What is The Resurrection?

Zanesville, OH | September 22, 2019 | John Pollard | Sermon Notes

**Foundational Scripture:**

**Intro**:

* No doctrine is more important to the Christian and Christianity than that of the Resurrection. This, in no way, diminishes or dismisses the importance of the birth, ministry and death of Christ. Those play an extremely crucial role in our faith and why a lot of people bother to get out of bed in the morning. But all these subjects and doctrines converge to form the greater reality of what took place at the end of each and every gospel account. The Resurrection of Christ is so pivotal because Jesus’ character/reputation and the bible’s credibility depends on it. But before we can discuss the theological importance of the Resurrection and prove whether or not it actually happened with reference to Jesus, we must ask: **What is the Resurrection?**
1. **Resurrection Background and Definition**
	1. Renowned NT scholar, N.T. Wright discusses in his book: “***The Resurrection of the Son of God”*** concerning the background of the resurrection:
		1. *“This basic tenet of human existence and experience is accepted as axiomatic throughout the ancient world; once people have gone by the road of death, they do not return. . . . “Resurrection” was not one way of describing what death consisted of. It was a way of describing something everyone knew did not happen: the idea that death could be reversed, undone, could (as it were) work backwards. Not even in myth was it permitted”* (Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*).
	2. His point is rather essential here considering that the ancient world held to plenty of myths, superstitions and supernatural beliefs that welcomed the thought of ideas beyond the human realm yet the **“Resurrection”** was not one of them. Many people considered this idea ludicrous, mischievous and even dangerous.
	3. Wright goes on to explain that most people were well-aware of what the word **“Resurrection”** meant in the ancient world offering this example:
		1. *“Here there is no difference between pagans, Jews and Christians. They all understood the Greek word anastasis and its cognates, and the other related terms we shall meet, to mean . . . new life after a period of being dead. Pagans denied this possibility; some Jews affirmed it as a long-term future hope; virtually all Christians claimed that it had happened to Jesus and would happen to them in the future”* (Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*).
	4. Jews as well as Gentiles had an understanding of the **“Resurrection”** but most of them would not even tolerate the notion of such an idea being real. Wright discusses exactly what is meant by the term **“Resurrection”** in stating:
		1. *“Resurrection” was, by definition, not the existence into which someone might (or might not) go immediately upon death; it was not a disembodied “heavenly” life; it was a further stage, out beyond all that. It was not a redescription or redefinition of death. It was death’s reversal…When the early Christians spoke of Jesus being raised from the dead, the natural meaning of that statement, throughout the ancient world, was the claim that something had happened to Jesus which had happened to nobody else. “Resurrection” (anastasis and its cognates) was not in use elsewhere in the ancient world as a description of non-bodily life after death”* (Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*).
	5. The main reason the idea of the **“Resurrection”** was so controversial was because of its relation to embodiment. Wright states:
		1. *“The meaning of “resurrection,” both in Jewish and the non-Jewish world of late antiquity, was never that the person concerned had simply “gone to heaven,” or been “exalted” in some way which did not involve a new bodily life. Plenty of disembodied postmortem states were postulated, and there was a rich variety of terminology for denoting them, which did not include “resurrection.” “Resurrection” meant embodiment; that was equally so for the pagans, who denied it, as it was for the Jews, at least some of whom hoped for it”* (Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*).
	6. Pagans and Jewish believers alike did not attach the spiritual state to that of the **“Resurrection.”** The **“Resurrection”** specifically referred to the idea of someone who had been dead for a period of time then reappearing at some point in the future in very bodily form they had departed.
2. **The Physical Nature of the Resurrection**
	1. The very physical nature of the Resurrection can be seen in the argument of the “empty tomb.” Jesus’ physical body was laid in the tomb Joseph selected following the crucifixion (Lk. 23:50-56). His body was wrapped and half-way prepared (to be completed later on) to allow for the process of decomposition to take place.
	2. Now, any logical mind would assume that the stages of death would have begun to take place. But when the women returned at dawn on Sunday to finish the embalmment procedures, they noticed the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty (Lk. 24:1-12).
	3. This would suggest that the premise of the Resurrection would require that Jesus’ physical body did not undergo decomposition at all (cf. Acts 2:27) and that He physically got up and left the tomb He was placed in presumably never to leave. Without some physical, bodily manifestation, the idea of a **“Resurrection”** (let alone Jesus’ one) can no longer be supported or condoned.
	4. Renowned apologist, Norman Geisler argues that the physical nature of the resurrection is so key to Christianity but especially in validating the claim that Jesus is God:
		1. *“If Christ did not rise in the same physical body that was placed in the tomb, then the resurrection loses its value as an evidential proof of His claims to be God (John 8:58; 10:30). The resurrection cannot verify Jesus’ claim to be God unless He was resurrected in the body in which He was crucified. That body was a literal, physical body. Unless Jesus rose in a material body, there is no way to verify His resurrection. It loses its historically persuasive value. The truth of Christianity is based on the bodily resurrection of Christ”* (Geisler, *The Battle for the Resurrection*).

**Sources:**

Geisler, Norman L. *The Battle for the Resurrection*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1989.

McDowell, J. *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999.

Wright, N.T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.