

Alive Again: The Beauty of Resurrection

INTRO

Yesterday, I was feeling a bit of stress about my schedule piling up over the next couple of weeks. I know—it's Easter, Jesus is alive, I'm forgiven, and I'm going to heaven—and I'm feeling stressed!

My wife, full of wisdom, encouraged me with a smile on her face, "Why don't you get those bikes out and take your son on a bike ride?"

- So I did. As I did, I felt some anxieties melt away from me. I began to pray as I rode. Everywhere I looked, I saw signs of new life beginning... brown things turning green, branches bearing color, and the warmth of the sun causing life to spring forth.
- We arrived back home, and life started again, but I was happy...

I believe that there are times in this life when God allows us to have what I call "glimpses of beauty" or "foreshadowings of heaven." These are moments when God gives us a glimmer and a glimpse of what he created us for.

- God reminded me in that short bike ride that there is an eternity coming, one of resurrection and new life. It will last forever. It will be full of untainted beauty. Sin and death will be distant memories of the past, forever erased.

This is how Easter meets us. The reality of the resurrection of the King and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, was, for the first follower of Jesus, a glimpse of eternity. It was a shining ray of hope amid a dark, chaotic, broken world that declared, ***"Don't fret! Death will not have the final word! Sin will not have a forever hold! There is the assurance of victory and hope both in this life and the one to come!"***

APPLICATION

The theme of our Easter sermon this morning, *Alive Again*, reminds us that in the midst of a very real physical life, full of confusion, ups and downs, unexpected tragedy, pain, and travail, there is a beacon of hope that nothing can extinguish. When we catch a glimpse of the risen Jesus, we have the opportunity to be alive again, that is, truly alive!

Are you truly alive? This question might prompt you to ponder, "Is there more than one way to be alive?"

Sure, my heart is beating; blood courses through my veins, delivering life-giving oxygen and nutrients to my regenerating cells. My brain's neural pathways are active, thoughts race, and I am aware of the physical world around me. By these measures, yes, I am alive. But, is there another dimension to being alive?

Jesus once made a profound and thought-provoking statement: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." He directed these words at people who were already physically alive. Throughout His ministry, Jesus introduced the concept of another form of life. He spoke of being "born again," suggesting an existence that transcends our current experience—a life not just for the here and now but extending into eternity. For He also declared, "Whoever believes in me, though he may die (physically), yet shall he live."

So, yes, you may be breathing, moving, and functioning today. But are you **TRULY** alive? Are you alive in a way that connects you to the spiritual reality of God? Are you awakened to the greater purpose of your existence, and filled with a steadfast, unwavering hope that when your physical life concludes, your eternal life is assured?

Throughout history, humanity has wrestled with the profound question: "Is life merely a series of random synaptic functions that culminate in oblivion?" In our quest for understanding, we've devised countless philosophies and lifestyles attempting to provide an answer. Some advocate for a hedonistic approach, urging us to "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Others propose adherence to an existential moral code, suggesting that through this, we might find reincarnation in another form of life. And there are those who argue that questions of life, death, spirituality, and eternity are beyond our comprehension.

APPLICATION

The resurrection of Jesus provides humanity with something tangible, and historical, something that took place in our world in a physical sense in a way that could be verified and trusted to give us hope. As John put it:

[1Jo 1:1 NKJV] [1] That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life--

APPLICATION

I began to think of all the first followers of Jesus and how Saturday must have been for them. On Thursday, they were on top of the world; on Saturday, their Messiah was dead; they were trapped in fear of the Romans; their hopes and dreams were shattered; they probably felt as though they wasted three years of their lives and the future held nothing positive to look forward to.

Yet, on Sunday, their worlds were rocked, and the courses of their lives were changed forever! And the resurrection of Jesus is still rocking boats, changing lives, and redirecting futures!

While this is not an all-inclusive list, I want to look at how the resurrection impacted the first followers of Jesus in a way that made them "Alive Again" by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

1 The resurrection meets us in our sadness

APPLICATION

The first witnesses to the risen Jesus were Mary Magdelene along with several other women who went to attend to the body of Jesus. When Jesus died, it was nearly sundown, leading into a sabbath. They didn't have the time to appropriately prepare the body for burial, so they went after the sabbath had concluded to place preserving spices on the body. To their shock and dismay, the body was gone.

On a side note, one of the ways we can verify the historicity of the gospel accounts is their honesty, regardless of the cultural norms. God chose women as the first witnesses to the resurrection. Seems insignificant to us, but to the ancient culture, women could not testify in a trial because their opinions were considered tainted and invalid. While secular scholars today wouldn't dare to do this, ancient secular philosophers who were enemies of Christianity sought to discredit Christianity with these arguments.

- **As we move down the timeline, the 2nd-century philosopher, Celsus, attacked the claims of the resurrection. His strongest argument? We can't trust the eyewitness accounts because it all started when Jesus appeared to women. The testimony of a woman was highly disregarded in that time and culture. The fact that women had the first eyewitness testimony must mean that we can't trust it! Apparently, God was way ahead of the curve!**

In the midst of the events of the morning, Mary Magdelene finds herself at one point alone in the garden of Jesus' tomb.

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Jhn 20:11-18 NKJV] [11] But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. [12] And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. [13] Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." [14] Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. [15] Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." [16] Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). [17] Jesus

said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.' " [18] Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.

APPLICATION

Mary from Magdala was a woman who, before knowing Jesus, only knew torment. Seven demons had wreaked havoc in her life before Jesus came and delivered her. From that point on, you always saw her faithfully by Jesus' side. Even at the cross, Mary was loyal to the end, there at Jesus' feet even when many of His disciples fled.

She was the first at the tomb to honor Jesus, even in his death. Upon seeing the stone rolled away and the body of Jesus missing, her heart was broken. She couldn't even pay last respects to the one who brought so much peace and freedom into her life. Perhaps someone moved him? Perhaps someone stole his body. The angels who moved the stone question Mary's weeping. They knew who was standing behind her, fully alive, but she didn't.

Verse 14 tells us that Mary's initial exposure to Jesus was veiled; she wasn't aware of the presence of the risen Jesus, though he was right in front of her.

- This actually seems to be a pattern that Jesus followed. He initially hid his identity from some who saw him.
- The two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus were also distraught and mourning the loss of Jesus. When Jesus comes alongside them on the road, he hides his identity from them. He spoke to them, and His words caused their hearts to ignite with passion and life. It wasn't until the end of their encounter that Christ opened their eyes and disappeared from their site.
- He did the same to Mary. Initially, Mary thought this was simply someone tending the garden. She brought her questions, sorrow, and confusion to this man, not knowing who he was.
- In verse 16, the call of her name opened her eyes to the reality of the risen Jesus in her midst! Perhaps Jesus said, "Mary," in the same voice and tone that he used when he first called her name.
- Undoubtedly, the moment that she saw Jesus, her faith was sparked, and her tears of sorrow turned into tears of joy!

APPLICATION

I think many times, sorrow and mourning in life can give us the impression that Jesus isn't anywhere near us when, in fact, His presence is always there, but perhaps we just can't quite perceive it.

- But the resurrected Jesus still meets us in our mourning. Often, His voice awakens us to the fact that He is alive and active in our lives. When we read His word and the Holy Spirit opens our understanding, He reminds us that at the end of our sorrow is a living Savior who has conquered the world.

[Jhn 16:33 NKJV] [33] "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

[Mat 5:4 NKJV] [4] Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

APPLICATION

I do not doubt that Mary had many more sorrows along the path of her life before she died, but I guarantee that after that moment, every sorrow was viewed through a lens of hope. In every trial and pain and difficulty, she remembered the sound of that voice... "Mary."

Do you know the hope of the resurrected Savior and comforter through your sorrows? Who doesn't have sorrows in this life? Who is free from the pain of loss?

2 The resurrection meets us in our fear

APPLICATION

From the moment that Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane all the way to Sunday morning, one of the best words that could describe the state of the disciples was fear.

- In the garden, they fled from Jesus.
- At Jesus' trial at Caiaphas' house, Peter "followed at a distance" and denied Jesus three times out of fear.
- on Saturday and Sunday the disciples were locked in a room! [*Jhn 20:19 NKJV*] 19

8:55



The mighty disciples who claimed they had the courage to follow Jesus to the cross, who cast our demons, healed the sick, and raised the dead, were now victims to their natural human fears.

BIBLE PASSAGE

[*Jhn 20:19-22 NKJV*] [19] Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." [20] When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. [21] So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." [22] And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

APPLICATION

The risen Jesus meets his fearful followers. Notice what he does to turn their fear into the courage that would change the world and cause them all to follow Jesus faithfully to their deaths.

1. **He stood in their midst**- the knowledge of the very presence of Jesus can drive away every human fear.

1. [Jos 1:9 NKJV] [9] "**Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.**"

2. **He spoke His peace over them** - The Shalom of God, the peace that surpasses all understanding! Only the risen Jesus can take a fearful human heart and bring unspeakable, supernatural peace in the middle of a real life circumstance.

1. [Jhn 14:27 NKJV] [27] "**Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.**"

3. **He gave them evidence** - Many think that faith in Christ is blind faith, but it's actually faith based on empirical evidence. Yes, one must choose to believe that the miraculous is possible, but Jesus allowed them to see that He was no imitation. The same Jesus that was removed dead from a Roman cross was now physically alive in their presence. I'll talk more about that evidence in my next point.

4. **He gave them purpose** - Jesus passed on His mission to His followers. They now have a future and a hope. They have something to live for that will outlive them. But how would they do this? 11 ordinary men without power or resources?

5. **He imparts His Spirit** - Jesus breathed on them. The same breath that breathed life into the first man in the garden of Eden, breathed new life into the reborn disciples. That breath would turn into a mighty wind on Pentecost when all the disciples would be engulfed with the Holy Spirit's power to become witnesses of Christ's resurrection to all the world.

APPLICATION

Certainly, the disciples encountered fears again. As I mentioned, each one of them would eventually give their lives for the testimony of Christ, another powerful proof of the historical reality of the resurrection. But just as Mary's sorrows would always be met with the remembrance of Jesus' voice, so the disciple's fears would be met with the reality of Jesus' promise. The Holy Spirit would give them supernatural courage in the face of threats, persecution, and even death.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Hebrews 2:14-15 - 14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

QUOTE

“ The meaning of life is that it ends, and for most, the end of life comes all too soon.

Franz Kafka, 20th century Jewish novelist

3 The resurrection meets us in our doubting

APPLICATION

Another thing I love about the honesty of the Bible is that it reveals that all of the initial reactions to the resurrection news of Jesus were doubt and unbelief!

- Mark 16 tells us that the disciples "did not believe" the words of Mary.
- Luke 24 tells us that the women's words "seemed to them as idle tails, and they did not believe them."
- When the two disciples who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus told the other disciples what happened, Mark tells us, " They did not believe them either.
- We all know the story of Thomas! (By the way, Thomas was the first Missourian apostle because when the others told Him of meeting Jesus, his first response was, "Show me.")

- John 20 tells us what happened when Jesus finally appeared with Thomas present:
- **[27] Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." [28] And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" [29] Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

APPLICATION

If you have, at some point, found yourself questioning the validity of the resurrection of Jesus and the possibility of such a miraculous event being real, you're actually in good company with the very first Christians. The men who followed Jesus day after day for three years initially heard the report of His resurrection, and their first thought was, **"crazy women telling crazy fairy tails to try and conjure up some false hope as a crutch for their grief."**

- It's worth pointing out that we have a ton of church history and written accounts from within the first 100-200 years of the church that verify the fact that when Jesus died, there were 11 men hiding in a room, afraid for their lives that turned into 11 men who boldly and fearlessly gave their lives to spread the message of a resurrected Jesus whom they encountered first hand.
- Ignatius of Antioch, a 1st century Christian and disciple of John the Apostle wrote in one of his letters, **"For I know that after His resurrection also He was still possessed of flesh, and I believe that He is so now. When, for instance, He came to those who were with Peter, He said to them, 'Lay hold, handle Me, and see that I am not an incorporeal spirit.' And immediately they touched Him, and believed, being convinced both by His flesh and spirit. For this cause also they despised death, and were found its conquerors. And after his resurrection He did eat and drink with them, as being possessed of flesh, although spiritually He was united to the Father."**

When commanded by the religious leader of the day to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, the early apostles replied:

Acts 4:19-20 - But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

APPLICATION

The resurrection of Christ is not some mystical fantasy invented and believed by a bunch of weak-minded individuals who are easily deceived. It was a reality that was "seen and heard" by the first followers of Christ. Their testimony has proven trustworthy for 2000 years. Those of us who have trusted in this Risen Savior and king have experienced firsthand the work of this living God in our lives, and that evidence also cannot be dismissed.

Perhaps the greater deception is the deception by a spiritual enemy who desires all to perish and none to come to the knowledge of the truth. Perhaps he has utilized human pride, arrogance, and the human desire to be their own king, savior, and God to blind this world to the reality of a living God to whom they will give an account.

ILLUSTRATION

I read an article from an honest atheist entitled, "I'm an Atheist, so why can't I shake God?" In it she states:

"The idea of God pesters me and makes me think that maybe I'm not as devoted to my beliefs as I'd like to think I am and would like to be."

Later she concludes:

"I'm not sure what to do about God. If I could figure out a way to banish this figure from my psyche, I would."

APPLICATION

Or perhaps there's a God! Instead of trying to banish Him from your thoughts, try responding to Him. Lay down your pride, lay down your sin, lay down your need to be God,

and submit to the true God.

4 The resurrection meets us in our failure

APPLICATION

I'm sorry to be the one who broke it for you. Human beings are failures.

- No, not failures at everything, but failures at the most important thing. We have failed when it comes to the righteousness, goodness, and faithfulness required to be worthy of eternal life.
- I'm often struck by Peter's failures before Christ's death and his calling after Christ's resurrection. The last look Peter had with Jesus was right after he had denied him three times. His last memory was weeping bitterly over his failure.
- Yet it was that same Peter to whom Jesus three times gave the commission to "feed my sheep and feed my lambs" in John 21. Peter went from pre-crucifixion failure to ***post-resurrection leader!***

APPLICATION

At the cross, Jesus took Peter's sin upon himself and became the propitiation for Peter (that is, he absorbed the rightful wrath of God toward sin that belonged to us). At His resurrection, he declared that he would forever live to make intercession for Peter and that His once and for-all sacrifice for sin would be enough to ensure Peter's future, both on earth and in heaven.

And by the way, He did that for you and I as well.

We are all failures when it comes to us and God. He is perfect; we are flawed.

- All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
- We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us to our own way.

- While we were sinners Christ died for us.
- For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

It is only Jesus who was good. It is only Jesus who was righteous enough. It is only Jesus who was a sufficient sacrifice for our failure, sin, and rebellion against God. It is only Jesus who gave His blood. It is only Jesus who conquered the grave and ascended to the highest place of power and authority. It is only Jesus who offers forgiveness and eternal life. It's only Jesus who is coming back again!

APPLICATION

if you haven't noticed, things are not fine on this planet with humanity.

- Beneath the facade of our scientific discoveries, technological advances, beautiful architecture, and calls for peace and harmony, it doesn't take much digging under the surface to find out **that beneath the exterior beauty is pain, death, sorrow, sickness, depression, hate, and all types of human ugliness.**
 - Suicide rates among our next generations are at an all-time high
 - Drug addiction and its ensuing damaging effects are ravishing families
 - People all over this world are being oppressed, abused, and manipulated by their governments, who pervert justice and truth.
 - The underbelly of sex and slave trafficking is so sickening it can't be discussed in a public forum.
 - And no, it's not getting better as people become more enlightened. Human nature has not changed since they decided to rebel against God in the Garden of Eden.
 - Is this the world you want? Is this the life you want to be chained to and bound by?

You don't have to be. If you are a great sinner, Christ is a great savior. His resurrection means you have an advocate with God the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is willing to stand in your place and redeem your failure for your good and the glory of God!

QUOTE

“Jesus has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so.”

CS Lewis

CONCLUSION

From these four examples, the resurrection reminds us of four things:

QUOTE

“The resurrection reminds us that there is no sorrow greater than Christ's presence.

QUOTE

“The resurrection reminds us that there is no fear greater than Christ's power.

QUOTE

“The resurrection reminds us that there is no question greater than Christ's truth.

QUOTE

“ *The resurrection reminds us that there is no failure greater than Christ's forgiveness.* ”
