

What is Christmas Without the Resurrection?

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A primary problem facing scientists and engineers around the world during the “space race” of the late 1950s and early 1960s centered on getting the space-traveler back through the earth’s atmosphere alive. Once the problem of getting the spacecraft and occupants safely *out* of the atmosphere was solved, the issue of getting them back *in* posed a real obstacle — one that took many years to overcome. God’s problem (or more correctly, God’s mission) when He sent His Son to this earth was the very opposite. He was working from the other side of the atmosphere. He sent Jesus from the spacious firmament on high down to this world of woe below, and His problem was how to bring Him back. How to dispatch His Son out of the ivory palaces, down to a rugged cross to die, and then to bring Him back alive from the garden tomb and to His right hand was God’s so-called problem.

But, friends, God solved the problem. And today, we can say with confidence,

But now is Christ risen from the dead.... (1 Corinthians 15:20)

He did it! He came out of heaven’s glory and down to this earth, went through the doorway of death and then came back to life — back to the Father’s right hand.

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

The death and then the resurrection of Christ are the two pillars on which the arch of the gospel rests. In fact, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the crowning fact of our gospel; it is the hinge on which the door of salvation swings; it is the fulcrum on which is placed the lever of redemption that can lift man from sin and death. One of the gnomic poets of the Greeks said, “If I had a place to put a fulcrum and a lever long enough, I could raise this earth.” May I say to you, raising the earth to Himself was God’s problem. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is that fulcrum, and on it He put the lever of redemption so that today He can lift us out of sin and death and bring us to Himself.

Our salvation rests entirely upon the resurrection, and the resurrection lends value to the death of Christ

Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.
(Romans 4:25)

The resurrection also gives meaning to the life of Christ,

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

The resurrection is what gives substance to the teaching of Christ, because, my beloved, we need a dynamic to go with the ethic. And the resurrection furnishes that dynamic. I had a roommate my first year in college who had come to the city fresh from country life. After the first semester he found himself very popular. He had a good mind, was a very attractive fellow, and was studying for the ministry, but he was carried away by all of it. We had a religious emphasis

week (it wasn't religious, however, nor was it an emphasis) during which a liberal from Chicago gave a series of messages. My roommate came in one night after hearing the speaker, and as he dropped down on his bed in a dejected fashion, he looked over at me and said, "I don't need anyone to tell me how to live; I already know how to live. I do not need somebody to set before me a system of ethics, because I have a high standard. I want someone to furnish me a dynamic by which I can live up to that high standard." But liberalism has no such dynamic. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only thing that can give the dynamic for Christian living.

His resurrection from the dead gives credence to the miracles of Christ, for it is the supreme miracle of all. It's always around the Christmas season when articles start circulating in which the statement is made that the virgin birth of Christ is the "miracle of miracles." I believe in the virgin birth with all my heart, but I do not believe that it is the miracle of miracles. The miracle of miracles is the resurrection of Jesus Christ; that's the one that is all-important and which crowns all the others. In fact, it is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that certifies and guarantees the virgin birth of Christ. Paul says,

And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. (Romans 1:4)

He is *declared* to be the Son of God, not *made* the Son of God. He was already the Son of God when He was born, but when He was raised from the dead, everything that He was and everything that He did received upon it a seal of guarantee from the courts of heaven.

Without the resurrection there is no gospel to preach.

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:1, 2)

What then is the gospel? Paul says, "It's what I preached to you. It's what you received. It's what you are standing in."

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received [I did not hatch this up out of my own mind, but it was given to me], ***how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.*** (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ crowns it all, and without it there is no gospel to preach. The virgin birth would become merely a cold and hard doctrine to be kicked about the theological football field by fundamental believers and liberals, as it is today in many places. And if Christ be not raised from the dead, then let's drop the argument about the virgin birth; it's a waste of time. We may as well send word to the wise men that they're going to make an unnecessary and meaningless trip. If He be not raised from the dead, we'd better get word out to the shepherds not to leave their sheep, because it's just another baby born in Bethlehem. Dismiss the angels; send them about their regular chores and let the heavenly hosts keep silent, because if that baby born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, crucified on Golgotha and buried in the garden tomb

doesn't rise from the dead but remains a corpse, then the virgin birth doesn't have any significance at all.

And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. (1 Corinthians 15:14-19)

My friend, today if Christ was not raised from the dead, why celebrate His birth? Christmas would be an idiot's delight! What good would all of this talk about putting Christ back in Christmas do? It would make more sense for us to sing "Rudolf, the Red-Nosed Reindeer" than to sing "Joy to the world, the Lord is come." In fact, it would be better for us to wear sackcloth and ashes and weep, my beloved, than to sing at all. Without the resurrection Christmas would be a season of sobbing rather than singing.

But, my beloved, Christ is risen from the dead, and His empty tomb sends a shout of victory back beyond the cross and all the way to the cradle in Bethlehem! When He was just a little newborn baby He was wrapped in swaddling clothes which He just grew out of naturally. And, my beloved, when He died they wrapped Him up again, that time in linen clothes. But He didn't come out of those naturally; He came out of them *supernaturally*. There was no room for Him in the inn yonder in Bethlehem and there was no room for Him in Joseph's tomb. Oh, you may say, "But the record states that no one had ever been put in there — there was plenty of room." No, there was no room for Him. That tomb was made to receive the bodies of those who had died and were going to stay there. There was no room for Him because He didn't stay there! He was born in a cave and buried in a cave, and there wasn't room for Him in either place. No one expected the promised Messiah to be born in a stable in Bethlehem, and those women who came to the sepulchre that morning never expected to find Him anywhere except in that tomb. But as the angels pointed out to them, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5).

The resurrection says that from the cradle to the grave He was God. And now will you send a cablegram to the wise men and tell them to come on? It's all right. That little baby is God, and He's back from the dead. Tell the shepherds to leave their sheep, for the baby lying in that cave is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Tell the angelic hosts to shout it to the ends of God's universe that a Savior is born — born to die and be raised from the dead.

I want to look at the only two records we have of the virgin birth of Christ and see how both of them point us to His resurrection. First, we'll go to Dr. Luke's record. Dr. Luke was a medical doctor, and he gives us the longest and most exact account of the virgin birth. I honestly believe that he knew more about it than anyone living today. I don't care what seminary these contemporary theologians are in; the best they can do is speculate. Dr. Luke was a practicing doctor, he was living back then, and he *knew*. So I'll take his report. He gives us what I believe is Mary's account of the virgin birth:

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? [She was the first one who ever doubted the virgin birth.] And the angel answered and

said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:34, 35)

Now, Nazareth did not believe her story, and they did not have a very high opinion of Mary or her Son. If you want an idea of their attitude, go back to Psalm 69 which paints a prophetic picture of Christ on the cross and gives us insight into the cruelty He endured as He grew up in Nazareth.

I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away. (Psalm 69:2-4)

Perhaps this is what went on in His mind as He was hanging there on the cross. He looked out around Him and said, “There is no place for Me to stand. I’m in deep waters.” Sin was ready to be pushed down on His head as a crown of thorns. He said, “I’m weary of My crying. My throat’s dry.” Then as He looked out at that crowd He said, “They hate Me without a cause. There’s young Saul of Tarsus. He doesn’t even know Me, but He hates Me. I’m dying for him, and he doesn’t know that in a short time I’m going to reveal Myself to him. They hate Me without a cause. Oh, what a crowd — they are more than the hairs of My head!” And as He is there on the cross, since He is perfectly human, He does what a great many people do when they are ready to die — He goes back over His life:

Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. (Psalm 69:7)

You and I have no notion what He endured in life because He was virgin born. Listen to Him,

I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a proverb to them. (Psalm 69:11)

They made His life so miserable that He went about Nazareth in sackcloth. The awful thing is that they ridiculed and criticized Him even for that.

They that sit in the gate* [those were the leaders of the town] *speaking against me; and I was the song of the drunkards. (Psalm 69:12)

In other words, “Not only were those in high positions against Me, but those down on skid row made nasty little ditties about Me and My mother, and they sang them.” That’s what He went through in order that you and I might be legitimate children of God. And when the angel asked Mary, “Would you be willing to be this one?” she responded,

...Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:38)

My beloved, because of her decision there was a cloud over Mary all her life; that is, until His resurrection.

Dr. Luke, in writing the Book of Acts, has a master-stroke there which many of us might miss. He says that after Jesus was raised from the dead and was with His own for forty days, He ascended back into heaven; and when He ascended into heaven the disciples came aside to wait, as the Lord had told them, for the promise of the Father. Here is the record:

Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. (Acts 1:12-14)

What a masterstroke — Mary is in the upper room! After His ascension into heaven and as they are gathered in prayer, talking about these things that had happened — His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension back into heaven — I can see Mary sitting there with a smile on her face, for finally the cloud is gone. I do not know if it happened exactly this way, but something very similar had to have taken place.

She is saying, “Nathanael, do you remember when you first met Him and you said, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Didn’t I tell you He was virgin born? Now you know something good came out of Nazareth, because He came out of the tomb and He has gone back to heaven.

“Simon Peter, you were right when you said ‘Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.’ But, Simon Peter, you thought that He shouldn’t die on a cross. Don’t you know that His resurrection made His death upon the cross necessary? That He must bear the sins of the world? And on the day of Pentecost, Simon Peter, you are going to be able to say, ‘Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ by raising Him from the dead!’ Simon Peter, I told you all along that He was virgin born.

“Philip, do you remember in the Upper Room when you said, ‘Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us’? Oh, Philip, didn’t I tell you that the little one formed in my womb was God manifest in the flesh? And then He said to you, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?’ That’s when I knew, and now you know, Philip — He’s raised from the dead.

“Thomas, oh, doubting Thomas, you never believed anything, did you? And I wouldn’t expect you to believe the virgin birth. But, Thomas, you always were raising doubts. Even after He came back from the dead, you said you wouldn’t believe till you could touch the nail prints in those hands. Thomas, there were wise men who came to Bethlehem when He was a little baby, and they saw those little hands, those little hands that formed a *universe*, and they believed in Him then. Thomas, you had to wait and you missed so much. But you are a wise man now.”

The disciples never went to Bethlehem, but they all went to an empty tomb — and believed. Our second rendering of the birth of Christ comes from Matthew. Matthew says wise men

came from the East,

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11)

Because of the three gifts we generally assume there were three wise men, but there could have been three hundred; no one knows the exact number.

But the three gifts they offered to our Lord were gold, frankincense and myrrh. Pray tell, wise men, why are you bringing myrrh? That's embalming fluid! You don't bring myrrh until someone dies! None of you who are reading this are expecting a bottle of embalming fluid for Christmas, are you? Well, I know some who might want to give *me* a bottle, but, my beloved, I don't want a bottle of embalming fluid for Christmas! But they thought it fitting to bring Him myrrh. Why? The interesting thing is that when Isaiah looked ahead and wrote about His second coming when He shall come and drive away the darkness and set up His kingdom, he noted,

The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, all they from Sheba shall come [wise men again — not three this time, but, oh, what a multitude]: ***they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord.*** (Isaiah 60:6)

Where is their myrrh? When the wise men come to Jerusalem the second time, they'll bring no myrrh. Why? Because that little baby, to whom they brought it the first time, was born to die. But the second time He is coming to live and to reign on this earth.

I want to do something I'm confident no other preacher has done before. I want to introduce to you the fourth wise man. I know his name. He is one who brought myrrh, but he didn't bring it at our Lord's birth. It was thirty-three years later that he took it out to Joseph's tomb.

And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand. (John 19:39-42)

Nicodemus is the fourth wise man, and the gift he brought was myrrh. He and Joseph of Arimathaea were the undertakers who handled the body of Jesus, and as they applied the myrrh and wound the body in linen, they came to those nail-pierced hands through which jagged spikes had gone. I imagine Nicodemus said to Joseph, "One dark night three years ago, here in Jerusalem, He said to me,

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal

life. (John 3:14, 15)

And, Joseph, that night I did not quite understand. But look at those hands. I never saw those wee baby hands in Bethlehem, but look at those hands now.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities....
(Isaiah 53:5)

And now, Joseph, I understand it. He died for my sins on the cross.”

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son...” (John 3:16) — He gave a real Christmas gift, not merely a helpless baby. Oh, I hope that this Christmas you won’t turn to Bethlehem! I hope you’ll go to a living Savior at God’s right hand, still bearing the wounds and the bruises that He bore for you and me down here upon this earth. Let’s turn to Him, no longer a helpless baby but a mighty Savior risen from the dead!

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

This Christmas remember He is not a little baby. He’s the Man in the glory. And when He ascended up yonder, He did something, my beloved, for those who will come to Him and receive Him — He gave them a power. Paul prayed for that power, and it’s the gift that most of us need this Christmas. When Paul prayed for the Ephesians he said,

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. (Ephesians 1:19-21)

Oh, my friend, let’s go to Him who is yonder at God’s right hand and who says today,

...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. (Matthew 28:18)

He’s no longer a little helpless baby yonder on Mary’s bosom in Bethlehem. He is a mighty Savior today at God’s right hand. God today is on the giving end and is offering you a gift. He wants to give to you eternal life through Jesus Christ.

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (1 John 5:11)

Have you received it? And do you know anything about the working of that mighty power

that brought Christ back from the dead? He gave His Son; all we have to do is receive Him.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God [that is, He gives them eternal life], ***even to them that*** [don't do any more nor any less than simply] ***believe on his name.*** (John 1:12)

How do you get a gift? May I give a simple illustration? I have here a watch that was given to me as a gift by the members of a Bible class I used to teach. It was a gift, so when it was handed to me all I had to do to get it was reach out and take it. For over twenty years now I have never paid one dime on that watch. But it's mine because by faith I reached out my hand and I took the gift. That's the only way in the world you can get a gift. You just reach out your hand and take it.

Several years ago, a woman asked me to go by the hospital and speak with her husband who was dying. I went over the plan of salvation with him twice, and he kept saying, "I think I'm good enough already." I said, "Sir, when you lie there and I sit here, you *are* good enough — because you are comparing yourself to me, and you're probably a lot better man than I am. But did you know that in a few hours you're going into God's presence? I won't be there then, nor will anybody else from down here. You'll have to meet *His* standard then. Do you have anything that will meet His standard?" He looked at me and shook his head. I said, "Then God has something for you. You won't work for it and you won't pay for it. You get it for nothing, because the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus." Then I took this watch off my wrist, held it out and said, "Suppose I said I'd give you this watch just like it was given to me? What would you have to do to get it?" And he lifted that feeble hand and said, "All I'd have to do is just reach out and take it." I said, "Look, you don't even have to do that much to be saved. Right where you are and without reaching out anything other than just to say 'Oh, God, I believe You when You offer me eternal life. By faith, I'll take it.'" And that man by faith accepted Christ. He told his wife that night before he passed away, "I have accepted Christ as my Savior, and I'm ready to go into God's presence."

Oh, this business of giving gifts is all right, provided you have received the *real* gift. The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. Do you believe God means it when He says all you have to do is reach out and take it? You dishonor God when you don't reach out your hand, but when you do reach out your hand, you honor God.

May I ask you, have you received the gift of eternal life? The fact that He was born 2000 years ago has no meaning by itself. But when He was raised from the dead, it gave a great deal of meaning to His birth. It meant He was virgin born, God manifest in the flesh, the only One who could pay the penalty for your sin and my sin. Jesus told Nicodemus that God so loved the world that He gave His own Son to die for us. And this Christmas all you have to do to receive the free gift is just believe God and reach out your hand and take it.

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (1 John 5:11)

But as many as received him, to them gave he power [the right, the authority] ***to become the sons of God....*** (John 1:12)

Will you believe God? Will you accept His gift?