

BECAUSE HE LIVES

By Rev. Will Nelken

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An Arlington, Virginia, minister said, “We have closed our minds to such trivial considerations as the question of the resurrection of Christ. If you fundamentalists wish to believe that nonsense, we have no objections, but we have more important things to preach than the presence or absence of an empty tomb 20 centuries old.”

If, under the heat of Jewish persecution, the weight of Roman oppression, and the resistance of human skepticism, twelve men and the thousands who followed with them were so confident of the resurrection of Jesus that they were willing to taste brutal deaths rather than deny Him, can it really be “nonsense”? Still today, two millennia later, real Christians are so persuaded that Jesus is alive that even the threat of death cannot alter their testimony.

I tell you, there is no “more important” message to proclaim. His empty tomb makes a world of difference — for you and every other person on the planet!

Let me attempt to explain...

Two Trees

I'll begin at the beginning.

Genesis 2:7 Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

God's Breath (Spirit) put the life into Adam. It is still God's breath that is our life today, which is why it cannot be replicated by scientists in a test tube.

God placed the man in a luxurious garden, abounding with edible fruits and vegetables.

Genesis 2:9 In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:15 The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. ¹⁶ But the Lord God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— ¹⁷ except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

Two trees — one providing life, the other producing death. It should have been a no-brainer: tons of available fruit, only one tree off-limits. So why did they spend their mornings under the tree with the forbidden fruit? Why do we hover so near the line?

The serpent persuaded Eve that the fruit should be hers, so she ate it and shared it with Adam, and instantly, everything was different. And yet, nothing changed. They died, just as God predicted. Yet they were still alive. The part that died was on the inside, not readily visible.

Now, cut off from God's Breath, they felt guilt and shame for their self-will and disobedience and began to try to hide from God. Innocence turned to guilt.

Genesis 3:22 Then the Lord God said, “Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!”
²³ So the Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden.

There were two trees in the Garden. Since they first chose the forbidden one, to then eat of the other would have made their fallen condition permanent — forever. It was the mercy of God (not His anger) that drove them out of the Garden until their sin could be removed.

Years passed, then decades, centuries, and millennia...

Two Resurrections

But in the fullness of time, God sent His Son, born as a human being and subject to human life, to redeem us and transform our guilt into purity. Though we all must die (with the exception of the rapture of the church), we all will be resurrected. Jesus was the “firstborn from the dead.”

John 11:25 Jesus said to [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

And just as there were two trees where the first choice was made, there will be two resurrections where the final consequence will be meted out.

John 5:29 [They will] come forth— those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Acts 24:15 [Paul said,] I have hope in God... that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

What is it that makes a person “just”? In God’s economy, it is how one has regarded and treated Jesus, His Son. Nothing else matters in the end.

Everyone has sinned. We are all sinners, so there is nothing in terms of our behavior to distinguish us. The only thing that can distinguish us is our faith. Do we trust God or not? Have we followed His plan and put our confidence in His Son? Or, are we still depending on what we can do for ourselves to prove ourselves “worthy”?

Jesus Christ died in our place and for our sins. And He was raised from the dead *for us!*

Our Salvation

John 14:19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

The Breath of God has been restored. Jesus gives the Spirit to those who put their trust in Him. He lives and we live because of Him.

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Peter called it a “living hope” because it is the result of life, and it leads to life’s fullness.

Revelation 1:18 [The Risen Christ said,] I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

Jesus has destroyed the shackles of death and thrown open the prison doors so that you may walk free!

Hebrews 2:14 Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. ¹⁵ Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

Only as a human being... only by dying... only in this way.

We have all been slaves to the fear of dying. Call it “fear of the unknown” or “fear of judgment.” The fear of death is the root of all fears.

If you put your life in Jesus' hands, no one can lock you in that prison again!

John 10:10 I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

2 Timothy 2:11 This is a faithful saying: If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.

That is to say, if we identify with Him in His death (by recognizing that He died in our place and for our sins), we gain the fruits of His resurrection.

Chinese Christian, Watchman Nee, wrote, “Our old history ends with the cross; our new history begins with the resurrection.”

The resurrection of Jesus Christ addresses death, the fear of death, and the judgment to come, and it brings new life, fullness of life — hope and joy and peace.

As one of the Early church fathers (Clement of Alexander) wrote, “Christ has turned all our sunsets into dawns.” Whenever you encounter darkness in your life, know this, the light of day will dawn again, if you put your hope and trust in Jesus, the Risen One!

Have you put your trust in Him? Will you do it today?