

THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE: SOTERIOLOGY



THE PURPOSE, PLAN AND METHOD OF GOD

Soteriology (Thiessen, 1949) is the Biblical doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ and God's plan for the salvation of mankind through His Son. This includes the entire scope of Jesus Christ, from His pre-incarnate state (before being born as a human being), His short life on Earth, through His ascension to heaven and His ultimate return.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

This document is the fourth in a series of articles on Soteriology. We saw that Jesus' mission to the Earth was to become a man and represent God the Father to a sinful world and introduce us to God so that we would repent and gain eternal life. To complete His mission, He had to die so that there could be atonement for the sin of man. However, it does not end there. Dying is one thing – it is the destiny of every human being. Being raised from the dead and to live forever, is quite something else. We are going to look at the following:

1. Why the resurrection is so important
2. How the resurrection took place
3. The resurrection and the results thereof were witnessed by many people
4. The effects of the resurrection
5. The heavenly ascension of Jesus
6. Back in heaven, Jesus Christ is exalted and sits at the right hand of God the Father
7. The end result of the ascension and exaltation

Without the resurrection, the Christian faith comes to nothing. As said before, if there was a death but no resurrection, Christianity will be no different than any other religion. None of the other religions can claim a Saviour for whom there is no current grave, or an account of the death **and** resurrection of such a person.

Paul makes it clear that without a resurrection, then the preaching of the gospel is in vain.

¹⁵But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: ¹⁴And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. ¹⁵Yea, 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. ¹⁶For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: ¹⁷And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. ¹⁸Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. – **2 Corinthians 15:13-18**

Most of the New Testament teaches a resurrected Christ. He spoke to people:

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. – **John 20:15**

People saw Him:

¹⁸Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples **that she had seen the Lord**, and that he had spoken these things unto her. – **John 20:18**

They spoke to Him:

²⁸And **Thomas answered and said unto him**, My Lord and my God. – **John 20:28**

They touched Him:

²⁷Then saith he to Thomas, **Reach** hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. – **John 20:27**

They dined with Him:

¹²Jesus saith unto them, **Come and dine**. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. – **John 21:12**

They witnessed His ascension.

⁵⁰And **he led them out** as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. ⁵¹And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. – **Luke 24:50-51**

The resurrection is thus a fundamental doctrine.

Secondly, the resurrection is critical for the application for our salvation. If we were to live eternally, then the source of our faith must also live eternally. If He is not in heaven now, then He cannot be the head over all things. He had to go to heaven before the Holy Spirit could be poured out over believers.

²⁰Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹Far 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: ²²And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, ²³Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. – **Ephesians 1:20-23**

The resurrection displays the power of God and that He is in control of everything, even death. If Jesus Christ died and was not resurrected, then death would have had the victory. In the same way that God has power over life, He has power over death. Because Jesus lives, we have hope for an eternity in His presence.

²³Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: ²⁴Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. – **Acts 2:23-24**

How did the resurrection take place? The Jewish leaders were first to claim that there was no bodily resurrection and that the body was stolen. However, Scripture teaches us that it was an actual, bodily resurrection after an actual death. Of the death there is no doubt as even the centurion confirmed that He had died.

⁴⁴And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. ⁴⁵And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. – **Mark 15:44-45**

The resurrection was the same. He was not a phantom walking around. As mentioned in a previous article, Jesus Christ displayed human characteristics after his resurrection. He spoke, ate, allowed them to touch Him and acted in a normal way. They recognised him as He was before. Of course, part of His resurrected state shows that He was no longer bound by material objects, being able to appear inside a room when the doors were locked. He told the disciples that was flesh and blood.

³⁶And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. ³⁷But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. ³⁸And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. ⁴⁰And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? ⁴²And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. ⁴³And he took it, and did eat before them. – **Luke 24:36-43**

Although He did not need to eat or sleep after His resurrection, He still ate food in the presence of the disciples to prove that He was alive, with a human body, and not a ghost.

His resurrection was unique in the sense that everybody else before Him who died and was resurrected, died again and none of them received a resurrection body (The son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24); the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:18-37); Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:22-43); the young man of Nain (Luke 7:11-17); Lazarus (John 11:1-44); Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43); and Eutychus (Acts 20:7-12) are examples.). Undoubtedly all died again.

The resurrection was a miracle and there is the testimony of many people to prove it. It was important that the witnesses have credibility, first-hand experience and there had to be enough of them to make the observation valid. In addition, they had to have a good reputation in order to be believable. The disciples met all of these requirements. One could ask if they would have been willing to put their lives on the line for a lie.

Lastly, had there not been a resurrection, then the New Testament would not have been necessary as there would not have been a message of hope and the resurrection of man himself into everlasting life.

The result of the resurrection points to the deity of Jesus Christ and that His work was complete. All that remained was for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Through the resurrection, Jesus Christ becomes the one who intercedes for us in heaven. Additionally, we are assured of salvation, repentance, regeneration, forgiveness, sanctification and justification.

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ left this for heaven Earth but promised that He would return in the same way. At this stage, His resurrected body took over, as flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

⁵⁰Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; –
1 Corinthians 15:50

After arriving in heaven, He was exalted by God the Father and now sits at His right hand. The fact that the four gospel writers do not spend a great deal of time on writing about this event, is not relevant as an argument to refute the facts, as after them a number of writers attested to the validity of the event.

That the ascension was genuine, is confirmed by Jesus Himself when He said that He was going to prepare a place for us.

³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. – **John 14:3**

The exaltation in heaven is amply demonstrated by the writings of Luke and Paul. Jesus was now crowned in glory and He has received a name that is above any other name.

³³Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. –
Acts 2:33

Stephen the martyr said that he saw Jesus in heaven.

⁵⁶And said, Behold, I see **the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing** on the right hand of God. – **Acts 7:56**

Jesus is now the Head of the church and serves as our high priest.

¹⁴Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. ¹⁵For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. – **Hebrews 4:14-16**

All powers are now subject to Him. He is present everywhere and fills the life of the believer. Finally, when the believer dies, he is immediately in the presence of Jesus in heaven.

⁸We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. – **2 Corinthians 5:8**

This is the ultimate reward.

Bibliography

Thiessen, H. C., 1949. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. 3rd Edition ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company.