

Notes on Jesus' Resurrection 6: The Meaning of Jesus' Resurrection for Today

Wright's Opening Comments

The Resurrection and The Problem of Accounting for the Rise of Christianity

It is difficult to account for:

- ◆ the rise of Christianity,
- ◆ the rise of the Resurrection stories,
- ◆ Paul's developed theology of Resurrection

unless something remarkable actually happened.

The early Christians believed the New Age that the Jews had been longing for had indeed begun. They proclaimed that in Jesus, the "Resurrection" had arrived -- and they acted as if it had arrived. Yet this New Age was not what most Jews had imagined it would be -- so what caused the early Christians to believe that the New Age had arrived even if it was not quite what everyone had initially imagined?

In Wright's view, what caused the early Christians to believe in the arrival of the New Age was exactly what they said had galvanized their belief: that Jesus had risen from the dead. It was not intended as a "metaphor," some fuzzy way of speaking about a spiritual experience of God

Circumstantial Evidence for the Event of the Resurrection

There is also circumstantial evidence pointing to the event of the Resurrection.

1. The day of worship shifted from Saturday to Sunday (even though Sunday was a work day). This was a huge symbolic change, yet they made the change readily.
2. The burial of Jesus was a two-stage process, providing several opportunities to disprove any rumor that the body was missing, if in fact that had indeed been a false rumor:
 - ◆ First stage: the body was laid in the tomb. Over the next year, other bodies might be placed in the same tomb.
 - ◆ Second stage: once the flesh had decomposed, the bones were collected in a "bone box" (ossuary) and then reburied.

What is the Meaning of All this for Today?

What the Resurrection Does Not Mean

The Resurrection does *not* primarily mean that:

- ◆ there is a life after death – the Jews in Jesus’ day already believed this.
- ◆ Jesus is alive today – This is true, but this reality primarily reflects Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit.
- ◆ the supernatural world exists, or there is an interventionist God. Not true. The biblical view of God is a God who is *always* present. “Heaven” and “earth” are the two dimensions of God’s reality – and these dimensions are not identical to what we speak of as “supernatural” and “natural.”

The Central Meaning of the Resurrection.

The central meaning of the Resurrection is that the New Age, the New Creation has already begun. This is the New Age promised by the prophets through which God’s justice and peace will embrace the world

We are:

- ◆ the covenant community (loosely called the “church”),
- ◆ the people of the Resurrection,
- ◆ God’s renewed people for the world,
- ◆ new human beings, transformed as Paul says, by the renewal of our minds (nous; see below),
- ◆ examples of a new model of “humanness,” a people who should show to the world what God intends human beings to be

who must take the New Age forward until it is finished.

The Christian Hope

The Christian Hope is for:

- ◆ the New Heaven and New Earth
- ◆ the re-integration of the two dimensions of God’s created order

After death there will be a time of rest, of refreshment, and then Resurrection into God’s New World.

Paradise is not the final resting place of the Blessed in Judaism, but rather a resting place until God makes the New World.

“We have in the Resurrection:

- ◆ a vision of the New World that has already begun,
- ◆ a vision of the New World that is yet to be,
- ◆ and an agenda for the present for New People that we are supposed to be in the power of the Spirit”

Discussion

Sin and the Resurrection

The Resurrection is the power through which we have the forgiveness of sins. Paul in 1 Corinthians says that if the Messiah had not been raised, then we are still in the power of sin. It is as though sin was “concentrated” on Jesus as the representative of the world. If Jesus is still dead, then God has not dwelt with sin and death and we are still under the thrall of sin and all that sin brings, including death, decay, corruption.

Christians still do sin. But the key question is: where do we live? Going back to the Exodus stories:

- ◆ Are we still living “in Egypt” – then we still hear the voice of our “slave master”, and we feel we have no choice but to obey.
- ◆ Or do we believe we are free of Egypt, albeit wandering in the wilderness, but on the way to the promised land, and live in that freedom and in the knowledge?

Because of the Resurrection, the forgiveness of sins (as we pray for in the Lord’s Prayer) is now a *possibility*, not merely a *hope*.

Has the New Creation Really Begun? Have Things Really Changed?

It has been 2000 years since Jesus. There is no one to tell us what things were like in Jesus’ day. Are we really “freed from Egypt”? Have things really changed? Are we really living in a New Age? What evidence is there?

Some humility is necessary as we look upon the history of the church. Yet there are saints – many right under our noses.

Consider: the Roman Empire before and after it converted to Christianity. There were changes for the better after its conversion, for example:

- ◆ new attitudes toward the death penalty
- ◆ caring for the sick
- ◆ change in the status of women

Consider in more modern times:

- ◆ the abolition of slavery
- ◆ the fall of the Berlin Wall

Consider:

- ◆ the arts inspired by religion

The gospel has changed the world, although we must be realistic about the challenges remaining.

Wright's attitude coming out of the Resurrection towards Jubilee 2000: the principalities and powers – the forces of Mammon, of economics -- have been defeated on the cross. The purpose of Jubilee is to bring the world into this reality, to apply the victory of the cross.

The Transformation of the “Mind” = *Nous*

Integrated Mind

Nous is normally translated as “mind” in the New Testament, but implies more than the modern view of “mind” -- in modern times “we think about thinking in a very shrunken manner.”

When Paul refers to the transformation of our minds in Romans 12, he means something much richer than what we think of as “mind.”

Nous does not contain the dichotomy between:

- ◆ “thought” vs. “action”
- ◆ “head” vs. “heart”
- ◆ “left brain” vs. “right brain”

Nous is integrated mind (“left and right brain,” “head and heart,” “head and feet” together).

A New Way of Knowing

The New Age has also brought to us “a new way of knowing, which is being known and loved by God, and hence being set free to know and love one another in the world, to relate appropriately to one another and to the world.”

God's Wisdom Become Human and Dwelling in Our Midst

Wisdom in the Jewish Wisdom Tradition includes a broad range of knowledge – from simple, basic knowledge such as how to boil an egg, all the way to the name of God and to how to relate within family and work.

In Ecclesiasticus (also called The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach), Wisdom asks where shall I go and live? And Wisdom decides to live in the temple as “the revelation of the way it is for God's people.”

The New Testament picks up on this image. Jesus is God's wisdom becoming human, God's thought becoming human. John speaks of God's *logos* (God's word and idea together) becoming human and dwelling in our midst (a temple image) and we beholding his glory (another temple image).

The Shroud of Turin

Recent carbon dating has suggested it is a medieval forgery. The carbon dating however may have been picking up medieval overlays of paint and/or fiber.

Studies have revealed some extraordinary details: for example, it was customary to lay Roman coins over the eyes at death in the first century, and there are Roman coins on the figure on the Shroud which are from the right period. However it could still be a very clever later forgery.

Although some people may have become Christians based on the Shroud of Turin, it ultimately should not be essential to faith. If the bridge over which you cross to the mainland is rickety, what is important in the end is that you are on the mainland.

Archeological Find of an Ossuary Containing a Jesus son of Joseph

The BBC recently publicized the find of an ossuary in the Holy Land containing a Jesus, son of Joseph, as well as a Judas, a James, and a Joseph.

The find is not really compelling (the Israeli archeologists were the least impressed): these are very, very common names for the time

Wright's Closing Comments

Living Daily with the Resurrection

Paul: all of life is prayed life. The idea that we should “pray” and worship only on Sunday would have been an anathema to Paul.

We do need “sacred” time when we consciously take time to worship God. We must also remember (in Lamentations): God’s mercy is new *every morning*, a Resurrection image.

A morning prayer that Wright uses in his private prayers: “As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence O God set our hearts on fire with love for you now and forever.”

“The rising sun is ‘God’s visual aid’ to remind us that the Resurrection matters today . . . we are to live each day in the light of the rising sun and that by that light we will see clearly to walk all the day through until the day dawns . . . when (as Revelation says) in the New City, in the New Jerusalem, they won’t need any sun or moon any longer because that’s the point at which God’s visual aid becomes reality, and the rising Son of God replaces the rising sun of the world and the Lord Jesus will be the light of that City forever. That’s what we are looking forward to, and in the light of that, we are now living and working, please God, to His praise and glory.”

Reference

Video. **Jesus' Resurrection. Then and Now.** N. T. Wright. Tabgha Foundation, Minneapolis. Available from CARES (Center for Advanced Religious External Studies), P.O. Box 863, Forest, VA, 24551. 800-665-2149. <http://www.caresonline.com/>