *resurrected Jesus* walking with Cleopas and another man on the road to Emmaus. Verse 16 says "But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him." They were walking with Jesus—but didn't know it. Jesus asked them why they were so sad.

--Let's pick it up at vs 18. Notice what He tells Jesus—*about Jesus*—in vs 19: "which was a prophet **mighty in deed** and word before God and all the people." They couldn't understand why Jesus had been condemned to death and crucified. Why were they confused? Because in vs 21, they had trusted—they believed—that He was going to be the one to redeem Israel—to get them out from under the control of Rome. But instead of *delivering* them, He was dead!

From a human standpoint, the followers of Jesus were confused. To see Jesus arrested as a criminal—and not put up a fight—and be shamefully hung on a cross, was in their mind a sign of weakness. In their minds, God had failed...and Jesus had failed...and evil men had won! All was lost because the Savior did not have enough power—*so they thought*—to save Himself and was now dead!

And if there was no resurrection, that *would be* the proper deduction!

2. Clarification the resurrection provides regarding the power of God

So how does the resurrection "solve" this "problem" of God seeming to lack *power*?

A. Jesus came back to life—the grave could not hold Him!

--Look at Luke 24:1-7. 'Don't seek for the living among the dead! He is risen—just as He said!'

--'And remember, Jesus told you He would be crucified—and on the third day would rise again!'

Acts 2:24 "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it." Did you catch that? It was *not possible for death* to hold Jesus! Why? Because He has power *over* death! Death is swallowed up in victory! Death—the last enemy—is destroyed by Jesus!

One other important aspect regarding the absence of God's power at the cross and it is this:

B. Jesus gave His life—it wasn't taken from Him

God determined ahead of time that Jesus would die. His life was not taken from Him—He gave it up!

John 10:17-18 "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

¹⁸ No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

--Jesus was not **over-powered** by evil men and crucified. He **laid down** His life—and took it up again! It was the plan all along!

Acts 2:23 "Him, being delivered **by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God**, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:"

Randy Alcorn, in his book, "*If God is Good...*," put it like this: "Scripture portrays a God so strong He can take on weakness to overpower all opposition and accomplish His eternal purposes" (211).

Without the resurrection, the cross causes confusion regarding the **power** of God.

Let's consider next the...**3. Confusion the cross causes regarding the fairness and goodness of God**

Why would Jesus' death on the cross cause confusion regarding God's **fairness and goodness**? Because at face value—and from a human point of view—God does not seem fair—or good—to allow **a good, innocent man** die the death of a criminal!

Let's consider first... A. The innocence of Jesus

Notice Lk 23:4 Pilate says, "I find no fault in this man."

--Drop down to vs 14 (read). "Have found no fault in this man."

--vs 15 "nothing worthy of death is done unto Him."

--vs 22 "...Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him..."

In vs 41, we see one of the thieves understood the innocence of Jesus when he said, "...but this man hath done nothing amiss."

--And in vs 47, we see the centurion saying, "Certainly this was a righteous man."

There is absolutely no question whatsoever that Jesus was 100% innocent and did not deserve to die!

But Jesus was not just an innocent man, He was also a good man. B. The goodness of Jesus

Numerous places we can turn to, but for the sake of time we will stay in Luke.

In Luke 22:50-51, Jesus heals a man who was wrong arresting Him!

Now Lk 23:27. What was Jesus' response? We see it in vs 28—He was concerned for **them**!

--In vs 34, He prays for the **forgiveness of those** who are crucifying Him!

--In vs 43, He forgives the repentant thief and says to him, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Think of Jesus' life **before** this point. Children loved Him...sinners loved Him...the common people heard Him gladly. In Acts 10:38 the Bible says that Jesus "went about doing good."

Are you getting the picture? A good, gracious, helpful, innocent, kind, truth-loving and truth-teaching Person was beaten, mocked, slapped, spit-on, whipped, and tortured on a cross!

Where is the fairness and goodness of God in all of that? There doesn't seem to be any—and it doesn't make much sense—unless and until you **consider the resurrection**!

4. Clarification the resurrection provides regarding the fairness and goodness of God at the cross

Let me ask again: Was God **fair** in allowing Jesus to suffer? In a word, "NO!" In fact, there is absolutely **nothing fair** about the cross—and we should be incredibly grateful for that! Why?

Because if **fairness** was God's priority, there wouldn't **have been** a cross! **Fairness** requires people pay the punishment for their **own sins**. Consider **money and bills**. I shouldn't have to pay **your** bills—and you shouldn't have to pay **mine**. I am responsible for what **I spend**—and you are responsible for what **you spend**.

The same holds true for **fines**. I shouldn't have to pay for your speeding tickets—and you shouldn't have to pay for mine! And the same holds true **for sins against God**. Fairness requires that I pay for my sins—

and that you pay for yours! But the cross is **not about fairness**. It is about God's wonderful plan whereby **imperfect rebels** like us are **allowed entrance into a perfect heaven** and dwell in the presence of a holy God.

The real injustice of the cross is **not** that an innocent man was put to death. The real unfairness is that Jesus—God the Son—took the penalty for **our sin**—the just for the unjust—that He might bring us to God!

I'll say it again: there is absolutely nothing fair about the cross—and you should be incredibly grateful!

What about goodness? Was God **good** in allowing Jesus to die for us? Yes, yes—a thousand times YES!

Rom 5:8 "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, **while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**"

I John 4:10 "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us, and sent His Son** to be the propitiation for our sins. **Rev 1:5** "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the **first**

begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that **loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood,**"

Simply put, **God's love for us as sinners** is what prompted Him to come to earth as Jesus and die for our sins! The resurrection proves that there was satisfaction with what Christ had done. You've **heard it** before because I've **said it** before: The resurrection is **God's "Amen"** to Jesus saying, "It is finished!"

5. Application when we are tempted to question the absence of God's power or goodness

There are times—probably more often than we care to admit—that we struggle with **why** God allows horrible things to happen. We wonder, "Where are you God" and "Why didn't you do something to stop this?" There is no "pat answer" to these kinds of questions. But two truths regarding the cross should help us wrestle with these things.

A. God has reasons for **not** demonstrating His power

Had the followers of Jesus been able to do what **they thought** was best, they would have insisted Jesus do everything in His power **not to die**. In fact, when Jesus first told the disciples that He would suffer many things at the hands of the chief priests and scribes—and then be killed by them—**Peter rebuked Jesus** and said, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee" (Mt 16:22). God knew the Big Picture—and we often times don't! So when God chooses **not to do something**, it is not because He is powerless—it is because He has reasons that we don't know or understand—and may **never** understand!

The cross, then, helps us see there may be reasons God does not demonstrate power. The cross can also help us see how... B. God can bring good out of suffering

The cross teaches us that, doesn't it? Jesus suffered horribly...and unjustly. It was **not fair**—and it seemed **no good** could come from it. And yet, **good did come** from it! **Alcorn** put it like this: "God allowed Jesus' **temporary** suffering so He could prevent our **eternal** suffering." That's what happened, didn't it?

Our sins—every one of them—was put on Jesus. Because Jesus is God, He is **infinite**. Because He is infinite, He can die **for an infinite number of sins** committed by an **infinite number of people**.

Isaiah 53:4-6 "Surely He hath borne **our** griefs, and carried **our** sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was wounded for **our** transgressions, He was bruised for **our** iniquities: the chastisement of **our** peace was upon Him; and with His stripes **we** are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the **Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.**"

That is why Jesus emphatically stated, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

I want to close with one last quote from **Randy Alcorn**: "Whenever you feel tempted to ask God, 'Why did you do this **to** me?' look at the Cross and ask, 'Why did you do this **for** me?'" (If God is Good, 213).

Good thought, isn't it?

Why is the resurrection important? Because if there were no resurrection, the cross would be confusing. It would seem God was unfair...and uncaring...and weak. But because Jesus rose again, we know God is powerful and good! And when He allows suffering in our lives, it is not because He is bad—or weak. It is because His ways are higher. And so we trust that He can bring good out of suffering—even if we don't see how.

So, what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, receive Christ as your Savior if you've never done that. Not the Savior from your problems—but the Savior of the penalty of your sins! When you consider the cross—and what Jesus did there for you—don't think that you can get to heaven any other way than by Him!
2. For those of who are forgiven, are you trusting God's goodness and power—even when He is not doing what you think He should? He is good—and does good! And He is all-powerful! So if He allows things into your life that make us ask "Why did you allow this, God?" look at the cross and remember that His ways and thought are higher than ours.