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Remember Jesus, Risen from the Dead! **2 Timothy 2:8-10**

What do we mean when we say that Christianity is supernatural? Before attempting to answer the question I can readily tell you what we *don't* mean. We *don't* mean that Christians despise or devalue physical reality. We *don't* mean that Christians are the sort of people who ignore the so-called laws of nature. We *don't* mean that Christians are the sort who foolishly jump out of airplanes without a parachute or fail to appreciate the beauty of a flower in full bloom or are blindly insensitive to the grandeur of a starlit night. To say that Christians embrace the supernatural does *not* mean they believe in unicorns or go on an annual hunt for Bigfoot or live in fear of an invasion of alien man-eating creatures from a distant planet.

What we *do* mean is that Christians are people who believe that ***God is the creative origin of all that is physical or natural.*** God called all material reality into existence out of nothing. Christianity asserts that this universe in which we live, from the most massive of distant galaxies to the smallest of sub-atomic particles, is not self-sustaining but is upheld and preserved and governed by the power of God himself.

If you believe that to be true about the God of the Bible, then the idea that a man who ***truly died*** was later ***truly raised*** to life will come as no surprise to you. Christians who believe in the God of the Bible should never entertain the slightest degree of doubt about what we read in that Bible of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let me explain what I mean. In the opening chapter of his gospel, the apostle John says this: "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3).

The apostle Paul affirmed the same thing in his speech to the philosophers of ancient Athens: "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:24-25). In his letter to the Colossians he declared of Jesus Christ that "in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17) and again in Hebrews 1:3 that "he upholds the universe by the word of his power."

This is what we mean when we say that Christianity is supernatural. All that is natural or material or physical was created by God and is preserved by God and is subject to his will and purposes. Why, then, should any Christian be surprised or confused about whether or not God parted the waters of the Red Sea so that his people might escape from slavery in Egypt? Why should any Christian raise her eyebrows when she reads of a man who was kept alive in the belly of a great fish for three days? Why should any Christian flinch at the possibility that God could enable a virgin to conceive and give birth. And why should any Christian hesitate to gladly affirm that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead? ***The only reason not to believe such things that we read in the Bible is if the God of the Bible does not exist.***

That is why I am ***unapologetically supernatural*** when it comes to my worldview. The omnipotent God who spoke and the universe leapt into existence should hardly have any trouble reversing the process of physiological decomposition and raising a man from the dead.

But it's one thing to affirm that God *could* or even *did* raise Jesus from the dead. It's another thing to answer the question: So what? What difference does it make? In a world caught up in the swirl of economic uncertainty and subject to the madness of global terrorism, is it really all that important? Yes, it is.

It is as important and central to Christianity today as it was 2,000 years ago when Paul, in his final letter before his death, perhaps only days before he was beheaded by the Roman emperor Nero, said to his young protégé Timothy: ***"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead"*** (2 Tim. 2:8a).

Remember!

I've always been intrigued both by what Paul says and doesn't say here. He doesn't say remember Jesus Christ. It is not merely the person of Jesus to which he directs our attention. Nor does he say remember Jesus who rose from the dead. Neither does he say remember the resurrection of which Jesus is the first to experience it.

Rather it is: ***remember Jesus as the living Lord. Remember him precisely in his identity as the one whom God raised from the dead and seated at his right hand in power and authority over all of creation.*** Remember the risen Christ! Let the truth of Christ ***as risen*** take root in your mind. Let the reality of his unending life awaken your affections. Let the victory of Jesus over death be ever in the forefront of your thinking.

When we suffer and are hurting and grow despondent there are any number of things we might choose to remember, such as family, or some occasion in the past when God proved faithful and delivered us, or the promise that nothing will separate us from God's love, etc. But here it is specifically Jesus Christ as risen that we are exhorted to remember. It is Jesus as living Lord of the universe who once was dead but is now and forevermore alive that we are called upon to keep fresh and forceful in our thinking.

It isn't even to the exaltation of Jesus that he directs our attention, although following his resurrection that is what happened: Jesus was exalted and enthroned with God the Father. Rather, here he wants Timothy and you and me to ***continually hold in our conscious experience*** the reality of this one who himself suffered such humiliation and oppression as being now risen from the dead.

This had special relevance for Timothy, to whom it was originally addressed. He was young. He was timid. And he was being slandered and undermined and persecuted. Earlier in chapter one, verse eight, Paul had told him not to be "ashamed" of the gospel but to "share in suffering" for it (2 Tim. 1:8). He then, in 2:1, encouraged Timothy to be "strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). Again, he almost repeats himself in 2:3 when he exhorts Timothy to "share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:3). That is why Paul directs Timothy's attention to Jesus as "risen from the dead" in 2:8.

He wants Timothy, and he wants you and me as well, to be strengthened to endure whatever hardships come our way by remembering that Christ has conquered every enemy, even death itself, and reigns as the living Lord over our lives and all the adversity and painful circumstances we encounter. So Paul speaks not only to Timothy but all of us today as well and in effect says: "No matter how hard life may be, no matter how serious our suffering may become, the most that anyone on this earth can do is kill you. So remember Jesus as the risen and ruling Lord who has overcome death and has removed its sting. Remember what Jesus said: 'Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul'" (Matt. 10:28).

"And one more thing, Timothy. No matter what you have to suffer or endure in this life, never forget that the risen Christ has secured for you a salvation 'with eternal glory' (2 Tim. 2:10)." Or as Paul put it in his second letter to the Corinthians, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17).

So Paul is not here pointing to Jesus as our example, although he is surely that in countless ways. But we are to look to him and think of him as the resurrected and almighty, Savior and sovereign Lord over all mankind, even, perhaps especially, over those men and women who greatly ridicule us and reject us and seek to destroy us.

So what do ***anti-supernaturalists*** make of the notion of resurrection? By the way, I trust you realize that there are numerous so-called "churches" all across OKC that are celebrating Easter Sunday in spite of the fact that they don't believe Jesus literally and physically rose from the grave. So what do they say about it? They argue that Jesus was raised in the sense that his ***ethic of love*** continues to be emulated by those who claim to be his followers. Jesus was raised in the sense that ***the experience of his abiding presence*** continues in our minds and hearts, but not of course in literal reality. He was raised in the sense that ***his message and the truths*** he proclaimed are still embraced and taught. He was raised in the sense that ***the influence of his life*** continues to exert itself on how men and women conduct themselves. He was raised in the sense that ***his transcendent attractiveness*** continues to draw men and women to a life of self-sacrifice and altruistic love and concern for others.

But dear friend if that is all that is meant when the Bible speaks of the resurrection of Jesus Christ then you are a fool for being here today and you are still in your sins and you have no hope of triumph over death and decomposition. Therefore, it is of the utmost urgency that we understand what Paul meant when he issued this exhortation to Timothy, and what he means today when we put ourselves in Timothy's place and hear this word as it applies to our lives as well.

So let's begin by thinking a bit more about this word translated "remember" (2 Tim. 2:8a). We often use the word "remember" for someone no longer alive. "Oh, yeah, I remember President John F. Kennedy. And I remember the comedian Robin Williams. Too bad they're no longer with us." But this is not what Paul means when he exhorts us to "remember" Jesus. We are to remember Jesus precisely as risen from the dead. ***It is as the risen, living, very-much-alive-and-ruling-the-world Jesus that we are told to keep fresh in our thinking and ever in front of our thoughts and vividly present in our hearts.***

Paul want us to remember Jesus precisely as the Risen One. He doesn't call on us to remember his earthly life, although he would fully endorse and support such thinking on our part. It isn't in his authority over demons or his healing of the sick or his teaching with authority to which he draws our attention. ***It is to his ever-present life in heaven as Lord and King over all things.*** Why this focus? Could it be that it is precisely because he is risen from the dead that we can have confidence that what he achieved in his life, teaching, ministry, and sacrificial death is true and lasting?

In other words, ***of what possible good was his sinless life if he's dead and decaying?*** What authority could we possibly give to his teaching if he's ultimately no different from the Buddha or Confucius or Gandhi or Muhammad? And why would we ever believe that his death was atoning and has fully paid the penalty for our sin if he could not conquer the grave? Why would his death be any different from yours or mine or of any other famous figure in history if he was powerless to overcome the grave and rise again?

The precise expression Paul employs here lays stress on the fact not simply that Christ was raised. After all, there are several resurrections mentioned in the NT. Christ himself as well as the apostle Paul raised several people from the dead. Lazarus was resuscitated and brought back to life. But Lazarus eventually died yet again. Paul's point in the language he employs is to highlight the fact that the risen Christ is ***still alive***. He was raised and ***is even now still raised and will be forevermore!*** Thus Paul's focus isn't simply on the historical event of the resurrection but on ***the resurrection as an on-going reality, an irreversible truth, a perpetual fact of space-time history that is to be rehearsed over and over again in the mind of the Christian.***

The Offspring of David

But notice something else we are called to remember. We are exhorted to remember that this Jesus who was raised and is now and evermore alive is also ***"the offspring of David"*** (v. 8b). That's a somewhat strange thing to insert in his statement. Why in the world would he have included a reference to Jesus being, literally, the "seed" of David?

The reference to Jesus as "the seed/offspring of David" is Paul's way of pointing to ***the incarnation and humiliation and humanity of Jesus***. This one who himself walked the earth and suffered abuse and slander and scourging and death on a cross is the one you must consistently remember and call to mind as risen from the dead.

In other words, he inserts this brief explanatory phrase, "the offspring of David," because he wants to make sure you know that ***Jesus was human*** as well as divine. After all, if he were only an angel or a phantom or a spiritual being of some other sort, rising from the dead, or appearing to rise from the dead would be easy. But Paul wants us to understand that Jesus Christ was fully human. He had a body just like yours and mine, a body that was subject to decay and decomposition. He had a body that was dependent on breath and blood and brain waves. So when that breath ended and the blood ceased to flow and the brain waves went flat, he was truly dead. He did not swoon or faint or fall asleep or lapse into a coma or enter into a trance of some sort, only then to revive and make an appearance as if he had been raised from the dead. He was dead! ***Dead!*** He was on the verge of rigor mortis and bodily decomposition. But before that could occur, God raised him from the dead!

So God didn't raise an angel from the dead. The one he raised from the dead was a human being, a man who once was a fetus and then an infant and later a boy and eventually a teenager and finally an adult with skin and bones and

hair and kidneys and a spleen and kneecaps and knuckles. He mentions Jesus as the “offspring of David” because I am the offspring of my ancestors and you are of yours. We share with Jesus his humanity and thus by faith in him we will eventually share in his risen life. Being human is no hindrance to being raised from the dead, and Jesus is living proof of that truth!

I’ve made much of this word translated “offspring” or “seed” but something needs to be said about the reference to **“David”**.

Although it may not have registered immediately with Gentiles in the first century, every Jew would have known instantly what Paul was saying. By referring to David, Paul is declaring that this Jesus whom God raised was in fact **the Messiah**. Let me remind you of what the angel Gabriel said to Mary, the mother of Jesus:

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”
(Luke 1:31–33)

The Resurrection is Central to the Gospel

But Paul isn’t finished. He is also unmistakably clear that the bodily resurrection of Jesus is absolutely central to the gospel he proclaims. Notice that this truth of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is **“preached in my gospel”** (2:8b). **Without the reality of a resurrection there is nothing good in the news we share.** The message we proclaim is worse than false, it is silly and misleading and ultimately destructive of human souls for it offers a hope of eternal life after death that simply doesn’t exist.

Pretending that Christ rose from the dead might temporarily soothe a guilty conscience, or might bring a measure of emotional or psychological peace; it may even give a person a sense of meaning and purpose in life. But if Christ didn’t truly rise from the dead the Christian “good news” is in fact **“bad news”** for it dupes people into investing their lives both now and in the future in something that is no more a reality than a desert mirage (see 1 Cor. 15:4, 12, 13, 14, 16; 2 Cor. 5:15).

The good news of the gospel, therefore, is that **God in raising Jesus from the dead has overcome and triumphed over that relentless predator, death.** Decay now gives way to renewal. Paralysis now gives way to power. Death now has lost its sting. It no longer terrifies. Its grip on humanity has forever been shattered.

Many wish to delete the resurrection of Jesus from the gospel message or, as I noted earlier, to spiritualize it in some way. They prefer to direct our attention to Jesus as the wise sage, the preeminent model of love and non-violence, the great religious philosopher who embodied kindness and justice. But Paul insists that if Jesus did not rise from the dead he’s less than useful to us. At least Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., and other great leaders never claimed to be God.

If Christ is Risen, why do we Suffer?

But wait a minute! If Jesus is alive, if Jesus was truly raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father where you say he is ruling as sovereign Lord over all of heaven and earth, **what in the world is Paul doing in prison?** There’s something wrong with this picture! How can you say on the one hand that Jesus is the risen, living King over all things and on the other hand that his precious and prized and most preeminent apostle is **languishing in chains in a filthy Roman dungeon, on the verge of having his head severed from his body by the tyrannical and sadistic Nero?**

In other words, how can Paul say that the truth of Christ’s resurrection is **gospel**, that is to say, “good news” **if it is on account of that very news** that he is “bound with chains as a criminal” (v. 9a). I thought “good news” meant things like freedom and prosperity and robust health and a lot of friends and physical comfort. How can it be good news if it lands Paul in a dingy Roman dungeon? Paul, of course, answers this question in v. 10. There may well be suffering in this life for those who embrace and rely upon the gospel of Christ’s resurrection, but it secures for them “salvation” with “eternal glory” in the ages to come!

“But Sam, if Jesus is really alive, as you say, surely he would not permit his chosen apostle to suffer like this, much less die prematurely under such barbaric conditions. Surely, if Jesus is really alive, as you say, he would have the power and authority to orchestrate Paul’s pardon or would in some way secure his release so he could continue to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.”

I think it was *precisely because* Paul was in prison and precisely because he knew that he would never be released that he directed Timothy’s attention and ours as well to Christ as risen. He wanted us to understand that no human demise, no earthly setback, no so-called crushing defeat at the hands of unbelievers could ever reverse God’s purposes or undo the accomplishment of the cross. The reason why the “Word” of God or the gospel is unchained and always flourishing and spreading is because the Christ, the Savior, of whom it speaks is very much alive!

Or again, *the word of God is not bound because the Son of God is not dead!*

Some Christians have bought into a false notion of Christian privilege that sadly leads to disappointment and confusion and often to complete disillusionment. They’ve been taught, correctly, that Jesus is risen from the dead and was exalted and enthroned by God the Father as Sovereign King and Lord of the universe. But from this they have drawn a terribly misguided conclusion about how it affects their experience and the privileges they think they have a right to enjoy on earth. They say: “If Christ is the risen and ruling king then I, as one of his followers, should share even now on this earth in power and prosperity and fame and fortune. God would never allow me to suffer imprisonment as if I were a criminal.” Oh, really?

What did the Resurrection Achieve?

And what do we owe to the resurrection? What did God accomplish by it? What are the benefits both now and for eternity that we derive from this glorious truth? Here are just a few:

The new birth: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

The forgiveness of sins: “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The gift of the Holy Spirit: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:32-33).

Freedom from condemnation: “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:34).

The assurance of future judgment of the wicked: “[God] 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 17:31).

Salvation from the coming wrath of God: “[We] wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

Our own resurrection from the dead: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11).

The constant abiding presence of Jesus: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Roll Call of the Dead

And now, as has been my custom every Easter for countless years of ministry, it is time to call roll among the dead.

"Julius Caesar?" . . . "Here!"

"Confucius?" "Yo!"

"Muhammad?" . . . "Here!"

"Buddha?" . . . "Present!"

"Mahatma Gandhi?" . . . "Yo!"

"Joseph Smith?" . . . "Here!"

"Martin Luther?" Present!

"Martin Luther King, Jr.?" "Yo!"

"Charles Darwin?" "Right here!"

"Abraham Lincoln?" "Yeah, I'm here."

"John F. Kennedy?" "Present!"

"C. S. Lewis?" "Yo!"

"Jesus?" "Jesus of Nazareth?" "Where is Jesus of Nazareth?"

The only reply is that of the angel, who said to the women at the tomb on that glorious Easter morning:

"He is **NOT** here! For he has risen, just as he said!"