

## Lesson 1

### Introduction, Ancient Beliefs, and Contemporary Christian Confusion

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#### 1. Some Preliminaries

##### a. Purpose of the Class

- To reflect upon the foundational doctrine of Jesus' resurrection and ours, in order to consider, pray through, and work out its implications for living the Christian Life. To put it question form, the purpose of this class is to address the following: What is the ultimate Christian hope? and What does this hope have to do with the present?

##### b. Outline of the Class

- **April 11** – Introduction, Ancient Beliefs, and Contemporary Christian Confusion
- **April 18** – Jesus' Resurrection: The Strange Story of Easter
- **April 25** – Eastered Bodies: The Hope of the Resurrection
- **May 2** – Living Eastered Lives (1): The Ministry of Patient Groaning
- **May 9** – Living Eastered Lives (2): Walking in the Resurrection Way
- **May 16** – Living Eastered Lives (3): The Mission of the Resurrection

2. **Objective:** To address the question, 'Why is the resurrection important?' To consider ancient beliefs, specifically, pagan and Jewish, concerning the question of resurrection as well as the contemporary Christian confusion surrounding the doctrine of the resurrection.

#### 3. Why Is the Resurrection Important?

##### a. No Resurrection, No Gospel (I Cor. 15. 1-19)

- If the resurrection isn't true then there is no gospel (vv. 3-4)
- If the resurrection isn't true then the proclamation of the gospel makes God out to be a liar (v. 15)
- If the resurrection isn't true then our faith is vain, i.e. it is futile (vv. 14,17)
- If the resurrection isn't true then you are still in your sins (v. 17)
- If the resurrection isn't true then those who have died 'in the Lord' have perished (v. 18)
- If the resurrection isn't true then the believer is of all people most to be pitied (v. 19)

##### b. The Resurrection Is the Hope of the Christian (Rom. 8.24)

- The hope of the Christian isn't death it is resurrection, the redemption of the body

#### 4. Ancient Pagan Beliefs Regarding Resurrection

##### a. Acts 17.32

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, 'We will hear you again about this.'

Once a man has died, and the dust has soaked up his blood, there is no resurrection – *words of Apollo in Eumenides*

##### b. What Did Resurrection Mean?

- Not resuscitation
- Not the 'afterlife,' whatever that might have entailed
- It meant returning to something like this sort of life which humans presently experience. Resurrection was the word used to denote a new bodily life that would take place after someone had already died.

When the ancient classical world spoke of...resurrection, there should be no controversy about what the word and its cognates referred to: it was coming back again into something like the same sort of life

that humans presently experience. 'Resurrection' was not one way of describing what death consisted of. It was a way of describing something everyone knew did not happen: the idea that death could be reversed, undone, could (as it were) work backwards (Wright, N.T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 33)

**c. Wanted, But Not Possible (The Worldview of Homer)**

- Death not a good thing
- Hades, the realm of the dead is seen as a place of dread where one exist as a ghost or a shade and therefore less than human. One would escape if they could.
- Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*

Achilles held out his arms to clasp the spirit, but in vain. It vanished like a wisp of smoke and went gibbering underground. Achilles leapt up in amazement. He beat his hands together and in his desolation cried: 'Ah then, it is true that something of us does survived then even in the Halls of Hades, but with no intellect at all, only the ghost and the semblance of a man; for all night long the ghost of poor Patroclus (and it looked exactly like him) has been standing at my side, weeping and wailing, and telling me of all the things I ought to do

- Achilles in the *Odyssey*

Never try to reconcile me to death, glorious Odysseus. I should choose, so I might live on earth, to serve as the hireling of another, some landless man with hardly enough to live on, rather than to be lord over all the dead that have perished.

**d. Not Possible And Not Wanted (The Worldview of Plato)**

- Souls released from prison, i.e. Death is a good thing
- Body and matter didn't matter
- Hades not a place of doom, but a place of delight and knowledge. Even if one could escape they wouldn't...*Socrates speaks of lovers of wisdom gladly following their beloved into the next world where wisdom will be possessed fully and truly.*

Christianity was born into a world where the central claim was known to be false. Many believed that the dead were non-existent; outside Judaism nobody believed in resurrection (Wright, p. 35)

**5. Jewish Beliefs Regarding Resurrection**

**a. John 11. 24**

Martha said to Jesus, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'

**b. Death Was Enemy and Intruder Yet Hoped Remained**

- Gen. 1, 3
- Ps. 49.14-15
- Is. 25.6-9
- Ez. 37.1-14
- Dan. 12.2

**c. The Exception, the Sadducees (Matt. 22.23)**

**6. Contemporary Christian Confusion**

**a. A Muddled View of Earth/Creation**

- 'This is not my home, I'm just a passin' through'
- 'This mud hole called earth
- Platonic Dualism – the material is of less value than the spiritual
- The Semi-truth: Creation is broken, yet it is not to be considered bad

**b. A Misconceived View of Heaven**

- Heaven is the Christian's Ultimate Destiny, Our Final Home
- If earth is a mud hole and not our home, heaven is
- What is heaven? It's our true home. It's a place where we will continually worship God forever and ever. It is the place we are to long for.
- It's the view that heaven = our salvation
- The Semi-truth: Heaven is where the Christian goes when he/she dies but it's not our 'final resting place'

**c. A Mistaken View of Death**

- Seeing death as something to look forward to, a desired escape and even salvation
- Semi-truth: For the Christian death is not something to be feared, yet it is still an enemy

**d. A Minimized View of Resurrection**

- Jesus was raised so I get to heaven when I die
- The resurrection has nothing to do with the present
- Semi-truth: Jesus was raised so that you could be given resurrection life now by the Spirit and in full when Jesus returns to make *all* things new

**7. 'Let Him (Christ) Easter In Us...'**

*'Let him Easter in us, be a dayspring of the dimness of us, be a crimson-crested east...'* (Gerald Manley Hopkins in *The Wreck of Deutschland*)