

## A Resurrection Like His

Matthew 28: 1 – 9; Romans 6: 1 – 11<sup>i</sup>

### The Easter “Story”

I was speaking with a colleague not long ago about the idea of the “Easter Story” and the various Gospel texts that we inevitably use on this particular Sunday in the church year, like the passage that we read earlier from the Gospel of Matthew. We spoke of the fact that they are amazing stories in their own right, the kind of stories that we tend to take out of Scripture and include in anthologies that are put together for children. Of course, sometimes they are well written, and others not so much.

Then we wondered together, what if someone like J.R.R. Tolkien or C.S. Lewis had written the story, what would it be like then, and we realized that Lewis actually did in the Chronicles of Narnia. After Aslan, the great Lion, gave himself to die in place of the traitor, Edmond, the two girls, Susan and Lucy, waited at the site of the stone table where he was sacrificed to see what would happen. This is the condensed version.

It was quite definitely early morning now, not late night...

They walked to the Eastern edge of the hill and looked down. The one big star had almost disappeared. The country all looked dark gray, but beyond, at the very end of the world, the sea showed pale... Then at last, as they stood for a moment looking out towards the sea... the red turned to gold along the line where the sea and the sky met and very slowly up came the edge of the sun. At that moment they heard from behind them a loud noise—a great cracking, deafening noise...

They turned then, and

The rising of the sun had made everything look so different—all the colors and shadows were changed—that for a moment they didn't see the important thing. Then they did. The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan...

"Who's done it?" cried Susan. "What does it mean? Is it more magic?"

"Yes!" said a great voice behind their backs. "It is more magic." They looked round. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself.

"Oh, Aslan!" cried both the children, staring up at him, almost as much frightened as they were glad...

"But what does it all mean?" asked Susan when they were somewhat calmer.<sup>ii</sup>

And whether we are reading or telling the Narnian version, or one from the gospels, that is indeed the question because the resurrection is an amazing story, but so is Homer's Odyssey, and Beowulf, and Pride and Prejudice, and just about anything by Shakespeare,

and the list goes on and on. There are many, many great stories and, as Solomon once wrote,

<sup>12</sup> ...Of making many books there is no end... Ecclesiastes 12:12 ESV

so, there will be many, many more. But may God forgive us if we have ever used the term “Bible story” such that some child came to think of the story of Jesus (or Abraham, or Moses, or David for that matter) as something akin to Green Eggs, and Ham. May he forgive us if we have ever given the impression that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is just another great story amid all the great stories that have been told down through history, as if it was just another story to be endured before we get on to the bunnies and baskets.

### The Resurrection Account

If the Easter story is just another story then the answer to the question, “But what does it all mean?” is perhaps best summed up by Shakespeare in Macbeth, “It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Or, if you’re more comfortable with the Apostle than you are with Shakespeare on this Resurrection Sunday morning, Paul put it this way in First Corinthians 15.

<sup>14</sup> ...if Christ has not been raised...

(if the Easter Story is just another story),

...then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

(it is, in other words, “sound and fury, signifying nothing”)

<sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

<sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. 1 Corinthians 15:14–19 ESV

“But,” Paul went on,

<sup>20</sup> ...**in fact** Christ has been raised from the dead... 1 Corinthians 15:20 ESV

and this is why it’s so important that we never think of the various Resurrection accounts found in the Gospels as mere stories to be told around the campfire, or from behind the pulpit. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact. It is an historic reality. Earlier in that same chapter, Paul wrote:

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...

And it's funny that sometimes we stop there. I've heard people quote those two verses and say, "That, that right there, that's the Gospel, the whole Gospel, and nothing but the Gospel," as if to imply that we really don't need anything else. But Paul didn't stop there. In an older (and perhaps better) translation, this is all just one big old run on sentence.

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received...

(and here it is!)

...that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; <sup>4</sup> **and** that he was buried; **and** that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; <sup>5</sup> **and** that he appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve; <sup>6</sup> then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; <sup>7</sup> then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles; <sup>8</sup> and last of all, as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also. <sup>1</sup> Corinthians 15:3-8 ASViii

Paul's point here was not merely that this is "the Gospel" or even "the essence of the Gospel" in some reductive and definitive sense. His point was to say, this is

<sup>1</sup> ...the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved... <sup>1</sup> Corinthians 15:1-2 ESV

And by the way, it's true, it really happened and there are indeed eye witnesses to the event, don't ever let anyone tell you different. That was his point. It was his point then, and it is the point today.

### A Resurrection Like His.

The Easter Story is not mere story, it is historic fact, evidenced by eyewitnesses, and as to the question of what it all means, we have an answer from one of those witnesses. Our text this morning, from Romans, chapter 6 for instance. Paul started with a question drawn from the statement that he made near the end of chapter 5, where he wrote:

<sup>20</sup> Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more... Romans 5:20 ESV

So, chapter 6, verse 1:

<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Romans 6:1 ESV

Which is the natural question, given that his original readers and we ourselves too are sinners who often find sin quite enjoyable, and if God's grace abounds where sin increases, then why not say, as Paul pointed out earlier in Romans, "Let us do evil that good may come; let us sin all the more that grace may continue to abound."

Well, by no means! Certainly not! May it never be! And there are two arguments put forward by the apostle here, and we'll consider them sequentially even though Paul bounces back and forth a bit. First, then, verses 2 and 3:

<sup>2</sup> ...How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Romans 6:2-3 ESV

So, if we have died to something, it's impossible to still *live* in it, and those of us who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into His death. As it says in verses 6 and 7:

<sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him **in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing**, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin. Romans 6:6-7 ESV

Paul wrote of this in Galatians 2 as well, when he said:

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ... Galatians 2:20 ESV

and later in Galatians, too:

<sup>14</sup> ...far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, **by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** Galatians 6:14 ESV

But Paul's second argument here takes us beyond our death with Christ. In Romans 6:

<sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, **in order that**, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4 ESV

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ...

is only the beginning, because,

<sup>5</sup> ...if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Romans 6:5 ESV

See, the Christian life is not simply about dying to sin, and putting away the pleasures of the flesh. We are not called like mystics and monks to go into the desert and sit on a rock to await the return of the Lord. The goal is not to be as miserable as we can possibly be. Jesus said,

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. **I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.** John 10:10 ESV

So, in dying with Christ to the death that held us captive to sin, we are born again, we are raised to walk "in newness of life." That's why Paul followed up, "I have been crucified with Christ..." saying

...It is no longer I who live, **but Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 ESV

As James Montgomery Boice put it,

The Christian way of speaking about this is to say that, for the Christian, death is followed by a resurrection. **And not just at the end of time!** True Christianity is living out a new, joyful, abundant, resurrected life with Jesus Christ now.<sup>iv</sup>

True Christianity is knowing that we are

<sup>11</sup> ...dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11 ESV

And this is why it's so important that Easter is not just a story that we tell. This is why we can't let talk of earthquakes, and the angel of the Lord descending, and empty tombs be swept away by family dinners, and Easter baskets, and chocolate bunnies. The Lord's Day, this one, and every other, is about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and it's about our resurrection too. It's about remembering every time we gather on the first day of the week that, as Paul wrote:

<sup>20</sup> ...the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 ESV

And if this is the desire of your heart this morning—if you are desire to be free; if you long for the abundant life that Jesus promised—then hear the call of the Gospel; turn to God, trust in Jesus and be raised to walk in newness of life. Then, present yourself to God as having been brought from death to life, and present your body to Him as a living sacrifice, for

<sup>5</sup> ...if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Romans 6:5 ESV

As we are about to sing:

'Tis the spring of life today! Christ has burst His prison, and from three days sleep in death like the sun has risen.

All the winter of our sins, long and dark is flying; welcome now the light of Christ, give Him praise undying.

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i All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

ii C. S. Lewis. *The Complete Works of C. S. Lewis: Fantasy Classics, Science Fiction Novels, Religious Studies, Poetry, Speeches & Autobiography: The Chronicles of Narnia, ... Letters, Mere Christianity, Miracles...*, e-artnow. Kindle Edition, (pp. 1028-1030)..

iii *American Standard Version* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995).

iv James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: The Reign of Grace*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 666.