

MEDITATIONS FOR MEN

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EL MONTECITO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH ABOUT RESURRECTION

by Dr. Harold Bussell

*Does any educated person today believe that Jesus Christ died
and three days later physically rose from the grave?*

—The first Christians believed it—

The earliest creed of the church was simple: "Christ is risen." Today the entire impact of historic Christianity continues to stand or fall with this truth. The Bible insists that the resurrection was an historical event, not a psychological wish-projection. The "good news" that turned the first century upside down was not "love your neighbor" or "God is love." Every morally sane person or religion taught one or both of these truths. Every sermon preached in the New Testament centers on the resurrection. The message was that a resurrected human body had been raised in to the Godhead. Not everyone believes this, of course, and **many people have proposed alternative theories:**

—Some say the disciples stole the body and hid it—

But why should the followers of Jesus believe His words—and later die as martyrs for their beliefs—if they had nothing to gain? Christ had predicted His resurrection, so if He did not rise from the dead He would have been a lunatic or not a great moral teacher worthy of dying for. If the disciples knew Christ was dead, wouldn't they have produced the body to save their own necks? Why should they lie, when central to their own philosophy was the belief that lying would bring God's judgment? Imagine these simple followers conspiring to say Christ had risen and then deceiving both the political and religious powers of Rome and Jerusalem. They weren't even lawyers. Nothing proves sincerity like martyrdom.

Also, why would their accounts record women being ordained by God to teach the disciples this truth? The first people to see the resurrected Christ were women. In that day, by law, the testimony of women was not to be accepted.

—The political or religious leaders removed the body—

But since both government and religious institutions had a vested interest in stopping the spread of the Christian message, why didn't they provide a corpse to prove their point and stop this movement?

—Jesus was in a comatose state and, when revived,
convinced His followers that He had power over suffering and death—

But it would be quite a miracle for someone who had been beaten, bruised, and nailed to a cross to then roll away a massive stone in front of the tomb where He was laid and get past guards who knew they would be executed if they let Him escape. (Continued)

Some scholars believe that these accounts were written two generations later, and that they were based on a myth about Jesus and contained numerous inaccuracies. That whole approach was undercut when a Swedish university dated the oldest manuscript of the Gospel at A.D. 70, at a time when many of the earliest Christian would still have been alive.

Just three ways to view death . . .

1. The secularists and naturalists say it is normal and what you are is all you get in this life.
2. Some mystics say you are recycled, that your soul keeps returning, until you are absorbed into the morass of impersonal energy.
3. Some see death as abnormal and a problem which God has done something about.

Modern culture has tried hard to be secular and rid itself of a belief in the afterlife. There is a new American fad that comes from ancient Egypt: so far 140 persons have put money down with a Utah-based company to have themselves mummified when they die. The owner of the company says that his clients don't want to be "covered over with dirt and forgotten."

The Cryonics Society of New York says, "Never say die." At your final breath they will freeze you until science discovers a cure for your condition. However, they offer no guarantee against freezer burn.

Apparently, Americans still experience longings for eternity. One of the hottest topics in health circles is longevity. The *Longevity Factor*, a *New York Times* best seller, gives advice on how to live longer. Another, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, informs us that our bodies are simply creations of our minds—that we can live longer by consciousness.

What are we striving for on the stretch racks of modern exercise machines, in high fiber diets, and compulsive running? We are probably dying in better health than any other generation in history. But the death rate still remains at 100 percent. And some skeptics call the teaching on the resurrection an escape!

Some clergy are embarrassed by the event and call it a metaphor—a symbol of new life. On the positive side, they are saying that if God really cared about your major crisis—death—this is what God would do, since metaphors point to a greater truth. However grief and death are not metaphors, nor are tombstones papier-mâché.

On the negative side, they are saying God really doesn't care about your greatest crisis—death. God simply sends down faxed statements about love and sentimental metaphors about recurring spring. God has come to find us in our death. Our tombstones will not be our finish-line . . . Christ is Risen!

To obtain a free copy of this article by Dr. Harold Bussell, contact El Montecito Presbyterian Church, 1455 East Valley Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93108; (805) 969-5041. E-mail: www.elmopres.org

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—BECAUSE HE LIVES—

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow;
Because He lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living just because He lives!

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GLORIOUS MORNING!

by Jack Hayford

"He is not here. He is Risen!"

Luke 24:4

"It's Resurrection Morning, and it is glorious!"

What else can you say about Easter? There's no way to tinsel it. Gifts aren't necessary. Lights strung on the garage can't illuminate it. And listen . . . firecrackers are pip-squeaks compared to the earthquake roar of a stone rolling back from the tomb. There's nothing louder than life! Nothing more glorious than resurrection.

"Celebration" is a diluted, overused word and I'm weary of it. But what else can you say about Easter? The word was made for the day. The act fits the occasion like a diamond fits an engagement ring. **SO CELEBRATE!** . . . Sing, shout, laugh, dance, praise . . . do cartwheels if you can, but most of all . . . lift your voice heavenward. Proclaim His majesty! JESUS CHRIST IS LORD . . . RISEN INDEED, AND HIGH ABOVE ALL! We can stand with our risen Lord in His triumph. What triumph is that, you ask?

HIS TRIUMPH OVER FEAR No shadow of fear can withstand the brilliance of the Son-rise. All other shadows of the flesh's limits must fade as well: doubt, pride, lust, hate, and bondage to self. Anyone who can handle death, as effectively as Jesus has, is more than adequate to conquer anything that assails me! As Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus effectively merges both spheres—God's infinite power and humanity's infinite need. Jesus is Lord over weak flesh—even yours and mine! Do we believe it? And He is Lord over failure—even ours!

HIS TRIUMPH OVER RELIGIOSITY Call it what you will: ceremonialism, deadbeat memories of "churchianity", plastic piety, stain-glass habit, supernaturalistic unrealism, wierdo-fanaticism. The unbounded reality of His life burns through all that like a summer sun piercing a thin mist. Anyone so almighty as to smash the gates of hell, and so humble as to invite weary, doubting men to breakfast with Him, is my kind of Savior. John 21 reminds me that He is demanding enough to expect my allegiance but patient enough to help me grow in full discipleship.

HIS TRIUMPH OVER TOMORROW Anyone who can descend into death, conquer hell and the devil, touch bases with earth and earthlings, then spring heavenward into the glorious rule at the right hand of All-Power-on-High deserves our vote of confidence about handling my future—and whatever it holds. They said of Christ at Pentecost that it was not possible that death could hold Him, nor can it restrain us who hold His hand.

Join me, friend, in trumpeting a celebration offered to every man and woman from every corner of our bruised and battered planet. Let's worship the risen One together. It's a joyous occupation that will engage us through the bright eons of eternity—with the redeemed of all ages and all heaven's angels. We might as well get a jump on it now. Amen! and Hallelujah!

Adapted from *Glorious Morning: An Invitation
to Resurrection Praise*, copyright 1996,
by Jack Hayford, Multnomah Books, Sisters, Oregon.

Editor: The articles in this issue center on the resurrection of Christ. When anyone invites Him into their hearts and lives, they discover the true meaning of Easter—and learn that His death and resurrection has won them freedom, forgiveness, and a "forever" personal connection with God. They become members of God's family—and enjoy His peace and promise of never-ending life with Him.

Dateline: Easter Sunday... New York City.

by David McCasland

It's 7:30 a.m. I'm the only customer at Jimmy's Diner in East Harlem when a man enters and approaches my table. He says, "Good morning, and God bless you," leaves a gospel tract, and quickly walks out. I smile, appreciating his witness and realizing that God has His people everywhere.

That night I attended church with our daughter, Debbie, joining an enthusiastic congregation of 300 people, most in their thirties. Their infectious love for Christ and others was a bright light in a city that is often considered spiritually dark.

In the first century, Paul visited the Greek city of Corinth, which was known for its immorality and corruption. When he faced opposition for presenting Jesus as Messiah, the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent: for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you: for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10).

No matter where we go, the Lord's people are there. **The risen Christ is powerfully present** in and through all who know Him. The Lord has His people where you are today. Look for them. Join them. *Christ is risen indeed!*

—David McCasland is a freelance writer who lives in Colorado.

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—A Resurrection Hymn Story—

This hymn was sung for the first time in a deserted iron foundry in London England. That foundry became the first Wesleyan chapel, known as the Foundry Meeting House. Today this hymn is regarded as one of the greatest hymns Charles Wesley ever wrote. Enjoy, below, three powerful stanzas of this triumphant hymn:

**Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!**

**Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once He died, our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where's thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!**

**Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!**

CHARLES WESLEY (1707-1788)

From *The Complete Book of Hymns*, copyright 2006 by William J. and Ardythe Petersen, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL

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