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Why Does the Resurrection Matter?

By Tal Davis

In 1881 Mark Twain wrote a classic story called *The Prince and the Pauper*. It was the fictional story of two 16th century English boys. Tom Canty was a poor commoner and Edward, Prince of Wales, was the son of King Henry VIII. The two boys were almost identical physically. One day while Edward was going through the town, they met each other. In order to see how life was for the other one they switched clothes. Also, on that same day, the royal Great Seal of England went missing in the Royal Palace. Edward had hidden it in a suit of armor before leaving to impersonate Tom.

Both boys learned how hard life was for the other one. Edward learned the harshness of life for the poor like Tom. Tom learned, to his surprise, how stressful life was for royals like Edward. In any case, no one believed either of them when they finally admitted who they really were. Eventually King Henry died and Edward came back to reclaim his throne. Still no one believed Edward or Tom, who, to his dismay, was about to be crowned king.

You may ask, "What has this got to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ?" Just this, many people question the identity and importance of Jesus Christ and the significance of His death and resurrection. In my last article (see here <http://www.marketfaith.org/2015/02/the-centrality-of-the-cross/>), we explored the critical importance of Jesus' crucifixion as a sacrifice for mankind's sins.

Also, in a previous article we examined evidence as to why we should believe in Jesus' bodily and historical resurrection from the dead (see: <http://www.marketfaith.org/why-should-i-believe-why-should-i-believe-in-the-resurrection/>). In this installment we will consider the meaning and significance of His resurrection for the truth of the Gospel and our salvation. First let's review several reasons why we can believe the resurrection of Jesus actually happened in real time and space.

In Luke's Gospel, chapter 24, is his account of the resurrection. From that account we can discern three good reasons why we can be assured it happened. First we are told that the women saw the stone rolled away (vss.1-2). Second, they saw that the tomb was empty and angels appeared to announce the resurrection to them. The women (Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary, the mother of James) went and told the disciples. The disciples were naturally skeptical, but when Peter went to the tomb, he found Jesus' body gone and only the burial wrappings still lying there (vss. 3-12). Third, and perhaps most important, after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to many people in and around Judea and Galilee over the course of about forty days. Luke mentioned several of them including two men on the road to Emmaus and all the other disciples. The four Gospels and Acts provide complementary accounts of Jesus' resurrection and appearances (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21; Acts 1:1-8).

In addition, the Apostle Paul reported, in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, that Jesus appeared also to more than five hundred people at one time, to His brother James, and

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then to Paul himself on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-31).

So we can affirm that Jesus' resurrection occurred in real time and space. It was not just a myth, or a fable, or a legend.

So that being said, what significance does that have for the world today? Let's look at three ways it impacts our faith and our personal lives.

First, Jesus' resurrection vindicated the claims He made about Himself.

In Twain's story of The Prince and the Pauper, though he was the rightful heir, no one believed Edward's claim to the throne of England. However, when Edward produced the Great Seal, he was able to prove his identity and received his due coronation. He was then acknowledged to be the king and remained friends with Tom Canty. Sadly, the real King Edward VI died six years after his coronation at the age of fifteen.

Jesus claimed to be the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God (meaning God Himself incarnate). Most people did not believe it, especially after He was crucified. They figured whatever claims he had made were now buried with His dead body. His physical resurrection, however, vindicated His assertions. This was the Great Seal of who He was!

Second, Jesus' resurrection demonstrated His ultimate victory over all enemies, including Satan and death.

The Apostle Paul states: "For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death" (1 Corinthians 15:25-26 NASB).

When Jesus died on the cross, Satan thought he had won the cosmic war of good versus evil. It probably seemed to him that he had the last laugh and that humanity was doomed to his rule. But Satan and the other enemies of Jesus did not understand that His very death was the instrument of their defeat. For on the cross Jesus paid the ultimate price for mankind's redemption. Jesus' resurrection sealed His victory over Satan and over death.

Third, Jesus' resurrection allows us to share in His victory.

Atheists, secularists, and others who hold to a Naturalistic worldview, of course, deny any concept of life after death. For them, when the physical body dies and the neurons in our brains cease to function, then life is completely over with no conscious existence beyond.

On the other hand, other worldviews and religions teach that human life and consciousness continues after death in one form or another. For instance, the pantheistic Far Eastern worldview asserts that the life force continues through many other reincarnations until final absorption into "the all." Sikhs, who are monotheists, also believe in a form of reincarnation.

Most theistic religions, but not all, assert that conscious life continues after death. Orthodox and Conservative Jews, nearly all of whom believe in God, affirm some sort of afterlife. Most Reform Jews, however (many of whom are atheists or agnostics), do not necessarily believe in life beyond the grave.

Islam teaches that all people will be judged after death by Allah, who will decide whether they will go to paradise or hell. Nonetheless, they have no absolute assurance of their fate. The only exception is if a Muslim man dies in a Jihad. Then he will expect to go immediately to paradise where he will be welcomed by 72 virgins.

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So while most religions have some concept of life after death, they don't really have any objective reason for it. Their perspectives are based on traditions, myths, philosophy, or pure blind faith. For instance, Islam bases its view of the after life completely on the word of Muhammed as recorded in the Quran. Yet he provided no objective evidence that what he said was true.

That is not so for the Christian faith, however. The Christian hope for life eternal is based on a historical event: the resurrection of Jesus Christ for the dead.

Jesus' literal resurrection in space and time is the basis for our hope for victory over death. This is the key difference between the Christian doctrine of life after death and all others. His resurrection was not a myth or legend, it was a historical actuality. In fact, we would argue that if Jesus was not physically raised from the dead then we do not have any real hope of life after death.

As the Apostle Paul blatantly put it, "For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:16-19 NASB).

Paul was saying that if the resurrection did not actually occur then he and all other Christians are pathetic fools. That is still true. If Jesus is still dead then we are but self-deluded simps. But Paul does not leave it there. He boldly declares that we need not despair, "But now Christ *has been raised* (emphasis mine) from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep" (i.e.: those who are dead) (1 Corinthians 15:20 NASB).

Paul was convinced beyond any doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead. He had the eye-witness testimony of more than 500 people, most of whom were at that time still living, as well as his own encounter with the risen Lord. We have the same confidence based on their diverse independent testimonies.

But he does not stop there. Paul goes on to explain the magnitude of the resurrection for all followers of Christ.

"For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:21-26 NASB).

This is the critical event in all of world history. Jesus was raised from the dead. And because He was raised, we will be raised! Our hope is not in some vague philosophical notion of an immortal soul (Greek philosophy), not in some unsubstantiated concept of reincarnation (Hinduism), and not in any animistic idea of dead spirits roaming the earth (spiritualism). Nor is it some pie-in-the-sky notion that everyone goes to heaven, where they will become angels who work to earn their wings (*It's a Wonderful Life*).

Next time you attend a funeral, listen carefully to the main speaker. If the speaker is a biblical Christian pastor or layperson, he or she will focus on the resurrection of Christ as the basis for the hope that we will see the departed one again (if she was a

Christian). If he or she appeals to some other basis or does not mention an afterlife at all, then you will know, no matter how warmhearted it may sound, that it is not really a Christian funeral and is based on unsubstantiated presuppositions.

Our hope and our confidence lies in the historic death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can look ahead with assurance that this life is not the end. If, and only if, we repent of our sins and put our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, will we be raised to eternal life in heaven. Conversely, those who die without Christ do not have the confidence of eternal life in heaven with God. Nevertheless, they will be raised from the dead but consigned to eternal separation from God in hell.

Sad to say, late in his life Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) may have given up belief in an afterlife and maybe even belief in the Christian God. But, if he were alive today we would point him to Jesus' resurrection. The great writer then might ask, "Why does the resurrection matter?" We would respond saying, "Because everything depends on it! It proves, like a found Great Seal, who Jesus was and how much God loves us." Perhaps even Mark Twain would respond to that.

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