

“WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?”

Psalm 105:1-5, Colossians 3:1-4, Luke 24:1-12

Resurrection Sunday, April 9, 2023

“When people go shopping and pay for something, they get a receipt. That receipt validates that they made a purchase. If there is ever a question or if anything ever goes wrong, the receipt proves that the payment was made in full.

“For Christians, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ, the payment for their salvation was paid in full on Friday night when Jesus was crucified on the cross. Early on Sunday morning, the receipt was given. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is our receipt.

“The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God’s receipt for the payment of the death of Christ Jesus.”<sup>1</sup> And as we claim Jesus as our Savior, we have that receipt with us to remind us of the cost that Jesus paid on our behalf for the forgiveness of our sins.

But for those who were experiencing that first purchase of God’s forgiveness through the death of Jesus Christ, it was tough going. Though the purchase had been made by Jesus, the cost of that purchase was beyond expectations for all those who loved Him. Jesus had paid the full price of our sin when He died on the cross that Friday afternoon, but the receipt was not yet realized, even on that early Sunday morning. Listen to the account as recorded in Luke 24:1-12. (READ Luke 24:1-12)

Every one of the disciples and followers of Jesus thought that it was over, that when Jesus died on the cross, their hopes for the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God had come to an end. Jesus had spent His 3 ½ years of ministry teaching about the goodness of God, about the need for transformation and renewal, about the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Jesus had told them that He was the Messiah, the Son of God who had come “*to seek and save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10). But no one really knew what that meant. Though He had marveled them with His miraculous works, they did not yet know that as the Messiah, He would have to become the sacrificial lamb, and by His blood shed for them, He would bring safety and life to all who believed in Him.

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<sup>1</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Stories and Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 260, #785)

Three times Jesus had told them that He would be handed over to the leaders of the Temple, that He would be beaten, tried, and crucified, but they didn't want to believe it. The full payment of redemption was not their idea of the Messiah. They thought that Jesus would be the new king of Israel bringing redemption to the people by bring freedom to the nation. They thought of Jesus as the new political leader who would rule as king over Israel. But die on a cross? That never connected. The one thing that the followers of Jesus had failed to remember was that He had told them that He would rise on the third day, that death would not be the victor. He had even told Martha that He was the "*Resurrection and the Life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die...*" (John 11:25-26).

Yet the people really didn't understand what it was that Jesus was seeking to do. They failed to know that by His death, He would be purchasing forgiveness and eternal life for all who would believe in Him. So the disciples and followers were completely overwhelmed by Jesus' crucifixion and death. His burial meant the end of any hopes they might have had. They were depressed, discouraged and completely defeated, because they did not yet have the receipt from the purchase Jesus had made.

So when Mary and the other women had gone to the tomb early that Sunday morning, they were expecting to say their last "Goodbyes." They were planning on making the last arrangements of Jesus' body for His forever-sleep in death, thinking they would never see Him again, never hear His gentle voice speak to them, never feel the love He had shown them ever again. His words on the cross, "It Is Finished," meant to them that everything He had ever hoped to achieve was now done.

But that's where everything got turned up-side-down. When they got to the tomb, the stone had already been rolled away. It wasn't so that Jesus could get out, but so that His disciples and followers could get in! You can bet your life that they checked to make sure that it was the right tomb. This was serious - how could someone do such a thing as to desecrate the final resting place of any person, especially Jesus? How dare they steal the body! But it was not as the women had thought.

You see, they had come to the cemetery that early morning seeking the dead, to put behind them

any hopes or aspirations that they might have had. They were there to grieve Jesus' untimely death, not remembering His words of assurance that He would rise from the dead. Their emotions of sorrow and remorse and anger and disappointment flooded their minds to the point that they were stuck in the moment, refusing to remember any hope given to them by Jesus. None of Jesus' prophetic words made sense to them anyway, so why did they need to remember them then? Though the purchase had been made for the forgiveness of sins, these women did not yet have the receipt in hand to prove that it was finished.

But as they were standing there in wonder and confusion, they were joined by two men in lightning-bright clothing, which lit up the tomb. They asked the women the most important question of their lives, "*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*" (Luke 24:5). Why do you seek the Messiah Jesus out here in the cemetery where dreams go to die and hopes are lost forever? Why do you come bringing spices to embalm a living body? Why have you given up so quickly in the Son of God?

The angels knew what had taken place! They knew that Jesus had broken the curse of death and had become victorious over its hold on us. They had seen Jesus die on the cross, too, but they knew God's plan for the salvation of the world, and they rejoiced at the validation of that receipt when Jesus made the final payment for the sins of the people of the world, conquered death and then rose victoriously for all who would put their faith and trust in Him.

But the question for all of us today is, "Why do we continue to seek the living among the dead?" Why do we give up so quickly on Jesus as our Savior when things turn up-side-down? Why do we not remember His teachings and commandments, but continue to follow the things of this world, making up our own rules as we go along? Why do we focus on all the struggles and worries and hardships and disappointments of this world when Jesus has paid the price for all of it already?

Jesus had not been abandoned to the grave by the Lord our God. Yes, He had died on the cross and was buried in a borrowed tomb, but it was a temporary arrangement. Jesus only needed the tomb for three days, not for an eternity. He had to complete the transaction between God and humanity by

paying off the separation caused by sin. He had to break Satan's death-grip on us and provide us a way to find new and eternal life. While Satan thought he had won over God on that Friday when Jesus died, little did he know that the outcome would be restoring all people back to the Lord God Almighty through His resurrection! Jesus paid the full price for our sins, and in the next few statements of the angels, we were given the receipt for our freedom from eternal death. The angels proclaimed to the women, "*He is not here; He has risen!*" (Lu.24:6).

The Savior of the world, the Messiah of the Jews, had accomplished all that He had come to do for us. He had broken the chains of sin and death and brought hope to us when we believe in Him and receive Him as our Savior. Here's the receipt - "HE'S NOT HERE; HE HAS RISEN!"

So we can echo the first few words of Psalm 105, "*Give praise to the Lord, proclaim His name; make known among the nations what He has done. Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts. Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always...*" (105:1-4). Let us rejoice today for what the Lord has done! He has raised us up out of the pit of darkness and despair. He has opened up the gates of Heaven to us as we confess Him as our Lord and Savior. He has provided us hope amid the hopeless. He has done the impossible and beaten death's strong grip so that we, too, can find life. Even though we die physically it's not a permanent situation, for we will be with the Lord our God forever if we hold onto our receipt that Jesus provided to us. We have the promise of eternal life. "*He Has Risen!*"

But there are so many people in our world today who have not yet realized the payment of our sin-debt. They do not yet hold onto the receipt of Jesus' full compensation for the unbearable price of their sin. Even the disciples didn't have their receipt until they encountered Jesus.

The women had run back to tell the other disciples of Jesus what they had experienced at the tomb, "*but they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense*" (Lu. 24:11). They would not receive the receipt of Jesus' payment until they had seen and believed Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Oh, they wanted to believe, but this had never happened before. No one had

ever come back from the dead on their own. Yes, Jesus had raised three people from the dead, but no one had ever proclaimed that they, themselves, would rise again after they died. It was just so new to them, even though Jesus had told them it would happen. They had to see it to believe it. Even after Peter went to the tomb himself, *“he went away, wondering to himself what had happened”* (Lu. 24:12). It was too good to be true! How could he hope to believe it?

Let me put it to you in a different way so that you can grasp what Jesus did for us. “Two men were climbing a mountain. They had two guides along with them - a guide in the back and a guide in the front. They were all tied together by the same rope. As they were climbing up the mountain, the guide in the back slipped and fell. When he fell, he rolled off the edge of the mountain and yanked the two men in the middle. The guide in the front took his axe and dug it into the ice. He gripped and held on. The two men in the middle were able to climb back up on the rope because the guide in the front had dug in and not let go. Even the guide in the back was able to climb to safety because of the front guide who dug in and saved them.

“In the garden of Eden, the first Adam slipped and fell, and we are hooked into him by nature. So when Adam died, we all died. When he slipped and fell, we all slipped and fell with him. We were all hanging over the edge and headed toward an eternal abyss.

“But there was somebody else on that rope. He was born of a virgin, a man like you and me. And he dug in. He was born a perfect baby. He lived a perfect life. He did everything according to the will of God. He dug in, and then He died on a cross and rose from the dead. Because He dug in, all in Adam who were slipping and heading to the abyss can climb back up on this last Adam who has paid the price.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus, the very Son of God, has become our anchor, enabling us to find salvation from eternal death because he has dug in and held on so that we might live through Him. Without Him we are forever lost into the eternal abyss of hell and death. But because of Him, we can find life, because we are connected to Him through our faith in Him. By uniting with Jesus through faith, He provides us

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<sup>2</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Stories and Illustrations*, pg. 264, #794)

with the receipt of the payment made on Calvary's cross on that Friday afternoon.

Folks, that's the importance of this day we celebrate as Resurrection Day! It is the pivotal day in the history of this world, when the sting of death has been taken away and the hope of eternal life begun. It is available to everyone in the world, regardless of nationality, creed, color, language or economic status. This receipt of eternal life is obtainable by anyone who eagerly seeks to follow the ways of Jesus. It is accessible to all people who earnestly repent of their sins, believe in Jesus, receive Him as their Savior, and then spend the rest of their lives letting Him be the Lord of their life by following all of His commands. What joy is ours as we receive this receipt of payment from sin by Jesus!

Then, as the Apostle Paul told the people in Colossae, *"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory"* (3:1-4).

Nothing here on this earth can save us! No one on this earth can bring salvation to us! Only Jesus has made that possible. It's not the Buddha. It's not Mohammed. It's not Hari Krishna. It's not Bahauallah. It's not transcendental meditation. It's not yoga. It's not material wealth. It's not fame or power. It's not Yong Il Kim or Xi Jinping or Vladimir Putin. It's not Donald Trump or Joe Biden. It's not George Soros, or Elon Musk or Bill Gates. It's not Hee Soo Jung or Warren Waddell. Nothing in all this world can save us from the penalty of our sins. We've got to stop looking for the living among the dead!

There is only one person in all the history of the world who has made it possible for us to find eternal life with God the Father and that is the One who has made the payment that covers the price of all of our sin-debt, who died as the perfect sacrifice on the cross for the penalty of our sin, who spent three days in death, and then rose up from the grave, having beaten death and given us life by connecting us with the living God of the Universe. **JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY ONE WHO GRANTS US FORGIVENESS AND GRACE SUFFICIENT FOR ETERNAL LIFE. No One Else!**

So stop seeking the living among the dead! Seek Jesus, the one who conquered death to bring us life. Stop pursuing the joys and delights of this world - they are empty. Stop craving the carnal desires of the flesh - they're powerless. Stop running after fame and fortune - they are worthless. Stop clawing after power and authority - they are useless. In order to find real life we must seek the living, not the dead. We must seek Jesus, who is the first fruit of the living among the dead. "*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things*" (Col. 3:2).

The receipt of the payment of our sins was given to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But we must receive it, believe it, and then live it! "The story is told of a king who pardoned two criminals who were headed for death. They were on their way to be killed for their crimes but he issued a pardon. Both men could now go free.

"But the reactions of the two criminals were totally different. The first criminal who had been pardoned was full of joy, excitement, and exuberance. He was shouting and screaming as he looked at the pardon: 'What joy to know that I was on my way to death and I have been given life, and not because of anything I have done.'

"The other criminal stood trembling and thinking, 'Could this really be true? Was this a joke? Nobody would do anything like that for me. Look at what I have done!' He was terrified and rather than having the joy of the first criminal, he felt miserable. In fact, the second criminal tried to discourage the joy of the first criminal by telling him not to get too excited. He tried to convince him that this might not be real.

"Because the first criminal believed the pardon, he had both the assurance and joy of his release. Because the second criminal questioned the pardon, he had neither the joy nor the assurance of his release. One criminal looked at the piece of paper that held his pardon and believed it. The other criminal looked inside of himself to see whether he really believed it, and because what he saw in himself was doubt, it took away the joy of his assurance."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, pg. 260, #783)

We have all been issued a pardon from the wages of our sin. We have all been saved from death. But we must receive it, believe it, and then live it in order to enjoy the assurance and hope that is in it. Seeking the living among the dead only leads us to disappointment and discouragement. Seeking the things of this world only brings us emptiness and despair. We've got to move away from the things of this world and begin pursuing the things of the Lord Jesus, starting with His resurrection from the dead. And then we will find real life within us.

But as you look around you in this world, there are so many people who have not yet heard of the payment that Jesus made on our behalf to save us from death because of our sin. They are looking as hard as they can for life among the dead, and they're coming up empty.

The call of Jesus Christ is for us to take this Good News to others so that they can also find out about the payment made on their behalf, and receive the receipt of forgiveness and grace. How will they hear about the salvation of Jesus Christ unless we tell them about it? How will they come to know of this great thing of the Lord if they focus on Easter eggs hunts and bunny rabbits and butterflies? They're stuck looking for the Living among the dead. Why not take the chance to share God's love with them, telling them about what Jesus has done for all of us? Why not take the time and energy to give out the receipts of forgiveness and grace to those who are still lost and confused?

Jesus has risen for us; indeed for the whole world. Let's share the Good News!

Let's pray: Father, You have done a great and mighty thing for us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. He has become the propitiation of our sins, giving us new life through His death and resurrection. He has offered us life, eternal life with You, if only we will believe it, receive it, and then live it. THANK YOU! But, Lord, let us be like the women on that first Resurrection Day, taking the news to their fellow disciples so that they might also receive the Good News. In our own belief, help us to bring others to Jesus as we live in joy and excitement and exuberance, today and every day. Help us to keep our eyes on Jesus, the author of our Salvation and the giver of all grace, so that we might seek Him in all things. This we pray in Jesus' great and powerful Name. AMEN.