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Resurrection

More Words of Life for the Church and for the World
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LEADER'S GUIDE

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FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Is it possible that we're inadvertently raising gnostics in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod? That is, do God's people in our care look forward to getting rid of their bodies at death rather than looking forward to having those bodies restored at the resurrection of the dead? Do they long for the day when their souls rest with the Lord, but have little anticipation for Christ's return, when their resurrected bodies — as well as their souls — will enjoy God's new creation?

God created Adam with both a body and a soul, so he — and every human since him — remains incomplete without both. Further, Jesus put on bodily flesh for the express

purpose of redeeming our bodies. And the importance of these bodies — even if they may return temporarily to dust — should be evident also in the fact that our bodily-risen Savior dwells now in heaven with a body. In fact, He may be the only resident of heaven that currently has a body (depending on how God has dealt with the bodies of Enoch, Elisha and others).

This study will explore what Scripture teaches us about the resurrection of the body, so we can help Christ's people understand the joyous implications that Jesus' resurrection has for our lives in the body now, and especially after Christ's return.

SCRIPTURAL USAGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORD

Old Testament

Here's the scenario: A member of your congregation has an agnostic but biblically knowledgeable friend. The friend claims that the idea of a resurrection of all people at the end of time was never taught in the Old Testament. He insists that it's an invention of Christians. The friend is pretty convincing when he says Christians read resurrection into passages like Is. 53:10 (where, the friend says, the natural reading of "he shall prolong his days" has nothing to do with coming back from the dead) and Ezekiel 37 (where, he notes, the dry bones are a metaphor for the restoration of Israel, not a picture of the resurrection of individual believers). The member is flustered and doubting her faith. How do you respond?

How does each of these Old Testament passages teach a future resurrection of the dead?

1. Is. 25:6–9, where the verb for "swallow" often implies destruction.

While the verses do not explicitly teach resurrection, they do explicitly teach that death will in some way be ended by YHWH.

2. Job 19:23–27, in which Job anticipates not just resurrection, but resurrection of his own flesh.

Job speaks of his flesh being destroyed, yet confidently claims that same flesh later will see God. That's possible only after a resurrection of the dead.

3. Dan. 12:1–3, where the Hebrew verb is "awake." The imagery of resurrection as an awakening from sleep is continued in the New Testament.

Here, sleeping in the dust of the earth seems to be a clear reference to death, so awakening can hardly mean anything other than resurrection. Note also that this passage teaches a resurrection of all flesh — believers and unbelievers — either to life or contempt.

4. Is. 26:19.

"Your dead shall live," "their bodies shall rise," and "the earth will give birth to the dead" (literally, "to the quiet") clearly anticipate a future resurrection.

The Hebrew word for "live" (and its cognate "life") used in this verse may well indicate "eternal life" or "life that doesn't end with death," making the adjective "eternal" almost redundant when it modifies "life." Genesis 2 and 3 make clear that Adam is given life that is not meant to end in death. Medical science generally says a person has "life" if that person has breath, a heartbeat and brain waves. But isn't that really just death waiting to happen? After all, every human who has ever been conceived (with the significant exception of Jesus) begins dying — not living — at the moment of conception. That's why resurrection is necessary!

5. Ezek. 37:1–14.

While it is true that this passage refers to the metaphorical resurrection of the nation of Israel, the metaphor — especially in verses 12–13 — assumes that there will be a resurrection of human bodies to which the resurrection of Israel is being compared.

To emphasize the hiphil verb, v. 13 could be more vividly translated as, “I will cause you to come up from your graves.”

New Testament

Although the resurrection of both Christ and all dead humans is taught with a variety of terms in the New Testament, the Greek words *egeirō* (“awaken”) and *anistēmi* (“rise”), along with their cognates, predominate. When a verb form is used, *egeirō* is more common than *anistēmi*; but when a noun is used, biblical writers prefer *anastasis* to *egesis*. Several Bible writers repeatedly speak of Christ with the phrase *raised out of dead ones* (usually translated as “raised from the dead,” although *nekrōn* lacks an article in Greek). The preposition translated as “from” is occasionally *apo*, but usually *ek*, with the object *nekrōn*.

Contrary to those who claim that Jesus did not teach a resurrection at the end of time, our Lord refutes the Sadducees by stating specifically that the dead are raised (Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37; see also John 5:21). In addition, Jesus implies that Martha is correct when she says, “I know that he (my brother) will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” (John 11:24).

Hope of our resurrection begins with the rising of the One who appropriately calls Himself “the resurrection (*anastasis*) and the life” (John 11:25). The angel declares, “He is not here, for he has risen” (the verb from *egeirō* is *aorist* passive, so perhaps more literally, “He was awakened,” Matt. 28:6). Then the angel bids the women at the tomb, “Tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead” (there’s the phrase *apo nekrōn*; Matt. 28:7). The Emmaus disciples are told, “The Lord has risen indeed” (again, *aor. pass. of egeirō*; Luke 24:34). John speaks of Jesus being revealed “after he was raised from the dead” (*aor. pass. of egeirō plus ek nekrōn*, John 21:14).

The resurrection of Christ became an essential element of the preaching of Peter and the apostles, who frequently employed the same phrase, “raised from the dead” (a form of *egeirō* with *ek nekrōn*). See, for example, Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30; and 13:37; as well as 1 Peter 1:21. Paul’s letters echo that emphasis on Jesus’ resurrection, often also using the phrase for “raised from the dead.” (Examples are Rom. 4:24; 6:4; 6:5; 7:4; and 8:11; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; 1 Thess.

1:10; and 2 Tim. 2:8.) Paul adds that Jesus was “raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

Paul also links Jesus’ resurrection to our resurrection: “He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies” (Rom. 8:11; see also 2 Cor. 4:14). Note Paul’s statement that our bodies (not just our souls) are given life after death. Faith receives the promise of resurrection life (“believe in your heart that *God raised him from the dead*,” Rom. 10:9, emphasis added). The Holy Spirit especially uses Baptism to bond us with the crucified and risen Christ: “having been buried with him in baptism in which you were also *raised with him* through faith in the powerful working of God, who *raised him from the dead*” (Col. 1:12, emphasis added; see also Rom. 6:1ff). As Peter explains, “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).

So Jesus’ resurrection leads to our resurrection. That reality alters our lives now, not just our lives after death. Even when our bodies wither, “we do not lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:16), since our bodies, like Christ’s, will be raised to life. In addition, since these bodies — purchased at a great price — *will be raised (exegeirō here)* with Christ, Paul says they should never be used for sexual immorality; instead, he urges God’s people, “Glorify God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:14–20). Put another way, “He died for all, *that those who live* might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and *was raised*” (2 Cor. 5:15, emphasis added). Even Christian suffering provides a hint of future life, for “we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:11).

Resurrection life belongs to the baptized believer already on earth. Indeed, we have experienced a spiritual resurrection already: “You, who were dead in your trespasses ... God made alive. ... having forgiven all our trespasses” (Col. 2:13). However, Paul is adamant that the resurrection (*anastasis*) of the body has not yet occurred (2 Tim. 2:18). So still today, “we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).

The most complete explanation of the resurrection is in 1 Corinthians 15, so we’ll focus especially on that passage.

1. In 1 Cor. 15:1–11, what truths about Christ does Paul say are “of first importance”?

That Christ died for our sins (note both that He *died* and that He *died for our sins* are essential), that He was buried, that He was raised and that He appeared. So Paul treats the resurrection as equal in

importance to Christ's death (and to His burial and appearances).

2. Read 1 Cor. 15:12–19. Why is our preaching (and the faith of God's people) in vain if Christ did not rise?

Without His resurrection, we have no assurance that the judgment against our sin has been satisfied. Further, if He didn't rise, we cannot trust anything Jesus said, since He would have been lying when He promised repeatedly that He would rise.

3. Read 1 Cor. 15:20–34. What is Paul's point in verse 20 (which uses *egeirō* in the perfect tense, implying continuing effects)?

Since Christ *has been raised*, our faith is not in vain, we are not in our sins, those who have died in faith have not perished forever, and we have hope for more than this life.

4. Why might Paul use the term "fallen asleep" rather than "died"?

Perhaps to indicate the temporary nature of our stay in the grave, while also indicating that it is restful (rather than a time of suffering or purgation). In addition, the term fits wonderfully with the verb *egeirō*, "to awaken."

5. What might Paul mean by "firstfruits"?

When you see the first fruit on the trees in an orchard, you don't assume that's all the fruit you'll see that

season; instead, you know more fruit is to come. When Jesus rises, there's no doubt that more resurrection fruit will follow.

6. What implications does the resurrection have for the way we live now?

For us to go on sinning — or for us to indulge ourselves today because we'll die tomorrow — is contrary to who we are and to the sinless bodies we will have.

7. Read 1 Cor. 15:35–49. Even though a plant looks different than the seed from which it sprouted, both the seed and the plant are the same entity. Likewise, no matter what our resurrected bodies look like when they come out of the ground, we'll still be ourselves. What contrasts does Paul use to help us understand the difference between our bodies now and our bodies after the resurrection?

Perishable vs. imperishable; dishonored vs. glorified; weak vs. powerful; natural vs. spiritual (which doesn't mean that we'll only have a spirit after the resurrection; after all, Paul is explaining what our *bodies* will be like).

Paul writes that Adam received life, but Jesus gives life. And, because we are connected to both Adam and Christ, we have borne the sinful, mortal image of Adam while on earth, but we will bear the sinless, immortal image of Christ at the final resurrection (v. 49).

CONFESSONAL USAGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF RESURRECTION

All three ecumenical creeds¹ explicitly confess the resurrection both of Jesus and of all humanity. It is no surprise, then, that the Augustana's article on the Son of God declares that "He truly rose from the dead on the third day."² The natural result of His resurrection is our resurrection: "On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal

life."³ But what is unique about how each Creed explains the resurrection when Christ returns?

The Nicene Creed speaks of the resurrection of the *flesh* (usually translated "body"), emphasizing what is raised, namely, our bodies. The Apostles' Creed confesses "the resurrection of the dead," emphasizing the previous condition of those who are raised, namely, that they were dead. The Athanasian Creed states, "All human beings will rise with their bodies," emphasizing both what is raised (the body) and the universality

¹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 21–25.

² *Ibid.*, 38.

³ *Ibid.*, 365.

of the resurrection (all the dead, including unbelievers), as the explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed also notes.

The Augsburg Confession devotes a brief article to the resurrection (AC XVII). The brevity does not reflect a lack of importance but rather a lack of dispute, as Apology XVII makes clear.⁴ That article also teaches that we will enjoy not just eternal life but also endless joy. Notice the reference to a resurrection to eternal torment for the ungodly.

In the Formula, the most significant discussion of resurrection occurs in the article on original sin that distinguishes our pre-resurrection and post-resurrection bodies.⁵ It states that the “very substance of our flesh, albeit without sin, shall rise,” echoing Job’s statement, “In *my* flesh I shall see God, who I shall see *for myself*.” Further, the Formula

4 Ibid., 233.

5 Ibid., 539.

argues, if original sin were of the essence of our human nature, then at the resurrection we would either have to receive a (sinless) body not our own or our bodies would remain sinful, both of which are contrary to Scripture. So the Epitome⁶ declares that original sin will no longer exist in our resurrected bodies.

The Small and Large Catechisms explain the connection between Baptism and resurrection, not just bodily resurrection on the Last Day but also daily resurrection in the Christian life: “The slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new creature ... must continue in us”⁷ and “daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”⁸ Our daily life of repentance, then, is always lived in view of the resurrection of our bodies.

6 Ibid., 489.

7 Ibid., 465.

8 Ibid., 360.

TEACHING/PREACHING USAGE OF THE WORD

“The old creature, like a stubborn, recalcitrant donkey, is also still a part of [our pre-resurrection bodies], and it needs to be forced into obedience to Christ not only through the law’s teaching, admonition, compulsion, and threat but also often with the cudgel of punishments and tribulations until the sinful flesh is completely stripped away and people are perfectly renewed in the resurrection. ... [However, after the resurrection, our bodies] will perform the will of God by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God spontaneously, without coercion, unhindered, perfectly and completely, with sheer joy, and they will delight in his will eternally.”⁹

1. What implications does this have for our preaching?

Our bodies that are afflicted by original sin need to hear the Law in all its forms, or we will not obey. It also implies that we can fully enjoy life in creation (and the new creation) only when we have a body and when that body has its sinful inclinations removed. Creation is designed for humans with bodies. So

without a resurrection we would miss out on the joy of using our bodies to do God’s will in ways that our sinful natures prevent prior to the resurrection.

2. How might Paul respond to Christians who say that we don’t need a resurrection, since our best life is now, not in the distant future?

If our best life is now, this is a pretty pathetic life, thanks to our rebellion. Without resurrection, all we can ever hope to experience is this current sin-ruined semblance of God’s good creation.

3. How might we preach at funerals in ways that provide comfort and encouragement to those who mourn the death of a Christian without implying that the Christian has already experienced the resurrection that will happen at Christ’s return?

Assure God’s people that those who have died in the Lord are with Him in paradise (Luke 23:39–43) and are resting from their labors (Heb. 4:9–10; Rev. 14:1–13). Echo the hymn “For All the Saints,” which looks forward to the calm that believers enjoy when our

9 Ibid., 591.

bodies die (“Soon, soon, to faithful warriors cometh rest”), while anticipating a “yet more glorious day” when “saints triumphant rise in bright array.”

4. Which is more important to our salvation (and, therefore, to our preaching), Jesus’ death or His resurrection? Why?

If Christ is not raised, our faith is in vain. To be stuck forever in a box six feet under the soil makes the forgiveness of Christ’s crucifixion useless to me. I need Christ’s resurrection to give me resurrection, so I can enjoy forgiveness. Conversely, to have resurrection without forgiveness is to be raised to life only to be consigned to hell. So Christ’s crucifixion is also essential. In short, without both Jesus’ death and

resurrection, we’re doomed, so both must be “of first importance” in our preaching.

5. Since their souls remain alive when the body dies, why should Christians care whether or not their bodies will be raised?

Without a body, we are not fully human. Consider Job 19: The only way we can see with our own eyes the God who loves us, cares for us and redeems us is if our bodies are resurrected (since our bodies can’t see Him now, and souls don’t have eyes). Bodies are also necessary to enjoy the new creation God will make for us.

DISCUSSION

1. Does the content of Lutheran preaching tend to imply that Jesus’ occupied cross is more essential to our salvation than His empty tomb? Elaborate. If so, what is the corrective?
2. How can the imagery of sleeping and waking (*egeirō*) be used effectively in preaching?
3. “We should talk less about *burying* Christians and more, as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15, about *planting* Christians. After all, when you bury something, you put it in

the ground and expect it to stay there. When you plant something, you expect it to come out of the ground again.” Respond.

4. How might we preach Christ’s resurrection and therefore our resurrection in ways that encourage Christians whose bodies seem to be wasting away (2 Cor. 4:7–18)? In ways that enable Christians to use their soon-to-rise bodies in ways that live not for themselves but for Him who died and was raised for them (2 Cor. 5:14–17 and 1 Cor. 6:12–20)?

SUMMARY

If there is no resurrection of Christ, we have no resurrection. If we have no resurrection, we have no hope. But Christ has been raised. And we have been baptized into His resurrection (and death). So when He returns, dead bodies will not remain in the ground but will be awakened from sleep in the grave. Then, with our bodies as well as souls, we will enjoy life in God’s new creation — for all eternity — the way He intended life to be enjoyed in His present creation. That certainty changes our lives now. We have hope. We have a reason to battle the sinful inclinations

that currently inhabit our sin-riddled bodies. In addition, even when these bodies are wasting away, we can live with faith, confident that we will get these bodies back, remade without the effects of sin. Further yet, we are led to use these soon-to-be-resurrected bodies not for self-gratifying purposes but in ways that glorify the One who by death and resurrection — His and ours — gives us back the life we forfeited. In Christ, death has been swallowed up in victory!