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The Truth - and Comfort - of the Resurrection

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CHRIST IS RISEN
continued from preceding page

people.

Paul explicitly makes this analogy in his Letter to the Ephesians: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."¹⁵

When a couple stays married through the bad times and the good times, through times of silence and of celebration, times of estrangement and of intimacy, the couple testifies to the reconciling presence and power of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

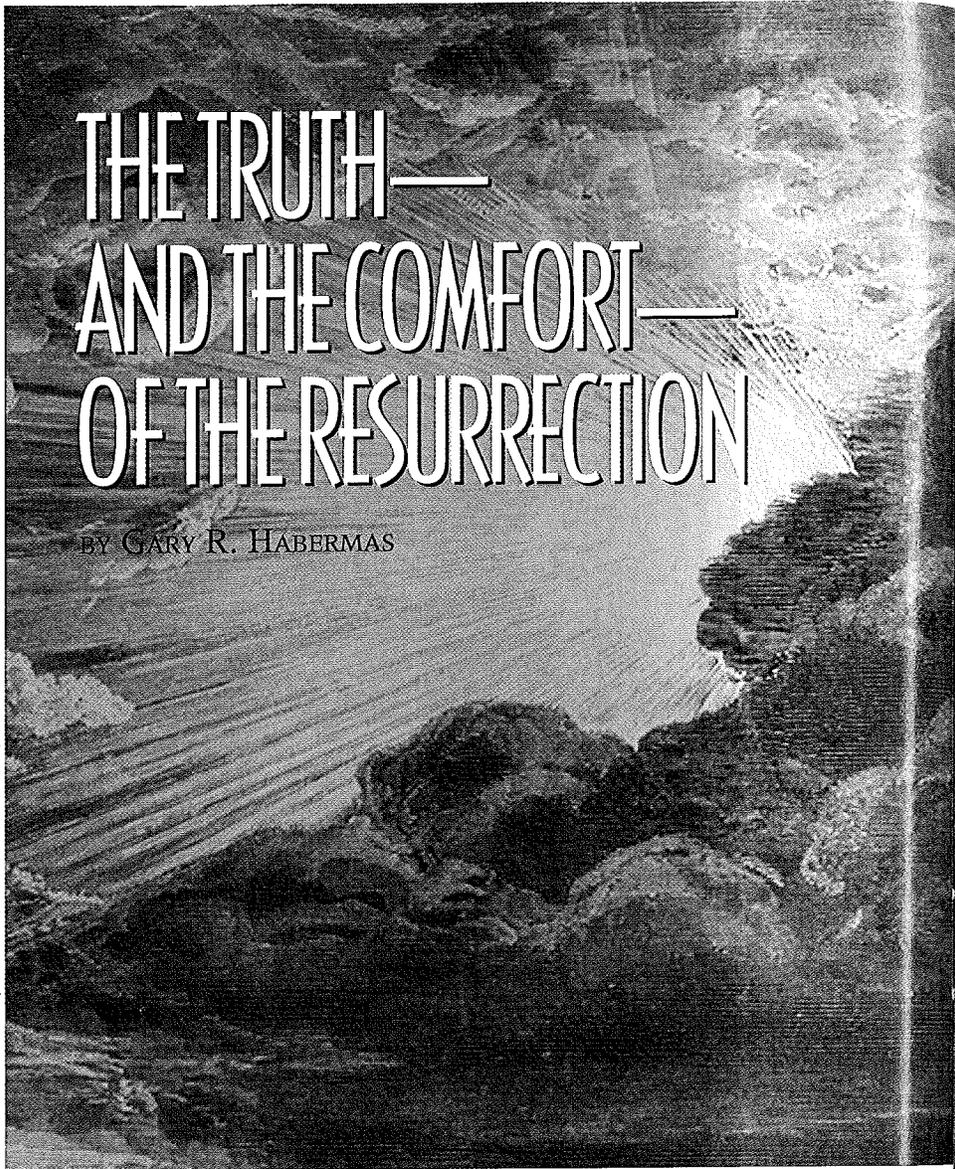
God is an expressive God, eagerly reaching out to His children, passionately committed to showing the reality of His work as Creator and His Son's work as the risen Redeemer. All we need to do is open our hearts, confess our sin and invite Him in. ☩

(1) Psalm 19:1, NIV. (2) John 20:16. (3) John 20:27-28. (4) John 21:6-7. (5) Exodus 35:31, KJV. (6) Exodus 35:30-36:38. (7) From "The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming" by Henri J. M. Nouwen, ©1992 Henri J. M. Nouwen, The Continuum Publishing Company, New York, New York. (8) Psalm 103:6, NIV. (9) James 1:27, NIV. (10) Matthew 25:40, NIV. (11) Luke 24:30-31. (12) John 6:50, NIV. (13) Matthew 18:20, NIV. (14) 1 Corinthians 12:27, NIV. (15) Ephesians 5:25, NIV. Bible verses marked NIV are taken by permission from The Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Illustration: Gustave Doré, Doré Bible/Planet Art

THE TRUTH— AND THE COMFORT— OF THE RESURRECTION

BY GARY R. HABERMAS



BY PAUL BORTHWICK

A WEEK THROUGH JESUS' LAST WORDS



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MONDAY

"Father forgive them."¹

I praise God today for the forgiveness made possible through the events of this Holy Week culminating in Jesus' death on the cross.

TUESDAY

"Woman, behold, your son! . . . Behold, your mother!"²

I draw inspiration to care for others by considering the selflessness of Jesus in thinking about others when He could easily have been absorbed in His own needs.

WEDNESDAY

"Today you shall be with Me in Paradise."³

I concentrate today on praying for friends, family, neighbors and coworkers who need to come into a relationship with Jesus.

Photo: Media Graphics/ArtToday

How do our most cherished doctrines fare when they are tested in the blistering fires of life? In 1995 my wife, Debbie, had the flu. When it didn't go away as quickly as it should have, we went to the hospital for tests. The first sentence I remember that the doctor uttered to Debbie was, "You've got some serious problems here."

My heart sank into my stomach, and both turned instantly to water. I had to sit down. Little did I know that my belief in Jesus' resurrection was about to be severely tested by



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the sting of pain and grief. Debbie was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Four months later, at the age of 43 years, she passed away just after we celebrated our 23rd wedding anniversary.

I had lost my best friend. All four of our children lived at home, and witnessing their pain was painful to me. Did they have to suffer like this? Would they have lasting scars from watching their mom die? Would they blame God? I was suffering a double dose of grief. I often thought that I could not have experienced pain any worse than this.

During Debbie's suffering, I regularly took refuge in the truth of Jesus' resurrection. It had been my major research area for 25 years, and I appreciated a student who asked, "What would you do now if Jesus hadn't been raised from the dead?"

I knew that the resurrection had a historical, theoretical side, but I wasn't fully aware of its

"I knew that the resurrection had a historical, theoretical side, but I wasn't fully aware of its practical power. I had much to learn about applying Jesus' resurrection to my daily life"

practical power. I had much to learn about applying Jesus' resurrection to my daily life.

Jesus' bodily resurrection occupies the very center of the Christian faith. After He died on the cross to pay for our sins, Jesus was raised from the dead. He appeared to many people in His own physical body that was now immortal.¹ This is not only the theological and evidential

continued on next page

Add new meaning to Holy Week by prayerfully focusing on the seven last statements of Christ while He was on the cross.

THURSDAY

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"⁴

I'm always shocked by Jesus' honesty in talking with God. Jesus shows me that no matter what I'm feeling, God already knows about it and wants to meet me there. No pretense. No false spirituality.

FRIDAY

"I thirst."⁵

I think about Jesus' humanity and remember that He identifies with any suffering that I might be going through. I contemplate His total devotion to His mission when I realize that His request for liquid may have been to prepare His parched throat to cry out in victory.

SATURDAY

"It is finished!"⁶

Remembering that Jesus has paid my debt in full, I pause to confess any doubts, false guilt or attempts that I've made to earn God's love. And I thank Jesus for paying the penalty I deserved.

SUNDAY

"Into Thy hands I commit My spirit."⁷

I offer a prayer, saying, "God, as Jesus relinquished total control of Himself to You, so on this Resurrection Sunday I give myself to You. Again. Here I am. I commit my entire life and being to You."

(1) Luke 23:34, NASB. (2) John 19:26-27, NASB. (3) Luke 23:43, NASB. (4) Mark 15:34, NASB. (5) John 19:28, KJV. (6) John 19:30, NASB. (7) Luke 23:46, NASB. Bible verses marked NASB are taken by permission from the New American Standard Bible, ©1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, California

CHRIST IS RISEN

continued from preceding page

core of Christianity, it is intimately related to our daily walk with God. The Apostle Paul fearlessly asserted that our faith is in vain if Jesus has not been raised.² Paul added that the truth of Jesus' resurrection also ensures the resurrection of our loved ones if they are in Christ.³ Without the promise of our resurrection, we may as well seek pleasure as our life's goal.⁴

The resurrection of Jesus is supported by an awesome array of historical information. Even those skeptics who reject the divine inspiration of Scripture typically admit a number of facts that are crucial. For example, skeptics almost always agree that Jesus died by crucifixion, that His earliest disciples believed that they had seen Jesus after the crucifixion, that their lives were transformed by this conviction, and that they too proclaimed this message shortly afterward in Jerusalem.

Modern critics additionally concede that Paul (Saul) and Jesus' brother James had both been antagonistic to Jesus' teachings but were later convinced that they too had seen the risen Jesus.

Virtually all contemporary scholars, whether or not they believe the Gospel message about Jesus, recognize these and other facts. Scholars also tend to grant that attempts to invent alternative scenarios have not been successful. They usually realize that those who have tried to explain all of this in natural terms have failed to prove their case.

The facts of the resurrection are not true simply because the critics say so. The best reason to believe the facts is that there is historical confirmation for each one.

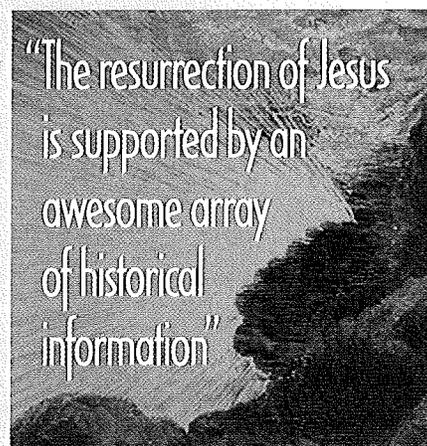
What is some of this

corroboration? Today most scholars believe that the Apostle Paul provides the key testimony to Jesus' resurrection. In a number of Paul's writings, he passionately explains that he was converted by an appearance of the resurrected Lord.⁵ And Jesus appeared to many others,⁶ and His apostles gave the same report that Paul did.⁷ Later Peter, John and James extended fellowship to Paul and agreed that he should take the Gospel message to the Gentiles.⁸

In explaining the content of his preaching the Gospel to Gentiles, Paul chose words from ancient Jewish tradition. The message that he "passed on" to his listeners was precisely what he had "received."⁹ It is widely held that during Paul's first trip to Jerusalem about A.D. 35, he obtained this material from Peter and from James. Paul became acquainted with Peter while visiting for 15 days.¹⁰ The Greek word for "get acquainted" implies that Paul questioned or examined Peter, and the immediate context indicates that the subject was the Gospel message.

So Paul was in a good position to know what happened after Jesus' death, and the information that Paul gives provides an excellent historical trail for us: He had met the risen Jesus. Later Paul questioned other eyewitnesses who had also seen Jesus. Those eyewitnesses examined Paul's teaching too, all very soon after the events. Then Paul reported the message to the Gentiles: Jesus had gloriously risen from the dead!

How did all of this help me while Debbie was dying? I imagined what God might say to me in response to my questions about Debbie. He would ask me: "Gary, did I raise



My Son from the dead?"

"Of course You did, Lord," I would respond. "But why is Debbie dying?"

"Gary, did I raise My Son from the dead?" the question would come again.

"Yes, Lord, but . . ."

"Gary, did I raise My Son from the dead?"

I imagined God repeating the same question until I got His point. There was an answer to Debbie's suffering, even if I didn't know it. If Jesus has been raised, then I can trust that Debbie will be raised someday too.¹¹

It was sufficient to know that because of Jesus' resurrection, and because Debbie and I belong to Jesus, then we will be together again—for all eternity! This is the force of resurrection faith for all who trust in Jesus Christ. This answer was sufficient for me in 1995, and it remains so today. Through all of my pain, this truth has never failed to comfort me and to provide tremendous peace. 

(1) 1 Corinthians 15:1-20. (2) 1 Corinthians 15:14,17. (3) 1 Corinthians 15:18-23. (4) 1 Corinthians 15:32. (5) 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8. (6) 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. (7) 1 Corinthians 15:11-15. (8) Galatians 2:1-10. (9) 1 Corinthians 15:3, NIV. (10) Galatians 1:18. (11) 1 Corinthians 6:14; Philippians 3:21. The Bible verse marked NIV is taken by permission from The Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society, Colorado Springs, Colorado