

Discovering The Risen Life

“Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail. ...There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.”

(From A Christmas Carol, Charles Dickens, 1843, Stave 1: Marley's Ghost.)

Charles Dickens begins his classic story of the Christmas transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge by emphasizing the deadness of his partner, Jacob Marley. Understanding that Marley was “as dead as a door-nail” is essential in Dickens’ mind, for his readers to be wonderfully impacted by the story he is about to unfold. If you didn’t know that Marley was dead, then you wouldn’t be shocked and amazed when he mysteriously appears.

In a similar way, there is a foundational truth that needs to be distinctly understood by those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. In order for us to fully appreciate and be wonderfully impacted by what God has been accomplished in our lives, we need to understand with absolute clarity our condition prior to placing our faith in Jesus. Read the following verses and see if you can identify the key truth.

· “... death came to all men, because all sinned” Rom 5:12

- “For the wages of sin is death” Rom. 6:23
- “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.” Eph. 2:1
- “When you were dead in your sins ...” Col. 2:13

It’s not hard to spot, but have you allowed the reality of your condition without Christ to sink in? You weren’t simply spiritually sick or suffering from spiritual malnutrition or in need of spiritual rehab. You were dead! Spiritually dead. There was absolutely nothing you could do to correct your situation. No amount of moral improvement could possibly address our need before God. As Dr. Howard Hendricks frequently said in his Dallas Seminary classroom, “Our need is total, not partial.”

For some, the idea of mankind being spiritually dead, apart from faith in Christ, may sound extremely basic, even to the degree that it doesn’t need to be addressed. If you are feeling that way chances are good that you have grown up in a Christian home and attended a bible teaching church but you are in the minority. For the majority of those living in the United States and around the world the notion that man is somehow impaired to the point of being unable to solve his own dilemma is unthinkable, even offensive. Most of society embraces the idea that man is basically good. In his book *What Americans Believe*, George Barna of Barna Research Group found that 87% of non-Christians agreed with the statement “People are basically good.” But this belief in the inherent goodness of humankind isn’t peculiar to non-Christians. It has found its way into the Church as well. In that same study, Barna also found that 77% of self-described born-again Christians agreed with the statement. Perhaps most shocking, of those self-

described born-again Christians who identify themselves as *mainline Protestant*, 90% agreed with the statement “People are basically good.”¹ The prevailing message in society is that society’s problems can be remedied with more money, additional education, and better technology. In other words, man can fix his problem. The gospel of Jesus remains a hollow message if those who hear it fail to recognize their fundamental need. The need of mankind is not financial, educational, technological, or even physical. The need of every man, woman and child on the face of the planet is spiritual. Mankind has a spiritual problem that he or she is powerless to remedy.

Imagine for a moment that you are sitting in the observation area, overlooking an operating room in a prestigious University Medical Center. Lying on the stainless steel table under the sterile fluorescent light is a corpse—cold and lifeless. Surrounding the corpse is a team of doctors. They are the brightest minds in the medical world. Each has unsurpassed expertise in a particular field. This is a medical dream-team.

The question at hand is “How can life be restored to this lifeless body?” There is a sense of excitement in the room over the possibility of witnessing a medical miracle. This may not be your area of training but you are mesmerized by what you are seeing.

One by one the experts begin to make their recommendations. The first doctor says, “I believe this patient needs to strengthen his heart and should begin a cardiac rehab program immediately.” The next doctor says, “The lung function is definitely diminished.

¹ George Barna, *What Americans Believe* (Ventura: Regal, 1991), 89-91.

I prescribe a change of climate and intensive respiratory therapy.” Yet another doctor, a world renowned nutritionist says, “This patient is suffering from severe malnutrition. He needs to begin a vitamin enriched, high protein, low carbohydrate diet regimen.” An expert in exercise physiology says, “This patient has poor muscle tone. He needs to begin a rigorous program of physical therapy and exercise.”

The rest of the medical students seated around you are nodding their heads in thoughtful agreement and feverishly taking notes of the doctor’s medical wisdom and insight.

You can’t believe your ears! You look around in disbelief. Are these people crazy? The closest you may have come to attending Medical School is eating in the cafeteria, but you know that what these doctors are prescribing is ridiculous. You can’t restrain yourself. You stand to your feet and yell at the top of your lungs, “The man is dead!”

The Bible declares the same message. Because of sin, mankind is spiritually dead! The need isn’t for changed behavior, it is for new life. Telling a spiritually dead person to engage in good works in order to become spiritually alive is like telling a corpse to eat the right foods and exercise in order to regain physical health. The lifeless person is incapable of doing anything to address his or her own deadness. The need is for spiritual life to be imparted from a source outside ourselves!

It is only when we realize the severity of our hopeless, lifeless condition without Christ that we can begin to appreciate what God has done for us with a sense of joyful awe and wonder. With the reality of our spiritual deadness in focus consider the following verses.

- “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, *made us alive* with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And *God raised us up* with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” Eph. 2:4-6
- “*God made you alive* with Christ” Col. 2:13
- “... offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought *from death to life* ...” Rom 6:13
- “Since, then, *you have been raised with Christ*, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.” Col. 3:1

The wonderful reality is that Christians have been raised from the dead in union with Jesus. Through faith in Christ, his resurrection becomes our resurrection. We are risen people! Dr. Ravi Zacharias says it this way, “*Jesus did not come into this world to make bad people good. He came to make dead people alive.*”² Having placed our whole reliance upon Jesus and His death and resurrection, we are now the glad possessors of eternal life. Our sins have been forgiven, the righteousness of Christ has been credited to our ‘life account’ and the personal presence of God dwells within us.

² Ravi Zacharias, *The Grand Weaver*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007, p. 82, 187

Many Christians live each day of their life without knowing the reality of who they are in Christ or being aware of what God has wonderfully accomplished on their behalf. Now we can appreciate more fully Paul's passionate desire for his believing friends whom he dearly loved:

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms." - Ephesians 1:18-20

A calling of hope, a rich and glorious inheritance from God and incomparably great resurrection power— did you wake up mindful of those realities in your life today?

Notice that the power Paul identifies as being at work in believer's lives today is "like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him *from the dead*." (Eph. 1:20)

As Christians, we are the recipients of resurrection power! We are risen people, and the church is the fellowship of the risen! It is appropriate for us to affirm, "Jesus is risen and so am I." But we haven't only been given resurrection life. There are also a multitude of blessings that are ours because we have been raised with Christ through faith. Consider these examples:

- We have received the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:22)
- We have died to sin and been set free from its rule in our lives (Rom. 6:7, 22)
- We have died to the demands of the Law, being released from its condemnation (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:1)
- We have received the indwelling presence of God (1 Cor. 3:17; 6:19)

The list could go on. Peter writes, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3).

To live the Risen Life is to be awakened to the reality of what God has accomplished on our behalf. Every Christian has been spiritually raised from the dead by the same power that raised Jesus on Easter morning. Realizing this wondrous truth, we are then called by God to live our lives in keeping with the reality of who He has made us to be in Christ Jesus.

- Offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought *from death to life* - Rom. 6:13
- Live a life worthy of the calling you have received - Eph. 4:1
- Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ - Phil. 1:27

The Risen Life, walking in the reality and power of Christ’s resurrection and allowing those truths to inform and fuel our faith, is the distinctive message of Risen Life

Ministries. The risen people of Jesus exist to *raise the dead spiritually, equip the risen* with the liberating and empowering truths of God's Word which free them to walk in the power of His resurrection, and *mobilize a resurrection generation*.

The Dictionary defines "Renaissance" as "a rebirth" or "revival" of culture, skills, *or "learning forgotten or previously ignored."* In these strategic days, as Christ's return draws ever closer, God's people have largely forgotten or paid little attention to the truth of who they are as risen men and women. By God's grace Risen Life Ministries will be used as one of many tools He is raising up in this critical time to awaken His Church to their identity as Resurrection People and their calling to live for Him as those who have been brought from death to life (Rom. 6:13) – *a spiritual renaissance*.

If Charles Dickens were writing about the Risen Life, he might well say:

"We were spiritually dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. God declares it, scripture reveals it, our sinful behavior confirms it. There is no doubt that we were spiritually dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the resurrection story that scripture relates."