

## The Resurrection and No Other Name

A local pastor wrote in a recent article on coming Christian persecution. He suggested the two issues that Christians will face persecution for are the matter of sexual orientation, and the matter of exclusivism, saying Jesus is the only way to God. I think he's right. Increasingly, sexual orientation is going to be defined not as a moral choice, but as part of one's nature, and therefore defended like a human right. Those who speak for the Bible's teaching on marriage and sexuality will be called bigots and hatemongers.

Similarly, those who say that Jesus is the only way, and that other religions have it wrong, will face similar persecution. In the name of so-called tolerance, the liberal order will no longer tolerate those who do not actively agree that all religions are equally valid.

Sometimes, we may even find ourselves wondering if we are right for continuing to evangelise and assert that Jesus is the only name given under Heaven by which men may be saved.

But it is on this day, on Resurrection Sunday, which every other Lord's Day also commemorates, that we are reminded why Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father except through Him. The Resurrection changes everything. If there was room for greater ignorance, greater latitude in belief before the Resurrection, that day is now over. There is no going back to the way it was before the Flood, or between the Flood and Abraham, or in the time of the patriarchs, or even from the time of Moses to the coming of Christ. Why?

The answer comes in this sermon of Paul's given in Athens. Paul is on his second missionary journey. He had just come out of a bruising experience in Philippi, where he was beaten, and placed in stocks. He was almost the victim of mob violence in Thessalonica, and narrowly missed it again in Berea. So the believers in Berea send him to Athens as a kind of safe-place, to wait for Timothy and Silas to catch up. But Paul can't help himself, and while he waits for his companions, he cannot but become vexed and grieved by the idolatry. After all, he is in Athens. Even though the glory days of Greece were now long gone, Athens remained the capital city for Greek philosophy and mythology.

As Paul walked about, he would have seen altars and shrines to all kinds of Greek gods: Zeus, Hera,, Poseidon, Ares, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Hephaestus, Demeter, Aphrodite, Hermes, Nemesis, Dionysus, Nike, Hypnos, Hades. Gods of sky, marriage, sea, war, wisdom, archery, music, poetry, prophecy, moon, blacksmithery, agriculture, magic, beginnings, choices, crossroads and doorways, justice, strife, youth, memory, wealth, safety. This is the ultimate place of multiple ways, multiple religions. That's why Paul began his sermon saying, “ 22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; (Acts 17:22) That wasn't a compliment, it was an insult. You are hyper-religious, you even have a blank cheque altar, if there is a god you've missed.

In many ways, this is Paul's ultimate sermon to atheists or pagans. In his other sermons, Paul is either speaking to Jews who know the Scriptures, and know the prophecies, or he is giving his personal testimony of salvation when he was on trial. But here Paul shows us what you do when you speak to those who do not accept the Bible, or have multiple gods. This is the sermon to those who believe there are multiple ways to eternal life. This is the Bible's answer to the question: what do you say to those people who think all religions are valid? What do you say to those who say there are many ways up the mountain?

Do you tell them that if they try hard enough, things will work out? Do you tell them that if they do what they believe is right, then God will judge them according to their own personal standard of right and wrong? Or do you tell them everything has changed since Resurrection Sunday?

Paul's sermon has really five points, with one conclusion. He then gives one major proof, or evidence to support his conclusion. Let's fly over his sermon to get to his conclusion, and his major proof. Because his major proof is what this Day is about.

*1. Only one God exists, who is the Creator and Sustainer of all life.*

24 "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

Atheism is wrong. Paganism is wrong. Polytheism is wrong.

*2. This God is self-existent, and needs nothing from us.*

does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

All those gods who demand works from men are false. All those gods who seem needy and more like superhuman versions of us, are false.

*3. God has providentially moved in all nations at all times, prompting men to seek Him.*

26 "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 "for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

God does not belong to any ethnicity, nor has He been absent from any culture. He has worked in countless ways to draw humanity to himself. God wants men to come to Him.

*4. Men mostly turned to idolatry, and made gods in their own image.*

29 "Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

Man suppressed the truth about the true God, and exchanged the glory of the Creator for that of the creature.

*5. God allowed the nations' ignorance, but no longer will.*

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked,

God did not bring immediate judgement on these nations, and judged them according to their response to what He had revealed to them.

Here comes the conclusion.

*He now calls all people from all nations to repent and believe in Jesus.*

*but now commands all men everywhere to repent 31 "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.*

All people, from all cultures, must repent of rejecting Yahweh the Creator and come to Him through Jesus.

*because there is now a deadline with a Man who will judge the world.*

In other words, Paul is preaching what is known as particularism. Particularism is the idea that salvation, knowing God comes through a particular and exclusive way, and no other way. The way

to God is no longer broad and general, but a single way has been singled out.

Paul says to these Greeks, the days of your worshipping multiple gods is over. There is no longer going to be leniency on this matter. God now demands that false religion, false practices end, and that all men everywhere, all nations, all peoples in all parts of the world, repent of idolatry, and turn to the true and living God in saving faith. Now God is going to judge the world according to a standard of righteousness, and that standard of righteousness is the one that was lived out by a particular Man in a particular place.

That chosen, ordained man was Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ claimed to be not just a regular man, but claimed to be God's Son, and claimed to be the one who would judge all men.

22 "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, 23 "that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. 24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. 25 "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. 26 "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 "and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. (Jn. 5:22-27)

In other words, man must now turn from His idolatry, turn to the living God through His Son, and embrace Him as your forgiveness from sins, as your merit before God, as your new life. If you refuse to do that, you will be judged by the standard of that Man, Jesus, and if your life fails to measure up to His life, you will be condemned.

Now that's a very bold claim. Paul has just taken on the whole Greek and Roman pagan system, and said that it is not valid. These multiple ways, and multiple gods are not multiplying your chances of eternal life, they are multiplying your guilt and your condemnation. All this paganism was ignorance and idolatry, and now man must turn and trust in one Man, Jesus Christ.

How is Paul going to justify such a claim? Why should these learned Greeks, who understood logic and argumentation very well, trust these bold claims by Paul? What reasons does Paul give, what evidence does he present that there is now only one way, and it is through Jesus Christ?

Here it is in verse 31: He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

This is amazing. The word for *assurance* here is the same Greek word for belief, for faith. God has given the belief, the faith, the reason for believing, the assurance that this is true and can be trusted. God has given what the world needs to believe that there is now only one way, through one man, who will be the one judge, and have one standard. What God gave the world to believe that is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Now Paul doesn't say that God has proved His existence to sceptics through the Resurrection. Paul doesn't say that the resurrection will prove Creation. If you deny those first principles, then the Resurrection won't help you.

If you are honest enough to admit the creation requires a Creator, and that moral beings were made by a Moral Being, then your real question should be, which way to God is the right way? Paul says the Resurrection is God's proof that Jesus is now the only way.

How could Paul say that? Paul doesn't explain why here, because it was at this moment that his sermon was interrupted by hecklers.

32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this *matter*." 33 So Paul departed from among them. (Acts 17:32-33)

But we do have the advantage of having all of Paul's letters. As we look through Paul's writings elsewhere, we can see three reasons why the Resurrection is the event that confirms Christ is the exclusive way.

## I. The Resurrection Is Historical

3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

Paul here details that the proof that Christ died was that He was buried, and the proof that Christ rose was witnesses who saw Him alive: Peter, then the twelve, then 500 brethren, then his half-brother, James, then again all the apostles, and last of all, Paul.

In fact, in nearly every sermon in Acts, the mention of the resurrection and of witnesses comes up. 32 "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. (Acts 2:32)

15 "and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. (Acts 3:15)

30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. 31 "Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 "And we are His witnesses to these things (Acts 5:30-32)

40 "Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, 41 "not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even to us* who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. (Acts 10:40-41)

30 "But God raised Him from the dead. 31 "He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. (Acts 13:30-31)

Why all this talk of witnesses? Because every religion has stories about great miraculous events taking place, visions, visitations, ascensions. But all too often, there are no public, present, independent witnesses. In a court of law, that would be dismissed as hearsay.

On the other hand, how many independent witnesses do you need before a court feels that this event took place? Usually, more than one suffices.

Paul says, you can go and look into this thing and find that a certain Jesus lived at a certain time in a certain place. Yeshua the son of a carpenter actually lived, and became prominent in the nation between 30 and 33 A.D. He was crucified by Rome, and many witnesses claimed He was alive. This much, no one disputes. And that His followers claimed to be eyewitnesses that he was alive again is beyond dispute. You hold in your hand, literature written by at least five men who claimed to see the Risen Jesus: Matthew, John, Peter, James, and Paul.

In fact, Josephus, the Jewish historian, lived between 37 and 100 A.D., had no sympathies with Christianity, wrote this about Jesus,

“At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and [he] was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. Accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.” (10th Century Arabic Text)

What this tells us is that the Resurrection was historical. It was not a mystical, private, internal event experienced only by the devoted. It was an external, visible, public event recorded by witnesses. It was not a hallucination. It was not wishful thinking. It was an event.

And of course, other undeniable historical events took place after this: the church began. The church was persecuted for its beliefs. The church began celebrating baptism and the Lord's Supper, both of which have the resurrection in them. And the church began meeting on Sunday, instead of Saturday. Something had actually happened in history.

Now perhaps someone might say, well I know that something happened that year. I know those witnesses claimed to have seen Jesus. But how can I be sure that their interpretation is the correct one? Paul then has a second reason why the Resurrection changes everything. Not only is the Resurrection historical,

## II. The Resurrection Is Irrefutable

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up-- if in fact the dead do not rise. 16 For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. (1 Cor. 15:12-19)

There were some resurrection deniers in Paul's day. Here is how Paul answers that. He says, if there is no resurrection, Christ obviously didn't rise. If Christ didn't rise, there is no Gospel. Then we apostles are liars, and perpetrating a hoax. But if we are doing that, Paul says, then the message we are preaching doesn't save anyone, including us. And it means all of the believers, including those being persecuted for the faith to death, are dying without hope. We apostles are busy risking life and limb for a lie!

Paul then caps it off in verse 19: we are the most miserable, pitiable people in the world if we are actually lying about this whole thing. We're busy experiencing loss, deprivation, persecution, poverty, and imminent death, and all for nothing.

People who perpetrate hoaxes do so for personal gain, for money, for fame, for amusement, for entertainment. The apostles got nothing but loss, poverty, ignominy, and suffering for publicly maintaining that Jesus rose.

In fact, the only hoax that was perpetrated was the one recorded in Matthew, that the guards were bribed and paid to say that the disciples had stolen the body.

This was how God set the situation up so that the historical fact of the Resurrection is irrefutable. You see, everyone admits that the tomb was empty. So either someone took the body and hid it, or Jesus rose.

Who are the possible thieves? The Romans had no reason to take it. The Jewish leaders had no reason to take it. And if they had, they would have presented it the moment people mistakenly began preaching the Resurrection, and squashed the whole movement in a day. If the enemies of Jesus didn't take it, the only other option is the friends of Jesus.

But the apostles were terrified the night before the crucifixion, and absolutely devastated at the end of Friday. They didn't seem like people with a grand plan to hoax the world, including taking on Roman soldiers. And if they did, Paul here tells you why that would be insane. They would be preaching a lie, living a lie, losing from a lie, and supposedly being willing to die for a lie.

The tomb was empty. Jesus' enemies didn't steal the body. Jesus' friends didn't steal the body. But the body was gone. And within days, the followers of Jesus were transformed from cowards to courageous preachers. The Resurrection is irrefutable.

But there is one last objection someone can make. He might say, fine perhaps, Jesus rose from the dead. But maybe it was one of those remarkable things that happened, and doesn't mean that he is the only way.

In fact, there was a Jewish rabbi named Pinchas Lapide who wrote, "I accept the resurrection of Jesus not as an invention of the community of disciples, but as an historical event." But Lapide did not think that Jesus was the Son of God. He thought he was the human Messiah of the Gentiles.

So Paul would take us one step further.

### **III. The Resurrection Is God's Testimonial**

**Romans 1:1** Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. (Rom. 1:1-4)

According to Paul, Jesus was declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. That doesn't mean He was not the Son of God before then. It means the Resurrection is the ultimate vindication and proof that that is His true nature.

Rabbi Lapide believed that the resurrection was historical and irrefutable, but he did not believe the correct theological meaning.

The Resurrection means what Jesus said it would mean: it would be the ultimate sign, the sign of the prophet Jonah, the sign of rebuilding the Temple in three days, the sign that He was truly the Messiah and the Son of God. It would prove that death was not able to hold him, because if any man has even the slightest sin on him, the grave closes its grip on that man and does not let go.

But Jesus, in rising from the dead as vindicated as sinless man over whom death had no claim, and proved to be God, Lord of life, over whom death had no power.

Now once you admit that God walked among us as a man, then the discussion about multiple religions and multiple ways to God is over. Wherever God appeared among us, and whoever He was, that is the truth. That is the true faith, the true religion, the one and only way.

And for the true believer, this testimonial is personally revealed to us as we believe in Christ by faith. If you have come to know Christ, then you do not merely know the Resurrection as historical and irrefutable, but you have heard the Father's testimony in your soul.

10 He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.

11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 Jn. 5:10-12)

Paul says to these Greeks, you can no longer hold your multiple ways, because there is only one God, and He has appointed only one Man who is both the Saviour and the Judge. And if they should say, why should we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is that one man, the answer is: He rose from the dead. Some Greeks burst out laughing and walked away, like many do today. But for those who

wanted to know more, they could hear this: Jesus rose from the dead: it is historical, it is irrefutable, and it is God's testimonial.

Now if we keep proclaiming that, it may be that arrests and persecution lie ahead of us. But this day will give us the confidence to answer just as the apostles did when they were arrested:

"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20)