



Back to God Hour

**THE
RESURRECTION
QUARTET**

DENOMINATIONAL BROADCAST
OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES
OF AUSTRALIA

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If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.
Romans 8:11

In at least two respects Easter and Christmas are a great deal alike. Both holidays have strongly pagan overtones—both are Christian adaptations of what were originally non-Christian festivals. How successfully Christianity has overcome these pagan elements is a matter of judgment. But one thing is sure: Because of these original pagan associations, both of these holidays tend to slip back into what they were before. And that is the second characteristic they have in common. It's very possible to observe both Easter and Christmas and never benefit from the rich facts they celebrate.

So one of the tasks of the church each year is to focus on the central and abiding Christian facts that distinguish these holidays. Now is the time we must do that with Easter. Let's begin by scrapping the name *Easter*. Obviously we cannot do that altogether, for many people are too accustomed to using this essentially non-Christian word to talk about the resurrection of Jesus. It is not a good word, however. It would be best if we didn't use it anymore. What we must talk about on "Easter" is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is necessary to overcome the trivial and secular elements that have become part of the celebration; I'm thinking of such things as Easter bunnies and Easter eggs. I am even thinking of the renewal of the earth that occurs simultaneously with Easter in many parts of the world. Easter is a very intriguing concept when one thinks of rabbits loping over new green turf, but none of these things have anything to do with what happened to Jesus the glorious morning He arose from the dead. Here, then, I am going to try to overcome the general Easter idea by underscoring some of the elements of the resurrection of Jesus that are apt to be overlooked at the very time people are

supposedly celebrating His great victory.

When we think about the resurrection of Jesus, it is first of all necessary to remind one another that it is reported in the Bible as an actual fact. Moreover, it is a fact which, if rejected, must lead to rejection of the total Bible and of the total Christian faith. In other words, it is a mistake to think that one can benefit from the Bible's message and from the advantages accruing to a Christian if one does not believe that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive at this very moment. Notice the straightforward quality of this resurrection report, which we find in the book of Matthew:

Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Hail!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me" (28:1-10).

The closing chapters of the first four books of the New Testament are one in their announcement that Jesus really arose from the grave, and the body that He had after His resurrection was the same as the one He had before. It is reported, for example, that Jesus ate with His disciples; surely this is the strong impression given by John 21:13. And it is the Apostle Paul who sums up the resurrection appearances of Jesus

Christ when he says in 1 Corinthians 15:

He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (5-7).

Further along in this chapter, the Bible declares that everything about the Christian faith stands or falls in terms of the resurrection. We read:

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied (17-19).

In other words, pity those who call themselves Christians but who have not believed that Jesus rose from the dead.

And it is not really possible to admire Jesus either, if one rejects His resurrection from the dead. For if Jesus did not rise from the dead, He was a remarkable liar during His lifetime. Jesus had predicted his own resurrection (Matthew 20:19), and Jesus had said that He was the Son of God (Matthew 16:16). Both of these claims were closely connected. If he had not risen, His prediction would have been false, and His claim to divinity as well. The opening verses of the book of Romans show how closely Jesus' claim to divinity and His resurrection were connected when it says: "[He was] designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead. . . ." (1:4).

Everything about Christianity stands or falls in terms of the resurrection of Jesus. If He did not rise from the grave, it is foolish to try to celebrate His resurrection, or play games on Easter. There is no reason to celebrate anything if Jesus did not rise—all celebrations become hollow if Jesus was conquered by Satan and if finally we all will be conquered. But now we know that He has risen, and our lives can be full of joy and gladness.

If it is true that the resurrection of Jesus is extremely important, it is still necessary for each of us to find

a way to capture the fullness of its meaning for his or her own life. And I think it is possible to do this if we notice the four persons who were, and are still, involved in Jesus' resurrection. There is, in a real sense, a resurrection four, or a resurrection quartet. We should identify them carefully. If we do so, we can better understand the significance of Jesus' resurrection.

The resurrection quartet—read this sentence from Romans, chapter eight, that deals with the resurrection, and see if you can identify the four persons who make up the resurrection quartet:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you (v.11).

This sentence shows us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a very complex event—several persons were involved. Did you notice who they were? Let's try to identify them.

First of all, God the Father is identified as the person who caused the resurrection to happen. Though God the Father's name is not explicitly mentioned in Romans 8:11, He is most certainly the one referred to in the phrase "the Spirit of him who raised Jesus," and the phrase, "he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead."

Apparently what we are dealing with when we talk about the four persons involved in the resurrection of Jesus involves the three persons of the Holy Trinity. If you are somewhat acquainted with the Christian faith you know that the God who reveals Himself in the Bible is a trinitarian God—that is, though He is one, He exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the Father, according to Romans 8:11, is the person of the Trinity who actually raised Jesus from the dead. We could properly call the Father the subject of the resurrection: He did the deed.

When we review the material we have about the ministry of Jesus Christ, we discover at every turn that His Father in heaven was intimately involved in everything that Jesus did. The salvation of men was not accomplished through one of the persons of the

Trinity working alone; no, all the Godhead was involved. When Jesus was baptized it was the voice of His Father in heaven that spoke the astonishing identification over His head, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). And on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured shortly before He went to the cross, the same Father voice from heaven repeated the announcement and thus prepared His Son for the ordeal that lay before Him (Mark 9:7).

The impression we get from the gospel writers is that throughout the course of Jesus' ministry He was in continual conversation with His Father in heaven. He made no move without consulting His Father first. Jesus Himself voluntarily limited the fullness of His knowledge and awareness during the course of His humiliation, and He relied continuously on the Father's guidance. He rejoiced that the Father had given Him a people to save, and He knew that His Father in heaven insured that His work would be fully successful (John 10:27-30).

And as the intensity of Jesus' experience mounted, Jesus turned to His Father with especially earnest prayer. The book of Hebrews describes the tense and agonizing prayer Jesus directed toward His Father as the cross came nearer and nearer. It says:

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. . . (5:7,8).

With this we see that as Jesus approached the cross, He placed with His Father in heaven His only hope of escaping Satan's clutches. And His trust in His Father was fully rewarded; for it was the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who, after Jesus had fully accomplished His work, lifted Him from the corruption of the tomb and set Him new and fresh in the fellowship of His friends.

The Father is one of the persons in the resurrection quartet; the Holy Spirit, another. Surely Romans 8:11 speaks about this person of the Trinity and clearly identifies Him as the Holy Spirit of the living

God. And in this sentence the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit dominates everything.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through the Spirit which dwells in you.

The strong implication of this sentence is that God the Father used the power of God the Holy Spirit to raise God the Son—Jesus, and God will use the same power to raise those who have the Spirit of Christ in their hearts. The Spirit of God is the life-giving Spirit, and the Spirit of God was the agent of Jesus' resurrection.

God the Father did it, and He used His Holy Spirit to accomplish it. Those who know the Bible well immediately sense here a striking parallel to the opening words of the Bible:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1,2).

Surely what occurred in the mysterious confines of Jesus' tomb was an act similar to the great creative work of the Holy Spirit when a cosmos was created from the chaos described in Genesis 1. Jesus' body had been horribly disfigured and mutilated. Besides the superficial wounds, there is evidence that His heart had been bruised, and the sword thrust had mercilessly destroyed His vital organs. His was a body that was not able to function again, not in the usual sense. His was like ours will be when the powers of death have done their worst with us. And Jesus was made alive.

O Holy Spirit, we marvel at your great creative power!

And Jesus, He was a part of the resurrection, too. Of course. Why mention this? Well, we are carefully going through Romans 8:11 to identify each member of the resurrection quartet. We have seen the Father in that sentence, and the Holy Spirit, and surely, we must see Jesus. If God the Father was the subject of the resurrection (He did it), and if the Holy Spirit was

the agent of the resurrection (it was performed by Him), Jesus was the object of the resurrection (He received God's action). He was raised. He did not raise Himself.

That Jesus was raised, that He did not raise Himself, is the great proof in the Bible that the offering He had brought for human sin was accepted in the courts of heaven. It is a mistake to think that Jesus rose because, after all, He was the divine Son of God and everything He did in connection with death was playacting, a drama that He enacted to impress His audience... people like us. No. The awesome dimensions of the sacrifice of Jesus can only be understood when we remember that it was all real, totally real. Jesus really died for human sin, He really bore the wrath of God against the sin of the world, and He really tasted death for every man. So when it was all over, Jesus lay in death's embrace. And if His sacrifice and His work had not been enough to take care of the sins of humankind, He would have continued to lie there forever, and those who put their trust in Him would all go and join Him forever, too.

This means that when we sing "Up from the grave He arose," we are not rejoicing because Jesus was so great that, of course, He arose, but we are rejoicing that His sacrifice for human sin was so complete, God the Father did not leave Him in the tomb, but gave Him the glory that He had had with His Father before the worlds were made.

Jesus' resurrection was the great victory gift He received because He had conquered sin and death. So we see Him too, part of that quartet which makes the resurrection so glorious. We see Him, and we remember that He stands before us whole and complete once again because of the work of His Father and because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, on resurrection day we celebrate the great work of salvation the Triune God has accomplished. We bring praises to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But the quartet—we were talking about a resurrection quartet. Who is the fourth person whom we must identify? Why, it's you, yourself, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came so that those who believe in Him might have life and have it abundantly.

And thus His resurrection was not a private, solitary, individual victory. With Jesus' resurrection the Triune God insured the resurrection of all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the remarkable point that Romans 8:11 establishes: "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you." But let there be no mistake: Even in this good news there is the chilling reminder that our bodies are mortal. This means that there can be no hope for eternal life and for our ultimate restoration because of something characteristically fine and strong about our bodies. Our bodies are decaying, and some of us at this very moment are well aware that this is so.

I am thinking about you right now as I talk about this, you dear people who are weak and suffering. The surgeon's knife, tubes, pumps pumping all day long, monitors clicking away, all this to keep you alive—you know how the human body does not remain strong. But today is resurrection day, and there is that fourth person involved, that could be you. If you believe in Jesus, that fourth person is you.

I believe that when Jesus rose from the dead there was a glorious reunion within the depths of the divine Trinity. I realize I am talking about things that are too wonderful for human understanding and comprehension. But there are so many indications in the Bible that there was something incomprehensibly horrible about the great separation between the Father and His Son when Jesus died on the cross. But when Jesus successfully completed His work, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit and God the Son could again be together in perfect love and harmony. But that is not all. God and His dear children could also be together.

Oh, how far we can be from God sometimes! We stray. We fall into sin. We lie on beds of illness, and the cords of death seem to be drawing tightly around us, and we do not seem to be men and women with eternity in our hearts. Sometimes it looks as if death will have the last word. But we are God's children. We are Jesus' brothers and sisters. We are, if we believe in Jesus.

Believe in Jesus—this is the great command that comes to us from heaven itself. We have heard the story of the cross, of the descent into hell, and of the resurrection; now we must surrender to this Savior, and we must believe that what He has done can make our lives eternal. Jesus died and rose again so that we who live today might have the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Yes. This is the same Holy Spirit who accompanied Jesus each step of His earthly journey and gave Him the power to work His mighty miracles; this is the same Holy Spirit who raised Him from the dead. When you believe in Jesus you will receive the Holy Spirit, and God will raise you too one day through the Spirit's mighty power.

I am so grateful that there is a resurrection quartet—not just three persons, the three persons of the Godhead, but four. I'm there, too. I am part of it. Through faith I may know that my resurrection is now a certainty.

I want you to have that faith, too. For those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the future is glorious and exciting.

PRAYER

Fill our hearts with rejoicing today, O God, as we remember the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to perceive the fullness of His victory, and help us to understand how this victory now relates to our own lives. We are so grateful that it is possible for sinful human beings like ourselves to be part of what happened when Jesus arose.

Comfort many hearts with the message we have thought about, O Lord; be especially with those who know that their days in this world are drawing to a close. If there are such people reading this today who have not yet given themselves to you in faith, conquer their hearts with your Spirit, and with your Spirit enter their hearts. Make them new and hope-filled people who know the grave will not destroy them.

Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—receive our praise and our adoration for the perfect salvation you have accomplished. We magnify you for your love expressed so marvelously in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
In His name, Amen.

The message printed in this pamphlet was heard over the Back to God Hour, which is broadcast every Sunday in co-operation with the Christian Reformed Churches of America, in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia, and by shortwave throughout the world.

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