

RESURRECTION FROM "NO RETURN"¹

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A group of young families went on a rafting trip down the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho during a warm summer. A kiosk at the "put in" caught my attention. It read, "River of No Return." The canyon the river flowed through was so deep that once committed there was no way out.

The guide invited me to take a turn in a unstable one-person inflatable canoe. Cruising through calm waters the river descended through a series of rapids. The canoe was caught in the currents and flipped over. I found myself being dragged under. I held my breath as while going down, down, down, wondering if the water would ever spit me out. I thought this was the end of my life. Drowning by taking water into the lungs was not a pleasant prospect.

The good news is that the icy cold of the Salmon waters finally released her grip and let me drifted up to the surface. I gasped for a breath of fresh air, while choking on some ingested water. I had come back from "No Return."

When Christ died upon His cross, the whole world died with him. This astonishing truth is revealed in 2 Corinthians 5:14 that says, "If One died for all, then all died."

There is an interesting story back of it. People were saying Paul was crazy because he never stopped going on those grueling journeys for Jesus,

¹ Acts 2:23-24. 166, 526.

enduring stonings, beatings, imprisonment, cold, nakedness, hunger, all for His sake. "You're an old man, Paul; you should retire and get a villa beside the sea and grow roses. Let the younger men bear these burdens of being a missionary! You've done your part; you have earned your reward. Now the great church will call you a saint and you will have a statue made in your honor; and after you die, you'll have a mansion in heaven. So, loosen up, Paul; rest now for the rest of your life!"

No, said Paul; I can't rest. "The love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died." Paul was speaking for all of us.

But how could it be that "all died"? If we can learn that, then we shall be able to understand how when Christ was resurrected, then "all" of us were resurrected with Him.

Christ is the new Head of the entire human race. "All men" are naturally "in Adam" in a very real sense for all are descended from him—the Bible says we are all by nature, by birth, "in Adam." But now because Christ as the Son of God has fired the first Adam from his job of being head of the human race and taken over as the new Head of the human race, we are all in a real sense "in Christ."

An example is seen in the baptism of Christ. When He came up, dripping wet, out of the River Jordan and the Father said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," at the same time the Father "embraces humanity." Jesus He was putting His arms around the entire human race! "God spoke to Jesus as our representative" (DA 113).

You are all like My beloved Son! You are now one family!

This means in plain language that when Christ died on His cross, the broken law of God (which demands death to the transgressor) has no claim upon you, for Christ died for your sins and you were “in Him” when He died. And Paul had the deep insight to sense that what that means is that you died “in Christ.” If Christ had not died for you, you would have died. That’s the sense in which “all died” when He died.

Now, if when Jesus died upon His cross, “all died,” then what happened when He was resurrected? It follows that when He was resurrected, the whole world was resurrected with Him. The world was given new life “in Him.”

This is made plain when we think about the time when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. He chose to die, for God had said to him, “In the day you eat [of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil], you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). But he did not die on that day! Why? The Bible tells us the reason: there was “a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). As the Son of God, Christ right then took Adam’s sin upon Himself and in a timeless sense, He died for Adam then, so that Adam’s life was renewed to him at that point, all because of Christ’s sacrifice of Himself for him. All this time since, the whole human race has naturally been “in Adam.” Because Christ took Adam’s place, the whole human race in that sense is now “in Christ.” You don’t have to die that awful second death, because Christ died it for you! And

just like day follows night, so when Christ was resurrected, you were resurrected too.

This does not mean that everybody is going to go to heaven. Some don’t want to go. Christ’s sacrifice has set everyone free to choose as he/she wishes, and many choose to reject the gift of life that Christ has already given them. They perish at last, not because God is angry with them and wants to punish them, but because they have rejected the gift of life that God has given them “in Christ.” “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Jn. 3:18, 19).

BAD FRIDAY

The Bible tells us that He died on Friday afternoon about 3 p.m. Joseph of Arimathea was a man who had secretly believed on Jesus but had hardly dared to tell anybody (he lost a great blessing in being too cowardly to confess Christ openly). He went to the governor, Pontius Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus so he could give Him an honorable burial.

Pilate was surprised that He had died so soon, and sent for the Roman centurion to get an official report. The centurion confirmed what Joseph had said, and the governor gave Joseph permission to remove and bury the body honorably. This was a fulfillment of God’s prophecy.

It was the custom of the Romans to throw the bodies of crucified victims out on the garbage heap,

but Pilate was convinced as the centurion was, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mk. 15:39). Thus he readily gave permission for an honorable burial, for Christ was to make “His grave . . . with the rich in His death” (as Isaiah had prophesied of Jesus, 53:9). The Bible says that Joseph went somewhere that Friday afternoon and “bought fine linen” with which to wrap the body of Jesus (Mk. 15:46). Never mind the expense, he said to himself; this man was the Son of God!

Nicodemus was another wealthy and powerful man who secretly had believed on Jesus. You remember, he was the one who came to Him once “at night” and was given the precious lesson about the new birth (John 3:1-13). He worked with Joseph to take the body down from the cross, for it required two men to do this (Jn. 19:38-40). Probably the Roman centurion told them of his conviction that Jesus was the Son of God, which they had begun to believe already. Tenderly and reverently they laid Jesus in a new tomb that had been hewed from rock “wherein was never man yet laid” (vs. 41). Very likely, as they folded His hands to lie in death, they couldn’t keep the tears back. Now, what was to happen to all of us? Christ was dead! Is there to be no Savior for the world?

An inexpressible grief filled their hearts, not only at their own personal loss. They grieved also for the whole world! Was the great plan of salvation a failure? Was there no hope now for the human race?

Joseph and Nicodemus saw that the sun was setting, and the holy Sabbath day was drawing on

at sunset. So they rolled a great stone across the opening to the tomb, and left with tears in their eyes.

Jesus’ own Eleven disciples also left; and so did the women who had been watching all that was happening.

On the Sabbath, the next day, the unbelieving Jewish leaders (ready to break the holy Sabbath!) went to Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was still alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first” (Mt. 27:62-64). Pilate agreed with them and said, “Make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch” of soldiers (vss. 65, 66).

Meanwhile, the believing women who had been watching were also heartbroken. Would the world never have a Savior? Had they been deceived in believing that Jesus was “the Saviour of the world”? No, deep in their hearts they knew that the Holy Spirit was with Him.

He was the Son of God; there was too much evidence for them to doubt. But they could not understand why He had to die as He did. But just before the sun sank down in the west that Friday evening, they hurried to buy some expensive “spices and ointments” with which to anoint Jesus’ dead body as soon as the holy Sabbath day would be past (Mk. 16:1; Lk. 23:56). Only a week earlier

Mary Magdalene had broken her alabaster flask of “very precious ointment” which she had bought for that purpose, costing all she had, and had anointed Him with it; now she thought she must go and buy some more!

It is interesting to note here that they all, the Eleven disciples, the believing women, and Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, all ceased from their work from sundown Friday afternoon until sundown Saturday afternoon, for they “rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment” (Lk. 23:56). In the beginning, God had “blessed and sanctified” the seventh day of the week as His holy Sabbath (Gen. 2:2, 3).

All this God did not just for the Jews, for “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” And as the second Adam, the new Head of the human race, “the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:27, 28).

All those faithful followers of Jesus, mourning His death and burial, would never have dared to abandon keeping holy that seventh-day Sabbath. Their Lord and Master had given them a faithful example in keeping it holy, for we read that “as His custom was He went in to the synagogue [the house of God in His day] on the Sabbath day” to take part in the congregational worship of God (Lk. 4:16). So should we today! That is where we shall find Him today—in the house of God on the seventh day Sabbath where His faithful people gather to worship.

Jesus did no work on that last Sabbath as He lay in Joseph’s new tomb. Now He rested from His

long, hard work, as Savior of the world. It had been an extremely busy week:

The anointing at Bethany; the ride on a donkey into Jerusalem at the beginning of this busy last week; meeting the contentions of the Jewish leaders who opposed Him; preaching His sermon on last-day events of Matthew 24; His last meeting with His disciples when He organized the Lord’s Supper on Thursday night; the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane when He nearly died and would have had not an angel come to strengthen Him to endure more suffering; His disappointment at His disciples sleeping through His period of agony; the betrayal by Judas and the cruel arrest by the police; the forced march to the high priest’s house, then the all-night (illegal) trial when He was mocked, spat upon, beaten, ridiculed and despised; the terrible sorrow at hearing Peter deny Him three times with cursing and swearing; the trial before Pilate; the forced march again to Herod, and his sneering contempt that Jesus had to endure; the march back to Pilate; having to listen to the people shout “Crucify Him! crucify Him!”; the last visit with Pilate when the governor almost yielded to his wife’s pleading not to condemn Jesus; the sentence of death; the mocking of the soldiers; the crown of thorns on His head; the jeering of the mob; being forsaken by all of His disciples; the forced march this time to the hill called Calvary when they forced Him to carry His heavy cross; His fainting beneath the burden; hearing the women weep and wail because of Him and His last sermon to them when He said, ‘Don’t weep for me; weep for yourselves

and your children!” (Lk. 23:27-31); the actual crucifixion with its physical pain; the exertion of His soul to say words to the penitent thief, “Thou shalt be with Me in paradise!”; the taunting of the priests and rulers and the cruel crowd as He hung on His cross in pain and shame; the terror of the great darkness that came at noon that Friday when He cried from his broken heart, “My God! My God! why have You forsaken Me?”; His refusal to taste the intoxicating drink they offered Him to help to deaden His pain; His mental agony as He fought in His mind against despair (such a struggle would exhaust anyone!); His choice with His last ounce of strength to believe that His Father would not abandon Him, that His sacrifice would be accepted, that—yes! He had saved the world!

And then He bowed His head and prayed, “Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit,” and He died.

He was tired, oh, so tired! But He had finished His hard week of work and now He was resting in the tomb on the holy Sabbath day.

The death which He died was special. He “tasted death for every man,” not the ordinary kind of death which we call “sleep.” No, Jesus did not “go to sleep for our sins,” He died for our sins! He died the equivalent of what the Bible calls “the second death,” the real thing (Rev. 2:11). He went all the way to hell in order to find us and to save us. Since the world began, He is the only person who has ever truly died; all the others have gone to sleep!

On the cross Christ felt the horror of eternal separation from the Father. This was due to infinite guilt, but not the self-righteous, self-justifying pain of

a sinless person who feels his innocence; it was the total self-condemnation felt by One who was “made to be sin for us who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). The “us” is the entire human race. Combine the guilt of all the sin of the world: that is what He bore “in His own body,” in His nervous system, in His soul, feeling as if the guilt were His own (1 Pet. 2:24). He died for the human race and He died as the human race, for He became our second Adam. In dying the equivalent of our second death, He delivered the human race from that death (Jn. 3:16). Some statements may help make this clear.

“The guilt of a world lying in wickedness, . . . the sense of God’s wrath against sin [He felt it against Him personally!] was crushing out His life” (DA 687). “So great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father’s love” (685). “As man, He must suffer the consequences of man’s sin” (686; and the “consequences” are eternal death). “He will save man at any cost to Himself” (693). “He had borne that which no human being could ever bear; for He had tasted the sufferings of death for every man” (694, a quotation from Hebrews 2:9). “The guilt of every descendant of Adam of every age was pressing upon His heart. . . . The Son of God, . . . the sin-bearer, endures judicial punishment for iniquity and becomes sin itself for man” (SR 225); “guiltless, He bore the punishment of the guilty” (1SM 322).

One need only ask two questions: (1) “What is the punishment for sin?” and the answer has to be, “death” (Rom. 6:23; Eze. 18:4; Gen. 2:17; Rev.

2:11; 20:14). The first death which the Bible calls “sleep” can never be the punishment for sin. The Bible does not say that “Christ went to sleep for our sins,” but “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). (2) “Did He suffer the true punishment for our sin?” The answer better be “yes,” or we are lost for eternity. *Thus Christ died every man’s second death* (Heb. 2:9)

(b) But how then could He be resurrected the third day? To misread Revelation 20:14 out of its context creates confusion (“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death”). The second death is not the mere Fahrenheit physical pain of the lake of fire. On the cross, Christ hardly felt the physical pain, so terrible was His spiritual anguish, being “made . . . sin for us” (DA 753). Likewise, the lost will hardly feel the physical pain, so great will be the spiritual anguish sensed because of their true guilt—which now at last they fully realize. The anguish of despair which Jesus endured on the cross was itself the precise experience the lost will have at last—the second death (Rev. 2:11).² Isaiah describes it clearly: “He

² “Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race” (DA 753). The statement in Revelation 20:14, “This is the second death,” does not limit the “torment” (vs. 10) to physical pain, even though as children we could comprehend nothing greater. Verses 12, 13 make clear that the real pain will be the awful self-condemnation aroused by a full realization of guilt for “those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” There is no agony greater than seeing that record in all its horrible exactness—*when there is no Saviour to deliver from it*. This almost infinitely

poured out His soul unto death.” “Therefore” the Father honors Him supremely, to “divide Him a portion with the great.” “He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied” (53:11, 12).

It had to be that “God raised [Him] up, having loosed the pains of death, because *it was not possible* that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:24). Those were not the “pains” of mere sleep! Not only did He make the total commitment of His “soul” unto eternal death—not seeing “through the portals of the tomb” (DA 753), He actually did experience the total agony of the real second death. Those who deny this do not understand why His *agape* made it “not possible” that He should be held in the tomb. Christ’s resurrection is an eternal principle. All who choose to be “crucified with Christ,” motivated by this *agape* of Christ to die with Him the second death, says Paul, cannot “possibly” be held in its grasp: “If we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom. 6:5).

But that awful second death could not hold Him. Satan wanted to keep Him a captive there, but it was impossible. The Son of God had lived and died triumphant over sin and Satan; He had “condemned sin in the flesh,” our fallen, sinful flesh, and had

transcends the discomfort of physical pain from fire. “In the day of final judgment, every lost soul will understand the nature of his own rejection of truth. . . Before the vision of Calvary with its mysterious Victim, sinners will stand condemned” (DA 58). (The gift of self-knowledge and self-humbling repentance now is an infinite blessing, whether for individuals or for a church).

gained the victory for the entire human race; He had single-handedly wrested from Satan the control and rulership of this world. He had conquered sin. Now He must be resurrected as triumphant over death as well!

In our behalf He has humbled Himself through those steps of condescension that we read of in Philippians 2:5-8. He became a “slave” for our sake, became “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”—the death that involved suffering the awful “curse of God.” Now the Father must “highly exalt Him, and give Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (vss. 9-11). The voice of the Father called, “Jesus! Come forth from that prison house of death!” It was so real!

He carefully folded the grave-clothes they had wrapped about Him, and laid them down neatly. Then He stepped out of the dark tomb into the everlasting light of His resurrection life.

Yes, in Him you and I are resurrected also. “He that hath the Son hath eternal life,” says John (1 Jn. 5:11, 12). Jesus had said, “Because I live, ye shall live also” (Jn. 14:19).

That is why when Jesus was resurrected, you were resurrected “also”! Now, be happy forever; and demonstrate your thankfulness by following Him “whithersoever He goeth” (Rev. 14:5).

The Pope has confessed wrongdoing in persecuting non-Catholics in past centuries; the

Southern Baptists have acknowledged being wrong in supporting slavery in the ante-Bellum days.

Many Anglo-Americans are apologizing to the American Indians for the way our forefathers treated them several hundred years ago. Germans are regretting the Holocaust.

No one is talking about it, but here’s another atrocity that needs attention: the murder of Jesus Christ, when He died on His cross.

Now, here’s my question: do you have anything to do with all these terrible atrocities of the past? You may say, “No, for I wasn’t even born when these things happened!”

But wait a moment. God has a special x-ray machine that reads our human hearts and sees what is buried there. If He sees in the heart a seed of a Sequoia tree, He is right to see that Sequoia tree full grown to its full 300-plus feet. Just give the seed time, that’s all. Let’s start with the last atrocity first: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” asks the old Negro Spiritual. The answer is Yes.

There was a thoughtful man (Horatius Bonar) who wondered how it could be possible that he would join in crucifying Christ if he had been there that day. “My whole soul would revolt against taking part in such a deed!” he said to himself. Then one night he had a dream in which he witnessed the rude, cruel soldiers driving spikes through Jesus’ wrist bones and ankle bones and stringing Him up on the cross. In his agony (the dream was so realistic) Bonar grabbed hold of one of the soldiers, shook him by the neck and yelled at him, “Don’t do this awful deed!” Then the soldier turned around to look

at him, and to his horror he saw himself as in a mirror.

The rejection and murder of the Son of God is not a crime that only the ancient Jews and Romans are guilty of; we all share. But there's good news: we can be forgiven that sin if we see that we did have part in it, confess, and repent. But we've got to see the sin before we can confess it!

Jesus' *agape* made it "not possible" that the second death should hold Him in its grasp (Acts 2:24).