What happened to the Resurrection?

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This article has been sparked by an odd and puzzling phenomenon in some evangelical gospel preaching. Quite rightly, orthodox and thoroughly evangelical Gospel messages I have heard over the last few years have laid great stress on the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus on the cross. But in many cases those messages have completely failed to mention his resurrection from the dead! After I had noticed this on more than one occasion it drove me to wonder why, and led me to the conclusions I would like to share here. I am not going to (I am not sure I really can) offer a full explanation as to the mysterious disappearance of the doctrine of the resurrection from gospel preaching. But I would like to arrest the trend!

I would like to challenge those who preach the Gospel to think about this very carefully. One explanation, I think, can be found in the fact that we sometimes, even in the most Biblically-based circles, have a very “man-centred” view of the gospel. The cross is the event which clearly meets our own need for forgiveness of sins. But once we are forgiven, why is the resurrection important? To put it bluntly, apart from the “apologetic” purpose of proving that Jesus was who he said he was, many preachers sound as if there was no real point to the resurrection - that it would make little difference to their doctrine if the Lord Jesus had simply vanished from the cross once atonement were achieved.

I would like to challenge this unconscious tendency to ignore the resurrection of Jesus, or to treat it (as it sometimes appears to be treated) as simply an apologetic appendix to the cross (“Jesus rose so what we could see that his offering for sin was acceptable”, a doctrine which on closer examination is in my view not to be found in the New Testament.)

Of course not every Christian truth needs to be stated on every occasion, or indeed on every occasion when people are challenged to become followers of Jesus. One may compare the doctrine of the resurrection with the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture. I would personally take it to be true that Scripture is infallible, in the sense that every proposition asserted by the Bible is true. However, I do not think that the doctrine of Scripture’s infallibility needs to be presented to someone, nor even assented to by someone, before they can be saved. But what in fact are the essential elements that we ought to be aiming to present to someone so that they can enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

True, the question of someone’s ultimate destiny is not for us to determine. But it seems to me important that we be clear on the things that someone really needs to be told before we can have the genuine hope that they are saved. If the gospel is the power of God for salvation, when can we look to see that power achieve that result? After all, while one hears stories about people being converted by picking up a loose page of the Bible blowing down the street, not many propose “tearing up Bibles on a windy day” as a sound evangelism strategy!

I take it that all evangelicals would agree that one core proposition of the gospel has to do with the cross of Jesus and the forgiveness that is won by Jesus’ substitutionary and sacrificial death. In this sense one could say that every presentation of the gospel which is meant to lead to saving faith should clearly

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1 See the Appendix for comments on the sense in which the resurrection can be said to function as an apologetic doctrine.
present the cross. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that similarly almost every such presentation of the gospel should refer to, and make some explanation of, the resurrection of Jesus- or that if it does not, the preacher should have considered very carefully, why not.

I should make it clear that I am not suggesting that every exposition of Scripture must mention the resurrection of Jesus. Many passages may be properly expounded without doing so, although of course the preacher needs to do so keeping in mind the overall topic of the Bible, which is the Gospel of Jesus. But it does seem to me that in most cases an evangelistic presentation, where we expect someone to be able to become a believer after having heard it, should mention the resurrection. In some cases, where an evangelistic presentation is based on a specific passage of scripture which does not itself directly refer to the resurrection, that may need to be done briefly. But it should be done.

The Content of the “Gospel” - central passages

How do we determine the content of the gospel message? One approach to this question (it may not be the only one, but it sounds like a good starting point) is to explore the way that the word “gospel” is given content in the New Testament. The following represents a skim through some of the important passages.

(1) Perhaps the most obvious is 1 Cor 15:3-5. Notice the way Paul introduces the chapter:

1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

The gospel he is about to remind them of is the gospel (i) that he preached to them historically (it is the content of the apostolic preaching); (ii) that they received from him (it was the original basis of the Corinthian church); (iii) that they currently “stand” by (it is the basis of their life together now); and (iv) it is the message by which they “are being saved” (presumably, it is the message which gives them confidence that in the day of judgment they will be found innocent). It is also the message that Paul urges them to continue “holding fast” to, and departure from which, if they abandon it, will lead to them having believed “in vain”. This is a pretty important message!

The message, then, seems to be clearly spelled out in the following passage.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

The content of the message seems to be the following: (i) Christ’s death; (ii) in accordance with Scripture [we may abbreviate by taking this to refer both to death and resurrection]; (iii) Christ’s being buried; (iv) Christ’s being raised from the dead and then (by way of proof of this) his appearance to various witnesses.

The rest of 1 Cor 15, of course, goes on to emphasise the importance and centrality of the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ. If it is not clearly maintained,
Paul says, “then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (v 14), and “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (v 17). We don’t have time here to explore the rest of the chapter, but the crucial significance of the resurrection of Christ as “first-fruits” of the coming Kingdom of God are clearly stressed. In a way this paper could stop here. I think even if we only had 1 Cor 15 we could see from this the central importance to understanding the plans of God for the universe of the resurrection of Jesus. Why would we present a gospel which was limited to forgiveness of sins won by the cross, when the full importance of what happened after Good Friday is spelled out by Paul? God’s ultimate purpose in the universe is to deliver all things under the rule of his Risen Son Jesus (Eph 1:10), who will then at the end time deliver the Kingdom to his Father (1 Cor 15:24). (I will return later to the full implications of the end-time for our preaching of the resurrection.)

But there are many other indications from the New Testament of the central importance of the resurrection of Jesus to a proper understanding of the gospel.

(2) The preaching in Acts.

I take it that the sermons in Acts are, among other things, meant to provide something of a model for our gospel proclamation. In almost every speech where it is clear that the gospel is being proclaimed, whenever the cross is mentioned, the resurrection is also mentioned. (The single possible exception to this is the speech of Stephen in Acts 7, where interestingly even the cross is only mentioned very briefly in 7:52- this speech is more of an accusation of the leaders of Israel than a public gospel proclamation. And in any event the circumstances surrounding the speech involve Stephen’s vision of the risen Jesus in 7:55-56!)

In fact, if either one of these two elements (the cross or the resurrection) is left out of a speech, it is the cross (though again this is not common.)

Just so that this claim can be checked, the references are:
(b) Peter in Solomon’s portico (3:12-26): cross in vv 14-15, resurrection in v 15).
(c) Peter before the Sanhedrin (4:8-12): cross in v 8, resurrection in v 10.
(d) Peter before the High Priest (5:29-32): cross in v 30, resurrection in v 30.
(e) Peter in Cornelius’ house (10:34-43): cross in v 39, resurrection in v 40.
(g) Paul & Barnabas in Lystra (14:15-17): neither the cross nor the resurrection are mentioned, but that seems fairly clearly because they had only just started preaching when dragged away by the crowd.
(h) Paul in Thessalonica (17:2-3): both “suffer” and “rise” mentioned in v 3.
(i) Paul in Athens (17:22-31): the cross is not mentioned, but the resurrection is in v 31: “he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead”.

If it be objected that, on the above logic, every presentation of the gospel ought to mention Christ’s burial and the testimony of the Old Testament, my response would be (i) I think the burial is mentioned to emphasise the “bodily” aspect of the resurrection, which in the current day we do need to stress as against so-called “spiritual” theories; (ii) the witness of the OT is indeed a very important part of the gospel, and there may well indeed be reasons to suggest we need to do more in this area. But I think I can leave that for another paper!

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(j) Paul to Felix (24:10-25): the cross is not specifically mentioned, and neither is the resurrection of Jesus- but Paul does say in a possibly intentionally ambiguous comment in v 21: “it is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today”.

(k) Paul before Agrippa (26:2-29): the cross is mentioned at v 23, and so is the resurrection in the context of the general judgement (“by being the first to rise from the dead…”).

(l) Paul to the Jews in Rome (28:23): mentions neither cross nor resurrection in a brief summary sentence. Instead (see material later) the burden of his address is said to be “the kingdom of God”, and that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament.

We have, then, a very consistent pattern that both cross and resurrection are on the whole a key part of the gospel proclamation (especially since I take it that in particular the “key” speeches of Peter and Paul in the first half of Acts are really meant to imply that this was the ongoing burden of their preaching.)

(3) Romans
Romans contains a number of key statements about the gospel, which should not surprise us given the nature of the epistle as (in my view) an intentionally clear summary of Paul’s doctrine.

Romans 1:2-4 gives us, right at the outset of Paul’s most important letter, his definition of “the gospel of God”:

2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord

I don’t of course argue that because Paul doesn’t mention the cross here that it doesn’t form part of his understanding of the gospel. But it is at least very clear the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is crucial. How we precisely link the Spirit and the resurrection is not immediately obvious. But I think the connection is something like this- God’s purpose for the world is the new heaven and earth. In the Old Testament this New Age was clearly marked by the general resurrection of the dead- see Ezekiel 37. This resurrection involves the “Breath” or “Spirit” of the LORD coming into those dead bones (Ez 37: 9-10, 14). But now the resurrection of Jesus announces that the Future has come into the Present! The Spirit, then, enters into the people of the new Age (from Pentecost on), raising them to new life; and through the preaching of the apostles the Spirit “declares” Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God, whose end-time rule has been inaugurated though not completed. But the arrival of the new Age could not take place until the Lord Jesus inaugurated the end-time Resurrection of the dead!

In other words, the “age of the Spirit” is the end of time, which has the characteristic that the dead are raised! So when Jesus is raised from the dead the end-time is seen to have commenced. At the end of time the “Son of God”, the messianic descendant of David, the Christ, rules the world. So Jesus is seen to be this Son of God because he has been raised first.

In 2:16 Paul notes that “according to my gospel”, “God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus”. Here Paul is at one with Jesus (of course) in stating that it is the voice of the Son of God which will raise the dead to receive judgment on the last day-
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cf John 5:22, 25, 27-29. What is interesting for our purposes is that Paul sees the proclamation of the end-time resurrection judgement and the role played in that by the Lord Jesus as a part of “the gospel”.

In Romans 10:9-10 Paul gives what seems to be designed to be a short statement about what is needed for a person to be saved:

if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Note that, contrary to what one might expect, there is no mention of the cross! Again, I do not suggest that the cross be omitted from statements of the gospel - but Paul’s very specific inclusion of “that God raised him from the dead” suggests that for Paul a belief in the resurrection of Jesus was very close to essential to being saved. (It is hard to sort out whether “confess” and “believe” are two different things; I think in the end the results of being “justified” and “saved” are referring to the same thing, the verdict that is handed down at the final judgement.)

Note the chiastic parallelism in these 2 verses: confess/believe; believe/confess.

if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

The confession that “Jesus is Lord” in v 9 must relate to “being saved”, linked with “confession” at the end of v 10; the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead seems to relate to the belief in v 10 that results in “being justified”. Hence, as in Rom 4:25, the resurrection of Jesus is somehow, contrary to our normal evangelical preaching, related to justification. The faith in the risen Lord Jesus results in justification, which is connected to the confession (on the final day?) that Jesus is Lord and hence salvation.

(If we need a verbal link with this being “the gospel” it may be found a little bit later in Rom 10:16 where Paul says of the Jews- “But they have not all obeyed the gospel.” There seems a direct chain between this word and the contents of the message in v 9, for it is confessing and believing this message that results in a person being “saved”.)

(4) Other evidence for the content of the gospel in other NT books

This section gives a quick overview of other significant uses of the word “gospel” and how they illuminate its meaning.

In Matthew, 3 out of 4 uses of the word “gospel” are to “the gospel of the kingdom” (4:23, 9:35, 24:14; cf 26:13). See below for links between “kingdom” and the resurrection of Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4-5 we read of the “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord”. The gospel here must include “the glory of Christ” which in the context I think (I know “glorification” is linked to the cross in John, but this is a different context) must include the resurrected and glorified Jesus. In the rest of this
marvellous chapter Paul alternates between discussing the cross and the resurrection of Jesus in fascinating ways, but always both are linked.

Certainly there is a great deal in Galatians about the cross. But the resurrection is affirmed “up front” in 1:1, and it underlies Paul’s argument. In 2:19 when he says “I have been crucified with Christ” he has just said this was so that he could “live to God”, and his reference in 2:20 to “Christ who lives in me” is vital. One might be given pause in 6:14 when in his emotional conclusion he says: “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!” But his “anything” is a rejection of boasting in circumcision, and he immediately goes on to look ahead to resurrection day when he says in 6:15: “A new creation is everything!”

In Colossians 1:5 Paul can say that the “hope laid up for you in heaven”, was revealed by him to the Colossians “in the word of truth, the gospel”. He refers to “the hope of the gospel” again in 1:23. It may be that vv 13-22 represent Paul’s more detailed “gospel outline” at this stage in his career- if so, they include the message of the new “kingdom of his beloved Son”, the message of redemption and forgiveness, and the message that Jesus is the “firstborn from the dead”.

At an earlier stage of his ministry it seems Paul could sum up the gospel message in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 – “how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” The coming kingdom, judgement and the resurrection are central here.

In 1 Timothy Paul makes a number of short statements which could be seen as gospel summaries- one focuses on the cross (2:5-6, “ransom”), but another on the overall sweep of history and seems to include the resurrection (3:16, “vindicated by the Spirit” I take to be a reference to the resurrection, as in Rom 1:4). In 1:15 “Christ Jesus came into the word to save sinners” is, despite an initial temptation to refer it solely to the cross, not so confined- he “saves” sinners both on the cross but also on the last day when he appears as resurrected Judge!

Interestingly in both 1 & 2 Timothy Paul links the gospel with “glory” and “light”- in 1 Tim 1:11 (“the gospel of the glory of the blessed God”), 2 Tim 1:10 (“our Saviour Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”). In 2 Tim 2:8 we again have something very close to a definition of the word: “Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel”). This almost exactly matches the mini-definition he gave us in Romans 1:2-4 (above).

Finally in this very quick overview, Revelation 14:6-7 shows us an angel proclaiming “an eternal gospel”; and what does the angel say? “Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth”. There is no specific reference to either the cross or the resurrection- but the overall message of the coming Kingdom of God and day of judgment is clear, and that message is what the cross and resurrection (together!) are all about.

(5) The centrality of the resurrection in the Gospels

We see further evidence for the centrality and fundamental importance of the resurrection in the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry.

One might be tempted to downplay the importance of the resurrection as a central part of the gospel message, for example, if the ending of Mark were taken into account on its own- the news that Jesus is raised is indeed announced in Mk 16:6 but not much more is said.

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But that would be to ignore the extensive references to the resurrection in the body of the Gospel. No less than five specific predictions of the resurrection are contained in Mk 8:31, 9:9, 9:31, 10:34, and 14:28. There are significant allusions in references to John the Baptist being thought to have risen, in 6:14, 16. The resurrection of Jesus permeates the Gospel; as well it might since the announcement of the “gospel” in 1:14-15 of the arrival of the kingdom of God.

In Matthew the resurrection of the dead is mentioned as a mark of the arrival of the kingdom—see Matt 11:5, which is echoed in Jesus’ interesting charge to his disciples in 10:8 (which I had never noticed before!) to “raise the dead”. Indeed, I wonder whether that otherwise curious comment in Matt 9:6 “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home!” is perhaps explicable because it is an acted parable of the Voice of the Son of Man calling on the dead to “rise” at the end of time—see John 5:25-29, where Jesus calls himself “the Son of Man”. (See below for discussion of this passage.) Consistent with this theme is the fact that Jonah and the Queen of Sheba are specifically said to “rise up” at the judgment day in 12:41-42.

But Jesus also predicts his own resurrection in Matt 16:21, 17:9, 17:23, 20:19 and 26:32 (a prediction even confirmed by his enemies in 27:63). The event is recorded in detail, of course.

Luke repeats much of Matthew’s material. He specifically records Jesus raising the widow’s son in ch 7, and in 7:22 this is provided as evidence of the arrival of the Kingdom. Luke 9:22 and 18:23 record specific predictions by Jesus of his own resurrection. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man, of course, contains a punch-line about those who would not believe even if someone should return from the dead. Luke 20:36-38 is an argument in favour of the proposition “that the dead are raised” derived from the fact that God has a relationship with men after death. Luke 24:6-7 reminds us of Jesus’ predictions of his own resurrection. In 24:46 the risen Jesus reminds them that it was written that the Messiah must suffer and rise.

John might be called the pre-eminent “Gospel of the Resurrection”. Allusions start as early as 2:19-22, where Jesus refers to the “temple” being rebuilt in 3 days. The story of the resurrection of Lazarus in ch 11 is not only a pivotal point of the book, but it is the incident which directly leads to the authorities deciding to put Jesus to death.

Chapters 5 & 6, however, are the most important for current purposes, as they spell out in great clarity why the resurrection of Jesus is so central to human history.

It is no accident that at the start of ch 5 Jesus’ voice raises a sick man (paralysed for 38 years) from his virtual “death” (and note the first word in v 8 is literally “rise up”!) Later when defending himself to the leaders he notes that he has been given authority as Son by the Father to “give life to whomever he wishes”. How does this take place?

25 Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.
The Lord Jesus is first the Agent of the end-time Resurrection. He gives life to those who hear and obey his words; he will judge those who refuse to. Of course, then, it must be the case that if he dies for the sins of the world, he must rise to life again- otherwise the resurrection of the rest of humanity cannot take place! That is why his resurrection is not some added extra to the cross, or an unrelated “reward” for his obedience. (The reference to the “Son of Man” ties in with Daniel 7, of course, but that itself leads us to Daniel 12, where we read in v 2 of the resurrection of all, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.)

Later, in John 6:38-40, we read:

38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

The Lord Jesus is the Risen Judge, the one who raises all of God’s people at the end of time. Of course he must rise if he dies!

The course of events at the end of time

The inextricable link between the cross and the resurrection is seen because of what the Gospel is about. It is the message about “the kingdom of God”, an eschatological message (Mark 1:1, 14-15). It seems (as noted above) that this is precisely the content of the gospel according to what are probably Jesus’ earliest recorded words in the NT: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near”. It is that good news which Jesus calls upon people, having repented, to believe.3

The two features that characterize the end-time kingdom are (1) the Judgment of all humanity (Rev 20:11-15); (2) the New Heaven and New Earth containing the resurrected saints around the throne (Rev 21-22). The events of Jesus’ death and resurrection correspond to the pattern of the end of time.

(1) The Cross corresponds to the Judgment of God on sin- for at the cross God judges sin in the person of his Son. This is the Instantiation in the present of the future judgment on humanity. Those who then link themselves to Jesus by faith can take advantage of the fact that the end-time Judgment has already been fully executed, and they do not have to face it themselves. In other words, they are forgiven. The Cross is at the same time the Inauguration of forgiveness for God’s people.

(2) The Resurrection of Jesus corresponds to the end-time resurrection (and vindication) of God’s people. It is both the Instantiation in the present of the end-time resurrection (Jesus representing in his person risen humanity), but also the Inauguration of the new life which starts now for those who put their faith in Jesus and become a new creation.

Since both these events are so closely linked, it is not surprising that almost every presentation of the gospel we find in the NT includes both these elements, the cross and the resurrection of Jesus.

3 Notice the similarity between this first mention of “the gospel” in the New Testament, with the last mention of the word in Rev 14:6-7: “the hour of his judgment has come” sounds a lot like “The kingdom of God has arrived”, and “repent” is almost exactly equivalent to “Fear God and give him glory”.

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The link between the Spirit and the Resurrection

This discussion is already too long, so I can’t explore this topic as I ought to. But it seems to me that there are fundamental connections between the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit, which probably have their origins in Ezekiel 37. If the end-time means the resurrection of the dead, then it will mean the “breath” of life (as way back in Genesis 2:7) coming on the dead bodies. We are not told in the gospel accounts or Acts that the Spirit had a direct role in the resurrection, although we do seem to have some hint in Romans 1:4. But once Jesus did rise, then it was necessary, for the new life of his people to start, for the Spirit of Life to breath into them. The uncertainty of chronology seems to be what one would expect from this “now and not yet” phase we live in- we can be “born again” (and of course, as John 3:5-8 tells us, this involves the Spirit) into a “new creation”; but at the moment we are still waiting for the final consummation.

In this context it seems to me that Ez 37 provides just the right background for Jesus’ otherwise enigmatic comment in Jn 3:5 that someone must be born “of water and Spirit” before they can enter the Kingdom of God. In Ez 37 the immediate background to the “dry bones” passage is Ez 36:25, where the LORD promises to “sprinkle clean water” on his people to cleanse them, and then give them a “new heart”. The water (like the cross) achieves the cleansing, the breath/Spirit (like the resurrection) gives new life. Both are essential, neither can be forgotten if someone is to enter the Kingdom.

Objections

Are there, then, other passages in the New Testament which might be taken to mean that the Resurrection of Jesus is an optional extra in gospel proclamation- that all that someone really needs to hear is the message of forgiveness? Two that might be suggested (there may be others) include the following.

(1) Paul’s resolution to “know the cross alone” in 1 Cor 2:2?

Does the fact that Paul can say in 1 Cor 2:2 “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified”, mean that he did not preach the resurrection in Corinth? I don’t think so! The very strong emphasis on the subject later in 1 Cor 15 should warn us against thinking that. It seems most likely that what he contrasts in ch 2 with the cross, is the airy rhetoric of his rivals, their “lofty words and wisdom” noted in 1 Cor 2:1. His proclamation no doubt included the resurrection in his focus on “Jesus Christ”.

(2) Jesus’ statements about the purpose for which he came which limit that purpose to his death?

It is possible to find statements in the gospels that point to the cross as the major reason for Jesus’ “coming”. Mark 10:45 is probably the main one: “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”. But lurking behind this statement are two important facts:

(1) The phrase “Son of Man”, while of course Jesus’ preferred self-description, must still carry with the overtones of the context of Daniel 7, where in 7:13-14 the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days is certainly an image of the resurrected Jesus coming to his father in the ascension.

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The context of the phrase “ransom for many”, particularly the use of the word “many”, seems to be a reference to Is 53:11-12; as such it includes, not just the event of the cross, but also the references there to the resurrection (v 10 “he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days”; v 11 “he shall see and be satisfied”).

I don’t say a sermon on Mark 10:45 has to include a reference to the resurrection (though see the textually close references in Mk 10:34, a prediction, and 10:37, an allusion to his future “glory” which Jesus does not deny). But I do say the fact that Jesus does not on this occasion mention the resurrection as part of the purpose of his coming, does not mean that it is not an essential part of the gospel message to be proclaimed now. Indeed, it is worth noting that any statement in which Jesus refers to what he is planning to do might not include, before the event, the resurrection- since that is an activity of God the Father. But a complete statement of the gospel after the events of the first Easter should, in my view, always include this element.

Conclusion

Most modern gospel summaries invariably mention the resurrection- “Two Ways to Live”, of course, does so. But the question I have been addressing is whether we are ever justified, on occasions when we present the gospel to unbelievers expecting them, as a result of what we say, to be able to cross over from death to life- whether we are ever justified on those occasions in not explaining the resurrection of Jesus. In my view, the answer is that we must have very good reasons for not doing so.

In his recent important book, Gospel-Centred Hermeneutics (Nottingham: Apollo, 2006), Graeme Goldsworthy defines “the gospel” for the purposes of his discussion in this way:

The gospel is the event (or the proclamation of that event) of Jesus Christ, that begins with his incarnation and earthly life, and concludes with his death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. This historical event is interpreted by God as his preordained programme for the salvation of the world. (at p 58; footnote omitted, emphasis added)

He continues:

The gospel centres on what God did for us in the incarnate Christ in order to save us from sin, the devil and death. Its goal is the new creation where the people of God redeemed by Christ will enjoy the presence of God for eternity. The gospel is what we must believe in order to be saved. (pp58-59)

To view the gospel in this full-orbed way seems to me to be exactly right. There is always a temptation in presentation of the gospel to focus primarily on the needs of the hearers. In my evangelical circles we do not fall into the error of supposing that those needs can be defined in terms of earthly health and wealth. But we can be tempted to think that the true human need, the need for forgiveness of sins, is the main thing. A broader overview of the gospel message in the New Testament shows us that it is the proclamation of God’s coming Kingdom, his purposes for the world. Our gospel must always be theocentric, not anthropocentric.
God’s purposes have never wavered - they have always been that there should be a community of human beings, made in his image, living in harmony with God and each other in a heaven and earth ruled over by God. The announcement of God’s purpose was made to Adam and Eve in Gen 1:27-28. It will be fulfilled at the end of time, when the final judgment takes place and all are raised from death to face either condemnation or forgiveness and new life.

It might even be said that in this scheme the cross is not the most important moment in history - that this description should be applied to the resurrection of Jesus. But this is perhaps merely a rhetorical issue. Better to say that the inextricably linked events of the cross and resurrection of Jesus together mark the pivotal moment for the universe.

For God’s new kingdom to contain human beings, the problem of sin needed to be dealt with. How could anyone in this rebellious world survive the end-time judgment? The answer is revealed when the incarnate Son of God takes the wrath of God in penal substitution on the cross.

But, having done so, the salvation of God is not complete until the Son of God rises to life, having paid in his own person the price of sin. He becomes the Firstborn of the new Kingdom, the precursor of all who will be raised in glory in his image at the end of time. He commences his rule over the universe, yet in an unexpected way - while there is still ongoing sin, and while the end of time has not quite arrived. He does so because God in his immense patience wishes others to join the kingdom. As Risen King Jesus sends out his followers to proclaim this gospel of the kingdom around the world. The end-time Spirit is given, who resides with the new believers, those who have been actually “born again” into the new kingdom (while still living in the old world.) The Spirit begins the process of transforming the new people of God to resemble the risen Lord Jesus, to fit them to live in the new kingdom.

The resurrection of Jesus is not just an optional piece of nice but unexpected news to be tacked on the message of forgiveness of sins. It is an essential part of the gospel proclamation. It signals, for one thing, the new life that a believer now lives, having “risen with Christ”. To clearly proclaim the resurrection is to avoid the danger of the new believer simply taking “forgiveness” from the cross as a gift and ignoring Jesus from then on. To receive forgiveness means placing yourself in the community of those who serve a Risen, not a dead, Lord. It means a change in the way life is lived, a change worthy of the description of a “new creation”. That change is signaled by the fact that the source of salvation is not the cross alone as an event in the 1st century, but an ongoing relationship with the living Lord Jesus.

If this view is accepted I suggest that it means at least two things:

1. Whenever we make an opportunity where we know that we will be presenting the gospel to unbelievers, and inviting them to become believers, then we should almost always in that presentation mention the resurrection of Jesus as an essential part of what must be accepted. If it be objected that this is setting the bar too high, that unbelievers will more readily accept a message about the cross when they are not also required to believe that a man rose from the dead, the only response must be: that was not the view taken by the apostles.

2. In general, when teaching from the Bible in all contexts, we should be alert to see if the text is pointing to the

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resurrection of Jesus, and make sure that we factor that in to our teaching. Biblical Theology requires (because the Bible tells us) that every part of the Bible is ultimately related to the gospel of Jesus. This is not to say that we must make every Bible passage say the same thing, or that we must artificially strain to include references which are not there. But we should be concerned if, over a period of time, the resurrection is not touched on equally as often as the cross. There may be something we are missing.
Appendix 1- The Resurrection of Jesus as apologetic

One of my concerns about the way the resurrection is preached is that it is sometimes presented as if it were an argument in favour of Jesus’ offering for sin being acceptable. This, in the way noted in the paper, is a very “man-centred” view—the resurrection becomes something that gives us assurance. It is also not echoed, as far as I can tell, in the NT.

However, it is true that the resurrection of Jesus is used in NT preaching to prove something. But what it proves is not the acceptability of Jesus’ work; rather, it is used as evidence of his office and identity.

In John 2:18-22 the natural way of reading the passage is that Jesus (at this point) accepts the demand of the Jews for a sign demonstrating his authority to speak as the Messiah. (The quote in the previous verse, about zeal for God’s house, comes from Ps 69:9, a Davidic psalm.) The sign he offers is his own coming resurrection from the dead.

Why is that the mark of the Messiah? Peter explains this in Acts 2:24-32 – Psalm 16 speaks of God’s Holy One not being left to “corruption”. Hence Peter explains that Jesus’ resurrection (coupled with his previous “mighty works”, Acts 2:22) shows that he is indeed God’s promised Messiah. (Further evidence is provided by his pouring out the Spirit—Acts 2:33).

Hence the resurrection does operate as proof that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah. But this is not because it is simply a marvelous event (as if walking across the Jordan River, for example, could have done the same thing.) It is because resurrection from the dead is what marks the end-time, and the Messiah is God’s chosen King of the end-time. So the apologetic function of the resurrection is really a “by-product” rather than, as seems to sometimes be suggested, the main reason for it.

The fact, however, that it does function this way supports the thesis that if we are proclaiming Jesus as Christ, then proclamation of his resurrection from the dead plays a key role.
Appendix 2- Notes from I Howard Marshall on the resurrection and the gospel


A couple of caveats, though. Marshall’s book is primarily a response to the “penal substitution” debate (chs 1 & 2). While he affirms his general support for the traditional (and correct) evangelical view, he is weak in a couple of areas that may justifiably make some unhappy with the book. In general there is a bit of a tendency to want to reach out to “both sides” of the debate, and in process I think some muddled thought. In particular I disagree with his view (hinted at n 48 on p 30) that final judgment is destruction rather than eternal conscious punishment (and see the unhelpfully flippant comment on p 18 about God not “arousing the criticism of a cosmic equivalent of Amnesty International”!) He also wants to have a bit both ways by accepting “penal” as an adjective but then arguing that it could be replaced by something else (see p 44, p 66). In ch 2 he also seems to want to rehabilitate the views of Forsyth while supporting Denney. I am still not sure I understand exactly why he refuses to recognize the notion of God propitiating God at p 58. He also controversially (in my view) attacks the doctrine of limited atonement at pp 62-63 n 45, which seems to explain why in his overview of defences of penal substitution he does not support Jeffery, Ovey and Sach *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, which is a very significant omission. (I think that the arguments in favour of limited atonement are fairly strong, but I agree the two doctrines do not have to be necessarily linked.)

In the end, however, as the chapters of the book very much bear the marks of their origins in 4 separate essays on different occasions, these flaws do not impact heavily on ch 3’s discussion of the resurrection. Yet pragmatically there is a danger if an argument for the centrality of the resurrection, using Marshall’s material, becomes confused with an argument which in some way “waters down” penal substitutionary atonement. My view is that *Pierced for Our Transgressions* gets it pretty well right; if Marshall intends his book to be a sort of *via media* between the 2 sides of evangelicalism, which tries to come half-way by somehow de-emphasising the cross, I do not want to be associated with it. However, he has some very good material in ch 3.

What does Marshall add on the issue of the gospel and the resurrection of Jesus?

- Rom 4:25 is treated as the central text, and I think on reflection he is right- it is one of the very clear places where there must be a challenge to any view that preaching the cross “alone” will address the need for justification.
- He is right to point out 3 types of passages: (i) where the death and resurrection of Jesus are openly and clearly linked- eg Rom 8:34 “It is Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who intercedes for us!” (Indeed, the *mallon de* construction here is worth exploring: “even more, who was raised”?); (ii) where the death of Christ alone is mentioned; (iii) where the resurrection alone is mentioned.
- Of these final passages he correctly highlights Rom 10:5-13 (noted in my paper above), 1 Thess 1:9-10 (ditto). He refers to Phil 2:6-11 here,
though this seems odd as both the cross and resurrection are mentioned. But he puts it in this category because the “saving significance” of the cross is not highlighted, simply its humiliation. I am not sure about this - for one could also say that the “saving significance” of the resurrection is not highlighted either, it being a prelude to Jesus’ Lordship over heaven and earth. So I am not sure this passage is in this category (I would put it in category (i), I think). Marshall then also refers to the preaching in Acts and makes similar though more cursory observations to those I have previously made.

- He helpfully notes the common reference to the resurrection of Jesus as “stamping God’s approval” on the atoning death of Jesus, and notes how this view does not fit the NT evidence. He also notes how the resurrection functions in relation to Jesus’ Messianic role. A good quote:

> The resurrection is not seen as God’s approval of what Christ has done for sinners. Rather, the resurrection is how God undoes the acts of the wicked people who put Jesus to death, and how he affirms that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord, and thus the author of salvation. (at p 76)

- Marshall then has an odd almost excursus on Hebrews 9-10, at pp 76 ff. I am still not sure I agree with it, but I am also not sure it really relates to the significance of the resurrection, as he himself concedes that Hebrews hardly uses the idea, concentrating on the “ascended” Christ. I will leave that aside.

- In coming to Rom 4:25, then, Marshall canvasses a number of views. (See the article by Lowe he cites at p 80 n 21, and also the article by Bird p 83 n 27.) He argues at p 83, and I agree, that the word *dia* will probably mean the same thing when used twice in such close proximity, and hence that if the first part of the verse “handed over to death *for our* trespasses”, means that the death was designed to achieve forgiveness from sins (perhaps more accurately, to deal with the problem created by our trespasses? but this seems to amount to the same thing), then the second half of the verse “raised *for our* justification”, means that Christ’s resurrection was designed to achieve our justification.

- In the end the view he prefers is something like this: God’s raising of Christ is in some sense a “justification” of Christ, in that the verdict of “innocent” is both pronounced and executed by his coming back to life. The resurrection

> Makes explicit God's granting of the decisive remission of the guilt that Christ has been bearing, and makes him the representative Man in whom we can be justified. (at p 86)

- Marshall refers at p 87 to Hooker’s study of Romans 5:12-19 where she notes that Christ “was raised in order that we might share in his acquittal (pronounced at his resurrection)”. This is very interesting and warrants careful study. In particular note the Greek of Romans 5:18 at the end – *eis dikaioson zoes*! (For the justification of life?) There is a very helpful analysis of Romans 5:10:

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death (*dia tou thanatou*) of his Son, much more surely (*pollo mallon*), having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life (*en to zoe autou*).
• This verse, which I hadn’t noticed previously, seems to say it all! Reconciliation takes place through the cross; salvation from the final judgment takes place “in” or “through” or “by” the life of Jesus, by which Paul must mean his resurrection! Both are essential! Marshall sums this up well:

Our sins have been dealt with by the death of Christ (with whom we are now united); now, as those who are united with him in his life, we are alive to God and, therefore, outside the sphere of wrath. It is thus union with the Christ who died and rose for us that is the basis of our final salvation. (at p. 88).

• Marshall also notes the view of others that the enigmatic 1 Tim 3:16, which says that Jesus “was vindicated in the Spirit” (edik aioth e n pneumat i), may also point to the “justification of Jesus”. The phrase’s position in the verse (after “manifested in the flesh” and before “seen by angels”) would seem to fit the resurrection, and would in fact bear some interesting links with Paul’s introductory words in Rom 1:3-4 (where descent from David “according to the flesh” is immediately followed by the declaration that Jesus was declared or “designated”, or isthentos, to be the Son of God “according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead”). Perhaps the best that can be said, as Marshall concludes, is that this verse is not inconsistent with the view that the resurrection of Jesus has something to do with justification!

• I think the following longer quote from Marshall is fair:

[I]n raising Christ from death after he has taken upon himself the sins of the world and died, God… is bringing him back from the dead as the One who is now just and experiencing the new life that God grants to those whose sin has been taken away; this is happening representatively to Christ so that believers may share in this new life… Hence the resurrection is essential to the saving act in that it is not merely God saying that Christ has done what is necessary; rather, God himself has to carry out the act of pardon on the basis of what Christ has done, and he does so. Thus Christ was raised for our justification, and, without this raising of Christ, we would not be justified.

• By way of excursus, it struck me that something similar can be seen in the classic substitutionary episode of Barabbas in Matt 27 (brilliantly expounded by William Philip at CMS Summer School 2009, though this point was not touched on.) Pilate as judge pardons Barabbas- apol ouo is the word, which could simply mean “lets go” but in the context seems to imply a judicial pardon. But of course Barabbas would not have been truly “released” if the judicial verdict were pronounced and he stayed in his dungeon. For the pardon to have full effect he must not be pronounced innocent, but must walk out into the sunlight! So the justification of believers must be accomplished by not only a formal verdict but new life; and as the “first fruits” the Lord Jesus experiences the verdict of innocence and the release from the tomb to new life.

• Marshall in this theological conclusion makes some points which are valid but could be misunderstood. He points out that the resurrection cannot be said to be “substitutionary” (doing something so we do not have to do it), as Christ’s risen life will indeed be shared with
believers (see p 92). But while this is a fair point, it would be better to avoid confusion to maintain very clearly that the cross still remains substitutionary, even if the resurrection is “representative”.

- It is odd that Marshall then says that in Rom 6 Paul writes of a believer’s baptism into Christ’s death but “[h]e does not speak of their baptism as being a baptism into Christ’s resurrection” (at p. 92). To the contrary, it seems to me that any reference to “baptism” is a reference to both- for it implies not only a “going under the water” but a “rising up again”. Indeed, to me that is precisely what Paul says in Rom 6:4-

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

- Indeed, it seems to me now that the almost universal use of the symbol of baptism for those entering the new Christian life is actually itself a strong argument for the inseparability of cross and resurrection in the gospel. It is not just a washing of sin, it is a rising to a new life! The structure of the conversion ceremony mirrors the structure of the gospel that should have been preached to bring about the conversion! 1 Peter 3:21-22 seems to make this point: “baptism” saves, not as a physical act but as a sign of “an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”. The resurrection of Jesus is the appeal as it is the sign both that sins have been washed and the believer has come out into the new life.

- Marshall sums the chapter up well as he concludes:

Thus the raising of Jesus by God the Father is seen to be an essential part of the saving act, and is not simply a way of proclaiming to humanity that the price of sin has been paid. If Christ had not been raised, we would still be in our sins. (at p. 97)

I would only reiterate that if indeed the resurrection is so central a part of God’s act of salvation, it must surely also form a central part of our overall gospel preaching!

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