

We are people of the resurrection, because our Master is the Resurrection. We have resurrection life because our Master is the Life. We walk in this resurrected life because our Master is the way. Like Him, we endure our suffering for the joy set before us. We are sheep who follow a Lamb to the slaughter, whose dreams and hopes of worldly comfort die daily. Though these realities afflict us in every way, they do not crush us, for **resurrection gives meaning to our suffering**. Our aspirations are not rooted in this temporal world, but are planted in eternity and will blossom to fragrant beauty when our triumphant resurrected Master comes again to make all things new. The spires of our dreams may burn and fall into the ever-rising flames of injustice and evil, done by us and done to us, but the edifice of God's work will be raised to greater glory, stunning in its purity and beauty and loveliness by the One who raises the dead things to life again. This Christian hope, what Dostoevsky called, "something so precious...that it will justify all that has happened", has an enormous impact on how we face and process suffering and loss today. That is, by treasuring our hope, our souls rest in the justification of our present pain because we

know that Jesus, the Risen One, will raise us up and make all things right.

Now, before I continue I must state this clearly: if you have not repented of your sins and are clinging to Jesus as your only hope of acceptance with God, then the return of Jesus will not be hopeful for you, but terrifying. Paul warned the educated Athenians, “that God has overlooked the times of ignorance, but now commands all people everywhere to repent, for He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appoint; and of this He has presented evidence to all by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30-31) Jesus is risen to reign over all, and to do so rightly. If you are not submitting to Him now, you are in rebellion against the King to whom Death bows. Be warned to repentance.

Because, for those who entrust themselves to Jesus as Master, His resurrection to reign is our hope. For, it is stated that “death has been swallowed up in victory!” The resurrection in which we share with Jesus, as our forerunner, is not a mere consolation for our suffering, but it eats it up and makes it productive for our

enhancement and strength and joy. This is the utter defeat of suffering: The deepest sorrows that the Christian will experience will only make her joy greater than it ever would have been otherwise.

Without this hope, suffering is utterly useless. Without the resurrection, suffering becomes meaningless cul-de-sacs of futility intruding into our lives. This is the conclusion that Richard Dawkins draws in his book, *River Out of Eden*, “In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, or any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”

Dawkins, though usually a very logical man, must avoid thinking all the way through the reality of his position in order to write the words and sell the books that, ironically, he considers to be meaningful. He must live meaningfully by functionally denying his

worldview. The secular man dwells in cognitive dissonance in order to go on living without despair.

**But for the Christian, we have a hope *through* suffering.** And we walk in this hope, not by denying our worldview, but by thinking through it all the way down. Christianity is not wishful thinking, but grounded thinking, grounded in the historical reality of an empty Palestinian tomb. For the secular man, his only hope is wishful thinking, to stop thinking through his worldview in order to avoid “blind, pitiless indifference.” Very few people actually live like that. They instead live by blind faith in some kind of meaning, though their worldview has no good reason for it.

But Christians are consistent with their worldview when they believe that not only life has meaning, but suffering does as well, that justice and righteousness are eternal terms with eternal meaning, and our hope grows through thinking deeply about the implications and outcomes of our worldview. So, to do that today, we are doing to heed the word of God in Romans 8:18-23 to see some of the implications of the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

## Romans 8:18-23

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

“The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption.” Think about this implication! God has revealed that the natural world — the material, physical world — will be freed from its curse one day, its subjection to futility and corruption. This is a great and precious promise, verified by the physical resurrection of Jesus: that all which has been bound by decay, incoherence, disarray, confusion, and frailty will be brought back again in a glorious newness for those who have loved and entrusted themselves to Jesus Christ, what the Spirit calls, *freedom* of the children of God.

The three characteristics of this creation, in its current state, will be reversed. **Instead of futility there will be fulfillment.** Nature is currently bound to fruitless efforts, to pushing up daisies to die and push up daisies again, over and over and over without end. The intense frustrations of the body not free, of a body held captive by cancer, of eyes held captive by cataracts, of thoughts held captive to delusions and fears and failures, will be shattered by the glorious life which explodes from the regenerating power of God's life-giving Spirit of resurrection. As the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, so shall all of Creation itself be set free to numinous eternity, never to succumb to entropy again.

**Instead of corruption, there will be glory,** strength and newness. Every moment of this life, is in bondage to corruption, is lived in the experience of entropy. Things get older, faded, weaker, and increasingly incoherent and disintegrated. Our loved ones, and the beloved Creation around us, fades in captivity to the curse. But for those who belong to Jesus, there is coming to them the new heavens and the new earth, where this law of entropy will be undone, things will get newer, more beautiful, stronger, more coherent – every moment forever.

**Instead of suffering, there will be incomparable joy!** So great is this joy that it cannot even be compared to this present suffering in either its quality or its

quantity! Glory will outstrip suffering so that it isn't even measurable in the light of God's renewing work!

“The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Do you see this promise? We will not be changed to fit the new glorified universe; the new universe will be set free and changed to fit the children of God. And look at how these ones are referenced – notice the phrase “the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Not the freedom of the glory of the saints, or the freedom of the glory of Christians, or the freedom of the glory of the redeemed. That would be true. But it's not what it says.

**The new heavens and the new earth are the inheritance of *the children*.** The universe is not important in itself. It is important as the playground, and as the temple, and as the farm, and as the craft shop *of the children of God*. God doesn't design his children for the universe. He designs the universe for his children. This was true from the beginning and it is true in the end, and it is especially true for his incarnate Son, the King over it all: Jesus. All things were made for him. So we won't have to adapt anymore. Our bodies will be totally redeemed and new, like His resurrected body. And everything in creation will be adapted to us so that God would receive the glory as the good and gracious Father.

Thus we learn, that God did not make the world and preserve the world to be wasted, but as a cause for wonder and worship of the one for whom it was made. Christ Jesus. We will be present with the risen Jesus, the glorified and eternal-bodied Jesus. We will eat with Him, rejoice with Him, work with Him, celebrate with Him. He is our grandest hope: the One appointed by God on our behalf and as our hero, and His victory which we celebrate so grandly today. **All of it is preeminently remade for Jesus, for He is worthy of a remade world and a remade people.**

Notice the phrase: “We wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.” What does that mean — “in this hope we were saved”? Surely this would include the meaning that, **our hope of redeemed bodies is intimately tied to our salvation from the sin** which not only disintegrates these bodies, but also disintegrates our relationships with one another, with our own self-understanding, with Creation, and ultimately with the Creator. Our sin is, at its root, animosity towards God, disdain and distrust of Him. It is hatred of His rules and His ways, a despising of His character. We have only appreciated Him when He agrees with us and makes much of us, but we rejected Him as He is. Therefore, the death and resurrection of Jesus is a rescue of the ungodly, not merely a help to the godly. Christianity is not “do good and try hard and you will make it.” No, it is “you are desperately in need of someone to save you from yourself and from the wrath of God against our mutiny against Him.” **Christianity is about a divine**

**rescue of sinners according to mercy alone**, not a shot in the arm for good and goodly people. And since this rescue comes only through humble dependence upon this crucified and risen Jesus, who does all that we need (1 Corinthians 15:1–3) in order to be forgiven and restored and forever changed, our hope is secured by Him and by Him *only*. Only Jesus has risen from the dead, the unique Death-defeater, which proves that He alone is capable of fixing all that is wrong with us. Only He triumphs in bringing us to this hope and securing it for us (Romans 6:5; 8:11).

But we must not leave it there. The good news of the resurrected man is the rock-solid assurance that God is both just and can fix us. The good news is that Jesus binds Himself to those who believe in Him, who turn from their self-trust and entrust themselves to Him alone. He is like a husband, whom when united to His wife unites all of his assets to her and takes all of her debts as his own. So Jesus, when we entrust ourselves to Him as our one and only, unites His righteousness to us and takes our sins upon Himself and pays them down at the cross, and is raised for our justification, to secure our rightness before God by virtue of His own risen life. Therefore, God vindicated this union by raising Jesus from the dead with authority over all things — that is what Christians remind one another of when we are looking for a rock to stand on in the face of fear, or suffering, or grief. Our Savior lives and stands to answer for us in every way.

You see, it is not simply having faith, in general, which gives us hope. Faith is only as hopeful as the object upon which it depends, upon the object upon which it places its weight. A person who places a tentative step upon a rock or one who leaps a great two-footed leap upon a rock are both held up by the rock, even though one's faith is more confident than the other. And if a person takes a great leap upon a sandstone ledge, it is not the great confidence of the leap that matters, but whether the ledge can bear his weight. And the rock upon which we placed our weight is Jesus, the death-defeater. He alone has the quality to save us, because he alone has defeated death. So He is worthy of our trust. Your faith, too, is only as good as the object upon which you place it. Is it capable of standing up to death? How do you know? Jesus was executed for our sins, but even more, He was raised from the dead victorious over it. I know He can hold me safe and secure from all alarm, because He was raised up *in history*. Christianity is not a mere ethical system or some esoteric, blind shout into the darkness. It is the historical narrative, the true story of the man who could not be held captive by Death because of the power of His life. As Peter said in his first public statement after the resurrection, "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." (Acts 2:22-24)

**The whole material universe was created in the first place so that the Son of God could be made a man, suffer in the flesh *for us*, be crucified to purchase us, rise from the dead to justify us, and reign over Creation as the glorified**

Man, surrounded by a countless host of redeemed sinners who in our redeemed strong bodies fitted for eternity will sing and speak and work and play and love in ways that visibly reflect his significance most fully precisely because we have bodies in a world spiritually and physically radiant with the glory of God. And oh, He is worth our singing and shouting and loving. And oh! We long to behold the resurrected one. And today, we who remain in the presence of sin and suffering, without and within, can walk in the hope of seeing the same one, and this hope in Jesus alone will truly purify us as He is pure.

**He alone is worthy!** He alone is able to fix all that is wrong. In fact, the revelation of this Resurrected Man was given to John in the context of great sorrow and suffering in this world. Tradition tells us that John had been boiled in oil, but survived, then banished to an island where God revealed the eternal implications of the triumph of Jesus. And in this vision, John sees a scroll sent from God's very throne, a message sealed by God in the context of great injustice and evil all around. What does God want to communicate at such a time? What is He going to do about all of this injustice and suffering? Yet, there was nobody in heaven or earth worthy enough to open the scroll of God. Nobody was qualified to read the message, or even to look upon it, to see what God was saying about all that is wrong with the world. And John wept because there was nobody qualified. But then...

“one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping! Look! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. 8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." 11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" 13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" 14 And the four living creatures said, "This is true!" and the elders fell down and worshiped. (Rev. 5:6-14 ESV)

And this same Lion who is a Lamb, the conqueror who conquered through being slaughtered and raised up victorious, makes His final proclamation at the end of this book, His final declaration to His suffering people in desperation for hope:

[On that day] God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be grieving, nor crying, nor pain

anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, **“Watch this! I am making all things new!”**

Come to the Resurrection and the Life, the Beginning and the End, the King of the Universe with a glorified body, who gives the water of Life for free. He offers you freedom and new life today. Come and be made new by the only one capable and worthy.