

The Morning Star

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.”

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<i>Chapter One.....I Am the Resurrection.....</i>	<i>Page 2</i>
<i>Chapter Two.....The Morning Star.....</i>	<i>Page 6</i>
<i>Chapter Three.....The Birth Of A Testimony.....</i>	<i>Page 10</i>
<i>Chapter Four.....The Witness Of The Resurrection.....</i>	<i>Page 17</i>
<i>Chapter Five.....If By Any Means.....</i>	<i>Page 22</i>
<i>Chapter Six.....In Deaths Oft.....</i>	<i>Page 33</i>
<i>Chapter Seven.....Therefore, My Beloved Brethren.....</i>	<i>Page 43</i>

Chapter One ***I am the Resurrection...***

When the LORD God like a potter working in clay formed man from the dust of the ground He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” God placed the man in a Garden, and in the midst of the Garden the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And He told the man that in the day he disobeyed Him, and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die. Nothing—as we have seen from that day till this—could have been more tragic.

However, there was a dimension of Life still secluded in the bosom of God even while He breathed the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils and made him a living soul. So, when the Serpent succeeded in bringing sin and death into the family of man, thus ruining the Potter’s vessel, the only wise God went to His wheel again and began from the ruin to make another Vessel in whom He would manifest this new dimension of Life. The Potter did not abandon man and start over with a completely different kind of vessel; in His great wisdom and grace He determined that out from the very ruin of the first vessel He would bring forth this new and greater dimension of Life. Life out of death. Resurrection life.

“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15.21).

Resurrection life! What a day is coming at the end of the age when the time for the dead to be raised has arrived! That day surely comes. Even so, resurrection life is a dimension of life that is not content to await its time.

Remember the much-loved story of Lazarus? It’s the story of a little family that discovered resurrection life is far more than something that happens at the end of the dispensation.

Jesus used to resort often to a certain home in Bethany, a small village near Jerusalem. It was the home of Simon the leper, and we discover Jesus had a special friendship with the family there—Mary, and Martha, and their brother Lazarus.

Lazarus. His name in Hebrew is Eleazar, which means *God is help*. And as we pick up the story in John Chapter 11, Lazarus deeply needs help. He is sick unto death.

And yes, God can help. He can deliver. He can heal. But knowing this just adds to the anguish of Martha and her sister Mary. For, they had sent out their urgent petition, but... where is our Lord in our moment of desperate and overwhelming need? Could not this Man who had opened the eyes of the blind... could He not have prevented this? Could he not have done something so that our brother did not die? The anguish! Where is our beloved Lord Jesus? The tears flow out from the broken heart: did He not get the message we sent?

“Behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.”

But Jesus did get the message, confidently assuring his disciples that:

“This sickness is not unto death....”

That’s quite the statement when you think about it, since Lazarus did die—although Jesus called it *sleep*. “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep” (Jn. 11.11). I like that very much—Jesus referring to Lazarus as “our friend.” It gives us a glimpse into the kind of relationship these men had with this One who was also their Lord and Master, their Teacher and Rabbi. And it’s very meaningful that those who believe in Jesus, as Lazarus believed, are no longer in the pale of death when they die; they are just asleep, to be awakened from sleep by the Voice of the Son of God. Yes, we know that Lazarus did in fact die; when the disciples misunderstood what Jesus had said about Lazarus being asleep, He told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.” Yet He had stated that the sickness was not unto death, but for the glory of God. Does this mean, then, that God caused the sickness that brought Lazarus to his grave? No, it means that God intended the sickness that came upon Lazarus as a result of the law of sin and death working in his mortal body to be the means by which His glory would be revealed in the Son of God. This family with which Jesus had so close and special a relationship were chosen of God for a very powerful revelation of His glory.

“Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.

When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was” (Jn. 11. 1-6).

This one He *loved*—and He loved them all—this one He loved was sick. *Therefore...* he rushes immediately to the sick bed? That’s what we would expect to read here, and that’s what we ourselves would have done I am sure. But no, He loved them... *therefore* He stayed where He was two more days. He loved them, therefore He waited two more days before

coming to them. And while He waits, Lazarus dies. What kind of love is that?

Lazarus died, in spite of the fact that Jesus had just told His disciples:

“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”

May we meditate much on this. In all He did, Jesus the Son of God was motivated by a passion to see the glory of God shine forth. This was all He lived for—that others see the glory of God. That was the depth of His love for the Father, and for them. “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus... Therefore...” He waited. He had received their message—had heard their prayer. Yet His love for them was such that He wanted them to see the glory of God. Of course He was deeply moved by the distress of them all, but burning within Him deeper still was the passion for the shining forth of the glory of God—a passion not alien to their need, but something crying for expression far deeper than they could yet comprehend.

For if Lazarus had a need, so did God.

Finally Jesus sets out, His disciples following fearfully, for they know He is heading straight into the jaws of death by going back to Judea. After a journey of two days they are near Bethany.

Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (Jn. 11. 20-26)

We know the story, we love the story. We are familiar with the wondrous outcome. But how little, really, do we comprehend His words.

“I am the resurrection and the Life...”

Martha had good doctrine. Jesus had said to her, “Thy brother shall rise again.”

She nodded, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” That’s good doctrine. The day of resurrection inevitably comes. But the resurrection as good doctrine is far from what Jesus the Morning Star had in mind.

“*I am* the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

“He that believeth *in Me*...”

Not, “believeth good doctrine.” Not, “believeth in events to come.” But believeth in One who is Himself the fulfillment of a hope long waited for.

“He that believeth *in Me*...”

When He comes to the tomb, He calls for them to remove the stone. They are astonished. Remove the stone, Lord? Martha reminds Him that Lazarus has been dead four days now, and so “by this time He stinketh...”

But He says to her:

“Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” (Jn. 11.40).

He is referring back to His words: “I am the resurrection and the life; He that believeth in Me...” So He brings us to see that *it is a demonstration of resurrection life that is the glory God.*

And faith that joins us to it. He says that if we will *believe Him*, we will see the glory of God.

He calls for faith in the midst of the direst of circumstances. He says that if we will believe Him—*continue* to believe Him in circumstances similar to those Mary and Martha and Lazarus found themselves in—circumstances and situations that we have long cried out to Him about and called for His intervention in, but now give off death’s trademark stench—we will see the glory of God. We will see in our darkest hour the shining forth of the Resurrection and the Life.

Chapter Two **The Morning Star**

This world of ours has endured a very long and very dark night. That night will end as the Sun of righteousness arises to rule over the Day—the Day of the Lord.

This does not mean we have to wait till morning to see the Light of Day, the Sun of righteousness. In the physical universe there is a star (actually the planet Venus) that is the harbinger of the coming day. Toward the end of the night the light of the coming day shines on this star, so that, as far as this star is concerned, morning has broken. This is a sign God has set in the heavens testifying, bearing witness, to a greater spiritual reality. Peter, writing of the coming of this greater spiritual reality, says that it was not with “cunningly devised fables” that the apostles made known “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Pt. 1.16). Eyewitnesses! That’s what he says. He and James and John were eyewitnesses to this.

And then he goes on to bring in another witness, one that he says is even more sure: the prophetic word. That is even more sure, Peter, than your own testimony of what you saw on the mount of transfiguration? My, what a high regard you have for the scriptures! And because of this, Peter advises those to whom he was writing that they do well to take heed unto this prophetic word “as unto a light (a lamp) that shineth in a dark place...” What lamp? The “prophecy of scripture” spoken by holy men of old who were “borne along by the Holy Spirit” as they spoke, and wrote. Heed that word, Peter says, give it your undivided attention, walk in its light, “...till the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1.19). The prophetic word, said Peter, is a lamp in the dark of the night to walk by, but God’s purpose in this is that as they heed and cherish that word and walk in its light, the light of that lamp would be swallowed up in a greater light—the Morning Star, or Daystar, arising in their hearts.

In due time—and nothing can stop this—the Sun of righteousness arises, and “the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mal. 4.2, Mt. 13.43). But there is an arising before that arising. There is One who awakens the dawn. Before the Sun of righteousness arises to dress the mountains with day, the light of day first clothes the morning star in the heavens.

Jesus during His life often arose before it was yet day. He also arose from the dead before the day had dawned. We read that when the women came to the tomb with their aromatic spices “as it began to

dawn,” the stone that sealed the tomb had already been rolled away (Mt. 28.1, Mk. 16.4). In fact John tells us that Mary Magdalene had come to the sepulchre “while it was yet dark” (Jn. 20.1).

It was still dark, and the tomb was already open! Mary finding the stone rolled away was beside herself. Had someone stolen the body away? She runs to tell the others. Dismayed themselves, Peter and John run back to the garden and go into the tomb. It is empty! Wrapt in thought and wonder, they go back home. But Mary Magdalene, who apparently had followed them back to the tomb, lingers there, weeping. What had happened to her beloved Lord? She stands outside the sepulchre, weeping. At some point she stoops down to look within, and sees two angels (though it seems she didn't know they were angels) who ask her why she is weeping.

“Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.”

This One who had so loved her, this One whom in return she so loved... He is... gone! Gone! Her heart is broken.

She turns herself, still weeping, away from the sepulchre, and through her tears she sees... here is someone... here is a man, whom she supposes to be the gardener. He too asks her, “Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?”

“Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.”

“Mary.”

...That Voice!

“Rabboni!”

It is very moving to me that it is Mary Magdalene to whom the Lord Jesus first revealed Himself when He rose from the dead. She didn't have deeper insight into the cross and resurrection of the Lord. But oh, the deeper love she had for Him, who had delivered her out of deep darkness and demonic bondage. Let that be a reminder to us that deep insight into the doctrines of truth cannot hold a candle to first love.

I want to quote something nineteenth century minister and hymn writer Horatius Bonar wrote.

“It was ‘very early in the morning’ while ‘it was yet dark’ that Jesus rose from the dead. Not the sun, but only the morning star shone upon His opening tomb. The shadows had not fled; the citizens of Jerusalem had not awakened. It was still night—the hour of sleep and darkness, when He arose. Nor did His rising break the slumbers of the city. So shall it be ‘very early in the morning while it is yet dark,’ and when nought but the morning star is shining, that Christ’s body the church shall rise. Like Him, His saints shall awake when the children of the night and darkness are still sleeping their sleep of death.”

What a beautiful insight. I love that thought—that Jesus rose from the dead “while it was yet dark.” And this: “So shall it be ‘very early in the morning while it is yet dark,’ and when nought but the morning star is shining, that Christ’s body the church shall rise.” What wondrous hope we have! But I want to tweak our understanding a bit, and our hope. No doubt our brother Bonar had in mind the great resurrection of the just, the resurrection of the last day. But is the Resurrection content to wait for that day? Martha, as we pointed out, had told Jesus concerning her brother Lazarus, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” But Jesus’ responded to Martha—and we will not tire of quoting this—

“*I am* the resurrection and the life...”

He was saying to her that... yes, the great Day of the resurrection comes. But the Morning Star shines in the darkness bearing witness to the coming Day, shines when there is nothing but darkness and death and decay all around us. While it is very early, while it is yet dark, the Morning Star arises on the horizon of day shining bravely and testifying confidently, “Death’s cord is broken!”

Christ says of the *overcomer*,

“I will give him the morning star” (Rev. 2.28).

It is Christ Himself who is the Morning Star.

“I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star” (Rev. 22.16).

Yes—we know He is the coming Sun of Righteousness who arises with healing in His wings. But for those who love Him, for those who while it is yet night are “stretching forth unto those things which are before,” He is first the Morning Star, appearing before the Sun has

breached earth's horizon. To those who love Him, He manifests Himself in a way that the world in darkness does not yet see.

And so even now the Sun of Righteousness just below the horizon is rising, inexorably rising, and shortly the Day of burning heat shall break and “nothing shall be hid from the heat thereof” (Ps. 19.6). But even before that rising, the morning star shines forth the Light of the coming Day *while it is yet night*, and proclaims that the Day is at hand!

Yes. Yes! It is the very Sun of Righteousness Himself that is seen in the Morning Star just above the horizon, shining victoriously over the darkness of the night... while it is yet night.

That is the promise to the overcomer—the victorious one.

Chapter Three **The Birth Of A Testimony**

“And with great power gave the apostles witness [or, *testimony*] of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4.33).

This is what the powers of darkness were up against in the days of the early church. This is the power that was being manifested—the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus Christ—*His* resurrection life—in *His church*.

We are quick to Amen that, aren't we. But do we remember what these men went through to come to this testimony? When the Lord first began to speak to them about His coming death and resurrection, they were perplexed and very anxious about this. And fearful. Oh how they loved this One who had chosen them to be His disciples—chosen them to be with Him. Oh, what a wonder He was, His words, His works... Himself. Oh that this would never end! And now He is talking about leaving? Now He is saying that He must suffer many things, and be crucified, and rise again the third day? What is this all about? They didn't even want to know. They couldn't bear such words. It was like a charge of dynamite to their understanding of what the Messiah would do when He came.

Yet the time came when these words that they simply had not wanted to hear, that He must die and rise from the dead—this dread event of the Cross—suddenly resurrection life Himself was alive in them! Now, they became witnesses with a very powerful testimony.

And so these men had come quite the distance to come to this powerful testimony. Let's follow their trail as they follow along with Jesus as He sets His face toward Jerusalem and certain death. I think it will be a great encouragement to you and me, small of faith and understanding as we often are concerning this very thing—the Cross—to see how lacking in faith and understanding these men themselves were in the beginning. Nevertheless they continued to follow with Him in spite of the fears and doubts, and because of this, what at one time was too hard to comprehend, too hard to bear, became their testimony.

Let me add another reminder here. Just because we have heard a truth does not necessarily mean that we are awake to its reality. That is often a difficult thing for us to grasp. We “know in part,” but all too often are inclined to take the part for the whole. We are inclined to think that our present consciousness is full consciousness—though, relative to

spiritual reality, we are still in a state of sleep. I think of the prophet Zechariah, who said that an angel came and talked with him and woke him up—when he was already wide awake (Zech. 4:1). This, I would say, describes very well our present state, our present comprehension of truth. We are conscious, we think we know things, but relative to the resurrection Life about to be revealed, we know only in part, we are still in a state of sleep.

And so the Lord Jesus led His disciples, as a loving Shepherd His sheep, into the awakened consciousness of a spiritual reality called resurrection life, such that the words they found so difficult to grasp, though He spoke them plainly enough, became their *testimony*.

Let's follow along with them.

When Jesus came with His disciples into the region of Caesarea Philippi He “began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He spake that saying openly” (Mk. 8.31). Meaning, openly to the disciples, that is. He did not broadcast this revelation far and wide.

This was the occasion when Peter by revelation had confessed that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16.15). Jesus then charged His disciples that they were to “tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ [the Messiah]” (Mt. 16.20). However, this revelation occasioned something very significant. It was from this point onward that He began to tell them of His coming Cross.

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Mt. 16.21).

This was when Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him for saying things so unworthy of a Messiah. “This shall not be unto *Thee*,” of all people. Thou art the Christ. Thou art the Messiah who is going to come to Jerusalem and reign on the throne of David and put all our enemies under Your feet—and ours too, of course.

Then a few days later, on the way down from the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus told Peter, James and John that they were not to tell anyone the things they had seen on the Mount “till the Son of man were risen from the dead.” They obeyed Him, of course; they kept the vision to themselves. But here were those words again. They kept

“questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean” (Mk. 9.9,10).

Luke’s account of the same occasion has it this way. Jesus tells them,

“Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.

But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask Him of that saying” (Lk. 9.44,45).

Not that the Lord purposely hid this from them; in fact He had just told them plainly. It was the darkness of their own hearts that hid this from them, so that they understood it not. Have not you and I experienced much the same thing at times? The Lord speaks something to us very plainly, but it is over our head because we have not yet the spiritual capacity to understand it. Or, we may even reject what He is saying because it doesn’t line up with our doctrinal boundaries.

Later on as they made their way through Galilee we are told that Jesus did not want anyone to know He was passing through. Why the secrecy now?

“For He taught His disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him; and after that He is killed, He shall rise the third day” (Mk. 9.31).

Again they didn’t understand what He meant, “and were afraid to ask Him” (Mk. 9.32). In fact while Jesus was preoccupied with what was before Him—He was about to lay down His life a ransom for many—His disciples were preoccupied with which of them would be the greatest (Mk. 9.34).

Again on another occasion we are told that:

“Then He took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that were written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.

For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on;

And they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death, and the third day He shall rise again” (Lk. 18. 31-33).

What we are getting at is that it is very apparent that Christ told His disciples plainly again and again that He was about to suffer and die,

and then be raised again the third day. “He spake that saying openly.” Yet they didn’t understand Him. It seems they didn’t want to understand Him, likely, as we have said, because this was so alien to what they had been taught about what the Messiah would accomplish when He came. And so when what He foretold actually happened, they were utterly devastated by it—completely disillusioned, filled with sorrow, totally undone. All their hopes had been utterly smashed. This One upon whom all their hopes and dreams had been pinned... now He is crucified? Now He is dead? Dead and buried? In a sepulcher sealed with a great stone? This could not have happened! They bent and held their bellies like a woman in the travail of birth.

...But now what is this? Here is a frantic Mary Magdalene running to Peter and John and telling them that the stone is gone from the sepulcher! And Jesus’ body is gone! No! Not this on top of it all! His body has been stolen now?

Peter and John race to the tomb to see for themselves. John gets there first. He stoops down and peers into the tomb. He sees the linen grave clothes lying there. But he doesn’t go in; he waits breathless for Peter to catch up.

And now Peter comes up out of breath, and, just like Peter, goes right straight in. Sure enough, there is the linen cloth His Lord had been wrapped in. Suddenly Peter sees something further—the napkin that had been about His head “wrapped together in a place by itself” (Jn. 20.7).

At that point John goes into the tomb also.

“And he saw, and believed.”

Believed what? The next verse tells us, I think.

“For as yet they knew not the scripture, that He must rise from the dead” (Jn. 20.9).

That’s quite the statement considering the many times the Lord Jesus had told them this plainly. But up till that moment John had not comprehended, had not yet known, had not yet believed, what Jesus had been telling them all along—and what the scripture foretold, scripture they no doubt had heard many times, and in their youth even memorized.

“For Thou wilt not leave My soul in Sheol; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16.10).

As yet they didn't *know* that scripture.

Now John sees the evidence right before his very eyes—the grave clothes lying there and the linen napkin in a place by itself. Anyone stealing the body would certainly not have stripped it first of the grave clothes. This could only mean one thing.

“And he saw, and believed.”

Then later the same day Jesus revealed Himself to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, lovingly chiding them for their unbelief:

“Oh, fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?” (Lk. 24.26).

They rushed back to Jerusalem the same night to tell the others, and while they were doing so, Jesus Himself appeared to them all. After He had shown them His hands and His feet, to dispel their doubts even further He asked if they had anything to eat. They looked quickly about, and here was a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb—a very interesting combination—which He ate before them.

“And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me” (Lk. 24:45).

Then He added these words. Let us read them mindful of what Peter said of the “more sure word of prophecy whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a lamp that shineth in a dark place...”

“Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ [the Messiah] to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

And ye are witnesses of these things.”

They had all been slow to believe. In fact we are told that when Mary Magdalene and the women with her first related to the apostles that they had seen angels who told them the Lord was risen, “their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not” (Lk. 24.11). It had been upon this first report that Peter and John had run to the tomb

to see for themselves, returning home with John, it seems to me, now believing.

It's a little hard to piece together from the four Gospel accounts all that took place that morning—just who was where, and when. There was a flurry of activity, people running back and forth from the sepulcher to the city. But it seems, as we said, that Mary Magdalene, no doubt also running, had followed Peter and John back to the sepulcher. And then, after she had met the Lord in that precious encounter outside the sepulcher, she returned to the disciples the second time, this time telling them that she had seen the Lord herself, and that He had spoken to her about His coming ascension (Jn. 20.17).

That same evening the disciples were still gathered together when the two disciples who had met the Lord on the road to Emmaus returned to Jerusalem to tell them they had seen the Lord. And the Lord Himself appeared to them. Here is John's account of that appearing. The doors were shut for fear of the Jews. Even so, Jesus came in and stood in their midst and said to them:

“Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side” (Jn. 20:20).

I love the next verse:

“Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord” (Jn. 20.20).

That, I would say, is the most powerful understatement ever written.

They had been slow to believe. Yet here He was right before their very eyes—risen from the dead, just as He had told them! What a reunion this was! Now they could resume blessed fellowship with their beloved Master...

...Just as Mary Magdalene herself had expected when she clung to Him outside the sepulcher. But He had said to her, “Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father...” (Jn. 21.17). “Touch Me not...” Or better, “Do not cling to Me...” (ESV). Jesus would not be staying with them; He would not be with them as He had previously been. He had something even better for them all. Remember the enigmatic words that He had given His disciples just before the cross?

“A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father.

Here was perplexity upon perplexity at a time when their hearts were filled with sorrow because of what He had been saying about leaving them. Some of them began to question this among themselves, having once again no idea what He meant.

“They said therefore, what is this that He saith, A little while? We cannot tell what He saith.”

Jesus of course knew “that they were desirous to ask Him,” and so explained what He meant.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you” (Jn. 16.20-22).

“I will see you again,” Jesus had said. Was this fulfilled when He appeared to them after the resurrection? “Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.” Was this what Jesus had in mind when He said, “I will see you again”? Here He was, right before their eyes.

But did you notice those words of His, “...Because I go to the Father”? He had not yet ascended to the Father when He appeared to them that evening.

Even so, perhaps they could understand readily enough that they would not see Him because He was going to the Father; this was what filled them with sorrow.

But, “ye shall see Me *because* I go to the Father”?

This, then, speaks of a seeing and a reunion far beyond what took place when He rose from the dead!

Chapter Four ***The Witness of the Resurrection***

Here again is the verse we quoted at the beginning of the last chapter.

“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4.33).

What had brought about this great transformation? The same men who had been unable to comprehend what had been plainly spelled out to them... now they are boldly proclaiming—and bearing witness to—the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

What brought this about? It can only be the Witness of the Resurrection who was now indwelling them—the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told them the same:

“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me:

And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning” (Jn. 15.26,27).

In Luke’s account the words Jesus spoke to His disciples that night when He appeared to them and showed them His wounds, and ate some food before their widened eyes, and then opened their understanding as to the scriptures that prophesied of his suffering and resurrection, He concluded by saying, “And ye are witnesses of these things.”

But then He added this:

“And behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on High” (Lk. 24:49).

He told them they were witnesses—but were not ready yet to witness.

And so, “ye also shall bear witness” wasn’t just because the disciples had seen the resurrected Christ for themselves. It was because of the previous words: “He shall testify (bear witness)... and ye also shall bear witness...” It is this that enabled them to bear witness with power.

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me...” (Acts 1:8).

Power to do mighty things? Yes, they did mighty things. But power, primarily, to “be witnesses unto *Me...*”

They had been through the travail pains of the Cross and had seen the risen Christ with their own eyes. But more than that now, with the coming of the Paraclete, they had something more; now they had the very Resurrection Himself within them. *The Witness—the Spirit of the resurrected and ascended Christ—dwelt in them now*, according to His promise, “I will see you again...”

This is what happened when He sent to them from the Father the promised Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

“Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me: because I live, ye shall live also.

At that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in Me, and I in you” (Jn. 14.19,20).

It is this seeing, this coming that made them witnesses even as the Spirit was witness:

“It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth” (1 Jn. 5.6).

And so, “He shall bear witness... and ye also shall bear witness...” This is what we find throughout the Acts of the Apostles: these witnesses of the resurrection bearing witness in the power of the Spirit.

When the apostles sought God about someone to take Judas’ place it was to be someone who could be “a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1.22). This is the first instance of this emphasis in The Acts, and from hereon we come across it over and over again.

“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2.32).

“But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of Life, whom God raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3.15).

“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree...”

And we are witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey Him” (Acts 5.30,32).

(Notice that one: we are witnesses, and the Holy Spirit is a witness.)

“This One God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly;

Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead” (Acts 10. 40,41).

“But God raised Him from the dead,

And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people” (Acts 13. 30,31).

This last quote is the apostle Paul speaking, and while he doesn't number himself among those who saw Christ at the first, he did see Him in an encounter that made him, as he described it, “one born out of due time” (1 Cor. 15.8).

“And last of all He was seen of me also...” (1 Cor. 15.8)

On the Damascus Road Paul saw the Resurrection and the Life Himself, and Jesus told him at the time that He had appeared to him “for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee...” (Acts 26.16). Thus Paul too became one of the witnesses of the resurrected Christ, and a faithful and obedient minister of Him whom he had seen. It was a testimony that he continually sought not merely to relate, but to make manifest, as we shall see. Our Bible does not give us the record of the lives of the other apostles, but to some extent we are given Paul's, not that we should exalt the man above others (something he himself abhorred) but that we might learn from him, that we too might discover “the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe”—God's secret weapon working in our own lives as it worked in the life of the apostle Paul—to the benefit of others.

For it is true:

God Has a Secret Weapon

This is something that God's Adversary and ours never seems able to comprehend. If the princes of this world had known the outcome of

what they were doing when they crucified the Lord of glory they would never have done it (1 Cor. 2.8). We ourselves are slow to comprehend this, are we not? Just as were the first disciples.

Satan thought to put an end to God's plan in man, and he succeeded back there in the Garden; he succeeded in causing Adam to disobey God, to sin, and brought the whole family of man down into death. Now here was the Son of God in his sights; he that had the power of death would put an end to this One as well, and totally annihilate any hope of this creature man ever escaping his grip. But, thinking to put an end to the Son of God by conspiring to have Him crucified, Satan actually planted the corn of wheat that bears much fruit exactly like the Seed that was planted.

“Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out.”

The cross comes in many forms. It can come by deep trial of circumstance or affliction. It can come by open persecution. It can come by rejection. It can come by reproach and misunderstanding at the hands of others. It can come at the hands of friends or foes, the one far more grievous than the other. It's all a form of injustice of some kind—suffering wrongfully (1 Pt. 2.19, 4.16). For the Just One, the death of the Cross, the death of a criminal, was an entirely unjust death. That's the significance of the Cross—an unjust death. His Adversary thought to put an end to Him by it. What happened instead?

Haman erected a gallows for Mordecai. Who was it that ended up hanging on that gallows?

Joseph's brethren casting him into prison thought to put an end to his dreams. What they did became the very thing that caused the dreams to be fulfilled.

We see this same divine principle over and over again in the life of the apostle Paul. His life was characterized by this one verse:

“For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4.11).

“We which live...” How precious to be made part of this. “For Jesus' sake.” It is Jesus' own great desire to manifest Himself in resurrection life... not just in the great day of The Resurrection. Now... while we are

yet in mortal flesh. This is the Devil's one dread—Life being manifested in his domain, in mortal man. He wants people to think he holds this domain secure. He brought death into the family of man way back there in the beginning, robbing man of life, and he aims to keep us in this state. He will keep using this weapon of his—death. But God has His own secret weapon. What the Devil didn't know is that God had a greater dimension of Life in Himself—and His intention all along was that man be the creature in whom this Life would be released—eternal life, the Resurrection and the Life. And so the hour came when this One who was the Resurrection and the Life took on Him flesh and blood—mortal flesh. And in due time He used the Devil's own weapon—death—to destroy him. Walking in obedience to the Father even unto death, and that the death of the Cross, He destroyed the Devil with his own weapon, at the same time loosing man from his bonds and releasing him into a totally new dimension of life. Resurrection life.

He accomplished this in Himself... in His Cross. The same Cross the Devil brought upon Him became His own secret weapon. But let us probe this a little further. Men were crucified every day back then. Was it the cross itself that became the Devil's own destruction? No, it was nailing the Christ to that cross that became his destruction. The Son of God was no ordinary man. This Man was the Resurrection and the Life: the cross, then, became the means by which that Life was released and shone forth in triumphant victory. Over sin. Over death. Over principalities and powers. Over all the devices of the Adversary. And so when we say that the Cross is God's secret weapon, it was only as Christ walked in obedience unto death that it became so. And it is only as we ourselves walk in obedience to the will of God that it becomes so in our own lives; it is only as we deny ourselves, take up our own cross and follow Jesus.

This was the continual pursuit of the apostle Paul—to release among men the triumph that Christ accomplished in His Cross. The Cross of Christ was a weapon the apostle Paul became very familiar with; as we shall see, he used this weapon over and over again.

Chapter Five **If By Any Means...**

One is awestruck reading Luke's account of Paul's life in the Acts, and also Paul's own testimony in his letters to the Corinthians. Paul was an addict, a man infected with an obsession. There was Something coursing in his veins that addicted him to the pursuit of resurrection life. Why so? It was because our Lord Jesus Christ had shared a secret with Paul. And Paul responded in faith; he acted upon this—the awareness of the secret power of God by which He defeats all His enemies; by which, in fact, He uses the devices of His enemies to defeat themselves, and brings forth His own in victorious resurrection life.

“For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4.11).

It's very encouraging to see this here—“we which *live*...” Paul is not talking about those who are alive in the ordinary sense of the word. In fact all men in Adam are “dead in trespasses and sins.” So Paul is speaking of those who have been baptized into Christ, have been begotten of God by the Spirit of God, and so now are alive with the eternal life of Christ within. Eternal life is not just something to be anticipated after life on earth is over. Paul said,

“Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6.4).

And so we who have been baptized into Christ have resurrection life within us—or should I say the Resurrection and the Life—the moment we are baptized into Christ and receive His Spirit. Our whole Christian life and walk is to be the expression of the resurrection life of Christ working in us—eternal life.

But again, why this obsession in Paul? Where did this come from? It will be a great encouragement to us to understand that it is God's own obsession. When God breathed into Adam “the breath of life,” he became “a living soul.” But as we said, God had yet a far greater dimension of life that He intended to—and longed to—give expression to. His great eternal purpose—which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord—is a Man who is the very expression of the glory of God. He did not fully have that in Adam, who was but “a figure of Him that was to come” (Rom. 5.14). So when Satan succeeded in contaminating man with His own disobedience, God-only-wise wrought it all into His ultimate intention to

reveal in another Man the fullness of His glory—resurrection Life. He greatly longed to reveal Himself as the Life that overcame the Death that entered into His creation as a result of the disobedience of Adam. And He did this in Christ—in His life, and death, and resurrection from the dead.

And so when Christ said, “I am the resurrection and the life,” He then and there defined true Life. True Life is resurrection Life—the Life that has overcome all sin, all death, and the Devil with all his principalities and powers. God *accomplished* this in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3.11, where the meaning of the Greek word translated *purposed* in the KJV is *wrought*, or *accomplished*). And He will yet fully manifest this accomplishment, both in the earth and in the heavens, in and through the church which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1.23, 3.10).

This Life, this resurrection life in man, is the full expression of the glory of God.

“Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldst believe thou shouldest see the glory of God?”

And so the reason Paul continually presented himself to God to be delivered unto death was because of this consuming passion for the outshining of the glory of Christ. It was actually the pressure of the Life within him just bursting to come forth in resurrection life “to the praise and glory of God.” This is the priestly calling—to be one who bears the glory of God for the benefit of others; we who have upon our lives the priestly calling of God are always presenting ourselves unto Him a living sacrifice that He might demonstrate in us:

“...the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies...” (Eph. 1.19).

It is all about the glory of God shining forth in resurrection life.

The call originates in God; this is what God Himself is longing to do—to reveal His glory. But what is it about this burden of His? There is something so compelling about it that when He shares this burden with certain ones they pursue it so ardently that they come forth in resurrection life *even before the time*—as the morning star in the darkness of early dawn. This was the burden, the pursuit of the apostle Paul. God had a great desire to make Himself known in resurrection life. Paul had a corresponding desire to know Him in this way.

“...That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death,

If by any means I might attain to the out-resurrection from among the dead” (Phil. 3.10,11).

That’s the way the Greek has it. “The out-resurrection from among the dead.” So it is not the general resurrection Paul has in mind here. He knows that will come in its time. His passion was to attain unto that resurrection *before the time*... so that the very resurrection life of Christ was made manifest in his *mortal* flesh.

Now consider. Why did Paul write of this hope of his? Why is this in our Bible? Only because it is God’s hope for us also—for you and for me. At one time the apostles were entirely out to sea concerning this matter of the resurrection. But on the day of Pentecost the very Spirit of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life began burning right in their hearts like a consuming fire, enabling every difficulty and death unto which they were delivered to become an opportunity for the shining forth of the Morning Star in the darkness of the night. This became their continual pursuit. So also with the apostle Paul after his confrontation with the ascended Christ on the Damascus Road. After he was baptized in the Spirit (after Ananias prayed for him) he had within him the power of resurrection life, and so he continually sought out the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings if by any means he might attain to this first resurrection. So also it must be with any who receive the Spirit of the Resurrection and the Life. This is why this is written in our God-breathed Bible. This by the hand of the apostle Paul is God’s hope for you and for me. And this makes us tremble, does it not? There are going to be some who in the great day of resurrection are already there—walking in resurrection life.

So often it seems to us that God is painfully slow in His movings. It requires assiduous patience to walk with God. The saints in all ages have yearned for His appearing. “O Lord Jesus, how long, how long, till we shout the glad song?” But is He in fact slow in His movings? The demons cried out, “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art Thou come hither to torment us *before the time*?” (Mt. 8.29). They knew their time, their doom, was inevitable... someday down the millennia when the Sun of righteousness would arise to dispel all the darkness of night, and the saints would take the kingdom and judge both men and angels. But here was this Light, this Morning Star—right before their eyes! It was still the deep of night to their darkened minds: this should not be happening!

Does this not serve as a warning to us? Yes, we must walk in the kingdom and patience of Christ. But at the same time we are called to continual watchfulness. Let us not be among those for whom the appearing of the Lord is a perpetually distant thing, and are suddenly overtaken by an appearing we were not expecting. Yes, that great Day comes, precipitating the resurrection of the dead. But “blessed and holy is he that hath part in *the first resurrection*. On such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20.6).

Who shall reign with Him the thousand years? Those who are “beheaded (literally, *axed*, that is, executed) for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God” (Rev. 20.4). They had the Witness of Jesus, the *Marturos*, in them, then—the Holy Spirit—and this caused them to become martyrs who lose their lives in this world. Let us be exhorted. Whether or not it results in actual physical execution, let us give the Holy Spirit free rein to lead us to this end: let us lay our own head on the block even today. Let us deny ourselves, disown ourselves, take up our cross daily, lay down our lives in this world—that we might find the Life that is life indeed. This is what Paul was doing. He was giving the Holy Spirit in him free rein to lead him into all truth—into the realm of resurrection life.

This, again, is the priestly calling; it is no selfish pursuit. It means presenting ourselves unto God a living sacrifice that He might have a people in whom He can manifest Himself in resurrection life. This, really, is what it is all about. God’s answer to all the problems of this world that men in all their efforts to resolve are only complicating and making worse... the answer is *a realm of Life that is Resurrection Life*—a new Creation that is the full expression of the Resurrection and the Life. *This* is the answer! Not conciliation, not mediation, not peace talks among men who are dead in trespasses and sins. But... a New Creation Man walking in resurrection Life with all enemies, all sin and death and darkness, under his feet! (See Ps. 18.9.)

This was Paul’s continual pursuit. The resurrection was to Paul a life to be attained to—not merely waited for. And because it was his pursuit it was ever his teaching. We see so clearly in his teachings that the life, eternal Life, resurrection life, is not just a future prospect, wondrous as that is. Resurrection life *is for now*—is to be “made manifest in our mortal flesh.” Paul’s teachings are filled with this. As in the passage in Ephesians we quoted above. Read it in its context: he is speaking of the power that is now working in those who are in Christ, in those who believe.

“...the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies...”

This power—the same power that was working in Christ when God raised Him from the dead—*is working in us*, Paul says.

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power *that worketh in us*,

Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph. 3.20,21).

Also this:

“But God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us,

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus...” (Eph. 2. 4-6).

I wonder if I don’t hear in this the echo of the words from Isaiah we quoted earlier: “Arise... and sit down...”

And once again, this passage from Romans:

Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection...” (Rom. 6. 4,5).

When we are baptized into Christ by baptism in Holy Spirit, we are instantly partakers of His death to sin—and of His resurrection life. Resurrection life now dwells in us, and we in Him, enabling a walk “in newness of life.” And as we walk this walk, what is the outcome? We will see this very dramatically as we look at what it meant in Paul’s life.

We cannot move on without also bringing in Paul’s teaching in Romans 5, where he speaks of the sin and the death that “passed through unto all men” as a result of Adam’s disobedience in the garden. As a result of this, “death reigned by the one (Adam)” (Rom. 5.17). And so death is not just an event that terminates our lives here on earth. Death

reigns over all men from the moment they are born to the moment they die. All men are in a state of death. All men, that is, except “they which receive abundance of grace, and (abundance) of the gift of righteousness...” These “reign *in life* by one, Jesus Christ.” Here, I believe... does not our vision of the out-resurrection from among *the dead* take on enlargement with these words?

And so this was Paul’s constant teaching. And his own pursuit. Scripture shows us over and over again the “deaths oft” he found himself in as he walked in newness of life. We will mention some of them in the next chapter. But first let’s hear from Paul’s own words what he continually gave himself to.

Paul’s Pursuit: the Resurrection

This is in the Acts, the story of Paul after he had come to Jerusalem where with great forbearance he kept a vow with certain of the Jewish brethren who had not yet fully parted ways with the old rituals of the Law. (See 1 Cor. 9.20 for an understanding of the love that motivated Paul to do this.) But suddenly he was recognized in the temple precincts by some of the Jews who had come down to Jerusalem from Asia. Here was their archenemy right in their midst! Their hue and cry went up! They laid hands on this heretic and dragged him swiftly out of their holy court, and were about to kill him, and would have succeeded if the chief captain of the Roman band had not been told about the uproar and come immediately with soldiers to rescue him.

But as Paul was being led away he asked permission to speak to the people as he stood on the stairs. And since he spoke in Hebrew it got their attention. They listened to him attentively... that is, listened until he related that God had said He would send him “unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22.21). At this despised word the whole crowd was filled with wrath and cried out, “Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.” They started throwing dust in the air and tearing off their outer garments, readying themselves for a stoning. So the chief captain had Paul safely away. But the next day the captain, wanting to find out specifically what this was all about, commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear before him, with Paul present again.

Things get very intense very quickly once again. But then Paul perceives that half of the council are Pharisees, and half of them Sadducees. He cries out in their midst, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question” (Acts 23.6). Immediately the two factions forget about Paul and are at one another’s throats. For, the Pharisees allowed the resurrection in their doctrine, but the Sadducees denied it.

“We find no evil in this man,” the Pharisees now cry, and the two factions begin fighting over Paul. In danger again of being pulled in pieces by them, he is rescued by the Roman guard again—rescued to prison, that is. The Lord appears to him the following night and stands by him with a word of encouragement.

“Be of good cheer, Paul; as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23.11).

But next day certain of the Jews band together and bind themselves with an oath that they will not touch bread or drink till they have killed Paul. His sister’s son hears of the plot, and visits Paul in the prison and tells him about the conspiracy. Paul calls one of the centurions to take the young man to the chief captain, who, when he hears of the plot, calls a large contingency of soldiers to take Paul to Antipatris, and from thence to Caesarea to Felix the governor, who “commanded him to be kept in Herod’s judgment hall.” Felix arranges another hearing, and this time Ananias the high priest and certain elders with an orator named Tertullus seek to lay their charges against “this pestilent fellow” once again. The governor listens to their accusations, and then gives Paul an opportunity to speak for himself. He responds that his accusers cannot prove any of the things they charge against him.

And then he adds this.

“But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way, which they call heresy (or, a sect) so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets;

And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men” (Acts 24.15).

Once again we see Paul’s focus on resurrection life. Felix on this occasion puts Paul’s accusers off, but at the same time keeps him in prison, calling for him frequently, hoping Paul will try to bribe him to let him go. Paul spends two years in prison here, till Porcius Festus succeeds Felix as governor. All along, the high priest and the elders haven’t forgotten Paul, and so when the new governor pays a visit to Jerusalem they ask him to have Paul brought up to them there, intending once again to lie in wait and kill him. Festus, however, decides to have a hearing in Caesarea again, inviting the Jews from Jerusalem to come down, who, once again “laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove” (Acts 25.7). Festus, however, wants to

do something to curry favour with the Jews, so he tries to work Paul into going to Jerusalem again to be judged there.

Paul responds that if he has done something wicked he refuses not to die, but if none of the Jews' accusations against him can be proven, "no man may deliver me unto them."

And so at this time, knowing that the Lord has shown him he must "also see Rome," he says, "I appeal unto Caesar."

Festus responds, "Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go."

Now, when Herod Agrippa on a visit to the new governor hears that "this man left in bonds by Felix" has appealed to Caesar, suddenly a case that the day before would have bored him to tears is very interesting. The man will appear before the great and mighty Caesar? In that case, no small man himself, he too will hear Paul.

"And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth" (Acts 25.23).

Let us hear the words of this humble man beloved of the Lord, now brought before kings for Jesus' sake. They are very precious words, and very significant:

"...And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:

Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly (or, intently) serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26. 6-8).

These are significant words. What is the hope of Israel? What do all the covenants and promises find their fulfillment in? Paul sums it all up in one Promise: the resurrection. This is what "our twelve tribes" are preoccupied with. They instantly—intently—serve God night and day... to what end? The word *serving* is the Greek word *latruo* which in Scripture is always used of priestly service or worship. That is to say, what they, "our twelve tribes," are doing, they are doing as priests, as a *priestly service* to God. What is this priestly service? What is the purpose of these twelve tribes of Israel, this kingdom of priests? They present themselves to God a living sacrifice—their priestly service—they wait on

God day and night with all that is in them if by any means they might help forward His promise to them and their fathers... that of revealing resurrection life to a dying creation, a creation under the sentence of death since that day in Eden.

They hope to *come* to this—to arrive to it, to attain to it.

This, “this one thing,” is what Paul so ardently pursued. For, this is what Israel is supposed to be all about, he says—graciously making no mention of Israel’s chronic apostasy and actual state at this time. Oh, the irony of it. Paul is in trouble with his own people for their own wondrous hope. He is in trouble with his own people for cleaving to their own hope and for pursuing it with all his heart—the hope of attaining to resurrection life.

He tells Agrippa further,

“For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness” (Acts. 26. 21-25).

Again, these are priceless words, and let’s break them open. No, I am not mad, most noble Festus. There is no greater hope than this—that Christ should suffer and that He *first* should show *Light* unto His own people, and then by them to the Gentiles: *Light*. That is, that He *first* should *by resurrection* show *Light*, should announce, *proclaim the Gospel*, shine forth *by resurrection life*, the Gospel, the Glad Tidings: *Light* unto the people, and to the Gentiles. This is why I give myself to Him counting all things loss, “that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead.”

Oh that this might grip us as it gripped Paul! Let us read those words again slowly, and weigh them carefully. Resurrection Life is...

Light! Light shining forth in the darkness! *That* is the Gospel, the Good News! The Gospel is not just words. It is *Light*—that is, *resurrection Life*, Life victorious over death and darkness! And if Christ was *first* to shine forth this *Light*...

...Is that, Paul, why you now are you so impassioned about this?

Yes, to see the shining forth of the Gospel—resurrection life—where death formerly reigned. That's what burns in me. And it is a passion for the glory of God. It has nothing to do with any ambition of my own to press into the last frontier and make a name for myself. It is not for my own sake that I seek to attain to the resurrection. I am consumed with a passion for the glory of God, for the Gospel of the glory of Christ. Attaining to the resurrection... it is *for Jesus' sake* I long for this—and for His body's sake, the church! That is the fire I am feeding within me. For Jesus' sake and the Gospel's... and the glory of God. Oh, that *Christ* be glorified in me... whether by life or by death.

This is what made Paul one of the priests of God in His kingdom of priests. Yes, he taught, he preached, he ministered, he guided the church. But that was not his pursuit. As one in whom the hope of God dwelt, he was seeking to attain unto the resurrection from among the dead. This is the fire that was in his bones—the passion and longing to see a *Life manifested*... in his mortal flesh, *resurrection life*... shining forth as *Light* in his *mortal body*.

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

And so the earthen vessel is broken, as in the day of Gideon, and suddenly there is *Light* in the darkness!

“For we *which live* are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

“So then death worketh in us, but life in you.”

...Life in you? The apostle Paul had heard something, had seen something. He'd had a revelation of Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road.

“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *Me?*”

It was a revelation of *Jesus Christ*—and in it Paul discovered that those he had been persecuting, and this One who now unveiled Himself to Him—*they were one*.

We don't know just when all the implications of this wondrous revelation took shape in Paul's understanding, but we read in his writings that he had come to *know* something about resurrection life. He knew that being delivered unto death “for Jesus' sake” ministered life *into the body of Christ*. He told the Colossians he rejoiced in his sufferings for them,

“And fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of the afflictions (Gk. *troubles*) of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church:

Whereof I am made a minister...” (Col. 1.23).

In other words, Paul's faith in the reality of resurrection life was so strong that he embraced not only his own portion of the cross, but looked to take upon himself the sufferings of others in the church as well.

In another place he wrote, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ” (Gal. 6.2).

What Law is that?

The law of love.

What love in this man—the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Chapter Six In Deaths Oft

Those two passages of scripture in Acts Chapter 26 certainly give us a clear understanding as to why we continually read of Paul in situations that are a matter of life and death. It was because Christ in His cross had abolished, annulled, death, had made it of no effect, had taken the teeth out of it, and had “brought life and incorruption to light *by the gospel*” (2 Tim. 1.10). That is the essence of the Gospel, and Paul had been appointed an apostle, a preacher, a herald, of this Gospel (2 Tim. 1.11). And so he continually sought opportunity in the will of God to *preach* it, to *proclaim* it—that is, not to just stand behind a pulpit expounding about the Gospel, but to bear about in his body “the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor. 4.10).

Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians is pressed full to overflowing with this message. He tells them right at the start of his “trouble which came upon us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life...” (2 Cor. 1.8). Why was this?

“But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God *which raiseth the dead*:

Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us...”

Paul and those with him had the sentence of death upon them. God had delivered them unto death. For what reason? To the intent that He might reveal in and through them His resurrection life. And so, what utter folly to trust in themselves and seek to preserve their lives! If they carried in themselves a sentence of death, they would put their trust in the God who *raiseth the dead*. Now mark. He who had delivered them *unto* death had first in the cross of Jesus Christ delivered them “*from* so great a death.” And so now He would make what He accomplished in the Cross of Calvary a reality in their lives...delivering them from death and *continuing* to do so, the Corinthians helping together by prayer in this awesome corporate operation of God (2 Cor. 1.11).

Paul and those with him had been “pressed out of measure” in Asia, to the point that they “despaired even of living.” But later in the same letter he tells them of the treasure in the earthen vessel, and that when the earthen vessel is delivered unto death, the treasure within the vessel shines forth, and God is glorified. The English translation can’t

capture the nuances that are there in the original Greek, but we can grasp the principle Paul is teaching—and *testifying* of its reality in his life—that in the midst of perilous and impossible pressures and difficulties there is yet to be revealed, in and through those who live, the triumph of a certain Life.

“We are troubled on every side...” That is, “we are pressed in every way...” Or, pressured, squeezed, pressed like grapes in a press...

“Yet not distressed...” That is, “not straitened,” not narrowed, not cramped in a tight place, not crushed...

“We are perplexed...” That is, “we are without a way...”

“Yet not in despair...” Not “utterly at a loss for a way...” In other words, there is yet a Way when there is no way!

“Persecuted...” That is, “pursued...”

“But not forsaken...” Not “abandoned, left alone...”

“Cast down...” Or, “smitten down...”

“But not destroyed...”

“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.”

And why all this?

“So then death worketh in us, but life in you.”

It was love for the church that motivated Paul and those with him.

And if the Devil had known this principle—it is a law, the inexorable Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus—he would never have crucified the Lord of glory, as we said. He would never have planted the Son of God—the corn of wheat that fell into the ground and died. He would never have conspired to have Stephen stoned, nor instigated the persecution against the church that began that day. For the persecution caused a scattering that spread the Gospel far and wide (Acts 8.1,4).

And the stoning of Stephen was instrumental in the raising up of a certain young man named Saul, who became one of Satan's most formidable foes.

As we follow along his pathway as recorded in the Acts we see this Law continually at work—that as Paul walked in the way of the Cross, as he was delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, the resurrection life of Jesus was continually made manifest and the Devil continually foiled in his own workings. In the last chapter we gave Paul's own words as to what motivated the way he walked. Now we will sketch out that walk. Let us bear two things in mind as we read, and they are related.

One, walking in the pathway of the Cross is not a passive thing—just passively submitting to evils that come upon us. Paul was walking in the will of God, was doing His will, walking *in newness of Life*, walking in the Light, advancing the Kingdom of God with every step God led him in.

Two, we cannot manufacture this kind of thing—in which what we are doing overcomes death and causes resurrection life to break forth—of our own ingenuity. We must be led of the Spirit of God in all things. We must be walking in the Spirit, seeking to be attentive to the leadings of the Lord. Paul brought the forces of darkness upon him because step by step he was walking in the Light and in the Life. The Life in him was being manifested *as Light*—and it caused a reaction from the powers of darkness.

And so we begin with Paul's encounter on the Damascus Road. He is on his way, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, to deliver Christians to prison and to death. Suddenly He sees a Light above the brightness of the sun, and hears a Voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" The result is that he who once "persecuted this Way unto the death" begins to walk in this same Way. He has a new mission now. Instead of persecuting the saints at Damascus he "preached Christ in the synagogues" (Acts 9.20). For this he finds himself on the receiving end of the malice that had so recently motivated him.

"And the Jews took counsel to kill him... And they watched the gates day and night to kill him" (Acts 9.24,25).

And so right out of the gate Paul begins to discover "how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake" (Acts 9.16). His life is continually on the line. The brethren let him down the wall in a basket by night, and he goes back to Jerusalem. However, the saints there were still afraid of him till Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. Then they received him into their company, and he "spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus." This brought further persecution

upon him, and once again the Jews “went about to slay him” (Acts 9.29). So the brethren had him away to Tarsus, after which the churches had a short season of rest.

We come upon Paul again after the Holy Spirit has sent him and Barnabas out from the church of Antioch in Syria (Acts 13.1-3). They travel through a number of places. Paul is preaching Christ the Resurrection. Luke records the words Paul spoke at Antioch in Pisidia, and we begin to see the deep and Spirit-inspired insight into the Scriptures he had been given as he declares to the Jews that the words of the second psalm, “this day have I begotten thee,” as well as “the sure mercies of David” in Isaiah Ch. 55, refer to the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 13.30-41).

One thing more here. Let us not overlook the significance of Paul here linking together the Gospel with the promise made to the fathers—saying that God has fulfilled (the Greek word means *completely fulfilled*) that promise *by raising up Jesus from the dead*. In Paul’s Spirit-inspired thinking, the promise God made to the fathers—to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob—is fulfilled in the Gospel of *the resurrection of Christ* (as we saw also at Acts 26.6-8). This—the resurrection of Christ—is the sum and substance of the Gospel, the glad tidings. And the promise God made to the fathers is fulfilled in this Gospel—not in some future dispensation after the so-called church age.

“And we announce to you the glad tidings—(announce-the glad-tidings is all one word in the Greek)—the promise made to the fathers, that God has [completely] fulfilled the same to us their children, having raised up Jesus, as it is written in the second psalm...” (Acts 13.32 literal translation).

Now note this, and we marvel. When the Jews reject Paul’s words God opens the door to the Gentiles (Acts 13.46-47). And so Satan, instead of shutting the Gospel down by means of the hardness of heart of the Jews... to his dismay the Gospel increases and multiplies by leaps and bounds. It is that powerful Law at work again—the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus—triumphing over the law of sin and death.

Paul and Barnabas now spend “long time” at Iconium “speaking boldly in the Lord, who gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Acts. 14.3). However, the city is divided. There is a plot made by both Jews and Gentiles to stone them. So they move on to Lystra where Paul heals a man crippled from birth (Acts 14.10). This causes the people to attempt to worship them. “The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.” It is the Devil at work again. If he can’t kill them outright he will attempt

to take them in his own snare—pride. But Paul and Barnabas rend their clothes and cry out and bring it all to a halt.

Okay, says the Devil, back to Plan A. Certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium come on the scene a day or two later and persuade the people against the apostles. Now instead of wanting to worship Paul they stone him, and drag him out of the city, “supposing he had been dead” (Acts 14.19). “Howbeit as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city.” Was Paul actually dead? We are not told. But *rose up* in the Greek is the same word used of being raised in resurrection. In any case this is certainly one of the occasions where he was “delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake,” and resurrection life was manifested as a result of it.

Some time later Paul is delivered unto death also in Philippi. Paul is with Silas now. And he casts out a spirit of divination from a woman here. When her masters discover the source of their income is gone they bring Paul and Silas before the magistrates, who have them scourged and thrown into prison. The city breathes a sigh of relief; they have shut these men down in Philippi. But this simply provides Paul and Silas with another opportunity of witnessing Christ and the resurrection. For, as they sing praises at midnight there is suddenly a great earthquake. The foundations of the prison are shaken, its doors are flung open, and everyone’s bonds are loosed. The jailer suddenly awakening sees the prison doors open. He realizes he’ll be executed for letting the prisoners escape, so he draws his sword to kill himself. Paul cries out—remember, all is pitch dark—“Do thyself no harm: for we are all here” (Acts 16.28). The jailer calls for a light and springs in, and comes trembling and falls down before Paul and Silas.

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And it is not long before he and all his house believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Once again we see this operation—men in whom is Life taking up their cross and being delivered unto death, and resurrection life breaks forth because of it. When the disciples of Christ are walking in the way of the cross, the Devil and wicked men, do what they may, are undone by their own doings. God in fact furthers His purposes by what they have done.

We are not touching on everything in The Acts; we just want to draw attention to this wondrous working of God by which a man in whom is the Spirit of life, who then commits himself to walk in the way of the Cross—this causes resurrection life to break forth at every step.

So we move on to Athens, where Paul, as is his custom, disputes in the synagogues of the Jews. He also meets with “devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.” This must be where he meets certain philosophers of the Epicurean and Stoic schools. He preaches unto them “Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18). Wonderful, they think—something newer to relieve their boredom. So they take Paul with them to their daily discussion session, where he opens to them the Gospel of the unknown God. He has their attention till he comes to his words about—you guessed it—God raising Jesus from the dead (Acts 17.30). For this simplemindedness he is mocked by the sages there. A dead man coming to life again? What utter foolishness. They dismiss him. It is philosophy they are interested in, not fairy tales.

“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness...” (1 Cor. 1.22,23).

In Chapter 18 Paul is in Corinth where once again He is strongly resisted by the Jews, and once again declares his intent that “from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” (Acts 18.6). The Lord assures him in a vision,

“Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee, for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18.10).

Paul continues in Corinth for a year and a half ministering among Gentile believers before moving on to Ephesus, where he stays for something like two years.

In Chapter 20 Paul is preaching at Troas. He is in a gathering in a home there, and preaches in an upper chamber long into the night. A young man named Eutychus is listening while sitting in a window. It’s late, and his eyes are heavy. His head starts to nod, and he falls asleep. Suddenly he falls to the ground “from the third loft” and is taken up dead. But Paul rushes down and falls upon him—like Elisha of old—“and embracing him he said, Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him.”

There is resurrection life at work in this man who has himself been delivered unto death time and time again.

“So then death worketh in us, but life in you.”

We come now to the occasion when at Miletus Paul calls together the elders of Ephesus to bid them a final farewell. And he tells them,

“I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem not knowing the things that shall befall me there;

Save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city that bonds and afflictions abide me.

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God...” (Acts. 20. 22-24).

He has set his face as a flint to go to Jerusalem. Wherever he stops along the way he is advised he should not go up to Jerusalem. But his answer is,

“What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21.13).

Chapter 21 brings us to Paul in the temple at Jerusalem, and the chief captain of the Roman band rescuing him, which we recounted at length in the last chapter. Paul is stretched out for another scourging, there is a conspiracy to assassinate him, and he spends at least two years in jail here, during which time he appeals to Caesar.

On the way to Rome he is shipwrecked—but in the shipwreck the power at work in him is once again wonderfully manifested. The ship is totally lost; in fact they would all have been lost if not for Paul the prisoner making earnest intercession, I am sure with his friends Aristarchus and Luke. And so everyone on board, 276 souls in all, instead of going to a watery grave are all preserved.

They are cast on a certain island called Melita—all safe and sound, but drenched to the bone, and cold. The “barbarous people” are kind to them, and kindle a fire for them. Paul gathers a few sticks and as he is putting them on the fire a viper comes out of the heat and fastens on him. But he shakes it off into the fire “and felt no harm” (Acts 28.5). The natives eye him. They know this viper is deadly. They are certain that justice has caught up with this criminal whoever he is, and in a moment or two he will drop dead; they’ve seen it happen many times. However, Paul doesn’t drop dead. So they change their minds and say he is a god.

And so it is not long after this that we read of Paul after his “prosperous journey” now close to Rome. Luke says:

“And from thence (from Rome) when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The Three Taverns: whom, when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage” (Acts 28.15).

Paul took courage? Why the need? By now we are thinking he’s superhuman. But at Corinth earlier we were told that the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision and encouraged him to not be afraid (Acts 18.9,10). Paul afraid? Paul needing to take courage? But Paul is not some otherworldly being. He is a mortal man as we are mortal men. He is an earthen vessel just like us... but an earthen vessel with a treasure in it... just like us.

And so now he is in Rome. The Scriptures give no account of his hearing before Caesar, nor of his later execution there, which he himself referred to as the crowning conclusion of his life—the time of his “offering up” (Phil. 2.17, 2 Tim. 4.6).

We are in awe as we read of what Paul suffered in his love for the Lord Jesus, and for all saints. Yet all this that Luke put down is only a partial record of what Paul went through. Look at his own account in 2 Corinthians:

“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth through Christ” (2 Cor. 1.6).

“...We despaired even of life... that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (2 Cor. 1.8,9).

“So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

We, having the same Spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;

Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor. 4.12).

“...In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings,

By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned,

By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet true;

As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor and yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. 6. 4-10).

We trace through all this the beautiful workings of the power of resurrection life triumphant in the midst of great suffering—as the Lord through Ananias had promised Paul (Acts 9.16).

Now mark what Paul sets forth as his curriculum vitae for a minister of the Gospel of Christ:

“Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

Of the Jews five times received I the forty stripes save one.

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep;

In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

Beside those things that are without, that which cometh on me daily, the care of all the churches” (2 Cor. 11. 23-28).

I know, all this can be quite intimidating to us ordinary Christians. We wonder if we are even on the map. It can have the same effect on us as on the man who heard a very great violinist play: he went home and broke his own violin. Let us not do that. Let us not break our own violin. Let us take up our own Cross, our own “instrument of ten strings”—ten in Scripture being the number that signifies testing and trial and trouble—remembering that the same power that was at work in Paul is still there in the Spirit of Christ, working in all them that believe. It may be dormant. But it is there. Let it be our earnest prayer that it be awakened once again. The power of resurrection life. Awakened in you and me (and we quote this passage again)...

“...the exceeding greatness of His power *to usward who believe*, according to the working of his mighty power

Which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies...”

We take courage in this. The same power that was at work in Christ when God raised Him from the dead is there “to usward who believe.” Paul discovered it to be true. And the same power that Paul proved to be real is there also for us. “...Toward us who believe...” This was Paul’s own pursuit. It must be ours as well.

“...That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings...”

Note the order here. Note what is first. The power of His resurrection. If we don’t have that resurrection Life in us by the Spirit of Christ in us, death, or course, will always triumph. But if we do, with that power at work in us, when the Devil seeks to bring his weapon of death to bear upon us in some way or another, death is always defeated. For like the corn of wheat that falls into the ground and dies, when death does its work, the kernel comes forth in abundant fruit.

And so, is there some plot of fertile ground in the vicinity of our own life into which you and I can lose our lives, can fall and die? No doubt there is. Let us not fear to do that. Let us rather fear saving our lives in this world, which we may do easily enough, it seems, but with, oh, tragic loss. Let us believe our Lord Jesus. The very cross that He bids you and me to carry, to take up and carry, following Him, will issue in the life we long to live, and this beyond our greatest expectations: resurrection life victorious over all.

Let us believe our Lord, and be inspired by the life of Paul and the record of others in the early church. These things in the Bible record are there for *our* sake: to exhort *us*, encourage *us*, inspire *us*. The early church was just, as some have called it, the seed church. If that, then, was the church just as it came out of the womb, what then shall be the mature, the full grown church... the fruit?

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it beareth much fruit.”

Chapter Seven **Therefore My Beloved Brethren...**

In the resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, Paul begins with these words.

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand...

...That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...”

Then after laying out the beautiful foundation of our hope Paul ends with this. We need to read the whole chapter to get the impact of what he is saying and calling us to. But he ends with this:

“Therefore *my beloved brethren*, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

These are very beautiful words to find here, and very significant words. Paul has started with, “Moreover, brethren...” He finishes with, “Therefore my beloved brethren...” It is the brotherhood of those who are called to work together with God in His great eternal purpose of revealing His glory, revealing Himself—in the Resurrection and the Life. This brotherhood (the word is gender inclusive) is a kingdom of priests who wait on God night and day to the intent that His promise of resurrection life might be realized triumphantly throughout all the earth. This is the brotherhood spoken of so often by the apostles, spoken of with such tender affection and love.

This brotherhood is beloved by the Father—and so *by one another*.

“Love the brotherhood,” Peter enjoins upon us (1 Pt. 2.17). Brethren—the word includes the sisters—we are called to something. Together. We are called to make known in the earth and in the heavens the reality of resurrection life, the redemption that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is far, far, from an easy calling. And so we are called to inspire and encourage and strengthen and help one another in it.

If there is to be resurrection there must first be death. But what kind of death? The death of Christ. The dying of the Lord Jesus. If it is the resurrection life of Christ that is to be revealed in and through us there must be a sharing together in *His* death. What is that all about?

First of all it involves being baptized into His death by the Spirit baptism. Then subsequently it involves being made conformable to that death by taking up our own cross daily, and walking in fellowship with Him.

What does this involve? I leave it to you to explore this; there is much in Scripture that shows us the kind of death He died, revealing the character of the Lamb who defeated death. Here I want to draw attention to just one thing. The death of Christ was the death of Him who *loved* us, and gave Himself for us (Eph. 5.1). Yes, “He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*” (Gal. 2.20). Yes, His sacrifice on the Cross was a demonstration of His love for *me* as an individual. That is so precious. But it is also a love that encompasses us all together. “Unto Him who loved *us*, and washed *us* from our sins in His own blood...” (Rev. 1.5). You mean He loved and died for my brother too, my sister? How then can we not love one another?

What happened at Calvary was a revelation of the love of God, a love with great breadth to it, great length, great depth, great height. Much of the meaning of Calvary would not be revealed till after Christ had ascended and sent His Spirit, imparting revelation that has become Holy Scripture. Yet let us remember. Jesus did not die on the cross in a... how shall I put it? In a merely theological way. Do you know what I’m trying to say? The story of the Cross is a love story involving people. Mary Magdalene. Peter. John. Thomas. Cleopas and his friend... People like you and me. He loved us, and died for us, laid down His life for us.

“...And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn. 3.16).

Let’s read this in context.

Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

(1 Jn. 3. 13-16)

There again—*the brethren*. If we do not love our brother, no matter how far advanced in understanding we might feel we are, apparently we haven’t gone anywhere yet. We abide yet in death.

And if we do love our brother, how is this expressed? We lay down our life for him—as Jesus laid down His life for us.

It's a very demanding calling—this love of God. But we are a kingdom of priests who are not “hurt of the second death” (Rev. 2.11, 20.6). If we lose our life, if we lay down our life in this world, we find it again. And so we do not fear carrying our own cross, and laying down our lives for one another. Yes, each one of us has his own cross to carry, our brother has his own cross to carry, and we cannot carry it for him. But—what a wonder—even Jesus Himself needed help to carry His cross. So with one another. Each one must carry His own cross. But we can exhort one another, encourage one another, help one another, to carry that cross, and follow our Lord—the One Who is the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

“Therefore my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved” (Phil. 4.1).

What great love Paul had for his beloved brethren. How he longed for them, yearned for them, agonized over them, that they might hold true to the end and attain the prize of that high and holy calling in Christ Jesus, and “attain unto the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3.11).

“For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1.8).

Can we can hear him urging yet, his words yet speaking to us in the Holy Spirit? “Go for it, my beloved brethren! Run, that ye may obtain the prize!”

Does this same love for the brethren that flowed in Paul's veins... does it pulse in our own hearts?

Or in another place, to the Thessalonians. I want to quote the full passage, though it is long. I encourage you to read it slowly; you cannot help but feel the love coming through.

“But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

For ye are our glory and joy.

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity (love), and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:

Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:

For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;

Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1 Thes. 2.17- 3.13).

Does this not humble our heart, cause us to bow our head? Oh, to see this same fervency of love one for another—preoccupation not with ourselves and our own things, but with one another. This is the atmosphere our Lord is longing to see us living and breathing and dwelling in—the atmosphere of love. I say with tears in my eyes that we have seen too much of the other. Yet in great love and patience our Lord Jesus Christ continues to call to us, calling us to lay down our lives for one another as He laid down His own life for us. Oh to *hear* Him speaking afresh to us His *new commandment*—that we love one another as He has loved us!

He actually said that? Yes, this is what He said. "As I have loved you!" "This is my commandment..."

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, *as I have loved you.*

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15. 11-13).

Fulness of joy! Are we lacking joy? Do we want to know where we can find it—not just more of it, but *fullness* of joy? It will be found in loving one another *as* Christ has loved us. Not with a lesser, an inferior love, but *as* He has loved us! Jesus could not contain the love He felt for His own when He rose from the dead. What was the first word from His lips after He was raised from the dead? He was bursting with a Message for them. For the joy that was set before Him, He had endured the Cross. Now He is risen! And so when Jesus Himself meets the women whom the angel has bidden to bring the disciples the news that He has risen, what is His first word to them?

“*Rejoice!*” (Mt. 28.8).

Oh, the *JOY* that filled Him! Sin, death... utterly vanquished!

He had done it all for their sake! For our sake! For my sake, for your sake!

And so He gives us the secret of His own joy. Fullness of joy will be ours in the same love for the brethren.

In spite of the condition of things in this hour, God will find *some* who enter into His love, and into His joy, *some* who “...walk in love *as* Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (Eph. 5.2).

As much as we bemoan the condition of things in “the church” these days—the splintered state of “the church,” the broken relationships, the carnal divisions, the misunderstandings, the resentments, the pride, the ambition, the hardness of heart, the lack of forgiveness, the unwillingness to forbear one another in love... even so—he that hath an ear, let him hear—*there is nothing hindering the coming forth of the fruit of the Spirit in the power of resurrection life.* There is nothing hindering the coming forth *of love.* Conditions are absolutely perfect for a harvest of love to come forth. What we see around us in this hour is just so much fuel for the fire... *of love!* Love is a consuming fire—and there is much, much fuel for that fire these days!

Beloved brethren, if we aspire to attain to the resurrection from among the dead—the first resurrection—oh, what a cleansing of our motives we need! Oh for the eyes of Fire to search out the thoughts and intents of the heart. The first resurrection, the Morning Star, is not for those who think in terms of their own attainment. It is not for those who think they are way out in front somewhere, having left the organized church realm back there in the dust. This is for those who walk daily in the Way of the cross, the Way in which death worketh in them, that life may work in others. It is the Way of love. It was in great love, and in the will of God, that Christ died. *For us.*

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 Jn. 3.16).

This is what the walk “in newness of life” is all about. It is walking in love. Let us look at that passage again.

Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death?

Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:3,4).

To walk in newness of life, then, is to walk in resurrection life. The disciple of Jesus, having been baptized into Christ, walks in the very resurrection life of Christ. It is this that enables him to lay down his life, and thus discover the working of God that causes that life to increase, and increase, and increase.... in others.

The resurrection life of Christ is for those who lay down their lives *for the brethren*. It is not for those consider it a laurel with which to crown their own brow, but for those who give themselves to this wondrous working of God that others may live and be crowned.

“Death worketh in us,” said Paul, “but life in you.”

As in the days of Joseph, when his brethren had betrayed him into slavery. God had given Joseph a dream of reigning in the midst of his brethren. Now the very opposite takes place; instead of reigning, he is reduced to slavery, his brethren sell him into slavery. But—oh the wisdom of the Cross—this proves to be the very way to the throne, to the fulfillment of his dreams. When it seems his hope is forever gone, and he will be a slave in prison in Egypt for the rest of his life, in a single day he goes from the prison to the throne! Yet who was that crown for? The hour comes when Joseph’s brethren themselves are captives in Egypt. Oh, the

torment of the place they find themselves in now! But the man Zaphnath-paeneah has them just where he wants them—reduced to the greatest extremity... with no way out.

It is then that Judah steps forward. And makes a very broken plea from the heart, concluding with these words:

“...Let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondslave to my lord...”

He is laying down his life for his brother. As far as he knows he will spend the rest of his days a slave to a cruel and merciless Egyptian. The others stand there, heads bowed. They are undone. Their sin has come back to haunt them. God, after all these years, has found them out.

But right in that very moment they are on the edge of a heart-stopping visitation. Suddenly this heartless dictator is... why is he weeping? What did he just say?

“I... am... Joseph...”

So also is the resurrection from the dead. God is able to design things so that He is able to prove the verity of our love, and our motives. He designs things so that, as far as we know, we are laying down our lives for our brother... never to see our precious life again. God doesn't say, “It's all right, you know. Nothing to worry about. Just lay down your life for your brother; I'll shortly raise you from the dead.”

No, He designs things so that as far as we know, as far as we can see, this means the end of us, that our brother might live.

God designs it so. He is seeking love. Not play-acting love. Genuine love.

He is seeking the love for our brother that has grown greater than our love for our own lives.

Who is sufficient for such things? Only those who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. They alone know the faith and the love that enables them to lay down their life, that they might find it again—as the Morning Star that is given to them.

He that hath an ear, let him hear.

The End