

“Fr. Frank Matera is both a distinguished biblical scholar and a wise pastor. Both qualities are on display in this exceptionally clear and thorough study of the meaning of the Resurrection for Christian faith. Written for a broad audience it demonstrates that the mystery of the Resurrection not only reveals a God of Life and vindicates Jesus’ mission to the world but also is the dynamic inspiration for the mission of the Church and for a hope-filled Christian life. Here is truly substantial and nourishing spiritual reading for those who want to plunge deeply into the beauty and power of the gospel.”

—Donald Senior, CP
President Emeritus
Catholic Theological Union

“With this volume, Fr. Matera offers inquiring Christians a valuable gift for Easter (or for any time of the year). In it, he clearly, concisely, and incisively presents the perspectives of the New Testament authors on the mystery of the resurrection and highlights the multi-faceted significance of the resurrection for individual Christians and the Church as a whole today.”

—Rev. Christopher Begg
Professor of Old Testament
Catholic University of America

“In this volume, Father Matera presumes and builds on others’ work on the historical issues regarding the empty tomb narratives and the appearances of the risen Jesus, and focuses this work exclusively on the *meaning* of Jesus’ resurrection for those who believe in and try to follow him. What emerges from his study of this diversity is a stunning *coherence* in the underlying vision regarding such elements as the relationship between Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom of God and the general resurrection, or God’s raising of Jesus as a victory over the power of evil, the vindication of an apparently defeated Jesus, and the promise of everlasting life in a new creation begun with Jesus’ resurrection, furthered by the Spirit’s empowerment of the church, and fulfilled in the ultimate resurrection of the faithful.”

—Dennis Hamm, SJ, Professor Emeritus at Creighton University

Resurrection

*The Origin and Goal
of the Christian Life*

Frank J. Matera



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

Cover design by Stefan Killen Design. Cover photo © Thinkstock.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible* © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture texts in this work are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 2015 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Matera, Frank J.

Resurrection: the origin and goal of the christian life / Frank J. Matera.
 pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8146-4862-9 — ISBN 978-0-8146-4887-2 (ebook)

1. Resurrection—Biblical teaching. 2. Jesus Christ—Resurrection—
Biblical teaching. I. Title.

BS2545.R47M38 2015

232'.5—dc23

2014023484

This book is dedicated to
the parishioners of St. Mary's Church
in Simsbury, Connecticut,
in whom I encounter the risen Christ every day.

Contents

Preface	ix
Introduction	Why the Resurrection Matters 1
Chapter 1	The Witness of the Gospel Tradition Apart from the Resurrection Narratives 19
Chapter 2	The Witness of the Resurrection Narratives 36
Chapter 3	The Witness of the Acts of the Apostles 64
Chapter 4	The Witness of the Pauline Tradition 83
Chapter 5	The Witness of Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation 112
Conclusion	The Mystery of the Resurrection 134
Annotated Bibliography for Further Reading	143
Scripture Index	145

Preface

My academic career began with a study of the passion narrative in the Gospel of Mark, and for several years thereafter I pursued the theology of the passion narratives in the other gospels as well. But at a certain point my interest turned to the theology of St. Paul, and it was then that I discovered the centrality of the resurrection in the Christian life. When I retired from my teaching post at the Catholic University of America to assume the pastorate of St. Mary's Church in Simsbury, I decided to focus my attention on the resurrection in the New Testament, given the importance of this topic for pastoral ministry. This book is the outcome of that decision. I have written it for a wider audience with the hope of inspiring a deeper hope in the resurrection among Christ's faithful people. This volume is dedicated to the parishioners of St. Mary's Parish in Simsbury whom I am privileged to serve. It is they who have helped me to see ever new dimensions of the resurrection through their strong Christian faith.

I express my gratitude to Christopher Begg, professor of Old Testament at the Catholic University of America, and to Ronald Witherup, the superior general of the Society of Saint-Sulpice, for their careful reading of this text and for the suggestions they made for improving it.

Frank J. Matera
Professor Emeritus, The Catholic University of America
Pastor, St. Mary's Church, Simsbury, Connecticut

I n t r o d u c t i o n

Why the Resurrection Matters

This is a book about the central mystery of the Christian faith: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the hope his followers have for their own resurrection from the dead. It may seem strange that I am writing such a book. After all, if Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the central mystery of the Christian faith, what need is there to write a book about it? Do not believers already understand the central mystery of their faith? It is true that most believers understand, at least in some rudimentary fashion, that the resurrection is the event upon which their faith stands or falls. But it is also true that many are puzzled by this teaching, which is so central to their faith. After all, if one's immortal soul enters heaven after death, is there any need for a bodily resurrection from the dead? In other words, while many understand the importance of Jesus' resurrection for their faith, they are puzzled about the significance of this teaching for their lives.

The reason for this book, then, is *to explain as clearly as possible what the New Testament teaches about the resurrection of Jesus and of those who believe in him so that contemporary believers will have a better understanding of what is most central to their faith*. This is not an easy task, however, since the teaching of the New Testament on the resurrection is multifaceted and complex. For example,

whereas the gospels tend to focus their attention on the stories of the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Christ, the Acts of the Apostles turns its attention to the preaching of the early church on the resurrection. Paul, for his part, provides us with a profound theological reflection on the meaning of the resurrection for the life of those who believe in Christ. Most importantly, there is the added challenge that the resurrection is a *mystery* that can never be completely fathomed. Accordingly, even after we have summarized and described what the New Testament says about the resurrection, we will not have exhausted its meaning. That meaning can only be appropriated by faith and participation in the mystery itself. And even then, when we have participated in the mystery by our own resurrection from the dead, we will not have exhausted the meaning of the mystery.

In the rest of this chapter I will do three things. First, I will discuss why the resurrection *was* so important to the first Christians. Second, I will offer some reasons why the resurrection *remains* important for believers today. Finally, I will discuss the structure, method, and purpose of this work, which I have written for a wider audience than the academic community.

Why the Resurrection Was Important

Anyone who reads the New Testament cannot help but notice the central place the resurrection of Jesus plays in these writings. All of the gospels end with accounts of the empty tomb and stories of the risen Lord who appears to his followers.¹ The central theme of the Acts of the Apostles is the witness of the early church to Jesus' resurrection. The Pauline letters are, for all practical purposes, a theology of the resurrection.² The same is true for Hebrews, the letters of Peter and John, and the book of Revelation, all of which testify to the importance of the resurrection, albeit in different ways. If we remove the topic of the resurrection from the writings of the New Testament, these writings make little or no sense. The story of Jesus as related in the gospels ends in failure and tragedy. The central theme of the Acts of the Apostles—the witness of the church to the

resurrection—makes no sense; and the driving force of Paul's theology (the newness of life that believers enjoy in Christ) is false. So why was the resurrection so important to the early church? Why does it play such a central role in the New Testament writings?

God's Vindication of Jesus

The first reason that the resurrection was so important to the early church can be stated in this way: *By raising Jesus from the dead, God vindicated Jesus' life and ministry.* To understand this, imagine how Jesus' followers would have responded if they did not believe God had raised him from the dead. They would have lost their faith in the one who proclaimed that the kingdom of God was making its appearance in his life and ministry. They would no longer have found his teaching convincing and enduring. Jesus' ministry and teaching were so intimately related to his understanding and trust in God that it is difficult to comprehend why his disciples would have remained faithful to him if God had not raised him from the dead.

Death is the defining moment in every person's life. It marks the end of life as we know it. Jesus' own death was no different, and it appeared to contradict all that he proclaimed. He was condemned by the religious leaders of his own people as someone who had led God's people astray. He was executed by the Roman authorities as a political insurgent, "the King of the Jews." His death by crucifixion was a scandal to his own disciples, who could not understand why he had to suffer and die if he was the Messiah. In a word, the first Christians were confronted with the scandal of the cross that their enemies would use against them for years to come: If Jesus was truly God's Anointed One, why did God allow his anointed to suffer and die in such a scandalous manner? Was Jesus, after all, a deceiver? Did he die under God's curse?³

It was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead that enabled his followers to move forward. By this powerful creative act, God vindicated Jesus as his Anointed One, the Messiah, the Son of God. It was the resurrection that convinced the first Christians that God had not abandoned Jesus after all but vindicated him by raising him from the dead. The Acts of the Apostles develops this theme of vindication in

a series of sermons that Peter and Paul deliver, which I will discuss in chapter 3. But one example will suffice for now. In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter says to those assembled in Jerusalem, “this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power” (Acts 2:23-24). The contrast that Peter establishes between what the people did (crucified and killed Jesus) and what God has done (raised him from the dead) highlights the importance of the resurrection for the early church. The resurrection was God’s vindication of Jesus. By raising Jesus from the dead, God justified Jesus. It now became clear in a way that it had not been before that Jesus was God’s anointed agent who had inaugurated the kingdom of God. It now became clear that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, the one whom God appointed as Savior and Lord of all.

Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

The second reason why the resurrection of Jesus was so important to the early church is closely related to the first and can be stated in this way: *The resurrection of Jesus from the dead confirmed his proclamation that the kingdom of God had made its appearance in his life and ministry.* Put negatively, if God had not raised Jesus from the dead, there would have been no reason to believe in his proclamation that God’s rule was making its appearance in his ministry.

The Synoptic Gospels attest that the central content of Jesus’ proclamation was the imminent appearance of God’s rule (Mark 1:15). By healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, and overcoming the chaotic forces of nature, Jesus demonstrated what he proclaimed: the kingdom of God was at hand. To be sure, the kingdom had not yet arrived in all of its power and glory. That would only happen with the glorious appearance of the Son of Man, with whom Jesus identified himself.⁴ It was clear, however, from Jesus’ preaching that he saw his ministry as the way in which God was inaugurating the kingdom in his ministry and that the consummation of all things was at hand.

Jesus' ignominious death on the cross, however, called into question his central proclamation. If he was truly the one through whom God was reasserting his rule over history and creation, why was he put to death as a messianic pretender? If Jesus was the one through whom God's kingdom was overcoming the rule of Satan, why did the powers of Sin and Death overcome God's Anointed One?²⁵ Was the kingdom of Satan more powerful than the kingdom of God that Jesus had proclaimed? And if Jesus was to return as the glorious Son of Man, whose return would inaugurate the kingdom in all of its power and glory, how could this occur if Jesus was dead?

Once again it was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead that enabled his disciples to reaffirm their faith in him. By raising him from the dead, God demonstrated in a powerful way that the kingdom of God had made its appearance in Jesus. The disciples' encounter with the risen Lord convinced them that the one who proclaimed the kingdom had now entered into the fullness of the kingdom he proclaimed. As the first to rise from the dead, Jesus was the first to enter into the fullness of the kingdom he announced, the new creation that God had established in the one whom Paul calls "the first-born from the dead" (Col 1:18).

Just as God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead, so God vindicated Jesus' proclamation about the kingdom of God by raising him from the dead. The early church learned that Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom was true because he had entered into the kingdom through his resurrection from the dead.

The Experience of the Spirit

A third reason why the resurrection was so important for the early church can be stated in this way: *The resurrection of Jesus resulted in a profound experience of the Spirit within the early church.* Thus, even though the vast majority of early Christians had never known the earthly Jesus or encountered the risen Lord, they experienced the power of God's Spirit, which Jesus' resurrection gave to those who believed in him. This experience of the Spirit confirmed what they believed: that God had raised Jesus from the dead and enthroned him as Lord and Messiah. Three examples will illustrate what I mean.

First, on Pentecost God poured forth his Spirit upon the apostles in a dramatic fashion. In his explanation of how and why this took place, Peter draws a relationship between Jesus' resurrection and the Spirit: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33). The sequence of events that Peter describes is as follows. First, God raised Jesus from the dead. Second, God exalted him at his right hand. Third, exalted at God's right hand, the risen Lord received the promised Holy Spirit, which he now pours out upon the church. The outpouring of God's Spirit upon those who believe in Christ, then, testifies that Jesus is risen and alive.

Second, in Romans 8:11 Paul assures the Roman Christians that "if the Spirit of him [namely God] who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead [God] will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you." For Paul and the Pauline churches, the experience of the Holy Spirit assured them that God would raise them from the dead just as God had raised Jesus from the dead. The Spirit, then, was more than the source of wondrous gifts within the church; it was the first installment toward resurrection life (2 Cor 1:22). The Spirit was the one with whom believers were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph 4:30), and the possession of the Spirit was the assurance of their resurrection from the dead. For inasmuch as believers had already received the gift of God's life-giving Spirit, the power of Death no longer ruled over their lives.

A third example occurs in Paul's letter to the Galatians. When trying to dissuade the Galatians from being circumcised, the apostle reminds them of the intense experience of the Spirit they received when they believed in the gospel he proclaimed to them. Accordingly, he asks the Galatians, "Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?" (Gal 3:5). Paul's rhetorical question needs no answer since the Galatians were fully aware that they received the Spirit when they believed in the mes-

sage of the gospel, long before they considered having themselves circumcised and doing the works of the Mosaic Law.

For the early Christians, then, the Spirit was the outcome of Jesus' resurrection from the dead and the assurance of their own resurrection from the dead. Without the resurrection, there would be no Spirit, and without the Spirit, there was no assurance of their resurrection from the dead. In addition to vindicating Jesus and his message, then, the resurrection provided believers with the gift of the Spirit, which assured them of their own resurrection from the dead.

The Fulfillment of Israel's Hope

A fourth reason why the resurrection was so important to the early church can be stated in this way: *In light of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the first Christians began to understand that the resurrection of the dead, which had begun in the Messiah, was the fulfillment of Israel's hope.* For example, toward the end of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul defends himself before the Jewish king, Agrippa. Having been accused of betraying the faith of his ancestors by preaching that God raised Jesus from the dead, Paul recounts his former zeal for his ancestral faith: "And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the *promise* made by God to our ancestors, a *promise* that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! *Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?*" (Acts 26:6-8).⁶ As the italicized words indicate, Paul draws a connection between the promise God made to Israel and Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

On first reading, Paul's defense is rather puzzling since Israel's Scriptures do not say a great deal about resurrection from the dead.⁷ Moreover, the promise or promises that God made to Israel tend to deal with the promise of the land, the promise of progeny, the promise that Israel will be a great nation, the promise of deliverance from exile, the promise of a savior king, an anointed figure, the Messiah. There is little, if any, promise of resurrection from the dead. But this is not how Paul, according to the Acts of the Apostles, interprets Israel's history.

In light of his call and conversion whereby he encountered the risen Lord, the apostle understands that all of the promises God made to Israel have found their fulfillment in the resurrection of the Messiah, which prefigures the resurrection of all who believe in him. And so Paul and the early church viewed the many promises God made to Israel as pointing to a single promise: resurrection from the dead. The promises God made to Abraham and his posterity find their deepest fulfillment in the risen Lord who makes all who believe in him children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, no matter what their ethnic origin. The promise God made to David finds its fulfillment in the risen Messiah who now reigns eternally over the house of Jacob. God's promises to deliver Israel from bondage in Egypt and from exile in Babylon receive their full meaning in the resurrection of Christ, which delivers humanity from the ultimate bondage of Sin and Death that separate humanity from its Creator.

The resurrection of the Christ, then, was important to the first Christians because they understood that in the risen Christ God brought the promises made to Israel to fulfillment. Apart from the resurrection, no matter how noble Jesus' death, God's promises would not have been brought to completion.

The Community of Jesus' Disciples

If God did not raise Jesus from the dead, Jesus could not have reconstituted his scattered flock. If God had not raised Jesus from the dead, there would be no church. The final reason the resurrection was so important to the early Christians, then, has to do with the church. The first Christians repeatedly testified that it was in virtue of the resurrection that they had been gathered into the community of the church—the community of Jesus' disciples. For example, in the Gospel of Mark, after telling his disciples that they will be scattered on account of his death, Jesus promises them that after he has been raised from the dead, he will go before them to Galilee (Mark 14:28). Then, after Jesus has been raised up, the angel at the tomb instructs the women to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee, where they will see him just as he told them (16:7). In other words, the risen Lord goes ahead

of his disciples—just as a shepherd leads his sheep—to reconstitute his scattered disciples as his church.

The gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John also testify to this. The Gospel of Matthew describes how the disciples gather at the mountain in Galilee, where the risen Lord commissions them to make disciples of all the nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:16-20). At the end of the Gospel of Luke and at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, the risen Christ makes his disciples witnesses to his resurrection who must preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins, beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Luke 24:26-48; Acts 1:8). Finally, in the Gospel of John, the risen Lord appears to his disciples in Jerusalem and Galilee. In Jerusalem he breathes the Spirit upon them, granting them the power to forgive and retain sins (John 20:25), and in Galilee he restores Peter—who denied him three times—as the one who is to feed his flock and tend his sheep (John 21:15-19).

Although we traditionally think of Pentecost as the birth of the church, the appearance of the risen Lord to his disciples marks the beginning of the church inasmuch as Jesus reconstituted the community of his disciples by appearing to them as risen and alive. But if God had not raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus would not have been able to reconstitute his flock. It was in virtue of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, then, that the first Christians understood that the risen one reconstituted them as the community of his disciples—the church.

Paul's letters testify to the same reality. Throughout his letters the apostle refers to the community of disciples as the church, or the church of God, by which he means the assembly God has called into being through the saving death and resurrection of his Son. God chooses and elects people as members of the new (eschatological) congregation on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection. If God had not raised Jesus from the dead, there would be no church. But by raising the Son from the dead, the Father "creates" a congregation of believers that remains in continuity with the assembly of Israel, and yet is new.

One can easily think of other reasons why Jesus' resurrection from the dead was so important to the first Christians. Here, however, I have listed those I deem most important because they are seminal to Christian faith:

1. By the resurrection, God vindicated Jesus.
2. By the resurrection, God vindicated Jesus' central proclamation that the kingdom of God was making its appearance in his ministry.
3. Because of the resurrection, the first Christians experienced the power of God's own Spirit in their lives.
4. In the light of the resurrection, the first Christians understood that Jesus' resurrection from the dead was the fulfillment of Israel's hope.
5. By the resurrection, the scattered flock of Jesus was reconstituted as the church.

Why the Resurrection Is Important

If the resurrection from the dead affected only Jesus, it has little to say to our lives today. But this is not the witness of the New Testament writings. The New Testament repeatedly testifies that Jesus' resurrection from the dead has profound implications for the lives of those who believe in him. Not only will they be raised from the dead but their present life is *already* being changed and transformed. Accordingly, Paul speaks of the "newness of life" (Rom 6:4) that believers presently experience in Christ, and the Gospel of John speaks of the "eternal life" that believers enjoy now, which assures them they will be raised up "on the last day" (John 6:54).

The Foundation of Christian Faith

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of Christian faith; it is that without which Christianity is no longer Christianity. If we remove the resurrection from the Creed, the Creed loses its coherence. If we downplay the resurrection by saying that Jesus did not really rise from the dead, but rather his disciples believed in him

anew despite his shameful death, there really is no basis for faith in the general resurrection of the dead of all believers. For, if Jesus was not raised, those who believe in him will not be raised from the dead. As important as Jesus' teaching is, it is not his teaching that is the essence of Christianity but his resurrection from the dead. Faith in Christ is not simply faith in his teaching; it is faith in God who raised him from the dead.

The incarnation and the resurrection are the two pillars on which Christianity stands.⁸ If Jesus was not the incarnate Son of God, he could not save humanity from the powers of Sin and Death. If God did not raise Jesus from the dead, God will not raise from the dead those who believe in Jesus. Apart from the resurrection, there is no eternal life. Apart from the resurrection, Sin and Death are victorious. Like the incarnation, the resurrection from the dead assures us that it was God who acted in Jesus' life and death.

God's Response to Sin and Death

Sin and Death are the two great enemies that threaten our life with God and with each other. By "Sin" I mean more than our daily sins; I mean that power of evil that, were it not for Christ, would control our lives. In Romans 5 Paul explains it this way: when humanity rebelled against God, the power of Sin entered into the world. With the appearance of Sin, St. Paul tells us, another power made its entry, namely, Death (Rom 5:12). Like Sin, Death is a power that, were it not for God's work in Christ, would dominate our lives. It is the last enemy, the enemy we cannot escape. It is the enemy that would cast us into absolute nothingness if it were not for God's act of a new creation in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God overcomes the powers of Sin and Death by the death and resurrection of Christ, which is a single redemptive event. It is not as though Christ atoned for our sins by his death on the cross and then God raised him up to prove that what happened on the cross was true. Rather, God brought about redemption through Christ's death and resurrection. This is why Paul writes of Christ, "It [righteousness] will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was *handed over to death for our*

trespasses and was raised for our justification” (Rom 4:24-25). What God has done in Christ has two phases (death and resurrection) that form one event. Consequently, if we deny the resurrection, we deny what happened on the cross.

The Moral Life of the Christian

Contemporary believers rarely appreciate the intimate relationship that exists between the resurrection and their moral or ethical life. Many Christians think of the moral life in terms of rules and regulations: what they must do and what they must avoid. But this view of the moral life is only partially correct and woefully inadequate. To be sure, there are things that believers must do and avoid. But the essence of the moral life is the new life—life in the Spirit—that makes the moral life possible. Those who believe in the risen Lord already have a foretaste of the resurrection that will be theirs through the experience of the Spirit they enjoy—the Spirit of God that has been mediated to them through Christ’s resurrection.

In Romans, for example, Paul writes that in our baptism we were buried with Christ so that “we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4), which is the resurrection life that Christ already enjoys. In Colossians the apostle exhorts his audience to live in a way that corresponds to the new life that is theirs in Christ: “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:1-3).

While the general resurrection of the dead is a future reality for which believers long and hope, the resurrection of Jesus Christ affects their lives even now. Inasmuch as Christians have been incorporated into the risen Lord through baptism, the power of Christ’s resurrection has already changed and transformed their lives. Those who are in Christ enjoy the life of the risen Lord through the gift of the Spirit that *empowers* them to live a morally good life. The moral life of the believer, then, is not a mere matter of following rules and regulations. *The morally good life of the believer is life in the Spirit of the risen Lord, and it is this Spirit who makes it possible to do God’s will.*

The Source of Christian Hope

Christ's resurrection from the dead is the source of Christian hope since his resurrection is not an isolated event of the past but the beginning of the resurrection from the dead for all who live in him. Therefore, those who believe in the risen Christ hope for their own resurrection. Confident that God did not abandon his own Son to death, they are confident that God will not abandon those who conform themselves to the pattern of his Son. The hope that believers have, however, is not limited to their own future; it extends to the future of creation, as St. Paul explains:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Rom 8:18-21)

The resurrection of those who are in Christ will inaugurate the redemption of creation, which has been subjected to futility because of human sin. Peter makes a similar point about the new creation that believers await: "But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home" (2 Pet 3:13). The promise to which Peter refers is Christ's second coming, which is made possible because Christ has been raised from the dead.

While Christian hope expresses itself in different ways, the source of this hope is Christ's resurrection, through which God has overcome the last and greatest enemy—Death. Without this hope that God will conquer Death, human hope is limited to this life only. This is why Paul writes, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19).

The Mission of the Church

Although contemporary believers rarely avert to it, the resurrection is the impetus for the church's mission to preach the gospel to all the nations. The reason for this is simple: inasmuch as Christ's

resurrection from the dead is the beginning of a new creation in which those who believe in Christ already participate through the gift of the Spirit, it is imperative for those who belong to this new creation to proclaim the gospel to others so that they too can enter God's new creation. To neglect to preach the gospel to others, then, is to abandon them to the old age of Sin and Death. It is a denial of what God has done in Christ. It foolishly affirms that all will be well *even if* the gospel of Christ's saving death and life-giving resurrection is not proclaimed to the world.

The Gospel of Matthew concludes with the risen Lord commissioning his disciples to go forth and make disciples of all the nations (28:19). The Gospel of Luke ends with the risen Lord instructing the eleven to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem (24:47). At the outset of the Acts of the Apostles, the risen Christ spends forty days with his apostles, appearing to them and showing them by many convincing proofs that he is truly risen and alive (1:3) so that they will be able to witness to his resurrection "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8). The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of Paul's mission to the Gentiles. Having encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, the great apostle understood that the purpose of this revelation was to make him the apostle to the nations: "But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, *so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles*, I did not confer with any human being" (Gal 1:15-16). Paul's conviction that God raised Jesus from the dead, then, became the impetus for him to preach the gospel of Christ's saving death and resurrection to the nations, since the resurrection of the Messiah implied that God's new creation had begun in the risen Christ.

To summarize, there are several reasons why Christ's resurrection is important to believers today. The resurrection is the foundation of Christian faith; it is that without which there is no gospel about God's victory over the powers of Sin and Death. As the gospel of God's victory over Sin and Death, the resurrection enables believers to live a morally good life since they are now empowered by the Spirit of their

risen Lord. This Spirit is also their source of hope for their own resurrection and their impetus to proclaim the gospel to all the nations.

The Structure, Method, and Purpose of This Work

The structure of this work, for the most part, follows the canonical order of the material of the New Testament. It begins with the witness of the four gospels. Next it considers the witness of the early church as found in the Acts of the Apostles. Then it turns to the Pauline letters before concluding with the witness of Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, and the book of Revelation. Although this arrangement does not reflect the chronological order in which the material was written since most of the Pauline letters were written before the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, it has the advantage of presenting the material in a way that moves from Jesus to the early church to the major witnesses of the early church: Paul, Peter, and John.

This study is essentially theological in nature rather than historical. This does not mean that historical data is irrelevant to the topic of the resurrection or that I ignore historical questions. I do not. For example, I begin with the Gospel of Mark rather than the Gospel of Matthew, even though Matthew appears first in the order of the canon, because I am convinced that Matthew and Luke made use of Mark in writing their gospels. Likewise, I distinguish between those Pauline letters whose authorship is not in dispute and those letters whose authorship is disputed in order to show how later letters (whether or not Paul wrote them) develop the tradition of earlier letters. I do not, however, engage in the important debate about the historicity of the resurrection. Consequently, this is not a work of apologetics that tries to show that Jesus was truly raised from the dead, that he appeared to his disciples and others, that the resurrection is not a fraud. Rather, I begin with the New Testament claim that God raised Jesus from the dead and that the risen one appeared to others who proclaimed what happened to them.

This work seeks to draw out the theological meaning of the text. What does the text claim about God and God's work in Christ? What does the text affirm about the new situation in which believers find

themselves now that Christ has been raised from the dead? What are the implications of the resurrection for the life of those who believe in Christ?

This work is also *ecclesial* in nature. It is written for those who already believe and seek to deepen their understanding of their faith. Its purpose is to strengthen the community of believers. Others may read this work to see what Christians believe about the resurrection. I, however, have written this work from *within* the community of believers in which I stand. Its purpose is to hear anew the proclamation of the resurrection in a way that will strengthen the community of those who believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

This work is structured in the following way. In chapter 1 we consider the witness of the gospel tradition to the resurrection apart from the resurrection narratives. Accordingly, this chapter deals with intimations of resurrection from the dead. These include accounts of Jesus raising the dead, his allusions to and his defense of the resurrection of the dead, and statements in which he anticipates that God will vindicate him by raising him from the dead. After considering these intimations of resurrection from the dead, in chapter 2 we deal with the gospel accounts of the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Lord with a focus on their theological meaning.

In chapter 3 we consider the witness to the resurrection of the dead found in the Acts of the Apostles. We begin with the appearances of the risen Lord to the apostles and to Paul. Next, we examine the proclamation of the resurrection in the speeches of Peter and Paul.

After examining the proclamation of the early church as witnessed in Acts, in chapter 4 we turn our attention to the Pauline letters, which provide us with a profound theological reflection on the meaning of the resurrection. Here we consider Paul's encounter with the risen Lord, the creedal statements and hymns in his letters that refer to the resurrection, his insistence on the resurrection of the body, the role of the Spirit in the resurrection, the resurrection and the creation of the church, the resurrection and the life of the Christian, and the renewal of God's creation.

In chapter 5 we consider the witness of four other New Testament writings: Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, and the book of Revelation.

Although these are diverse writings, their moral exhortations draw a relationship between the resurrection of Christ and of those who believe in him.

Finally we conclude with some theological reflections about the resurrection as a mystery, an act of God, the beginning of a new creation, and how it shapes the life of the believer and of the church.

The resurrection is the central teaching of Christianity—that without which there is no Christianity. It is my hope that this volume will help those who believe to enter more fully into this mystery and invite those who do not believe, or who have fallen away, to consider the central claim of the New Testament: *God raised Jesus from the dead.*

Notes

1. The exception to this is the Gospel of Mark, the best manuscripts of which end with the story of the empty tomb. Later manuscripts, however, include stories of the appearances of the risen Lord.

2. Paul J. Achtemeier argues that resurrection is the central theme of Paul's theology ("The Continuing Quest for Coherence in St. Paul: An Experiment in Thought," in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney, 132–45 [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996]).

3. The text of Deuteronomy 21:23 ("for anyone hung on a tree [that is, crucified] is under God's curse") suggests that one who is crucified is under God's curse. Paul alludes to this text in Galatians 3:13 ("Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'"), suggesting that those who opposed the early Christian movement argued that Jesus could not have been the Messiah since he had been crucified and so died under God's curse.

4. Jesus seems to have adopted the expression "the Son of Man" from Daniel 7, which speaks of a humanlike figure, "one like a son of man" (Dan 7:13), to whom God gives dominion, glory, and kingship (Dan 7:14) after a period of suffering and persecution. This expression allowed Jesus to

refer to himself in a way that pointed to his suffering and vindication as the Messiah: just as the one like a son of man in the book of Daniel was vindicated by God, so Jesus would be vindicated by God after his passion and death.

5. Throughout this book I capitalize “Sin” and “Death.” In doing so, I am following the thought of St. Paul, who personifies Sin and Death as powers that rule over unredeemed humanity.

6. Italics in Scripture quotations have been added.

7. Belief in the resurrection of the dead appeared rather late in Israel’s history. For the origins of this belief, see Christopher Bryan, *The Resurrection of the Messiah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9–34; James H. Charlesworth, with C. D. Elledge, J. L. Crenshaw, H. Boers, and W.W. Willis Jr., *Resurrection: The Origin and Future of a Biblical Doctrine* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006); Geert Van Oyen and Tom Shepherd, eds., *Resurrection of the Dead: Biblical Traditions in Dialogue*, BETL 249 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 2–116.

8. Whereas the doctrine of the incarnation affirms that the eternal Word of God was made flesh in Jesus, the doctrine of the resurrection affirms that God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead. Both doctrines, from different vantage points, affirm that God was present and at work in Jesus.

Chapter 1

The Witness of the Gospel Tradition Apart from the Resurrection Narratives

Although the gospels are not the earliest documents of the New Testament, they are an important witness to some of the oldest traditions about the resurrection from the dead. For example, they recount stories of Jesus raising the dead, and they preserve sayings that give us insight into his understanding of the general resurrection of the dead, as well as his faith that God would vindicate his proclamation of the kingdom by raising him from the dead. In addition to these traditions, the gospels recount stories about the empty tomb and appearances of the risen Lord. Accordingly, the witness of the gospels to the resurrection is a good starting point, even though the gospels are not the earliest writings of the New Testament.

In this chapter I examine what the gospels proclaim about the resurrection from the dead, apart from the resurrection narratives. Then, in the next chapter, I consider the accounts of the empty tomb and the stories of the risen Lord's appearances. My aim is to highlight the theological meaning of these texts and events rather than evaluate or establish their historicity. Accordingly, in this and the

next chapter I ask the following kinds of questions: When the gospels recount stories of Jesus raising the dead or anticipating his own resurrection from the dead, what are they saying about Jesus and his ministry? When the gospels report that the tomb was empty and the risen Lord appeared to his followers, what claims are the gospels making on us today?

Intimations of Resurrection

The Gospel of Luke narrates an episode that points to Jesus' resurrection in an oblique way. In a story that is unique to his gospel, Luke recounts an episode in the life of the twelve-year-old Jesus who goes to Jerusalem with his parents for the feast of Passover and remains in the temple—his father's house—causing his parents to become distraught at the loss of their son. *After three days*, however, Mary and Joseph find the child in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening and asking questions (2:46). While this episode foreshadows Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem when he will take possession of the temple and teach the people of Israel in his capacity as the messianic Son of God, the statement that the parents found the child in the temple *after three days* anticipates a far more important event: the third day when the distraught disciples will find Jesus risen from the dead.

The gospels of Matthew and Mark foreshadow Jesus' resurrection when they recount how Herod put John the Baptist to death. Both Matthew and Mark introduce the story with a report of Herod's reaction to Jesus' ministry. Hearing all that Jesus has been doing, Herod says of him, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised" (Mark 6:16; cf. Matt 14:2). Herod's remark becomes the occasion for both evangelists to recount how Herod put John to death. Although the readers of both gospels eventually learn that John was Elijah who has returned to herald the coming of the Messiah, they know that Jesus is not the Baptist raised from the dead. Rather, the perceptive reader comprehends the irony of Herod's remark, which points to Jesus' resurrection.

The Gospel of John contains similar kinds of remarks. At the outset of his ministry, for example, Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the feast

of Passover. While in the temple, he drives out the sheep and cattle and overturns the tables of the moneychangers, thereby disrupting the temple's commerce. When challenged to produce a sign that will explain why he does this, Jesus replies, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). Although Jesus is talking about the temple that is his body, the Jews mistakenly think he is referring to the temple built by Herod the Great. It is at this point that the evangelist confides to the reader, "But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (2:21-22). Thus, while the evangelist concedes that nobody, including the disciples, understood Jesus' remark when it was spoken, he explains that after the resurrection they remembered and *understood* what Jesus had said.

Something similar happens in a series of "riddles" that Jesus tells the Jews while he is in Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles. Jesus says, "You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come" (7:34). Puzzled by this remark, the Jews ask, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?" (7:35). Next, Jesus pronounces a second riddle: "I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come" (8:21). Again the Jews misunderstand Jesus, this time thinking that he intends to kill himself. Jesus pronounces a number of similar riddles in the farewell discourse that he gives to his disciples, and like the Jews the disciples do not understand (14:2-3, 19, 28; 16:5, 16). But by the end of the discourse, Jesus explains the meaning of these riddles and his disciples begin to comprehend: "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father" (16:28). Although there is no mention of the resurrection of the dead in these texts, the resurrection is the key to understanding what Jesus means. Jesus, the incarnate Word whom the Father has sent into the world, will return to the Father by his saving death and life-giving resurrection.

There are other texts in the Johannine gospel that are more explicit. For example, when he explains why he has cured a man on

the Sabbath, Jesus compares himself to a son who only does what he sees his father doing. Referring to God as his Father and to himself as God's Son, Jesus says that the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does, affirming that "just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes" (5:21). Then in an explicit reference to the general resurrection of the dead, Jesus affirms, "Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (5:28-29). Although the audience does not understand what Jesus is saying at the time, after the resurrection it becomes clear. The same can be said for Jesus' good shepherd discourse when he proclaims, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again" (10:17-18). When these words are spoken, the audience does not know that Jesus is referring to his resurrection from the dead, but when he rises from the dead they will understand.

The texts I have discussed in this section are *intimations* of Jesus' resurrection. They do not explicitly proclaim the resurrection; and people only understand their meaning after Jesus has been raised from the dead. All of them, however, point to the climax of the gospel narrative, Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Raising the Dead

In addition to preserving stories and sayings that intimate the resurrection of the dead, the gospels recount stories of Jesus raising the dead. For example, when the messengers of John the Baptist ask Jesus if he is the Messiah, he responds, "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, *the dead are raised*, and the poor have good news brought to them" (Matt 11:5; also Luke 7:22). It is not only Jesus who raises the dead; it is his disciples as well. When he sends them on mission, he instructs them, "Cure the sick, *raise the dead*, cleanse the lepers, cast out de-

mons” (Matt 10:8). To be sure, the dead whom Jesus raised during his earthly ministry died again since they were only restored to their former life. Their resurrection was not the beginning of the general resurrection from the dead whereby the dead enter into the transcendent realm of God’s life through the power of the Spirit. Those whom Jesus and his disciples raised were restored to life but not yet changed and transformed by God’s Spirit. These stories of Jesus raising the dead, however, play an important role in his proclamation of the inbreaking reign of God. For by raising the dead, Jesus and his disciples anticipate the general resurrection of the dead that will occur when the Son of Man returns in power and glory to inaugurate the final phase of God’s kingdom. It is to these stories that I now turn.

The three Synoptic Gospels recount the story of Jesus raising Jairus’s daughter. In doing so, they insert the account of the healing of a woman with a hemorrhage between the beginning and end of the story to increase the drama of the narrative. Jairus comes to Jesus, begging him to go and heal his *twelve*-year-old daughter, who is at the point of death (Mark 5:21-24). Jesus’ departure, however, is delayed by a woman who has been afflicted with hemorrhages for *twelve* years (5:25-34). By the time he begins to go to Jairus’s home it is too late. Jesus has lingered too long in attending to the older woman so that the young girl has died (5:35). Or at least it appears that she has died. In the final part of the story Jesus goes with Jairus, instructing him not to fear but to have faith (5:35-43). When Jesus enters Jairus’s house, he insists that the child is not dead but only asleep. But those who are present are so sure that the girl is dead that they ridicule Jesus (5:40). In response to their ridicule, Jesus takes the child’s father and mother, as well as his inner circle of Peter, James, and John, into the room where the child is. Grasping the child’s hand, Jesus says, “Little girl, get up!” (literally, “I say to you arise,” *soi legō egeire*; Mark 5:41).

Is the girl dead, as the mourners insist, or is she merely asleep, as Jesus says? Or, are both correct? From the point of view of the mourners the child is dead, because no matter what they do they cannot “wake” her. From the point of view of those without faith, those who do not accept Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom, the

child has died. But Jesus looks at the child with the faith of one who knows that the power of God is already breaking into this world because the kingdom of God is making its appearance in his ministry. From the perspective of those who believe in the kingdom, then, the dead are merely asleep, waiting for the general resurrection from the dead. This mighty deed that Jesus performs, then, proclaims the inbreaking kingdom of God. It is not yet the beginning of the resurrection from the dead, and the child will die again. But what happens foreshadows what will happen in the final stage of the kingdom: the dead will rise incorruptible, never to die again. For those who fear and do not believe in the kingdom, the child was indeed dead, but for Jesus and those who believe in the kingdom, the child was asleep. In saying this, I do not mean that the child was sleeping and that Jesus found a clever way to awake her from her slumber. Rather, the dead child was asleep inasmuch as God's power is greater than the power of death.

There is another story in the Gospel of Mark that shares some interesting similarities with the story of Jairus's daughter. It occurs immediately after the transfiguration when another distraught father comes to Jesus for help (Mark 9:14-29). The father has already brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus' disciples, but the disciples have failed to expel the demon. Desperate, the man says to Jesus, "if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us," to which Jesus replies, "If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes," and the man replies, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (9:22-24). As in the episode of Jairus's daughter, the issue is faith. When Jesus finally expels the demon, Mark notes, "After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, *so that most of them said, 'He is dead'*" (9:26). As he did with Jairus's daughter, however, "Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand" (9:27). Although this is an exorcism story, Mark wants us to remember what Jesus did for Jairus's daughter. Just as he took the little girl by the hand, so he lifts the young boy by the hand so that "he arose" (RSV). The story is not presented as a resurrection story, and it is only the crowd that thinks the boy is dead, but it would appear that Mark wants us to

read this exorcism narrative as a resurrection story as well. For by lifting up the boy whom the demon has left as good as dead, Jesus has restored him to life. To be sure, the boy, like Jairus's daughter, will die again. What Jesus has done for both, however, points to the power of the inbreaking kingdom of God that will overcome death in a definitive way when Jesus returns as the glorious Son of Man.

The story of Jesus raising the widow's son, which is only found in the Gospel of Luke (7:11-17), is different from the accounts we have considered thus far as there is no doubt that the young man has died. Jesus, who has just healed the centurion's slave from a distance, now journeys to the city of Nain, where he encounters the funeral procession of a young man, the only son (*monogenēs*) of his widowed mother. Moved with pity for the woman, who has no one left to support her, Jesus tells her not to weep. And touching the coffin, he says to the dead youth, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" (7:14). While the verb that Jesus employs here (*egeirō*) can simply mean to stand up or rise, it is the same verb that the writers of the New Testament use when speaking of Jesus' resurrection. In raising the young man who is the only son of a widowed mother, then, Jesus foreshadows his own resurrection when the Father will raise his *only* Son.

The crowd that has been part of the funeral procession is filled with awe because it understands that it is standing in God's presence. Accordingly, the crowd glorifies God, just as the centurion will glorify God at Jesus' death (23:47) by exclaiming that a great prophet has arisen in its midst and that God has visited (*epeskepsato*) his people (7:16). This is the same word that Zechariah uses in his canticle when he speaks of God *visiting* and bringing redemption to his people (1:68) and the daybreak from on high *visiting* the people of Israel (1:78). Although the identification of Jesus as a great prophet is ultimately inadequate, it makes perfect sense here since the raising of the widow's son recalls the story of the great prophet Elijah, who raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:17-24).

It is immediately after Jesus raises the widow's son, according to the Gospel of Luke, that the disciples of John the Baptist tell him all that Jesus has been doing. This leads John to send two of his disciples to ask if Jesus is the coming one or if they are to look for another. In

response, Jesus instructs John's messengers to tell their master what they have seen and heard: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, *the dead are raised*, the poor have good news brought to them" (7:22). The intent of Jesus' reply is evident. The mighty works he has been performing point to the dawn of the messianic age. By healing the sick, raising the dead, and preaching to the poor, Jesus inaugurates the messianic age. To be sure, the young man of Nain will die again since the general resurrection of the dead has not yet begun. His resurrection from the dead, however, signals what is about to happen with the death and resurrection of Israel's Messiah.

The account of the raising of Lazarus (which only appears in the Fourth Gospel) is the most explicit and theologically sophisticated account of Jesus raising someone from the dead. It is one of the seven signs that Jesus performs in the first half of the gospel, which is called the book of signs (John 1:19–12:50). The purpose of these signs is to point to Jesus as the one whom the Father has sent into the world to reveal the Father to the world so that the world may have life. As the seventh and last sign, the raising of Lazarus is the climax of the signs that Jesus performs, and its purpose is to point to him as the giver of life. Ironically, however, the very sign that points to Jesus as the giver of life is the sign that leads the Jewish leadership to plot Jesus' death (11:45-53).

The episode begins with Jesus learning that Lazarus is ill and affirming that this illness will not lead to death but to God's glory so that the Son may be gloried. As if to reinforce this, Jesus remains where he is for two days before going to Lazarus. When Jesus finally arrives at the home of Martha and Mary, Lazarus has already died and been in the tomb for four days. There is no doubt, then, that Lazarus is dead, and so also a great deal of puzzlement about Jesus' statement that this illness would not end in death. It is not surprising, then, that Martha complains even as she expresses her faith in Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him" (11:21-22).

The conversation that ensues between Jesus and Martha is subtle and theologically charged. First, Jesus assures her that her brother

will rise. Martha affirms this with an explicit statement of her faith in the general resurrection of the dead: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (11:24). But Jesus has more in view than the general resurrection of the dead. He wants to lead Martha to a deeper understanding of resurrection life that is grounded in faith in him, a faith that overcomes the power of death even now. And so, he reveals, "*I am* the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (11:25-26). Jesus is the resurrection and the life because he comes from the Father and does what the Father does: just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so Jesus raises the dead and gives them life (5:21). He calls himself the resurrection and the life because he raises the dead through the glory of the Father that has been bestowed upon him. When Jesus says that those who believe in him will live even if they die, he means that he will raise them on the last day. And when he says those who live and believe in him will never die, he means that even if they die they will not be separated from God because they already possess the seed of resurrection life through faith in him.

When Jesus comes to the tomb of Lazarus, he is deeply moved and troubled by the death of his friend, and he asks that the stone that covers the tomb be taken away. At this point, Martha reminds Jesus that Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. *Lazarus is truly dead*, and there will be a great stench because the body is already decomposing. But Jesus reminds Martha that if she believes, she will see the glory of God. This glory of God is the glory the Father has bestowed on the Son, enabling the Son to raise the dead.

The story of the raising of Lazarus is the most theologically charged resurrection narrative we have encountered. Whereas the stories in the Synoptic Gospels hint at the general resurrection of the dead, the purpose of this account is to remind us that Jesus *is* the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in him are assured they will be raised from the dead, even if they die; and those who are raised from the dead will not die again. There will be no second death.

Lazarus, of course, died again. The resurrection he experienced was a return to his former existence rather than a transformation of

his existence. His rising from the dead, however, is a sign that points to the fullness of resurrection life.

Defending the Resurrection of the Dead

According to the Synoptic Gospels, there was an episode during the final days of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem when he was challenged to defend the resurrection of the dead. This episode, which involves Jesus and the Sadducees, is one in a series of controversies between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem that occur shortly before his death. According to the Gospel of Mark, the Pharisees and some Herodians try to entrap Jesus by asking whether or not it is lawful for a Jew to pay taxes to the Roman emperor (12:13-17). Next, the Sadducees present Jesus with a case intended to show the difficulties inherent in the doctrine of the general resurrection of the dead (12:18-27). Finally, a scribe asks Jesus what the greatest commandment of the law is (12:28-34).

While the Pharisees and Sadducees may have been allied in their opposition to Jesus, they held opposing views about the resurrection of the dead, as Luke informs us in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 23:8). Whereas the Pharisees embraced this rather new teaching on the resurrection of the dead, the Sadducees, who belonged to the priestly circles of the day, did not. Thus the purpose of their question is to demonstrate the problems inherent in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. This is why they present Jesus with the question they do. If the dead are raised, what will happen in the case of seven brothers, six of whom married the same woman at one point or another in order to raise up offspring for their deceased brother? If the dead are raised, as the Pharisees maintain, whose wife will she be after the resurrection of the dead since she was, at one time, married to each of the seven brothers? The fact that the Sadducees ask Jesus this strange question suggests that they know he espouses the teaching of the resurrection of the dead.

The response that Jesus gives, according to the gospels of Matthew and Mark, is essentially the same. First, he tells the Sadducees that they are wrong because they do not understand the Scriptures

or the power of God. Second, they have misunderstood the nature of the resurrection from the dead. Resurrection from the dead is not a matter of resuscitation whereby people return to their former life, as the Sadducees seem to presuppose. It is entrance into a new kind of life in which there is no need to marry and propagate children since those who are raised do not die and so have no need to produce offspring; they will be like the angels in heaven who live forever. Scripture itself presupposes the resurrection of the dead, Jesus affirms. Quoting the passage from the book of Exodus in which God appears to Moses (Exod 3:6), he notes that God identifies himself as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Mark 12:26), which indicates that God has not abandoned the patriarchs who have died. Jesus concludes that the Sadducees are quite wrong because God is not the God of the dead but of the living (Mark 12:27). For even though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead for centuries when God spoke to Moses, God still identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because they are alive in his sight.

Luke’s version of this controversy is more expansive than the accounts of Mark and Matthew. In his response to the Sadducees, Jesus notes that whereas those who live in the present age marry, those who will be worthy to live in the age to come do not marry since they will be like the angels of God and will not die (Luke 20:34-36). Marriage is necessary in the present age to propagate the human race. But in the age to come, there will be no need to marry and propagate since the resurrected will not die.

The Sadducees, like the Corinthians whom Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 15, have confused the resurrection with resuscitation from the dead. The more serious issue, however, is that they have underestimated the power of God. By denying the resurrection of the dead, they imply that the power of death is greater than the power of God, whereas the underlying claim of the resurrection from the dead is that God’s power is stronger than death. To say that God is the God of the living rather than the God of the dead is to affirm that those who have died are alive before God because God has not abandoned them to death.

Anticipating God's Vindication

The authors of the New Testament report that at different moments in his life, especially as he journeyed to Jerusalem, Jesus expressed his supreme confidence that his life and the central message of his ministry—the kingdom of God—would not end with his death. Rather he affirmed that God would vindicate him and the gospel he preached. Jesus expressed this faith in a series of statements that are often referred to as “passion predictions,” a series of sayings in which he foretells his rejection, suffering, and death. These statements, however, are much more than “predictions” of Jesus’ passion and death; they are statements in which he affirms that his suffering and death are an integral part of God’s redemptive plan to usher in the kingdom of God. Accordingly, Jesus does not merely predict his suffering; he affirms his strong faith and hope that God will vindicate him by raising him from the dead, thereby ushering in a new phase of the kingdom of God.

If we follow the Gospel of Mark, the first of these statements occurs after Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus is the Messiah. Immediately after Peter’s confession, Jesus tells the Twelve “that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, *and after three days rise again*” (8:31). Jesus’ identification of himself as “the Son of Man” echoes Daniel 7, a passage in which Daniel has a vision of four beasts (each of which represents a nation that has oppressed Israel) arising from the sea. After these four beasts, a human figure, one like a son of man, comes with the clouds of heaven and is presented to God. “To him was given dominion / and glory and kingship, / that all peoples, nations, and languages / should serve him. / His dominion is an everlasting dominion / that shall not pass away, / and his kingship is one / that shall never be destroyed” (Dan 7:14). When Daniel asks who this figure is, he is told the following: “The kingship and dominion / and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven / shall be given to *the people of the holy ones of the Most High*; / their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, / and all dominions shall serve and obey them” (Dan 7:27). The human

figure in Daniel's vision, the one like a son of man, represents those loyal and faithful Israelites whom God will vindicate, after a period of suffering and persecution, by giving them an everlasting kingdom.

By referring to himself as "the Son of Man" Jesus appropriates this vision to interpret his destiny. His rejection and passion will not be in vain; they will be the prelude to his vindication. Just as the saints of the Most High received an everlasting kingdom after a period of persecution and suffering, so Jesus will be vindicated after his passion and death.

The most noticeable difference between the text of Daniel and Mark is the explicit reference to Jesus rising from the dead. The resurrection of the dead, however, is implicit in the text of Daniel 7 as the saints of the Most High have already died. Moreover, in Daniel 12:2-3 we find one of the earliest references to the resurrection of the dead: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." Jesus' affirmation of his resurrection from the dead, therefore, is firmly grounded in the hope of vindication and resurrection found in the book of Daniel. He understands that he must be rejected, suffer, and die in order to usher in the kingdom of God he has proclaimed throughout his ministry. He is confident that God will vindicate him at the resurrection of the dead by granting him life in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God and the resurrection of the dead are intimately related to each other inasmuch as resurrection from the dead is entrance into the fullness of God's kingdom.

Jesus affirms that God will vindicate him a second and a third time as he makes his way to Jerusalem, where he knows he must suffer and die. The second statement of vindication is the shortest of the three, but it makes the same point—Jesus will rise from the dead: "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, *and three days after being killed, he will rise again*" (Mark 9:31). The third is the most detailed, outlining the events that will take place during Jesus' passion, but it concludes in the same way, with a hope for future vindication: "See, we are going up

to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; *and after three days he will rise again*" (10:33-34).

Two points should be noted here. First, Jesus' disciples do not comprehend the significance of these statements in which he affirms that he will rise after three days. Indeed, after the transfiguration, when Jesus tells Peter, James, and John not to recount what they have seen until after the Son of Man has risen from the dead, Mark notes the following: "So they kept the matter to themselves, *questioning what this rising from the dead could mean*" (9:10). Second, whereas the New Testament usually speaks of *God raising Jesus from the dead*, in these statements Jesus speaks of *the Son of Man rising from the dead after three days*.

In regard to the first point, the fact that Jesus' disciples are puzzled by his statements of rising from the dead is not surprising. Indeed, it is to be expected since the Pharisaic doctrine of the resurrection from the dead was a relatively new teaching that was not accepted by all, as the controversy between Jesus and the Sadducees shows. While the disciples witnessed Jesus raising people from the dead, they did not understand that God would raise the dead in a final and definitive way, at the end of the ages. Second, in saying that he would rise from the dead, Jesus is affirming his hope in the resurrection of the death rather than claiming that he will raise himself by his own power. When he says that the Son of Man will rise after three days, he is affirming his faith and trust that God will vindicate him shortly after his death. Luke, who makes use of the Gospel of Mark in writing his gospel, clarifies this when he edits Mark in this way: "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, *and on the third day be raised*" (Luke 9:22). The fact that Luke maintains Mark's language about rising from the dead in Jesus' third statement of vindication (Luke 18:33) does not contradict what I have just said but rather indicates that Luke understands "rising from the dead" in terms of "God raising Jesus from the dead." Thus,

while Luke uses both expressions (rising from the dead, and being raised from the dead), he understands rising from the dead in light of being raised from the dead.

In addition to these statements of suffering and vindication, there are others in which Jesus anticipates that God will vindicate him after his death. For example, he speaks of his return at the end of the ages as the glorious and triumphant Son of Man (Mark 8:38; 13:26-27; 14:62; also see Luke 17:22-37). He says that the next Passover he will celebrate with his disciples will be in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25), and he tells his disciples that after he has been raised up he will go ahead of them to Galilee, where they will see him (Mark 14:28; see 16:7 as well). Furthermore, according to the Gospel of Matthew, the priests and Pharisees ask Pilate to secure Jesus' tomb with a guard, for they remember "what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again'" (Matt 27:63). The upshot of this is as follows: *Jesus' faith that God would vindicate him by raising him from the dead undergirds and complements his central teaching about the kingdom of God since the kingdom will be experienced in its fullness at the resurrection of the dead.* There is no tension, then, between Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and the church's kerygma that the resurrection of the dead is at hand—for the Messiah has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of the general resurrection of the dead.

The Kingdom of God and the Resurrection from the Dead

Before concluding this chapter, I would like to reflect further on the relationship between Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and his resurrection from the dead. By all accounts, the central content of Jesus' proclamation was that the kingdom of God was making its appearance in his ministry. It was in light of the inbreaking rule of God that Jesus called people to repent and gathered a community of disciples in order to renew Israel. Jesus' ministry, however, did not conclude with the final inbreaking of the kingdom, and after his death the central message of the early church tended to focus on his saving death and life-giving resurrection. Thus *the one who*

proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom became the content of the gospel the early church proclaimed. This is not to say that the early church forgot or neglected Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God; it did not. But it does raise the question of the relationship between Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and the church's proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection. How are the two related? How is it that the one who proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom became the content of the church's gospel?

Although Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God was making its appearance in his ministry, he was careful to teach his disciples "the mystery" of the kingdom of God—namely, that while the kingdom is *already* present in his ministry, the kingdom will not be revealed in power and glory until the glorious Son of Man returns at the end of the ages to gather the elect. "Son of Man" is Jesus' chosen self-designation that allows him to speak of himself in a way that is both self-effacing and revealing. On the one hand, a listener might think that Jesus is merely referring to his humanity. But the biblically literate reader, who is familiar with Daniel 7, knows that "the one like a son of man" in the book of Daniel was a figure who, after a period of persecution and suffering, received kingship, power, and glory from God. When Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, then, he employs a term that is both elusive and revealing. While it can refer to his humanity, it also refers to his destiny as the messianic Son of God. Jesus is God's chosen agent whom God will vindicate after a period of suffering and rejection. Accordingly, when he teaches his disciples that he will return as the glorious Son of Man to usher in the final stage of the kingdom of God, he is saying that *the resurrection is intimately related to the establishment of the kingdom of God since Jesus cannot return as the glorious Son of Man to inaugurate the kingdom until he has been raised from the dead.*

The relationship between Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and his resurrection from the dead can be put in this way. By his ministry of preaching, healing, and teaching, Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God. In his person, the kingdom of God was made present to those who believed in his message of the kingdom. Those who did not believe in his message and those who were looking

for a restoration of the kingdom of David eventually saw Jesus as a failure, a false prophet. The final stage of the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed could only be brought about by an act of God raising Jesus from the dead. *By his resurrection from the dead, Jesus was the first to enter into the fullness of the kingdom.* Understood in this way, the kingdom of God and the resurrection are so intimately related to each other that to proclaim one is to proclaim the other. Those who are raised from the dead have entered into the fullness of the kingdom, and those who have entered into the fullness of the kingdom have been raised from the dead.

If what I have said is correct, there is no tension between the proclamation of Jesus and the church's proclamation of his death and resurrection. Both proclaim the same message. Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God is making its appearance in his ministry, and the church proclaims that Jesus has been raised from the dead, the first to enter into the fullness of the kingdom. By proclaiming the death and resurrection of its Lord, the church confesses that her Lord has entered into the fullness of the kingdom, thereby making it possible for all who believe in him to do the same.