

Easter Presents
Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 45, Luke 24:1-12,
1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 20-28

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (Lk 24:5). Within forty days the conviction that Jesus Christ had really risen from the dead would become the center of the apostles' preaching and teaching and propelled them to spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:3-5 The resurrection is crucial to our faith. It was "of first importance." It was so important that Paul took great pains to "passed on" this good news to the Corinthians.

I. The New Testament Witness

A. No other event in the life of our Lord is more clearly attested to than is the resurrection. The Bible, especially the New Testament, spends more time on the resurrection than on the crucifixion and death of Jesus.

B. Yet, Christ's resurrection surprised His followers. They did not expect an empty tomb, but they should have. During his ministry, Jesus told His audience about the sign of Jonah recorded in Matthew 12:40. Jesus predicted specifically that He would rise again on the third day (Mk 8:31, 9:31, 10:32). Jesus' followers forgot what Jesus said about His resurrection. On the other hand, the chief priests and the Pharisees remembered, and although they didn't believe Jesus would rise, they did ask Pilate to secure and guard the tomb (Mt 27:62-66).

C. We know from Scripture that there were at least 12 resurrection appearances of Jesus: all were to believers of those who would become believers. He did not appear to anyone who did not believe, or who would never believe. The resurrection appearances of His disciples. This explains why He stayed on the earth for 40 days before He ascended. He knew they needed help believing that He was resurrected. His appearances were crucial in preparing the twelve to be apostles. The Heidelberg Catechism explains how crucial the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to not only the first believers, but to all who came after them, including us. According to the Catechism, there are three benefits, or let's call them Easter presents, that Christ's resurrection gives us. Those benefits are Christ's righteousness, new life, and our glorious resurrection.

II. The First Present: Righteousness

A. Christ's suffering on the cross at the hands of the Father provided for sins to be forgiven for all who believe in Christ. The believer's legal status has gone from "guilty" to "not guilty." Jesus did more than this.

By His crucifixion Christ changed our status from "guilty" to "not guilty," and, by His resurrection, Christ changed our status from "not guilty" to "righteous." "Guilty" becomes "Not Guilty" and "Not Guilty" becomes "Righteous." According to the Catechism, "...by his resurrection Christ makes us share in the righteousness he won for us by his death."

When we present the Gospel, we cannot talk about the cross and forgiveness as being the entire Gospel message. 1 Corinthians 15:17 "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." A complete presentation of the Gospel is to speak not only of the cross and its consequences but also of the empty grave and its consequences. Romans 4:25: "He (i.e., Christ) was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

Illustration of a bucket filled with sin, emptied, and filled with the fruits of the Spirit. Colossians 3:12-17; Galatians 5:22-24

B. Paul says in Romans 4:25, "Jesus was raised to life for our justification." And, according to the Catechism, "... by his resurrection he has overcome death, so that he might make us share in the righteousness he won for us by his death." Because of Christ's resurrection we share in His righteousness. An alien righteousness is added to us and credited to our account because Jesus was raised from the dead. We are pronounced "righteous."

What is this righteousness of Jesus? His was a sinless, perfect life in a sinful, imperfect world. Because of His resurrection all this righteousness or goodness of Christ is mysteriously transferred to us – as if we had acted in just the same way Jesus did. Our bucket, formerly filled with all sorts of sin and evil, is now filled with Jesus' holiness, Jesus' sinlessness, Jesus' perfectness; this is added or granted or credited to us (cf. Q & A 60).

We are still sinners; all that we do, say, and think is still stained with sin. But because Jesus has risen from the grave God sees none of that – all that He sees in us is the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.

III. The Second Present: New Life

A. Because of this new life, *we need to take seriously our union with Christ. Whatever happened to Jesus also happens to those who are "in" Jesus.* Thus, the New Testament teaches not only that we died with Him and were raised with Him but also that we were exalted with Him in His ascension and are seated with Him at God's right hand (Eph 2:6). Furthermore, when Christ is revealed in glory we also will be glorified with and in Him (Col 3:4). What Christ has, we have, because we are in Him. What He underwent, we underwent, because we are in Him. Because He has risen from the dead "we too are already now resurrected to a new life."

B. We can say we are now "dead to sin" and "alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:11). Sin and Satan no longer have the last word in our lives; rather, Jesus does!
We are not only to confess this new life because of Christ's resurrection but also to live it. Rom 6:12-13; Colossians 3:1-3
The resurrection is not just about the future, it is also about the present.

IV. The Third Present: Glorious Resurrection

A. I am (you are) guaranteed the future resurrection of my body. 1 Corinthians 15:20
A "firstfruits" is a foretaste, a promise, of the other fruit to come. So, we know that there will come a day when we, like Christ, will be raised from the grave. We also know that there will come a day when we will be like Christ: when He "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil 3:21).

B. We can never underestimate the comfort and hope to be found in this present of Easter. What gives us the strength and peace to carry on in all of this and more? The resurrection of Jesus Christ! Christ's resurrection is a guarantee that someday we also will be raised into a glorious existence. What gives us the strength and peace to carry on in all of this and more? The resurrection of Jesus Christ! Christ's resurrection is a guarantee that someday we also will be raised into a glorious existence.