

## Eternity in their Hearts III

Arklow 21<sup>st</sup> April 2013

Over the past few weeks, we've looked at some of the implications of the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the grave after being crucified. What does it mean? What difference does it make to our lives today?

We've looked at these:

1. The resurrection is absolutely central to the gospel. Without Jesus being raised from the dead, there is no good news in him. He's just another well-meaning person who taught some good stuff and got killed for it. (Ghandi, MLK Jr, Lennon...)

2. The resurrection is central to the existence of the church – we are witnesses of the resurrection.

3. It shows us there is hope beyond this mortal life – because He rose it shows that people can rise. We can believe his words in JN 11:25-36 (HCSB)

*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die – ever. Do you believe this?*

4. It has implications for our life now, not just in that it gives us hope and strength to endure the difficulties and challenges of life, knowing that they are temporary, but because of the position it gives Jesus.

He is not just the 'firstfruits' or 'forerunner' He has been given absolute supremacy.

One of the main names that Jesus used to describe himself was 'the son of man'. This was a reference to his humanity and his representative nature – that in himself he represented all humanity. But it also referred to a particular passage from the prophet Daniel, where there is a vision of the heavenly realm at the end of history.

*I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven.*

*He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him.*

*He was given authority to rule, and glory, and a kingdom;*

*so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve Him.*

*His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away,*

*and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.*

Daniel 7:13-14 HCSB

Later in the same chapter this establishment of a new dominion is shared with God's 'holy ones'

*But the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess it forever, yes forever and ever. (7:18, cf. 22, 27)*

In the last chapter of Daniel this time of inheritance is found to have another side to it:

*But at that time all your people who are found written in the book will escape.*

*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, and some to shame and eternal contempt.*

Daniel 12:2 (Only explicit reference to eternal life in OT)

Jesus quoted DA 7 he was on trial before the religious leaders. In fact, it was the final straw that led them to condemn him to death, because he was clearly claiming a divine nature and authority, something they couldn't stomach.

The implications are clear: the Son of Man is the figure that will lead a new, perfect order under God's ultimate authority. They will make an evaluation between those who will be part of that order and those who won't. And that evaluation, that decision, will be just and it will be final.

After Jesus had returned to the Father, the early apostles preached the message not just that Jesus was the Son of Man, but that he had risen and had ultimate authority, including the authority to be the final arbiter between God and man, and between people.

Pentecost: Peter (speaking to Jews)

*God has resurrected this Jesus. We are all witnesses of this. Therefore, since He has been **exalted** to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, He has poured out what you both see and hear.*

AC 2:32-33

*God exalted this man to His right hand **as ruler and Saviour to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.** We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.*

AC 5:31-31 Again, Peter to Jews

Then the message broke out beyond the borders of the people of Israel:

*God raised up this man on the third day and permitted him to be seen...He commanded us to preach to the people and to solemnly testify that **He is the One appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.***

Acts 10:40-42 Peter, speaking to Gentiles

And just in case you think this was just Peter's thing, at the heart of the Greek civilisation of the ancient world, Paul proclaimed in Athens:

*God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has set a day when **he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.***

Acts 17:30-31

Time and time again in the New Testament the day of decision is stressed as the future crux of human history, just as Creation, the Fall and the events of Easter are the hinges in the past. We put great emphasis on the fact that Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection were predicted through the many different writers, styles and experiences of the Old Testament period. Handel wrote a whole oratorio about it. But there are far more predictions of Jesus' second coming, over 250 in fact, and each of them point to Him being the focal point of how people live now, and how they will live in the life to come.

You see, we get all kinds of images and emotions triggered when we think of the message of 'judgement'. For some reason, we immediately hone in on the negative side of it, of punishment. Maybe that's our conscience speaking, our inner knowledge that we haven't even lived up to our own standards, let alone God's. Maybe it's our experience of people in authority who have made unfair and unjust decisions about us in the past, whether parents, at school, employers or whoever.

So somehow we can get the sense that it will be unfair, that God will somehow be cruel and arbitrary, or that really he has no right to judge us. (Interestingly, those who've been through the judicial process sometimes still acknowledge God's right – tattoo)

But let's look at it a different way – not the model of a sadistic deputy principal, overwhelmed parent or power-hungry boss. What is God? He is love. He is holy, that is utterly pure and good in his nature, his thoughts, his words and his actions. Nothing in him is in any way crooked or polluted. And he created mankind to be like him, to

reflect this holy, loving nature to the world, and to be in a perfect, covenanted relationship with Him. That's his bottom line desire for mankind. Can we grasp that? Let's take an illustration: in **manufacturing**, a product is developed and a process designed to make it. One of the key elements of this is Quality Control or Assurance. The manufacturer wants to know that every product that goes out of the factory is of sufficient quality for its purpose and for the reputation of the company. If it's not up to standard, it's rejected or recycled, and the process adjusted so that it doesn't happen again.

Every illustration is imperfect. We are not 'products' but we are the creations of a perfect designer and maker. And he wants us to be fit for purpose: to be in relationship with Him, loving and holy and reflecting him. If there are imperfections in us, if we are in any way crooked or polluted, we won't be able to be in that relationship. The mirror is cracked.

*"What we will hear on the judgement day will be familiar, only too familiar. At the judgement you will meet yourself, and I myself, the people we have been in the lives we have lived." Bruce Milne*

We're in **exam** season. If that doesn't endanger our thinking about a 'final test' then nothing will! Fourteen years of education coming down to a few hours of what you can recall and regurgitate in an exam room, with seemingly your whole future hanging on what happens between opening and closing the papers. It's an imperfect system, for sure, but no-one questions the idea that we need to evaluate what has been learned, what skills have been developed and what potential there might be for the future, whether in further education or in employment. And there are resources out there to help us: Study Hub, Revise Wise, grinds & so on.

Can't we expect our Maker and the One who has died and risen for us to give our lives some kind of evaluation? And can't we trust a loving, perfect God to evaluate our lives in a way that's fair and just? Put the two together and we have a Judge who wants everyone to get an A1, and who has provided the means for that to happen, if we're willing to take it.

Or another place where an examination takes place: a **doctor's surgery**. The doctor checks over every symptom and sign to work out what is wrong and then prescribes the best treatment to restore health. There may be some restrictions: bed rest, dietary changes, unpleasant medicine, but the goal is health.

God has performed a thorough diagnostic survey of humanity, of your life. And the verdict is clear: we're severely infected with sin, the tendency to turn away from Him and therefore from His holy and loving nature. The prognosis isn't good. Without drastic surgery to cut this disease out of us, it will corrupt and kill us, not just here but forever. It's terminal. That is God's judgement on mankind. Without getting this dealt with, our final examination will result in failure, rejection, death.

Where did we catch this disease? From the original rebel against God, the one who knew perfection in God's presence but then tried to rival God and had to be pushed out of the glory of heaven. We've come to know him as Satan, the accuser, the deceiver, the father of lies. He lied to Adam and Eve in the garden undermining God's word and telling them that God would not punish them for disobeying, then making the disobedience seem attractive. **He uses exactly the same tactics today.**

The issue at stake was the ability to know good and evil. God knew these, being all-knowing. He didn't want mankind to know evil, only the good that he created for

them. Into the mix came Satan, who knew good because he had been made that way and stood in God's presence, but who also knew evil because he had chosen that way. God wanted mankind to love Him from choice, not from being programmed that way, so he gave total freedom to enjoy everything He'd made, but also to choose not to take this path. He spelled out the consequences: you'll experience something I never intended for you: death and separation from my presence.

Satan's lie was that God wouldn't follow through with these consequences, that there is no ultimate accountability. He also suggested that God was being unfair, trying to keep valuable knowledge and experience from people – 'he knows that when you eat it you'll be like God.' But in fact, Satan was enticing people to be like him: knowing good and evil not out of almighty knowledge but out of falling from a place of perfection. Every time we choose to go our own way, we are actually going the way of the devil. He's including us into the condemnation that he's under.

Let's bring this together in some of Jesus' own words.

He told a story of a harvest field. (MT 13:24-30, 36-43) The farmer sowed good wheat seed in the field and looked forward to a good crop. But he had an enemy, who came along and sowed weeds in the field. When the shoots came up, the workers realised there was a mixed crop and asked if they should take out the weeds. The farmer said no: don't damage the roots, but wait until the grain is ripe, harvest everything and separate the good crop from the weeds. The wheat was gathered into his barns and the weeds thrown out and burnt.

Again, it's an illustration, and incomplete. What Jesus was getting at is that there will be a final separation between his 'holy ones' (as in Daniel) who will inherit his kingdom and those who won't.

The great news that's not in this parable is that being a wheat or a weed isn't dependent on where you're born, who your family is or what kind of upbringing you've had. Every single one of us has the opportunity to change from a weed destined for the fire to wheat set aside for God's house.

The night before he went to the cross, Jesus spoke to his friends and promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to them. It's interesting what he said the Holy Spirit would bring to them.

*When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness and judgement; about sin, because they do not believe in me, about righteousness because I am going to the father and you will no longer see me, and about judgement because the ruler of this world has been judged.*

John 16:8-11

Notice the different aspects of that conviction.

The world needs to be convicted of sin, because it's in the position of not believing in Jesus, and so being out of connection with God.

The disciples need to be convicted of righteousness, because Jesus will be gone from their sight and they need to know that all he has brought continues in them through the Holy Spirit.

We all need to be convicted about judgement, but Jesus emphasises that it's Satan, the prince of this world, that stands condemned. Judgement is on him and on everyone who by their own rebellion against God (even through ignorance or disbelief) join with Satan. Hell was not created for people, but for the angels that fell in league with Lucifer.

This was in the same conversation where Jesus said that he was going to prepare a place for his followers in God's presence.

Judgement is about separation, separation between right and wrong, good and evil, life and death. Sin has brought death to every one of us, and God wants to separate us from it. He poured out all the punishment, all the consequence of broken relationship, on Jesus on the cross. When we trust in that, then we are separated from sin and death and joined with Christ and eternal life in God's presence. If we choose not to, we choose to be separated from God forever on that last day.

So the resurrection establishes Jesus as our just and loving judge. He gives us the qualification we need to pass the evaluation, if we're willing to accept it from him, and he calls us to live out of that grace now, showing his love and care to the world around us. And so our lives will be examined and weighed, and a separation will be made.

That's a sobering and glorious thought at the same time.

Final Blessing:

*May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good work and word.*

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17