

RAISED TO SALVATION

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The disciples of Jesus loved their Master and Friend. They trusted His teachings; they emulated His behavior; they even performed miracles in His name. But they were not prepared for Him to die—not so soon, not so tragically. They were in shock.

Even less were they prepared for Him to rise from the dead, although He had foretold it. At a loss for words—caught up in the mystery and wonder—they tried to grasp what had happened.

Unable to believe the reports of others, scarcely able to believe what they saw with their own eyes, they tried to stretch their minds around this miracle.

And then one day, Jesus Himself stood in their midst, saying, “Peace be to you.”

They looked into His eyes. They touched His clothing. They stroked His hand and hugged His neck. They shared a meal and talked together. And then they *knew*. This was real. Jesus was truly alive! And their lives could never remain the same.

To the Jew First

Jesus Christ explained His mission, as follows: *“I have come to seek and to save those who are lost”* (Luke 19:10), specially *“God’s lost sheep—the people of Israel”* (Matthew 15:24).

Presenting Himself “to the Jews first” elicited a great deal of resistance from the established religious leaders. Resistance turned to veiled hostility, and ultimately to Jesus’ violent death.

Jewish history is the story of faith in God—faith informed by the Scriptures and sustained by the traditions—faith rising and falling, and all but disappearing. Today, 70% of the Jews who live in Israel are completely secular (non-religious); many more are only nominally religious. A local rabbi has explained to questioning hearts, “You don’t have to believe in God to be Jewish.”

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ that the Hebrew people, as a whole, rejected, has found its home in the hearts of hundreds of millions of people today. The Risen Savior has rescued these men, women, and children, and reunited them with God.

Today, I want to recount for you the power of Jesus’ resurrection for the salvation of people—all kinds of people, everywhere.

Gospel of the Resurrection

The Gospel is eminently the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. More than His teachings, more than His miracles—it is His resurrection which grounds the story in glorious power and purpose!

In the early days of the Church, Peter stood up to testify of his calling, *“And we apostles are witnesses of all [Jesus] did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify*

that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the Judge of all—the living and the dead. He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name.” (Acts 10:39-43)

Real Faith

The key to this mighty salvation is faith—believing in Him. I hasten to explain that faith is not mere head knowledge. Faith is not a statement of faith or the recital of a creed. Faith is a belief that takes command of one’s heart and guides a corresponding lifestyle that reflects the life of Jesus.

Also, faith is not a ritual. Religious practices may be hollow, empty rituals, no more than religious superstitions—what the Bible calls a *“form of godliness, but lacking the power thereof”* (2 Timothy 3:5).

So, faith is more than what we know and more than what we do or who we do it with.

Faith is inner trust, heart confidence, and actual reliance on God. When you trust God more than yourself, you’ll know that you have real faith. When you rely on God more than on your circumstances, you’ll know that you have real faith.

When you rely on yourself, you get what you yourself can provide; when you rely on God, you get what Almighty God can provide.

In fact, faith itself is not mighty or powerful, for faith is dependence—faith is weak, but God is mighty. I once hoped to become a man of mighty faith, but eventually discovered that I could not be both: I could be mighty (as people recognize it) or I could be full of faith, but I could not be both. As Paul wrote, *“When I am weak, then I am strong (in the power of the Lord)”* (2 Corinthians 12:10).

If your faith relies on the strength of Christ and the authority of Christ, then great things will result. But if, instead, you rely on the strength of your faith, you will be frustrated.

Well-Anchored Faith

The whole potential of our faith depends on something that none of us could ever produce. The Christian faith is anchored to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Our faith’s whole source of supply—authority, strength, wisdom, and power—is utterly dependent on just one thing: that Jesus was indeed raised from the grave.

Our salvation—Christ’s power to free us from sin’s bondage, guilt, shame, and judgment and give us new and everlasting life—is wholly tied to that fantastic miracle. We can be saved because Jesus was raised. Or not.

Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, *“If Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless.”* (1 Corinthians 15:14).

His work as an apostle, a missionary, and a church planter was worthless if Jesus had not been raised. Why would he say that? Hadn’t he done good things? Hadn’t he healed people? Hadn’t he improved people’s lives and ethics?

Paul said that preaching Christ is useless unless Jesus is alive! Yet, there are many today who tell His stories and apply His truths, who do not believe that He is actually alive, as you and I are alive.

What's important, many say, is just that you believe. And to many of those, god can be whatever they understand him to be.

But that is not what Paul preached. He said if your faith is not anchored in Christ—the Christ who rose from the dead—it is useless. Well, what is faith “useful for,” anyway?

One of the many “bag ladies” from the city’s center was found dead in her apartment. She had spent her days panhandling and collecting recyclables and dumpster diving to survive. Yet, when they cleaned out her seedy little apartment, they found over \$120,000 in cash under her mattress. Surviving by begging, while sleeping on a fortune!

If I have \$100 in my pocket, I may think I have plenty, but it’s only imaginary—it’s just a piece of paper in my pocket. It’s value only becomes real when I spend it.

Faith is like that—holding on to it has only imaginary value; it doesn’t have real value until I spend it, until I act on it.

If you invest your faith in Jesus—the Jesus who walked out of the empty tomb—you will discover its real value; you will discover the full and free forgiveness of your sins, and a place in the everlasting Family of God.

That can be yours—today and every day—if you believe that Jesus is alive and you follow Him.

Faith’s Real Value

For, as Paul also wrote, *“If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins”* (1 Corinthians 15:17).

That’s what your faith is useful for! And, in case anyone wondered if Paul was suggesting that perhaps Jesus Christ had not been raised, he added, *“In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died”* (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The resurrection of Jesus is not only a solid base for faith, it also depicts faith’s horizon, for Jesus is only “the first” of a great harvest, that will include all who have died in faith. Just as He was raised from death, so also all those who trust in Him will be raised from death.

Your faith is stronger than death, outlasts death, overcomes death—transforms what seems to be a final ending into an actual new beginning!

To the church in Ephesus, Paul extolled the God who is *“so rich in mercy, and [who] loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.”* (Ephesians 2:4-6)

Jesus’ resurrection guarantees *your* resurrection! If His resurrection was imaginary—just a religious fable—then yours will be, too. But if His was real, actual, physical—then yours will be, too.

In the Spirit, every believer has already been raised together with Christ and is seated with Him in the heavenlies. This is wonderful! This is how we taste heaven on earth. And though this is not without value and effect, it is only the beginning. There is much, much more to come!

To the church in Thessalonica, Paul reflected, “[People] speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God’s Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.” (1 Thessalonians 1:10)

This salvation that Jesus bought for us is so much more than a better life, a nicer life, a more comfortable life for you and me. It is an inward transformation that shows up in a life of holiness and grace, continually growing in likeness to Jesus, and leaving in its wake a trail of miracles and blessings for those whose lives we touch. It erases any conflict with God and His ways and leads us toward His return with a clear conscience, a fearless mind, a hopeful heart, and a joyful spirit.

*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living
Just because He lives*

Israel’s Salvation

Jesus brought this message to “the Jews first.” Their rejection of the Good News opened the door for the rest of the world (including us) to hear and believe and receive God’s grace. But He has not abandoned the people whom He chose and to whom He gave His Code for a Worshipful Life.

He raised Jesus from the dead to insure that there would be another chapter to the Hebrew story, as well as ours.

With a fury similar to that which nailed Jesus to a cross, Jewish leaders arrested the apostles who were preaching about the powerful resurrection of Jesus and put them in prison. But an angel of the Lord released them in the middle of the night and sent them back to the Temple grounds to continue preaching.

When the guards discovered their escape, they went to look for them and arrested them a second time. In answer to the High Priest’s threats, Peter and the others replied, “*The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed Him by hanging Him on a cross. Then God put Him in the place of honor at His right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven.*” (Acts 5:30-31)

If they had killed the Lord of Glory and that were the end of the matter, there would be no place of repentance left for them, but because He lives, they have another chance! Because Jesus lives, the Jews—and all people—have the opportunity to repent of their sins and be forgiven.

Have you taken advantage of that opportunity? Have you repented to God for your sins? For your willful resistance to His leadership in your life?

You cannot find forgiveness without repentance. You will not be forgiven until you confess your fault and surrender to Christ’s leadership. Going to church won’t achieve it. Reading a Bible won’t achieve it. Saying a prayer won’t achieve it.

Only real faith—faith that answers to the Living Christ, the Resurrected One—can achieve it. Believe in Him now. Put your faith in Him today. Call on His name—call Him “Lord.” Start listening to Him and do what He tells you. Then, He will begin to lift your life toward the highest heights. You, too, will be raised to salvation.