

# **THE GLORY OF EASTER**

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## **1. GOD'S DREAM FULFILLED Based on Matt. 28:1-10**

Few people have ever been more lost than Dr. Robert Dykes and his wife Margery. Both in their late 20's and parents of two young children, they were presumed dead when their small plane went down in the mountains of the Wyoming-Utah boarder. Hundreds of planes searched in vain for nearly a week, and there was no sign of them. The temperature had been below zero every night, and they had no supplies, and so it was presumed they would freeze and not be found until spring.

But young George Hunt who had just completed his first cross country flight as a student pilot prayed for them as he went to sleep. He asked God to get them back to their family. When he went to sleep he dreamed. He saw a red plane on a snow swept ridge, and two people waving for help. He woke up and reasoned that he had that dream because he had been praying for the couple. But when he went back to sleep he dreamed it again. The third time he could see clear details of an area he use to hunt in. It was Painter's Basin and Gilbert Peak.

The next morning he went to the airport and took a plane he was not authorized to take. He flew to the place he saw in his dream. There he saw the red plane and the Dykes waving at him just as in his dream. He waved back and headed to call the Civil Air Patrol. He got chewed out for taking the plane, but when others flew over the area and confirmed his find he

was forgiven. He joined the rescue party that spent the next 24 hours getting to the plane. There was much hugging and thanksgiving when they arrived.

The Dykes had all but given up. They had written notes as to who was to raise their children. All they had left was one candy bar. Mrs. Dykes said to young George, "When we saw your plane, it was the most wonderful thing. Our prayers were answered; a dream come true." They were brought back from certain death and given life with their family by means of a dream.

This salvation story is a mini example of what God did for all of us on Easter. We were all lost, and the whole human race was facing certain death, and not just physical death, but spiritual as well, which is separation from God. But God gave His Son a dream, and in that dream a vision of how mankind could be rescued and saved from that death which threatened to engulf them. The Bible tells us that Jesus was crucified before the foundation of the world. The plan of salvation was a dream of God even before He created man. He knew the consequences of making a free will creature, and He knew sin and death was inevitable. But it was worth it, for He had a plan of salvation that would be a dream come true.

In the Incarnation Jesus took flight from eternity into time to seek and save the lost. In the crucifixion he paid the penalty for their sin and took their judgment on Himself. In the resurrection Jesus fulfilled God's dream, for by this victory over man's last enemy, which is death, Jesus guaranteed that God would have a redeemed family for all eternity. Easter is the celebration of God's dream fulfilled.

When Jesus woke from the sleep of death,  
And in His new body took His new breath,  
The storm of darkness and doom He stilled;  
With hope His disciple's hearts He filled,  
And God's dream for man He fulfilled.

What Jesus did for God and man on that first Easter dawn is so awesome and so ultimate there is no way to adequately convey in words the wonder of it all. That is why we have cantatas and a world filled with beautiful Easter music. The Easter message not only has to be believed, it has to be felt, for the mind alone cannot grasp it all. When the Queen of Sheba saw the wisdom and wealth of Solomon she exclaimed, "Behold, the half was not told me." Jesus said of Himself, "A greater than Solomon is here." If words could not convey half the glory of Solomon, how much less can they convey the glory of our risen Lord?

Trying to illustrate the glory of the risen Christ by the use of words is like trying to illustrate the glory of the sun by means of a candle. That is why we see God doing some spectacular things that first Easter dawn, and adding special effects to the event. The violent earthquake, the angel rolling the stone back, and His appearance like lightning with clothes white as snow. No wonder the guards were so afraid that they shook and became like dead men. They were paralyzed with fear.

That first Easter had a real impact on those guards, for it was not just a message they were hearing. They were hearing the Son of God breaking down the very gates of hell and

releasing man from the bondage to death. They were witnessing a victory more amazing than any Rambo movie could ever portray. Nature and super nature combined to bear witness to this cataclysmic event that shook up all of history. As the physical sun rose that dawn and lit up the world, so the Son of God rose from the darkness of death's night and filled the world with the light of hope.

Back in February of 1993 the Flight Control Center near Moscow reported the successful development of a space reflector. This aluminum-covered dish was used by Cosmonauts to reflect light from the sun to the dark side of the earth. With a 25 foot disc in space they were able to produce a 2 mile circle of light on the earth. In other words, they were able to turn 2 miles of night into 2 miles of day by reflecting the sun. The dream of man is to use this technology to eliminate the night and be able to keep daytime all the time.

This is one of God's dreams too, and He intends to dwell with the redeemed in the eternal kingdom where Rev. 22:5 says there will be no more night. Rev. 21:23 says the New Jerusalem will not ever need the sun or moon to shine, for the glory of God will be its light, and the Lamb of God will be its lamp. Verse 25 says the gates never need to be shut for the night, for there will be no night there. What we need to see is that this dream of God had its fulfillment when Jesus came out of the darkness of the tomb like the sun bursting from the womb of night. Paul in II Tim. 1:10 tells us that Jesus, "...has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."

The simple message of the angel at the tomb was, "He is not here, He has risen." You will never find Jesus in the place of darkness, for He dwells in eternal light, and that is where all will dwell who trust in Jesus as their Savior. If you are looking for Jesus, you will not find Him in the darkness. If you go to the tomb the only message you will get is that He is not there. If you look for Jesus in the darkness of pessimism you will only get the word that He is not there. If you look for Jesus in the darkness of despair, you will only get the word that He is not there. If you look for Jesus in the darkness of your prejudice, again it will be that He is not there.

Where will you find Jesus? You will find Him in the light, and only in the light. He is in the light of love, joy, peace, and all the fruits of the Spirit. In the light of the awareness of God's presence in your everyday is where you will find Jesus. You will find Him in the light of prayer and in the light of hope. Dr. Heyes tells of living through the long night of a dark Artic winter. But the day finally came when he walked to a high point to watch the sun rise for the first time in many months. When he saw it he was moved to shout, "Heaven be praised! I have once more seen the sun! He goes on to describe the reaction of others: "Off went our caps with simultaneous impulse, and we hailed this long-lost wanderer of the heavens with loud demonstrations of joy."

Most of us have never been in darkness for so long that we cheered the rising of the sun. But we can imagine how precious it would be to see the light again after that long night. We can identify with the joy of those at the tomb who had suffered through the darkest weekend of their lives, but who now hear the good news that the Son of God has risen. Light has conquered darkness, and God's dream has been fulfilled. Had the angels said, instead of, "He is not here," but, "Welcome to the tomb of the world's greatest teacher. Come in and

observe the body of this great prophet." The women would have not been as shocked, but would have tearfully viewed the body and carried the message of sorrow back to the despairing disciples. The sun rising that morning could have done nothing to dispel the darkness in their hearts that would never go away.

There would be no lights of Christmas, for there would no celebration of the birth of one who died a loser. Good Friday would be bad Friday, and Easter would not exist at all. If Christ had not risen, but stayed in death's prison, His life's story would be a nightmare rather than a dream fulfilled. But we do put lights at Christmas, and we do sing and rejoice in the beauty of the cross on Good Friday. We do celebrate Easter as well because Jesus was not there in the darkness of the tomb. He was alive and filling the world with the light of the Gospel of God's dream fulfilled. Annie Johnson Flint wrote,

How vain is our faith if the Christ be not risen;  
How dark is the tomb if the Lord is still there!  
How heavy our burden of grief and transgression.  
How deep our despair!

Oh, justified faith is a finished salvation!  
Oh, sure resurrection that comforts our woes!  
Oh, glorious light in the valley of shadow,-  
Because Christ arose.

Number one on the list of the seven wonders of the ancient world was the Great Pyramid. It was the most stupendous mass of masonry ever put together by man. It was four hundred fifty feet high using blocks of stone weighing 2 and a half tons a piece, and there were 2,300,000 of them to pile on top of each other. Cheops, the Pharaoh who had it built, spent his life on this project using 100,000 men for 30 years to do the job. He lived for a place to be when he died.

Almost 3000 years later we see another tomb very famous, but very small by comparison. The tomb of Jesus was a mere hole in the hillside. It had one large stone rolled in from of the entrance. Jesus did not spend a dime on it, nor did He spend any labor on it. It was a gift. If you are only going to use something once, and for a very short time, it is wise to borrow or rent. That is what Jesus did with His tomb. It was no final resting place for Him. It was just a weekend getaway, and the result is that the stress of the New Testament is on the empty tomb and the open tomb. It played but a trivial and temporary role in the biography of our Lord. He was not a king who lived for a place to die. He was a king who lived for a place beyond the sky, and a place where He would take you and I, and all who love Him, to dwell in light forever.

But the fact remains that the Easter story begins at the tomb. It began in the silence and secrecy of the pre-dawn night. Jesus at an hour unknown to anyone but God came back into His body and rose from the dead. There is no record of the actual resurrection. This was a totally private event within the darkness of the sealed tomb. Alice Meynell in her poem Easter Night describes it.

**Public was death; but Power, but Might  
But Life again, but Victory  
Were hushed within the dead of night  
The shattered dark, the secrecy.  
And all alone, alone, alone,  
He rose again behind the stone.**

Jesus was alive and long gone before the stone was rolled away. The stone was not removed to let Him out, but to let men in to see that He was gone. Because Jesus came out of the tomb there is no escape from the tomb imagery in Easter. The Easter egg became so popular a symbol of Easter because it is like a tomb sealed out of which comes life. Easter eggs are still a popular custom, but seldom do we tell our children that they are also because they represent the tomb of Christ broken open for us to give new birth, life, and hope beyond the tomb.

The Easter rabbit falls into the same category. The rabbit lives in a hole in the ground like the tomb of Jesus, and out of it comes much life. A rabbit has 5 to 6 litters a year, and so if you have a few rabbits, you will soon have a lot of them. They are symbolic of life abundant out of a tomb like atmosphere. I haven't watched Bugs Bunny for years, but I see that my grandchildren do. Bugs is not consciously a symbol of Christ, but the fact is that he can be made to be such. He is pursued by those who seek to destroy him, but he always comes out on top with a victory over all the forces that seek to do him in. This is what Easter is all about. It is about victory over all the forces of darkness that sought to rid the world of Jesus once and for all. But instead, He came out on top with the victory. Isaac Watts wrote,

**Wrapt in the silence of the tomb  
The Great Redeemer lay,  
Till the revolving skies had brought  
The third, the appointed day.  
Hell and the grave combined their force  
To hold our Lord, in vain.  
Sudden thee Conqueror arose,  
And burst their feeble chain.**

The point is, even the secular symbols of Easter, like the egg and the rabbit, are valid symbols that can be given biblical color. But like most symbols they become detached from what they are to symbolize, and they become objects of focus in themselves. As parents and grandparents we need to tie in the secular symbols with Scripture, and use the power of secular customs to support the Christian faith.

Most every comedy or cartoon is about good and evil in conflict, and the evil forces seem to be so powerful with their giant firecrackers, cannons and bombs. But the good guy, no matter how fiercely attacked, is able to outwit the evil, and the clever schemes backfire so that the evil ones suffer the very judgments they want to inflict on the good. This is all Easter theology, but we do not see it, and so we fail to teach our children that the Easter Gospel can be seen in cartoons, and in rabbits and eggs. The first challenge of Easter is to see life as victorious over death. We are to see it in nature, in cartoons, in our culture, and in God's

**Word. The more we see it everywhere, the more we will have an Easter spirit all year round. And the more we will praise our Lord daily for making it possible for God's dream to be fulfilled. His dream for us will be fulfilled as well if we confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead. Believe this and see God's dream come true for you.**

## **2. THEN CAME THE MORNING Based on Matt. 28:1-10**

**Louis Evans told of the soldier who was wounded on the battlefield at night. He could not move or speak, but he could see the lanterns of the medics as they made their way from body to body. Finally a lantern was shining down on him, and after they examined his wounds one of them said, "I believe that if he makes it to sunrise, he will live." This gave the soldier a goal to reach, and a hope to cling to, so he lay there looking up into the stars longing for the dawn. "If I make it to sunrise I will live," he kept saying to himself, and so he filled his mind with thoughts of his wife and children, and all the reasons he had to live. Then came the morning and a feeling of victory, for he knew he would see his family again.**

**Hope is a powerful tool in helping people get through the night of their trials to the dawn of a new day, and a new life. Most of you have probably had some experience of waiting for the dawn. The one that stands out in my mind was in my first year of college. I friend of mine hit me in the front teeth on the basketball court. I developed an abscess that began to hurt terribly in the night. I lived in the dorm, and I can remember it being the longest night of my life. I roamed the hall and pleaded for the sun to rise. I was in such pain that I had no other goal in life but to see the sunrise and be able to get some help. Nothing is so comforting as the coming of the dawn when you are suffering in the night. Thank God for the morning that enables you to endure the night.**

**Easter is that morning of history than gives man the courage and the hope to endure any night, even the night of death when the light of life is snuffed out and darkness seems to have won the war. God has always been a morning person, and it fits all we know of God that he would raise his Son up from the grave on a Sunday Morning. It was the greatest single victorious event ever to happen on this planet, and it happened in the morning. You don't hear of Easter sunset services, but Easter sunrise services, for it was in the early morning that the Son of God rose to never set again.**

**That first Easter morning was the beginning of a day of Sonshine that would never end in the darkness of night, for Jesus turned on a light that all the powers of hell could never put out or even dim. Easter never ends, for on that morning of all mornings Jesus conquered death and darkness and brought life and immortality to light. There is just something about the morning that God loves. He dwells in perpetual light and he is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, yet He loves the dawning of the new day, and He made Easter morning the**

time of his total victory over the kingdom of darkness. Easter was just the fulfillment of what we see all through the Bible. God never slumbers or sleeps, but is ever alert to give songs in the night to his needy children. But from the very start of creation God has been most active in the morning. He does his best work in the morning. That is when he created the world.

I don't know if you have ever noticed before, but God's workday in creation always began in the morning. After each day he said there was evening and morning. For 6 days God began each morning with a whole new project. We know it was morning because God told Job it was. He asked Job in Job 38, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" And after a few more such questions he added, "While the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy. God started all his masterpieces in the morning. On the 7th morning God rested and did no work, and the 7th day became the Sabbath day of rest. It was still the sacred day of worship and rest when Jesus lay in the tomb. But Matthew now begins the last chapter of his Gospel with God going back to work on Sunday morning. The Sabbath was over and it was a dawning of a new week, and God decides it is time for a new morning creation that will begin a whole new history on this planet.

God could have raised his Son on the Sabbath, but he was starting fresh with a whole new plan of salvation. He was not going to dignify the Sabbath by the resurrection, and lock in the Sabbath forever. He came to destroy the legalism of the Sabbath and make a new day of worship. The Pharisees had no law against rising from the dead on the Sabbath, but it did involve a lot of forbidden work. The stone being rolled away, and the Messiah getting out of his grave clothes, and traveling more than a Sabbath's day journey. The whole thing would have been condemned had it been on the Sabbath. So God chose to wait until Sunday morning to start his new creation. It meant a mighty dull weekend in the tomb, but what a way to start a new week. God skipped a chance to make the Sabbath the most sacred day forever. Instead, he exalted the lowly Sunday to that status.

Sunday was just a commonplace secular day. It was not sacred time, but secular time. God took this day of common labor and made it the day that would be exalted above all others, even the Sabbath. Easter Sunday morning changed everything for God's people. It changed who they worshiped, and when they worshiped, and how they worshiped. Easter morning didn't just change our eternal destiny, it changed the whole design of our earthly life in relation to God. The one thing it didn't change, but only confirmed, is that God loves the morning. One of the reasons is, no doubt, because every morning is symbolic of Easter morning. Every night we sleep and are like the dead, but in the morning we rise to walk in newness of life. It is a fresh new day filled with the potential of tasting all the fruits of the Spirit-love, joy, peace, and all the rest. Jan Struther wrote,

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,  
Whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,  
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,  
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

I could spend an hour just quoting the Scripture on the importance of the morning and beginning your day with God, and hours more quoting all the poetry men and women have written on it. Let me share just a few:

**Ps. 5:3, "Morning by morning, O Lord you hear my voice: Morning by morning I lay my request before you and wait in expectation."**

**Ps. 30:5, "Weeping may remain for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."**

**Easter morning is the greatest example of this. The darkness night ever endured by God and man was on Good Friday. Jesus entered the darkness of hell, and the world was plunged into darkness, and all of the disciples were in a state of gloom as they wept over his fate and their own. Some of you may have heard Tony Compolo on TV. He was describing how a black preacher went on for an hour and a half describing the darkness of Good Friday, but then he would say, "But that was Friday-Sunday morning is coming and with it the rejoicing of the resurrection." It was after a dark and sorrowful world that the light of Easter began to shine. Easter morning guaranteed that all evil and sorrow is only temporary, and that good and joy are eternal. There is a great gettin-up morning coming when the night of darkness ends forever, and the only kind of songs we will ever sing again are songs of victory.**

**Easter morning is like that which the Psalmist waited for in Ps. 130:6. "My soul waits for the Lord more than watchman wait for the morning, more than watchman wait for the morning." He repeats that, for that is the hope of the watchman-the morning, and that is the hope of all Christians. If we wake on earth we wake everyday in a world where Lam. 3:23 says of God, "...His compassions never fail. They are new every morning." If we wake from the sleep of death in heaven, we enter an eternal morning. We wake in the presence of him who is the bright and morning star, and he promises he will give to over comers in Rev. 2:28, the morning star.**

**In eternity it is always morning, for we will be fresh and energetic and full of life with no weariness as time goes by. It will be a fresh start that never ends. It will be Easter morning forever. When Donald Cargill died a martyr he stood on the scaffold in Edinburgh, England and said to the crowd in a loud voice, "Now for the morning and the King's face. No more night and no more darkness." Easter morning provides us with the hope we need to face death with confidence, but it is not just pie in the sky on high by and by when we die that we need. We need pie on the table in the now, and Easter gives us this as well.**

**Jesus came back from the dead not just to tell his disciples that they would go to heaven when they die. He came back to encourage them in living, and to meet basic needs, and so He fed them breakfast on the beach. He gave them a purpose, and it was to reach the whole world with the good news of Easter, and to teach the world all he commanded. Easter is not just about victory over death, it is about victory over life. It is about conquering all obstacles that get in the way of achieving the purpose of Christ. The stone was rolled away, not for Jesus to come out of the tomb, but for others to see its emptiness. But there are no end to the stones that need to be rolled away to fulfill God's purpose for our lives.**

**God's mercies are new every morning because we can't live on yesterday's. We need new ones everyday to overcome the obstacles in a fallen world. Tom Dooley, the missionary doctor who died of an early case of cancer, told of lack of money, supplies, and tedious labor. He wrote, "Every time I get discouraged and down in the dumps someone comes along and rings the rusty bells of hope, and I have encouragement to get back at it." Easter is about a**



hope that enables you to cope with the frustration of a fallen world where nothing is just like it ought to be. If Jesus rose and conquered death, then it is obvious his goal is to conquer all the lesser consequences of sin as well. Death is the last enemy that will be destroyed. Meanwhile, there are many other enemies to be destroyed now as we move toward that final victory. Easter is about victory over all the forces of darkness. We need to grasp this lest we think that the final victory is the only one that matters.

Leonard Broughton was a pastor in Atlanta some years ago when the water in the poor section of town became infected and 4 people died. A city council meeting was held to talk about the problem, but it was tabled for further study. At that same meeting they approved 15,000 dollars for road improvement in front of an influential member's home. This so angered pastor Broughton that he invited the council members to attend a special service the next day. A few did, and he preached for 50 minutes on the fact that Christ was not only interested in saving souls, but also in good water. He even promised a reward for a cup of cold water given in his name. The council members there got the message, and at ten o'clock the next day money was appropriated to clean up the water. Broughton said later, "I baptized 75 people in the next few months, and almost everyone said that what got them interested in the church and in God was the fact that they were concerned about giving them water that was good to drink."

When Christians care, not just about what people are going to do after they die, but about what they are doing now as they live, they will get people to consider their readiness to die. If you don't care that they live right, they don't care if they die right. Easter is about life, and all of life, not just the after life. If it was just about the after life, Jesus would not have needed to come back and spend 40 days teaching and training his disciples. People don't just need hope for after death, they need hope for every morning, and Easter hope is an every morning hope.

Jesus is alive, and he is now as always a morning person. He always rose early in the morning to pray, and though he does not need to do that now in heaven, he still needs to grant us new mercies every morning. So every morning is special as a fresh new opportunity to serve the living Christ and be a channel of his love and light in a dark world. Easter morning makes every morning special, for every morning is a new chance to know and serve the Christ of Easter. Arthur Tubbs wrote,

A moment in the morning ere cares of the day begin,  
Ere the heart's wide door is open for the world to enter in,  
Ah, then, alone with Jesus, in the silence of the morn,  
In heavenly sweet communion, let your day be born.  
In the quietude that blesses with a prelude of repose,  
Let your soul be smoothed and softened, as the dew revives the  
rose.

It is a pretty poem, but the practice of it can make life beautiful. A young office worker wrote about her experience in an article entitled, "The Day That Changed A Life." Her attitude was so changed it changed the atmosphere where she worked. When her employer asked what made the difference she told him she was not enjoying life as she knew God

wanted her too. She was bored and just generally unhappy. She decided she would begin everyday with a determination to sense the presence of Christ in her life. She would consciously seek to say what He would want her to say, and do what He would want her to do. It became an exciting experiment that changed her, and as a result changed all around her. It was making Easter morning a way of life in which she encountered the living Lord, and not just a yearly few hours of celebration.

Easter morning never ends, as I said, but that is not necessarily true in our personal lives. For some it never begins, for they are without God and without hope in the world. But for most of us it is intermittent. It is off and on and off again, because we do not work at being conscious of the resurrected life. After Easter is over we sink back into a spiritual coma, and don't come out of our cocoon state again until the following Easter. I know that is a radical way of stating it, and it is not accurate for many Christians, but none of us are as alive to the Easter morning experience as we need to be. We could all benefit by praying every morning something like the prayer of Ella Scherick:

Lord, in the quiet of this morning hour,  
I come to Thee for peace, for wisdom, power  
To view the world today through love-filled eyes;  
Be patient, understanding, gentle, wise.  
To see beyond what seems to be, and know  
Thy children as Thou knowest them; and so  
Naught but the good in anyone behold.  
Make deaf my ears to slander that is told;  
Silence my tongue to ought that is unkind;  
Let only thoughts that bless dwell in my mind.  
Let me so kindly be, so full of cheer,  
That all I meet will feel Thy presence near.  
O clothe me in Thy beauty, this I pray,  
Let me reveal Thee, Lord, through all the day.

The best argument for the reality of the resurrection, and both temporal and eternal hope, is not the empty tomb. A negative fact, or an absence of something is not where the power is. It is in the presence of something positive, like the power and love of Christ in life. Charles Bradlaugh went about England debunking the Christian faith, and one day he challenged Hugh Price Hughes, a pastor at one of the missions, to a debate of the merits of the Christian faith. Hughes agreed and said "I will bring to the meeting one hundred people who will testify to the power of Christ in their lives. They will tell of sin forgiven and walking in paths of victory where they once sat in chains." He said to Bradlaugh, "You bring those who can testify to the new and better life they have because of their unbelief." Needless to say, the skeptic never showed up for the debate, for there is no argument that can match the reality of changed lives, and that is your most powerful weapon. If you have no light to shine because Christ has made a difference in your life, then you are not going to have much of a witness to a doubting world. We need to roll the stone away and let the Christ entombed in us rise and shine and bring morning into the night around us.

You are your own best argument, and that is why it is so vital that you begin your morning

with Christ, and learn to develop a Christlike attitude that takes you through the day. I know that not everyone is a morning person, and mornings are hard for some. In the new heaven and new earth all God's people will be morning people, for it will be morning forever, and night will never come. Meanwhile, we have to live in this world where mornings are not always pleasant. The poet put it-

The alarm is set,  
But I fear the worst;  
Come dawn, the baby  
Will go off first.

The idea of being an Easter morning person is in developing an Easter attitude of optimism. Genesis begins with the earth as a formless empty mass in darkness. Then came the morning and God said, "Let there be light," and thus began the beauty of creation. Chaos first, and then came the morning, and cosmos was formed. This is God's pattern. On Good Friday the God-man relationship was thrown into chaos. Man in hatred killed God on the cross. God in judgment cast man into hell in the person of his Son. It was the most bitter battle the universe had ever seen. God and man killed each other in violent conflict, and the world was plunged into darkness. But then came the morning-Easter morning, and with it the dawn of a new day, a new life, a new age, a new people, and a new kingdom. On Easter morning all things were made new.

It was a world of darkness, then came the morning and a light that could never be put out. It was a world of death, then came the morning and life conquered death. It was a world of hate, then came the morning and love triumphed over hate. It was a world of despair, then came the morning and hope was born anew. Some poet put it-

Behind him were the shouts of scorn.  
No longer wore he the crown of thorn.  
This was the day that hope was born,  
On that first glorious Easter morn.

And now it is always morning somewhere, for the Son of righteousness has risen with healing in his wings, and the sun never sets. Everything connected with Easter is a symbol of optimism, hope, and life. Even the secular symbols of Easter can teach Biblical truth if we see them for what they are.

Easter eggs are symbols of the sealed tomb of Christ. But then comes the morning, and we break them open, and out of them comes life giving food. Little chicks, or new life can be born from this mini-tomb as well. The egg is a valid symbol of the Easter message. So is the rabbit that is so popular in the secular world. The rabbit lives in a hole in the ground much like the tomb of Christ, and out of that darkness comes a great deal of life. If you have a few rabbits, you will soon have a lot of rabbits, for they have 5 or 6 litters a year. They are symbolic of abundant life out of a tomb-like atmosphere. I haven't watched a Bugs Bunny cartoon for years, but I know my grandchildren watch often. Nobody consciously made Bugs a symbol of the Easter message, but the fact is, he can be made to be such a symbol. He is pursued by those who seek to destroy him and rid the world of his presence. But no matter

how clever and deadly the schemes to do him in, he always comes out on top with a victory.

No matter how big the cannon, or powerful the bombs, Bugs finds a way to escape and come out a winner. That is the secular portrayal of the Easter message of optimism. All the powers of darkness and hell could not defeat our Lord. They did their best at the cross and it looked devastating, but then came the morning, and Christ broke loose like Samson from the feeble ropes that held him, and he rose victorious over all his foes. We need to teach our children that many of our secular and cultural heroes are symbols of Christ.

Characters like Superman, Batman, and Tarzan are often the target of clever evil forces that almost do them in, but every time these forces for good escape and come out victorious. The difference with Jesus is that his victory was not just fiction but real, and he can save us from all these evil forces that he conquered. He saves us, not just for heaven, but for earth, in order to add life and light to this fallen world.

Charlie Brown was telling Linus what an awful world it was. And Linus said, "I think the world is better today than it was 6 years ago." Charley protested, "Don't you read the paper or watch TV? How can you say the world is better today than 6 years ago." Linus responded, "I am in it now!" That could be said in a spirit of pride, but it can also be said in a spirit of Easter optimism. If the living Christ has come into your life because you have asked him to be your Savior, and have asked him to forgive you and make you a light in this dark world, then the world should be a better place because you are in it. If you have never asked Jesus to be your Savior, do so this morning and make this Easter morning the beginning of a day that will never end. Be able to go out into this dark world with the testimony, "I was lost and in the grave of darkness. I could see no way of escape. Then came the morning, and the Christ of Easter became my Lord, and I now live in the light of his victory over all the powers of evil." Ask Jesus to be your Savior and enter the kingdom of optimism where the last word is-then came the morning.

### **3. A RISEN REDEEMER Based on Mark 16:1-14**

Back in 1851 two missionaries, one English and the other American, were walking past the temple of Siva in Tanjore, India. They noticed the people carrying out one of the brass idols. It was a hot sunny day and the idol had become heated. One of the worshipers happened to touch it, and feeling that it was very warm, concluded that it was sick with a fever. The Rajah, or king being present immediately sent for a physician. He came and told them not to be alarmed for the god was well. The king called him a fool and sent him away. He ordered that another physician be called. When he arrived and examined the idol, he told them the god was very ill with a high fever and would soon die if remedies were not immediately applied. He directed them to put the idol in a shady place, and wash him with cool liquid. When it was cooled off the physician pronounced him cured, and the Rajah gave him three thousands

rupees for saving the life of the god.

It is not everyday that a man can save a god, and he was no doubt delighted with his accomplishment. We can laugh, of course, at the ignorance of men who could seriously believe in a god capable of getting sick, dying, and needing to be rescued by men from the jaws of death. Any god who can get sick and die is no god at all. This ought to be as obvious to us as any truth is. Those who make statements that God has died only reveal that the God of whom they speak is no more than a man made idol, and not the God of Biblical revelation. It is true that God, out of the great love with which He loved us, became incarnate in human flesh, and submitted to the death of the cross. He did literally go through the experience of dying, but the vital fact, the great fact of Easter, is that He went through it. He did not remain in death, but rose to live forever. Jesus said to John in Rev. 1:18, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen and have the keys of hell and death." Christ has the keys of hell and death because He experienced both, and triumphed over both. A poet has written,

Yes, He is risen who is the First and Last,  
Who was and is, who liveth and was dead.  
Beyond the reach of death He now has passed.  
Of the glorious church the glorious head.

This is more than the message of Easter, for this is the foundation of the whole of Christianity. Anyone is free to disbelieve, and even deny it, but none are free to honestly bare the name of Christian who do so. There is no Christianity if the resurrection is not true. If men have lost faith in the idols of their self-made religion, let them cry out that their god is dead, but let us not confuse their petty idols with the Living God of Revelation. Those who have a God who is dead need to be even more enlightened, and recognized that their god was never alive.

We want to consider the great story of the resurrection from the point of view of two groups of people. Both groups are believers, but Mark's account first deals with the experience of the women, and then of the men. We want to consider the male responses in another message. For now we will consider the experience of the women on this day of resurrection. The first thing we see is-

#### **I. DEVOTION DISPLAYED. v. 1,2.**

These few loyal women have endured the agony of watching their Lord die a violent death, and they watched Him being placed in a tomb hastily before the Sabbath began. How much real resting they did on that Sabbath we do not know, but our text shows that as soon as it was over these devoted disciples made a purchase. Late in the evening they bought spices for the purpose of going to the tomb in the morning, and anointing the body of this one they so loved.

They harbor no hope of the resurrection, for they would not spend money for spices to anoint His body if they had any hope that it would be alive soon. They acted in the belief that this was the end, and that His body would forever lay in the tomb, or at least until the

resurrection at the last day, which all faithful Jews looked for. They are so grateful, however, for all that He was, and all that He did for them, that they must express their devotion, and the only way they could do so was to honor the body that once housed His much loved soul.

Call it an extravagant waste if you will, but to discerning eyes it is an act of devoted love that is taking place. It is in sharp contrast to the despair that characterized the 11 disciples. All of the men were thrown into a state of paralysis by their sorrow. They did not make a move until they were compelled by the testimony of the women, and even then it was with reluctance and skepticism. But here we see action in the women, and a love that has not altered because it alteration found. Jesus was no longer alive and with them, yet they display what Macaulay refers to as "The perfect disinterestedness and self-devotion of which men are incapable, but which is sometimes found in women."

They had seen the worst and were convinced that Jesus was dead for good, yet they could not wait to display their loyal devotion. Verse 2 says it was very early in the morning they came to the sepulcher. It was at the rising of the sun. They were hardly able to wait for dawn to carry out their act of love. When we consider the devotion displayed by these faithful female disciples, we can well understand why it was they were granted the honor of being the first to receive the good news of the risen Redeemer. Women bore the shame of being the first to bring the cause of death upon man, but now she bares the honor of being the first to bring the good news of victory over death to man.

Not only were they the first to hear the message, but Mark makes it clear in verse 9 that Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Christ. This is no accident, or incidental fact, but appears to be an act by which the risen Redeemer recognizes and rewards her devotion. Jesus could have appeared at anytime to any person, but he chose to appear first to Mary. Jesus said, "To whom much is forgiven the same loveth much," and this was certainly true for Mary whose devotion did not depreciate even in the face of death. Valzac spoke in truth when he said, "To feel, to love, to suffer, to devote herself, will always be the text of the life of woman." It is also true that it will always be the role of the risen Redeemer to richly reward those who are devoted to Him.

If these women were so devoted to Christ when they thought He was dead, imagine the beauty of their lives when the shock wore off, and they realized he was in reality a risen and living Lord. Mary Magdalene was the first to be able to affirm with assurance and confidence the conviction of the poet Robert Heirich who wrote,

I do believe, that die I must,  
And be return'd from out my dust;  
I do believe, that when I rise,  
I shall see, with these same eyes.

She was the first to see Jesus risen and transformed; the first to know that the grave has been conquered. If such was the reward for her devotion, and such was the honor granted to the other women to be the first to hear the good news, how great will be their reward in heaven after a life of devotion to the risen Redeemer? We cannot pretend to know, but we can learn a marvelous lesson from their experience on that first Easter. We can learn that

**Jesus prizes devotion, and that there is no greater testimony to the reality of our love and devotion to Him, than to act in love and honor Him, even when the circumstances are darkest, and hope seems to be demolished. Their display of devotion was not anything profound. It was very simple and personal. There is no need for elaborate display, for Jesus looks on the hearts, and we should care only that He sees our hearts as He saw the hearts of those women in the morning hours of that first Easter. May the experience described by Thomas Moore be ours:**

**As down in the sunless retreat of the ocean,  
Sweet flowers are springing no mortal can see,  
So deep in my soul the still prayer of devotion  
Unheard by the world, rises silent to Thee.**

**As we move on to consider the second aspect of their experience that morning, we see their devotion magnified even more. The second point we want to consider is-**

## **II. DIFFICULTY DISSOLVED. vv. 3 and 4.**

**There is a saying that out of difficulty grows miracles. This is true, for if there is no difficulty, there is no need for a miracle. All miracles are divine solutions to human difficulties. A miracle is only a miracle to man, and not to God, for He has no unsolvable difficulties. These devoted women had a dandy of a difficulty facing them, yet they moved forward. They watched the large stone rolled in front of the tomb by strong men on Friday night, and now early Sunday morning, all alone with no muscular men to help them, they made their way to the tomb. When we add the details of the other Gospels, we see that the obstacles that they faced were even greater. Not only was the stone large, but it had been sealed, and not only that, the Jewish leaders had seen to it that a guard was standing watch lest there be any attempt to remove the body.**

**If ever the weaker sex faced what appeared to be an insurmountable problem, it was here as they walked along discussing how they will deal with the difficulty of the stone. When you consider the circumstances there is a natural tendency to question their good sense at this point. Common sense would tell them that they had to sit down and figure out a solution to this problem before they went marching to the tomb. They knew they could not do it, for they were wondering who could roll the stone away for them. Their devotion refused to be delayed until a solution was found, and so with the attitude in mind, we will cross that bridge when we come to it, they headed for the tomb. Lesser love would have failed to make such a plan in the first place, or would have forsaken the whole idea in the second place, and would have retreated in the face of the difficulty.**

**These women were like the English drummer boy who was captured and brought before Napoleon. He was told to sound the retreat and his prompt reply was, "I never learnt it!" Loyalty and love do not care to learn the march of retreat, but like these devoted disciples it marches ever onward in spite of difficulties. And again we see that their determined devotion was richly rewarded. Like so many difficulties that are faced with no apparent solution, when they are met head on they dissolve and disappear. So here we see that when they arrived at the tomb their problem was gone. The difficulty had been dissolved, for they looked up and**

the stone was already rolled away.

We need to learn another valuable lesson from their experience. We need to learn to be persistently positive in the face of difficulty. We must be always actively advancing in our cause of serving Christ. Difficulties are not imaginary. They are real, as real as the stone that sealed the tomb, but the experience of these women reveals that for those who walk forward in the face of obstacles to serve Christ, there will be a solution available. The church has plenty of obstacles to overcome, but until there are devoted disciples marching forward, there will not be solutions to these difficulties.

In 1799 one of Napoleon's generals appeared before the town of Feldkirk in Austria. It was Easter day and the leaders of the town were at a loss as to what to do. The old dean of the church gave this advice, "This is Easter day. We have been counting on our strength and we know that always fails. On the day of our Lord's resurrection let us ring the bells and have our church service as usual and leave this thing in God's hands. He will show us the way out, and we can certainly not find a way out without Him.

The bells began to chime, and worshipers thronged the streets as they made their way to the house of God. The French general was frightened by the bell ringing, for he interpreted it to be a rejoicing on the part of the city because an Austrian army had arrived in the night to rescue them. He ordered his men to quickly break camp, and they marched away leaving the city safe. God specializes in special delivery, and so we need to learn to leave the impossible to Him, and move ahead in devoted service regardless of obstacles.

If these women could display such determined devotion with the conviction that Christ was dead, how much greater ought our devotion to be who have 19 centuries of evidence of the power of the risen Redeemer? They marched forward to a sealed tomb, a dead Lord, and a hard difficulty, on a dark morning. But we can shout with Fortunatus,

"Hail, Day of days! In peals of praise  
Throughout all ages owned,  
When Christ, our God, hell's empire trod,  
And high o'er heaven was throned."

We serve a living, royal, risen, reigning king. The Easter experience of these women challenges us to consider the weakness of our devotion, and to commit ourselves more completely to live for the honor and glory of our risen Redeemer.

#### **4. THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION Based on**



## **Mark 16:1-14**

Ministers frequently call at a home when the man alone is there, and he will respond in some such manner as this: "I'm sorry my wife isn't home. She takes care of the religious matters in our home." I have not just read about this, but have experienced it, and have wondered how it is possible to be so misinformed about the Christian life. Men in general seem to think that spiritual matters are for women to handle. Men tend to be more skeptical, and women tend to be more sensitive to spiritual things. Eve may have gotten the problem of sin started, but men seem to have the biggest part in hindering God's solution to the sin problem. For some reason men feel that faith is feminine and not to be associated with the strong and self-sufficient image of the ideal man. Religion has the reputation of being a crutch, and no man wants a crutch, for he wants to walk on his own.

This attitude has had an effect on the lives of even those men already committed to Christ, and has made them timid. The message of Christ's manliness is missed, and even Christian males slip into the background, and let the women do the work. It is no joke, but actual fact, that many male responses to the call for missionaries is, "Here am I Lord, send my sister." Statistics reveal this to be far from fictitious. Dr. Barton was not just trying to be funny when he wrote,

**In the world's broad fields of battle,  
In the bivouac of life,  
You will find the Christian soldier  
Represented by his wife.**

He was serious, and was stating a well known fact. However else men are superior to women, they are statistically inferior in their commitment and devotion. Nothing could be more unprofitable, however, then to rant and rave about the problem. More profit, I am sure, can be gained by recognizing that this has always been the case. It is not new, but has been a characteristic of men from the start.

The very group of men Jesus hand picked to be the foundation on which He would build His church were of like nature. They were the first body of skeptics in the Christian church. If they had not been convinced by the personal appearance of Jesus in their presence, they would not have believed in the resurrection. If Jesus had not soundly rebuked them for their skepticism, they would have been the greatest hindrance to the advancement of the cause of Christ. The fact that Jesus did go to this length to convince them shows that in spite of the fact that men are more skeptical and harder to convince about spiritual realities, yet, they are responsible for the leadership of the church. They were the foundation, and once convinced they were dynamos of devotion. Men are harder to win, but when they are won they are of greater power, and power is what is needed to make Christianity appealing to other men. There must be a Christ-centered manliness for the church to appeal to the masculine mind. We want to consider how hard it was to even bring the Apostles to a state of belief and commitment to the risen Redeemer. In contrast to the devotion of the women, we see in the men, first of all-

## **I. DESPAIR DISPLAYED. v. 10**

While the women, who are supposedly more emotional, were up early and out actively doing something practical in the face of the great tragedy that had struck them, the men, most of whom had fled, and, as far as we know, did not even see the crucifixion, as did the women, were setting idle mourning and weeping in despair. They thought they were really going to be something, and now the whole thing has proven to be a failure, and they are left with no leader, humiliated and helpless, and with no further hope of establishing a kingdom. They are sad sheep without a shepherd. Despair had immobilized them. They were in the slough of despond. If the discovery of the empty tomb had depended upon them, the world would have long remained in darkness and ignorance.

Someone has said, "Despair is the greatest of our errors." This was certainly true on this resurrection day. All day long these men were in sorrow when the greatest event in history had taken place. Christ was alive, and they were the key servants of this living king of kings, and yet they lived in despair. These men give us a picture that is parallel with what is true in millions of lives in every age. The good news is available, and eternal life in heaven, and abundant life now is potentially theirs, yet while this good news is either unknown or unbelieved, they gain no benefit, and so are without God and without hope. The disciples had every reason to be the most happy men in the world, but they sat weeping in despair because they were ignorant. Even after they were informed of the fact of the resurrection they gained none of its benefits because they persisted in their unbelief.

Despair is an evil, for it is being ungrateful for the fact that the path of hope is still open. Despair refuses to move against the obstacles because it has already decided that the battle is lost. We saw that when the women advanced to meet the difficulty it dissolved. They cannot stand before determined devotion, but despair disables men and defeats them before they even encounter the enemy. These despairing disciples speculate on the problems from a distance, and their very attitude of despair distorts their vision, and all they can see are insurmountable obstacles. Burke said, "A speculative despair is unpardonable where it is our duty to act." If men would get out and put their faith to work, and test their devotion, belief, and hope by action, they would see difficulty dissolved. But to set in despair produces a vicious circle. Despair produces such a hopeless attitude that it actually does become a hopeless situation. Howe wrote,

The wise and active conquer difficulties  
By daring to attempt them, sloth and folly  
Shimmer and shrink at the sight of toil and hazard,  
And make the impossibility they fear.

Despair did this to the disciples. It hardened them so they would not even respond to the evidence. This brings us to the second point which is an attitude growing out of their despair.

## **II. DISBELIEF DEMONSTRATED. v.11**

You would think that a company of men in such despair would have welcomed, as an angel

of light, anyone with a word of comfort and cheer. Anything that would ease the burden and lift the weight of darkness that had settled over their souls, you would think would be welcomed with joy. But instead we see them unresponsive even to the glorious news that Jesus was not dead but alive, and had actually been seen by Mary Magdalene. Certainly the paralysis will wear off soon, and they will shout for joy with Mary. But not so, we read on in verses 12 and 13 and discover that they persisted in disbelief all day. In the evening when the two on the road to Emmaus returned to tell them of their experience, they still stubbornly refused to yield to the evidence and testimony of fellow believers.

Here is a paradox. The men who would soon be proclaiming the message of the crucified and living Christ, who would be persistent in their emphasis on the resurrection as the foundation of belief, are here examples of the most narrow minded unbelief. Mary and the other two disciples had seen Jesus and the empty tomb with the stone rolled away. Peter and John had seen the evidence as well, and yet the disciples are unconvinced of the reality of the resurrection.

Remember this when you are quick to condemn the unbeliever or the skeptic who refuses to yield to your array of evidence for the resurrection. Why should we expect men today to be less skeptical than the disciples who had eye witness testimonies from intimate friends, and still demonstrated a disbelieving heart? Unbelief, is the most natural response of men to the resurrection, and we should expect it. If this experience of the disciples teaches us anything, it should teach us that belief in the reality of the resurrection is not a matter of evidence, but it is a matter of the will. All the evidence in the world may not convince a man, but all that is needed sometimes is a testimony to the fact that Christ is alive and has changed your life. If a man will not be willing to believe, no amount of evidence will persuade him. One must want to experience the reality of the resurrection. You cannot compel them to believe by amassing evidence. The evidence only becomes valuable when the will has chosen to believe.

A paragraph from an editorial in Life Magazine way back in 1956 is worth repeating:

"The resurrection cannot be tamed or tethered by any utilitarian test. It is a vast watershed in history or it is nothing. It cannot be tested for truth; it is the test of lesser truths. No light can be thrown on it; its own light blinds the investigator. It does not compel belief, it resists it. But once accepted as fact it tells more about the universe, about history, and about man's state and fate than all the mountains of other facts in the human accumulation."

This being the case, we need to do less proving and more proclaiming of this truth. We need more testimony to the reality of the resurrection in our own lives and attitudes. Only as men actually encounter the living Christ in us will they have a desire to will that he live in them. G. Campbell Morgan said, "The resurrection is a fact that cannot be proved except to the faith of the heart." The evidence must be approached with faith, or it will not convince the skeptic.

The evidence did not convince those who were already followers of Christ, and so we

should not expect it to convince those who are not his followers today. The only thing that could bring them to belief out of their stubborn unbelief was a personal encounter with Christ, and this is still true today for most. The disciples spent the whole day of the first Easter being bombarded by the evidence of the reality of the resurrection, and yet we see them in the evening still locked behind closed doors in the darkness of despair. Mark tells us that Jesus had to rebuke them for their unbelief. Imagine this, on the first Easter, the day of the greatest victory in history, Jesus has to give a message of rebuke, not to the world, but to his own church. Jesus had his problems with men that he never had with women. He had to make his first message a negative one on this great day of joy.

We call Thomas the doubting Thomas, but remember he just happened to be absent from the meeting. He was no more a doubter than the rest of them. They all needed the same evidence that he demanded before they would believe. Let us then be aware that it is hard to convince men of this truth. They will need more than evidence and argument. They will need to see Christ in us before they will believe in the reality of the resurrection.

## **5. ROAD TO EMMAUS Based on Luke 24:13-35**

During the early part of the World War II, the crew of a vessel in the Caribbean Sea had an experience that illustrates the theme we want to consider on this Easter morning. As reported by Walter Maier, this vessel was carrying a cargo of oil, and was suddenly attacked by an enemy submarine. It raked the decks with shell fire and shrapnel, and before the crew knew what was happening a torpedo hit them. It destroyed the stirring apparatus, and tore a gaping hole in the side. The craft began to sink, and fire broke out. Soon the order came to abandon ship. Only one life boat and three rafts remained undamaged, and so the crew had to squeeze into these, and roll for all they were worth to get out of the danger zone.

The captain and 8 men had been killed in the raid, but all the rest made it into the rafts. There they were, huddled together on a dark lonely sea waiting for the night to pass in great anxiety, and wondering what the future might hold for them. You can imagine the thrill that came to them as the sun came up and they discovered their ship had not gone down. Life took on an altogether different color. The blackness of despair was now the brightness of delight. Hopelessness vanished, and hopefulness filled their hearts. With all the vigor of men who had a good nights rest, they rode back to their ship, and with some emergency adjustments brought it into an American port several days later.

What an illustration of the experience of the disciples. Everything was going so well, when all of the sudden, all the forces of evil on earth and in hell broke loose upon Christ, and they abandoned the ship. The cross was to them like a torpedo that had ripped such a hole in their hopes that there was nothing to do but forsake Jesus, and that they did in despair and utter hopelessness. We want to follow two of these discouraged disciples and look at the three stages they passed through in coming to experience the joy and victory of Easter. The first stage is-

#### **I. HOPE DEFEATED. vv. 13-24.**

We know practically nothing about these two discouraged disciples. In fact, we do not even know the name of one of them. Someone has said that Jesus made His most remarkable revelations to the least remarkable people. Here we see Him walking 7 miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus with two people who are never heard of before, and never again after this. This shows there are no such things as unimportant people in the eyes of Christ. Jesus is always busy with important people, for all people are important to Him, even if the rest of the world only knows them as Cleopas and what's his name.

As these two walked along talking of what had happened, Jesus drew near, unrecognized, and asked them why they were so sad. Jesus knew perfectly well what the problem was, but like any good counselor He wanted to draw it out from them. Just as He knows our problems, but wants us to come and share it with Him in prayer. Modern psychology knows that the best medicine is just to talk out your burdens to a sympathetic person.

Cleopas answered this sympathetic stranger, and the gist of his answer as to why they were sad is in verse 21, "We had hoped." Note the past tense-had hoped. We had high hopes that at last the Messiah had come, but the nails they put through His hands punctured our hopes. It is no wonder they were discouraged, disappointed, downcast, and depressed. No one can be happy when their hope has been crushed. All of life is a search to find hopes that cannot be dashed to pieces by circumstances. They thought they had found such hope in Jesus, but now it looked as if this too had been shattered by the cross.

This search for uncrushable hope is true for all of us, and we all go through the experience of seeing that which we had hoped for be demolished by the circumstances of life. These experiences of defeated hopes begin even in childhood. The experience of pastor Donald Bastion is typical of many. Though humorous to us, it is painful to those who pass through it. He tells of how he fell in love in the first grade. He had high hopes in spite of the fact that Marjorie was in the third grade, and she was big for her age, and he was small for his age. His hope never wavered until one day he fell on some cinders at school.

As first grade boys will do, he began to cry, and walked around the corner of the school building. Of all people, he ran into Marjorie. When she put her arm around him and tried to console him like a mother, it was too much for his male ego, and right there his hope collapsed and was crushed beyond repair. How could a first grader love a girl who treated him like a child? Being a normal boy he recovered, and went on to become a happily married man, but when hopes are crushed in the lives of adults, they often can not adjust as does a youth, and so we have a world in which a suicide is committed every few minutes.

People who commit suicide are not crazy, but on the contrary, they are usually very serious thinkers. They have lost all hope, and have come to the conclusion that life without hope is worse than death, and even hell itself could hardly be as bad. Without hope life is perplexing, puzzling, and even paralyzing. Without hope a person is dead even while they live. That is why the Bible considers those who do not know Jesus Christ as being dead, and as not having real life. They are without God and without hope in the world. The people who scoff at Christians, and call them weak are usually those who do not have the courage to think seriously about the ultimate goal and purpose of life, for they know it will only lead them to the dead end of hopelessness.

Clarence Darrow, one of the most brilliant and successful lawyers America has ever seen, was an unbeliever, and he made the great mistake of doing some serious thinking about the meaning of life, and he became a hopeless skeptic. He was asked once if he had any advice for the youth of America. "Yes," he said, "My advice is to go to the nearest building and jump out of a third story window." He said, "Like if an unpleasant interruption of nothingness." He had everything life could offer, but he had no hope. Hope is essential to meaningful life, and the only hope that cannot be crushed is hope in Jesus Christ.

Getting back to our friends on the road to Emmaus, we see that they did not realize their hope was fulfilled. Jesus not only redeemed Israel, but redeemed the whole world. But this is a truth which does no one any good until they know it, and so we go on to the second stage of their experience.

## II. HOPE DEVELOPED. vv. 25-29.

After Jesus listened to their story, He rebuked them for their blindness. The Old Testament prophesied all that had happened, and yet they could not see it. They were blinded by tradition which said the Messiah was to come and overthrow the powers of the world, and the Jews would reign. When Jesus did not do what they thought He should, they lost hope. Jesus teaches a strong lesson when He rebukes them, and goes back to the Scriptures to expound them. The heart of the Protestant faith is here, for Jesus teaches that the Bible is to be our soul authority. If you allow tradition to guide you, you can wind up believing just the opposite of what God reveals.

The quickest way to get out of the will of God is to let a professional do all your thinking for you. That was the problem with these two. They let the religious leaders of the day guide their thinking, rather than the Word of God. There are millions today doing the same thing. They never bother to search the Scripture for themselves. They let professionals take care of that, and rest their salvation on fallible men rather than the infallible Word of God. Following ignorant traditions was the curse of Israel, and it will be the curse of masses of modern people if they do not get back to a biblical faith.

There is a legend about a race of people who lived in an isolated valley surrounded by high hills, and cut off from the outside world. It is called the legend of the valley of ignorance. The hills surrounding them were regarded as sacred, and any attempt to scale them was forbidden by law. One day, however, a youth with a spirit of adventure felt a strong urge to climb to the top and see what was beyond those hills. He did it, and returned to his village

with his body weary, and cut from the rugged climb, but so filled with excitement he hardly noticed his injuries. He told others of the land he saw, of fertile pasture, running streams, and of a mighty ocean that lay beyond. The leaders of the valley of ignorance considered him to be a babbling fanatic, and they had him stoned to death.

Many years rolled by, and a famine came to the valley. The streams dried up, the pastures withered, and the cattle began to die. Someone remembered the story of the young man, and hope revived. In desperation they forgot their traditional laws about climbing the hills. They sent a group of men to see what lay beyond. They, of course, returned with a message of hope and salvation. All of the people gathered at the spot where they had stoned the youthful adventurer. They erected a monument to him as the savior of his people. It is only a legend, but so true to life. Tradition is almost always an enemy of truth. It killed the prophets; it killed the Son of God, and will go on cursing all who cling to it rather than the Word of God. Tradition says there are several ways to be saved, but Scripture says there is only one, and that is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tradition told these two disciples that Jesus could not have been the Messiah, and so they lost hope. Jesus comes to them with the Word of God, and He shows them that it was necessary that the Christ was to suffer all that He did, and enter into His glory. As He took them through the Old Testament showing them these things a new hope began to develop. Jesus did not reveal Himself to them at this point, but use the Scriptures to develop their hope. He did this in order to teach that the Bible is sufficient to give us the truth of God. They would only see Jesus for a moment, but they would have the Scriptures to guide them always.

In verse 32 they admit to each other that their hearts burned within them as He talked with them, and open to them the Scriptures. The evidence that new hope began to develop in their hearts is seen already in verses 28-29. When they came to Emmaus Jesus made as if He would go on, but they constrain Him to abide with them. They hungered to know more of that which He spoke. This gives us a real clue as to why Jesus revealed Himself to these two. They wanted to know. No one is ever hopeless who really wants to know the truth. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. Jesus had stimulated new hope in them, and they desired to develop it further.

We notice here the courtesy of Jesus. He did not force Himself upon them. If they had had no interest, He would have gone on. Jesus will knock at the door, but He will not break it down. Jesus would not approve of cramming the Gospel down anyone's throat. When He sent the 70 out, He said, if they don't want your Gospel just shake off the dust of your feet and move on. There is no point in trying to force a decision, for only those who decide because they desire to do so have a decision that counts. These two desired Jesus to abide with them, and so He came, and that brings us to the third stage of their experience.

### **III. HOPE DISCOVERED. vv. 30-35.**

As Jesus sat at the table with them, He took bread and blest it, and broke it as He had done so often. And in so doing their eyes were opened, and they saw it was Jesus. Maybe it was the prayer, or the way He broke the bread, or the nail prints in His hands, that made them see He

was the risen Christ. Whatever, it was, as soon as they recognized Him He vanished. Jesus had no intention of staying with them. He was only concerned to lead them to discover that their hope in Him was not in vain. It was perfectly fulfilled as Scripture foretold.

At that moment they experienced the meaning of Easter. They discovered the reality of the resurrection, which meant that in Christ we can have a hope that is eternal and uncrushable. Not all the darkness of hell and death could quench His life and light. Never again did they need to be without hope. There cold hopeless hearts were kindled into flame, and as with those men on the sea who saw their ship afloat, knew life pulsed through their veins. Hope in the soul gives strength to the body, and so they rose up and returned in haste to Jerusalem. A new engine of purpose had been placed under the hood of their life, and with high octane hope they ran back to Jerusalem. I wouldn't be surprised if eternity reveals that they were the first to break the four minute mile.

Crushed hopes are like heavy chains around our ankles, but the hope that comes to those who discover the living Christ is like helium from heaven that lifts and lightens. Some people make a great deal of the empty tomb, and that is essential, but it is the negative aspect of the resurrection. The positive aspect is the full heart. The heart filled and flaming with hope because Christ is risen and is ever present is the necessary positive side. They knew of the empty tomb before, but that is not enough without the positive awareness of the living Christ.

I can imagine a beggar setting at the gate of Jerusalem seeing these two race past him in excitement, and thinking to himself, "Isn't that those same two who came dragging themselves along only a few hours ago with long sad faces? What a change has come over them." What a change comes to anyone who discovers the living Christ. You cannot come to know Christ and be the same. There is new hope, and a new flame that is set to burning, and it consumes that which does not belong.

When Blaise Pascal, the famous French genius, and inventor, discovered Christ, he wrote in his diary that Nov. 23, 1624 the word fire, and after that he jotted "joy, joy, joy, tears of joy-Jesus Christ." Such was the experience of John Wesley when he felt his heart strangely warmed as he trusted in Jesus as his Savior. And such has been the experience of millions who have discovered the living Christ.

When these two disciples walked out of Jerusalem that first Easter they were saying, "This is the end, this is the end." They were right, of course, but they did not realize which end it was. But after their discovery they realized it was the beginning end of a hope that would have no end. It was not the end; not even the beginning of the end. It was just the end of the beginning. The message of Easter is eternal hope, a hope that cannot end. Life with Christ is endless hope, but without Him it is a hopeless end.

Christ is risen, Christ is risen,  
Sins long triumph now is o'er.  
Christ is risen, death's dark prison  
Now can hold his saints no more.



## **6. THE EASTER POTENTIAL Based on Luke 24:33-53**

**One of the reasons that Ferdinand and Isabella supported Columbus in his scheme to find a new world was their hope that he would also find the fountain of life. When Columbus landed he searched for it, and he questioned the Indians about the legendary fountain that would make old men young again. These Indian legends made their way back to Spain, and they told of how old men could make love again to a young wife and bear children, if they drank from this fountain. King Ferdinand, not long after Columbus sailed, sent out Ponce de Leon to find the island where this fountain was supposed to exist.**

**The Spaniards did want gold for the present, but they wanted the fountain for the future, for they wanted life that lasted forever. This was one of the powerful motivating factors in their drive to explore the new world. Men have always longed for life that was immortal. Animals do not, but men do, because they are made in the image of the Immortal Creator, and so they have an inherent desire for immortality.**

**Ponce de Leon went from island to island drinking the water, but with no effect. On Easter Sunday he landed on what he thought was an island, and he called it Florida. They drank water from many springs, but no miracles. Again, they asked the Indians questions about the fountain of youth. He was convinced that Florida was where it was at. The Pope was informed that they were on the right trail, and he too was excited about the search. It was a Christian mission to find paradise, but instead, Ponce de Leon found death by an Indian arrow, and the search ended. This deep devotion to the notion that somewhere across the ocean there is a potion that will give eternal life has always been a part of the human drama.**

**Ancient stories tell of how men have been able to drink the Elixer of the gods, and thereby be restored to youth. The Greeks tell of Tantalus who became immortal by drinking of the nectar and ambrosia of the gods. The Koran tells of a fountain of life where dying fish are renewed by drinking of its water, and a dead fish dropped in it will swim away as a young and active fish again. Alexander the Great was told of a fountain in Arabia that would make a man immortal if he could drink but one drop. In the middle ages Christians thought India was the place where the fountain could be found. Many went in search, and Prester John developed a Christian kingdom in India, and he wrote to the Pope that the fountain of youth was there.**

**The legend has become a part of cultures all over the world, and texts on the pyramids of Egypt talk of the everlasting beverage and the water of life. Whenever you have such a universal legend you can assume there is some foundation for it in fact. Man wants to be able to drink some water that will give him eternal life. Is this sheer foolishness, or does the Bible encourage us to believe there is such a fountain of life? David writes in Ps. 36:8-9 about God's provision for those whom He loves, and He writes, "You give them drink from your**

river of delights, for with you is the fountain of life." So the idea is not far fetched, but just the direction men go to seek it is foolish. It is not in Arabia, India, Florida, or on any island. The fountain of life is with God.

Man in his rebellion against God seeks to find the fountain of life on his own, and become independently immortal. Jer. 17:13 shows the prophet lamenting the folly of Israel in choosing death instead of life. "For they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water." Like Ponce de Leon, men want to find their own fountain and not be dependent upon God. They always find death, however, instead of life. This is the folly of man all through history.

In Jer. 2:13 God describes this universal conflict: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns can hold no water." The reason men are forever seeking for a fountain of life is because they refuse to take the water of life as a gift. They do not want it as a gift of grace. They want it as a result of their own labor and discovery, so they can say they found it, and they did it, and they achieved immortality by their own wits and works. Meanwhile the Bible gives clear directions to the treasure that men desperately seek. Prov. 14:27 says, "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death."

In the New Testament the entire plan of God for man is all wrapped up in Jesus Christ leading the redeemed to the goal for which they long. It is the goal for which they are made, and it is that they live forever in perpetual youth. Rev. 7:17 says, "For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will lead them to springs of living water." In Rev. 21:6 we read this climactic statement about the fountain of life. "It is done! I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life."

You cannot find this water, or make it, or buy it, or in any way acquire it by human effort. It is God's gift, and Easter is the day God made it clear to man that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to find the fountain of life. He, and He alone, has the power to make life immortal, and the right to give everlasting youth. If you want to quench the universal thirst for the water of life you need to simply ask Jesus to forgive your sin, and come into your life as Lord. Easter is a day on which we celebrate His victory over death, but it is also the day we celebrate our own victory, for by faith in Jesus we too will live forever and drink of the fountain of life.

That which men have sought for and been willing to pay anything for is available to all who will take it freely as a gift. The only catch is that you must let Him be your Savior, and give up the task, once and for all, of trying to save yourself. You must surrender to win this greatest of all battles. Man loves life and naturally so, for God made him that way. The thirst for everlasting life is a God given thirst, but it is also a thirst that only He can quench. Men are constantly tinkering and tampering with life in the hopes of gaining some kind of control over it. We are living in an age of biological revolution as science learns how to manipulate life. This is the age of the surrogate mother, the artificial body parts, the sperm bank, genetic engineering, and cloning. Most of what men can do is at the beginning stages of life, but he is

working on the other end also, and striving to prolong life, but he has not come close to the fountain of youth yet.

Men can do a lot with life, but they cannot make it start, or make it last. The origin and on going of life are in God's hands. Man can prolong life for sometime, but only God can make it permanent. The potential for this permanent life, as well as abundant life, is what Easter is all about. Jesus died young, but on Easter He arose in that same young body to live forever in the prime of life. Jesus found the fountain men have ever searched for. Violet Storey put it in poetry.

And He was only thirty-three...  
The year had come to spring-  
And He hung dead upon a tree,  
Robbed of its blossoming.  
Sorrow of sorrows that Youth should die  
On a dead tree 'neath and April sky.

And he was only thirty-three...  
Anthems of joy be sung-  
For, always, the Risen Christ will be  
A God divinely young.  
Glory of glories, a Tree, stripped bare,  
Shed now Faith's blossoms everywhere.

That tree, the cross, is now no longer a symbol of fear and shame, but a symbol of victory, for now it represents the fountain of youth. The resurrection of Christ changed everything; the past, the present, and the future. It transformed the cross, and has in it the potential to change everything. We want to focus on the Easter potential as we see it when the risen Christ appeared to His disciples that first Easter evening.

We see the risen Christ offering to His disciples the very two things that men have sought for in the fountain of youth, and they are perpetual pleasure and power. These are the keys to the joy of life. Take away pleasure and power and life is no longer a treasure. Life is only truly life when there is some degree of pleasure and power. Permanent and perpetual pleasure and power is what the Easter potential is all about. Let's look at these two ingredients of a happy now, and a happy forever.

## **I. THE EASTER POTENTIAL FOR PLEASURE.**

The disciples got no pleasure from their first encounter with the risen Christ, for they feared He was a ghost, and seeing a ghost has never been man's idea of fun. The first thing Jesus did was to give them a lesson on ghosts by letting them touch Him, and feel that He had flesh and bones. These, He points out, are conspicuously absent in your typical ghost. Jesus is saying that ghosts do not have physical bodies, nor do they enjoy physical pleasures. If you discover your left over steak missing from the refrigerator, you can rule out ghosts right away, for they do not have the privilege of indulging in the physical pleasure of eating. Jesus, however, asked for and ate fish in their presence, and by doing so demonstrated that the

resurrection body will go on enjoying the physical pleasures of life. The Easter potential is everlasting physical pleasure, which is the very thing that motivated men to seek for the fountain of life.

This will be ours in Jesus Christ, and we will enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb with our Lord, not merely symbolically, but literally, just as we enjoy a festive banquet now. The resurrection conquers all that death robs us of, and restores us to a state where we can enjoy pleasures at His right hand forevermore. Death is man's greatest obstacle to eternal pleasure, but Jesus reversed what is lost in death so that man can have eternal health and pleasure. The paradox of life is that many worldly people refuse to submit to the Lordship of Christ, for they feel this would mean they have to give up some of the pleasures they enjoy. What they are really giving up is the eternal pleasures they might have. Jesus is the one who made us, and He knows our love for and capacity for pleasure. He is the one who made life as it is, and He desires that we have life to its fullest. He came that we might have life abundantly, and that means a pleasurable life.

All of the commands of Christ to practice self-control and self-denial, and to take up the cross and follow Him, are not pleasure eliminating commands, but pleasure enhancing commands. They lead to the disciplined life that develops a far greater capacity for pleasure. The Prodigal had his fling, but it was like the fire of the tumbleweed. There was a burst of flame and then ashes, and the Prodigal's pleasure trip ended in the muck of the pig pen. Such is the end result of those who seek pleasure as an end in itself. But the Prodigal went home and entered into the enduring pleasure of a loving relationship with his father. This is lasting and positive pleasure, and the kind God expects all of His children to enjoy forever. This is part of the Easter potential-pleasure forevermore. Phillip Doddridge wrote,

Live while you live, the epicure would say,  
And seize the pleasures of the present day.  
Live while you live, the sacred preacher cries,  
And give to God the moment as it flies.  
Lord, in my view let both united be;  
I live in pleasure, when I live to Thee.

Salvation and pleasure are linked all through the Bible. When God led the people in the Exodus out of Egypt, it was to give them the joy and pleasure of freedom, and to lead them into the land flowing with milk and honey. God loves His people to enjoy the pleasures of life, and to escape the pains of sin. The Passover Feast was to be a perpetual reminder to Israel of the pleasure of salvation.

Come ye faithful, raise the strain  
Of triumphant gladness.  
God has brought His Israel  
Into joy from sadness.

In the New Testament the cross is the Exodus-the bringing us out of bondage to the kingdom of darkness. The resurrection is the entering into the promise land of joy and pleasure. The cross was painful, but Jesus endured it with joy because of the end result which

He saw, and that was the eternal pleasure of the redeemed. This was the promise of the Father, and David in Ps. 16 prophesied the reward of the cross that kept Jesus looking beyond the cross to the resurrection. Both Paul and Peter quote this Old Testament passage in reference to the resurrection of Christ. Ps. 16:9-11 says, "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your holy one see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

This was the destiny of Jesus, and the reward of His resurrection. Because of Easter and the reality of His resurrection, this is now the potential destiny of all people. The fountain of life, and the well of endless pleasure is at God's right hand. Because of Easter that which is actual in the life of Jesus is possible in the life of all who receive Him as Savior. That is why Easter is the most special day of the Christian year. It is the day God revealed to man the way to the fountain of youth.

Awareness of the beauty in nature all around us will give us pleasure in nature. Awareness of the pleasant odors of food cooking will give us pleasure in anticipating in eating. Awareness of beautiful music in the background can give us the pleasure of peace of mind in our environment. Potential pleasure is everywhere waiting to become actual by means of our awareness. And so it is with the Easter potential, for pleasure is awaiting us as we become more and more aware of the reality of the risen redeemer.

"God-let me be aware," pleads a poet.  
Let me not stumble blindly down the ways...  
Stab my soul fiercely with others' pain...  
Let my hands, groping, find other hands.  
Give me the heart that divines, understands...  
God, let me be aware.

Angela Morgan writes as one who is aware in this poem:

I am aware,  
As I go commonly sweeping the stair,  
Doing my part of the everyday care-  
Human and simple my lot and my share-  
I am aware of a marvelous thing:  
Voices that murmur and ethers that ring  
In the far stellar spaces wherein cherubim sing.  
I am aware of a passion that pours  
Down channels of fire through Infinity's doors;  
Forces terrific, with melody shod,  
Music that mates with the pulses of God.  
I am aware of the glory that runs  
From the core of myself to the core of the suns...  
I am aware of the splendor that ties  
All things of the earth with the things of the skies.

When we become aware of the presence of Christ in our lives we will enjoy the pleasure of drinking from the fountain of life.

## II. THE EASTER POTENTIAL OF POWER.

Power and pleasure go together, for power is pleasure, and one of life's greatest pleasures is to have power to do the will of God, and be an effective servant. Jesus says to His disciples on that first Easter that His resurrection has created all kinds of potential for new power in their lives. He says in verse 45 that He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. The power of illumination is theirs because of the living Christ.

Not one book of the New Testament would have been written had Jesus not risen. The disciples would have gone back to fishing, and the movement would have been over, and been a mere footnote in history. But in the risen Christ was the potential for the New Testament; the new book of God to man; the new day of worship, which is Sunday, and the new people of God-the church. Easter had in it all of this potential power to change the course of history for all mankind. It changed everything, and continues to do so, for the full potential of Easter power can never be exhausted.

Jesus goes on to tell His disciples that they will be clothed with power from on high, and they will be witnesses to the message of the cross and Easter in all the world. The whole history of Christianity is the potential of Easter becoming actual. When a king stoops to pick something, it has to be of great value. Jesus stooped to pick up sinful mankind because He wants them to be saved as eternal treasure. Jesus said that without Him we can do nothing, but Paul knew that with Christ he could do all things, and that is why he says in Phil. 3:10, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection." In the power of the resurrection is the potential to do everything that God wants done in history.

The Greek word here for power is *dunamis*, which refers to latent power, that is the power that resides in dynamite, or the electrical charge in a battery. It is potential power ready to be used for purpose. In raising Jesus from the dead God created a new power source in the universe, and it was the most powerful ever created. "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me," said Jesus.  
Easter means endless potential of power.

A tomb is the last place from which you would expect good news, but from the empty tomb of Jesus comes the powerful message of joy, because life is stronger than death; love is stronger than hate, and light is stronger than darkness. Easter is the good news that in the resurrection of Christ there is the potential power for good to conquer all evil. Jesus lives, He loves, and He leads, but best of all, He lasts. This means we do not have to despair when evil is powerful, as it was when He hung on the cross. We do not have to throw in the towel and become weary in well doing when the power of darkness seems to dominate the scene. As powerful as evil is, it is temporary. Only the power of the resurrection is permanent.

In the Easter message is the power to be a perpetual optimist. If we can be ever aware of the presence of the living Christ, we can have this power. Jonstone G. Patrick wrote, "The

**Gospel which the church proclaims to the world ever Easter is not an embalmed memory of something that lit up the screen of the past-it is the offer of an up to the minute fellowship with a living Person, risen and radiant, vital and victorious."**

**Potential power is not necessarily actualized, however. We see this on the first Easter. Jesus was alive, but the disciples were not jumping for joy and dancing in the streets laughing at death. They were hiding fearfully behind closed doors, and they had very mixed and confused emotions with doubt and belief, fear and faith, all mixed together. Easter was a reality, but the potential power of it was not yet made actual in their lives. This is still true today. The potential power of Easter is not yet made actual in millions of lives, and even in the lives of us who believe the potential power of the resurrection has not been fully actualized.**

**Every relationship in life is full of potential that is not made actual. Every marriage, every friendship, every neighbor, and every relationship you can imagine has the potential of becoming more. How much more so the relationship of the risen Christ with His people? It is a lifetime adventure to keep growing in our awareness of the presence of Christ, and to tap that source of power for the abundant life. Science is forever striving to better understand how to tap the mind-boggling potential of the atom. The Christian is to strive to do the same with Him who made the atom.**

**The more we do tap this infinite potential of power, the more we taste of the things to come, and drink now of the fountain of life. We do not have to wait until eternity to drink. Jesus said to the woman at the well that if she would drink of the water He would give it would become a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Eternal begins now, and not just after death. The power to live forever begins in time in the power of the resurrection. The potential of Easter means there is never an end to progress. There is always more life to be had, and more love, more joy, more peace, and more of all the fruits of the spirit. Easter means we are to live in a perpetual state of anticipation.**

**Because Jesus is alive with all power in heaven and on earth, we can at any moment experience new insight into the Word of God, or new power to do His will, and touch some life for eternity. This kind of potential is what enables the Christian to keep pressing on living for the ideals of the kingdom of God. Phillips Brooks wrote,**

**Be such a man, and live such a life  
That if every man were such as you,  
And every life a life like yours,  
This earth would be God's paradise.**

**The fact is, it will be paradise again one day because of the power of the resurrection, and in that power God will restore this fallen world to its pre-fall state. Life as we live it now is our expression of faith in that precious hope. Spring is such an appropriate time for Easter for nature itself is a witness to the message of potential power. All winter the forces of life are real and potential, but not actual. Then spring comes and we see the actualizing of that potential. Charles Kingsley wrote,**

**See the land, her Easter keeping;  
Rises as her Maker rose;  
Seeds so long in darkness sleeping  
Burst at last from winter snows.**

**When the potential becomes actual there is life, joy, beauty, and all the positive emotions of life. So it is in the spiritual life of the Christian. There is never more joy, love, and wonder than when we become channels of the power of the resurrection. In the valley of Chambra in India there is a spring which flows from the hillside, which makes the area a place of beauty and fertility. The legend is that the valley was once desolate, and both plants and people were withering with thirst. A princess who loved the people and felt their sorrows deeply went to an oracle to find out what she could do to relieve the suffering of her people.**

**He told her she had to sacrifice her life for them. She chose to do this, and so her grave was dug, and she was buried alive. Then out of her tomb on the hillside a spring began to flow and run down into the valley, and this restored life and beauty. Ever since this spring of life has given pleasure and power to all who live in the valley. This legend illustrates what Jesus did. The world was perishing for want of the water of life. Jesus died and was buried, and from His cross and broken grave poured forth the river of the water of life for the quenching of man's thirst.**

**No longer does any person need to live in the desert and wilderness of life trying to survive on the husks of the swine. Now there is life abundant, and life with beauty, and life with pleasure and power. That is the Easter potential. The challenge for us to know Christ is to make more of that potential become actual by the perpetual growing of our awareness as to His presence. The challenge for those who have never received Christ as their Savior is to stop trying to find a fountain of life on their own. They need to just surrender to Jesus, and take His free offer as a gift. "To as many as receive Him God gives the power to become children of God." He invites us to freely drink of the fountain of life right now and begin to experience the abundant life, and the life that will be forever. Receive Him now and enter into the Easter Potential.**

## **7. BELIEVE IT OR NOT Based on Luke 24:36-53**

**An Irishman on holiday in New York went into a drug store and asked for a small tube of toothpaste. When the clerk handed him a tube he noticed it was marked large. "I'd rather have a small one," he said. "Listen bud," the clerk replied. "In this country toothpaste comes in three sizes: Large, giant, and super. So if you want a small tube ask for large-see?" The mystified traveler found himself caught up in the topsy turvy world of believe it or not paradox where large can be the smallest thing available. There may be limits to what fiction can produce, but most anything can be true in reality.**



The proof that truth is often stranger than fiction is the fact that the first Christians were also the first doubters, deniers, and disbelievers in the resurrection of Christ. The paradox of Christian disbelievers is a biblical fact, believe it or not. That first glorious Easter dawn is glorious to us as we look back from our point of view, but for those actually participating in that first Easter it was far from glorious. In fact, as strange as it may seem, the first Easter was the day of the greatest unbelief in history.

We think our day is one of unbelief and skepticism, but it cannot match the unbelief of the first Easter. I doubt there is any period of history that can match it, for it is the only time in history where all believers were unbelievers. Believe it or not, there was not a single Christian who even showed a sign of belief in the resurrection of Christ until they were compelled to believe by His very appearance. Everyone of them, without exception, was a confirmed skeptic and doubter.

We are so used to making the quick transition from gloomy Good Friday to glorious Easter morning, that we tend to ignore the fact that Jesus had to work all day before He convinced His own disciples that He was really risen and alive. The transition from gloom to glory was not as swift as we have come to make it. It was a difficult process of persuasion, and not an instantaneous transformation. As Christians, we often act as if belief was an easy thing, and an effortless goal to attain, but this is not being realistic about man's nature, and His natural skepticism. When it comes to the matter of death and life beyond the grave, men have deep seeded doubts. All the evidence of our senses is against it, and man longs for evidence of the senses to destroy his doubts. We are so dependent upon physical facts for assurance. Tennyson wrote,

O Christ, that it were possible  
For one short hour to see  
The souls we loved, that they might tell us  
What and where they be.

When James Russell Lowell returned from the funeral of one he loved dearer than life, he said to those who tried to comfort him with the hope of communion in spirit,

Forgive me,  
But I who am earthly and weak,  
Would give all my income from dreamland,  
For a touch of her hand on my cheek.

Were these men deniers of the faith? Not at all! They were simply expressing the fact that belief and faith do not come easy. The demand of the human mind for concrete evidence is so strong that the leap of faith is hard to take. The biblical record recognizes this, and so, believe it or not, the first believers were not men and women of faith, but men and women of fact. They would not accept anything by faith. They not only would not take a leap of faith, they would not even take a step of faith. All the critics of the resurrection have failed to recognize that all of their false theories to explain the resurrection away were originated on the first Easter by the Christian disciples themselves. We shall see this as we go along.

**A. B. Bruce, the great Bible scholar, wrote, "The disciples were not clever, quick-witted, sentimental men such as Renan makes them. They were stupid, slow-minded persons; very honest, but very unapt to take in new ideas. They were like horses with blinders on, and could see only in one direction,-that, namely, of their prejudices. It required the surgery of events to insert a new truth into their minds. Nothing would change the current of their thoughts but a dam work of undeniable fact. They could be convinced that Christ must die only by His dying, that He would rise only by His rising, that His kingdom was not to be of this world, only by the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and the vocation of the Gentiles. Let us be thankful for the honest stupidity of these men. It gives great value to their testimony. We know that nothing but facts could make such men believe that which nowadays they get credit for inventing.**

**Therefore, believe it or not, the most solid historical foundation for our belief is the determined unbelief of the Christians on that first Easter. Our text reveals the climax of the day when they finally came to a point of recognition and rejoicing. But let us look at the record of the rest of the day where we see resignation and resistance.**

**Not a single Christian greeted the first Easter dawn with a ray of hope. The women made their way to the tomb to finish preparation of their Lord's body. They were obviously convinced that He was dead, and that He would remain dead. The men remained behind weeping in hopeless sorrow. Death was victor, and the forces of evil had conquered. The cross was the symbol of total disaster to them. They held to their despair tenaciously, and rejected any evidence of the resurrection as some kind of hoax. When the women found the stone rolled away, and the angel told them that Christ had risen, their reaction one of fear and unbelief. Mark 16:8 says, "And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.**

**Some of the women were brave, however, and they finally decided to tell the disciples. Luke 24:11 says, "Their words appeared in their sight as idle talk, and they disbelieved them." Mary Magdalene was the first to actually see the risen Christ, and she attempted to persuade the disciples, but Mark 16:10-11 says, "And she went and told them as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that He was alive, and had been seen by her, believe not." The very first preacher of the good news of the resurrection could not even get a favorable response among the disciples of Christ. The first Easter message was a total flop, even though everyone present was a disciple of Christ. Here were dogmatic and determined disbelievers. No hysterical, and emotionally controlled women were going to make fools out of these level headed, common sense directed, realistic fact finding disciples.**

**It was the disciples that originated the theory that the resurrection was the result of emotionalism, delusion, or hallucination. They were the first to charge the women with an overactive imagination which invented the whole thing. They, no doubt, looked upon these women as pathetic victims of their grief, while they as men, though sorrowful, still retained their grasp of reality. Mary Magdalene was the originator of the theory that the body was stolen. As she wept outside the tomb she said, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." The empty tomb proved nothing to her but that the body had been stolen. Had she not been approached by Christ in person, she would have spent the first**

Easter searching for the body of Christ, and seeking for clues as to the thieves.

Jesus met two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and they were still sad and unbelieving, and they said, "We hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel." They had heard all of the stories of the empty tomb, the angels message, and the testimony of Mary, but they were not convinced by any of this. They were willing to believe that some other theory could account for all that had happened without it being a fact that Jesus was a live. They were only convinced by a special act of revelation by which they recognized Christ. When they ran to add their testimony to the increasing evidence we read in Mark 16:13, "And they went away and told the rest; neither believed they them." Their unbelief was not based on their distrust of women preachers, for here were male evangelists that also failed to penetrate their shield of disbelief.

So what do we find at the end of the first glorious Easter? We find a group of fear filled disciples huddled in a room, and afraid for their lives, with no confidence or assurance. They were confused, bewildered, and, no doubt, wondered if they were going mad. They would have been okay with the theory that they were the victims of hallucination, or any other theory. Then Jesus appeared in their midst, and they were terrified. They thought they were seeing a ghost. That first Easter was about as joyful as spending a night in a literally haunted house. They must have been emotionally exhausted from all the sorrow, confusion, and fear.

How realistic the biblical picture is. And inventor would have had them singing the Hallelujah Chorus by the empty tomb, but real life is not like that. David Read writes, "Let me ask you this: If you lost a very dear friend in sudden death, and then after two days you suddenly saw him materialize in front of you, exactly as he was-would you immediately and spontaneously be overcome with joy and delight? Would you really be glad? I believe that you and I would be frankly terrified. We should most likely ring for the nearest psychiatrist."

The realism of the biblical record has convinced many a skeptic of its authenticity. It is so true to life that an inventor would have been unable to picture it apart from the actual fact of its occurrence. All of this determined disbelief was natural, but Jesus did not let it pass unrebuked, for he had labored long to prepare them, and yet it was all in vain. He rebuked them for not being willing to even accept the testimony of eyewitnesses among their own group. This was the basis upon which all other men in history would have to believe, yet, they would not surrender their doubt on that basis.

In Mark 16:14 we read, "Afterward He appeared to the 11 as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart. Because they believe not them which had seen Him after He was risen. And verse 41 of our text says that even when they were convinced, and heard, saw, and touched Him, they still though joyful, disbelieved, and felt it was just too good to be true.

If some theory could explain all this, they would have been ready to accept it.

So, believe it or not, the hardest men to ever be convinced of the reality of the resurrection were the very disciples of Christ on that first Easter. No other men in history whoever became believers needed as much evidence and persuasion as did these men. Even then,

**Thomas was gone and demanded all the evidence the others had before he would believe. The first Easter ended with at least one Christian still in the paradoxical position of being an unbeliever. The Christians resisted belief until overwhelmed with the facts. There is not a hint that a single disciple believed in the resurrection on the basis of the evidence we must believe on today. They all had to see Him before they would believe. That is why Jesus said to Thomas, "You have believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Our faith must be that of the poet who wrote,**

**Jesus, these eyes have never seen  
That radiant form of Thine:  
The veil of sense hangs dark between  
Thy blessed face and mine.  
Yet, though I have not seen, and still  
Must rest in faith alone,  
I love Thee, dearest Lord, and will,  
Unseen, but not unknown.**

**We must believe with a greater degree of faith than did the first believers, but we also have a broader historical basis. We have all they had plus the New Testament explanation of the Old Testament prophecies. We have this realistic record of their own journey from darkness to light, and we have the record of a history transformed by the power of the living Christ, plus the personal experience of His presence and power.**

**Nevertheless, let us not be deceived into an easy believism, and pretend that only the willfully blind and hopelessly ignorant resist belief in the resurrection. It is totally unrealistic to expect the majority of people alive today to respond on a higher level of faith than that possessed by the original disciples of Christ. People are basically materialistic, and they demand visible proof of anything that calls for a sizable investment, or serious commitment of their lives. If they do not see the reality of the living Christ in us who profess to know Him; if they cannot see a visible difference in our character and conduct that suggests the presence of a power which is supernatural, then what evidence do they have to persuade them to make the leap of faith?**

**The Christian life which is not Christlike is the greatest hindrance to evangelism, and to the growth of God's kingdom on earth. Believers are the body of Christ, and are the only part of the risen Christ men will ever see before the returning Christ appears in glory. Each of us on this Easter morning must ask ourselves if we are convincing proof of the reality of the resurrection, for, believe it or not, it is not the empty tomb, or the stone removed, or the angel voices, or the history of the church, that is the vital evidence for our day. It is, rather, the living evidence of a Christ-filled and Christ-transformed life.**

**If your picture was published with the caption over it-believe it or not, and underneath was the statement that here is a life which is positive proof of the resurrected and living Christ, would those who know you be more likely to laugh, or give serious consideration to the evidence? It is a frightening responsibility to claim that the living Christ indwells you, but none claim the name of Christ can escape this responsibility.**

God respects the craving of the human mind for evidence, and professing Christians are the evidence He grants the world. All other evidence will fall flat without that of Christlikeness in the flesh. People today, like the first disciples, want to hear, see, and handle before they will let down the guard of unbelief, and let the light of truth transform them. Belief comes hard, and so the evidence must be strong. As goes the typical Christian life, so goes the Gospel of the risen Christ. The most effective evidence of Easter truth is you and I, believe it or not.

The resurrection of Christ is more than a fact of history. Facts of history can be ignored, deplored, or adored, and have no significant effect on your life. If I do not believe Caesar was the emperor of Rome, I may be wrong and ignorant, but I am not thereby any worse off. If I do not believe there are pyramids in Egypt, I am misinformed, but I am none the poorer. But if I do not believe Jesus rose from the grave and conquered death, I am lost, and I lose all the benefits that could be mine by faith in, and commitment to Christ. This is a fact that calls for faith, and it is so vital that one come to have faith in it that every person owes it to himself to be a seeker until he finds whatever is necessary to persuade him to put his trust in the living Christ.

Easter means nothing can happen in life to a believer that can rob his biography of a happy ending, for that ending is always eternal life. If you have never put your faith in Jesus Christ, do it today. Ask Him to come into your life, forgive your sin, and be your Savior. He promises you eternal life, and a happy forever.

## **8. THE EASTER GARDEN Based on John 20:1-18**

A son kept asking his father questions until he was bugged. He decided and try to quench the lad's curiosity with the old cliché, "Remember, curiosity killed the cat." The son replied, "What was the cat curious about dad?" The plan backfired, for the boy was even curious about curiosity. The curious mind can be a nuisance, but its constant probing can make valuable discoveries, even in the most unlikely places. Sometimes the trivial stimulates the mind to curiosity more than the tremendous. Tell people that there are 281,796,349,000 stars in the sky, and they will believe you without question, but put a wet paint sign on a chair, and they will have to touch it and see for themselves. There is an attraction to the trivial.

This is true for me when it comes to John's record of the events of the first Easter. I am curious about a very minor detail that seems almost incidental and inconsequential. I am curious about why Mary thought Jesus was a gardener in verse 15. Why is such a trivial thing as that recorded in the Word of God? The world cannot contain all the books that could be written about Jesus is what John has said at the close of his Gospel. Why then would he use up even one precious line of his Gospel to tell us that Mary Magdalene mistakenly

thought Jesus was a gardener. It was only a mistake that momentarily flashed through her mind, and yet this error is recorded for all time, and for all to see that she failed to identify her Lord at first sight on that first Easter.

Some may feel it is best to just leave such minor incidents in the limbo of neglect, but curiosity demands an investigation. The Holy Spirit had some reason for having it recorded, and a little searching could open up some valuable insights into the mind and plan of God. If you feel it is a waste of time, you will have to take up your quarrel with God, for He inspired this challenge to curiosity, and I for one love to bite on the bait and get hooked on God's Word, even if it comes by way of a weeping woman making a mistake.

The first thing this mistake in identification tells us, by implication, is that the garden in which Jesus was buried was a beautiful and large garden with many flowers and shrubs. In other words, it was a sizable garden and well kept. The reference back in John 19:41 just says the place where He was crucified had a garden, and there was a new tomb in it where no one had ever been laid. If it was not for Mary's mistake we could never have guessed how nice a garden it was. Her mistake, however, tells us that it was large enough so that it took a hired man to maintain its order and beauty. She never could have supposed Jesus was the gardener unless she was in a garden that obviously needed the care of a gardener to maintain it.

The hymn writer was not merely dreaming, but had a good basis when he wrote, "I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses..." In this early hour the dew would be on the roses, and all of the flowers. It is fitting that He who is called the Rose Of Sharon and The Lily Of The Valley should come out of the tomb of the earth and first be seen in a garden. Like all flowers, He had to burst forth from the blackness and darkness of the earth into the light of life. Everything about this Easter garden is appropriate and fitting to the plan of God as it is revealed in Scripture. As we examine the Bible we discover that gardens play a major role. Pascal said, "Man was lost and saved in a garden." The Bible supports this.

God started human history in a garden, and it was no accident, but a deliberate plan. Gen. 2:8 says, "And the Lord planted a garden Eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed." God was the first gardener, and He made the first man a gardener. Adam's job was to keep the garden beautiful. It is no mistake that the second Adam was mistaken for a gardener, for He came to restore the paradise the first Adam failed to maintain because of his sin. How beautiful that the resurrection should take place in a gorgeous garden, for by His resurrection Jesus did in reality restore what Adam lost. If man fell in a garden, it is fitting that he should rise again in a garden, and that is just the way God planned it. God loves order, beauty, and what is fitting, and that is why He saw to it that His Son would be buried in the garden tomb of a rich man.

Kings who were anything at all had their gardens of beauty, and some of them were buried in their garden tombs. In II Kings 21:26 we read of Amon the King of Judah. "And he was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza." The King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, had the most beautiful gardens in ancient history built for his wife. The hanging gardens of Babylon were one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. The Scripture tells us, however, that even the king that Nebuchadnezzar left in charge at Jerusalem had his garden, for when Zedekiah rebelled against him, he came with his army to surround Jerusalem. We have the account

recorded three times in the Old Testament that Zedekiah and all his men escaped by way of the king's garden. (II Kings 25:4).

In Neh. 3:15 we read of the rebuilding of the king's garden. Solomon, of course, had his beautiful gardens with great orchards of fruit trees. The point is, kings had gardens, and it is appropriate that Jesus Christ, as the conquering King over death, should have His garden as well. If God started with a garden, and intends to end history with a restored earth, and a beautiful garden in the Holy City, as the book of Revelation reveals, then it is appropriate that Jesus should rise and be victorious over the sin that lost the first garden, in a garden setting.

Jesus made His first appearance after His resurrection in a garden, and to a woman. Satan made his first appearance in a garden and to a woman. It is no mere coincidence, but a part of the total order of God's plan of redemption. As a woman was the first to be deceived by Satan, So she was the first to receive the revelation of the risen Christ. A woman brought the first word of temptation to man, and now it is she who brings the first word of ultimate truth to man. The environment was a garden because it adds to the beauty of the truth of the resurrection. It symbolizes the truth of paradise regained, and God and man reconciled. God loves a garden, and He loved to walk in the cool of the evening with man in the garden of Eden. Dorothy Frances Gurney wrote,

The Lord God planted a garden  
In the first white days of the world,  
And He set there an angel warden  
In a garment of light unfurled.  
So near to the peace of Heaven,  
That the lark might nest with the wren,  
For there in the cool of the even  
God walked with the first of men.  
The kiss of the sun for pardon,  
The song of the birds for mirth,  
One is nearer God's heart in a garden  
Then anywhere else on earth.

Jesus experienced this Himself, for His most intimate meditations and struggles in relationship to the Father took place in the garden of Gethsemane. This was a garden where Judas betrayed Him, and where He was tempted to let paradise be lost forever, but where He gained the victory, and chose to go the Father's way, even to the depths of hell, that man might walk again with God in the garden. Surrounded by beauty He sweat drops of blood, for He had to endure the desert of damnation if men were ever to have the joy of perpetual garden beauty.

We can be sure of this: Mary's mistake in supposing Jesus was a gardener was no mistake as far as God was concerned, for no gardener ever created so much beauty as Jesus did. He could invite the thief on the cross into paradise, for He made it possible for all men to have access again to the garden of God, and the tree of life. Jesus is the only gardener that raises people. He raises them to life out of death. He beautifies them, and prepares them to wear

the garments of glory for all eternity. No gardener can match Jesus. When He reaps what He has sown, all of the universe will be a glorious garden. Let's look at some reasons why the garden is an important symbol of the truth of the resurrection.

## **I. THE GARDEN IS A SOURCE OF LIFE.**

The garden and the abundant life go together. The garden is a source of fruit, and when Adam and Eve were put out of the garden it was the end of abundant and fruitful living for them. The loss of the garden meant hardship, hunger, and a life of toil and sorrow. The desert is the opposite of the garden. The desert is symbolic of death and barrenness. Sin brings a desert of life. It is the life without fruit. God does not like a desert. He started with a garden, and can never be content until the garden is restored, and the desert blossoms as the rose. The prophet Isaiah tells us of God's love and plan in Isa. 61:11. "For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations."

When the Rose of Sharon blossomed in the Easter garden, God had brought forth a message of life that would cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. The Gospel of the resurrection is the source of abundant life to be taken to all the world. It is of interest that there were four rivers flowing out of Eden. It was really one river which divided in four ways, which produced a symbol that has influenced all of history. Many ancients had gardens with the four rivers, and Persian carpets often have beautiful gardens on them with four rivers which cross and make the symbol of the cross in the garden. That is just what we see in the New Testament picture. We see a garden tomb with the cross nearby. The cross is symbolic of the four rivers which flow out of the garden into all the world. Four is the number of the world. You have the four directions, and the four winds. The four arms of the cross represent the fact that the Gospel of the resurrection is to be taken to all men.

The Easter message is in such harmony with the reality of Spring that it is no wonder that the two are united in so much poetry. God's world and God's Word speak in unison of new life and resurrection. Luther said, "The Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime." The garden and the Gospel go hand in hand. Jesus is the world's best gardener because He is the only gardener that can bring Spring and new life the year around. Christina Rossetti wrote,

My life is like a faded leaf,  
My harvest dwindled to a husk;  
Truly my life is void and brief,  
And tedious in the barren dusk;  
My life is like a frozen thing,  
No bud nor greenness can I see;  
Yet rise it shall-the sap of Spring  
O Jesus, rise in me.

Jesus came to turn our personal deserts into gardens, and to give us life abundant. This is one reason why it is fitting that the resurrection took place in a garden. The garden is a source of life, and so is the resurrection.



## **II. THE GARDEN IS A SOURCE OF JOY.**

Men plant gardens not just for food to sustain life, but just for the sheer pleasure of seeing beautiful things grow. Flowers and plants are the source of so much of the joy of life. Joy and a garden go together in God's mind and plan. Isa. 51:3 says, "For the Lord will comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. When God really wants to bless His people, He grants them the joy of a good garden. A garden of beauty is a good environment for the production of the fruits of the Spirit. The Word of God, and all of history witnessed to the truth that a beautiful environment can promote beautiful living in harmony with the author of all beauty. Mary Howitt wrote,

Yes, in the poor man's garden grow  
Far more than herbs and flowers-  
Kind thoughts, contentment, peace of mind,  
And joy for weary hours.

The Christian poetry on the joy of the garden and flowers, and especially Easter lilies and the rose is voluminous, and they all relate to Jesus who became the greatest flower ever to bloom when He burst forth from the tomb. We would not sing of Him in joyful song as the Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon had He been planted but never risen. But He did rise, and the garden of His resurrection becomes the source of all our joy. Greater is the joy that Jesus was born from the tomb than that He was born from the womb. Christmas joy is completely dependent upon Easter joy. The birth of Jesus did nothing for our salvation, but the birth from the tomb made our new birth possible, and that is why the resurrection garden is the source of our joy.

The garden tomb was a place of gloom till God made His greatest flower bloom. Now it is the source of joy.

Joy dawned again on Easter day.  
The sun shone out with fairer ray,  
When, to their longing eyes restored,  
The Apostles saw their risen Lord.

## **III. THE GARDEN IS A SOURCE OF HOPE.**

When anyone plants a garden for the sake of food, or the beauty of flowers, they do so with expectation and hope. When the seed is planted you hope for what you cannot see. Jesus often spoke of the kingdom of God in terms of sowing and reaping, and He even spoke of His own death and resurrection in these terms when He said in John 12:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Jesus looked at His own life like a seed, and by planting it in death He knew it would come forth from the earth in resurrection and bear much fruit.

Every garden in the world the symbolic of the Christian hope of the resurrection. The garden is such an obvious picture of our hope that Paul uses this imagery often to describe

our resurrection hope. In Rom. 6:5 He writes, for if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. In I Cor. 15, the great resurrection chapter of the Bible, Paul again refers to the radical change that takes place when you plant a seed. It looks worthless and of no value whatever, but in rising from the earth it changes to what is beautiful and fruitful. You can look at that bare seed you plant in your garden with hope, for the resurrection will transform it, and so also you can look at your body with all of its sin and weaknesses. When you get discouraged with your body, look at your garden and remember the seed. Paul says in verses 42 and 43, "So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." Every child of God will be a startling beauty in eternity.

No, it was no mistake when Mary supposed Jesus to be a gardener, for He is not only the King of Kings, He is the King of gardeners. The Bible is full of garden terms to describe Him and His work. He is the alpha and omega of gardening. He is the Seed, the Branch, the Lily, the Rose, the First Fruits, the Tree of Life, and the Vine. The prophets call Him both a tender plant and a plant of renown. He is also the Lord of the harvest, and when He comes again He will reap the harvest from the seed He has planted in the world as the Sower.

Christ is risen, Christ the first-fruits  
Of the holy harvest field,  
Which will of its full abundance  
At His second coming yield.

Those who are ready because they have received Him as Savior, and bowed to Him as Lord, will enter the glorious garden of paradise to be with Him forever.

His reign shall know no end,  
And round His pierced feet  
Fair flowers of paradise extend  
Their fragrance ever sweet.  
Thy gardens and thy goodly walks  
Continually are green,  
Where grow such sweet and pleasant flowers  
As nowhere else is seen,  
Right through the streets, with silver sound,  
The living waters flow,  
And on the banks, on either side,  
The trees of life do grow.

Such is the desirable destiny of all who become branches of the Living Vine. If you have not attached yourself to Christ as the source of your life, do so today. There will no garden in hell, and no trees, shrubs, or flowers. Sin leads only to the desert of damnation, but faith in Christ leads to abundant life in an eternal garden. What you do with Jesus determines your eternal environment. It is either God and the garden, or the devil and the desert. Come to Christ, and you come to the garden where you enjoy beauty forever.

## **9 THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION Based on John 20:1-18**

When Jesus Christ entered the stage of human history He entered it to stay, and even when evil men and satanic forces nailed Him to a cross, and sealed Him in a tomb, it was not the end; not even the beginning of the end, but only the end of the beginning, for He made that cross a symbol of love and redemption, and that tomb a symbol of life and resurrection. On that first Easter morning the greatest act that ever took place on this earthly stage was performed. How great was it, and how important was it? So important that the Bible says, if it did not happen your faith is vain, and there is no hope, and you are yet in your sins. It was so important that from the start the Apostles fearlessly claimed it, and forcefully proclaimed it. Atheists and skeptics have done all they could to try and disprove it, for if they could all of Christianity would collapse, but so overwhelming is the reality of the resurrection that Christians welcome investigation. Many who set out to disprove it have become committed believers. There are just three things we want to consider in this message. First we want to-

### **I. EXAMINE THE RECORD OF THE RESURRECTION. vv. 5-8**

Why did John believe? What evidence did he have here that told him of the reality of the resurrection? We need to try and think like he must have thought. Could robbers have stolen the body? This would be a logical question. But John would conclude that no robber would neatly fold the grave clothes as they were. And a friend would not have stolen the body, for they would not have unwrapped the body there. The evidence indicated that Jesus must have done this himself.

Who but the Son of God would rise from the dead and then neatly fold up His grave clothes? He did not just let them fall in disorder, but He folded them neatly, and thus revealed that it was the Lord of all order that was at work here. Nobody else would have bothered with such a trivial matter, but nothing was too small for it to matter to Jesus, and John knew that.

Mary is seen weeping at the tomb because the body of Jesus was gone, but little did she realize that she would really have something to weep about if the body had still been there. She would then have a god like the gods of the world who always end up in a tomb somewhere. She was suffering the grief of Good Friday yet as she stood before the empty tomb which represented the glory of Easter morning, and of the Risen Redeemer. She was bewailing her loss when she could be beholding her Lord. She was like the masses who still live in the darkness of a world with no hope when the light of eternal hope is right at their fingertips in the Living Lord.

Mary, however, did not stay in the dark, for Jesus revealed Himself. He spoke her name

and Mary entered the dawn of a new morning, and Easter glory was born in her heart. Her Savior was alive, and had conquered death, just as he said. Anyone who will listen and turn to the Living Christ today can still hear Him say "Come unto me and rest." Anyone can enter into the Easter message and receive Jesus as Savior and have the hope of eternal life with Him. Next we want to-

## **II. EXPLAIN THE RESULTS OF THE RESURRECTION.**

Mary became the first witness of the resurrection, and she became the apostle to the Apostles. But they were too sad to believe her good news. They were the saddest group of men the world has ever seen. The walls of life had collapsed on them, and lay in ruins at their feet. The one they put all their hope in was crucified and buried. It was over and they were in despair.

That evening Jesus himself came to them and this group of discouraged, disappointed, and defeated disciples became dynamic and determined to devote their lives to delivering this good news to the lost world. They turned the world upside down and changed the course of history. Nothing but the reality of the resurrection could explain this sudden change from fear to faith; from pain to praise; from sorrow to service, and from self-centered cowardice to Christ-centered courage. Men do not face torture, burning at the stake, being torn in two, fed to lions, and all manner of persecution and suffering for the sake of a fairy tale, or for anything they were not so sure of they would be willing to die for its reality.

Some skeptics know that they must have seen Jesus alive to have such a motivation, but they come up with things like the swoon theory. It says that Jesus revived in the coolness of the tomb, and so they did see him alive again. This is foolishness, for he would be so weak that he would need long nursing back to health, and likely never make it but die in the attempt. They would know how unlike God he was then, and how he did not conquer death in any meaningful way different than others who have survived. A man half dead, and staggering from a tomb, and then needing a great deal of care would not inspire the conviction that death had been conquered. This theory cannot explain the zeal of the disciples to proclaim the reality of the resurrection. Jesus had to show He was mighty in His victory over death to convince His disciples, and motivate them to sacrifice their lives to share it with the world. Third we want to-

## **III. EXPERIENCE THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION.**

There is little profit if we examine the record and explain the results, but do not experience the reality of the resurrection. This is the heart of the Gospel, for we can know Jesus and the power of His resurrection. Men can live without feet, fingers, and many other parts of the body, but not without heart. You can know the facts of Easter, and not know the faith of Easter, and this leaves you with a corpse religion, for the heart is gone. If you meet your greatest foe, which is death, and all you have is the facts of Easter, but not faith in the Lord of Easter, you are fighting with an unloaded gun. You are on a bridge that only goes part way across the river that separates time from eternity, and a bridge that stops short of the other shore is not any better than no bridge at all.

The reality of the resurrection must be more than a fact you believe in. It must be a force that motivates you like it did the disciples. It must be a reality that determines your whole perspective on life, and your actions and goals. This can only be by asking the Resurrected Savior to come into your life as Lord, and to reign in you. Those who will receive Jesus as their Living Lord will experience the reality of the resurrection, and enter into the joy of Easter, which means we have eternal life in Him.

## **10. TEARS AT THE TOMB Based on John 20:11-18**

It I had a dollar for every tear shed by men and women if the Bible, I would be a wealthy man, for the Bible is a book soaked with the tears of the saints. The weeping of the wicked and the sobs of sinners added to the tears of the saints makes a salty sea of liquid. Not only was Jesus a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, but the Bible is a book of sorrows, and is acquainted with grief. The Bible deals with life as it really is, and real life provides abundant opportunity for the exercise of the tear ducts. Not all tears are bad.

Charles Dickens said, "We need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are like rain upon the blinding dust of earth." Tears, like rain drops, have brought forth much fruitfulness. Tears can move the very heart of God. When Hezekiah was told he would die he wept bitterly, and God sent Isaiah to say to him in II Kings 20:5, "Thus says the Lord, the God of David your Father: I've heard your prayers, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you."

Tears of repentance have transformed dying weeds into living flowers of faith. Dante, in his Divine Comedy, has a story of a demon and an angel debating over which should have possession of the body of one who had died in battle. The angel clinched his argument for possession by opening the eyes of the dead man. "See," said the bright angel, "The trace of a recent tear." This can be overly sentimental, and people can weep without repenting, but the fact is, tears of true repentance do move the heart of God. Few things are more tragic than eyes that have never shed tears over sin.

O ye tears, O ye tears! I am thankful that ye run!  
Thou ye trickle in the darkness, ye shall glitter in the sun.

The rainbow cannot shine if the rain refused to fall,  
And the eyes that cannot weep are the saddest eyes of all.

Tears of repentance are worth their weight in gold. Those who shed such tears will enter that land of bliss where God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. But those who never shed them will never escape them, for their destiny is outer darkness where there shall be

weeping and gnashing of teeth. Blessed are those who mourn now for sin, for they shall be comforted forever. Those who will not weep in time, will weep in eternity. There is no escape from tears, but you have a choice as to when you will shed them. Spurgeon said, "The tears of penitents are precious, a cup of them were worth a king's ransom. It is no sign of weakness when a man weeps for sin."

Henry Martyn is a legend among missionaries. One of the greatest ever, but he may never have been heard of had it not been for tears. As a student he got into a quarrel with his father. In a fit of passion he stormed out of the house, never to return. Before he could return and seek his father's forgiveness, his father suddenly died. His remorse was so pitiful, and his eyes so swollen with tears. F. W. Borham writes, "But that torrent of tears so cleansed those eyes that he was able to see, as he had never seen before, into the abysmal depths of his own heart." He saw himself as a sinner who desperately needed a Savior. His father, by dying, gained an answer to his prayers. The poet describes how tears of repentance can be a dead man's blessing.

When I was laid in my coffin,  
Quite done with time and its fears,  
My son came and stood beside me-  
He hadn't been home for years;  
And right on my face came dripping  
The scald of his salty tears,  
And I was glad to know his breast  
Had turned at last to the old home nest,  
That I said to myself in an underbreath:  
This is the recompense of death.

There are many kinds of tears. There are the tears shed for the sins of others. Compassion for others has made the strongest men weak. Jesus wept for others, and tears like these have changed the course of history. Shakespeare said, "Did he break into tears? There are no faces truer than those that are so washed." Psa. 126:5-6 says of this kind of weeping, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Compassionate tears, like raindrops, have brought forth much fruit.

When Lincoln got the telegram that General Lee was about to surrender, he left Washington to go to the front. He found officials preparing for his entry into Richmond. Lincoln put his foot down and said, "There shall be no triumphal entry into Richmond. There shall be no demonstration just now." He walked alone into the city with his head bowed and his heart heavy with sorrow. He went to the Southern capital, and sat at the desk of Jefferson Davis. He put his head in his hands and wept. His sympathetic heart bound the North and South together. Pride and a gloating smile of victory could have widened the division, but a great man's humble tears cemented this split nation, and brought it together.

Lincoln was just one of the many great men who won great victories with the power of tears. Someone once built a statue to commemorate a victory, and when an observer said, "Why there is a tear in the eye," the sculptor said, "I know, we won the war, but we did not

win the enemy." Lincoln's tears did not win the war, but they won the enemy.

No radiant pearl, which crested fortune wears,  
No gem that twinkling hangs from beauty's ears,  
Not the bright stars which night's blue arch adorn,  
Nor rising suns that guild the vernal morn,  
Shines with such lustre as the tear that flows  
Down virtue's manly cheek for other's woes.

C. S. Lewis in, *Letters To An American Lady* wrote, "I am very sorry indeed to hear that anxieties again assail you. By the way, don't weep inwardly and get a sore throat. If you must weep, weep a good honest howl! I suspect we-and especially, my sex-don't cry enough now-a-days. Aeneas and Hector and Beowolf, Roland, and Lancelot blubbered like school girls, so why shouldn't we?"

A concordance will reveal that almost every great man in Scripture wept. Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the apostle Peter, the apostle Paul, and the greatest of all, Jesus. Paul even counseled us to weep with those who weep, as he did. The fact is, there is more about the tears of men in the Bible than about the tears of women. Women are suppose to be the crying sex, but there are very few descriptions of it in the Bible. One of them we do have is of a wife's cleaver use of tears to get her own way. The woman in the Bible who cried the most was the bride to be of Samson. She wanted him to tell her the answer to his riddle. He would not do it, so we read in Judges 14:17, "She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her...." Samson may have been the strongest man in history, but even he could not take more than a week with a weeping woman. Women have used this fact effectively.

Ladies, to this advice give heed:  
In controlling men,  
If at first you don't succeed,  
Cry, cry again.

Tears can be a virtue, but these were tears that were a vice. Samson probably wept himself for ever getting mixed up with this fake cry-baby. She ruined his riddle bet for him, and he got angry, and the whole wedding was off. Even these tears had some value, for they led to Samson never having to live with this cry-baby.

We could go on studying the various kinds of tears of the Bible, but our text should be our focus. Here are some of the most unique tears of the Bible. Mary Magdalene is the weepiest woman of the New Testament. She is the only person in history who had both angels and the son of God ask her why she was weeping. Tears at the tomb are not really much of a mystery. If weeping is not appropriate there, then it is hard to conceive of where it is. Tears in the tomb are a common place couple, as perfectly matched as black and grief. If you see someone crying at a grave site, you are not puzzled by this emotion. The real mystery is why the angels and the Lord asked Mary why she was weeping. Nobody ever asked the disciples why they were weeping. They were still shedding tears after the Risen Son had dried hers, and made her smile in joy. In Mark 16:10 we read of Mary after she met Christ, "She went and told

those who have been with him, as they mourned and wept..."

The disciples tears are dismissed with a mere mention, but these tears at the tomb are an issue. Mary's tears are pure tears of loving grief. The disciples have tears mixed with guilt. They failed Jesus, they forsook Him, and their sorrow is contaminated with much selfishness. Mary, however, never forsook her Lord, and never denied Him, but openly followed Him to the end. Her love did not depend upon His popularity, or His acceptance among the leaders of Israel. It was not a superficial or surface love with her. Someone wrote, "Don't be veneer stuck on with glue, be solid mahogany all the way through." That was Mary Magdalene-she was solid.

Her pure tears, therefore, were the first to be dried by the risen Christ. Paul does not even mention her in his list of those who saw Jesus risen. Some see this as evidence of Paul's negative attitude toward women, but more than likely, Paul did not even know about these things of which John writes. John did not write his Gospel until long after Paul wrote his epistles. Whatever the reason for Paul's neglect, John makes Mary the first to see the risen Christ, and the first to have her tears of grief wiped away by the reality of the resurrection. Her tears at the tomb are symbolic of how deeply we can love Christ, and the drying of her tears are symbolic of how deeply Christ loves us in conquering death. Only Christ could dry her tears.

Verse 12 says she saw two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had been. Jesus had hung on a cross between two thieves, but His body in death lay between two angels. The angels were literally bodyguards, for if the archangel Michael had to combat with the devil in a dispute over the body of Moses, as we read in Jude 9, it would seem likely that the body of Jesus would not be safe from demonic plots without angelic protection. The angels were obviously in the form of men, and Mary did not realize they were supernatural beings. She could not calmly engage in conversation with them had they been great winged creatures as the artists portray them. She spoke with them as if they were a couple of curious bystanders who stopped to see what was going on. She was entertaining angels unaware.

In verse 13 they asked her why she is weeping. For all we know angels never shed tears. They never lose loved ones to death, and they may not grasp the meaning of tears of grief. They were not asking for information, but were simply making her examine the basis for her sorrow, for they knew she had none, but just didn't know it. Then Jesus appeared, but He was unrecognized, and He asked her the same question, "Why are you weeping?" She tells of her search for the body of her Lord, and makes a commitment to carry it away if he would reveal where it is hidden. When Jesus called her by name, and she suddenly became aware that He was alive, she almost did carry Him away, and Jesus had to caution her.

Mary's tears were tears of ignorance. Three times in verses 9, 13, and 14 there is reference to the cloud of ignorance that was responsible for the rain of tears from her eyes. She did not know any of the positives, but saw only the negatives. Ignorance is the cause of many tears. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians who were weeping for Christians who had died, and said, "I would not have you to be ignorant brethren, concerning them which are fallen to sleep, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope." Then he goes on to remind



them of the resurrection, rapture, and the precious hope of reunion. Those who live in ignorance of the good news will weep the tears of ignorance, but those who know the living Christ, who gained the victory over death, will only have tears of gratitude.

The word that brought light was her own name. When Jesus spoke her name the sun rose, the clouds dissolved, and the tears at the tomb were ended. The ear heard a sound which shut off the tears of the eyes. Words can be tear stoppers. Many a tear has been dried by words of love and encouragement. Mary heard the voice that had cast out the demons in her. She heard the voice that had given forth life and health to the multitudes. She heard the voice of her Lord, and from that moment joy filled her life, and tears were wiped away. The resurrection of Christ is the foundation for the ultimate wiping away of all tears, and an eternal life of rejoicing.

Who is this, a Man of Sorrows,  
Walking sadly life's hard way,  
Homeless, weary, sighing, weeping  
Over sin and Satan's sway?  
'Tis our God, our glorious Savior,  
Who above the starry sky,  
Now for us a place prepareth  
Where no tear can dim the eye.

Until that day tears will continue to be a universal language. The simpleton can weep as well as the sage. You may not understand Greek or Spanish, but you can understand the tears of the Greeks and the Spaniards. Tears are neither foreign nor domestic, for they are universal. But for the believer tears are only temporary. Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning, for when Jesus arose, He gained victory over all our foes.

I invite you to join me in the journey to that land of tearless joy by putting your trust in the Lord Jesus as your Savior. He wept so much on earth that we might weep no more in heaven. Whether you shed tears forever, or escape them forever, all depends on what you do with Jesus. It is tears forever, or tears forever wiped away.

Tears forever washed away,  
Or tears forever flowing.  
It all depends upon the way  
That you and I are going.

Jesus is the Way to tears forever wiped away.

## **11. THE RADICAL RESURRECTION Based on Rom. 6:1-10**

What is the most radical thing that could happen to you after you die? Death is not the last chapter in the biography of anyone. Things have a way of happening even after you are dead. Pastor Leland Botjen of Spokane, Washington almost left the ministry after his first funeral. The family of the deceased was poor, and a pine box was all they could afford. As the pallbearers carried the coffin up the stairs, the bottom fell out and the body rolled down the steps. The mourners were screaming, and the undertaker fainted. He was frozen in a state of shock.

That was a radical after death experience, and history is full of them. Just because the body is dead it does not mean that it cannot yet have a history. Bodies have been stolen from their graves and sold. Bodies have been moved from one country to another, or one cemetery to another. Dead bodies are still things, and a lot of things can be done with things like bodies.

My Christian aunt donated her body to medical science, and so part of her are still having a history. At her memorial service I saw what I had never seen before. There were balloon bearers rather than pallbearers. They hung in large bunches across the front of the sanctuary, and after the service everyone gathered outside and they were released to ascend into the sky and out of sight. In each balloon was a piece of paper with her favorite Scripture which read, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths." Prov. 3:5-6.

She wanted her memorial service to be a celebration, and to be a time when even the last event of her life would be a service to the kingdom of God. Her body will go on serving, and the balloons were an act of service to convey the Word of God to others. It was a beautiful experience, and a radical new experience for me. But it does not come close to being the most radical thing that can happen to someone after death.

The two thieves that died along side of Jesus were likely cast into the city dump and burned to ashes. Cremation is certainly a radical thing to happen to a body. Others have been left to be eaten by birds and animals, and this is a radical reality that has been the fate of many thousands. But none of these come close to being the most radical after death experience. That honor has to go to the experience of being resurrected. All of the after death experiences of people who see lights, and who see loved ones are all kids stuff in comparison to the experience of being resurrected. To be truly dead and then to have your body refilled with life, and renewed by the Spirit, and revived to consciousness to walk again in the land of the living-that is the ultimate in radical.

This means that the resurrection of the body of Jesus is the most radical event in history, for He was the first to be resurrected never to die again. All others who were raised from the dead had to endure a rerun of dying all over again. Their resurrection was only temporary,

but the resurrection on that first Easter was the beginning of the end for the reign of death, for the resurrection of Jesus was a permanent victory over death. Paul says in Rom. 6:9, "For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again, death no longer has mastery over him."

If resurrection is the most radical thing that can happen to one after death, and the resurrection of Jesus was the first permanent resurrection, then we can see why Easter is the world-wide focus that it is, for we are celebrating the most radical event that can be conceived. Before Easter there was a sort of dualism in the universe. Satan and his rebel forces had been cast out of heaven, but they had considerable power on earth. Their control of the realm of the dead seemed to be secure. To rob the enemy of this stronghold someone had to penetrate this fortress of death, and then escape to prove that life is superior to death. Easter is the celebration of the success of just such a radical military maneuver.

By means of his radical resurrection Jesus defeated man's greatest enemy. Now a follower of Jesus does not need to fear entering the realm of death, for it is no longer under the control of Satan, but is under the Lordship of Christ. Paul makes this clear in Rom. 14:8-9. "So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living."

There have been many decisive battles in history that have determined the direction of history, but none so decisive as this one that determined the destiny of all mankind. Because of His victory over death there is now an up for every down, and the up has the final word. Yes there is death, but life has the last word. Yes there is ugliness, but beauty has the last word. Yes there is falsehood, but truth has the last word. We could go on and on because the radical resurrection of Jesus has made all negatives temporary and all positives permanent. That is why Paul was such an incurable optimist. That is why he could write in Phil. 4:8, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

Paul knew that when a Christian becomes a pessimist it is because they have taken their eyes off of the radical resurrection. All the negative things of life are real, but they are not permanent. They will be, not just out of style, but totally obsolete in the kingdom of Christ. Therefore, the Christian has no business making them the focus of life. It is the permanent that is to be the focus, for in so doing we honor the victory Jesus gained by His radical resurrection. When we are pessimists we are being pre-Easter in our thinking. Pre-Easter is death oriented, but post-Easter is life oriented. Keep this in mind every time you are thinking negative, for it means you are taking your eyes off the radical resurrection. When this is your focus you will be able to say with Camus, "In the midst of winter I suddenly found that there was in me an invincible summer." Or sing with Charles Wesley-

Jesus, my All-in-All thou art:  
My rest in toil, my ease in pain,  
The healing of my broken heart,  
In war my peace, in loss my gain,  
My smile beneath the tyrant's frown:  
In shame my glory and my crown.

**In want my plentiful supply,  
In weakness my almighty pow'r,  
In bonds my perfect liberty,  
My light in Satan's darkest hour,  
In grief my joy unspeakable,  
My life in death, my All-in-All.**

**A Christ-centered mind is radically optimist and life-centered. There is no record of anyone being able to stay dead in the presence of Christ. Every time Jesus confronted a corpse He brought it to life. No one ever died in His presence, or stayed dead after He arrived. Even the thief who died next to Him was promised to be alive with Him that very day. No doubt, the reason Jesus did not come to the home of Lazarus when He was dying was because if He did Lazarus never would have died. Jesus had to stay away to give death a chance to do its worst. Then He came and raised him from the dead to demonstrate that even after death has done its worst life is still superior. Jesus said on that occasion in John 11:25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though He dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."**

**This is radical teaching. Nobody in history except Jesus made such radical claims. If you don't think Jesus was a radical, you are just not listening. The people who did listen said, "No man ever spoke as this man." In John 14:19 Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Try and top that! When a man says you are looking at God when you are looking at me, you have reached the top rung on the ladder of the radical. You can't get beyond the extreme of saying, as Jesus did, "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me." Let's face it, Jesus was the most radical personality whoever walked this planet, and He made the most radical claims, and did the most radical things, and at the center of it all is the radical resurrection. Jesus said in John 6:40, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day."**

**The resurrection is so radical because it becomes the foundation for the ultimate plan of God to have an eternal family in heaven raised up from the realm of death to dwell with Him forever. There is nothing moderate about the resurrection.**

**It is the supreme truth of Christianity.  
It is the Mt. Rushmore of Christian memorials.  
It is the Mt. Everest of Christian peaks.  
It is the Crown Jewels of Christian values.  
It is the Niagara Falls of Christian resources.  
It is the Great Pyramid of Christian permanence.  
It is the Grand Canyon of Christian awesomeness.  
It is the Rock of Gibraltar of Christian stability.  
It is the Sun of the Christian solar system.**

**The resurrection is the most radical event in history because it made the most radical changes in history. You cannot exaggerate its importance. You cannot excessively exalt it, or find terms that are too superlative to describe it. Paul made this clear in I Cor. 15:14 where he wrote, "...if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." The**

proverb says, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." God, however, does not always do the conventional thing. He did put all His eggs in one basket, and it was the Easter basket that He chose. The entire plan of God hinges on the reality of the radical resurrection. If this is not real, the entire plan of God is a house of cards ready to collapse into a meaningless heap. If Easter is not true, then Christianity is as worthless as a rotten egg. But if it is true, then all the forces of hell cannot withstand its radical power to change everything that sin has corrupted and made rotten. It reverses the ultimate wrong of death, and gives to us the ultimate right, which is life.

Two centuries ago a Russian General named Rimmniksky Suvarov faced an enemy that greatly outnumbered him. But he motivated his army to advance, and they won an important victory. He ordered all the captured enemy ammunition melted down and he made medals out of it for his soldiers. The very lead that was intended to pierce their hearts and take their lives was worn over their hearts in pride, for they had turned defeat into victory. What a radical change from bullets of death to medals of life. That is what Jesus did by His radical resurrection to the cross. He made this object of horror and death a symbol of beauty and life. By His resurrection He changed everything.

The epitaph of Jesus is the most radical in all of history. All over the world the words on tombs and graves are, "Here lies \_\_\_\_\_" the name is given, but on the tomb of Jesus are the words of the angel, "He is not here." That is radical. People go to famous tombs because the bodies of well-known people are there. But people go to the tomb of Jesus because His body is not there. If His body was there, there would be no reason to go, for it would mean that all He said was worthless, and that all He did was futile. But people go because the empty tomb is the radical symbol of His radical resurrection. That is what makes all that He said and did the most radical truth and action in the history of the world.

In the 19th century it was a custom to bury valuable things with loved ones in order to show your grief. Dante Gabriel Rossetti showed the extent of his grief by putting into coffin of his wife the manuscript of his poetry. These famous poems laid in her arms for years. Then he began to doubt if this was the best place for his creativity to lie. He risked imprisonment and fines by digging up her grave and retrieving his poetry. It was wet and had to be dried leaf by leaf, but this poetry rescued from the grave is now in anthologies of poetry all over the world. But as radical as this was it cannot begin to match the radical resurrection of Jesus by which He inspired poems by the millions.

Before Easter death was a dead end street, but by his radical resurrection Jesus changed it from a terminal to a freeway to the eternal city, and ever since, the joy of the Easter message has brought forth poetry and songs of praise and thanksgiving. There has never been a more radical gift ever given than the one made possible by the radical resurrection. An unknown poet wrote,

Thanks to Thee, O Christ victorious!  
Thanks to Thee, O Lord of Life!  
Death hath now no power o'er us,  
Thou hast conquered in the strife.  
Thanks because Thou didst arise

**And hast opened Paradise!  
None can fully sing the glory  
Of the resurrection story.**

**Easter is so radical because it is the basis for all the other Christian holidays and celebrations. There would be no Christmas, lent, or Good Friday, or a Christian year at all if there had been no Easter. Jesus could walk on water, feed the famished, heal the heart broken, cure the contagious, hush the hurricane, lift the lowly, and teach the truth, but all of this would be in vain if His body did in the tomb remain. If the tomb of Jesus was not empty, then all of the rest of His life would be, for all the hopes of man for a radical victory over death would be buried there with Him. But Jesus lives, and His radical resurrection began to change the world right away.**

**A Roman magistrate said to the Christian prisoner before him, "I sentence you to death as a follower of the Nazarene." The prisoner replied, "Death sir is dead. It no longer has power to make me afraid. Our Master has conquered death and the grave and He told us, 'Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.'" Rome had no weapon by which to counteract this radical strategy of Christ. The threat of death was the most powerful weapon in the world to coerce and manipulate people. Jesus took that away on Easter, and so it is no wonder that the cross of the despised Galilean became the dominate symbol, and the Roman eagle began to fade.**

**The resurrection of Jesus is the most radical fact of history, and it is also the most radical force in history, for it changed the value placed upon every human being. Life was cheap all through pre-Easter history, but if Jesus died for all, and rose at all might have eternal life, this changed the value of every person. They now have infinite worth. This was so radical a change that Celsus, the bitter critic of early Christianity, said that other teachers invited the clean and the worthy to follow them, but Jesus called the rag, tag and bobtail of humanity. Origin, the church father, answered the critic by writing, "Yes, but he does not leave them the rag, tag and bobtail of humanity, but out of the material you would have thrown away as useless, he fashions men, giving them back their self-respect, enabling them to stand on their feet and look God in th eye. They were cowed, cringing, broken things, but the Son has made them free."**

**The radical resurrection reversed so many of the values of the world and enabled ordinary men to live extraordinary lives. That is the whole point of this passage in Rom. 6. If we identify with the cross and resurrection of Christ, we can die to sin and live to God. The resurrection made it possible for any of us to live the life that is pleasing to God and victorious over the forces of evil. The resurrection life does not start after we die. It starts now in this life, and it is a radical change from the life of the flesh. The flesh life enjoys the physical, and by itself this leads to all sorts of sin. The resurrection life enjoys higher values of the spirit, and this keeps the enjoyment of the flesh consistent with those higher values. It enables a person to fulfill the chief end of man, which is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.**

**The one problem involved in the resurrection life is that you have to die first to experience it. Jesus could not be raised until He died, nor can we. We will not all die**

physically, for when Christ comes again those who are living will not die but be changed and receive new bodies like those who are raised from the dead. But all Christians need to die spiritually and be raised spiritually. We need to die to sin and to live to righteousness. We need to die to pride and to live to humble service. We need to die to greed and to live to generosity. Death and resurrection are a part of the whole process of becoming sanctified and mature in Christ. The less we die the less we can rise. The more we die the more we can rise. Resurrection is always after death, and so if people do not die there can be little in the way of rising.

It is one of the marvels of history that one poor man in England could care for the needs of ten thousand orphans. George Muller not only build 5 spacious building to house orphans, but he established day schools and Sunday schools all over the world. They touched up to 150 thousand children. It is estimated that he raised 7 and a half million dollars back in the 1800's. How could a man be so fruitful? When George was asked this he replied, "There was a day when I died, utterly died, died to George Muller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will-died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends-and since then I have studied only to show myself approved to God."

The point is God could use all of us to care for thousands of orphans, but that the more radical the death the more radical the resurrection. If we are never crucified with Christ, we will never be raised with Christ to live the resurrection life of victory. What that victory means to you and I will be radically different for each of us. None of the Apostles did what Muller did, nor have any of the great Christians of our century. Each of us has a different role in God's plan, but that role is more likely to be fulfilled if we die daily and like the Sun rise anew each day to walk in newness of life. D. L. Moody said, "Everyday I have a little new birth." Sarah Woolsey wrote-

Everyday is a fresh beginning,  
Every morn is the world made new,  
You who are weary of sorrow and sinning,  
Here is a beautiful hope for you,-  
A hope for me and a hope for you.

Everyday is a fresh beginning;  
Listen, my soul, to the glad refrain,  
And, spite of old sorrow and older sinning,  
And puzzles forecasted and possible pain,  
Take heart with the day, and begin again.

This is radical teaching, but the fact is, the Scriptures support the idea that everyday is resurrection day. Easter comes but once a year, but everyday is resurrection day. Paul did not say that he dies once a year. He said that he dies daily. Nature is too slow a model for us to follow. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Note the word daily. What you did yesterday was yesterday's life. Today is a new day and tomorrow will be another new day, and every day of your life is a new beginning. You have to start all over on every one of them, and die to self, and live to God.

Salvation is a one for all experience. It is an act of faith by which we trust in Jesus as Savior, and we are born again into the family of God. It can happen by the simple prayer, "Lord Jesus forgive me and come into my life." But the resurrection life is not an event. It is a process that never ends. It is daily and perpetual. Nothing we do no Easter will be of any major consequence if we do not continue to do it the day after, and everyday after, for where there is no death there can be no resurrection. It depends upon daily dying. Grasping this, and then doing it, can make everyday an Easter, and everyday a day in which we experience more of the power of the radical resurrection.

## **12. THE LAST BREAKFAST Based on John 21:1-14**

The Bible says God's mercies are new every morning, and the result is that many of His blessings have come to His people at breakfast. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission, tells of this event in his life as he prepared to go to China. When he got to China he knew he would have to depend upon God alone, and so he began to practice while yet in England. He decided that he would move man through God by prayer alone. He worked for a man who needed to be reminded every time his salary was due. Taylor was determined to trust God to move him and not do so directly. He began to pray for God to bring this need to his employer's mind. The time came for his quarterly salary, but Dr. Harley made no mention of the matter. As the day passed, Taylor prayed without ceasing until finally he was down to one coin that was worth about one dollar.

On Sunday he had a full day of Christian service, and after the last service at about 10 at night a poor man asked him to come and pray for his wife who was dying. The man was a Catholic and so he asked him why he did not send for a priest. The man explained that he had, but the priest would not come without a payment of 18 pence which the man did not possess. That reminded Taylor of just how poor he was also at that point. His last coin was in his pocket and all he had at home was some water-gruel for breakfast. He had nothing for dinner the next day. He thought how gladly would I give something to these poor people if I only had more, but to part with his last coin was not even thinkable. When he got to the home he saw a miserable and wretched sight with five children with sunken cheeks. They were slowly starving, and there was the poor exhausted mother lying on a pallet.

He began to struggle with himself. He tried to offer words of comfort, but inside he was calling himself a hypocrite, for he was telling them to trust God, but he would not trust God alone. He was clinging to that last coin as if that was his only hope. He prayed and rose to leave. The father said, "You see the terrible state we are in. If you can help us, for God's sake do!" At that moment the word flashed into his mind, "Give to him that asketh of thee." He reached into his pocket and pulled out his last coin and gave it to the man. Joy flooded his heart, and he was again on track of trusting God alone and not God plus a coin. He walked home rejoicing, and that night he reminded the Lord of His Word which said, "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord." He asked God to not let his loan be a long one for he had no



dinner for the next day.

The next morning he rose and sat down to eat his last plate of porridge. While he was consuming this final bit of food, there was a knock at the door. It was the postman with a very unusual Monday morning delivery. When he opened the letter he found a blank piece of paper out of which fell half a sovereign. He writes, "Praise the Lord," I exclaimed, "Four hundred per cent for a 12 hour investment." This was not the end of the story for he did get his salary also in answer to prayer, but this blessing at breakfast so convinced Taylor that he could trust God alone to meet his every need that he went on to start the greatest missionary movement in the history of China. That breakfast was the beginning of a great movement in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Jesus loves to do some great things at breakfast. As we focus our attention on the beautiful breakfast on the beach in John's Gospel, let us keep in mind that it was indeed the last breakfast. We hear much of the last supper, but here was the last breakfast that Jesus had with His disciples, as far as the record of the Bible reveals. It was also a breakfast of beginnings, for Jesus here taught the disciples the same lesson Hudson Taylor needed to learn. He taught them that He can supply their every need, so they are to follow Him and fish for men, and trust in Him alone. This breakfast was also the beginning of a great missionary movement. The movement that began the history of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Many great movements begin with decisions made around a meal. Here is one of the greatest ever to begin at a breakfast. Breakfast is the most unsociable of all meals. How often do you have people over for breakfast? It is the least elaborate and most monotonous of meals, and yet many experts say it is the key meal of the day. There are even poets who will rank it the number one meal for pure pleasure.

Dinner may be pleasant,  
So my social tea;  
But yet methinks that breakfast  
Is best of all the three.

Irvin S. Cobb said, "Next to the Magna Carta, and Englishman's breakfast is his most sacred right."

Since the Jews generally ate only two meals a day it is likely they felt quite strong about their breakfast also, and especially after working all night, as did the disciples in this context. This last breakfast was nothing elaborate, but it is the most mouth watering meal described in the life of Christ and His disciples. It is of interest to note how often food is involved in the resurrection appearances of Jesus. In Luke 24:30 we read of how He took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to the two companions He had met on the road to Emmaus. They recognized Him in the breaking of the bread.

Later that night Jesus appeared to the disciples and in Luke 24:41-43 we read, "He said to them, have you anything here to eat? They gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and He took it and ate before them." In both of these references we see Jesus at an evening meal, and this last one was more like a midnight snack of left over fish. But when we come to this last

breakfast we get details like no where else in the Gospels. Verse 9 shows us a charcoal fire on the beach with fish frying on it and bread being toasted. If you have ever been camping you know the appetite that the open air develops. You can just imagine what a sight and smell that was to those hungry fishermen.

Jesus knew they would be hungry, and so He prepared this delicious fish breakfast. Fish for breakfast is not very common for most of us, but a study of history, and books on nutrition, reveal that Jesus was a very wise cook. He may have done this often for His disciples in that He was an early riser. We only have this one record, however, and we see Jesus making fish for breakfast. Helen Brown, a breakfast expert, says that for a good protein diet the American people should have fish for breakfast. The early Americans did. The early presidents had cod fish cakes for breakfast. In 1888 a nutrition expert, Thomas Murrey, wrote, "Would it not be beneficial were the average American to substitute fish for the everlasting steak and chops of a breakfast table." Jesus, of course, did not have the choices of cereal or eggs and bacon. He used what was common every day food of that day.

The point that most expositors focus on here is the identification of the risen Christ with our humanity. We do not see Jesus anywhere in His earthly ministry more involved in the common place realities of everyday life than we see Him here as He cooks breakfast. He has just demonstrated that it is He and not the mythological god Neptune who controls the sea. He is the one who got them a great catch of fish, and yet in spite of being the Lord of all nature He stoops to serve human nature by cooking breakfast for His disciples. The Lord's supper was prepared by others, but the Lord's breakfast is really just that, it is the Lord's breakfast that He prepared Himself. This is the only men's breakfast we read about in the Bible, and the Lord of the universe is both the host and the cook.

The incongruity of what was happening was hard for the disciples to adjust to. The paradox of the King of Kings frying fish for these grimy fishermen was more than they could cope with. Verse 12 reveals the confusion of their minds. None dare ask Him who are you? They knew it was the Lord, they knew, yet it didn't seem possible, and so they questioned the reality of what they were experiencing. For Jesus to appear in the upper room and show His nail-pierced hands made sense. That was a place of sacred memory for them all. To appear in the garden to Mary was a beautiful and logical appearance. Had Jesus come in the clouds they would have shouted for joy. But now they come ashore and discover the Lord busy around a camp fire cooking them breakfast, and they were puzzled.

There was no parable coming from His mouth. No profound theological dissertation was on His lips. His only words were, "Come and get it." It was also commonplace they just could not recognize how their risen Lord fit into this role He was playing. What did Jesus do after He conquered man's greatest enemy? What did He do after He rose victorious as Lord of all time and eternity? He fixed breakfast for His disciples. Jesus was going from the marvelous to the mini; from the tremendous to the trivial; from the magnificent to the mediocre. John ends His Gospel by telling us that Jesus did so many other things that the world could not hold all the books if they were all written down. Yet, with all that material to select from, he chose to end his Gospel with the risen Lord making breakfast on the beach. There has got to be profound implications in this breakfast.

I am convinced that the purpose of it is to make clear that though Jesus is ascended to the right hand of the Father, He is still one of us. The humanity of Jesus survived death as well as His deity. He still enjoyed the common pleasures of life like fishing, and eating breakfast in the open air. This closing chapter of John should impress us on how much Jesus loves the commonplace realities of our humanity. It also supports those who believe that in the eternal kingdom the redeemed will continue to enjoy many of the common pleasures of this life. Commonness was the great note of the incarnation. His birth was as common and as earthly as that of any fisherman. His ministry was preceded by His working with the commonplace tools of the carpenter. During His ministry He lived and labored among the common people. All His life Jesus was the Christ of the common people.

John is in this last chapter making sure that Jesus does not lose that identity with the common people because of the reality of His resurrection, and departure into the realm of the spirit. It is possible to so exalt Jesus that we remove Him from involvement with our everyday lives. This last breakfast helps prevent us from that mistake. This last breakfast should play a greater role in our lives than Christians have allowed it to be historically. We have the church of the resurrection; the church of the ascension, and the church of the transfiguration. They all capitalize on the supernatural events in the life of Jesus. But where is the church of the bread and fish? Where is the church of the charcoal, or the church of Christ the cook? Nobody builds temples to the commonplace. Peter on the Mr. of Transfiguration wanted to build three tabernacles, but no such impulse came over him on the beach.

It is a universal aspect of human nature, for we are motivated by the spectacular, but we tend to miss the joy and meaning of the commonplace. Because of this we miss much of the fellowship we ought to have with our Lord, for He is ever present in the everyday events of life, and not just the spectacular events. John 21 is a commentary on the Great Commission promise, "Low I am with you always." This means, not just in crusades and revivals, but at breakfast. G. Campbell Morgan, the prince of expositors, feels we have missed a vital truth taught by this last breakfast. We feel we must put a gap between breakfast and spiritual work, or some gulf between fishing on Saturday and worshipping on Sunday. Morgan says we fail to see the fullness of the Gospel until we see the unity of the sacred and the secular. He said in a sermon to mothers and wives,

...When tomorrow morning you are up laying a fire, preparing a breakfast, remember that the Lord of glory built a fire and cooked a breakfast. This is a wonderful sanctification of life; this is an illuminating glory that transfigures the commonplace and makes it special. Let us cancel the word "Secular," or at least some of our uses of it. There is nothing secular. Our Lord transmuted the commonplace, base metal, and made it the fine gold of the sanctuary of God, when He prepared that breakfast and waited upon those hungry men.

If you doubt whether Jesus cares about the ultimate values of life and your forgiveness and

cleansing from sin, remember the Lord's Supper. But when you doubt that Jesus is concerned about the routine commonplace everyday needs of life, remember the last breakfast.

### **13. THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION Based on Eph. 1:15-23**

For the man who has everything there is now a solar-powered headstone. John Dilks, a computer engineer for Western Electric designed this headstone with a recording device and a video display screen, which will display a biographical account and a computerized photograph. Dilks Creative Tombstone Incorporated offers many options so you won't be just one of the crowd in the cemetery. You can get a voice-activated box if you don't want just anybody toying with your tombstone tapes. Other options include sensors to tell when a visitor is approaching, and when the grass needs cutting. He will even include a nozzle that will spray incense. For those who really think long range you can include messages for future generations, and so you will be able to speak some words of wisdom to your great, great, great, great grandchildren.

The potential of this device called "Imitations of Immortality" are nearly endless. And the cost is only 39,500 dollars, if you throw in the bulletproof glass to protect from vandals. Future generations will be going to the cemetery for multimedia presentations from the grave. Death will be to some degree swallowed up in this death denying Disney Land display of data. Technology has made it possible for modern man to talk from the tomb, and this gives him a sense of power over death.

This is all mere child's play compared to the game being played by the men described in the book *The Tomorrow Makers*. We are talking about the top researchers of our day who are convinced that downloading will happen in our lifetime. This means that man will be able to figure out how to make a copy of the human brain just like we now make copies of movies on videotape. The brain can be hooked up to a computer and a copy made, and then that copy can be put into a robot, which will then be controlled by that tape of the brain. When the machine wears out or becomes obsolete the brain can be transferred to a new model.

This is not fantasy. It is the serious research going on in Carnegie-Mellon, MIT Stanford, and in Japan. Many of these researchers have a passion to never die, but become immortal by means of downloading. They believe that this could be the last generation that will have to die. Hans Moravec says, "We are on a threshold of a change in the universe comparable to the transition from non-life to life." Modern man is truly excited about the potential of developing power over death, and why shouldn't he be, for death is no friend.

**Death is the final foe that man must somehow defeat if he is to live forever.**

**The problem is that man in his pride always wants to try the Moby Dick approach to life. Moby Dick is Herman Melville's classic about Captain Ahab's search for a fierce white whale. On the surface the novel seems like a story about whale hunting, but it goes much deeper. Some consider it one of the most deeply theological novels ever written in America. When Melville finished the book he wrote in a personal letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, "I have written a wicked book." This was long before the "Save the whales" movement, and so he was not feeling guilty about the obsession of Ahab to get revenge on Moby Dick for his lost leg. He was feeling guilty because his book was really about God and man. The whale in all its brilliant whiteness was a symbol of God, and Ahab's obsession to hunt down the whale represents man's mad pursuit to reduce God to his slave in order to control God and use His power to achieve human ends.**

**The technological search for immortality is Captain Ahab at work. Man wants to figure out some way to live forever without doing it God's way. Man wants to be in control and do it his way. In other words, it is the same old story of a works salvation. Man does not want a handout and a salvation by free grace. He wants to get it by his own power, even if he has to capture heavenly power to do it. All of history is a power struggle between God and man, or Moby Dick and Ahab.**

**The good news of Easter is that the power to conquer death is already available to those who will humble themselves to receive it as a gift. The power of the resurrection is so much greater than anything man has even imagined. In the power of the resurrection of Christ there is available the power to give every person in history the gift of eternal life. And not merely mechanical life that is lived by a machine, but the life of a real person in relationship to other eternal persons, including the Person of the risen Christ.**

**We do have to give man credit, for he is on the right track. If man is going to live forever he must have a power source. The problem with science and technology is that it is limited to the power available in creation. That is mind-boggling power, but the Bible says it is but the work of God's finger. The Bible, on the hand, puts us in touch with the work of God's Son, and not just His finger, but His only begotten Son, and in the Son we are dealing with the power of the resurrection. This is power that is more than mind-boggling, for it is spirit-boggling. It is power so incomparable that Paul in this passage uses all the resources of the Greek language to make us realize that this was the greatest event in history for the sheer magnitude and might of this miracle. Paul assembles here the greatest array of terms for power that we find anywhere in the New Testament. Verse 19 is the power pack of the Bible. What did it take to get the body of Jesus back to life out of the tomb, and ascended to the right hand of God? Paul says it took-**

- 1. POWER.** The Greek word here is *dunamis* from which we get dynamite.
- 2. ENERGY.** The Greek word here is *energia*.
- 3. MIGHTY STRENGTH.** It took only the work of God's finger to create this vast universe, but when He raised Jesus from the dead it took even almighty God the flexing of His muscles.

**The resurrection of Jesus was no snap even for God. It was not a mere saying let there be**

life and there was life. It took the exertion of infinite energy to accomplish this miracle of all miracles. Every miracle of the Bible falls into the category of minor miracles in comparison to the only miracle in its class, which was the mega miracle of the resurrection. When we are talking about the power of the resurrection we are talking about the power of the Source. This is power at its greatest, and this is the peak and pinnacle of power. There is no concept of power that rises above it, for it is the ultimate demonstration of God's power. God operates on different levels of power just as we all do. Isa. 52:10 portrays God as rolling up His sleeves and flexing His muscles. "The Lord will lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of the Lord."

It is not as though omnipotence is stretched by harder projects, but just that even omnipotence has to exert greater energy to accomplish certain things, and the ultimate exertion of power was when God raised Jesus from the dead. Right away this should provoke a question in our minds-why should it take so much of God's infinite power to raise Jesus from the dead? After all, there were others raised from the dead in both the Old and New Testaments. They were marvelous miracles and rank among the greatest miracles, but there is no stress that they took special power to accomplish. This forces us to see the resurrection of Jesus as totally different from all other resurrections. All the others were really a matter of resuscitation. The spirit was restored to the body and they went on living for a time, but they all eventually died again. There was escape and postponement of death, but no real conquering of death in all the other resurrections.

In order to see the uniqueness of the resurrection of Christ we need to see the uniqueness of His death. Nobody ever died like Jesus. Many died on the cross, but no one ever died tasting death for all people. On Jesus was laid the iniquity of us all, and Jesus died for the sins of the world. The Bible says He actually became sin for us. He who knew no sin took on all sin, and He took on the wages of all sin, which was death. He was the only man who never deserved death, and yet He is taking on Himself the death that all other men do deserve. This is the one and only ultimate death. Most die for themselves; some die for their friends, and a few die for a larger group, but nobody ever died for all people but Jesus.

When death took Jesus He was the most dead person that ever was. No other person in history had ever been so dead, for He was held in death's grip by trillions upon trillions of sin that made Him the rightful possession of death. The wages of sin is death, and Jesus picked up the tab for every sinner that ever was or will be. This one of a kind radical death demanded more than a mere restoration of the spirit and the body. This demanded an all out, head on confrontation of the power of heaven and hell, of light and darkness, of life and death. This was not the battle of the century, but this was the heavy weight champion of the universe, which would determine the destiny of the universe and all who have ever lived. Raising Jesus was equivalent to raising every person who had ever died.

Raising others from the dead was like reaching over the fence and plucking a apple from the tree of an enemy and bringing it back to your side of the fence. Raising Jesus was more like an all out evasion into enemy territory to take every orchard and every tree and every apple into His possession. Paul says that Jesus led captivity captive. All who were under the power of Satan were liberated, and Jesus became the conquering King over hell itself, and He took possession of the keys of death and hell. What a powerful victory when the most in

**bondage to death person who had ever existed, not only gets free himself, but becomes the Lord over death with the right to grant freedom to all He chooses.**

**This was not a mere miracle, but the mega miracle of all time. This took the wisdom and power of God in full strength. God pulled out all stops and exerted power like never before to rescue His Son and complete the plan of salvation for mankind. We celebrate the power of the allies that gave us victory over the axis powers. We celebrate the power of science that gives us so much in the way of convenience and pleasure, but our ultimate celebration of power is the power of the resurrection. By this power our Lord became the Lord of all other powers in the universe, and thus assuring us that the story of history will have a happy ending for all who acknowledge His Lordship. By the power of the resurrection Jesus became Lord of the past, the future and the present.**

## **I. THE RISEN CHRIST AS LORD OF THE PAST.**

**Ordinarily it is true that even God cannot change the past. Whatever has been has been, and even omnipotence cannot make it so that it never was. Even if God blots it out and no longer remembers it-it still was. So basically the past cannot be changed, but the power of the resurrection was so great that it did change the past. Paul wrote, "As in Adam all die so in Christ shall be made alive." The whole past of human history has been based on Adam's fall, but because of the resurrection of Christ that is all different now, for even the past generations come under the Lordship of Christ, and they will live because of His power, and they will be judged by His power.**

**In the power of the resurrection Jesus changed the whole relationship of God and man. Jesus was always the Son of God for all eternity, but it was as Spirit and not as man. When He was raised from the dead His manhood became a part of His eternal being, and not just His incarnational being. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and Jesus was flesh and blood. His humanity was not immortal. If it would have been He could not have died. The God-Man union of the incarnation was a step on the way to the complete union of God and man for eternity, and the completion took place by the power of the resurrection. It fused together the God-Man partnership forever. Before the resurrection Jesus was capable of dying and having His human nature divided from His divine nature. After the resurrection this was no longer possible for His humanity and deity became one forever.**

**So radical was this event that nothing like it ever happened before, for on Easter we have the birth of the Son of God. Jesus experienced a new birth in the power of the resurrection. Never before had there been a being composed of immortal manhood and eternal deity. That is why Paul makes Easter the day of God's receiving a new Son into His family. He writes in Rom. 1:3-4, "Regarding His Son, who as to His human nature was a descendent of David, and who threw the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead." The resurrection declared Jesus to be the Son of God, says Paul. But He was always the Son of God wasn't He? Yes He was, but not as an immortal man. He was made in the power of the resurrection something He had never been before, and so He was a new being. He was the first of His kind, and the first fruits of a whole harvest of the redeemed who would become immortal people.**

God had never had a Son like the risen Christ. This was the goal of incarnation and the cross, and it was prophesied in the Old Testament. Paul in Acts 13:32-33 makes this point in his preaching. "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm, you are my Son: Today I have become your Father." The day of Christ's resurrection was the day He became the Son of God, and God became His Father in a way that never existed before. The past was radically changed. Christmas was when God came down to manhood. Easter was when man was lifted up to Godhood.

Power is associated with Easter more than with Christmas because it took an enormously greater amount of divine energy to lift man up than for God to come down. Christmas is God born from the womb as the Son of Man. Easter is man born from the tomb as the Son of God. Easter fulfills the purpose of Christmas, and it completes God's goal of more than restoring man to God's fellowship, but of incorporating Him into the family of God as His immortal children. Man lived in bondage to death all through history. It was the inevitable, inescapable and irreversible foe, but Jesus brought life and immortality to light.

We do not know fully what Peter was getting at, but it is clear that he is saying that the risen Christ is Lord of the past when he writes in I Peter 3:18-20. "He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah." Easter changed all the past because it made Jesus Lord of the past.

Peter is teaching that the power of the resurrection enabled the risen Christ to go back into the past and by preaching seek to change that past. We do not know all that this implies. It is just another of the mind-boggling hints as to the power of the resurrection, and of how it made the risen Christ Lord of the past. Next we see-

## II. THE RISEN CHRIST AS LORD OF THE FUTURE.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in verse 18 is that "The eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you." There was a play in New York called, "On A Clear Day You Can See Forever." Easter is that clear day for the Christian. It was the day that opened up forever for mankind. Not only was the stone rolled away from the tomb, but the clouds were rolled away from the sky and man was permitted to see the invisible and infinite destiny of humanity in Christ.

Three astronomers at the University of Arizona found two more galaxies at least 17 billion light years away. They feel that man is coming close to seeing to the very edge of the observable universe. But no matter how powerful a telescope man can build, he can never see forever. This power is found only in the risen Lord who is the Lord of forever, and who alone can open up to us a vision of the eternal destiny of the believers. Paul does not give us any description of eternity here as he does elsewhere, but he does say something crucial in verse 21 where he describes the power of the resurrection, which was also the power of the ascension which seated Jesus at the right hand of God in the heavenly realm. Paul adds in verse 21, "Far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."



**The power of the resurrection catapulted Jesus, the eternal God-Man, to the pinnacle of power for all time and eternity. The whole political structure of the universe was changed forever by the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God. He was not just the chief executive officer, or the president, or the chairman of the board, but He was King of Kings and Lord and Lords as absolute head over everything and everyone. Man was given dominion over the earth by God in creation, but by the power of the resurrection man in Christ was given dominion over the entire universe. Now the future destiny of everything and everyone is in His hands. He got the whole world in His hands, and greater yet, He has the whole universe in His hands. Our faith in a fantastic and fabulous future is founded upon this fact of what the power of the resurrection did to the person and position of our Lord.**

**It is a fallen world, and evil is powerful. There is so much suffering and injustice, and it would be intolerable if we did not have the hope of a risen Lord who will make sure that evil will not win. There is a happy ending of the story of history for all who get in on the power of the resurrection by faith in Jesus. Paul says it so clearly in Rom. 10:9, ".if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Our eternal destiny is determined by plugging into the power of the resurrection. If you are linked to the Lord of forever, you will also live with Him forever. You can see forever by the power of the resurrection-that power that made Jesus Lord of all the past and all the future. Helen Rogers Smith wrote,**

**He lifted from the dust,  
The cross of shame;  
And gave to it a glory and a name  
To live forever in the hearts of men-  
And bring them comfort, faith and peace, again.**

**He lifted from the depths,  
The soul of man-  
Oppressed by toil and wrong since time began;  
And gave to it a dignity and worth,  
In Him revealed, above the wealth of earth.**

**He lifted from the grave,  
Eternal life-  
Triumphant over pain and grief and strife;  
Our hope and stay along a war-worn way,  
Whose end is-Christ!**

**The focus of all is on Christ, for the power of the resurrection has made the risen Lord, Lord of the future. We don't have to be concerned about the past, and be puzzled about how people will be saved who lived before Christ and never heard of a Messiah. Jesus is Lord of the past, and He will settle all such issues wisely and compassionately. We do not need to be concerned about the future and wonder how the world's mess will all get straightened out. The Lord of the future will also take care of all these issues. Our only concern should be for the present where we can make choices that either put us in contention with or cooperation with the power of the resurrection. So let's look finally at-**

### **III. THE RISEN CHRIST AS LORD OF THE PRESENT.**

We look back at the scared cross and ahead to the second coming, but let us not forget to look up to the sovereign crown, for Jesus reigns now as Lord. The idea of waiting for Jesus and His future kingdom is a hindrance if it causes us to be blind to the fact that His kingdom is already here. Just because spring is not yet here in all of its fullness does not mean it is not here, and so it is with the kingdom of our Lord. He is already the head of everything and Lord of all. Everything that will be is already to some degree a reality. Paul makes this clear in Eph. 2:5-6 where he says that God "...has made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.." We have already been resurrected from the dead, and we have already been raptured into heaven to reign with Christ. The head is already there and so the body is guaranteed to be there. It is so certain that it is already a reality.

The challenge of the Christian life is to tap into the power of the resurrection and make the future certainty a present reality. This was the longing and the goal of the Apostle Paul. He wrote in Phil. 3:10-11, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." This profound passage is worth a message in itself, but we can only take note of the fact that Paul linked his own future resurrection to his present knowing of Christ and the power of His resurrection. The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now, and by the power of the resurrection we can also now be victorious Christians. Easter power is a now power, for it is the power to defeat vices and defend virtues.

Notice that the power of the resurrection is just a potential power in our lives. It is the power that is already changed the whole past and the whole future, but it is not an automatic power in our present. If that was the case, Paul would not be longing to know this power. It is like the power you have in your home. It does not work regardless of what you do. You have to plug things in and turn them on. You have to have knowledge of power and how to make it work for you to get the benefit of it. So it is with the power of the resurrection. You need to pray for it, seek it and strive to know how to be a channel for it. If Paul did not have it all together, and if he was still longing to know more of how he could be a channel of this power, we do not have to feel bad that we are not there yet. But we should feel bad if we do not long as he did to know Christ better and to know the power of His resurrection. He is the source of all the power that can make us persons of power in the present.

In the power of the resurrection our past is forgiven and our future is guaranteed, but what about right now? As channels of resurrection power what might we do and be right now that would exalt the living Christ and give Him victory over the forces of darkness in this present evil world? The power of the resurrection is to make us agents of beauty in an ugly world. It changed the ugliness of the cross into an object of beauty. It is the power that enables us to love our enemies, and to do good unto all men. It is the power to forgive 70 times 7, and the power to be patient and kind, and to be all that love is. It is the power to change all of our relationships and make them more positive. It is the power to be what God wants us to be.

The power to live for now is the same as the power to live forever, for it is power of the resurrection. That is why the Christian life continues where it began. We are saved by faith in Christ. In Christ alone is the power to live forever. But Paul longed for the power of the resurrection in his present life because he still lived in the flesh and had struggles. He cried out in Rom. 7, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" And he answers his own question, "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." The power for time and eternity is in the power of the resurrection. If you want to live before you die, and then after you die, your only hope is the living Christ. May God help us all to be like Paul in our longing to experience the power of the resurrection.

## **14. THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION Based on Phil. 3:1-16**

John Scott Harrison was the only man in the history of our nation who was the son of one president and the father of another. A man of such distinction you would think would be treated with great respect in his death, but the fact was, nobody was safe in 1878 when he died. Body snatching was at a peak. The demand for bodies in medical schools was so great that men became experts in grave robbing. John and Ben were his two sons, and they were determined that their father's body would be secure.

They had his grave sealed with brick and cement, and then had large stones placed on top of it. They hired a watchman to check the grave every hour. In spite of all these precautions the body of John Harrison ended up in the Ohio medical college. The shock of this led the Ohio General Assembly, in 1881, to pass a law permitting medical schools to use unclaimed bodies. This put an end to grave robbing.

I share this bit of history in order to point out that men have always had the power to break into the tomb. The ancient Egyptians took elaborate precautions to protect the wealth they buried with their Pharaohs in the pyramids. But to the great disappointment of archeologists, thieves found a way in and removed the treasures centuries before they found the way in. All through history man has developed the skill to get him into graves and tombs, and to take what the dead had to offer. What man lacked was the power to break out of the tomb. Getting in was not necessarily easy, but getting out was impossible. That is why Easter is the special day that it is, for Easter is the day we celebrate the discovery of the power to break out of the grip of the grave.

Many a tomb has been broken into, but the tomb of Jesus is unique in that it was a tomb broken out of. It was truly an inside job. Helen Frazee-Bower put this truth so beautifully in poetry.

**One helped Him bare His cross up Calvary,  
And there were those who placed Him in the tomb.  
But when He burst death's bonds and came forth free  
No human hands were in that narrow room.  
No one but God could reach beyond the rim  
Of death's confines and touch the dark unknown:  
Though there were those who longed to do for Him,  
When Jesus rose He did it all alone.**

**No one but God? Then truly He was God!  
And is an will be evermore. And those  
Who trust His grace sleep not beneath the sod:  
They are not dead. Because the Savior rose,  
These too shall rise. The tomb is open wide-  
The stone was rolled away by One inside.**

**This makes Easter a day in which there was a display of unprecedented power. Others had been raised from the dead before, but by someone else outside the tomb. Jesus was the first and only person to rise by His own power. Jesus said in John 10:17-18, "The reason the Father loves me is that I lay down my life-only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." No one ever before or since has had that kind of authority. That is why, if you want to know the power of the resurrection, you must know Jesus, for He is the only source of such power.**

**Paul was a man of authority. He had great credentials, and was a man of power in the Jewish community. He had the power of prestige, which comes with a great heritage, good education, and belonging to the right circles. Paul had the power to push people around and persecute them if they did not conform to the values of his heritage. He was a powerful man for he was not only a leader in Judaism, but he was also a Roman citizen. But this powerful man tells the Philippians that he did not know what power was until he met Christ. In comparison, all of his other powers became mere rubbish, and the loss of them was nothing compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ. It is in this context that Paul makes the statement in verse 10, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection." We want to focus on the three characteristics of this power that are evident in this passage.**

### **I. A PASSIONATE POWER.**

**It is an emotionally compelling power. Passionate means fervent, enthusiastic, and zealous. It is an intense power that motivates and dominates. Paul is not expressing a craving for information. He knows about Jesus, and even unbelievers can know about Jesus. He longs to know the person and the power of Christ experientially. It is a passionate desire for relationship. Paul knows there is power in who you know, and the power of knowing Christ is the greatest power of all. Paul would not deny the importance of "know thyself," but his passion was to know the Savior.**

**We know that power corrupts and that Christians do not escape the corruption that**

comes with power. That is why there is a mixed feeling about Paul's passion for power, and his clear ambition to rise to higher levels of power. It can be scary when a man longs for power. Jesus warned of the danger of power. He was tempted Himself to use the power of politics, showmanship, or compromise with Satan to achieve His goals. Jesus rejected all abuse of power. He rejected force and violence, and said that we are to put up our sword, and be careful not to pull up the wheat with the tares. All forms of coercive power which do not respect the freedom of the will are inconsistent with godly power.

There is great danger in a passion for power. It costs Judas his life and his place in history among the twelve. But we need not fear Paul's passion for power, for he longs for the power of the resurrection, and this is a power distinctly different from all other powers. Resurrection power is the power to help, to hope, and to heal. Had Jesus risen from the dead and gone back to Jerusalem to wreak vengeance on the Pharisees and rulers of Israel, we could be fearful of the power of the resurrection. But Jesus came out of the tomb with a spirit of love and not of revenge. His concern was that the whole world benefit from what He had done on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. He wanted His sheep fed, cared for, trained, and then empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into all the world to preach the Good News of His salvation.

The measure of a man is what he does with power, and Jesus was the most powerful person in the universe after His resurrection. We do not see Jesus spending a second in trying to get even for the hatred, rejection, and suffering He had to endure. He now had the power to go and nail Herod, Pilate, and all the Jewish leaders to crosses, but that was over and past, and what mattered to Jesus was the future. The future was to be one filled with the power to bring life out of death, and light where darkness once reigned. The future was to be filled with help, hope, and healing.

There is no need to fear a passion for resurrection power, for it will never be a power that crushes or destroys. It will always be a power to lift and love the fallen and feeble. Resurrection power is one kind of power we can afford to crave with passionate ambition. In a world where lives are continually blinded and blighted and blasted by the power of evil it is a sin not to have a passion for power to make a difference, and the only power that can make a lasting difference is the power of the resurrection.

This power made the greatest difference in history of any event. The Supreme Court of heaven on the third day reversed the decision of the lower court that sentenced Jesus to die. Never has a death sentence been reversed after it was already executed so that the condemned was restored to life. This was the most unique event in history, and the power of it was awesome, and it changes everything. Paul had a passion for this power because the power of the resurrection is the power to reverse all of the effects of sin and evil. In the power of the resurrection fear can be changed to faith; hate can be changed to love, and despair can be changed to joy.

Paul's passion for resurrection power is a passion for life. There is good reason why the rabbit is a symbol of Easter. Rabbits have a passion for life. They multiply rapidly with 5 or 6 litters a year. They also live in dark holes in the earth, and so you can see how they are a natural illustration of the resurrection. They represent the power of life to rise out of the

darkness of the earth.

There are those who say that Jesus was just revived by the coolness of the tomb and never did really die. This is a very superficial view of the resurrection. I love the way Leslie Weatherhead answers this view. He writes, "Such a suggestion asks more of credulity than orthodoxy asks of faith. How could a person too weak before his crucifixion to carry his cross, who had been scourged, tortured, nailed to a cross through the hot hours of a whole day, and into whose side a spear had been thrust, drawing not only blood but the water-like serum in the pericardial sac-or else urine from the bladder-get off a stone slab in the dark, remove his own tightly wound wrappings or bandages, push back from the mouth of the cave-tomb a heavy, grindstone-shaped boulder, like a solid stone wheel, which it took several strong men to move, evade the guards, procure from some unexplained source some clothing, and then appear to his friends not as an invalid needing weeks of nursing back to health, but as a man so fit that, in spite of two terrible wounds in his feet, he could, on the same day, walk seven miles to Emmaus with two disciples, have supper with them, and then travel another seven miles to Jerusalem in time to meet the rest of his friends?" Such a view is a denial of everything we see in the Easter account, and in the experience of Paul in his encounter with the risen Christ.

Paul had a passion to see this happen in the world of darkness. He wanted to see those dead in trespasses and sin arise and live and walk in the light. Life out of death, and light out of darkness-that was his dream, and it was a dream that came true in the measure that he saw the power of the resurrection at work. In the shower there is power to bring forth the brilliant flower. Nature is full of the power of God, but in the Son who has arisen there is power to empty death's prison, and this is power not found in nature. It is only in Christ, and that is why Paul has a passion to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. All other powers fade in importance compared to the power of the resurrection.

It is exciting to see man's passion for power, for it has enabled him to exploit the power of electricity, the power of the atom, the power of gas and oil, and the power of the sun. We were impressed by the display of man's power at Epcot. It was spectacle of man's power, and it was thrilling, but all of it together cannot give a person of one second of forgiveness, or one second of hope for life that will conquer death. Man's greatest powers and wonders are only weakness compared to the power of the resurrection. Next we see it is-

## **II. A PROGRESSIVE POWER.**

This is not Paul, the babe in Christ, who is writing. This is not Paul two days after being confronted by the risen, reigning, redeeming Christ. This is Paul, the Apostle. The mature servant of Christ who in the power of the Holy Spirit has saved multitudes, and started churches, and written New Testament theology. It is this man who says that he wants to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. This is not the longing of a new convert. This is the longing of a veteran of the faith.

He already knows Christ and the power of His resurrection. He has lived and served in this power, but he is saying that there is always more. You can never come to the place where you can say that you know Christ as well as you need to. There is no end to growing in this

relationship, and in the power that can come from it. It is progressive power. It starts when we confront the reality of the risen Christ and experience the power of His forgiveness, and of His love that incorporates us into the family of God.

To think that this is the end of it is to think that because Columbus discovered America he knew all there was to know about it. Every school child knows more about America than Columbus did. He only got a taste of America and its potential and power. You do not know America just because you know how to find it in the world's geography. America had potential that Columbus could not have seen in his wildest dreams. Those who know most about this great land will say they want to know more of it and its potential. This is the spirit of all who are dealing with life's great subjects.

Michaelangelo, after 70 years of working at creating masterpieces that made him famous for all time, said, "I am learning, I am learning." Right to the end he was pressing on and saying I want to know art and the power of its potential. I just learned how to use the computer a few years ago, and I realize that I am waiting in a puddle when there is a whole vast ocean yet untouched. I can say that I know how to operate a computer, but I still want to know the computer and the power of its potential. All knowledge that deals with that which has infinite potential is progressive knowledge. That means growth is endless, and the adventure of knowing is for all time, and in some cases it is for ever.

How much more is this true of Jesus Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? Nobody can ever know enough of the person and power of the risen Christ. Being saved is only the beginning. It is the gunshot that starts the race. It is not the finish line. There is endless potential after one is saved. It is the losing of this longing to press on and on in the progressive knowing of Christ and His power that leads the Christian life to become stagnant. We need to cease being foolish, and instead be wise like Paul. Here he is as the advance runner of the Christian race, but he is not slowing down as if the race is almost over and the goal is reached. He is dealing with an infinite Christ, and a power that knows no limit, and so he is pressing on ever growing in knowledge, wisdom, and power. A limitless Lord means a limitless life of learning.

If you have been leveling off, and even regressing in your knowledge of Christ and the power to live effectively for Him, you need to pray for forgiveness for treating Christ like finite and limited subject. Morly Shekleton wrote,

"It passeth knowledge, that dear love of thine,  
My Savior, Jesus! Yet this soul of mine  
Would of Thy love, in all its breadth and length,  
Its height and depth, its everlasting strength,  
Know more and more."

This is the spirit of Paul. He knew Christ well, and he had tremendous power, but he knew he had not yet begun to experience the full potential there is in Him who said, "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me." The Easter message is the message of good news that in the power of the resurrection there is a never ending, exhaustless source of power to give life abundant.

Because this is so, it is nothing short of sinful if we confine the power of the resurrection to the Easter season. Because the power of the resurrection is progressive, the desire for it is to be perpetual.

There are heights of sweet communion  
That are all awaiting me;  
There are ocean-depths of mercy  
That are flowing full and free;  
There are precious pearls of promise  
That can ne'er be priced in gold;  
There's a fullness in my Savior  
That has never yet been told.

Author unknown

A pastor reported that he asked a 6 year old girl what Easter meant to her, and she said that it was lots of candy and new clothes. He asked a youth of 16, and he said that it means Christ rose from the dead. Then he asked a 60 year old man, and he said it means, "I've only begun to live." That is what Easter means to those who love Jesus. We have only begun to live, for there is a perpetual progression of more and more, and endlessly more in Christ. Next we see it is-

### III. A PRESENT POWER.

Paul would agree with the poet who wrote,

There are depths of love that I cannot know  
Till I cross the narrow sea.  
There are heights of joy that I may not reach  
Till I rest in heaven with Thee.

Paul knew that the best was always yet to be, for we can never know in time what we will know and experience in eternity. Nevertheless, Paul's desire to know Christ and the power of His resurrection was not just a hope, for he says I want it-I want it now. Paul says there is life after death, but there is also life before death, and I want all I can get of both. I want the eternal life that is ours in Christ, but I want the abundant life that He came to give us in time as well. Sometimes Christians think we have to choose either the good life of eternity, or the good life of time. There is no biblical basis for thinking the one eliminates the other. The wise Christian follows Paul and develops a passion for the progressive power in Christ. It is both a present power, and a power that will become even greater in the future. The resurrection is a reality. It is a part of history, and its power is available for now, even though the fullness of its effects will not be felt until eternity.

We do not take any source of power and say that I will not use it until I can have the fullness of its potential. I will not use a computer until I can do all that can be done with a computer. I will not use electric power, or solar power until I can use it in all the fullness of its potential. These would be foolish statements, for we use a source of power to the limit of



our knowledge as we are growing in our ability to use it more fully. So it is with the power of the resurrection. We will never know the fullness of this power in time. We may not even be able to reach its fullness in eternity, but we can grow and know more and more of this power now. The poet expands the words of Paul and writes,

"That I may know Him." Ah, I long to know  
Not just a Christ of far-gone years ago;  
Nor even reigning on a heavenly throne,  
Too high and distant to be really known.  
I long to know Him closely; this is how,  
Alive-and in this ever-pressing "now";  
Communicating His all-conquering power,  
A living One, within my heart this hour,  
Who now no longer lives from me apart,  
But shares His resurrection in my heart.  
J. S. B.

The power of the resurrection is the power to do all that God wants you to do in time. Paul wrote in Phil. 4 that he could do all things through Christ who strengthens him. That is why he wants to know Christ and the power of the resurrection, for in that knowledge there is present power to accomplish the will of God. With your focus on the power of the resurrection you always aim for the maximum, but when you take your eyes off Christ it is easy to aim only for the minimum.

A man rushing through the lobby of a hotel suddenly stopped a bell boy and asked, "Would you please hurry to room 1203. I think I left my briefcase there. The airport limo leaves in 6 minutes. Could you run and see if it is there?" Several minutes later the bell boy came rushing back and reported, "Yes, sir. Your briefcase is still there." That is all he was asked to do, just see if it was there. He did as he was told and no more. He could have used common sense and brought the brief case with him, but he was not asked to do that. He did just the minimum. Many times we live on that level, but Paul had a passionate longing to live on the level of the maximum, and to gain the power to do God's will as fully as possible.

We will always fall short of the glory of God and the maximum potential that is ours in Christ. But Paul says in verse 16 that we can live up to the level of what we have already attained. Even if we are not climbing but just holding our own, we can be living a life that is pleasing to God and a blessing to man. If we would just use the knowledge and power that is already ours we would be fairly effective Christians. But the better way is to crave more and more, and press on to greater and greater power.

The message of Easter is a message of power. It is the dynamo, and the powerhouse for all Christian beliefs. The birth of Christ, His teaching, and His death are all powerless events without the power of the resurrection. Paul says our faith if vain and so is our preaching if the resurrection is not a reality. If death conquers in the end, then all power is weakness in its presence. But Jesus rolled the stone away and made the grave a two way street. Now you can come, and go. Before the resurrection it was a one way street, but Jesus became our Samson. He arose and carried away the gate of Gaza leaving it a city wide open. So Jesus did to the

**strong hold of death. Not all the power of Judaism, nor all the legions of Rome, nor any other power on earth, or in hell, can roll that stone back. Death is conquered by life, and in the power of the resurrection Jesus captured the keys of death and hell, and is now the most powerful person in the universe.**

**"Who shall rebuild for the tyrant his prison?  
The scepter lies broken that fell from his hands,  
The stone is removed; the Lord is arisen:  
The helpless are now released from their bonds."**

**The joy of Easter is not in the Easter parade, but in Easter power. It is the power that has the potential for blasting away the boulders of life's burdens into a pile of pieces we can handle with hope. The power of the resurrection took history's saddest event-the crucifixion, and changed it into the center of our Christian focus of joy. The cross is now history's greatest symbol of love, forgiveness, and hope. In the power of the resurrection there is power for victory over all the forces of darkness.**