

# Finishing Well

Forging Relationships to Encourage Men to Finish Well in Life

## Is Easter Really For Children?

*Christmas is really for the children,  
Especially for children who like animals, stables, stars and babies wrapped in swaddling clothes. Then there are wise men. Kings in fine robes. Humble shepherds and a hint of rich perfume.*

*Easter is not really for the children unless accompanied by a cream-filled egg. It has whips, blood, nails, a spear and allegations of body snatching. It involves politics, God, and the sins of the world. It is not good for people of a nervous disposition. They would do better to think on rabbits, chickens and the first snowdrop of spring.*

*Or they'd do better to wait for a re-run of Christmas without asking too many questions about what Jesus did when He grew up or whether there's any connection.*  
-Steve Turner

## REFLECTIONS ON Faith

Barry Morrow

### EASTER & GRAVE MATTERS...

H. L. Mencken once described religious faith as "The illogical belief in the improbable." Many people today look at religious faith in a similar vein, as though having faith is synonymous with shelving one's brain! It is especially true when the subject of Easter and the Resurrection comes up for discussion. "Surely," we hear, "we can't be expected to believe that Jesus was *actually* raised from the dead!" Despite such derision, N. T. Wright, former Oxford don and canon theologian of Westminster Abbey in London, makes a strong case for the historicity of the bodily resurrection of Christ. One of the apologetic arguments he uses for the bodily resurrection of Christ focuses on the issue of ossuaries—"bone boxes" that were used in the second of a two-stage burial process.

### Ossuaries...Hints of an Empty Tomb

Many first-century Jews were buried in such a two-stage process, where they were first laid on a slab, wrapped in cloths with spices, and then buried in a cave-tomb. Then, a year or so later, when all the flesh had decomposed, relatives or friends would return to collect the bones and place them in an ossuary, a box roughly two feet by one foot by one foot, which would then be placed in the recesses of the burial cave or elsewhere. The significance to the Resurrection of Christ is that the burial of Jesus as reported in the Gospels was only the first stage of an intended two-stage burial. So did anyone ever think about going back to the tomb to collect Jesus' bones to put them in an ossuary? No. It was not even remotely considered. Why? Because the entire early church knew that Jesus' body wasn't in the tomb. They believed that God had in fact raised Jesus to life again, transforming His body in the process.

### A Spiritual Resurrection?

If the disciples had believed that what they called the "resurrection" was simply a *spiritual* event, leaving the body in the tomb, someone sooner or later would have returned to gather His bones to place them in an ossuary, an event which would surely have destroyed the Christian faith before it had even begun. Yet even contemporary scholars who deny that Jesus was raised from the dead

readily acknowledge that all the early Christians believed that He had been bodily raised from the dead, a tenet that was the basis for their lives. Easter faith has historically been the belief that Jesus went through death into a new type of bodily existence with new characteristics and properties. And like Him, our bodies won't be abandoned; they will be transformed.

### The Significance of the Resurrection...

So why is the Resurrection important? The bottom-line is this: take away the bodily Resurrection of Christ, and the centerpiece of Christianity crumbles. As N. T. Wright has declared, "Let's make no bones about it. If Easter isn't good news, then there is no good news. But if it is—if it is true that Jesus Christ is risen indeed—then Easter Day, and the Easter message, is the true sun which, when it rises, puts all other suns to shame."



*The old field is to be weeded, dug, and sown for a new crop...*

"The records represent Christ as passing after death (as no man has passed before) neither into a purely, 'spiritual' mode of existence nor into a 'natural' life such as we know, but into a life which has its own, new Nature...That is the picture—not of unmaking but remaking. The old field of space, time, and matter, and the senses is to be weeded, dug, and sown for a new crop. We may be tired of that old field: God is not."

-C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*

"MAKE NO MISTAKE: IF HE ROSE AT ALL IT WAS AS HIS BODY; IF THE CELLS' DISSOLUTION DID NOT REVERSE, THE MOLECULES REKNIT, THE AMINO ACIDS REKINDLE, THE CHURCH WILL FALL."

-JOHN UPDIKE, FROM "SEVEN STANZAS AT EASTER"

"The evidence for the Resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion"...and the case for the empty tomb is "considerably better than I thought previously." -Anthony Flew, one of the world's leading philosophers, on his recent abandonment of atheistic naturalism in favor of theism.

"The resurrection cannot be tamed or tethered by any utilitarian test. It is a vast watershed in history, or it is nothing. It cannot be tested for truth; it is the test of lesser truths. No light can be thrown on it; its own light blinds the investigator. It does not compel belief; it resists it. But once accepted as fact, it tells more about the universe, about history, and about man's state and fate than all the mountains of other facts in the human accumulation." -Editorial in *Life Magazine*, 1956.

"There are two ways in which to look at human history, I have concluded. One way is to focus on the wars and violence, the squalor, the pain and death. From such a point of view, Easter seems a fairy-tale exception, a stunning contradiction in the name of God...But there is another way to look at the world. If I take Easter as the starting point, the one incontrovertible fact about how God treats those God loves, then human history becomes the contradiction and Easter a preview of ultimate reality. -Philip Yancey

"Oh, you're real, you're real! Oh Aslan!" cried Lucy and both girls flung themselves upon him and covered him with kisses. "But what does it all mean?" asked Susan when they were somewhat calmer. "It means," said Aslan, "that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of Time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards." -C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

"The risen life is not easy: it is also a dying life." -Thomas Merton

## Scripture For Reflection...

"But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is vain...and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied." -Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 13-19 (NASB translation)

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