

64. The Resurrection of Christ

Luke 23:50-24:12

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

700 years before Christ, God raised up a prophet in Israel that spoke of the glories of the Messiah (Christ). When I have asked Jewish people to read in their own *Tenach* (which Christians call the Old Testament), i.e., the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 53, they usually cannot believe their eyes. Their usual response is to look and make sure that it is a legitimate Israeli printed copy of the *Tenach*. Many rabbis today teach that the Suffering Servant passage is speaking about the nation of Israel. I leave you to make up your own mind:

³He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. ⁴Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ⁸By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. ⁹He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. ¹¹After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. ¹²Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:3-12).

Isaiah prophesied that a righteous Servant would come. He would be rejected and despised (v. 3), would take up our pain and bear our suffering (v. 4), and our iniquity He would bear (v. 6). The Suffering Servant would not retaliate with words, but as a sheep before its shearers are silent, He would allow them to take Him away to be cut off from the land of the living (v. 7). It would be a substitutionary death, for His death would be for the transgression of God's people (v. 8).

He would be assigned a grave with wicked people, but in fact, His tomb would be with the rich (v. 9). It would be the Lord's will for Him to be crushed and to suffer, and through it, the Lord would make His life and death an offering for sin (v. 10). It would not be His end, for He would see the light of life and be satisfied by what He accomplishes with His death (v. 11). The knowledge and right response to His death will justify many, for He will bear their iniquities (another word for moral evil or sin) (v. 11). He would pour out His life to death and be numbered

with transgressors, but He would bear their sin and others', praying for those that crossed the line (transgressed) against Him (v. 12).

Jeremiah also prophesied 560 years before Christ that God would initiate a New Covenant with Israel and for all people who will believe, for He would forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Jesus fulfilled over 400 Old Testament prophecies during His life on earth.

Jesus' Burial

The New Testament tells us of several secret believers at the time of Christ. It was two of the Sanhedrin that placed Him in the tomb:

⁵⁰Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, ⁵¹who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. ⁵²Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. ⁵³Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. ⁵⁴It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. ⁵⁵The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. ⁵⁶Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment (Luke 23:50-56).

Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple of Christ. John the Apostle wrote that he kept his beliefs to himself due to his fear of the Jews: "Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders" (John 19:38). Luke wrote that he was a member of the council, or the Sanhedrin, i.e., the seventy elders of the supreme court of Israel. It is possible that Joseph might not have been called to the meeting of the Sanhedrin that morning to convict Christ and that he only found out about it after Christ was sentenced. Luke writes that Joseph "had not consented to their decision and action" (Luke 23:51). It's also possible that he was there but cast an opposing vote. Luke only mentioned Joseph, but the Apostle John writes that Nicodemus also accompanied Joseph in the burial of Jesus.

Upon Christ's death, Joseph was moved to go to Pilate, the Roman Governor, asking him if he could have the body of Jesus to give Him an honorable burial. Meanwhile, another member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus, the principal teacher in Israel, i.e., the one who had come to Jesus at night with questions about how to be born-again (John 3:1-18), had gone to purchase seventy-five pounds of spices to put around the body and fulfill usual burial customs (John 19:39). The two disciples now gently lowered the body of Jesus from the cross and carried him a short distance to a tomb that was owned by Joseph in a nearby garden.

³⁸Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes,

about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there (John 19:38-42).

Question 1) Why do you think Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were open about their faith after the death of Jesus? What are some of the reasons why people hide their faith from others?

Perhaps, their love for Christ moved them to stand up for what they believed. The body more than likely would have been put into a pit with the thieves if they had not requested it. The body needed to be in the tomb before the Sabbath, which started in just three hours from the time Christ died at 3 pm. They both felt moved to give Jesus a proper, honorable burial. Accompanying the two men were several women who had made their journey down from Galilee with Jesus and the disciples (Luke 23:55). They saw exactly where the tomb was so they could return with more spices and perfumes when the Sabbath concluded. Merrill Tenney, in his book *The Reality of the Resurrection*, wrote about the customary procedure for the burial.

The body was usually washed and straightened and then bandaged tightly from the armpits to the ankles in strips of linen about a foot wide. Aromatic spices, often of a gummy consistency, were placed between the wrappings or folds. They served partially as cement to glue the cloth wrappings into a solid covering. When the body was thus encased, a square piece of cloth was wrapped around the head and tied under the chin to keep the lower jaw from sagging.¹

Matthew's Gospel tells us that Jesus was placed into a new tomb cut out of the rock. It was owned by Joseph who was a rich man (Matthew 27:57). Rich men's tombs were made big enough to stand in, and Matthew adds that a big stone was rolled in front of the entrance. Stones usually weighing a ton or more were chiseled into a coin shape, and a slot was cut for the stone to roll in. There is virtually no soil to speak of in Jerusalem, so they could not bury Christ in the ground, the hills of Judea are mostly barren limestone rock.

After Christ's body was placed in the tomb, the priests and elders made a request to Pilate for a guard of Roman soldiers to watch over the tomb. They were afraid that some of Christ's disciples would steal the body and say that He had risen. Roman soldiers made sure the disciples would not steal the body so no chance of deception would take place, but just in case, a seal was placed on the stone (Matthew 27:60-66). □

Question 2) Why did the Jewish elders request that Pilate order Roman guards placed around the tomb? Why didn't they guard it with their own men? Why does Scripture go into so much detail about His burial?

The Roman soldiers were highly trained; they knew it was at the cost of their lives if any of them lost a prisoner. In the book of Acts, we read of Peter the Apostle imprisoned with four squads of four soldiers guarding him. When an angel released him, Herod had all sixteen soldiers executed

¹ Merril C. Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963, Page 117.

for losing their prisoner (Acts 12:4-19). There would be no sleeping for the Roman guards around Jesus' tomb, for their lives were on the line if the body was stolen. □

People look for excuses as to why they should not live their lives in obedience to the claims of the Gospel. Many concede to the fact that there was a man by the name of Jesus, that He did many miracles of healing, and that He was even a great prophet, but the resurrection is the stumbling block for them. Some people cannot bring themselves to believe in the divinity of Christ. If Jesus was God and He did rise again, what is our response to Him and to the claims that He has made? What impact do Christ's death and resurrection have on our lives?

To avoid personal responsibility to a Holy God some people explain away the resurrection with a number of possible explanations, e.g., saying that the disciples and the women went to the wrong tomb, or that the body was stolen, or that Jesus only fainted on the cross and then woke up in the tomb and rolled the stone away. The Gospel writers go into detail on such things because on this point hangs the crux of the Gospel story. If there is no resurrection, then there is no hope, no life after death, and our Christian faith would be non-existent. As Paul once stated;

¹²But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (1 Corinthians 15:12-14).

The Resurrection

¹On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'⁸ Then they remembered his words. ⁹When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹²Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened (Luke 24:1-12).

One man, Josh Mc Dowell, tried to disprove the story of the resurrection for his college thesis. As he began to study and write, his careful study of the Scriptures, evidence from history, and his logical reasoning led him to the opposite conclusion — the evidence that he uncovered affected him to his core. He wrote a book called *"Evidence that Demands a Verdict,"* which has become one of the most popular Christian books of our time. It indeed illuminates the whole resurrection story. The climax of this story, i.e., Jesus' rising from the dead, gives us all a foretaste of the

victory we can expect to experience as Christians. Death had no power over Jesus. It will have no power over us.

Having watched where Joseph and Nicodemus put the body, it is likely that the women, having different homes in which they were staying, decided to meet at dawn at the tomb to put more spices on the body. The first there that morning was Mary Magdalene. She came alone while it was still dark, John tells us:

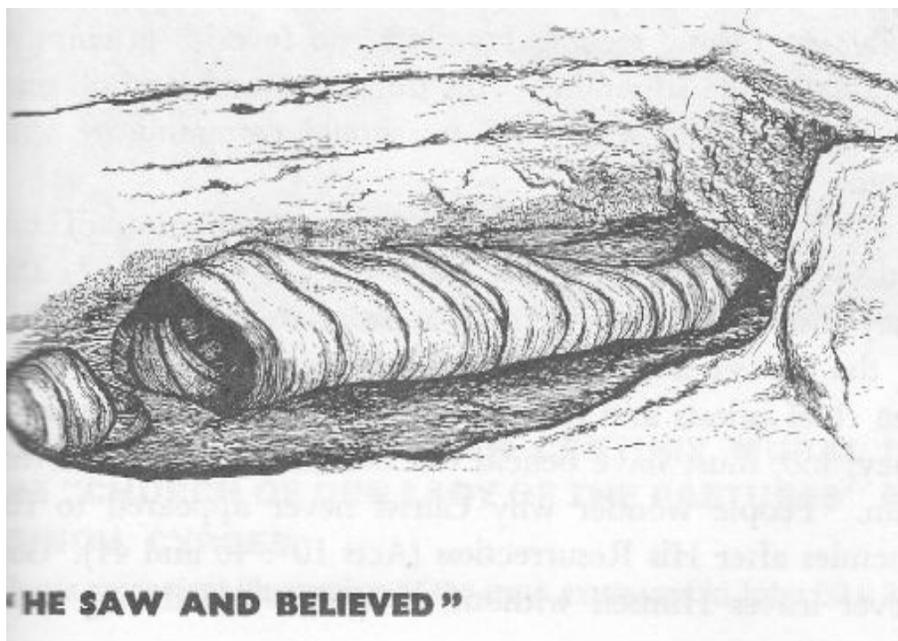
¹Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ²So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" ³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) (John 20:1-9).

She did not go into the tomb, but her immediate thought after seeing the stone rolled away (and without looking further) was to run to where she knew John and Peter were staying the night. She burst into the house and stated that *they* had taken the body of the Lord and that she did not know where *they* had put Him. Perhaps, she was accusing the religious leadership, thinking that they did not want Christ to be buried in a rich man's tomb and given an honorable burial. I'm sure she was angry and very tearful at the loss of Christ's body. John wrote about how the news was received by the disciples that morning. When Mary Magdalene burst into the room to tell them the incredible news, John and Peter reacted by running to the tomb.

Question 3) As John and Peter ran to the tomb, what kind of thoughts do you imagine were occurring in their minds? John writes that, after Peter went in, he also went into the tomb (v. 8). What do you think he saw that made him believe? (Verse 8).

It's possible that they had thoughts of accusation and anger toward the religious leaders because Mary thought someone had stolen the body (v. 2). It seems that Peter and John did not know what to expect as they started running to the tomb.

John did not mention an angel when they arrived at the tomb. He wrote about the strips of linen, also indicating the way the head cloth was folded by itself and separate from the linen (v. 7). We know from Luke's Gospel (23:53) that the body was wrapped in strips of cloth and that the spices were placed inside the wrappings as custom dictated. It seems very likely that what John and Peter saw was that the shape of the wrappings and spices were still completely intact and that the body of Jesus had passed through the strips of linen, thus leaving a cocoon with the cloth that was around His head laying there on its own.



Some believe that the Shroud of Turin, a one-piece cloth about fourteen feet long is the burial cloth of Jesus, but the evidence stacks up against it. There are two images on the fabric, one of the front of a person, and one of the rear. The heads of the image meet in the middle, and some have noted that there should be a space between the heads if the cloth was under the body and then laid above. It is also estimated that the head is 5% too large and the nose is disproportionate and the arms too long. Most skeptics believe the shroud to be a painting and a religious hoax. Here's what author Josh McDowell says: □

The Shroud has been known to have been around since 1354 and was tested in 1978 and thought to have been the real deal due to having no sign of paint or dye on it. However, in 1988, three independent laboratories made carbon-dating tests of threads of the Shroud. They all gave it a late medieval date. Proponents of the Shroud objected that the sample was too fragmentary and was from a contaminated section of the Shroud that reflected a medieval church fire.²

If it was just one piece of white linen, then what did John see that made him believe? All he was told was that somebody stole the body; they had run as quickly as they could. John emphasized the head covering folded away from the strips of cloth. Was he trying to describe the head covering folded in on itself after the Lord passed out of the strips of fabric? Henry Latham, in his book *The Risen Master*, had this to say about the grave clothes: "There lie the clothes—they are fallen a little together but are still wrapped fold over fold, and no grain of spice is displaced. The napkin, too, is lying on the low step which serves as a pillow for the head of the corpse; it is twisted into a sort of wig, and is all by itself."³

² Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Nelson Publishers, Page 232.

³ As mentioned by R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word, John. That You May Believe*. Printed by Crossway Books, Wheaton, Ill. Page 453.

As Peter and John went back to their homes, Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb (John 20:10). She saw two angels inside the tomb and talked to someone outside that she thought was the gardener.

¹³They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary” (John 20:13-16).

In talking with the One she thought was the gardener, she wanted to know where the body was taken. When Jesus spoke her name aloud, "Mary" (John 20:16), she suddenly realized Who the “Gardener” was, and she cried out in Aramaic, “*Rabboni!*” (which means teacher). When she heard His voice, she knew it was Christ.

Question 4) What could account for the fact that Mary did not recognize Him at first? Why do you think she recognized Him at the sound of His voice?

While Mary Magdalene was returning to the tomb after Peter and John left, the other women also arrived at the tomb with spices. Mark tells us that there were three: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (Mark 16:1). They brought spices with which to anoint the body. While on the way, they began talking among themselves as to whom they would ask to roll the stone away (Mark 16:2). When love is involved, difficulties, such as a one-ton stone to remove, were not considered until they were near. The stone was too large for the three of them to move. They proceeded to the tomb, regardless, believing that they would find a way. Their love and dedication to Christ compelled them to give Him a proper burial and put more spices over the body. It was the least they could do in this terrible situation. As they drew near, Matthew tells us what they witnessed:

²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay (Matthew 28:2-6).

Matthew wrote that an angel of the Lord came down, rolled the stone away right in front of the soldiers guarding the tomb, maybe before Mary Magdalene arrived. Matthew also wrote that the guards were terror-stricken, trembled, and acted like dead men not wanting to move as the angel rolled away the stone. I presume this all happened just as the women arrived, because the women themselves were overwhelmed at what happened (Matthew 28:5), and they were the witnesses to the soldiers lying on the ground. The angel showed the women the evidence of the vacant tomb while the soldiers, hardly daring to breathe, acted like dead men. Jesus didn’t roll back the stone; He had already risen. Mark indicates that, when the women arrived, the stone was rolled away and Jesus was already gone. The angel rolled the stone away to show the women that He had

risen, “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay” (Matthew 28:6).

The angel told them to go tell the disciples the good news that Jesus had risen from the grave. It is possible that there were two groups of women that had arranged to meet at the tomb at daybreak, but they arrived separately. After talking with the angel, the women met the Lord on the way:

⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (Matthew 28:8-10).

Luke tells us that several women reported what had happened to the disciples: “It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and *the others with them* who told this to the apostles” (Luke 24:10 –emphasis mine). Luke said that the disciples found it hard to comprehend: “But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (Luke 23:11). Everything changed that night for the eleven and others in the room, for the Lord showed up in their midst. We will look at that in the next study.

Matthew wrote of the guards being fearful for their lives on losing a prisoner. They went to the chief priests and told them exactly what happened. The Jewish leadership devised a plan to keep the guards quiet; they paid them a lot of money to say to people that the disciples came during the night and stole the body. If Pilate didn’t find out about it, they were in the clear. They probably kept the money for a few days so that they could say that they were bought off by the priests if they did not back them up before Pilate (Matthew 28:11-15). This story has been spread among the Jews to this day (Matthew 28:15).

Over the next forty days, Jesus spent time with the disciples, teaching and eating with them, and appearing to over 500 people at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6), taking away all their doubts and unbelief:

Jesus gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them throughout forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3-4). □

Evidence for Skeptics

People come up with all kinds of reasons as to why they won’t believe, but for every skeptic who will reasonably think through the evidence, God has covered all the bases. There are those who say the following:

- 1) **Jesus didn’t die. He just swooned on the cross, and later in the tomb, he revived and left the tomb.** We have evidence from the Roman soldiers who made sure that Jesus was dead by thrusting a spear into his side (John 19:33-35). Out of the side of Christ came a “sudden flow of blood and water.” We know this to be medical evidence of death. The chances that His wounds could have healed up in the tomb to the point where he could

remove a one-ton stone outside and then walk the seven miles to Emmaus that afternoon is remote, even if He could have gotten past the guards. If He had survived the cross, the time in the cold tomb would have killed him. Remember that Peter had warmed himself by the fire in the courtyard of Caiaphas the night before (Luke 22:55), thus revealing that it was cold in Jerusalem.

- 2) **Animals got into the tomb and ate the body.** The stone was sealed and very heavy. They would not have got past the guards; plus, Peter and John saw the grave clothes putting away that theory. □
- 3) **The guards and the women came to the wrong tomb.** The women had followed Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea to the gravesite and watched Him being buried. It was also near to the crucifixion site, a place where everyone knew.
- 4) **The disciples stole the body and perpetuated the myth that Jesus was raised from the dead.** The apostles had fled in the Garden of Gethsemane and were so discouraged after His death. It doesn't seem possible that they would deliberately confront the Roman soldiers and steal Jesus' body. Peter had lost his courage to the point where he had disowned his Master. How could so many frightened men have taken on the fierce and well trained Roman soldiers? It could not have happened while the Roman soldiers slept, either, for the noise of rolling back that huge stone would have wakened them all. There was also the fact that the soldiers knew that they would lose their lives if they lost the body they were guarding. The disciples would not have been ready to be martyred and give their lives for something that they knew to be a myth.
- 5) **The High Priest and leaders or even grave robbers stole the body.** When the disciples started preaching that Jesus was alive, it would have been the perfect time for the Jewish leaders to show all the people the dead body, but they couldn't because they didn't have it. Grave robbers would not have taken the time to set up the grave clothes in such a way that would make John believe. The guards protected the tomb to stop such things from happening.
- 6) **The disciples of Jesus imagined it all.** The empty tomb stands in silent witness to the fact that this was nobody's imagination. The 500 disciples to whom He appeared at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6), and all the disciples with whom He had eaten in the upper room and by the Sea of Galilee saw Him. I also note the courage of Peter the Apostle to preach to several thousand on the Day of Pentecost. Could he have done it if it was all imagination? Most of the apostles died for their faith, and no opposition could muzzle them. It doesn't seem possible to die for something that you know is a hoax or imagination.

The only conclusion based on the evidence is that Jesus has risen from the dead and is alive forever! The resurrection is not a myth; it is a fact of history. God has raised Christ from the dead to show you and me that death has lost its sting; the grave has lost its victory, and the resurrection is the proof of our reconciliation to God. "The same power that brought Christ back from the dead is operative within those who are Christ's. The resurrection is an ongoing thing" (Leon Morris).⁴ The resurrection of Jesus demands not our applause but our allegiance, not our compliments but our capitulation. The raising of Christ from the dead was the "Amen" by God to Christ's saving work on the cross. For all those who will trust His finished saving work on the

⁴ Compiled by John Blanchard, *More Gathered Gold, A Treasury of Quotations for Christians*, Published by Evangelical Press, Welwyn, Herts, 1986. Page 269

cross, death itself died when Christ arose from the tomb. Do you believe this? Will you trust in His saving work?

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for the resurrection of Christ, Your stamp of approval on the saving work of Jesus on the cross, and the promise that we also will enter into eternal life. Please help me to live a life of faith trusting in what Christ has accomplished rather than my works. Thank You, Jesus, for the ransom You paid to bring me back to the Father.

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