
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 24: RESURRECTION

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

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21 CHAPTERS OLD TESTAMENT • 9 CHAPTERS NEW TESTAMENT

Old Testament Lectures:

1. Introduction
2. Creation
3. Fall
4. Noah
5. Abraham
6. Patriarchs I
7. Patriarchs II
8. Exodus
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12. Priesthood
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New Testament Lectures:

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Lecture 24

RESURRECTION

Lecture Theme:

God reveals his glory to men and angels through the triumphant resurrection of Christ, through which he secures the promised redemption of his people.

Text:

“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished” (1 Cor. 15:17–18).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 24

The Bible is full of what we might call grand reversals. Over and over throughout redemptive history, God’s people appear to stand on the brink of disaster when suddenly and unexpectedly the Lord turns everything around and brings a great victory. Think of Israel standing with their backs to the Red Sea and the fiercest army in the world, Egypt, pressing toward them. All looks lost. Then, the Lord parts the Red Sea, brings His people across on dry land, and drowns the armies of Pharaoh in the sea. What a deliverance and how unexpected! Or, think of the account of Esther toward the end of the Old Testament era. You find yourself sitting on the edge of your seat as Haman plots the destruction of the Jews, and again, seemingly in a split second, God turns everything upside down and saves His people. The Old Testament is full of these kinds of examples. So, we’re accustomed to God’s pattern.

Now, imagine Christ’s disciples. They must have felt overwhelming defeat at the cross. Their whole world seemed to come crashing down at the death of their Lord, but as we will see in this lecture, the cross was not the end of the story. Christ triumphed over death in His resurrection and secured the most magnificent victory in history. Was Christ’s resurrection anticipated in the Old Testament? Was the nature of Christ’s body after the resurrection the same as before? Was it still a true body? How did Christ’s resurrection serve as a public vindication of Himself? What is the relationship between Christ’s resurrection and the salvation of the souls of God’s people? How is it connected to the future resurrection of the body of believers? In this lecture, we will consider the next great event in biblical history: Christ’s resurrection. We will explore the place of His resurrection within God’s plan of redemption and the implications for the salvation of God’s people.

So, first of all, let’s focus on Christ’s resurrection itself. The Old Testament provides several references to the resurrection of Christ. For example, we sing about it in Psalm 16:10, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,” or the grave,” neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” In Acts 2:27–31, Peter quotes this text from

Psalms 16 in a sermon and says that it spoke of Christ's resurrection, foretelling that God would raise up Christ to sit on David's throne. Paul refers to the same passage, along with Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 2:7, in a sermon at Antioch. You can read that in Acts 13:30–37, but there are others. Think of Jesus Himself, Who cites the experience of Jonah as an Old Testament type of Christ's resurrection.

In Matthew 12:38–40 we read, "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." After Christ's death and burial, He rose from the grave on the third day. The resurrection body of Jesus was a true physical body, not just a ghostly kind of appearance of a body. He ate with His disciples, showed them His nail-pierced hands, and invited Thomas to touch and handle His body. It was His true body, the one He had before His death, though now made new; and it would be further glorified upon His ascension into heaven.

Christ's resurrection was the greatest miracle of all, and the definitive and public declaration of His vindication. Let me provide some examples of what the resurrection demonstrated. First of all, it demonstrated that Christ is God's Messiah. In Acts 2:36 we read, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ." It also demonstrates that He is the Son of God as He had proclaimed. In Romans 1:4 Paul says, "and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Thirdly, it demonstrated that His sacrifice was accepted by God for the redemption of His people. In Romans 4:25 says, "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." Lastly, we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ reigns as Sovereign over all. In Revelation 1:18, we have this vision of the Lord Jesus Christ to the apostle John, and Jesus says, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

Despite the frequent attacks of unbelievers against Christ's resurrection, the truth of His resurrection is abundantly clear. Notice just a handful of things. First of all, we have the empty tomb. The empty tomb was discovered by multiple independent sources. The first witnesses were women, and then His disciples. You'll note that in the first century, and especially among the Jews, women had low social status, indeed, a status that prohibited them from serving as legal witnesses in court. It's obviously the case that the disciples would not have made up a story that had women as the first witnesses if it weren't true. So, the witnesses include women, His followers, and His disciples, but [they] also included Jesus's Jewish enemies. We're told that they bribed the soldiers to lie and say that His disciples had stolen Christ's body away. We read about that in Matthew 28:11–15.

Secondly, there were many eyewitnesses of Christ's physical resurrected body. So, in I Corinthians 15:6 Paul tells us of over 500 people [who] saw Christ after the resurrection and who were still living, most of them, at the time that Paul was writing, and who could therefore be interviewed, and whose collective testimony could not be disputed. Another eyewitness was Paul himself, an archenemy of the church, who was converted through his experience of seeing the resurrected and ascended Christ on the road to Damascus.

Thirdly, the disciples as Jews believed in the future resurrection of the body at the end of time, but they would've had no concept of a defeated Messiah, much less a resurrection prior to the last day. Now, this is of course despite Jesus's teaching. He had been instructing them in these truths, though they were slow to see it and believe it until after it came to pass. But, their experience of Christ's resurrection became the dominant force of the church's ministry and preaching. As you see in Peter's sermon in Acts 2 and throughout the rest of the New Testament, Christ's resurrection was central to the gospel and biblical orthodoxy. In fact, the doctrine of the resurrection is so indispensable to salvation that no one can be a true Christian or go to heaven unless they affirm this truth. We read in Romans 10:9, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." And so, the influence of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ on the disciples transformed them. They went out in great boldness proclaiming the person and work of Jesus Christ, and they were empowered, and they were motivated and driven by their experience of seeing Him after the resurrection.

Throughout this first point, we have been considering God's act of raising Christ from the dead. This was a true historical event in the history of redemption, which we're studying in this course. Paul says, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished"

(I Corinthians 15:17–18). To understand the theology of the resurrection, we need to consider the implications for the salvation of God's people. How is Christ's resurrection related to God's plan to save His people? We will consider that under two points. So first of all, we were looking at Christ's resurrection. Secondly, the believers' past resurrection, or the believers' past spiritual resurrection. The New Testament speaks of the believer being already raised with Christ in one sense and not yet raised with Christ in another sense. We will first of all consider how the Christian has already been raised with Christ, His past spiritual resurrection. The Christian experiences the resurrection power of Christ and the salvation of their souls.

Now to understand this, we must first recognize that the New Testament teaches a connection between Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of the believers. That connection is through the believers' union with Christ. We will look in greater detail at union with Christ in Lecture 27. Because the believer is united to Christ, all that Christ has accomplished was accomplished for them and becomes theirs in Him. The power of His resurrection is at work in their salvation. Now why would this be necessary? The answer is because men by nature are spiritually dead. We learned in a previous lecture about total depravity, man's inability. It is through Christ's resurrection power that believers are brought to newness of life. So, we read in Ephesians 2:5–6, "Even when we were dead in sins, hath [he] quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

We see this reinforced again in Colossians 2:12–13, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened," or made alive, "together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." So, you see Christ's resurrection power is brought to bear in the soul and salvation of the believer. Christ's resurrection also secured our justification as we saw earlier in Romans 4:25, "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." Furthermore, the believers' ongoing war with sin in the Christian life depends on the outworking of Christ's resurrection power in enabling them to mortify sin. The believer can rightly count himself dead to sin, no longer under the dominion of sin and, therefore, not compelled to serve sin. If you read Romans 6:4–10, you'll see this expounded.

Therefore, the whole orientation of the Christian's mind and affections must be centered on Christ in heaven. We pursue His interest in glory as those that are raised with Him. Paul says in Colossians 3:1, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." And so, because of the believer's union with the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection of Christ includes the believer. They are raised with Him, and that resurrection power is brought to bear in saving them and in sanctifying them. So, this refers to the believer's past spiritual resurrection, the sinner taken from being dead in sins and made alive, raised, as it were, to newness of life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, we have the believers' future bodily resurrection, the resurrection of the body on the last day raised the glory. We read in II Corinthians 4:14, "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you." The gospel imparts the hope of the future resurrection of the believer's body, so if you go to I Corinthians 15, that's the fullest or longest chapter in the New Testament devoted to this doctrine; you'll find much help there. But, even in the early period of the Old Testament, we find references to the resurrection. So, for example, we see Job declaring his confidence in the resurrection of his body. What a beautiful passage [is] at the end of Job 19:25–27 where Job, in the midst of all his sufferings, speaks of how he will stand upon the earth in the last day and with his own eyes he will behold his Redeemer and so on.

This future bodily resurrection of the believer is also attached to our union with Christ. We see this both in the concept of Christ as the firstfruits and as the firstborn from the dead. Paul says that Christ has gone ahead of His people, securing their resurrection through His own. Just as He was raised, so those who were united to Him by faith will also be raised and made to sit with Him in heavenly places: I Corinthians 15:20–23, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." So, the firstfruits are like a down payment. They guarantee that all else will follow.

Because the Lord Jesus has been raised, so too, His people in union with Him will also have their bodies raised. He is the firstfruits. Likewise, Paul says in Colossians 1:18, "And he," that is Christ, "is the head of the

body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.” Christ is the head. The church is the body. Where the head is, the body must be also. And so, if the head has been resurrected and seated in heaven, the body must follow. He is the firstborn of all those who will experience this resurrection with Him. And so, union with Christ also results in the bodily resurrection of the Christian at Christ’s second coming on the last day.

All men will be raised from the dead. Believers will be raised to glory, and unbelievers, their bodies will be raised as well but to condemnation. Here is how the Westminster Shorter Catechism question 38 describes what awaits the experience of believers. It says, “At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.” When Christ came to save His people, He came to save every bit of them: their whole person, both their souls and their bodies. If there was no bodily resurrection, then salvation would be incomplete. These very bodies, these hands and eyes, the bodies that God has given us which we now present as living sacrifices to Christ, as we see in Romans 12:1, and the members, the parts of our body that we now employ as members of righteousness, as we see in Romans 6:13, will on the last day be raised and glorified to serve and worship the Lord for all of eternity.

This confident hope makes all the difference in our life in this world. It transforms our perspective on risk and sacrifice in Christ’s service. Remember Jesus saying, “Don’t fear those who can kill the body. Fear Him who can both kill the body and throw the soul into hell.” The Christian recognizes that the worst that can be done to him or her is for the body to be destroyed. And what is that when the Christian has confidence that that same body laid in the grave, perhaps even dismembered or otherwise tortured and so on, will on the last day be raised from dust and ashes and glorified before the Lord? This affects even those called to the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom. Hebrews 11:35 speaks of those who “were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.” The martyrs could look into the threat of doom and death with confidence and hope, knowing that the bodies that they sacrificed for the testimony of Christ would not be gone forever but would be raised by Him. But, it also fuels our daily devotion and service to Christ.

Paul ends that longest chapter on the resurrection with the words in the last verse, verse 58, that say, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (I Corinthians 15). Look at that language, “steadfastness, being unmovable, always,” not sometimes but always, “abounding in the work of the Lord.” The believer is called to spend and to be spent, to give everything that they have, all of their strength and energy, their time, their resources, their gifts, their graces, and so on, and to expend them, to employ them, in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, looking to the end. Our view of the future affects our view of the present. Indeed, it transforms it. Our confident hope in the resurrection changes everything with regards to the Christian life. Christ’s resurrection was a world-transforming, history-altering event. Its importance is seen in God’s change of the Sabbath from the last day of the week to the first day of the week, the day on which Christ rose from the dead. We remember and celebrate the resurrection of Christ every single week in the Christian Sabbath. The Sabbath serves as a weekly memorial of this stupendous event of Christ’s resurrection.

Well, in conclusion, we have explored the central place of the resurrection in redemption and in the history of God’s plan to save His people. Christ has been raised from the dead, but He has not yet ascended to heaven, in our studies, to be glorified. We have not considered His ascension to this point. In the next lecture, we will consider one of the great results of Christ not only being raised but ascending to the right hand of God the Father Almighty, namely, the gift of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.