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**CRUCIFIXION
AND
RESURRECTION
IN THE
NEW
TESTAMENT**

**Concordia Theological Seminary Press
Fort Wayne, Indiana**



Crucifixion and Resurrection in the New Testament

First of all I wish to thank you for the invitation to address the students here at Concordia College, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Our Concordia College here at Ann Arbor was established with the expressed purpose of preparing students with a theological education for entrance into the seminary and the ministry of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Secondly, I want to thank you for assigning the topic "Crucifixion and Resurrection in the New Testament" as this theme is not only the heart and core of the message of salvation which we preach, but it is the very message itself. It might seem at first a gross oversimplification to state that crucifixion and resurrection are not merely themes in the New Testament, but the very message of the New Testament in its totality.

Perhaps the matter could be easily resolved by quoting Saint Paul's message to the Corinthians that he was determined to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Well then what about the resurrection? Or what about the rather comparative impressive length of the two letters to the Corinthians in which Paul says that crucifixion is his only message, let alone the entire Pauline corpus. If the real Christian message is simply that Jesus died and rose again, then the production of the New Testament seems unnecessarily excessive in length and an unfruitful exercise of apostolic effort. The New Testament quite obviously is not a succession of pages with the words that Jesus died and rose again and Christian preaching is more than singing a monotonous round "Jesus died and rose."

But in spite of the various types of material that appear in the New Testament, the beginning, the middle and end of the New Testament is Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Tonight's essay will be divided into three sections: (1) the correlation of crucifixion and resurrection in the Pauline Epistles; (2) the theological significance of crucifixion and resurrection in

the explicit sayings of Jesus; (3) the theological significance of crucifixion and resurrection in the parables of Jesus.

1.

Since the eighteenth century, the crucifixion and the resurrection have been characterized differently by the Biblical scholars. The crucifixion as historical act was assigned an authenticity which was denied the resurrection. While there was little or no doubt among scholars that Jesus had died by crucifixion, little credence was given to the Biblical accounts of His resurrection. The early Rationalists of the eighteenth century provided naturalistic explanations for the appearances of Jesus after His crucifixion. What appeared to be a resurrected Jesus was either a case of mistaken identity or the reviving of a Jesus who had not really been dead at all. The Passover Plot of more recent times has only reused a very old and we might add discredited theme that Jesus swooned but did not expire. If the resurrection is explained by a case of mistaken identity, for example a weeping Mary really encountering a gardener and not Jesus, or Emmaus disciples overcome by their own grief that their imagination becomes overactive, then there in fact is no resurrection. If it is explained by stating that Jesus did not really die but only appeared to be dead, then death by crucifixion is denied. David Friederich Strauss was the first to say that the entire life of Jesus in the New Testament was a fabrication of its authors. At least he was consistent and recognized that in the New Testament crucifixion and resurrection together form the fiber of the message and that one should receive the same type of attention as the other. Both were fabrication or both were authentic. Strauss was considered a radical, was relieved of his university teaching post, and entered politics. By the middle of the twentieth century the radical ideas of Strauss had become commonplace especially through Rudolph Bultmann, who was busy demythologizing the Gospels in order to modernize the primitive message for the modern man. Only by removing the myth could the

authentic be recovered. An entire school has sprung up around and after Bultmann devoted to recovering as much as possible about Jesus from the New Testament. Concerning His resurrection, this school has been totally negative. While there are some isolated New Testament scholars who recognize the resurrection as historical fact, the overwhelming majority have not overcome the 18th century rationalistic bias which cannot and does not tolerate a supernatural intervention that would be required for the resurrection of Jesus.

C. H. Dodd in the Apostolic Preaching of the Cross attempted--and in my estimation succeeded--in isolating certain basic ingredients in the earliest preaching of the Apostles. He did his critical study on the sermons of the apostles recorded in the Acts of the Apostles with the assumption that they were the earliest message of Christianity now available. He concluded that the earliest Gospel or kerygma consisted in the proclamation that Jesus died for sins, rose again, and that He would return in judgment. (It might be added here as a parenthetical element that any and all preaching to the unbelieving world consists of no less and perhaps no more than this message. Dogmatics or theology can be and must be no more than the extrapolation and elaboration of these themes of crucifixion and resurrection.)

Dodd's discovery--if that's what it was--certainly can be supported by the Pauline and other epistles and the Gospels. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul points his readers to what he considers as the most important part of his message.

Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast - unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

This pericope certainly supports Dodd's hypothesis about the centrality of crucifixion and resurrection in early Christian preaching. Paul specifically identifies crucifixion and resurrection as the Gospel and sees in these particular

salvific acts the cause of salvation for the Corinthians. Secondly, he states that crucifixion and resurrection belong to the fundamental premises of Christian doctrine. The use of the words "delivered" and "received" shows that Paul understands these concepts as belonging not to something given to him in ecstatic visions, but which were part of the earliest Christian Church in Jerusalem. Crucifixion and resurrection are not Pauline innovations, but were the message which was part of the common, universal and earliest Christian proclamation. The catholicity of the church's message demonstrates itself in the proclamation of the crucifixion and resurrection. Thirdly, Paul in reference to both crucifixion and resurrection affirms that these acts occurred according to the Scriptures, i.e., crucifixion and resurrection are not mere accidents of history, but rather belong to God's preordained will which had been sealed in writing centuries before they happened in time and space. Fourthly, Paul lists the historical witnesses, of whom Peter is the first and Paul himself the last. Fifthly, Paul correlates the resurrection of Jesus which belongs to the essential kerygma with the general resurrection of the dead, the doctrine which the Corinthians were denying. This denial motivated Paul's great discussion on Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. These points should receive a further brief elaboration since they are characteristic of the New Testament's attitude to crucifixion and resurrection in general.

(1) The kerygma is identified by Paul as the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and this kerygma is the object of faith, the cause of salvation, and the content of the preached message. Without crucifixion and resurrection, the Gospel ceases to be the Gospel and faith is in vain. Jesus is the object of faith, however, it is the Jesus who is both crucified and resurrected. A faith in a Jesus who is not both crucified and resurrected does not measure up to the Pauline standards and the early church tradition.

(2) This kerygma with its content of crucifixion and resurrection is primary in two ways. Among those things of a supernatural origin which Paul

made known to the Corinthians, these were declared first. In the further proclamation of Christian doctrine they remain primary in importance. What should be noted is that as an object of saving faith resurrection is placed on the same level as crucifixion. Resurrection is not afterthought in God's mind or merely historical proof, demonstrating God's seriousness about the crucifixion--but the content of the faith itself. In discussing crucifixion and resurrection Paul does not rely primarily on his own personal experiences, i.e., the appearance of Jesus or His ecstatic transportation into Paradise, but upon the doctrine established as part of the recognized tradition of the early apostolic church as that church lived its existence where crucifixion and resurrection had taken place. Jerusalem as the place of crucifixion shall have importance in the preaching of Jesus, as will be shown later.

(3) By using the phrase "according to the Scriptures" twice, Paul recognizes the Scriptural principle in at least two ways. First, the Old Testament is more than an authoritative guide for Christian living, but has throughout the character of God's Word, especially in the sense that it reveals what God intends to do. Secondly, it recognizes the Christological character of the Old Testament especially as it centers around crucifixion and resurrection. Rather than crucifixion and resurrection being isolated themes in the Old Testament, they are its very heart and core. Luke 24 with the account of the Emmaus disciples says the same thing in a bit more developed way. Vv. 26-7 satisfactorily summarizes the section.

'Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

(4) The resurrection is said by Paul to be an historically observed event. Perhaps the historical aspect of Jesus' resurrection has received the widest amount of consideration since its denial has been popularized by the followers of Bultmann. Conservative Christianity has responded frequently, magnificently,

and eloquently to the challenge. An entire system of apologetics has been built up for the defense of the resurrection. Several words of explanation are necessary here. Paul's historical argument for the resurrection is within the context of the Christian community and is not set forth as an argument for belief among unbelievers. That though it takes its place alongside other events of history, it is an event in which all history is contained and subsumed and which redeems creation. Christ's resurrection can simply not be understood only as the resuscitation of a corpse, but as glorification for himself and for others as they also participate in resurrection.

(5) Paul's treatment of crucifixion and resurrection, which might be the first complete theological treatise on the issue, is not merely for the purpose of setting forth an isolated dogma, but rather for handling a wider problem among the Corinthians. The problem of the denial of the general resurrection among the Corinthians was probably related to the Greek dualism between body and spirit with the consequential denial of the resurrection of the body. In my estimation the denial of resurrection in Corinth was essentially a clerical problem as the general resurrection was being denied in their preaching (v12).

Paul could have attacked the problem in a number of ways. He might have located and cited appropriate Old Testament pericopes. He also might have cited a saying of Jesus. His argument for the general resurrection is, however, intricately interwoven with the necessity of Jesus' resurrection and with the supernatural character of the entire Christian message. The denial of general resurrection is a denial of the resurrection of Christ without which there is really no Christianity. There is more to Christianity than the assertion of crucifixion and resurrection, but there is no Christian doctrine which is not informed by and established by crucifixion and resurrection.

It is this last point that should receive our attention. If it can be accepted that for Paul crucifixion and resurrection form two inseparable acts in an indivisible unity, then additional Pauline pericopes should be offered

to demonstrate that these events form the foundation for all of Christian doctrine. For Paul the intimate connection between crucifixion and resurrection on one side is paralleled with justification and baptism on the other side. A word should also be said about the relationship of crucifixion and the Lord's Supper in the theologies of both Jesus and Paul. First, to the matter of baptism.

Ephesians 2:1-10 is eloquently 'Lutheran' in its discussion of original sin understood as allegiance to Satan, justification, and what is commonly called in Christian dogmatics sanctification. This pericope contains the famous "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of your own doing, it is the gift of God (2:8)." This great assertion on salvation through faith is found settled comfortably within what seems to be an early form of the second article of what we know today as the Apostles' Creed.

But the God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

The English translations do not carry the force of the Greek language which clearly conveys the idea that the steps in our Lord's life are not isolated acts for His own personal glorification alone, but rather acts in which Christians have already participated. The raising of Jesus from the dead carries with it God's own justification of the sinner. The Christian life is a resurrected life, not in the sense that it has gone through a personal internal renovation, but rather in the sense it has already participated in Christ's humiliation and exaltation. On the basis of the Christian's participation in Christ's resurrection and exaltation, Paul can say, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (2:10).

Colossians 2:6-3:11 is equally as clear, if not perhaps better, in focusing the crucifixion and resurrection into the life of the Christian. An

early form of Gnosticism seems to have been the problem at Colossae. The Christians there had given themselves over to angel worship, Jewish legalism, and a general type of immorality. They had come under the influence of Satan. Paul's argument that such things are impossible for those who through baptism have already participated in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

And you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them (Col. 2:12-15).

While asserting that the Christian from his perspective faces death and resurrection as future non-accomplished realities, we cannot overlook Paul's viewing the matter from the divine perspective and observing something entirely different. From God's point of view the Christian has already endured death and triumphed in the resurrection. Baptism and faith are the divine given certainties that the Christian has already gone through the grave with Christ and is already now reigning with Him. It would not be amiss to state that Martin Luther revels in viewing crucifixion and resurrection as accomplished for the Christian. Salvation is not a possibility, but with God it is reality through baptism and faith. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ are the crucifixion and resurrection of humanity in totality. This universal resurrection in Christ means that in faith all are free from Satan, they are released from regulations outmoded by the cross, and that they are to replace base thoughts and actions with the vision of Christ who is now glorified at God's right hand. Three brief passages from this general section will be quoted: "If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?" (2:20); "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." (3:1); "Put to death what is earthly in you." (3:5).

Crucifixion and resurrection are historical events, but they are more. Rather, crucifixion and resurrection are cosmic events determining God's relationship to the world, penetrating into the core of Christian existence and forming and moulding that existence. Crucifixion and resurrection are historical events, but they are events that incorporate with themselves all that means to be a Christian. What happened in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection comes to expression within the Christian life. As Christ, the Christian dies to sin, is raised to a new life, and conquers Satan. The old life passes away. From 3:5 to 4:5 Paul addresses particular ethical problems among the Colossians, but this is simply not the restatement of a moralistic philosophy, but rather they are a description of a life which is in effect Christ's resurrected life being lived here within the dimensions of time and space.

In the extra-Gospel material, this presentation is being limited to the Pauline corpus. The examples from Romans and Colossians enwrap the Christian life into Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Paul uses a liturgical device so that the historic facts of the creed are extended to involve the Christian, with the result that doctrine and life are not two different categories, but they are different perspectives of the same reality. From God's perspective the Christian has passed with Christ from the cross, through the tomb, to glorification by way of resurrection. The final Pauline example is taken from his famous hymn to Christ in Philippians 2:5-11 with its familiar first words, "Let this same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

This pericope with its reference to Christ as a servant reflects Matthew 20:18-28 in which Jesus describes Himself as a servant and His death as a ransom for many. In Philippians 2:1-4 Paul addresses the problem of selfishness and suggests that humility, the type which brought Christ Jesus to death by crucifixion does not allow for pride among Christians. Paul's description of Christ's humility is elaborate. The one who is God puts away the appearances of God and appears as servant. He not only humbles Himself to common human

degradation, but submits Himself willingly to a gruesome death by crucifixion. Because of this God has exalted Him. There is no explicit reference here to resurrection, but the glorification of Jesus for Paul clearly includes His resurrection. Resurrection is seen here as God's reward to Jesus for having endured humiliation. Paul's admonition to work out salvation with fear and trembling (2:12-3) is not a moralistic warning tainted with synergism, but rather the assurance that God works through Christians to follow after, with and more important in Christ. The Christian life is nothing other than the duplication and repetition of Christ's own humiliation and exaltation.

2.

The Epistles are recognized as having such a developed theology that a fixed, almost credal pattern of crucifixion and resurrection, can be clearly detected. The real question is whether this device of placing crucifixion and resurrection in juxtaposition is original with Paul in particular or whether there are traces of it in the original preaching of Jesus. New Testament criticism always struggles with the gap between Paul and Jesus, between the post-resurrection and pre-resurrection material. It is a question which must be addressed now.

The placing in juxtaposition of crucifixion and resurrection is found explicitly three times in the Gospel of Matthew (16:20-1; 17:22; 20:18). In the first case it is placed immediately after Peter identifies Jesus as the Christ and Christ responds in turn by giving Peter the keys of kingdom. At that juncture Jesus informs them of His immanent death at Jerusalem and subsequent resurrection. Peter, flushed with his new position as Christological interpreter, finds death inappropriate for the Christ and is appropriately rebuked. The solution to finding life is not keeping it but by losing it for the sake of Christ. At first glance it might appear that Paul might be the first to suggest incorporation of the believer into the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. But a closer examination of this section shows Jesus as the one who views His

death and resurrection as more than mere historical occurrences, i.e., occurrences exhausted by the time and place in which they happened.

The extended pericope Mt. 16:13-28 is valuable for our purposes of crucifixion and resurrection for a number of reasons. (1) It contains, as mentioned, the Evangelist's first explicit reference to crucifixion and resurrection and may indeed be the first reference from Jesus Himself. "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (2) Crucifixion and resurrection are set within the immediate context by the Evangelist of Jesus' official recognition by His disciples that He is the Christ. (3) Mentioning Jerusalem as the place of crucifixion and resurrection emphasizes these historical events and distinguishes them from a mythological death and resurrection, a view not uncommon among the pagans who viewed death and resurrection as the annual themes of nature. (4) The mention of Jerusalem attaches this death and resurrection to the Old Testament and furthers the thought that Jesus is the Christ. (5) Being the Christ involves by definition crucifixion and resurrection. These events are not incidental to who He is, but are the chief characteristics of the messianic office. (6) The church, here mentioned for the first time, is set within the context of Jesus' dying and rising.

The reference to the church set within the context of the first mentioning of crucifixion and resurrection may not at first glance appear too significant until it is remembered that the word 'church' is found only twice in the mouth of Jesus. Peter's confession entitles him to a special place in what God intends to do and Peter uses his position to dissuade Jesus from crucifixion. After Jesus admonishes Peter for his refusing to see that God's kingdom can only come through crucifixion and resurrection, He tells all the disciples that those who want to follow Him must deny themselves and take up the cross. Are these three, denying self, taking up the cross, and following

Jesus, differing actions? Or perhaps these should be interpreted as three descriptions of the same type of action. Christ's self-denial meant for Him crucifixion. Christians follow in Christ's crucifixion by denying themselves for the benefit of others and in this way they come to the perfect completion in Christ. The following verse, v. 25 which sets forth the condition of losing one's life for Christ in order to gain it has the clear and subtle overtones of Christ's own crucifixion and resurrection. Just as He lost His life through crucifixion and regained it through resurrection, so the Christian who loses His life through self-denial will gain it in the resurrection. Paul's thought of dying and rising with Christ has its origin with Jesus who places this as necessary obligation upon His own disciples.

The second reference to crucifixion and resurrection is found right after the transfiguration with the disciples' failure to heal the demoniac boy, and before the pericope in which Jesus speaks of the freedom Christians have from the earthly authority because of the coming of the new kingdom (17:22-3). To theologize about the intent of the Evangelist seems at first glance more difficult. Set as it is between a preview of the eschatological Lord in His glory and the freedom of Christians from the restraints common to men under the cloak of sin, the message seems to be that even for Christ the final glorification can only be accomplished through the misery of the cross, something which troubles the disciples as they would prefer glory without the cross. At this point resurrection becomes offensive in almost the same sense as crucifixion is, since resurrection presupposes death. The entire process is said to trouble the disciples greatly (v. 23).

The last announcement of crucifixion and resurrection is followed by the most elaborate discourse by Jesus (20:17-28). After this final announcement, the mother of James and John asks for these two to sit on the right and the left of Jesus in His kingdom. Jesus as a good parliamentarian divides the question. The requested positions of honor can only be given by the Father, but Jesus holds

out the possibility of sharing in His death. By this action they will indeed share in His kingdom. The mother of the two disciples has a confused concept of the kingdom. For Christ this kingdom is suffering, but for her it is glorification. The rewards of the final glorification belong to the Father who will reward Jesus with the resurrection and all those who share in His suffering. The only thing that Jesus can promise the two disciples is suffering, which He calls the cup. This suffering is not individual but corporate, organic participation in His own suffering. The disciples can participate in this suffering now by being servant and slave as He Himself was in that He gave His life and by this action He became the ransom for many.

This pericope is marvelous for several reasons. (1) It has the classical formation of going up to Jerusalem, arrest, crucifixion and resurrection on the third day. (2) It identifies activities of Christ as God's kingdom, i.e., this is what God really wants to do and does. (3) Participation in the kingdom gives no quick glorification, but only after suffering and as a result of it. (4) Christian suffering is not only modeled after Christ's as a pattern, but involves sharing in His suffering which means humiliation through rejection.

The next clearest explanation of Jesus' death is found in connection with the Lord's Supper (26:26-28). The cup is defined as Christ's own blood which is required by God's covenant and is said to be beneficial in obtaining forgiveness for the sins of many. The words cross, death, and crucifixion are not used specifically here, but the use of the word 'blood' set by the Evangelist within the context of historical crucifixion can only mean that kind of gruesome death. Jesus is here speaking about substitutionary atonement, so basic to the understanding of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Because of sin God requires death and Christ's death meets this requirement once and for all. Blood signifies that death has taken place and the church receives this blood in the Eucharist as a certification that God has put aside His anger, i.e., sins are forgiven. God is again content with the world as He was at the first

creation. Paul's rendition of these words are not that dissimilar (I Cor 11:23-26), but special attention should be given to Paul's editorial note that Jesus instituted the Supper on the night of His being handed over for crucifixion. The apostle also sees the Supper as serving a kerygmatic function in that its celebration is itself a proclamation of that death within the context of the worshipping congregation (v. 26).

3.

Our final task is to show crucifixion and resurrection as the message of the parables which for many are the cryptic sayings of Jesus. His audience knew His intent. This can only be done in a cursory way. The parables of the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price seem to be clear references to the atonement (13:44-46). In both parables, the man who is God is said to divest himself of all his possessions to fulfill His desires of getting the treasure and pearl for himself. Crucifixion and resurrection are events that begin to lift themselves out of history as mere events and take on the character of divine events, i.e., events involving God not in an accidental way, but in a way in which His essence becomes totally involved. Crucifixion means that God has staked His entire existence in returning man to that condition in which he previously enjoyed divine bliss. Crucifixion is for God not merely involvement in suffering for the sake of suffering, but for the sake of redeeming the church. Resurrection may mean for us that Christ's death has met the divine requirements for sin, but for God resurrection means that He has triumphed. For us resurrection means certainty, but for God it means triumph. Thus, crucifixion and resurrection share in a definite divine necessity. Resurrection is not afterthought and only crucifixion is necessity, but both belong to God's necessary plan.

Two parables, the wicked tenants of the vineyard and the king's banquet for his son stand side by side in a complementary fashion (Mt. 21:33-22:14). Both are pictures of the kingdom. In the first the owner's servants and finally his own son are killed. Then the vineyard is taken away. In the immediately

following parable a king is giving a banquet for his son. Taken together these parables reflect humiliation and exaltation, crucifixion and resurrection. Together these parables form a theological as well as a literary unit. In both God is the main character. In both cases servants are sent to do God's will. In both others benefit from God's gracious activity. The tenants enjoy the produce of the vineyard and the subjects of the king are invited to the wedding. In both the refusal to follow God's will is followed by punishment. What is most striking is that even though God is the main character in both parables, God's attitude to the people is determined by their attitude to the son. The son in the parables is clear reference to Jesus Himself. He is slain by the tenants and He is the One for whom the Father-King gives the marital banquet. But what is striking is that the son slain in the parable of tenants is alive in the parable of the banquet for the king's son. He is not only alive, but He is celebrating with those who have accepted the invitation.

This topic is being handled in only a cursory way, but nevertheless imbedded within the parabolic teaching of Jesus are references to His own death and resurrection as the crucial acts of God whereby He determines His attitude to the world.

I am not so sure that traditional Lutheran dogmatics have grasped the organic unity of crucifixion and resurrection. Crucifixion as the atonement is viewed as necessity for God in making salvation possible, but resurrection is viewed merely as a benefit for man in a cognitive way. Typical is the synodical catechism's answers to what the resurrection proves: Jesus is God, His teaching is true, and most important, the Father accepted His sacrifice. Thus resurrection serves as proof and punctuation to atonement and as an opportunity for the apologetics so that Christianity can have intellectual standing in the world. The value of this cannot be questioned. But equally important is seeing crucifixion and resurrection as two parts of one divine composite activity in which God Himself not only atones for sins, but in which

He also triumphs. Crucifixion and resurrection have a dimension for the angelic sphere by which Satan and his associates are divested of their power (Col. 2:15). Crucifixion and resurrection mean that the God offended in Genesis 3 has been vindicated.

This evening I have attempted to place crucifixion and resurrection in the center of the entire New Testament by isolating a series of pericopes. This is not one teaching among many, but it is the center of all teaching because it is the center of all of God's activity. Regardless of what other pictures we have of God - Lawgiver, Sanctifier, Creator, etc. - His chief activity comes to ultimate fulfillment in crucifixion and resurrection. Martin Kähler was right in stating that the Gospels were only passion narratives with introductions. Here is the message of the entire New Testament, Gospels as well as Epistles, and the center, purpose and goal of all preaching. This is stated in extreme terms, because our words can never do justice to the theme of crucifixion and resurrection.

I would just like to close with this note that just as crucifixion and resurrection are the center of the New Testament so it is necessary that crucifixion and resurrection be reflected as the center in the life of every Christian. "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Mt. 23:11-12). Crucifixion is not much of a possibility for Christians today, but through humiliation by becoming subservient to others the crucifixion of Christ is reflected in and through the church. Today the church bears the marks of crucifixion through humiliation in the firm hope that God will exalt us "in, with, and under" and also through and because of Christ's resurrection.

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