

Hope and resurrection – There is a strong correlation between meaning, significance, hope, and the work of truly virtuous deeds. Questions such as, “What’s the point of life?” and “Is there meaning in all of this suffering?” are foundational questions for every human soul. And one’s answer to these questions dictates and determines their approach to everything, particularly how one relates to others and the world around them when life gets difficult. So, what are the Christian’s answer to such questions? They are answered in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its implications for our own resurrection as well.

Early Christians impacted their pagan culture and their pagan neighbors primarily because of how they lived with present grace during terrible suffering in such a way that their actions in the midst of such suffering were self-denying, other-benefitting, and full of expectant hope in God’s future grace.

When horrible plagues and epidemics rolled through the great urban centers of the Roman empire, it was the Christians who chose to stay and care for the sick rather than fleeing. Others ran away, but Christians risked their own lives, and many died, seeking to help others. They did this because their hope was not in the preservation of their own lives here, but in the resurrection of the dead like their Master.

When Christians were persecuted and unjustly executed and belittled, robbed and ruined by the powers-that-be, they did not respond with violence. They did not respond with terrorism. They did not respond with retaliation, but they died praying for their enemies, imploring God to forgive their enemies. They died with expectant hope that this was not the end.

When the *Pax Romana* had opened up their conquered world to various cultures, ethnicities, and worldviews, it was the Christian church who, for the first time in history, claimed that race, ethnicity, history, family lineage, etc. didn’t matter. There was no racial hierarchy in the Church, no ethnic superiority or power structure based upon one’s heritage or name. With the Greco-Roman expansions, cultures and races and histories were drawn together in urban centers in a way that had not happened before on such a scale, yet the tensions felt throughout the Roman Empire (and, indeed, led to its fall), was not present in the Church. While many pagans believed that each nation had their own god, Christians believed that there is one God over all the nations. And that he is making for himself one people from all kinds of nations. There was no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, named or nameless. There was Christ and His Bride made up of male and female, one Church with one Lord where each one was included

by one way: faith in Him as Lord and Savior with full rights as heirs no matter one's background.

So, what was it that made Christians so compassionate, so perseverant, and so ethnically inclusive? What was it that made them not only endure suffering, but willingly and purposefully risk its horrors so that others might live and flourish? What was it that made them seek their enemies' good even when the stones were raised above their heads, the torches laid to the pyre, and the blade was upon their throats? What was it that made them lay down their power of heritage and wealth and social positions and include those ethnically different than them? It was their knowledge that flesh and blood does not inherit the Kingdom of God, but that this perishable world will be swallowed up by the imperishable glory of the resurrection.

They *knew* their future. The Greeks didn't have any knowledge of the "great leap into the darkness", but death was shrouded in mystery. Christians didn't fear death. They knew its victor. So, they risked their lives. Christians didn't retaliate when persecuted, even unto death, because they knew that at the end of time Jesus would judge finally, and everything would be set right. The Greeks, and modern-day pagan worldviews as well, don't have any concept of a final judgement. Therefore, they feel a pressing *need* to try and make things right now, to fight for their life, or rather, to kill for it. Christians don't feel that all things are justifiable in such a way, but rather entrust justice to the One who will judge in the end. This creates people who will contend for justice, but never violently, who are lambs led to the slaughter because they refuse to kill the wolves but leave it to the shepherd, knowing full well that should a wolf consume them, he will raise them up to the fullness and glory of an imperishable life.

Their certainty of their future joy and glory in the love of God was so strong that it absolutely altered the way that they lived. So, the question for us becomes, "How can we have such a certainty that we, too, will inherit such a future glory so that we can presently love our enemies, lay down our power, endure great suffering, all with expectant joy?" The answer lies in the resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus gave them certainty of the fact of resurrection future and it also framed the means of the Christian's future as well. Resurrection hope – eyes upon future glory – which made present endurance in suffering and endurance in doing good to all men not merely possible, but purposeful.

1. The Kingdom of God is the Christian’s Primary Optic

- a. Note how Paul begins with the assumption that the Kingdom of God is something good and *inherited*
- b. That is, it is passed down from the Father, the glory of a kingdom shared with His children
 - i. Not merely citizens of a Kingdom, but sons of the Kingdom
 - ii. This is infinitely more intimate and cherished than merely a ‘heaven’
- c. The Kingdom of God is the flourishing of all life in humble dependence and joyful delight in the supremacy and saliency of God. God at the center of the worship of all Creation.
 - i. He rules over all and those who humbly submit to the One who gave Himself for their flourishing love Him in return and delight to do His will in all things.
 - ii. Thus, the Kingdom of God is ‘already, but not yet’ – it is here in portion in the life of the Church who have been freed from the power of sin, who submits to Christ and brings flourishing into the world, but not yet in fullness until Jesus returns to abolish death and the presence of sin
- d. It is this family Kingdom, with Jesus as our King/Brother, that is the primary shaping optic of the Christian’s future, and therefore the Christian’s present experience, ethos, and endeavors.

2. Christians Inherit the Kingdom of God Through Being Changed

- a. Note the emphasis on being “altered” or “changed”
 - i. “in a moment”
 - ii. “we will all be altered”
- b. This transformation is the change from temporal to eternal, from corruption to incorruption, perishable to imperishable
 - i. It is a change of quality that is not achieved, but obtained
 - ii. It is obtained by the work of Another

3. Christians are Changed by the Removal of Sin

- a. Stingless Death (v55)
 - i. “sting”, from the Greek word *kentron* means a poisoned sting, like from a scorpion, causing death
 1. It’s not the bite that kills you, it’s the poison in the bite
 - a. Thus, death itself, the bite, that is the problem
 - b. It’s the poison of death – what is the poison of death?
 - ii. The poison of death is sin and power of the poison is the law (v56)
 1. Epicurus: “If we could be sure that death was annihilation, then there would be no fear of it, for as long as we exist death is not there and when it does come we longer exist. But we cannot be totally sure death is annihilation. What people fear most is not that maybe death is annihilation, but that maybe it is not.”
 2. If we die and cease to exist, there would be no fear of death, there is no poison, no sting
 - a. Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1:

To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all
 - b. Fear comes from judgment...and since judgment is possible (not absolutely sure of annihilation) we fear death, the poison of the law (and therefore sin) is in our soul

- iii. The death and resurrection of Jesus proves to us that there is a judgment, but also that Jesus took it for us, giving us victory! No poison remains! Praise the Lord!
1. Jesus came to drink the poison, not to swing the sword of God's judgment, but to receive it
 - a. John 18:11 – "Sheath your sword, Peter! Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given to me?"
 - b. In drinking the cup of God's judgment, the poison of the curse of sin: death, Jesus swallowed it up and mastered it with His holy life
 2. Death now has no judgment, no law, no poison for those who depend on Him
 3. George Herbert, *Time* (1633)

MEeting with Time, slack thing, said I,
 Thy scythe is dull; whet it for shame.
 No marvel Sir, he did reply,
 If it at length deserve some blame:
 But where one man would have me grind it,
 Twenty for one too sharp do find it.

Perhaps some such of old did pass,
 Who above all things lov'd this life:
 To whom thy scythe a hatchet was,
 Which now is but a pruning knife.
 Christs coming hath made man thy debter,
 Since by thy cutting he grows better.

And in his blessing thou art blest:
 For where thou only wert before
 An executioner at best;
 Thou art a gard'ner now, and more,
 An usher to convey our souls
 Beyond the utmost stars and poles.

And this is that makes life so long,
 While it detains us from our God.
 Ev'n pleasures here increase the wrong,
 And length of days lengthen the rod.
 Who wants the place, where God doth dwell,
 Partakes already half of hell.

Of what strange length must that needs be,
 Which ev'n eternity excludes!
 Thus far Time heard me patiently:
 Then chafing said, This man deludes:
 What do I here before his door?
 He doth not crave less time, but more.

- iv. Death may sting you (you may die), but it won't really kill you (there's no poison)
1. In fact, for the Christian, death makes you greater ('usher to convey our souls beyond the utmost starres and poles')
 2. Death and Time were once our Masters whose impending arrival was our doom ('an executioner at best'), but through the resurrection of Christ they become our servants ('you are a gardner now') to usher us into the Kingdom of God through our own resurrection

b. Death Drunk Down

- i. Death is not merely removed, but swallowed up

1. Isaiah 25:6-8
2. There are two ways to get rid of that kale and beet smoothie.
 - a. You can throw it out
 - b. You can drink it down
3. Eating it uses it for your energy, for your betterment, for your enhancement
- ii. The resurrection is not a consolation for our suffering, but it swallows it up, making suffering *productive for our enhancement and joy*
 1. The more you've suffered, the greater your joy in the resurrection and restoration of the world will be.
 2. The more you know how broken you are, your experience of lostness felt, the greater is your joy and longing for renewal
 3. Jesus kept his scars in his resurrected body. His wounds and sorrows are part of His glory.
 4. Somehow, our wounds will only make our joy greater, swallowing them up and making them glorious, not merely destroyed/forgotten.
 5. That is the *utter defeat* of suffering.
 - a. Your deepest sorrows that you have experience will only make your joy greater than it ever would have been otherwise.
- iii. Without this hope, suffering would be utterly useless, as Richard Dawkins has written regarding the preponderance of suffering in the world,

“In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.” (*River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*)
- iv. Thus, Christians have a hope *through* suffering which is achieved *through thinking* through the resurrection worldview.
 1. It is not wishful thinking, it is grounded thinking.
 2. For the secular man, his only hope is wishful thinking, to stop thinking through his worldview, for in it he finds nothing but “blind, pitiful indifference.”
 - a. Very few actually live like that – they live by blind faith in some kind of meaning, but this is inconsistent with their worldview
 - b. But Christians are consistent with their worldview when they believe that life has meaning and that justice is important
 3. But the Christian hopes through thinking deeply about the implications and outcomes of her worldview
- c. Imperishable Physicality
 - i. The perishable puts on the imperishable, not the immaterial! (v54)
 1. Heaven is not merely spirits, it is spiritual, but not only spirits. We will have a spiritual *body*.
 2. You will have a renewed body, a glorified body, a profoundly material physical body
 - ii. Now, many pagan people come to end of their lives and dread death because of the uncertainty (that poison) of what comes after (judgment)
 - iii. How can one be certain of such promises which Paul speaks of here: imperishable, incorruptible, glory?
 1. How can we know that our sin won't result in terrible judgment? How can we die with certainty, so much certainty that we actively risk our life for the sake of others, sing when threatened, and preach from the pyre?
 2. We KNOW because Jesus was raised from the dead!
 - a. The great receipt stamped with the payment of judgment, “It is finished!”
 - iv. Jesus' body was a transphysical body, it wasn't less physical, it was more physical (N.T. Wright)
 1. It's hard to explain to a person born blind what it is like to see. What we will be in that day compared to what you are now is incomprehensible

2. The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of unimaginable flourishing of all of creation
 - a. Christians are ecologists because of resurrection hope.
 - b. For the secularist, the future only holds the consumption of the earth by the sun, or destruction by asteroids or comet – in the end it is all destroyed in “cold, blind difference”
 - c. For the paganized Christian, we all go to heaven and who cares what happens to the earth – it will all be destroyed in judgement and burned up
 - i. Ironically, the same as the secularist
 - d. But for the Christian who knows God’s revelation, we see that God cares about the Creation – and it will flourish through the resurrection of the children of God
3. Creation itself will be renewed, remade, reordered into ‘that which cannot be shaken’ – freed from the futility of sin’s curse – the poison cured and removed and unmade
 - a. Romans 8:19,21 – creation *waits with eager longing* for the revealing of the sons of God...that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the glory of the children of God.

4. Stand Firm Because Your Efforts are Not Fruitless

- a. And here is the command in the light of such a promise!
- b. Stand firm for the Kingdom of God *because your sufferings have significance and meaning* and even if you lose your life, you gain it back better: incorruptible and full of glory
 - i. There is a material newness coming which gives Christians endurance in doing good
 1. Therefore, we fight sin and suffering and poverty and death.
 2. We care about flourishing in all its forms because we are partakers of its fullness by faith and hope.
 - ii. Christians should be working harder than anyone else for the flourishing of all of creation and the flourishing of every human, black and white, terrorist and victim, arrogant and humiliated, with any risk to our lives because we know what is yet to come: THE RENEWAL OF CREATION in the Kingdom of God
- c. We see the torture, the abuse, the violence, the hatred, the ugly wretched evil perpetrated from man to man and we know that this is not the way it is supposed to be.
 - i. The world sees this, too. They riot over it. They lament it in song and poems. They KNOW that things are not the way they are supposed to be.
 - ii. We have an explanation for it and we know the good news of God’s redemption of it in Christ Jesus to whom we humbly and delightfully submit
 - iii. We know the One who bore up all the tortures of every horrific torture which man can perpetrate against man, who absorbed every meaningless word and terrific hate which any human ever perpetrated upon any other, and who carried every burden of every suffering brought about by the sin which we continuously spew upon the canvas of reality.
- d. We stand firm through suffering and beatings (“toil” or “labor” is literally “beatings”), poised between the resurrection of Jesus as the beginning and the New Heavens and New Earth as its end and fullness. We labor, not because we believe that we can transform the world, but because this world will be transformed.
 - i. “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye we will all be changed”
 - ii. We will be changed by Another in whom we have placed our hope.
- e. It is here we toil forward with hope. It is there we know that all our toil and terror will be made to flourish, the way they are supposed to be.

Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly, we pray.