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Lay Bible Institute: Christ is Risen

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Lay Bible Institute, Christ is Risen

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Christ is Risen Indeed—But So What?

Lay Bible Institute, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO

October, 2012

Prof. Jeff Gibbs, instructor

Session One: What Happened, Way Back Then?

1. What did other ancient cultures think about gods, the world, and humanity?

- a. There is a variety among the pagan cultures and religions, of course
 - i. Egypt, Greece, Rome, Persia—they are not all the same
 - ii. Some held to one god over all the others; some didn't
 - iii. Few, if any, attributed the creation to the act of one good god
 - iv. None of them thought that God was guiding the world to a great Day when all things would be restored, purified, and made whole
 - v. History was either a cycle to be repeated (like the seasons), or perhaps the world would be annihilated.
 - vi. And what do we think?
- b. What about the physical world of matter?
 - i. Once again, a variety of views existed.
 - ii. The ones of which we are most aware, and that have influenced us the most, might be some of the views of Greek thinkers. Again, there is a variety.
 - Some were indifferent—the world just is what it is.
 - Others were hostile—the world of matter is evil, and the goal is to escape it. This later becomes associated with “Gnosticism” in the second century AD and later.
 - For most, it seems, the physical world was inferior to the “spiritual” one.
 - And what do we think?
- c. What about humanity? Who are we, and what is our true destiny?
 - i. Again, a variety of views.

ii. For some, it was “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” You’re born, you live, you die, and that’s the end of it.

iii. Many believed in “life after death” in some fashion.

- For some, this life after death was grim, or painful, or just something less than physical life.
- For others, life after death meant that your pure, immortal soul had been liberated from the prison of your body, from the dungeon of this world. This was the goal, and it makes sense if the physical world is either unimportant, or evil.
- ***The view that humans being have an immortal soul, the important part of us, is not the view of the Bible.***
- ***The view that “life after death” is the final goal of our human existence is not the view of the Bible.***

iv. And what do we think?

2. What does the Old Testament teach about God, the world, and humanity?

a. Genesis 1-2 answer the basic questions with great clarity

i. The world is made by the one true God, who made everything

ii. The world as God made it was not just good—it was *very* good, and filled with harmony and peace.

iii. The created order—the physical world—is inherently good.

b. Genesis 3 sounds the note of deep tragedy, but does not change the goodness

i. The sin of Adam brings death to humanity for the first time. Death is an intruder, an invader, and the consequence of sin. Death is evil.

ii. The sin of Adam affects ***the ground***, and in some mysterious way, the entire world/cosmos.

iii. Even in a fallen world, there is still goodness: Psalm 19:1-6; Psalm 104.

- The physical world is still good
- God does not abandon his creation; the story of the Bible is the story of the God ***who comes down*** to his world.

iv. God has a plan for his fallen world!

- He will have to purify it of the evil that is there (Psalm 102:26-28)

- The goal, however, is to restore it to wholeness and peace! (Isa 35:5-7; Isa 25:6-9)

c. God's human creatures are still creatures. He designed us to be a "body-and-soul" unity. We are not made of "parts" meant to be separated. And we have a destiny!

i. Genesis 2:7—to be "man" is to be made of the ground, and to have God's life breathed into you.

ii. God's plan was for us to live in our created home, serving him, caring for the world, and loving each other.

iii. Death is not the end for us. Peaceful rest for the soul after death is not God's *final* answer. The solution for death is **resurrection** from the dead!

- Dan 12:1-3
- Job 19:23-27

3. What did Judaism of Jesus' day teach about these things?

- a. A similar view of God and His creation
- b. More diversity on human creatures and their destiny in God's plan of salvation
 - Although we don't know how they came to this view, the Sadducees rejected the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.
 - Others, and especially the Pharisees, were looking for God's intervention in his world, and for God to purify and restore His creation, and for the dead to be raised.
 - In the meantime, at death God's human creatures are 'disembodied,' and while the souls of believers are in a safe and blessed condition of rest ("Paradise," "Abraham's bosom"), God's final salvation is yet to come.
- c. Here is the point, however—this final salvation and resurrection was expected on the Last Day, and it would happen to everyone and everything all at once!!!
- d. So—the New Testament's claim about what happened to Jesus of Nazareth on that first Easter morning takes place in this context.

4. So—What Happened Way Back Then, on the First Easter?

- a. Two historical facts can be readily demonstrated.

i. The tomb in which Jesus was buried on Friday was found, on Sunday, to be empty.

- By itself, this historical fact could be explained in a number of ways
- So, we would say that an empty tomb is a *necessary* fact, but that it is not *sufficient* for our faith.

ii. The earliest Christian witnesses, including Paul, received appearances of the formerly-dead Jesus, whose body was now transformed such that he was no longer subject to death. He had been resurrected, the first Man ever to experience this.

- This is completely unexpected. You can't find any OT passages that talk about Messiah being raised from the dead ahead of time, before everyone else is raised on the Judgment Day.
- This is not what they were "hoping for," so that they convinced themselves that it was true. Once Jesus was crucified, they concluded the obvious: He wasn't the Messiah, and everything has been in vain.

iii. Together, these two facts invite every person and the whole world to consider this question: What caused them? The Christian answer, of course, is that Jesus of Nazareth was raised to full resurrection life on Easter Day.

b. Christians believe, both then and now, that Jesus was raised to life—and not just to be alive the way we fallen mortals are today. No, Jesus was raised to **resurrection life**, the life that awaits all believers on the Last Day.

i. This is NEW—something NEW that has never entered the creation since Genesis 3 and the entrance of death into our world.

ii. The FUTURE has become PRESENT—in, for, and through Jesus

iii. He is the FIRST and ONLY to rise from the dead in this sense

- 1 Corinthians 15:20
- Acts 26:33
- Col 1:18

iv. Death, the great enemy, has lost its power completely.

- Death, for a time, had mastery over Him; now, He has mastery over it! (Romans 6:9-10)
- So, it must be the case that all the other miracles in which dead people came to life (Acts 7, John 11, etc.) were only hints and anticipations. Those people later died again, just as the sick people that Jesus healed in his ministry later sickened again and died.

This is what happened; RESURRECTION ALREADY in Jesus. But So What?

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Session Two: What Does Easter Say About . . . Jesus Himself?

1. Anticipation: How would you fill in the blank? “My favorite title/name for Jesus is”

2. Review from Session One

A. The Grand Story

- i. As Christians, we believe that we are caught up into God’s great, true story
- ii. That story began with the creation of everything, and will end with the re-creation and renewal of everything.
 - This is why the Lord’s Prayer is built the way that it is.
 - This is why Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they *will be* comforted . . . Blessed are the lowly, for they *will* inherit the earth.
- iii. Our HOPE, then, is for the Day of Christ—the day of wholeness, of resurrection
 - We don’t fall into the mistake of “gradual progress”
 - We reject the error of dispensationalism / rapture theology
 - We do not focus very much on “dying and going to heaven,” although that is true. This is not the great hope.
 - The creation, our home, will be renewed. “We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.”

B. Jesus has already begun the END of the Grand Story!

- i. Death has been undone, for the first time since Genesis 3
- ii. The tomb is empty, and His body is the same body . . . but it is a transformed and “glorified” body.

3. What does Easter Say About Jesus Himself?

- A. Death, the Last Enemy, has not—did not—have the last word about Jesus.
 - i. If Death had the last word, then nothing about Jesus would be true: 1 Cor 15:14-19.
 - ii. Easter is the SIGN OF JONAH, and it validates and underscores everything that Jesus said or claimed or did (Matthew 12)

- B. Risen from the dead, Jesus of Nazareth is the LORD
 - i. Acts 2:22-36
 - ii. Think about it; if you are Lord over DEATH, then you are Lord over

C. The Confession that Jesus is LORD

- i. 1 Cor 12:1-3
- ii. Romans 10:9-10
- iii. 2 Cor 4:5-15
- iv. Ephesians 4:4-10
- v. Phil 2:5-11
- vi. Matt 28:16-20
 - Human frailty
 - The “bracket” of Jesus authority and abiding presence
- vii. Both the Small and the Large Catechisms of Martin Luther
 - Notice how smaller things fit under this identity of the Risen Jesus
 - Lord over death
 - Lord over sin
 - Lord over Satan
 - Lord over my
 - Notice how “justification and sanctification” belong together
 - Lord over my life
 - Lord over the church
 - Lord over my wallet
 - Lord . . . of ALL.

For Next Week

- D. The truth that the New Creation has already begun, and we can participate in it/Him
 - i. Remember—what does “resurrection” itself *mean*?
 - ii. 2 Cor 5:16-17
 - iii. Participating in the future, already now
- E. The promise of the Holy Spirit, poured out on every single believer and all believers together, as the “down-payment” of our inheritance.

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Session Three: The Future Has Begun—Easter, Ascension, Pentecost . . . the New Creation

Introduction/Review

1. The Christian claim is that God's plan extends to the whole creation, which is moving toward the Final Day.
 - Death is an enemy and an invader. It is not the doorway into eternal life.
 - God's will is for his creation to be purified and renewed, and for his human creatures to be raised from the dead, whole and holy, body-and-soul unities as God desires and as God intends.
 - This future—not merely dying & going to heaven—is our great Hope.

2. Already in advance of the Great Day, God's reign/kingdom has come into the world in a new way . . . in Jesus of Nazareth.
 - According to God's plan, evil men and human evil killed him by crucifixion. But because God is the living God, He raised His Son from the dead, to **full, immortal, resurrection life**.
 - Because he is now risen and exalted to the Father's right hand, Jesus is Lord of death, and he is Lord of all.
 - Perhaps the most important, sweeping declaration/confession that Christians make is this: risen from the dead, Jesus is Lord of all.

3. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 67: "To put it at its most basic: the resurrection of Jesus offers itself, to the student of history or science no less than the Christian or the theologian, not as an odd event within the world as it is but as the utterly characteristic, prototypical, and foundational event within the world as it has begun to be. It is not an absurd event within the old world but the symbol and starting point of the new world. The claim advanced in Christianity is of that magnitude: Jesus of Nazareth ushers in not simply a new religious possibility, not simply a new ethic or a new way of salvation, but a new creation."

I. Jesus Himself is Now the Beginning of the New Creation

1. Remember the very *meaning* of "resurrection"—what was expected on the Last Day has happened already to Him who is "first to rise from the dead."

2. A new **time** has begun in the history of the world
 - The *fullness* of the New Creation is yet to come—it is "not yet."

 - BUT--Acts 2:14-21, 33-36 . . . the Last Days . . . and Jesus the Lord

3. Here's the question. Is this only something that is true about Jesus? Or can it be true about us as well? The remarkable answer—

- 2 Cor 5:16-17

- Gal 6:14-15

II. We Participate in the New Creation . . . already NOW

1. Through FAITH in the promises . . . and NOT nearly always by what we can see.
 - a. The old evil age is still lingering . . . the old time and the new time in the world's history are **overlapping**
 - There are two ages (or "aeons") in the world's history (Matt 12:32; Eph 2:7)
 - The present evil age is still at work (Rom 12:2; 2 Tim 4:10)
 - The new age of salvation has already begun (1 Cor 10:11)
 - b. Your own Christian experience tells you both about what is *already* true in Christ, and about what it *not yet* completely true in Christ.
 - c. In Romans, the "already and not yet" significance of "now"
 - The "now" time is a time of salvation (Rom 3:21, 26; 8:1)
 - The "now" time is still a time of groaning and danger (Rom 8:18, 22)
 - **This is WHY we walk so often . . . always . . . by faith and not sight.**
2. The promises that we can believe have to do with being united with, joined to Christ's death and his resurrection . . . in Holy Baptism
 - a. Romans 6:1-11—a NEW way of living, joined to the NEW CREATION
 - b. Colossians 2:8-15 and 3:1-5
3. Jesus, the Risen Lord, pours out His Holy Spirit upon you as individual believers when you were baptized, and upon the baptized community/body of Christ together
 - a. Acts 2:33-36, once again
 - b. The Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, who testifies about Jesus (John 16:12-15). He takes the promises and truths that come from JESUS, and he enables us to know them and to believe them.

- c. To “walk in the Spirit” in the first place means to listen to, to know, and to believe what the Spirit reveals to us about . . . Jesus.
4. The Holy Spirit is powerful to produce the beginnings of the New Creation in each of us baptized believers, and in us as a community of the New Creation
- a. The Fruit of the Spirit
 - Not in isolation—but for others!
 - Ask, and you shall receive (John 16:23-24)
 - b. A new community, created out of old, fractured pieces that are believing that they have been made new
 - The situation at Corinth! What a mess!
 - 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. Love is the full manifestation of the New Creation . . . and it has become possible now.
 - c. *Again, Surprised by Hope*: “The point of 1 Corinthians 13 is that love is not our duty; it is our *destiny*. It is the language Jesus spoke, and we are called to speak it so that we can converse with him. It is the food they eat in God’s new world, and we must acquire the taste for it here and now. It is the music God has written for all his creatures to sing, and we are called to learn it and practice it now so as to be ready when the conductor brings down his baton. It is the resurrection life, and the resurrected Jesus calls us to begin living it with him and for him right now. Love is at the very heart of the surprise of hope: people who truly hope as the resurrection encourages us to hope will be people enabled to love in a new way. Conversely, people who are living by this rule of love will be people who are learning more deeply to hope.”
 - d. This “new creation” way of living is, in the first place, for us to practice with one another, in the community with Jesus at the center. Why am I different? Why is our fellowship different? Because we are baptized, that’s why!
 - e. This “new creation” way of living is, in the second (and not less important) place for us to practice in relation to the world. For the world is tasteless and rotting, and we are its salt. The world is dark and lost and wandering, and we are its light (Matt 5:13-16).
5. So, the NEW CREATION has begun, and we live in it by faith, joined to the crucified and RISEN Jesus. But the fullness still waits, and so we “look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the AGE (!!!) to come.” How can our lives be helped and changed if we will actively, genuinely long for Christ’s return? Good question. . . .

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2. Already in advance of the Great Day, God's reign/kingdom has come into the world in a new way . . . in Jesus of Nazareth.
 - According to God's plan, evil men and human evil killed him by crucifixion. But because God is the living God, He raised His Son from the dead, to **full, immortal, resurrection life**.
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 - Perhaps the most important, sweeping declaration/confession that Christians make is this: risen from the dead, Jesus is Lord of all.

3. Jesus is RISEN FROM THE DEAD, and exalted to God's right hand. He is the BEGINNING of the New Creation!
 - Only the beginning—because this present evil age still lingers.
 - Truly the beginning—because the new age/time of salvation has begun
 - We actually **participate** in this new creation—by faith in God's promises
 - To be in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), to be baptized (Romans 6:1-11) means a new life has begun in us.
 - To have the Holy Spirit means that we can believe God's promises, and He can bear fruit in our lives (Galatians 5)
 - To live in community with others who have the Spirit mean that we can be—we *are*—the Body of Christ in and for the world around us.

I. Easter & the Future: Christ, Risen from the Dead, Will Return in Glory

1. What He has begun, He will finish. It's as simple as that.

- a. Once again—the “direction of salvation” is from above, to below. Christ comes to us; we do not, in the most important sense, go up to him.
 - It’s too bad, but a **lot** of hymns have this problem: “Once in Royal David’s City,” stanzas 4-5.
 - Acts 1:11 promises it. Christ will be present, again—visibly, personally, fully.
 - b. It’s simple—and the “rapture” theology is fundamentally confused. The OT promises are true in Jesus, who is the embodiment of Israel. Then, with the 12 “new patriarchs,” all believers are “true, new Israel,” and the promises of the OT apply to us.
2. The objective truth about the Second Coming is beyond our ken—so Scripture gives us pictures and images which, nevertheless, are still *true*.
 - Isaiah 65:17-25
 - The theme of the great banquet is very common in Jesus’ parables
 - The joy of serving and working: “you were faithful over little, I will put you in charge of much!” (Matt 25:21, 23)
 - Revelation 21:1-4, 22-27, and 22:1-5.
 3. Christians will go through the judgment, though we do so with confidence. There is certainly a place, however, for “godly fear.”
 - If the appearance of the holy angels causes godly fear, how much more will the return of the Risen Lord!
 - There will be a kind of fiery purifying, and a transformation so that everything bring honor and glory to Christ Jesus.
 - 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. The Corinthians needed to be reminded of this, and so, at times, do we.
 - 1 Corinthians 15:51-55.

II. In the Certain Hope of His Return, We Face our Death

1. “Easter makes dying harder,” or, “Forrest Gump’s mother is completely wrong.”
 - a. The **necessity** of Easter, and its **substitutionary** character, tell us what death is, and how we are to think and speak of it.
 - b. We can add qualifications and clarifications, but death is, at its core, the last enemy that Christ will one day fully nullify.

2. Here's another problem—the way we speak about death, and the things that are said at funerals.
 - a. Sermons, in general, should say things that are true. Speculation has little or no place. The Christian “big picture” has to guide what is said.
 - b. The desire to offer as much comfort, and to make people feel as good as one possible can, should not be the controlling factor. Death is an enemy.
3. Little hope, and big hope. Small comfort, and big comfort. Grief, yes. With hope, yes.
 - a. Small hope, small comfort: Rev 14:13 (along with Luke 23)
 - b. Big hope, big comfort: Paul to his Christians: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
 - c. Big hope, big comfort: Paul himself
 - Phil 1:18-26, when he thinks it can go either way
 - 2 Tim 4:6-8, when he's sure that it's going to go one way

III. In the Certain Hope of His Return, We Live Our Lives

1. The Wake-Up Call
 - a. What time is it? Romans 13:8-14
 - b. What really counts more than anything? Why is that? 1 Corinthians 13
2. The Validation of our Callings—what we do now matters forever!
 - a. 1 Corinthians 15:58
 - “Therefore.” Because of what is coming.
 - Your labor, your works—“in the Lord”—matter.
 - b. “In the Lord”—in the new creation that has begun, and that will last forever
3. Joy and wonder already now
 - a. At being God's creatures, even in God's fallen creation
 - b. At the anticipation of being God's creatures, in God's restored creation
4. The Mission
 - a. The mission has begun, and it will continue (Matt 28:18-20)
 - b. Sow the seed. Live in hope. Live in Good Friday, and in Easter. In everything, in the Spirit's power, confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of the Father.