

Series: The Seven Sayings of the Cross, Part 10

Title: The Other Side of the Cross

Text: Matthew 27:45-54

Date: Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022

Prior to the crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples He would die. On three different occasions, He told them about the cross. Mark 8:31 says, "...he began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed, and rise after three days." Mark 9:31 similarly says, "For he was teaching his disciples and telling them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after he is killed, he will rise three days later.'"

Apart from the two aforementioned occasions, Jesus foretold His death a third time. He did so as He travelled with His disciples to Jerusalem. Scripture says, "They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were astonished, but those who followed him were afraid" (Mark 10:32). Why were the disciples "astonished" and why were those who followed Jesus "afraid?" The reason for such reactions was rather simple. Everyone knew that the religious establishment wanted Jesus dead. If Jesus went to Jerusalem, there would certainly be trouble. Our Lord sought to assuage His followers' fears by reminding them of God's plan for His life. He said, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death. Then they will hand him over to the Gentiles, and they will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him, and he will rise after three days" (Mark 10:33-34). On three different occasions, Jesus taught His disciples plainly about His upcoming death.

Overlooking the Cross

The Twelve were blind to Jesus' teaching. With fantasies concerning political emancipation, they looked straight past prophecies concerning the Messiah's suffering. They were fixated on a glorious kingdom free of any Roman influence or rule. It is for this reason that Peter initially scoffed at Jesus' pronouncement concerning death (Mark 8:32). It is also why the impetuous disciple unsheathed his sword at Jesus' arrest, attempting to strike a deathblow to the head of one of the men who apprehended Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:47).

Why did the rest of the disciples run for their lives when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:50)? What was the reason behind Peter's three-fold denial of our Lord (Mark 14:66-72)? Plain and simple, the disciples overlooked the cross. In their political fervor, they weren't mindful of the fact that Messiah had to suffer and die for sins (Isaiah 53:3-6).

The Twelve were blinded to the need for Calvary, but even after the cross they suffered another type of blindness. Though the Lord had also told them of His resurrection, they had no hope that He would be raised. In His post-resurrection appearances to His disciples, Jesus "rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who saw him after he had risen" (Mark 16:14). Though women had rushed from the empty tomb to herald news of the resurrection

(Matthew 28:8), the disciples brushed off the pronouncement, thinking it to be nothing more than the wishful thinking of grieving women.

How could the disciples overlook the place of the cross and the resurrection? On three different occasions, Jesus had told them He would be crucified and raised (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). The source of the disciples' folly was plainly evident. They were blind to realities related to the cross and the resurrection because they were focused on political aspirations. Even on the road to Jerusalem, James and John made a selfish request regarding the kingdom, saying, "Allow us to sit at your right and at your left in your glory" (Mark 10:37). Jesus replied, "You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink..." (Mark 10:38). The concept of a "cup" represented suffering in the ancient world. The meaning of our Lord's rebuke was plain. The disciples weren't focused on Jesus' redemptive work at Calvary. They were too concerned with political emancipation.

"Don't Leave Jesus Dead"

Aren't we sometimes like the disciples? Don't we sometimes overlook gospel realities in pursuit of our personal priorities? In this chapter I am concerned with one reality we often neglect. Though we often give adequate attention to the cross, we sometimes diminish the importance of the resurrection.

I remember an experience I had that made me see the importance of the resurrection. During my college years, I travelled and preached in local churches, filling in for small churches who needed preachers. On one particular Sunday, I preached at a small congregation out in the countryside near a very small, Southern town. After having preached on the cross, an older man approached. He said, "Son, you messed up! You did a good job talking about the cross, but you forgot to mention the resurrection!" He then added, "When you preach, don't ever leave Jesus dead!"

The man's reminder has stuck with me throughout my ministry. Without the resurrection, the gospel is incomplete. By being raised, Jesus proved He was God and He demonstrated that His work of atonement was effectual. Apart from the resurrection, our faith would be incomplete. Paul said, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Given the priority of the resurrection, it is important that we conclude our study of the seven sayings of the cross by considering the subject. No study of the cross is sufficient without a consideration of the empty tomb. In what follows, we will examine Paul's teaching on the resurrection from the book of Romans. In doing so, we will highlight five accomplishments the resurrection has secured for God's people.

CERTAINTY OF SALVATION (ROMANS 10:9)

Belief in the resurrection is pivotal to Christian salvation. In Romans 10:9, we read, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." The words, as written by the apostle Paul, provide a snapshot of what takes place at the moment of conversation. From a human perspective, two basic actions bring salvation to the heart of men and women — *confession* and *belief* concerning the person of Jesus.

The first action — confession — involves acknowledgment of Jesus' divine nature. The Greek word used for "confession" in Romans 10:9 was a compound word

that literally meant “to say the same thing.” In moral and religious contexts, it was used to portray the act of one professing belief in a stated creed or code of ethics. Paul used the word to say Christian salvation requires a profession that “Jesus is Lord.”

One cannot be saved apart from a profession in Jesus’ divine nature. To be forgiven of sin, one must believe that He was the God-Man who lived and died for sins. One must say the same thing about Him that God would say. His sinlessness and divinity must be affirmed.

The second action — belief — involves an affirmation concerning the work Jesus accomplished. Paul said it is necessary for one to “believe...that God raised him from the dead.” The word translated “believe” did not refer to a mere mental assent to a set of facts. Instead, it spoke of a confidence, trust, or reliance in a person, place or thing. Applied to salvation, the term indicated that one must trust in Jesus’ work at the cross for salvation.

Notice that Paul specifically mentioned the resurrection in Romans 10:9. He revealed that the event is integral to Christian salvation. Christians are saved from sin and death because Jesus was raised from the dead. Since sin deserves death (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23), life must be given for one to be rescued for sin. The resurrection was an act wherein the Lord secured such life for His people.

Seen in this way, the resurrection is more than a special event to be celebrated yearly at Easter. It is to be regarded as the cornerstone of Christian salvation. In being raised, Jesus reversed the consequences of sin and defeated death. He purchased everlasting life for all who confess Him as Lord and trust in His work on behalf of sin.

FREEDOM OF JUSTIFICATION (ROMANS 4:25)

The place of the resurrection in Christian salvation is further explained by Paul in Romans 4:25. In that verse, the apostle said, “He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” According to Scripture, something called “justification” is a direct result of the resurrection. What is involved in such a concept?

The Greek noun for “justification” only appears twice in the New Testament. Both uses of the word are found in the book of Romans. Paul used the term again in Romans 5:18, saying, “So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone.” From Paul’s use of the noun in the book of Romans, it is clear that justification is a fundamental part of Christian conversion. But what does the act entail?

The word rendered “justification” in Romans 4:25 and 5:18 was one that had a basic meaning of “to make right.” In Roman courts, it was often used to speak of one being acquitted of a crime. It is important to note that justification was not primarily seen as being something one earned from his or her own conduct. Instead, the act was intimately tied to the character and credentials of a judge who passed judgment. One experienced justification because of the decision and decree of another.

In Christian salvation, justification is the act whereby one is made right with God. Because of Jesus’ righteous life, believers are declared not guilty of their sins. They are fully vindicated and acquitted of all wrong doing. Though their sins were many, they

are released from the penalty they deserve. Before the tribunal of God's holy justice, they are decreed righteous.

According to Paul, the resurrection secured this thing called justification. Some miss this element of Christian salvation. They don't see the empty tomb in all of its luster and glory. They regard it as little more than a triumph over the executioners' ploys. They fail to see it as an integral part of the work that bought their salvation from sin and death. One has spoken concerning these matters, saying:

The resurrection of Jesus Christ must not be thought of simply as evidence of His death. The stress here is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is necessary to justification, not merely because of the difference it makes to us as certifying the atoning efficacy of His death and thus evoking our faith in Him, but also because of the difference it makes for Christ Himself. It marks the point at which His sovereign power as Lord is made effective. Our justification, the basis of which has been laid in the death, becomes an accomplished fact and effective reality only through Christ's rising again.¹

AN EXPERIENCE OF NEW LIFE (ROMANS 6:4)

In Romans 6:4, Paul said, "Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life." Paul's words referred to the act of baptism. However, he did not intend to speak of baptism in a literal sense. Instead, he used it as a metaphor for the experience of Christian salvation.

In Paul's metaphor, the immersion of a person under water in baptism stood for something. It represented the way in which the power of sin is broken when one is saved. Paul spoke of believers being "buried with him by baptism into death." The "him" of Romans 6:4 was Jesus. Paul intended to convey that Christians experience a sort of death with Jesus at the moment of salvation.

What type of death was Paul talking about? His intent was to reference the way the power of sin is broken at conversion. He used similar language in his letter to the Galatians, saying, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Paul was clear — Christian salvation involves a figurative crucifixion and death in which a believer dies to the power of sin.

Though the presence of sin will not be removed until Christ makes all things new, believers can have confidence that the penalty and power of sin have been broken in their lives. They no longer have to live according the promptings and passions of mere humanity. This was Paul's entire train of thought in Romans 6. He started the chapter by saying, "What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2).

If you are in Christ, the crucifixion of Christ has rendered sin powerless over your life. You don't have to give into worldly actions, addictions, and attitudes. Besetting

¹ Zodhiates, [CD-Rom].

sin doesn't have to be your master. Remember, Jesus cried, "It is finished!" You are forgiven and you are free from sin's dominion!

Paul emphasized the crucifixion in his baptism metaphor for good reason, but he also highlighted the resurrection. He equated the event with the way one is raised out of the water at baptism. For Paul, such raising signified how Christians are saved to "walk in newness of life." The Greek word rendered "newness" is one that was used of freshness. It sometimes had connotations of "strangeness," depicting the feelings of unfamiliarity that often accompany change.² Paul used the word in a moral sense, speaking of the moral renewal Christ brings to the believer's life.

The word rendered "newness" only appears one other time in the New Testament. Interestingly, the other occurrence is also within Paul's letter to the Romans. The apostle used the same Greek word from Romans 6:4 later in his epistle to say, "But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the *newness* of the Spirit..." (Romans 7:6). Paul's intent was to emphasize the way in which Christians have an approach to God that is not bound to Old Testament ways of looking at God. Because of Christ, they have "newness of the Spirit."

The apostle's words in Romans 7:6 are significant, because they show the source of the new life we have in Christ. Specifically, it is "the Spirit" that makes all things new. The Third Person of the Trinity is the means through which we are experiencing the renewing and refreshing of Jesus. At salvation, He comes to live within the heart of the believer (Galatians 3:2; Ephesians 1:13-14). By Him, believers receive instruction, comfort, and guidance for every season and struggle of life (John 16:7-15).

The new life we have through the resurrection can give us confidence and courage. Though life can seem strained and stale at times, the resurrection can make a difference. Because Christ is alive, we have a new perspective, new priorities, and a new purpose in life. Jesus is within us by His Spirit, and His Spirit gives us hope and help when life is hard. If Jesus would have remained dead, life would have indeed remained bleak. However, the resurrection teaches us that we have been raised to live a new type of life.

The new life we have also teaches us about how we should live. Remember the word translated "newness" was often used in a moral sense. As Paul referenced the resurrection through his baptism metaphor in Romans 6:4, he intended to encourage his readers to pursue a Christian lifestyle. He knew that many were being tempted to live like the rest of the world. Satan's schemes to dupe humanity have marked every age of human history. Since the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-7), man's archenemy has attempted to distract people to live for pleasure, possessions, and personal prestige (1 John 2:16-17). Knowing these things, Paul encouraged his readers to live in "newness" of life.

It is interesting to think of how the word translated "newness" was often used to speak of something that was strange. We referenced this earlier, but it is worth repeating here. The term was sometimes utilized to speak of a person who

² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 327.

encountered a foreign land. Entering into a new country, one would undoubtedly experience many “new” things, but such things would surely seem “strange.”

When it comes to the Christian lifestyle, believers are called to live in a “new” way. Because of Christ’s presence in their lives, they are to conduct themselves differently. Their attitudes and actions, beliefs and behaviors, viewpoints and values stand out in stark contrast to those of the rest of the world. In one of his letters, Peter said, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:14-16).

Living in such a “new” way would have certainly made Peter’s readers seem “strange” amongst unbelievers. When a Christian thinks differently and speaks differently, others notice. It is for this reason, that Peter later told his readership, “Dear friends, I urge you as *strangers* and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). When Christians live differently they stand out as bright lights against the black backdrop of corruption and confusion that is in the world. Jesus highlighted these realities in His famous Sermon on the Mount, telling His disciples, “...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

What was Paul’s point concerning the resurrection in Romans 6:4? The apostle wanted his readers to see that the resurrection calls believers to live lives consecrated to God. The Lord’s people aren’t to be marked by the old, stale ways of living and thinking that mark the rest of humanity. The resurrection has made them new.

In addition, Paul wanted his readers to be aware of how they could be witnesses for Christ. As God’s children embrace the new life they have in Christ, they stand out, being “strange” in a good way. Such is part and parcel of why God calls His people to holiness. When others see the new life Christians enjoy, many will be urged to worship the Lord themselves.

PROMISE OF A GO-BETWEEN (ROMANS 8:34)

Some have a one-dimensional view of salvation. They only focus on the fact that “Jesus died for you.” They overlook the significance of the life of Christ. They also diminish the importance of the resurrection.

Beyond these things, many are blind to the final work of Christ on Earth, a work known as “the ascension.” The act is a rudimentary part of Christ’s work on behalf of His people. It is described in Acts 1:9. In that passage, Luke said, “...he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” One theologian has defined the ascension as “the departure of Jesus from earth to heaven, marking the end of his post resurrection appearances to his disciples.”³ The author of Hebrews spoke of the event by saying, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3).

The ascension is significant for a couple of reasons. In particular, two reasons are seen from the passages mentioned above. First, Hebrews 1:3-4 tells us the

³ McKim, 19.

ascension is important because it signified Jesus' sovereign reign over all things. After detailing the event in Hebrews 1:3, the author of Hebrews said, "So he became superior to the angels, just as the name he inherited is more excellent than theirs" (Hebrews 1:4). In ascending to the right hand of God, Jesus proved that He has "the name that is above every name" (Philippians 2:9). Our Lord sovereignly rules over the nations from heaven. He has power over all things. The ascension teaches us these things are so. We should submit our lives to Him and trust His wise providence in the details of our lives.

Second, Acts 1:8-9 tells us the ascension is important because it also signified the coming of the Holy Spirit to Earth. Before describing the ascension in Acts 1:9, Luke depicted Jesus as saying, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). For Jesus, the ascension was inexplicably tied to the sending of the Spirit into the hearts of His people. It is for this reason that He once told His disciples, "Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

For the purposes of our study on the resurrection, we want to focus on this second benefit of the ascension. Both the ascension and the resurrection, had a part to play in the coming of the Holy Spirit upon believers. In Romans 8:34, Paul said, "Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us." Notice the way Paul mentioned both the resurrection and the ascension in his words. He referenced Christ being "raised" and Christ being "at the right hand of God."

What is interesting for our study is how both the resurrection and the ascension have contributed to the fact that "Christ Jesus...intercedes for us." After having been raised, and after having been seated at the right hand of God, Jesus took upon Himself a role of interceding for us. In ways beyond our full comprehension, He is in the presence of God. He always makes intercession for our spiritual needs.

Because Jesus has been raised, we can be confident that we have a go-between in all stages and phases of life. When we need help, strength, wisdom, and comfort, we can go to Him. If we are overwhelmed with guilt and shame because of feelings of failure or unworthiness, we can trust that He is always advocating on our behalf. The resurrection means we have a living Savior who is always standing before God in our defense!

HOPE OF FUTURE RESURRECTION (ROMANS 8:11)

A final benefit of the resurrection is seen in Romans 8:11. In that passage, Paul said, "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you." Paul's words indicated that Jesus' resurrection guarantees our future resurrection. The same Holy Spirit that raised Him from the dead will also give us new bodies at the end of time. We have hope of living forever because Jesus was raised to live forever.

In Romans 8:11, Paul used a present tense verb to depict the way the Holy Spirit "lives in" believers. The verbiage indicates a continual indwelling. Paul's point

was that the Spirit of God will never leave the true believer. Jesus guaranteed as much when He said, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). Because God's Spirit will always be with us, we can be confident that He will one day give us resurrection bodies that will live forever in the presence of God.

In His letter to the Ephesians, Paul tied the themes of the Spirit's permanent indwelling and the future resurrection together. He said, "In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14).

If we know we have been saved, we know we have the Holy Spirit. If we know we have the Holy Spirit, we can know that we will one day be raised. Jesus' resurrection has secured the future resurrection of our bodies. We never have to fear that death is the end. It will not be the end for us, nor should it be regarded as the end for any other believer in Christ. In light of these things, Charles Spurgeon rightly said, "If we are really in our senses, the thought of fearing death would be ridiculous."⁴

⁴ Spurgeon, C.H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1881; 27 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1984), 151.