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# ***THE RESURRECTION***

Reading: Matthew 27: 50—28: 15

The legendary football commentator, Kenneth Wolstenholme, uttered the words “They think it’s all over, it is now!” at the end of England’s World Cup victory at Wembley, in 1966.

After enduring six hours of the most agonising pain on the cross Jesus cried out, “***It is finished!***” Then He gave up His spirit and died. Would those words of Kenneth Wolstenholme have been said then, had he been there I wonder? Is this the end of the Messiah, and does it foretell the end of Christianity as well? Was death the victor after all?

Almost everyone thought that it was all over, even the closest of His disciples, but the words uttered by Jesus were words of triumph not failure. The story of The Cross is the end of the beginning, not the beginning of the end, although that’s how most must have seen it at the time.

But death had not conquered Christ! In facing dying He had conquered death, and hell, and the grave, and then risen again, exactly as He had promised! This was just the beginning for Jesus and everyone who chooses to follow Him will receive the gift of salvation. The world order had been changed and Jesus was about to make all things new.

From the point when Jesus cried It is finished and died there was no more abuse heaped on his body. Normally, when someone was crucified, after they had died their legs would be broken as a precaution against the body reviving, yet this didn’t happen to Jesus, and this meant that the Scripture saying: ***Not a bone of His body shall be broken*** (John 19:36) was fulfilled. Instead, one of the soldiers thrust a spear into His side and out flowed blood and water. That was the last time that the soldiers touched Him in any way, even though they would have taken Him down from the cross in normal circumstances. Because the next day was the Sabbath, it was necessary for Him to be removed from the cross and taken to the burial chamber. This task was granted to one of His followers, Joseph of Arimathea, by Pilate. Joseph was a secret follower because he was also a member of the Sanhedrin. Joseph had arranged that Jesus be placed in the tomb that he’d purchased for himself when the time came. A man named Nicodemus helped him, the two men coming to complete the task under cover of darkness for fear of retribution by the Jews. They took the body down, and taking with them a mixture of aloes and myrrh, they wrapped it for burial, and laid it in the private garden tomb.

Pilate commanded that a large stone be used to seal the burial chamber, after which a seal was placed on the stone as well, and guards posted in case the body was stolen by Jesus’ disciples to make it appear that a miracle had taken place, having been reminded by the chief priests that Jesus had said that after three days He would rise again.

Jesus had also foretold the disciples where they should meet Him after His resurrec-



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tion, but in their state of shock and grief they forgot. They're living as if they have no hope, yet the chief priests and the Pharisees – all unbelievers – remember Jesus' words!

For a while it was as though the Light of the world had been condemned to the darkness. The One who came to give life in abundance is now dead, but not for long! The reason that the symbolic cross in our church is empty is because Jesus is no longer on that cross. We do not serve the memory of a Messiah who is dead, but we serve the Living Christ! The living Saviour! His resurrection was the single proof sign of His deity. He had claimed to be God, and on the cross at Calvary. Only the resurrection could prove that He was God! The antichrist will be able to work miracles in order to deceive people, but once sent to hell you can be certain that he'll never rise again!

Christ's resurrection verifies the truth of Scripture, that He would die and yet within three days He would live again. If He had remained dead after being taken down from the cross then there would be no promise for us to place our hope in, and the Bible would fall apart, but since He was resurrected we have all the proof that we need to know that the Bible is true. There are many predictions about the coming of the Messiah who would conquer death, in the Old Testament.

Jesus told the disciples that He would return: ***I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also*** (John 14: 18/19). His resurrection secures our future resurrection. Paul writes to the Church at Corinth about the effect of the resurrection for believers: ***Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead*** (1 Cor. 15: 20/21). Our hope in Christ is the promise that He will return for us.

Following Christ's ascension into heaven He sits at the right hand of God the Father as our Mediator. This is a continuation of His ministry, and this demonstrates the fact that the resurrection completes the gospel. Scripture refers to Him as ***the great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God***, (Hebrews 4:14). When we go to God to confess our wrongdoings Jesus is there as our Intercessor. Only He can act as a go-between. No amount of confession before other than Christ will bring about our forgiveness, and for that reason we need to heed the words of Scripture that exhort us to ***therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find help in time of need.***

Following the resurrection Jesus appeared on several occasions, both to small groups such as the women in the garden, and the disciples, and to a crowd of more than five hundred people. Thomas states that he will only believe that Jesus is alive if he is able to see him, and the next moment Jesus is there with him, inviting him to place a finger in the imprint of the nails that fixed Him to the cross.

Such was the impact on the disciples that they shared the gospel despite the personal danger that doing so placed them in. Many of them were put to death for doing so. If they had not seen and spoken to Jesus after the resurrection then why would they



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continue to place themselves on the line for him? They preached the Word and declared the victory that Jesus had won for us all.

No person has ever had the global impact that Jesus has had. There is immense power in the Name of Jesus to transform lives, and for more than 2,000 years that name has transformed people's lives, and continues to do so today.

There is no other religion amongst the great religions of the world that can make the claim that their Founder is alive today. Only Christians can make that claim and know it to be true. We can say:

**I serve a RISEN Saviour,  
He's in the world today,  
I know that He is living,  
whatever men may say.  
I see His hand of mercy,  
I hear His voice of cheer.  
And just the time I need Him,  
He's always near.  
*He lives, He lives!*  
*Christ Jesus lives today.*  
*He walks with me and talks with me  
along life's narrow way.*  
*He lives, He lives!*  
*Salvation to impart.*  
*You ask me how I know He lives?*  
*He lives within my heart!***

Amen

(Sermon preached by Rev'd Colin Gordon-Farleigh, at St John's Presbyterian Church, Runcorn, 23rd March 2008)