

Resurrection

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14, et al.

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The resurrection follows the crucifixion. Without Jesus' death, there will be no resurrection. Without the resurrection Jesus is dead like every other human being before and after Him. It is a story of violence and victory. Our faith shouts that all the seeming crushing, violent deaths of Old Testament heroes are only three days away from a stunning, glorious life. Our faith shouts that a sin-bearing death and a justice-vindicating resurrection are the middle of the story.

W.H. Auden wrote, "Christmas and Easter can be subjects for poetry, but Good Friday, like Auschwitz, cannot. The reality is so horrible it is not surprising that people should have found it a stumbling block to faith." But the horrible reality, the brutal violence of the cross and the stunning victory of the resurrection are precisely what must be believed, what must be trusted and rested in by faith.

An unknown Christian Azerbaijani said of the resurrection, "A bridge of silver wings stretches from the dead ashes of an unforgiving nightmare to the jeweled vision of a life started anew."

Luke recorded for us the simple story and the stunning truth in these words. (Luke 24:1-11, NLT)

¹ But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² They found that the stone had been rolled *away* from the entrance. ³ So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

⁵ The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? ⁶ He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."

⁸ Then they remembered that he had said this. ⁹ So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. ¹¹ But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it.

There it is. This is the question before you today. How do you respond to a day, a story, like this? Why does it sound like nonsense to most? Why must it be believed?

The Message for Us – Pay attention to the Word... (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14)

⁹ Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. ¹² My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

The world is slouching toward certain destruction. But that is not the end of the story.

The Preacher (v.9-10)

We know that what we have been told in Ecclesiastes was carefully studied, deeply considered and wisely crafted. The preacher researched his material well. And he sought to craft a message that was true and beautiful. What he produced was the book of Ecclesiastes. This book has shown us the consummate wisdom of God, the need for that wisdom to live well in this age and the dreadful state of the soul who does not live with eternity in view.

The Words (v.11-12)

Pay attention to the words that have been written. Two reasons are given:

They have a powerful affect in the soul. Like a cattle prod they stir up the soul to please God. Like long nails deeply spiked into the wood, they fasten the soul to truth. Since the Scriptures, the words of God, have such a transforming power on the soul, we should give attention to them.

They are given by the Lord, our Shepherd. Solomon is possibly connecting the green pasture and the still waters to which the Lord, our Shepherd leads us in Psalm 23. Here is a clear allusion the coming of the Lord as the true Shepherd of God's people. Since these are His words, we should give deep and undivided attention to them.

An important warning reminds us to focus on the Word of God. There are many and useful books about what God has revealed. There will be no end to the making of them. If you are going to weary yourself in study, be sure that the Scriptures are the first focus.

The Message (v.13-14)

Our preacher, our writer, brings us to the conclusion of the book. Two final and powerful statements are given in the light of the fact that we are living between Eden and Eternity.

Reverence, respect and obey God in His Word. He is the Creator, the Lord, the Ruler. He is to be feared. He is to be obeyed. This is the sum of our duty under the sun.

Know and believe that there will be an accountability to God. He will judge. We will all stand before God. We will stand there on our own accountable for every deed. Or we will stand there with Jesus our advocate whose blood had cleansed the record and whose righteousness has covers us.

Ecclesiastes has called to a Christian Realism. It is not easy to hear this, either as a long series or in a passing moment. Reflecting what this means, the Eagles recorded a song that lifts the ancient, dust-covered words of Ecclesiastes and drops them on our American scene.

Freeways flickering, cell phones chiming a tune
We're riding to Utopia, road map says we'll be arriving soon
Captains of the old order clinging to the reins
Assuring us these aches inside are only growing pains
But it's a long road out of Eden

Back home I was so certain
The path was very clear
But now I have to wonder what are we doing here?
I'm not counting on tomorrow
And I can't tell wrong from right
But I'd give anything to be there in your arms tonight

Weaving down the American highway
Through the litter and the wreckage and the cultural junk
Bloated with entitlement, loaded on propaganda
And now we're driving dazed and drunk.

Been down the road to Damascus,
The road to Mandalay
Met the ghost of Caesar on the Appian Way
He said, "It's hard to stop this binging, once you get a taste."
"But the road to empire is a bloody stupid waste."

Behold the bitten apple - the power of the tools
But all the knowledge in the world is of no use to fools
And it's a long road out of Eden....

[The Eagles, *Long Road out of Eden*, © 2012]

But a part of true Christian thinking is not only the fall but a restoration, an amazing change. We may be living between Eden and Eternity. But something has happened here, under the sun that has changed it all.

Eswine has written:

The Preacher does exalt God. But what he exalts is that aspect of God's character which did not relieve Adam, Eve, or the Serpent from sin's consequences. We see his brooding and frowning. This is the God who governs us. He did not stop the unhappy business of paradise lost. We must linger here. This part of God's story tells us that God will not bring salvation by giving us escape and immunity from the now-cursed world. Jesus too will highlight this lack of escape throughout his teachings. "In the world, you will have tribulation," he assures us (John 16:33). We will have to come to terms with this fact about God. If there is no escape from what is under the sun, then rescue will have to come from somewhere else. The time will come in which God will personally squint and sweat beneath the sun's light and heat. He will enter the gainless world, endure its vanity, and feel the pain of it. "In the world, you will have tribulation," Jesus will one day say. "The poor you will always have with you," he will declare. In that, he will sound just like Solomon in Ecclesiastes. But then Jesus will go further than Solomon can. Jesus will stand beneath the sun with us. From there he will

look us in the eye and declare what Solomon cannot. "But take heart," Jesus will say; "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33)." (Eswine)

The Meaning for us - This is not all there is...

What has Ecclesiastes taught us? We live on the long road out of Eden. Each one of us and all of us and, indeed, everything, will come its own kind of end. The cross and the resurrection remind us that every ending may be swallowed up by an unimaginable beginning.

We are living in the Ecclesiastes world. But Jesus has overcome the world. He has defeated powers of sin and death. He has begun a great change. The Bible opens for us this amazing story. This is the fact that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the turning point. In our long journey out of Eden Jesus came and everything changed. What was far away and distant in prophecies, pictures and types had now begun to unfold.

This world, this age has been broken into by the new creation.

In the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, eternal life and the new Creation have broken into the world. Christ rose from the dead because He is alive today.

In the Regeneration of sinners, eternal and the new Creation have come into people. This inbreaking of the Spirit of God connects us to the life of God and begins the new creation in our souls.

In the Coming of the Lord, at the unveiling of His glory, the final transformation will take place and the New Creation will reach its culmination.

The resurrection is the truth beyond all truths, beyond this old creation under the sun, rising up and pouring in from eternity.

I want to ask you a question this morning. The question is this: "Is to live without God the real death, and to die with Jesus the only true life?" [Attributed to Bonhoeffer]

I want you to simply hear how the New Testament unfolds this stunning reality. These are from the New Living Translation with some edits for clarity.

The Resurrection of Christ is true (1 Corinthians 15:12-28).

¹² But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. ¹⁵ And [the] we apostles would all be lying about God—for [they] we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. ¹⁶ And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. ¹⁸ In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! ¹⁹ And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

²⁰ But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

²¹ So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. ²² Just as everyone dies because we all

belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.²³ But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.

²⁴ After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power.²⁵ For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet.²⁶ And the last enemy to be destroyed is death.²⁷ For the Scriptures say, "God has put all things under his authority." (Of course, when it says "all things are under his authority," that does not include God himself, who gave Christ his authority.)²⁸ Then, when all things are under his authority, the Son will put himself under God's authority, so that God, who gave his Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere.

Your unbelief may deny but cannot change the fact that Jesus died and rose again. Your belief in the resurrection does not make it true for you, does not validate that it is true, is not even evidence that it is true. If you come to believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus it is because it is true. The One who stepped from eternity into time has sent His Holy Spirit into your heart so that you do believe. That we believe is the result, not the cause of coming to life by the Word and Spirit.

The resurrection imparts life by God's Spirit (Romans 8:9-25).

⁹ But you are not controlled by your old sinful self. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.)¹⁰ And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God.¹¹ The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

¹² Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your old self [sinful nature] urges you to do.¹³ For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

¹⁵ So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."¹⁶ For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.¹⁷ And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

¹⁸ Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.¹⁹ For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are.²⁰ Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope,²¹ the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.²² For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.²³ And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new

bodies he has promised us.²⁴ We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it.²⁵ But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

We can be right with God. We can have the life of the Spirit in us. We can be enabled to call God our Father, our papa. But we are still in the groaning days. The glory days are coming, for sure. But not yet...

The resurrection life is our true life (Colossians 3:1-4)

¹ Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights, [the gaze of your heart,] on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. ² Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. ³ For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

For those who believe, we have another life in us. We have risen from spiritual death and have a true life in us connected to and in heaven. We cannot understand it now, only believe. But one day, we will see, we will know its eternal reality.

The resurrection power renews our souls (2 Corinthians 4:13-18)

¹³ But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, "I believed in God, so I spoke." ¹⁴ We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you. ¹⁵ All of this is for your benefit. And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.

¹⁶ That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

The resurrection gives us a hope in the midst of present difficulty and decline so that we will never give up. We will endure by grace. We refuse to be captivated by this passing nothingness. We set our eyes and our hopes, we have banked everything on what is to come on the other side of death's door.

The resurrection truth causes genuine transformation (Colossians 2:8-15)

⁸ Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. ⁹ For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. ¹⁰ So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

¹¹ When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your old sinful self [nature]. ¹² For you were buried with Christ when you were placed into Christ. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

¹³ You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

You are not changed by laws and rules. You are changed by life, by the righteous life that is in you through the resurrection of Christ and the regeneration of the Spirit. That life causes you to actively obey the Lord and Word.

You see, the sum of the matter? Reverence and obey God. For those who believe the judgment is past; it happened at the cross. For those who do not believe, there is judgment to come. And so...

The resurrection compels a Gospel call (2 Corinthians 5:14–6:2)

¹⁴ Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. ¹⁵ He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

¹⁶ So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! ¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

¹⁸ And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. ¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" ²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

¹ As God's partners, we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God's kindness and then ignore it. ² For God says, "At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you."

Indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation.

Reflect and Respond

Why believe? Believe so that your decaying body might no longer be suffering the troubles and torments of the gallows Ecclesiastes indicates with sin's cage and chain and padlocks. There is forgiveness and remission and releases other than that of earth. Believe the gospel to join the free in their singing: that singing and dancing in the bright, brittle Easter sunshine, held up not by chains but by invisible hands or on invisible shoulders.

Adapted from *The Pirate's Son* by Geraldine McCaughrean

We live and die; Christ died and lives! [John Stott]

Yes, indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation.

Christ is risen!!! He is risen indeed.