

## I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

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SCRIPTURE: John 11:21-28

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord; I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

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(Christ) hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

All men must die. But again on this Easter morning we are reminded of the glorious hope which we have in Jesus Christ. Without the hope we have in Jesus, without the message of Easter, how tragic, how hopeless, how futile life would be! Knowing that death comes inevitably to all, good and evil, rich and poor, black and white, bond and free, if we had not Jesus and the hope of his resurrection, life would have lost all its incentive, all its worth-whileness, all its meaning. For what reason should men strive and struggle and build, if death ends all?

The message of Easter is that death does not end all. The message of Easter is not that men no longer need to suffer death, but that men no longer need to dread or to fear death; that Jesus has risen from the grave, has conquered death, and has destroyed all its terrors.

Realization of the inevitability of death is frequently, and often pessimistically stated in the Old Testament. Job, although he rose above his pessimism to write "I know that my Redeemer liveth," also wrote "all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust." The disillusioned writer of Ecclesiastes observed that both men and beasts suffer death, and wrote, "One event happeneth to them all; ... as one dieth, so dieth the other ..... There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death." The Psalmist wrote, "What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?"

In the New Testament Paul expresses the same fact, but in hope and optimism which contrasts markedly with the pessimism of some Old Testament writers. To the Hebrews he wrote that it is appointed unto men once to die, but this statement is almost incidental to his explanation of Christ's sacrifice of himself for sin to obtain an eternal redemption for us. To the Romans he wrote explaining that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all hath sinned," but adding that "by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." To the Corinthians he wrote: "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Death came into the world because of sin. Death was two-fold. First, it entailed separation from God, or spiritual death. And second, it entailed the separation of spirit and body, or physical death. Death was not God's will, or God's invention, but Satan's. It was Satan who tempted man to sin, knowing that sin would produce death, and that in death men would be subject to him.

Jesus came to break this bondage of sin and death. He assumed the flesh and blood of humanity so that he could experience death as all men must experience death. He died, as all men die. But because he owed no debt to sin, death could not hold him. He took Satan's own weapon -- death -- and turned it back upon its inventor. He himself suffered death that death might be destroyed, that the death of the body might be but a prelude to everlasting life in a new and resurrected body which should nevermore taste of death. As Jesus brought God to man in the incarnation, he brought man back to God in the resurrection.

Jesus did not evade death; he suffered it and overcame it. He used it as a means of triumph and victory instead of defeat and despair. He did not guarantee that men should never have to lay down his mortal, sinful, corruptible body, with all the passions and urges of original sin inherent in it. But by his resurrection he assured us for all time that the death of the body cannot destroy the soul, and that the laying aside of the old body is but the means of acquiring a new, immortal, perfected body which shall never again know pain, sorrow, suffering, or the waning powers of age. By his death and resurrection he taught us that death is but laying aside the imperfect that the perfect might some day be.

Perhaps the most significant and outstanding of all Jesus' miracles was the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Jesus seems to have purposely delayed going to Bethany until there could be no possible doubt that Lazarus was dead. Once arrived there, he delayed again until a number of people had gathered who could witness the miracle. Lazarus had been dead four days. But even in the face of this hard, revolting fact, Martha believed that "even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." She also had faith that if Lazarus should not be raised now, he would come forth in the resurrection at the last day. But she understood only imperfectly, if at all, how this resurrection was to come, or by what power. To explain this, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life." It is by the power of his resurrection that each son and daughter of Adam shall some day be restored to the flesh, and be brought before God, thus overcoming both physical and spiritual death. Then will come the judgment, when some will be found worthy to remain in God's presence, and others will be constrained to flee far from him, being unable to tolerate his glory and perfection.

Some students of scripture have seen in Jesus' words to Lazarus a promise that man shall never have to lay down the physical body. They quote, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." But that is not in keeping with other Bible teachings, and it is only part of this sentence. Before that Jesus had said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Belief in and obedience to Jesus and his gospel laws and ordinances creates in him a new life, as he who was once dead in trespasses and sins is spiritually born again, and begotten a son of God.

"Though he were dead, yet shall he live." That promise has a two-fold significance. He who is spiritually dead may live through faith in and obedience to Jesus. He may have God's life, God's Spirit dwelling within him, so that he is literally living in God's presence and God's life. But the promise also applies to those who must lay down the body in physical death. He who believes in and obeys Jesus, and who has his life within, shall by the power of that life take up his body again, and live, through him who is the resurrection and the life.

"Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Once we have received the life of Christ, if we continue therein we shall never die. Death may destroy the body, but it cannot touch the soul. And once Christ's life has raised us in a new body by the power of his resurrection, that body can never die.

The message of Easter is that Jesus lives, and that because he lives, we too may live; that death is only an incident of life; that though the body dies, yet we shall live; and that he who believes in Christ and lives in him shall never die.