
A little boy is playing on the floor of a hospital waiting room where a man waits to see a doctor. The doctor's secretary beckons to the man and draws his attention to the boy: *He has the same problem your little boy had.* The man tells us, *I sat down next to the little boy's mother. "It's hard bringing him in here every two weeks for these tests, isn't it?" "Hard?"- she was silent for a moment - "I die every time."*

Jesus - Victor over Death

Acts 10:34-43 & Matthew 28:1-10

Easter Day 2020

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won !*

"It's good to know, isn't it - that even though the medical outlook is hopeless, we can have hope for our children in such a situation. We can be sure that after our child dies, he'll be completely removed from sickness and suffering and everything like that - and be completely well and happy."

"If I could only believe that. But I don't. When he dies, I'll just have to cover him with dirt, and forget I ever had him." "I'm glad I don't feel that way." "Why?" This time she didn't turn towards me, but kept watching her child. "Because we covered up our little boy with dirt yesterday afternoon. I'm here to thank Dr Wolman for his kindness, today."

"You look like a rational person." She was looking straight at me now.

"How can you possibly believe that the death of a man, or a little boy, is any different from the death of an animal?"

I don't know how that conversation continued. But if **we** had been talking - **what would we have said?** What does our **hope** - our **assurance** - rest upon? I trust it rests on the Lord Jesus Christ. For **he alone**, of all men, **has been raised from the dead** - not to die again - but to be **alive now and for ever**.

God raised Jesus to show us that **he has made a way** through Christ **for us to follow him** and be with him forever. There is a verse, written by Paul, I want you all to remember, **By his power God raised the Lord from the dead and he will raise us also.** (1 Cor 6:14)

So I ask, **Are you convinced that the tomb was empty** and no one could produce his corpse?! That Jesus was really alive and physically raised out of the grave, the third day after his terrible death? **That he appeared to many**; ate and drank and talked with them - not just for a few moments - but for hours at a time? **That he was real** and could be touched and handled - even though he was wonderfully changed - for he could appear and disappear at will, even in a locked room?

As a result of this shattering event, **Jesus' disciples were changed** from fear to joy, from being cowards to being brave, bold witnesses. Changed **from doubt to utter conviction!**

Do you share that conviction? Do **you** know the Risen Christ yourself? Not because you've **seen** him, but because **he's changed your life?** For God wants to change our lives by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. To begin with - he can change our thinking - just as that father was different in his attitude from that mother.

For, **if Jesus was raised from the dead, it follows that:**

1. There **is** a God. Dead men **don't** rise. Only the power of **God** could have done it.
2. Only Christianity proclaims a **Risen Saviour**. No other religion claims that. It's popular today to put all religions on the same level. **Why should we regard Christianity as special? This is why.** Our faith doesn't rest on wishful thinking - but on historical facts, to which no sceptic has ever given a more believable alternative explanation.
3. There **is** life after death. Have you stood at the grave of a loved one and doubted it? Wondered what has happened to them? **But ours is no vague hope** - based, for example, on what you may have read of near-death experiences. Our hope is firmly based **where alone there is true hope - in Jesus only.** Since God raised him - we **know** that Jesus spoke truth and not lies.

My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. (John 10:27-28)

Heaven is for those who put their trust in him. *I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies - and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25-26)*

At this time of pandemic, so many today are **fearful of death**, although they might not admit it. Not just the thought of dying painfully and being separated from loved ones. That would be natural. But there is **an underlying fear**. *"The dread of something after death... thus conscience does make cowards of us all." (Hamlet Act 3, scene 1)* We **need** the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance by the Saviour, and **new life** from him.

In addition, many are **fearful of the future**. The pandemic brings fear of job loss, inability to pay the rent on your accommodation and, of course, the mental pain of separation from friends and family, confinement to a small room, perhaps with small children. This along with all the other uncertainties about the future.

Many can't believe in God because they think science has explained it all and there's no need to 'invent God' (as they might put it). But eventually, they find life empty and without hope. Whereas **we Christians have a sure and certain hope**, because **by his power God raised the Lord from the dead and he will raise us also.** God wants **everyone** to know that **there is a way back** to friendship with God - to **life here** with purpose and a deep joy, whatever our circumstances - and **beyond the grave** - to a world renewed, freed from sin, death and evil.

When we come to Jesus, believing he is alive and willing to hear our prayer, in order that we might be healed from the past, forgiven and restored - **then** we discover his love and his peace. Let me illustrate this with a true story.

Sadam was born in South India of a respected, educated and artistic family. When his father took work in the north of India, Sadam was boarded with other members of his family, and from an uncle he caught leprosy. He was 8 when it first appeared. By 14, his hands began to claw and he lost feeling in his feet - so they became raw

and bleeding. He was turned away from school and spent 6 lonely years of isolation, without friends or hope. He was even refused coffee in a café; the house became a prison.

Eventually, a Christian doctor got him some more education, but still no-one wanted him. Then he heard about a Dr Paul Brand at Vellore Hospital. He set off by bus to go there, despite cruel stares and gestures of revulsion. When he arrived at the town, he found the hospital was still 4 miles away. He was refused entry into another bus, when the driver saw his bandaged feet. So he walked in the heat, on his ulcerated feet.

A woman - it was Mrs Brand - saw him at the entrance. He kept his distance and asked after Dr Brand. She didn't move away, but explained he was away for a few days; perhaps he could return to the town and stay there? He tried not to show his overwhelming disappointment. *You can find a place, can't you?* Turning round, he found she'd moved closer and was looking straight into his eyes - not with fear or revulsion or even pity - but with caring concern. So he told her his story and **he could scarcely believe what followed.**

She took him home and made a comfortable bed on the verandah. She brought him food, sat and talked with him. He stayed 3 days feeling respected, even loved, like a human being. Dr Brand returned late one night - but came and saw him immediately. He said there was a good chance Saddam could be healed and an operation would make his hands usable again. He would start tomorrow. *Sleep well*, he said and put his arm around Saddam's shoulder.

This is a picture of what Jesus wants to do for us. We are like that poor leper. If we surrender to him, he will heal us and make us able to serve him. ***As Jesus was raised, so he wants to raise us - from death to life.***

Meanwhile, while we serve him here, we live by faith, not by sight. The American author I quoted at the beginning, ends his book with the following story.

One January morning he sees the mail truck stop at his mailbox up the drive. Without thinking, he runs to the box in his shirtsleeves, although it is bitterly cold - below zero - and there's a foot of snow on the ground.

As he opens the mailbox, he sees **a seed catalogue.** On the front are bright zinnias, on the back huge tomatoes. *For a few moments I was oblivious to the cold - delivered from it. I leafed through the catalogue, tasting corn and cucumbers, smelling roses. I saw freshly ploughed earth, smelled it, let it run through my fingers. For those brief moments I was living in springtime and summer - the winter past. Then the cold penetrated to my bones and I ran back to the house.*

*When I was getting warm again, I thought how **my moments at the mailbox were like our experience as Christians.** We feel the cold along with those who do not share our hope. The biting wind penetrates us as it does them. F. Scott Fitzgerald spoke of the end that was 'desolate and unkind, to turn the calendar at June and find December on the next leaf.' We have had the same desolate feeling, many of us.*

But in our cold times - we have a seed catalogue. We open it and smell the promised spring - eternal spring. And the first fruit that settles our hope is **Jesus Christ, who was raised from death and cold earth to Glory Eternal.**

Lord, I want to know that Death has been swallowed up in Victory, because of your death and Resurrection !

And I want to know that You know me, love me, and that You forgive me, and will share that victory with me !

Lord, I turn from all that is sin in my life, and ask You to come into my life and change me. For your sake. Amen.
