



Chapter Six

What Difference Does It Make?

“Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it. He destroyed Hades when He descended into it. He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh. Isaiah foretold this when he said, ‘You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below.’ Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with. It was in an uproar because it is mocked. It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed. It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated. It is in an uproar, for it is now made captive. Hell took a body, and discovered God. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see. O death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?”²⁷

- St. John Chrysostom



THE GRACE:

Unshakeable Confidence in Jesus



For he rescued us from the domain of Darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ²⁸

Colossians 1:13-14



THEMES

Jesus has...

- Humiliated the enemy.
- Transferred humanity from one dominion to another.
- Rendered Sin impotent.
- Destroyed the power of Death.
- Canceled our debt.
- Recreated us.
- Given us access to the Father.
- Given us authority over the enemy.
- Sent us on mission to get his world back.
- Divinized us.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What am I thinking and how am I feeling right now?
- Which result of the resurrection of Jesus resonates most deeply with me and why?
- Calling to mind the importance of stories from Chapter One, what impact is the biblical story having on my life?

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RESOURCES

Catechism of the Catholic Church 651-655:

“The Meaning and Saving Significance of the Resurrection”

651 “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” The Resurrection above all constitutes the confirmation of all Christ’s works and teachings. All truths, even those most inaccessible to human reason, find their justification in Christ by his Resurrection has given the definitive proof of his divine authority, which he had promised.

652 Christ’s Resurrection is the fulfillment of the promises both of the Old Testament and of Jesus himself during his earthly life. The phrase “in accordance with the Scriptures” indicates that Christ’s Resurrection fulfilled these predictions.

653 The truth of Jesus’ divinity is confirmed by his Resurrection. He had said: “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he.” The Resurrection of the crucified one shows that he was truly “I AM,” the Son of God and God himself.

So St. Paul could declare to the Jews: “What God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written

in the second psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’” Christ’s Resurrection is closely linked to the Incarnation of God’s Son, and is its fulfillment in accordance with God’s eternal plan.

654 The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life. This new life is above all justification that reinstates us in God’s grace, “so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Justification consists in both victory over the death caused by sin and a new participation in grace. It brings about filial adoption so that men become Christ’s brethren, as Jesus himself called his disciples after his Resurrection: “Go and tell my brethren.” We are brethren not by nature, but by the gift of grace, because that adoptive filiation gains us a real share in the life of the only Son, which was fully revealed in his Resurrection.

655 Finally, Christ’s Resurrection—and the risen Christ himself—is the principle and source of our future resurrection: “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. . . For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” The risen Christ lives in the hearts of his faithful while they await that fulfillment. In Christ, Christians “have tasted. . . the powers of the age to come” and their lives are swept up by Christ into the heart of divine life, so that they may “live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” ²⁹

*Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the
Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, N.T.
Wright

“The Strange Story of Easter”

There are many smaller arguments which might be brought in at this point, but which we can only summarize. To begin with, the other proposals that are regularly advanced as rival explanations to the early Christian one:

1 Jesus didn't really die; someone gave him a drug which made him look like dead, and he revived in the tomb.
Answer: Roman soldiers knew how to kill people, and no disciple would have been fooled by a half-drugged, beat-up Jesus into thinking he'd defeated death and inaugurated the kingdom.

2 When the women went to the tomb they met someone else (perhaps James, Jesus' brother, who looked like him), and in the half-light they thought it was Jesus himself.

Answer: they would have noticed soon enough.

3 Jesus only appeared to people who believed in him.
Answer: the accounts make it clear that Thomas and Paul do not come into this category; and actually none of Jesus' followers believed, after his death, that he really was the Messiah, let alone that he was in any sense divine.

4 The accounts we have are biased. Answer: so is all history, all journalism. Every photo is taken by somebody from some angle.

5 They began by saying “he will be raised” as people had done of the martyrs, and this quickly passed into saying “he has been raised” which was functionally equivalent. Answer: no, it wasn’t.

6 Lots of people have visions of someone they love who has just died; this was what happened to the disciples. Answer: they knew perfectly well about things like that, and they had language for it; they would say “it’s his angel” or “it’s his spirit” or “his ghost.” They wouldn’t say “he’s been raised from the dead.”

7 Perhaps the most popular: what actually happened was that they had some kind of rich “spiritual” experience, which they interpreted through Jewish categories. Jesus after all really was alive, spiritually, and they were still in touch with him. Answer: that is simply a description of a noble death followed by a Platonic immortality. Resurrection was and is the defeat of death, not simply a nicer description of it; and it’s something that happens some while after the moment of death, not immediately.

Equally, we may just notice three of the numerous small-scale arguments which are often, and quite rightly, advanced to support the belief that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead:

1 Jewish tombs, especially those of martyrs, were venerated and often became shrines. There is no sign whatever of that having happened with Jesus' grave.

2 The early church's emphasis on the first day of the week as their special day is very hard to explain unless something striking really did happen then. A gradual or even sudden dawning of faith is hardly sufficient to explain it.

3 The disciples were hardly likely to go out and suffer and die for a belief that wasn't firmly anchored in fact. This is an important point, though subject to the weakness that they might have been genuinely mistaken: they believed the resurrection of Jesus to be a fact, and acted on that belief, but we know (so it would be said) that they were wrong. All this brings us face to face with the ultimate question. The empty tomb and the meetings with Jesus are as well established, by the arguments I have advanced, as any historical data could expect to be. They are, in combination, the only possible explanation for the stories and beliefs that grew up so quickly among Jesus' followers.

How, in turn, do we explain them?

In any other historical enquiry, the answer would be so obvious that it would hardly need saying. Here, of course, this obvious answer ("well, it actually happened") is so shocking, so earth-shattering, that we rightly pause before leaping into the unknown. And here, indeed, as some skeptical friends have cheerfully pointed out

to me, it is always possible for anyone to follow the argument so far and to say, simply, “I don’t have a good explanation for what happened to cause the empty tomb and the appearances, but I choose to maintain my belief that dead people don’t rise and therefore conclude that something else must have happened, even though we can’t tell what it was.” That is fine; I respect that position; but I simply note that it is indeed then a matter of choice, not a matter of saying that something called “scientific historiography” itself forces us to take that route.³⁰



SUGGESTED READING

Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 2003.

27. St. John Chrysostom, “The Easter Sermon of John Chrysostom.”

28. Col. 1:13-14 NASB.

29. Catechism of the Catholic Church 651-655: “The Meaning and Saving Significance of the Resurrection”, 170-171.

30. Wright, N.T., *Surprised by Hope*, 72-73.