

“What is the Relevance of the Resurrection?” (John’s Gospel)

Have you seen the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*? Stop for just a moment and recall how the movie ends. It concludes with a scene of Christ’s empty tomb. Why is this? Director Mel Gibson explains, “Without the resurrection, our faith is dead. The story’s not complete without it.”¹

Gibson is right. The most important event in human history is the resurrection of Christ. Yet, most people in today’s world are not asking the question, “Did Jesus really rise from the dead?” If they are asking any question, it is, “What difference will Jesus’ resurrection make in my life?” The concern is not scientific facts,² but personal experience.

Some cringe over this cultural paradigm shift, yet the Christian life consists of both facts and feelings. *Both* are essential to a healthy relationship with God.³ Therefore, I will appeal to your legitimate needs and desires that can only be met in Jesus Christ.

John’s gospel records seven statements in which Jesus describes Himself as, “I am...” In these “I am” statements, Jesus is making a claim to equality with God the Father. These brief declarations are intended to bring people to faith in Christ.⁴ However, the validity of these statements is grounded in Christ’s resurrection. If Christ didn’t rise, these claims are invalid. But if Christ rose, these claims are valid (cf. Romans 1:4).

Before considering the first “I am” statement, it is important to understand the history of this phrase. In the Old Testament, the description “I am” served as God’s autograph.⁵ When God appeared to Moses at a crucial time in Israel’s history, Moses asked God for a special revelation of Himself that would authenticate Moses as the leader of Israel (Exodus 3:14). In response, God made to Moses a new and awesome disclosure of His essential being, as well as His saving purposes for His chosen nation. Out of the strange fire of the burning bush God identified Himself in the mysterious and yet profoundly impressive announcement, “I am who I am.” This is not to be mistaken with the Popeye expression, “I yam what I yam.” God does not say, “I am this” or “I am that.” He says, “I am who I am.” He is conditioned and defined by nothing outside of Himself. In this context and others, the description means, “All that I am, I am for you” (cf. Isaiah 43:10-13).

[Now we are prepared to consider Jesus’ seven “I am” statements.]⁶

1. I am the Bread of Life (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51). In John 6, Jesus fed 5,000 men and undoubtedly thousands of women and children.⁷ The crowd that observed this remarkable feat began to follow Jesus. They wanted to see more miracles. They wanted more food. Unfortunately, they failed to understand the purpose of this miracle. Therefore, in John 6:35, Jesus said, “**I am the bread of life;⁸ he who comes⁹ to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.**” Notice Jesus does not say He gives spiritual bread, but that He *is* spiritual bread. As bread sustains physical life, so Christ offers and sustains spiritual life.

I don’t know about you, but I love bread. My wife, Lori, knows that a meal is incomplete unless she serves bread. This has been frustrating to Lori. After preparing a culinary masterpiece, I sit down and devour the bread that is on the table and then move on to main courses. Last week, we were at the Sizzler for dinner. I had access to an all you can eat buffet and all I wanted to eat was the garlic toast that they included with our order. I’m not sure why I like bread so much, but I do know this: When Jesus calls Himself “the Bread of Life” He is appealing to my appetite. When Jesus speaks of permanent nourishment and satisfaction, He is appealing to my need. Hear once again the words of Jesus: “**he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst**” (John 6:35b).

Jesus is saying to you and to me, “If you’re hungry, I am food.” Believe in me. Taste and see that I am good (Psalm 34:8). St. Augustine rightly observed that every single person has a God-shaped vacuum in his soul. We can attempt to fill that cavity with a host of other things: money, possessions, education, health, and family, but finally nothing fills our hunger for significance except Jesus Himself.

[The resurrection validates Jesus’ claim to be “the Bread of Life.” If you believe in Him you can be satisfied.]

2. I am the Light of the World (John 8:12). “**I am the Light¹⁰ of the world; he who follows¹¹ Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.**” The message of Jesus’ life is that He is what He is for us. This is seen again in the fact that Jesus does not lead us to the light, but *is* the Light that leads us.

We have just turned out all of the lights in the sanctuary. Now I want you to imagine that it is pitch black. It’s so dark; you can’t see your hand in front of your face. You don’t know the sanctuary well enough to find your way out. What would you do? You would look for a person that knows his/her way out of the sanctuary. Well, what if such a person also had a flashlight? You would follow that person, wouldn’t you?

In the spiritual realm, we need God’s light. In our stumbling about in the darkness of sin, Christ offers Himself as a constant guide.¹² Is there a hidden sin that is eating you up inside? Do you think you’ve done something that God will not forgive? Look to the Light. The word “**Light**” is also symbolic of holiness. When you believe in Christ, God the Father applied the perfect righteousness of Christ. If you’re in the dark, Jesus says, “I am the Light.” If you want to experience God’s forgiveness today, Jesus says, believe in Me and you will experience all that I offer.

[The resurrection validates Jesus’ claim to be “the Light of the World.” If you believe in Him you can have direction.]

3. I am the Door (John 10:7, 9). In John 10, Jesus informs Israel’s religious leaders that they are unfit shepherds of the nation. In John 10:9, He then says, “**I am the door;¹³ if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.**” I want you to imagine with me that we renovated this sanctuary and left only one entrance. The door off to your left by the piano is the only entrance. This means that you can’t get into our sanctuary through any other means. Jesus says, “**I am the door.**”¹⁴

Jesus is saying that believing in Him is like entering a door that opens up into a brand new life. Verse 9 presents us with a picture of a sheep-pen in the countryside, set in rich pasture-land where the sheep are under the shepherd’s eye, free to move “**in and out**” at will. The word “**pasture**” is speaking of fullness of life (10:10). Christ gives freedom and satisfaction! If you’ve been shackled in chains of religion and legalism, Jesus wants to set you free. He wants you to experience His grace.

[The resurrection validates Jesus’ claim to be “the Door.” If you believe in Him you can have freedom.]

4. I am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14). Jesus is still talking with Israel’s religious leaders when He says, “**I am the good shepherd;¹⁵ the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.**” Unlike hirelings who might run away and leave the flock unprotected, Jesus is committed to caring for and keeping watch over His people. Jesus does not say, “I am a shepherd” (in contrast to a bad one), nor does He say, “I am a good shepherd.” But He says without qualification, “**I am the good shepherd.**” Jesus is saying that there is no one like Him—He is claiming to be God.¹⁶ Believing in Jesus is like wandering aimlessly through life and then finding a shepherd to lead you into green pastures and cool water. If you’re without a guide, Jesus is your Shepherd.

The film, *Finding Nemo*, is an animated story of a father's resolute search for his son. The father, a fish named Marlin, teams up with another fish named Dory, to find Nemo. A dentist captured Nemo while diving off the coast of Sydney, Australia and placed him in a fish tank in his office. Nemo thinks his father has forgotten about him and that he'll never see him again. But one day a pelican named Nigel lands in the window of the dentist office and begins to tell Nemo an amazing story.

[Start video] "Nemo! Your father's been fighting the entire ocean looking for you!" reports Nigel. "My father?" Nemo incredulously asks. "Oh, yeah! He's been battling sharks and jellyfish," Nigel recounts. "It's my dad! He took on a shark!" proudly exclaims Nemo. Nigel says, "I heard he took on three." Nemo is dumbfounded. He repeats, "Three?" Nigel explains, "You see, kid. After you were taken, your dad started swimming like a maniac. He took on three sharks. He battled an entire jellyfish forest. Now he's riding a bunch of sea turtles on the east Australian current, and the word is he's headed this way right now to Sydney." "What a great daddy!" Nemo says.¹⁷

I'm here to tell you that Marlin has nothing on Jesus Christ. Jesus is a "friend that sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). One of life's deepest needs is for companionship and oneness with the God who made us and who enables us to manage life's problems. Easter makes this possible. You can walk out of here today with a brand new companion for life, someone who will do life with you and never leave you.

[The resurrection validates Jesus' claim to be "the Good Shepherd." If you believe in Him you can have companionship.]

5. I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25). After his dear friend Lazarus died, Jesus said, "**I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.**" No saying of Jesus has been more precious to Christians than "**I am the resurrection and the life.**" The first clause "**I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies**" is a promise of future resurrection after death. The second clause "**everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die, I am the life**" is an assurance that the life that is found in and comes from Jesus will never, under any condition, die.¹⁸

One spring afternoon a father and son were traveling down a country road when suddenly a bee flew in the window. Being deathly allergic to bee stings, the boy began to panic as the bee buzzed all around inside the car. Seeing the horror on his child's face, the father reached out and caught the bee in his hand. Soon, he opened his hand and the bee began to buzz around once again. Again, the boy began to panic. The father reached over to his son, and opened his hand showing him the stinger still in his palm. "Relax, son," the father said, "I took the sting; the bee can't hurt you anymore." The empty tomb is God's way of saying to us, "Relax, my child, I took the sting; death can't hurt you anymore."

If you're afraid of death and dying, Jesus is life. He says you can have confidence in the face of death.

[The resurrection validates Jesus' claim to be "the Resurrection and the Life." If you believe in Him you can have confidence.]

6. I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). The night before His death, Jesus spent time in the upper room teaching His disciples. When the disciples were confused about Jesus' statements about heaven, He said, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.**" Jesus did not say, "I'm one way." He did not say, "I'm a good way." He did not say, "All spiritual roads lead to the same place, so take your pick." This would be like saying, "I can dial any phone number and get home." That's ridiculous. You can't do that. There's only one number and one way that leads to home, and that is Jesus. His resurrection proves His claim to be God.

Many people try different ways to get to heaven. Some people try “salvation by sincerity.” It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere. Some people try “salvation by service.” I’ll just do a few nice things and that should be enough to get me in. Some people try “salvation by subtraction.” I’ll give up my bad habits. Being sincere, offering acts of service, and dropping bad habits are not ways of salvation. These may be issues that you deal with down the road in your walk with Christ, but they are not necessary to get into God’s family. The condition that is necessary is that you believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be!

[The resurrection validates Jesus’ claim to be “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” If you believe in Him you can have truth.]

7. I am the True Vine (John 15:1). In John 15, Jesus is still in the upper room where He is explaining to the disciples His relationship with His people. He said, **“I am the true¹⁹ vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”** The point of Jesus’ agricultural illustration is this: You need Me. I am crucial to your basic identity and your success in life. I define you. My life lies at the foundation of your life, and My power is the source of your fruitfulness. In an eternal sense, without Me, you can do nothing (15:5). I am your energy, without Me you will be malnourished.

I’ll be honest: I desperately need Jesus Christ. Like you, I have many overwhelming responsibilities. I’m a parent and this one job alone is enough to overwhelm anyone! I’ve got three kids. And I’m here to tell you that I can’t raise three kids without Jesus! Parenting takes “Resurrection Power.” Some days, I want to nickname my three kids “Hernia, Heartburn, and Headache!”

Before having kids, author and speaker, Charlie Shedd, used to travel across the country teaching a lecture called, “The Ten Commandments for Raising Perfect Kids.” After he and his wife had their first child, he changed the title to, “Ten Hints for Parents.” After their second child, the title became, “A Few Suggestions for Fellow Strugglers.” After their third child, he just quit speaking on the subject altogether.

Let’s face it: kids are tough. They can disappoint you. They can rebel against you. Kids can hurt you more than anyone in this world. You and I need the power that Jesus provides to help raise children.

Many of you may not look forward to going to work on Mondays...or Tuesdays...or. You have a difficult boss and challenging co-workers. You can’t go to work without resurrection power. You need to ensure that you’re hooked into the True Vine. You must be in fellowship with Jesus.

Right now, you may be in the midst of the worst trial of your life. You may be on the verge of separation or divorce. Maybe you’re in the midst of a financial crisis. Your job may be in jeopardy and you’re not sure how you’re going to make it. Maybe a loved one is terminally ill. You’re either in a trial or you’re getting ready to move into one. You need Jesus. If you’re a Christian, you need the strength and perseverance that Jesus supplies.

[The resurrection validates Jesus’ claim to be “the True Vine.” If you believe in Him you can have power.]

At the conclusion of his gospel, John stated his overall purpose for recording these signs. John 20:31: **“but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”** The one condition for eternal life is to believe, to place your trust in Christ alone. You can believe with confidence in Jesus because the resurrection proves that He is who He claimed to be!

Because of Easter, you can walk out of here today fully prepared and ready for the world and life to come. This is a great day of opportunity for you to have your deepest needs met! Your future can be secure; your relationship with God can be established; and your conscience can be cleared, all because of Easter.

This week I read the true story of a young man from a wealthy family who was about to graduate from high school. It was the custom in that affluent neighborhood for the parents to give the graduate an automobile. Bill and his father had spent months looking at cars, and the week before graduation, they found the perfect car. On the eve of his graduation, his father handed him a gift-wrapped Bible. Bill was so angry that he threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house. He and his father never saw each other again. It was the news of his father's death that brought Bill home once more. As he sat one night going through his father's possessions that he was to inherit, he came across the Bible his father had given him. He brushed away the dust and opened it to find a cashier's check, dated the day of his graduation, in the exact amount of the car they had chosen together.

As I thought about this story, I couldn't help but wonder how many people in this world have done the same thing to Jesus Christ. Literally tossed aside a wonderful promise, because they didn't understand it, or they didn't believe that it was possible. In our world, we are taught that, "if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." So many of us have been taken in by "empty promises" that we are leery of anything or anyone that tells us we can have something for nothing.²⁰

Yet, Jesus says again and again if we simply believe in Him, we can have eternal life in heaven and abundant life on earth. **The resurrection validates this claim!** Today, will you believe in Jesus Christ? Will you entrust your eternal destiny into His capable hands? All that He is, He offers you today.

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Notes

¹ See also the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:1-1-19.

² In April 2002, the well-respected Oxford University philosophy professor Richard Swineburne used a broadly accepted probability theory to defend the truth of Christ's resurrection. He did this at a high-profile gathering of philosophy professors at Yale University. In a *New York Times* interview, Swineburne said, "For someone dead for 36 hours to come to life again is, according to the laws of nature, extremely improbable. But if there is a God of the traditional kind, natural laws only operate because He makes them operate. Swineburne used Bayes Theorem to assign values to things like the probability that God is real, Jesus' behavior during his lifetime, and the quality of witness testimony after His death. Then he plugged the numbers into a probability formula and added everything up. The result: a 97 percent probability that the resurrection really happened. Preaching Today Citation: *Group* magazine (July 2002); submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky.

³ See Jonathan Edwards book *Religious Affections*.

⁴ For a great treatment of these statements see Peter Lewis, *The Glory of Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 89-106.

⁵ See Isaiah 41:10, 13; 43:25; 45:5, 18, 22.

⁶ Jesus equates Himself with the Old Testament, "I am" or Yahweh in John 4:25-26; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-6, 8.

⁷ Women and children were not included in this count.

⁸ See also John 6: 41, 48, and 51.

⁹ In his gospel, John uses various synonyms for faith which denote action or doing: "receive" (1:12; 5:43); "drink" (4:14; 6:53-56; 7:37); "come" (5:40; 6:35, 37, 44, 65, 7:37); "eat" (6:51-58); and "enter" (10:9).

¹⁰ Cf. Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19-25; 40:34-38; Psalm 27:1; 44:3; 119:105; Proverbs 6:23; Isaiah 49:6; 60:19-22; Ezekiel 1:4, 13, 26-28; Habakkuk 3:3-4; Zechariah 14:5-7.

¹¹ In John 8:12 and 10:27 the word "follow" (*akoloutheo*) is used as a metaphor for "believe." In its other usages, it is used as a reference to discipleship.

¹² Light is also symbolic of holiness.

¹³ The background for this verse seems to be Psalm 118:20: "This is the gate of the LORD; The righteous will enter through it."

¹⁴ The Bible makes exclusive claims about God (see Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 43:11; 45:5).

¹⁵ See Genesis 49:24; Psalm 23; 78:52; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Isaiah 40:10-11; Ezekiel 34:11, 13-15.

¹⁶ The Bible says there is no one who does good and that only God is good (Psalm 53:1; Matthew 19:17).

¹⁷ Preaching Today Citation: *Finding Nemo* (Walt Disney/Pixar, 2003), rated G, directed and written by Andrew Stanton; submitted by David Slagle, Wilmore, Kentucky. Elapsed time: Measured from the beginning of the opening credit, this scene begins at 00:58:30 and ends at 00:59:37.

¹⁸ The phrase "will never" [die] is a double negative in the Greek (*ou me*) and is literally rendered "will never, no never die."

¹⁹ In His use of the word "true," (*alethinos*) Jesus is contrasting Himself with Israel as a vine in God's planting (e.g., Psalm 80:8-10; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 15:1-5; 17:1-21; 19:10-15; Hosea 10:1-2), or even a vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7).

²⁰ Steven Kellett, *The Empty Promises of Easter* (Luke 24:1-12): www.sermoncentral.com