

The Joy which Overcame the Shame

Genesis 1-3, 1 Corinthians 15, John 11

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.

Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?

One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

—JOHN DONNE

In his book about MIRACLES, Eric Metaxas explains:

The great English poet John Donne (1572-1631), in his famous poem, declares what Christians have always believed: that Death was murdered in a tomb...that Death and the tomb can hold us no more.

Donne doesn't refer specifically to that tomb because he doesn't need to. As an English bishop, it is what he and what all Christians have believed, that the resurrection of Jesus opened the door, leading the way from that tomb and death to freedom and eternal life.

Even though Death still lingered through the centuries, it ultimately died. Even though each of us will die, we may now all live again, forever.

This belief has informed Western civilization for nearly twenty centuries, but it is a belief that is so radical it can easily be taken for granted, can be ignored as metaphorical, as something akin to saying that each spring brings new life, or that "life springs eternal." But we mustn't take it for granted.ⁱ

Today, this morning, we who follow Christ gladly celebrate **the following 4 truths**. These truths mean everything to us, and give our lives meaning:

#1 That **the Triune God** – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – **created** the universe, created a special planet in the universe, and created on that planet men and women, girls and boys, all of whom are wonderfully made **in the image of God**.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." **27** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

#2 That **man** – though made in God’s image – **sinned** by willfully disobeying his Creator, and by so doing **ushered the consequence of frustration and death** into the experience of our world.

Genesis 3:17-19 And God said to Adam, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

#3 That the 2nd Person of the Godhead – **God the Son** – became a man **to satisfy the penalty** of our sin on the cross and **to conquer the enemy** of death with an empty tomb.

¹ Corinthians 15:1 Now I would remind you...of the ...[which]...³I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

And **#4** **Anyone who** simply and fully **believes** in the Lord Jesus Christ **will live** – truly live and never actually die – in a newly created universe, and in the very presence of the Triune God himself ...forever.

^{John 11: 25} Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

The Oxford Scholar and former atheist C.S. Lewis was correct, and what he realized drove him from proud scoffing to a bent knee. Since *Jesus of Nazareth himself* taught these truths, and insisted that men must believe them, the options are three –

- #1 These truths are not true because Jesus of Nazareth was a liar. (or)
- #2 These truths are not true because Jesus of Nazareth was a lunatic. (or)
- #3 These truths ARE true because Jesus of Nazareth was who he said he was.

Christians stake their lives and eternity itself on number 3.

Yesterday morning, I was blown away when I opened my favorite newspaper and saw this article (i.e., “the Easter Effect”) on the front page of one of the major sections. It featured the 1534 AD painting by Giovanni Antonio Bazzi called the RESURRECTION OF CHRIST. It is a stunning painting. A careful look notices not only Jesus Christ out of his tomb, but the guarding Roman soldiers shocked into unconsciousness, angels in attendance, and disciples amazed.

But it was George Weigel’s article – a distinguished Senior Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington DC – that truly gripped attention. I was riveted because Weigel was

asking the right question: *How did a ragtag band of nobodies (Jesus' first disciples) become such a dominant force within 250 years in the Roman empire?* Here is his answer:

There is no accounting for the rise of Christianity without weighing the revolutionary effect on those nobodies of what they called "the Resurrection": their encounter with the One whom they embraced as the risen Lord, whom they first knew as the itinerant Jewish rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, and who died an agonizing shameful death on a Roman cross outside of Jerusalem.

As N.T. Wright, one of the Anglosphere's pre-eminent Biblical scholars makes clear, that first generation answered the question of why they were Christians with a straightforward answer: because Jesus was raised from the dead...early Christians were confident enough about what they called the Resurrection that they were prepared to say something like, "I know this sounds ridiculous, but it is what happened."ⁱⁱ

The early Christians were prepared to say this, and we who are Christians today are prepared to say the same thing. Because it is true. And because it changed everything. This morning, in just a few minutes, we will have the joy of hearing a number of people who have placed their faith in Christ and want to tell us this morning, "I am following Him."

This morning, we invite you – if you have not yet made the call – to believe in Christ and humbly join the company of those who in Jesus have their sins forgiven, and death conquered.

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ⁱ Metaxas, Eric. **Miracles: What They Are, Why They Happen, and How They Can Change Your Life**, Chapter 8 "The Resurrection"

ⁱⁱ George Weigel, "The Easter Effect," in the Wall Street Journal, Saturday/Sunday March 31-April 1, 2018, C1-C2.