

Resurrection Vindication Acts 2:22-32; Ps 114; 1 Pet 1:1-12; John 20:19-31

Audio: <https://www.daleappleby.net/index.php/mp3-sermons/51-recent-sermons/1029-resurrection-vindication>

Video: <https://www.stmarksbassendean.church/post/resurrection-vindication>

Introduction

“[A]n obsession with righteousness . . . is the normal human condition”, so says social psychologist Jonathan Haidt in his explanation of the animosity and conflict between the political left and right in America. Having listened to repeated claims by our own politicians to be on “the right side of history”, it is clear that a *fixation on being right in one’s own eyes* is an essential part of the fallen human condition (Prov 12:15; 21:2). We must not be deceived, Western cultures have not become less moral, they have simply redefined righteousness to subjects like sexual identity and climate action. In any time of suffering, and our time of health crisis is one, the key question becomes, “Is there some final justice in the universe?” The good news of the Bible is that we can be set free from the torment of knowing good and evil (Gen 2:17; 3:5). In particular, the revelation of the resurrection in particular that can release us from our need to endlessly justify ourselves. (All married people know about these things.)

Anticipation

The Jews of Jesus’ time had long been awaiting the “Resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14 cf. Acts 24:15), when at the End of history God the Judge would raise and reward all the just and condemn all the wicked. Christ’s prophecies to his disciples that after crucifixion he would be raised from the dead (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19) completely confounded their thinking because they could *not compute that the End of the world would begin with the resurrection of an individual*. The centrality of the resurrection as the reference point for all God’s final dealings with humanity comes through powerfully when we notice that each of the preachers in Acts who proclaim the resurrection (Peter, Stephen, Paul) describe it as the raising of “the Righteous One” (3:14; 7:52; 22:14). Paul told the pagans in Athens who despised the notion of resurrection (Acts 17:32) that a just final judgement by their Creator-Father (Acts 17:24-28) depended on the resurrection of Jesus. “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30-31). In the thinking of the Bible about the just character of God the righteousness of Jesus demanded a resurrection.

Resurrection as Vindication

At the heart of the moral authority revealed in resurrection is vindication. Thomas’ exalted affirmation of Jesus’ status in today’s Gospel, “My Lord and my God!” (Acts 20:28), has a

background in Psalm 35 which is deeply revelatory. The psalmist has been hated “without cause” (v.19), words which Jesus quotes of himself in John 15:25. Secondly, Thomas’ acclamation echo the psalmists desperate plea for deliverance, “Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication, for my cause, *my God and my Lord!* 24 Vindicate me...according to your righteousness, and let them not rejoice over me!” (Ps 35:19, 23-24). The heartfelt cry of the righteous sufferer in Psalm 35 for a display of divine justice was fully and finally answered in the resurrection of Jesus. This took place at a number of levels.

First, at a simple judicial level of vindication whereas the highest human court condemned Jesus as a blasphemer and political pretender the tribunal of heaven upheld his claims to be Son of God, Messiah and Lord (Rom 1:4). *Christ is justified* before the whole world by his resurrection. Second, the resurrection is the supreme revelation that *God* is righteous. What sort of a Father would send his Son to die as a common criminal and leave it at that? In raising Jesus from the dead, the Father radically demonstrated His own pure and perfect righteousness. The significance of the resurrection is even bigger than this because it represents the central revelatory act of God in history.

This is how Paul understands the saving moral power of the resurrection, “It (righteousness) will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and *raised for our justification.*” (Rom 4:24-25). If the cross blots out our transgressions the resurrection assigns to us the righteousness of Christ. In recreating Christ’s humanity by resurrection *God lit up* everything about the preceding history of Jesus (2 Tim 1:10): all the living, speaking, acting, suffering and dying of Jesus were now understood in this light. The apostolic witnesses taught and preached the cross in the unsurpassable illumination of the resurrection. They were powerfully gripped by a revelation of Christ’s resurrection as a radical translation from death to life on behalf of all humanity.

If the cross was God’s righteous judgement of “No” on our sin, then the resurrection was God’s just judgement of “Yes” on Christ. We need some insight into the depths of these experiences of Jesus. In bearing our sin Christ experienced forsakenness *as though* he was being punished unjustly/without a cause by God (Mark 15:34). Whilst I do not believe for a moment that the Father turned his face away from Christ, he certainly did experience the pains of the Final Judgement that will come on the ungodly (2 Pet 3:7). *Death did have “dominion over him”* (Rom 6:9). In sheer contrast, the resurrection was for Jesus the Last Judgement when raised by the glory of the Father his vindication as a just/blameless man was complete. The scripture testifies he was “declared Son of God with power” (Rom 1:4), he was raised into “newness of life” (Rom 6:4), he was “vindicated by the Spirit” (1 Tim 3:16). The End of the old age and the commencement of a new world has taken place in Christ; this is what is proclaimed in the gospel. The implications of all this are limitless.

Sometimes the wisdom of a decision is only vindicated by its final consequences. It is the resurrection of Jesus as the forerunner of the glory of the world to come (1 Cor 15; 2 Cor 5:17) that is the *final vindication of God’s right over all things*. The resurrection is the first act of the new creation shining with the light of immortality (2 Tim 1:10) in a fulness freed

from sin, guilt and death. The raising of Jesus from the dead vindicates the totality of God's plan for his creation. The resurrection of the slain Lamb of God as the final glorious identity of all things sovereignly justifies to every creature with a sound conscience all that God has ever done in history (Rom 8:28-30; Eph 1:3-12; Rev 4:11-5:13). [The resurrection is a universal sovereign theodicy.]

Christian

The resurrection solves the mystery of how it is possible for God, to quote Romans 4:5, to "justify (i.e. declare righteous) the ungodly". As Christ became one with us in our sin on the cross (2 Cor 5:21) so in solidarity with his resurrection we share *his* vindication/justification (1 Cor 1:30). We are sharing and will eternally share in the gracious experience that Jesus our representative enjoyed in being raised from the dead.

The benefits of being united with the resurrection of Christ are enormous. Tension between present justification and final judgement is bridged in our oneness with Christ. He is the "firstfruits" (1 Cor 15:23 cf. v.20) and "the firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5) assuring us that what is his will all be ours. As the reckoning of final judgement is over for the risen Jesus it is over for us who trust in him; "whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24). As far as my legal status before the court of God is concerned, I am no longer a sinner.

In a time when there is so much fear around, ultimately the fear of death, the bearers of the gospel can radiate great boldness. Paul's words ring true for us, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor 15:54). Sharing in the fulness of acceptance that Jesus enjoyed in being raised by the Father (1 John 4:17) no human criticism need ever disable us.

Conclusion

As the all-obedient sacrificial Son of God Jesus absolutely deserved the vindication of the resurrection, it was *the crowning point of all that went before it*. Christ's resurrection reveals the glory of new world coming because Jesus is the subject of the consummating act of God. The resurrection of Christ in his unsurpassable glory puts on *open display the reason why God created the world*. All the purposes of God, so strange to the fallen human conscience, are exposed in the gospel of Christ. It was to save that he was judged. It was to make alive that he was put to death. God says No to him on the cross in order to say Yes in the resurrection. Everything stands in the light of the resurrection. His promise, "Because I live, you shall live also." (John 14:19) ring out forever. Whatever may be coming in this world, coronavirus or some things far worse, we can face it confident by faith in the final Victory of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.