

The long nights after Jesus' burial ended on Sunday morning. The night before, after the sighting of two stars the Sabbath was over. Before darkness set in, the women disciples had gone out to buy spices to anoint the body of Jesus and agreed to meet at dawn at the tomb. Apparently, they don't know the tomb was sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers (Luke 24:1,2ⁱ). Before they arrived that morning, Jesus had risen. His physical body had returned to life but not the same kind of life it operated in before, for this new life did not require blood (Luke 24:39ⁱⁱ). His physical body was alive by the Spirit of God. He had become the firstfruits all who would die in the Lord and are resurrected with an eternal body (1Corinthians 15:20ⁱⁱⁱ).

An angel rolled away the stone, not to let Jesus out, but to let the disciples see into the empty tomb. The Roman soldiers trained in warfare to hold a square meter of ground against any onslaught... fainted at the sight. When they came to, they ran for their lives. The women approached the tomb ⁵ *But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you."* ⁸ *So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ and behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."* Matthew 28:5-10 (ESV)

After that, Jesus appeared to two on the road to Emmaus. They had last seen Him lifeless on the cross. For some reason they did not recognize Him. Jesus explained from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to die for the sins of the world. When Jesus sat down with them for a meal and gave thanks for the bread and handed it to them, they realized who He was. Suddenly, He vanished. They ran back to tell the other disciples (Luke 24:25-33^{iv}).

After that, Jesus appeared to Peter and twice to the disciples in Jerusalem. He ate in their presence and showed them the scars of the crucifixion (Luke 24:36-43^v). Then He ask them to meet Him in Galilee. They did meet Him on the shore of the lake, and later five hundred saw Him at the same time. Forty days after the resurrection He ascended to heaven near Bethany on the Mount of Olives, after giving them the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19,20^{vi}) and telling them to wait in Jerusalem to receive the power to be a witness (Acts 1:8,9^{vii}).

⁵⁰ *Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.* Luke 24:50-53 What a contrast to those two nights after the crucifixion wondering how it was possible for their rabbi who had done such miracles to then die such an ignoble death! They then knew that Jesus had indeed risen, for death could not hold Him (Acts 2:24^{viii}). And this is the crux of our faith.

What if only Mary and Peter had seen him? They were two of the closest, and we would probably say they were hallucinating or making up the story. Perhaps of the twelve

in a candle lit room we might even try to explain as a mass hallucination, but to be seen over a period of forty days to as many as five hundred people at once is unexplainable. If they were not convinced that they had seen Jesus alive, there is no way they would have lived the sacrificial lives they did or had the courage to die the deaths they suffered.^{ix} **Our hope, our courage, and our faith are based on the fact that Jesus did rise from death.** And the way we live is affected in proportion to our conviction of that resurrection.

For two thousand years man has tried to figure out some reason to argue away the reality of that resurrection. Why? Because if Jesus rose from the dead, then He is the author of life, the victor over death, the Lord of lords and King of kings, and we owe our lives and allegiance to Him. The only real hope for eternity is in this One who conquered death.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul puts it in what may be the earliest written account of the resurrection, which he wrote about twenty years after Jesus died when eyewitnesses were still living to confirm or deny it. Paul said it is the message he received. He spoke with the apostles the same decade in which Jesus was crucified so this was most likely the Apostles' teaching from the very beginning of the church just fifty days after Jesus rose. 1 Corinthians 15:1-17 *¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

This was the assignment of the Apostles, to testify that they were witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 1:22^x). Why? Because it is the basis of our faith. As Timothy Keller put it, **"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said?"**^{xi} God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins and verified His acceptance of Him as the perfect sacrifice by raising Him from the dead. If He didn't rise from the dead, why in the world did all the Apostles devote their lives to it? Every one of those men was ready to die for the truth

their eyes had witnessed. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, we have no hope of eternal life.

If there is no God, or if there is a god that does not deal with evil, where does that leave us? What would life be if evil and all its destructive effects were to continue forever? Our society is finding out what it is like to increasingly reject Jesus as the answer to evil. Our nation is headed down the path Rome took which eventually destroyed it. If there is a God and He is good, then sin had to be dealt with. The resurrection of Jesus says it was once and for all for all who believe (Hebrews 9:12^{xii}). The full manifestation of that is yet to come, but the promise is sure. And the Word tells us there will be a final reckoning for those who insist on rejecting God's provision for our sins (Revelation 20:11,12^{xiii})

The Word also tells us that what God has started in us will one day be complete (Philippians 1:6^{xiv}). We will be his spotless, radiant bride (Ephesians 5:27^{xv}). That is why we can look forward to heaven. There will be no sin there, not in me or in you. Right now, those who are in Christ Jesus have begun to walk in the resurrected life of Jesus. Colossians 2:12-13 *¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,*

That new life you experience in Him goes on through eternity. We experience it more and more when we walk in the Spirit. We have more of His peace in every situation as we learn to trust Him and His plan for our lives (John 14:27^{xvi}). The work in us will come to completion on the Day of Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:8-13 *⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.* The phrase, "will also live", which is resurrected life, is in future tense, but we are free to choose moment by moment to live in it now!

This next passage is not future tense but present tense. Ephesians 2:4-7 *⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* That resurrected life will be complete when we see Him, but we are free to live in it now. We should count ourselves alive to God and walk in resurrected life.

I like to look to nature for lessons as God made it to give us pictures of spiritual truth and Jesus often pointed to it for illustrations (Romans 1:20^{xvii}). Parables are not perfect pictures in every detail but illustrations to help us grasp spiritual reality.

Consider an egg, immobile, but life is inside. The egg can never fly. If it did the results would be catastrophic. It merely houses a potential birth. When the time comes the eaglet breaks out of the bondage of the shell. It has the potential now for flight, but it must mature. All that it needs for flight is there but there must be the development of its muscles and growth. One day it will soar and even do aerial acrobatics.

In a similar way we were once without hope, bound by our sinful nature. There is no way we could imagine life outside the shell. But God made us alive in Christ Jesus through His resurrection. ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* 1 Peter 1:3

Now, outside the old shell, we realize there is so much more. We can see there is so much more than the walls of the egg that represent this present world. Most of our sight is fixed on the comfort of the nest. We experience new life. The heavenly Father feeds us the Word. After a while we begin to wonder if we can fly. We start by flapping our wings. We feel the air rush through them. Then we see beyond the nest into the realm our Father flies. We start to realize we were meant to fly. We count ourselves able to fly. And today we stretch out wings and hop up in the nest and fly a few inches. (Play video here) You've been there in prayer or in worship or when witnessing to someone. You felt the wind of the Spirit lift your wings. But resurrection has shown us that one day we will soar. Isaiah asked, ⁸ *Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows?* Isaiah 60:8

A psalmist was experiencing mounting opposition and plots on his life when he wrote, *"Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest."* Psalm 55:6 We have those wings and we fly into the bosom of Jesus in prayer and cast our burdens on Him and are at rest (1 Peter 5:7^{xviii}). It is not by our own ability, but as we are raised by our heavenly Father and trained, we learn to operate in His strength and to soar in Him. We take little jaunts right now, but I think our hops in the nest are incomparable to how we will one-day soar. A commercial tells us that Red Bull gives us wings. HA! Jesus gives us wings! Caffeine is a pretty sad substitute for the Spirit, the resurrected power that is ours in Jesus.

Resurrection means everything to us. It is a cornerstone of our faith. It is the only hope for mankind. Listen to how Isaiah prophesied concerning the perfect faithfulness of God: ⁶ *On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.* ⁷ *And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.* ⁸ *He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.* Isaiah 25:6-8

Resurrection means that the shroud of the finality of death and impending judgement no longer hangs heavy over us who believe. The tears of disgrace for how we failed to respond to the love of God will be wiped away, forgiven and forgotten as Jesus has given us His righteousness in exchange for our rebellion (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xix}). That is the best result of Jesus' resurrection. It is available for all who come to Him for life.

The next chapter of Isaiah tells us ¹⁹ *Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and*

the earth will give birth to the dead. Isaiah 26:19 If you are in Christ, you too will have a transformed body like that of Jesus, eternal, Spirit empowered, able to eat, touchable, recognizable, but so much more (Philippians 3:21^{xx}). Christ is the firstfruits, the beginning of a great harvest, the promise that those who are in Him will follow. Even physical death of these bodies is no longer of concern to us, just as it was of little concern to the apostles. They witnessed the firstfruits and knew they would follow.

In the words of Jaroslav Pelikan: “If Christ is risen—then nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen—then nothing else matters.”^{xxi} I hope that by the grace of God that is seared into our consciousness and touches everything we do and say. If you don’t think the resurrection is a fact, that this great teacher or his disciples somehow pulled off the greatest hoax in history, then you should be an all-out hedonist. Why not, if tomorrow you die (1 Corinthians 15:32^{xxii})? But if you know in your heart it is real, then why wouldn’t you live all-out for Jesus who loves you and gave Himself for you?

There is a lie of Satan I want to expose. We sometimes hesitate to commit because we think a life in Jesus would be boring, as boring as playing harps on a cloud forever. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are so many legitimate pleasures that we enjoy even more when they are enjoyed within God’s boundaries. God richly provides us everything to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17^{xxiii}). Life in Jesus is anything but boring. It is true that you don’t get to be your own boss, but how is that working out for you so far? Jesus is a much better master over our lives than we ever could be. He has experiences for you that will make your spirit soar! And that is just the beginning, for eternity beckons with joys we cannot presently begin to fathom (Psalm 16:11^{xxiv}). He wants us to soar with Him now and forever (Isaiah 40:31^{xxv}).

Let the FACT of the resurrection of Jesus affect the way you see life every day. Exercise those wings in prayer, worship, Bible reading, and obedience to the Holy Spirit. Recognize that if you have died with Him, then you have been raised with Him. You can soar. You will soar. You are a new creation that lives in resurrection power (Philippians 3:10,11^{xxvi}). The way we live is radically different from the world in the proportion to which we are convinced of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Questions

- 1 Review the events of the first Easter morning.
- 2 To whom did Jesus appear?
- 3 How do we know He rose from death?
- 4 How did that give courage to the Apostles?
- 5 What must we conclude if Jesus rose from death?
- 6 What if sin were never dealt with?
- 7 When do we experience resurrected life?
- 8 How is natural life like an egg?
- 9 What does it mean to see beyond the shell? Beyond the nest?
- 10 Have you felt the wind in your wings? Do you long to soar?

Homework: Look up the cross-references and see how they go with the text.

ⁱ **Luke 24:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

ⁱⁱ **Luke 24:39 (ESV)**

³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

ⁱⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 15:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

^{iv} **Luke 24:25-33 (ESV)**

²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. ²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together,

^v **Luke 24:36-43 (ESV)**

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

^{vi} **Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

^{vii} **Acts 1:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

^{viii} **Acts 2:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

^{ix} Chuck Colson said the consistency of the testimony of the twelve unto death helped to convince him. There were twelve powerful men indicted over Watergate and their testimony fell apart in a matter of days.

^x **Acts 1:22 (ESV)**

²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."

^{xi} Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, New York: Dutton 2008, p. 203

^{xii} **Hebrews 9:12 (ESV)**

¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

^{xiii} **Revelation 20:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

^{xiv} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{xv} **Ephesians 5:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

^{xvi} **John 14:27 (ESV)**

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 hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

^{xvii} **Romans 1:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

^{xviii} **1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

^{xix} **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{xx} **Philippians 3:21 (ESV)**

²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

^{xxi} Quoted by Kent Hughes in Preaching the Word – 1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross.

^{xxii} **1 Corinthians 15:32 (ESV)**

³² What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

^{xxiii} **1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

^{xxiv} **Psalms 16:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

^{xxv} **Isaiah 40:31 (ESV)**

³¹ but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

^{xxvi} **Philippians 3:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.