



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

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Resurrection Is For Now!

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After accepting the invitation a couple weeks ago to share a resurrection reflection, I immediately thought how different the assignment is this year, a difference highlighted by the fact that I would be in town. As I've done for a few years now, I tentatively planned to be with my grandchildren.

Our circumstances today are unlike any most of us have ever experienced. Pressing in on us are disease, not health; restrictions, not freedom; the shadow of death, not life; and uncertainty, not confidence. A pall has been cast over every part of life, including our traditions and observances.

As part of my mind worked in the background on a direction for this reflection, I continued work on a different project, part of which involved reviewing the notes prepared a few years ago for a pair of sermons on the laments in Psalms 22 and 44. I came across a quotation I had included, from a blog post originally written a decade and a half ago by Bob Hyatt, a minister who at the time lived in Portland, Oregon. Under the title, "Don't Forget to Grieve," he wrote to encourage believers to take the sadness and despair of Good Friday more seriously in order to more fully appreciate—and celebrate—Easter Sunday. What I quoted, however, were two paragraphs in which he referred to a big difference between our nation and third-world countries. Hyatt wrote,

I'm absolutely amazed when I see television coverage of third-world countries, particularly the coverage of disasters. When I see the keening, wailing women, the men tearing their clothes from their bodies and even the hair from their heads in anguish, I realize how emotionally impoverished we stoics in America are. I realize that the grief and mourning which the Bible actually speaks highly of, is completely missing from our vocabulary. We've lost the ability to grieve.

And with it, I think we've lost the ability to be truly joyful. Have you ever wondered how those who live in other cultures, even those who live lives of impoverishment can smile so broadly and celebrate so joyfully in the midst of their impoverishment? We watch in amazement as year after year at times of victory or celebration they fill the streets, dancing in joy, eyes bright. The closest we ever come to that is when our team wins the World Series, or the Superbowl. And even that is a pale mockery of the joy that we know we should feel at times, but never seem to find. We wish we could dance the way that they dance, or feel the joy and excitement they seem to feel.¹

Of course, our present circumstances are not exactly parallel to the third-world situations Hyatt described either, but the present shadow of disease, restrictions, death, and uncertainty puts us closer to their situation than we've been in some time, if ever. And so, perhaps we might celebrate the resurrection this year in a way that is also more like theirs.

¹ Bob Hyatt, "Don't Forget to Grieve," April 9, 2004, <https://relevantmagazine.com/life5/1900-dont-forget-to-grieve/>. Accessed April 8, 2020.

To do that, we may need to expand the way we think about the resurrection. Often, especially in today's skeptical and critical world, we think about the *fact* of resurrection and the *evidence* that compels us to believe Jesus was raised. As a student of Christian apologetics for most of my adult life, I understand that—and endorse it. But sometime in my studies, I was made aware of a different slant on the subject, one that is prominent in New Testament passages on resurrection.

It's especially noticeable in the letter to the Romans. Paul did not ignore the *fact* of Jesus' resurrection and how it validated him as the Son of God—he referred to it in the fourth verse of chapter 1. But in the other passages where he mentioned that Jesus had been raised, he focused on what it means for the present life of believers, how it matters for the here and now.

In Romans 4.24-25, Paul directly connected Jesus' resurrection with our acquittal from sin, writing, "Jesus our Lord was . . . raised for our justification." In Romans 6.4, he said that the reality of Jesus' resurrection assured us of "newness of life" when we were baptized. In verse 9, he said it meant that "death no longer has dominion over him," a statement of fact that also reassures us. In Romans 8.11, he said that the one who raised Jesus will also give life to our mortal bodies through his indwelling Spirit.

But it's his reference to resurrection in the last half of chapter 8 that is especially relevant as we think about it in the midst of the current crisis of disease, restrictions, death, and uncertainty. In verse 18, Paul says this life's present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that awaits us. In verses 24-28, he says God's indwelling Spirit intercedes for us, even when we don't know what to ask, and that God will in all things work for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.

How could Paul be so sure? He answers, beginning in verse 31. God is for us. He gave up his Son for us. Who—or what—can overcome him? Tribulation? Distress? Persecution? Famine? Nakedness? Danger? A sword? No. And if none of those threats can defeat him, then surely disease, or restrictions, or uncertainty, or even death won't conquer him either! Even if, like the saints of old, we are "killed all the day long" for his sake, we will ultimately survive—and thrive (vv. 31-36). So, Paul says,

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8.37-39).

How could Paul be so sure? How can we? Go back to verses 33-34. "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

"More than that, who was raised!" Resurrection! Not just a promise for some day, as important as that is, but the reality that gives us the strength we need right now. Disease will take its shot. Restrictions will cramp our style. Death will do its best to stalk and discourage us. COVID-19 statistics and concerns about the economy will do all they can to unnerve us. But, because of Jesus' resurrection, today, and every day, we can move forward, confident and undaunted.

So, in Robert Lowry's words, we exclaim, "He arose! He arose! Hallelujah, Christ arose!"²

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² Robert Lowry, "Low in the Grave He Lay," John P. Wiegand, ed., *Praise for the Lord* (Nashville, TN: Praise Press, 1992), # 408.