

I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
 January 3, 2021—Christmastide  
 Texts: Acts 9:3-7; 1 Cor. 15:3-8 & Acts 24:10-21

On December 31, 2020 at 8:45 a.m., I received a call from my son Tucker and his first words to me were: “He is risen.” I was stunned because, unbeknownst to him, I had been up from 4 am to 6 am working on “resurrection.” It was one of those amazing coincidences. As a result of meditating on **There will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust**, I had asked myself, “Just when did Paul come to believe in the resurrection? Answer: when the crucified and risen Lord spoke to him on the road to Damascus as recorded in Acts 9—we should note that the verbs in Jesus direct address to Saul, the pre-converted Paul, were all in the present tense. Elsewhere Jesus used the citation, **I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** to establish the reality of *everlasting life*, that God is the God of the living and not of the dead! Immortality of the soul.

Consider the impact of this declaration: **I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting**. Jesus, the pretender, deceiver, heretic and false messiah was dead and buried. This is simply impossible. There can be no doubt that Saul was aware of the empty tomb controversy! And the rumors of resurrection, a point of great controversy in the divided Jewish community. (Sadducees denying life after death, and future judgment, and the Pharisees affirming both.) And a voice, **from heaven** is the easiest implication, ***accompanying the light***, saying, from one very much alive Jesus, **I am Jesus**. It is critical, I think, to note that what is contested here is not abstract; it is actual historical facts that are in the balance. Jesus was crucified, fact. And Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb, hurriedly mind you, to avoid a breach of the Passover Sabbath! Guards had been posted, and according to Matthew 28, they reported truthfully to the chief priests, the elders were assembled, they decided to spin the event, **they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, “Tell the people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’”**(vv.12-13) Now this “lie” was tantamount to admitting to *dereliction of duty*, a capital offense, for Matthew clearly has a Roman guard in view here—answerable to the governor! So the Jewish leadership assures the soldiers they will **Keep them** (you) **out of trouble**. (v.14) It is scarcely credible to think that Saul, being as involved as he was, knew nothing of this “cover-up.” However, the Jesus spoke to him, the whole deception unravelled—and Saul was, in an instant, undeceived! The machinations of the Jewish “government” must, I suggest, have taken second place to the dramatic proof of resurrection.

The fact that Jesus was alive could mean only one thing: ***that he had not tasted corruption***. Jesus’ body had not decomposed, or undergone the decay associated with corruption. Saul knew that the Messiah, the Holy One of God, was distinguished by this fact: Psalm 16:10 declares: **for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your “holy one” see corruption**; Psalm 49:9: **That he should live on forever and never see the pit**; and Psalm 103:4: **who redeems your life from the pit**. This could

chiefly mean one thing: *Jesus was the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel and none other*. That is where the reconstruction of Paul's theology took off from: Jesus was *gloriously alive* and *this very present Jesus was who he said he was!* Evidence of the factuality of resurrection was right in front of him—undeniable. The ironic appropriateness of his being blinded at that point in time should not be lost upon us. As Paul was healed (**the Lord has sent me that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit**, (Acts 9:17), and light was shed on both who he was, and who Jesus was, as he ***was shown***—“**he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.**”(v. 15-16)

This very present Jesus, *gloriously alive appearing in person* to Saul confirmed the reality, and the truthfulness of the reports of Jesus' **appearing many times, to many people over many days**. It corroborated their witness/testimony. Now Paul would know, for himself, that Christ was risen and is alive!

**That there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked** is a belief that carried Paul through the tempestuous temptations, conflict and confusions of his life. And that belief should also be your life-line, your stay, your stake in the ground, your anchor in this life—in the coming years! This belief is a corollary to belief in resurrection, your personal resurrection!

- You will rise to live—to live *life* on a higher plane—a life like his risen life.
- You will be raised to a state of permanent glory—that condition will far excel, or surpass even the best of states known to mortal man.
- You will be raised in splendor, a reflection of his radiant majesty! But, wonder of wonders, you will possess the same nature you possessed before translation except it will be perfected (forever altered by the gift of glory entailed in resurrection. Your nature will be physical/earthly, but without sin, imperfection or infirmity.
- Your risen nature will be strong, sweet, comely, pure and righteous—all in a perfect degree, all excellent.
- As light is to the glory of the sun, as strength is to the young, as grey hairs are to the elderly, so will your being be to the glory of your rising—a spiritual accomplishment of consummate beauty—far surpassing the best of fading beauty here on earth and everlasting.

Listen: the whole mad work of sin and evil, in body, soul, emotion, will and mind, the whole of it, ***in its entirety***, shall be unraveled, undone, reversed as your regeneration is consummated in glory. And as startling as it may sound, you will be “human” once more, “human” with the *humanity* manifest in the man Jesus and all this as a gift from heaven, and not as the result of some great humanistic cataclysm, Marxist Revolution, or other liberation from economic, social, or political oppression. Christ will set you free indeed. It will not be ideological in nature at all; it will be the consummation of God's great redemption in Christ and through Christ. ***You will be raised in Him***. Others

upon apprehending you will exclaim, “Behold the man!” Male, or female, no distinction . . . the renewed humanity!

- There will be no lame legs, stiff joints or crumpled shoulders—nothing crooked, bent or stooped. Agelessly sound! No bleary eyes, impaired hearing, no wrinkled faces—nothing sagging or dragging, not drooping flesh, nor untuned—all firm and sound and whole (fit for our eternal workings!).
- We shall be divinely made-over. Rebuilt as regal, more than royal. Ramped up!

Souls, now residing in heaven, shall in an instant re-enter, re-inhabit and re-embodied (much in line with Scriptures depiction of built up waste places and former ruins).

- We shall be raised in power—effective, efficient and effectual beings. Death will quake before us, and destruction itself shall fall dead at our feet!
- We will stand in grace, beauty, truth and awesome majesty, crowned, with countenances like lightning, in our spiritual activated(?) and alive resurrection bodies!
- Our same human nature manifest in its totally altered state—a state of surpassing glory (immeasurable worth, full of stunning-ness, absolutely awesome).
- We shall truly be ourselves, actualized! Fulfilled, genuinely “me” (as one un-defrauded, truly representative, frank, pure and simple.

All this must be, else we lose our “being,” the “us-ness” that does not pass away, our individuality/personality! We do not become disintegrated brain tissue, or biochemical matter . . . a pooling aftermath, or waste product. We are not annihilated into nothingness, or absorbed into the great cloud of non-being, the soul of the “universe.” The saved will not be disposed of in the frightening abyss of nothingness—as if they never mattered, as if nothing ever mattered.

- We shall outlive, and transcend nature, as known in this world, having attained a higher degree of life in a better and more exalted existence—in fellowship with him!
- This is the final repudiation of the closed system of materialistic science/philosophy—and all the reductionist theories of life rooted in a false premise.
- This is the proof and vindication of the Father pure, loving and redemptive will for us. This is the unseen purpose of God revealed to us in the days since his appearing.
- At last we shall make sense of all life and history, as it all comes together **cohering in Christ** (Col. 1:15-20)—just as God had planned! A triumph of the ages, wherein Christ the victor is finally vindicated and all those with him, too. For we shall be united with each other in the Risen One who is the beginning and end, hallelujah and amen.

**That there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked** is a belief that carried Paul through the tempestuous temptations, conflict and confusions of his life. And that belief should also be your life-line, your stay, your stake in the ground, your anchor in this life—in the coming years!—between now and your change **at the last trumpet**. And the proof of it is Jesus gloriously alive as he

appeared to Paul—his being alive assures us that we also shall rise *to be alive with him*.

**"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.** What was of first importance? That in accordance with the Scripture: Christ died, was buried and **raised on the third day** . . . after which he appeared to Peter, the twelve . . . then over five hundred brethren . . . and finally, to Paul. I have detailed that appearance for you this morning. I pointed out how it resolved the empty tomb matter, and exposed the lie of Jesus' body theft. And along with that the attempt to spin the facts, and to cover-up what was a blatant lie. However, the towering fact was this: Jesus had not tasted corruption and that was the Messianic proof that Jesus' appearance to Saul/Paul on the Damascus Road supplied. Paul saw the crucified and risen Lord, *resurrected!*

This belief in resurrection was central to Paul's creed, as cited to Festus in Paul's self-defense before the governor from the accusations of Tertullus (Acts 24). He described Paul **as a plague, one who stirs up riots**. It is worthy of note that Paul wasn't actually the instigator of said riots but Gentiles, nobility and the Jewish leaders were—in most instances. The immediate cause of offense was "defiling the temple." Paul refutes the charge of being an agitator, he didn't even engage in dispute in the temple, synagogues or in the city **in the past twelve days**.

**14 But I confess this to you, that in accordance with [b]the Way, which they call a sect, I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and is written in the Prophets; 15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16 In view of this I also do my best to maintain a blameless conscience *both* before God and before *other* people, **always**.** His creed included a belief in *resurrection*—a foundational belief, from the beginning a postulate of the Christian faith. *Resurrection* was a major theme in Peter's first sermon, delivered at Pentecost: **this Jesus you crucified and killed . . . but God raised him up** (Acts 1:24-5), **loosing the pangs of death**. Then he cites David, as a prophet, **knowing that God had sworn an oath that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of Christ, that he abandoned not to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of this we are all witnesses.** (vv. 30-32) So much for connecting the dots!

I am convinced that a bare belief in resurrection is insufficient. The idea of life after death by itself is a weak motivator, but if the quality of the risen life is laid out for us—which I have tried to do today!—if we could see its wonder and its magnificence, we would be strongly encouraged. Our eternal life is not subject to the limitations of this life, or tied into the destiny of this world—but we are to live above the closed system

cosmos, above the laws of nature and of the universe. Indeed, this world is transitory—we are not—and it is passing away, as subject to decay and destruction. But there is a new heaven and a new earth a-coming and we are heirs of that coming kingdom, co-regents once more. In fact by living in Jesus we are already living the first leg of our eternal life. In Christ we shall never die, never part, never cease to be—the pangs of death are in the rearview mirror. The baggage of a world that is passing away. **So, resurrection faith helps us live forward and upward.** I invite you to test and see if it is not as I have described it. Perhaps you can fill some blanks, or pencil in some details but, absolutely, I can affirm be hopeful because the best is yet to come.

**Amen.**