

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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Easter

As we are in the midst of the Spring season, we are looking forward to the most glorious occasion of the year — Easter.

Easter is determined by certain calendar rules, therefore, it does not fall on the same date every year. Jesus Christ was crucified on the day marking the feast of the Jewish Passover, and his resurrection occurred the third day after his death. The early Christians attempted to celebrate each year on the actual anniversary date, but the Jewish calendar could not be made to agree with the later Roman calendar. As a result the Christians decided to fix Easter as the first Sunday after March 21. Should the full moon fall on that Sunday, Easter is observed the following Sunday. The date of the full moon which decides Easter is figured according to certain calendar rules and may differ slightly from the astronomical dates of the full moon. This method of determining Easter was accepted by the early Christians and is still followed by the Christians of today.

To the early Christians, Easter was considered the greatest festival of the church year. In the early days, the converts were baptized on Easter Sunday and the following week wore white robes as a sign of purity. These ceremonies are still preserved by the Orthodox churches of Russia and the Balkans.

Good Friday, the Friday before Easter and the anniversary of the crucifixion, is observed with great solemnity by all Christians. The forty days of fasting called Lent, ends at noon the following day, known as Holy Saturday.

On Easter Sunday, which notes the Resurrection of Christ, many Christians and so-called Christians will gather at churches to witness Christ's Resurrection at early Sunday morning worship and such religious programs will be carried out throughout the day.

Some will tend to decorate the graves of their loved ones. On Easter Sunday night, many Sunday School pupils will be presenting programs symbolizing Easter.

Many sight-seers and bystanders will be in the midst of gay entertainment which may end in tragic mishaps. Some will be attending baseball games, visiting friends and relatives or joy-riding. Whatever the activity, it is important to be extremely careful.

Easter Monday will be celebrated mostly by Easter egg hunts given for children by different organizations and churches in the city. With the children out of school for the holiday there will be many baseball games, fishing, dancing, and other activities.

The origin of Easter celebrations at its early beginning has accumulated many activities in the celebration of this glorious occasion. We should all focus on one thought — "The Risen Christ," who is our Saviour.

Go to church Sunday!

This Week's Sunday School Lesson

BEGINNING WHERE YOU ARE

In one of Thomas B. Costain's historical novels, a wealthy but aging merchant was concerned about what would become of his fortune and business when he died. His only son had no talent except for spending money, and in those days women were not supposed to have any sense for practical affairs. In great distress, he said to his daughter, "I wish I could live forever so that I could continue to provide for you." Alas, neither he nor any other man can avoid the necessity of eventually turning his affairs over to another generation.

Indeed, the basic fact we humans must come to terms with is the fact of our mortality. No matter how essential we consider ourselves to our families and communities, when the call comes, we must lay down our tasks. No matter what great projects we have in hand, when the moment comes, we must let them go. Rich and poor, great and small, world figures and ordinary people—all alike live under sentence of death. In fact, in one sense we do not begin to live effectively until we accept the transience and uncertainty of life.

As we approach another Easter, we must set it in the context of this universal experience of death. Christian faith asserts that in the resurrection Christ conquered our final enemy, the grave and death.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

The Scripture for this lesson is Job 14; Matthew 28; 1 Corinthians 15. Selected verses are printed below.

Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20

1 Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulchre. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you." 8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Hail." And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus

came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Memory Selection: Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

—1 Corinthians 15:20

EXPLORING THE QUESTIONS

Being an honest and realistic book, the Bible does not evade the tragic aspects of life. In its pages, people face broken dreams and disappointed hopes; they experience cruelty; they sin and are punished. They also die. The Scriptures have much to say about death. The passages selected for our study today are examples.

Chapter 14 of Job is beautiful poetry, but its message is stark and grim. It is a picture of our human condition if we believe death to be the end. Like a shadow when the sun sets, man ceases to be. There is hope for a tree. It may be cut down, but "at the scent of water" its roots send forth new shoots. But when man dies, "he rises not again."

"If a man die, shall he live again?" the poet asks. The answer is plainly, No. Like a rock removed from its place, or like soil carried away by a flood, he is destroyed.

Aside from the Christian hope, what more can be said? If we reject the Easter story, this is our situation.

Against this dark picture, Matthew sets his account of the Resurrection. Note the simplicity and tenderness of the narrative. The two Marys visit the tomb early Sunday morning. They are accosted by the angel and then by Jesus. The authorities bribe the guards to falsify what happened. The eleven disciples meet Jesus in Galilee, and he gives them final instructions as to their mission. That is all, but the story is filled with light and joy. Its very directness and lack of adornment carry conviction.

From the very beginning the early church placed the Resurrection at the center of its message. Fifty days after Easter in the city of Jerusalem itself Peter was proclaiming that God had raised Jesus from the dead. (Acts 2:24)

Less than a quarter century after Calvary, Paul, in a letter to the Christians at Corinth, gave us our earliest written account of the Resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15) He says he "received" his information, presumably on his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. (Acts 9:26-30) He lists five appearances, some of which we can identify with those described in the Gospels. The appearances to five hundred brethren and to James are additional information. We should note that he regarded his own meeting with Christ on the Damascus road as being of the same order as those that immediately followed the Crucifixion.

Contemporary readers will be particularly interested in Paul's argument that the Resurrection is essential to Christian faith and in his distinction between the natural and the spiritual body.

The resurrection of Jesus raises more questions than can be answered. Human language cannot exhaust the depths of the divine mystery.

Such a confession does not excuse us from attempting to understand with our minds the meaning of the Resurrection for our lives. But when we have considered every explanation, argument, and counterargument, it is still required of us that we make a commitment in faith to the risen Lord.

The basic question, is of course, Is death the end? Must we determine the value of life on the basis of our three score years and ten? This problem was a concern of many of the psalmists. What are we to think of a world where we often see the righteous suffer while the evil enjoy the fruits of their wrongdoing?

What are the grounds for believing that Jesus rose from the dead?

Are immortality and resurrection the same? Is eternal life promised to everyone, or is it a gift of God only to the righteous?

What does the Resurrection tell us about the character of God?

Does believing or not believing in life after death make any difference in the way we live each day?

FINDING HELP WITH YOUR QUESTIONS

If we are to understand the meaning and significance of Jesus' resurrection for our faith, we need first to examine several basic aspects of what it means to believe in this doctrine.

1. Belief in the Resurrection is an act of faith. Here as elsewhere God treats us as free men.

In one of his parables, Jesus told of a wealthy but self-centered man who died and found himself in torment. He implored Father Abraham to send the beggar Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them to change their ways. Abraham replied, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead."

2. Nevertheless, the early church regarded the resurrection of Christ as the central item in its message. Peter preached about the resurrected Christ in Jerusalem as Paul did in Athens.

3. We have said that belief in the Resurrection is an item of faith rather than of reason. However, this statement does not mean that such belief is irrational. There are grounds for holding this faith.

4. Ultimately, faith in the Resurrection rests upon the character of God. It is because we believe that God has created us in his own image for fellowship and has called us to be his people that we believe the righteous are raised from the dead.

The Great Commission
 The Gospel of Matthew ends
 (Continued on Page 3)



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