

# The Risen Christ

***“Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.”***

**—John 16:20**

**ON SUNDAY, APRIL 1,** millions in the Christian world will gather in their local churches to give remembrance to the resurrection of Jesus nearly two thousand years ago. For most, however, this will be merely a brief recollection of that momentous event in the midst of a world of problems, turmoil and uncertainty. To even the most devout believer, the impact of Jesus’ resurrection perhaps seems very distant from the immediate challenges of the present day.

One of the conditions of today’s world which no doubt dilutes the focus which might otherwise be given to the resurrection of Jesus is the incessant bombardment of the human mind with information. Electronic communication of every type imaginable explodes each day to our eyes and ears. For most, it can be accessed quite literally in the palm of our hand. Sorting through this endless stream of information is, of course, impossible. In addition, one of its many negative effects is to divert the minds of mankind further and further away from the “old

paths” of the Bible, including the subject of the resurrection.—Jer. 6:16

Another reason that the all-important doctrine of Jesus’ resurrection does not resonate as it should among the people lies in the fact that it is generally misunderstood. At best, most see it as a one-time event in human history which they have come to believe has a relatively small impact on the future of the earth and its human inhabitants. It is only as we recognize the true significance of the resurrection, however, and additionally how it is linked together with other key elements of God’s overall plan, that we can begin to realize its eventual blessedness toward all mankind.

## **SORROW TURNED TO JOY**

To that small group of people who had become disciples of Jesus, the rumored news that he had been raised from the dead must have rekindled their hopes and provided a joyous prospect. They were at first a little overwhelmed that such a thing could have taken place, but they accepted the evidences presented to them, and rejoiced.

The words of our opening text are part of a touching prophecy, given only hours before his death, in which Jesus forecast the feelings of his disciples over his crucifixion, and also the great joy that would follow when they learned of his resurrection. Continuing his prophecy, Jesus said, “A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and

your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”—John 16:21,22

We can well understand the deep anguish of the disciples when Jesus was taken from them and cruelly put to death. They believed with all their hearts that he was Israel’s Messiah of promise, but their understanding of his mission was limited. They did not know that before he would rule the world in righteousness, as the Old Testament had foretold, he first had to die as the Redeemer of the human race. Not understanding this, they doubtless felt that his death might mean that he was not in reality the Messiah. However, they had loved him too much to readily admit this possibility. Thus, confused and sorrowful, they waited and wondered.

### **HOPEFUL—BUT LACKING UNDERSTANDING**

In those critical faith-testing days between Jesus’ crucifixion and his resurrection, his disciples probably remembered certain things he had said concerning the fact that he would be raised from the dead. However, these statements apparently had not been considered too seriously by them. He had also foretold his death, but this they did not wish to believe. To the disciples Jesus was to be a world ruler, and the idea that his enemies would be permitted to put him to death even before there was any evidence of his kingdom being set up, was incredible.

Why, then, should they think of his dying, or try to understand what he meant about being raised from the dead? On one occasion, when Jesus made a plain statement concerning his impending arrest,

trial, death, and resurrection on the third day, the writer, Luke, makes note of the disciples' complete lack of discernment at the time: "They did not understand about these things, and this statement was an insoluble riddle to them; they did not even begin to grasp what He meant."—Luke 18:31-34, *Williams New Testament*

Although bewildered by what had taken place, the disciples' great love for the Master kept alive a flickering hope. Within just a few short days, this hope was quickly fanned into a glowing flame of conviction and rejoicing by the news that the one whom they so dearly loved, and to whom they had devoted their lives, was no longer dead. Mary Magdalene was first at the tomb, even while it was yet dark, on that memorable first day of the week. She noticed that the stone had been taken away from the sepulchre, and she hurried to tell Peter and John.

These two ardent apostles ran to the sepulchre. John, who outran Peter, arrived at the tomb first. He stood at the entrance and looked inside, confirming what Mary had reported, that the body of Jesus was gone. Only the grave clothes and cloth that had been wrapped around his head remained. Peter then arrived, and, being a little more bold, he entered the sepulchre and confirmed what John had seen from the entrance. John then followed Peter into the sepulchre, and after examination, they both "believed" in the fact that Jesus' body was no longer there. However, neither Peter nor John yet realized what had actually happened. "As yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead."—John 20:1-9

## GO AND TELL

Peter and John returned to their home, but Mary lingered and Jesus appeared to her as a gardener. Only when he spoke her name did she know who it was. She would have embraced him, but he said to her, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John 20:10-17) An angel also said to the other women who had gathered at the tomb, "Go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him."—Matt. 28:7

There was a sense of urgency in the commission to inform the disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead. His entire ministry had been very brief, comprising only three and one-half years. Now that he was alive again, however, his stay with his disciples was to last only for a little more than a month. Even during this short time he was to converse with them only on a few brief occasions. One of the chief objects of these appearances was to present them with "infallible proofs" that he was no longer dead.—Acts 1:3

Another object of Jesus' limited appearances to his disciples after his resurrection was to impress upon them the responsibility which was now theirs of being his ambassadors in the world. The first time he met with them was on the evening of that first day he spoke to Mary, and she had taken the news to them of his resurrection. They were assembled behind closed doors for fear of the Jews, when suddenly Jesus appeared in their midst and said, "Peace be unto you." To allay their doubts he showed them his hands and his side, and

they were “glad, when they saw the Lord.”—John 20:19,20

“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” (vs. 21) They were not to suppose that their work as his disciples was finished. Indeed, it had been interrupted, and they were confused and discouraged. However, they were to arise from this situation with the knowledge of the fact that their beloved Master was no longer dead. Soon they would be sent forth to preach the Gospel throughout the earth to all having ears to hear.

Thomas was not present that evening when Jesus first appeared to his apostles. When the others told him about it, he said that he would not believe unless he could see certain evidence for himself. Jesus evidently was aware of this remark, so eight days later he appeared again under similar circumstances, so that Thomas might be convinced. He did not condemn Thomas, but referred to the blessedness of those who would be able to believe without seeing this visible evidence of his resurrection, a reference to the requirement of faith in all those who would truly be followers of the Master.—John 20:24-29

### **“SIGNS” OF HIS RESURRECTION**

As previously noted, Luke spoke of the “infallible” proofs, or signs, by which the disciples had been convinced over a period of forty days that Jesus was no longer dead. John used similar language. Referring to Jesus’ appearance for the purpose of convincing Thomas, John observed, “Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are

not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe.”—John 20:30,31

The display of the nail prints and spear wound was a sign. The apostles did not see Jesus’ divine, spirit body. They saw only the bodies in which he appeared to them. Actually, he had given his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51) However, as yet, the apostles did not understand this. Until begotten with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they could understand only earthly things, so as signs and proofs he appeared to them in various fleshly bodies, as circumstances indicated the need.

To Mary at the sepulchre Jesus appeared as a gardener. On the shore of Galilee he appeared as a stranger. To the two disciples on the road to Emmaus he appeared as a traveler from another region. (John 20:15; 21:4; Luke 24:13-16) Years later, the Apostle John, who witnessed most of these appearances, made clear to us that they were signs. He wrote, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:1-3) If John believed that the body which they saw in the room when the doors were closed—the body with nail prints in the hands and feet and a spear wound in the side—was Jesus’ real body after his resurrection, he would have had no reason to write, “it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” Rather he would have said, “We know what we will be like, for we will be like him who we have seen with wounds in his hands and in his feet and in his side.”

Later, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul explained the answer to the questions,

“How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?” (I Cor. 15:35) Using the analogy of a seed being planted, he points out that a seed that is sown in the ground is like a body going into death. The seed decays and dies, just as the natural body goes back to the dust after death. However, in the process of the seed’s death, the sprout of a new plant may emerge. The new plant is not the same organism as the seed that was sown. In fact, Paul says, it cannot have life and emerge from the ground without the former seed having already died. Thus, the new living plant, the apostle further explains, represents, in the resurrection, a new body given by God, as it pleases him.—vss. 36-38

Jesus had been put to death in the flesh. His humanity had been given in sacrifice to redeem the sin-cursed world from death. (I Pet. 3:18; Rom. 5:6-8) Now he had been raised to power and great glory, but appeared to his disciples in the only manner they could as yet comprehend. Indeed, and as we have noted, at this time they did not really understand why he had died. They were overjoyed that he was no longer dead, but must have wondered why the tragedy of his crucifixion had to occur and, to their minds, interrupt his mission.

## **EXPLANATIONS GIVEN**

Although the disciples did not understand fully these matters until the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, Jesus explained several points to two of them in considerable detail. These two were Cleopas and another disciple to whom Jesus appeared while they journeyed to Emmaus. (Luke 24:13-32) As they walked, these disciples “communed together



and reasoned.” How earnest their discussion must have been. They had received the report brought by the women that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but they had not seen him, yet hoped that the news brought to the disciples by the women was true.

Another traveler joined them, whom they did not recognize, and upon inquiry from him, they explained the cause of their sadness and perplexity. The stranger replied, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

These two disciples did not recognize that it was Jesus who was expounding the Scriptures to them. Not until at their journey’s end, when, after inviting him to join them at their evening meal, “he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them,” did they realize that this stranger was none other than their beloved Master! Now they had the answer to two questions. They knew for a surety that Jesus was no longer dead. The good news brought to them by the women early at the tomb was now proven to be true, for they had not only seen Jesus, but had conversed with him at considerable length.

They also now knew, as clearly as they could know prior to the begetting of the Holy Spirit, why it was necessary for Jesus to die. They learned that it was in fulfillment of prophecy, and because it was the plan of God that the Messiah should pour out “his soul unto death” to redeem fallen man from death. Otherwise his rulership would be over a dying race,

and not over those returning over the “highway” to everlasting life.—Isa. 53:12; 35:8

## **FEED MY SHEEP**

Another appearance of the Master to his disciples was on the shore of Galilee. (John 21:1-17) By now they had become convinced of his resurrection, but in his various appearances they became confused as to what to do. They could no longer follow him from place to place and assist in his ministry as they had done before he was crucified. He now could come and go as the wind, unseen by them except when he miraculously appeared in their midst. To them this seemed to mean that they had no leader, and they did not know how to continue in his service.

Consequently, although glad that Jesus was no longer dead, Peter and John, and some of the others, gave thought to the idea that they would go back into the fishing business. They procured equipment, and had spent an entire night on the lake, but had caught no fish. At the break of day a stranger appeared on the shore and inquired how successful they had been. When told that no fish had been caught, he suggested that they cast their nets on the other side of the ship. Reluctantly, probably, they did this, and to their surprise the net was filled with fish.

John, quick of discernment, said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” A similar miracle had been performed when they were first called to be his disciples, and to become “fishers of men.” John deduced that this was the way Jesus now purposed to reveal himself to them. Peter plunged into the water and swam ashore, and “the other disciples came in a little ship.”

Jesus had started a fire, and had fish and bread ready for the disciples, and he said unto them, "Come and dine." After they had eaten, Jesus began to question Peter. "Lovest thou me more than these?" he inquired. Three times Jesus asked Peter this same question, and three times Peter affirmed his love and devotion. Each time Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs, ... Feed my sheep."

This must have been most reassuring and comforting to Peter, for it was only a short time before that he had denied his Lord three times. To those less large in their hearts than Jesus, this denial might well have brought permanent estrangement, or at least a lack of confidence, but not with Jesus. He could read Peter's heart, and he knew that his love was genuine, and that he could be trusted as an ambassador. He knew, indeed, that the very experience which might disqualify Peter in the minds of some, would serve as a valuable background of experience, and enable him the more effectively to feed the Lord's sheep.

In John 21:14 we are informed that this was the third time Jesus had showed himself to his disciples. The reference, apparently, is to the apostles as a whole. He appeared to them in the room with the doors closed, and on a mountain in Galilee. (Matt. 28:16) It was here that Jesus announced to his disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Here also he commissioned them to go into all the world and "teach all nations," but with only minimal instructions as to just how they were to proceed. He did tell them, however, that he would be with them. How reassuring it must have been for one who had all power in heaven and in

earth to say, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,” or age.—vss. 18-20

## **DIFFERENCES**

The disciples must have had impressed upon them by Jesus’ various appearances that circumstances were now very different from those that existed when they worked with him prior to his death. Indeed, they knew that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but they did not now enjoy his constant companionship as they had before his death. When he did appear to them, his visits were all too brief, and they had very little time to converse with him.

Finally, the resurrected Jesus appeared for the last time, and the disciples boldly asked a question which was very close to their hearts: “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) To them, Jesus was still the great Messiah of promise, the one who had come to rule “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.” (Ps. 72:8) He had come to sit upon the throne of David, to rule over the kingdom of David, which to them meant that he was to reestablish that kingdom.

Before Jesus was taken away from his disciples and crucified, he had related a parable in which he likened himself to a nobleman who would go into a “far country,” receive a kingdom, and return. (Luke 19:12) Since they had seen Jesus only sporadically in the past forty days, the apostles may have concluded that he had been away in that far country, and now had returned to set up his kingdom. The king would, indeed, return in due time to set up his kingdom, but it was not yet that time. Today, we still rejoice in the fact of his resurrection, and are

happy to bear witness to a risen Christ. However, we have the additional blessing of discerning the fulfillment of various signs indicating that Christ has returned, and is even now preparing to establish his kingdom. How this thrills our hearts!

The hearts of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus burned within them when they learned that Jesus' death was not a miscarriage of God's plan. Later, through the Holy Spirit, they learned that the dedicated followers of the Master were to have the privilege of suffering and dying with Christ. (Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:12) We rejoice that even in this ending Harvest period of the age we also have the opportunity of taking up our cross and following the Master.

By faith, we now enjoy the blessings of being, symbolically speaking, "risen with Christ." (Col. 3:1-3) While none of us knows just when our individual earthly walk will end, we do believe that the work of the Gospel Age is nearing completion, and we are standing near the very threshold of the kingdom. How wonderful it is to be of those who publish peace, who proclaim salvation, and who bear the good tidings of the kingdom to a distraught and dying world!—Isa. 52:7

The message of the risen Christ to us, therefore, even as it was to the women first at the tomb after Jesus was raised from the dead, is to go and tell. Now, however, it is not merely telling of his resurrection, but also of the nearness of his kingdom of blessing. It is telling one another of our privilege of dying with him, and of our hope of being in the likeness of his resurrection. Indeed, our message to one another and to the world embraces God's

entire plan of the ages. It is that glorious plan which is about to reach its consummation in the blessing of all the families of the earth with peace, and joy, and health, and everlasting life.—Gen. 22:18; Isa. 11:6-9; Rev. 21:3-5 ■

*“I will sing of the LORD’S great love forever;  
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness  
known through all generations.*

*“I will declare that your love stands firm forever,  
that you established your faithfulness  
in heaven itself.”*

*—Psalm 89:1,2*