

**“Four Days That Change Everything –  
Day 2: The Power of the Resurrection”**

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So what difference does it make? What difference does it make that Christ rose from the dead?

It's easy for us to just fall into the familiar patterns, year after year; Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday; recounting those climactic events in Jesus' life, long ago, without giving much thought to *why* these events matter. Even the ancient creeds of the church don't spend much time dwelling on the *why*. "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again," *et cetera* – that's what the Apostles' Creed has to say; a brief narration of the most important events – but it doesn't tell us why they *matter*. The Nicene Creed helps, a little bit: "*For us and for our salvation* he came down from heaven; ... *for our sake* he was crucified under Pontius Pilate" and so on. The Nicene Creed makes it clear that Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection give us some positive benefit. Most of us have some general understanding that Christ's life, death, and resurrection bring us salvation and the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting – but let's be specific here. *Salvation* – that's a benefit we get from Christ's death on the cross. *Forgiveness of sins* – that's also a benefit we get from Christ's death on the cross. Christ's sacrificial self-offering, "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," resulted in us being given both gifts. We were *saved* on Good Friday. We were *forgiven* on Good Friday.

So what, then, is the significance for us of *Easter*? What *benefit* do we gain because Christ rose from the dead? I already hinted at it. We use this phrase, "eternal life." But what does that really mean? For – as we all know – we all still die. None of us get to escape the hard reality of death.

Let's step back in time a couple thousand years. What did the Jews in the time of Jesus believe happened when people die? Did they believe in any sort of life after death? The answer is *yes* – and *no*. In the Old Testament, there are about 65 references to a place called "Sheol," the abode of the dead, sometimes referred to as "the pit" or "the grave." The belief was that the spirits of *all* the dead went there, both the righteous and the unrighteous. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, a couple centuries before Jesus, the word "Sheol" was replaced with "Hades," which was the name the Greeks used for the realm of the dead. They even had a god named "Hades." That word "Hades" shows up in the New Testament 11 times, reflecting the fact that there was still a common understanding in the time of Jesus that *that* is where the spirits of the dead go to dwell.

But there were also some, in the time of Jesus, who believed that there was something *more* after death than just endless existence in the realm of the dead. A couple passages in the Old Testament pointed to something else, something called “the resurrection of the dead.” It’s hinted at in Isaiah 26, a verse that goes like this: “Those who die in the Lord will live; their bodies will rise again! Those who sleep in the earth will rise up and sing for joy! For your life-giving light will fall like dew on your people in the place of the dead!” (Isaiah 26:19) The implication is that *some* of the people who had died would not stay in Sheol but would somehow come to life again. A similar view is found in the last chapter in the book of Daniel. An angel says to Daniel: “Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace.” (Daniel 12:2) That was news to Daniel; he hadn’t heard *that* teaching before – the resurrection of the dead.

So by the time of Jesus, there was a debate going on within Judaism: would people who were dead rise to new life? One group of Jews, called the Sadducees, held to the traditional view: the spirits of the dead go to the underworld – Sheol – and that’s that. But another group, the Pharisees, had studied the scriptures a little more carefully, and on the basis those passages in Isaiah and Daniel had come to believe that there would be a resurrection of the dead. Jesus himself gets caught in the debate between these two groups when somebody asks him a question about the resurrection (Matthew 22; Luke 20). Jesus seems to side with the Pharisees when he says that “those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection of the dead ... are like angels and are children of God.” He goes on to say that there is proof of the resurrection of the dead in the book of Exodus, when God calls himself “the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob,” because he is “God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.” (Luke 20:34-38) That comment would have surprised *both* groups, for Jesus was effectively saying Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were not dead, but somehow *alive*. So Jesus was challenging *both* the traditional view, *and* the Pharisees’ understanding of the resurrection.

After Jesus died on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea took the body and laid it in a tomb. He wanted to give it a *proper* burial. Surely he never anticipated the surprise of Easter morn: the grave opened, the stone rolled away; Jesus ... *raised*. Death was not able to hold him. For he *had* been dead. He had *truly* died. His spirit had gone to the same place that all other spirits of the dead had gone: to Sheol, to the underworld. “He descended to the dead,” as the Apostles’ Creed puts it. But what did he *do* there? 1 Peter that says that, when he died, Jesus “went and preached to the spirits in prison.” (1 Peter 3:19) There’s a similar passage in the book of Ephesians. (Ephesians 4:9) Jesus went to the same place everybody else went – but not to stay. To perform a rescue mission. *He preached to the spirits in prison*. Matthew says that when Jesus died, “tombs opened” and “the bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead.” (Matthew 27:52-53) These were not just walking zombies – these were the saints of old, now receiving *new life* in Christ: *resurrection* from the dead.

This is what Jesus offers us, my friends. It’s not just endless existence as disembodied spirits, nor is it regeneration as spiritless zombies. It’s a true *resurrection to new life*. Spirit *and* body. Life.

“Wait a sec,” you may be thinking – “you mean we’re going to have *bodies*?” Funny you should ask that, because the early Christians wondered the same thing. This was a whole new teaching; it was unfamiliar, *different*. It didn’t match their traditional understanding. In one of his letters to the

Christians in Corinth, Paul went to great lengths to explain all this. Christ has been raised from the dead; he is the first in a *great harvest* that will include both you and me. We will experience a resurrection very much like the one that Christ himself experienced. “But,” says Paul, “someone may ask, ‘How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?’” (1 Corinthians 15:35) Paul’s answer: we get *new bodies*. Just as a *seed* becomes a *plant*, so we *humans* become ... something *else*. We put off this earthly shell and we take on a whole new form. “Our rotting body is put into the ground, but what is raised won’t ever decay. It’s degraded when it’s put into the ground, but it’s raised in glory. It’s weak when it’s put into the ground, but it’s raised in power. It’s a physical body when it’s put into the ground, but it’s raised as a spiritual body.” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44) *We will have a body*. But it won’t be the same as the body we have now. It will be different, qualitatively different, of a different kind of magnitude, a different kind of glory. The bodies we have now decay, they fall into disrepair, they break, parts stop working. Eyes go bad, ears go deaf, bones become brittle, hair turns gray; we fall prey to disease; malignancies can form; sometimes parts of our bodies just completely fail; sometimes we need replacements; sometimes it *kills* us. The bodies we have now are subject to decay. *But the body you have now is not the body you will always have*. God is going to clothe you in *something else*. I can’t even imagine what it might be like. How do you compare a *seed* to a *plant*? What we have now is just a *seed*. God’s going to give us something even *better*. “This rotting body,” says Paul, will be “clothed with what can’t decay.” This “body that is dying” will be “clothed in what can’t die.” (1 Corinthians 15:53) “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4) God will make *all things new*. That includes these frail bodies we have now.

We talk about “eternal life.” It’s important to understand what that means. It does *not* mean just the endless existence of our soul. It’s something *more* than that. The ancient creeds call it “the resurrection of the dead.” There’s a spirit, *and* a body. I don’t know what that’s going to look like. I don’t even know if the word “look” will have any *meaning* in that new existence. But I do know there’s not going to be any more *suffering*. There’s not going to be any more *chronic pain*. There’s not going to be any need for any *medication*. There won’t be any physical illness. There won’t be any *mental* illness. There won’t be any dementia. There won’t be any cancer. Can you even *imagine* what it will be like to live in a body that doesn’t decay? A body that doesn’t need medicine? A body that won’t be infected with a disease? A body that will never need to go to urgent care or the emergency room? A body that will never end up at a funeral home? We’ll be living in a world with no suffering or pain or disease or death. None of that is going to exist in the new order of reality that Jesus Christ offers to each one of us.

This new world that Jesus offers to all of us who trust in him sounds like the ultimate luxury vacation, a complete escape from all that ails us in life. Only, we get to *stay*. Even the grandest of vacations has an ending. A return to reality, where we have to once again face the difficult realities of life. But this new world that Christ invites us to – it’s a whole different kind of thing. We don’t have to *return* to reality, because it’s the *new* reality. A whole new state of being. A new *body*, given to us as a precious gift, wrapped in love from our heavenly Father, who makes all things new.

My friends ... Christ is risen!

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