



## Resurrection and Revelation

1 Corinthians 15 is the chapter that deals with the question of the resurrection most fully and directly. The crux I always feel is this:

“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” (vss.13, 14, 16, 17)

This definite sense of the Resurrection and of the miraculous that goes with it is important in a time like our own. We have just emerged from a period where for over a hundred years liberal theologians denied the historical resurrection of Jesus and tried to explain it as the understanding of the community of followers of Jesus, and their hope. But this is a patronising view. If Jesus is not raised, how can it be called ‘understanding’ to say he is? It is delusion, not understanding. And how can it be hope? It is a fiction, not a hope. And so the liberal view did not last, at least not within the Church, although it remains normative outside the Church.

Paul is very clear about the historical fact of the resurrection and how our salvation actually hinges on this historical fact. If there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead, and if therefore Jesus was not raised from the dead, if it is just an understanding and a hope of well-meaning people, then there is no salvation, “you are still in your sins” (vs.17). As if the Church has been making false representations for two millennia! As if Christianity could have survived and spread on the basis of a fiction! It is an indictment of our age, not of the New Testament, that we can more easily believe that Christianity could have spread on the basis of a myth of its leader’s resurrection, than we can believe in the historical fact of it. Faith, Paul says, can only be based on the historical fact, otherwise it is useless.

It is worth noting that the Gospel writers have Jesus’ resurrection being discovered by women, because within Judaism, there was a prejudice against the reliability of female witnesses in the oral tradition, which appears later written in the Talmud (*Numbers Rabbah* 10; *Yalkut Shimoni* I, 82). So if it was a fictional account of something that didn’t happen, written to persuade the world that it did, it would be less persuasive to have women make the discovery. Also, it would be even *less* persuasive to have women overcome with emotion make the discovery – but this is how the text of the resurrection shows them. In Matthew the women leave the tomb “afraid yet filled with joy.” (Mt.28:8). In Mark the women are “alarmed” and “fled from the tomb” because they were “trembling and bewildered”, then they “were afraid” and “said nothing to anyone.” (Mk.16). In Luke the women were “wondering” about the empty tomb then “in their fright” fall on their faces at the presence of

the Lord, and later, telling of this, “their words seemed like nonsense” and no one believes them. (Lk.24:1-12). Hardly rhetoric pitched to convince sceptical Greek philosophers or worldly Jewish lawyers! What we have in fact is realism, not rhetoric, reportage not fiction.

What does the fact of the resurrection say about our world and what does it say about ourselves? This is where revelation comes in. The resurrection is also a revelation. The resurrection indicates something about our world – that God can do miracles in it – and that the world is the kind of world that has *the capacity for miracles to happen in it*. As far as we know this has not changed. Also, with respect to ourselves, the resurrection shows that *we are already miracles* in the world; because if God can raise Jesus from the dead and he was human just as we are, but for sin, we have the potential, our sin forgiven, to rise with him in glory. So our world is not a Newtonian mechanism with fixed laws of nature – that is the myth! Nor is our human body like a machine or some kind of ultra-hi-tech device that ultimately we can ‘map’ – that is the myth! The basis of our body is not its materiality – that is the myth! Rather, the revelation is that our body has a miraculous capacity or potentiality, like Jesus’, to conquer the grave. Those who follow other lords will die and “they live no more” (Isa.26:14) but those who follow the Lord of life, and whose sins are thereby washed away, “will live, their bodies will rise ... the earth will give birth to her dead.” (Isa.26:19). The resurrection of Jesus *confirms* a picture of the world and of the human being that is new, amazing and historically-based *and this is the real hope!*

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