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Easter Special

THE CROSS AT THE BUS STATION

Easter in Jerusalem

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

How did he know?

ENDTIME INSIGHTS

The King's return



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In the course of working on this Easter issue, I read arguments on both sides of the Resurrection-fact-or-fable debate. My biggest surprise was that logic seems to be on the side of those who believe the accounts in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. I've believed for years, but as a matter of faith rather than logic.

Skeptics say that it's completely illogical to believe a story about someone who was brutally executed and sealed in a tomb for three days and three nights coming back to life and appearing to His friends and followers. But is it?

Here's one argument that I found especially compelling: Both believers and skeptics acknowledge that Jesus' disciples were willing to stake their lives on their story about encounters with the risen Savior. And remember, these were the same people who, by their own admission, had been discouraged, doubting, and in hiding for fear of their lives just a few days before seeing Him and beginning to spread the story far and wide. Was it a fabrication? Would they have been willing to suffer the consequences they did—beatings, imprisonment, and even death—for a fabrication? As one analyst put it, "Under such pressures, liars confess their deceptions and betray their cohorts." Jesus' disciples didn't. Clearly they believed what they preached. So did the apostle Paul, who had been among the disciples' most rabid persecutors until the resurrected Jesus appeared to him.

For Paul and the other eyewitnesses it wasn't a matter of reason or logic or even blind faith, but experience. They had all experienced the risen Savior. And so have I. No, Jesus hasn't appeared to me in bodily form, but my experience with Him has been every bit as real and every bit as wonderful. As the old song goes, "You ask me how I know He lives—He lives within my heart!"

Keith Phillips

FOR THE ACTIVATED FAMILY

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GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD...

By SUKANYA KUMAR

When we were young, my brother and I often engaged in silly fights. We bullied each other, we called each other names, and sometimes we even pulled at each other's hair. When Mom saw us do this, she would try just about anything to get us to stop. She would lovingly explain why we shouldn't, or scold us, or sometimes she would punish us. Each tactic worked for the time being, but before long my brother and I would be at it again. One day Mom couldn't take any more. We could see the anger in her eyes and the grief in her tears, and were sure that we were about to be severely disciplined. But instead she started hitting herself. She slapped herself on the face, and she pulled at her own hair. She was so enraged that she needed to vent her anger, but she loved us too much to give us our due. So she bore her own indignation.

This is what our heavenly Father did for His wayward children two thousand years ago. They had fallen into all sorts of sins. They were doing things they knew would displease Him, but they still did them. He called out to them lovingly, but they turned a deaf ear to Him. He warned them through prophets, but they laughed those warnings off. When they were in trouble and cried out to Him, He always came to their aid—only to be rejected again by them later, when their need for His help wasn't so apparent. And they didn't just do this once, but again and again. (And of course we're all just as guilty.)

Then the time came when God's displeasure became so intense that He

couldn't take any more, but at the same time He loved His children way too much to let them feel the brunt of His anger. So He made the greatest sacrifice any parent could make. He sent His own beloved Son to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus took on human form, came to earth, and lived among us. He didn't come as an "enforcer of righteousness," but as a "man of sorrows," to be humiliated and rejected by most of the people He had come to help. He was betrayed by His own people. He was beaten, spat upon, and mocked. And in the end He



gave His own life in order to spare ours. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). ■

(SUKANYA KUMAR IS AN ACTIVATED READER IN INDIA.)

The EVENTS EA

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ was crucified in the land now called Israel by the order of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of the then Roman province of Judea. Jesus had been falsely accused by the Jewish high priest and other Jewish religious leaders of blasphemy against the Jewish religion. This was not a crime under Roman law, and Pilate was inclined to release Jesus. But after being reminded that leniency toward someone regarded as a troublemaker could be viewed as disloyalty to Rome, and upon hearing the clamor of an incited mob that called for Jesus to be crucified, Pilate bowed to the accusers' demands. Jesus' execution took place right before the Jewish holy day of Passover.

Arabic documents dating from the 10th century contain the following account, credited to the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37?–100?):

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus, and his conduct was

good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon their loyalty to him. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive. Accordingly they believed that he was the Messiah, concerning whom the Prophets have recounted wonders.

Following is the account by Matthew, one of Jesus' followers, of the events following Jesus' death.

On the next day [after Jesus' crucifixion] the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first."

Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see



of STER

the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from Heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and wor-

shipped Him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, “Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.’ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.” So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always.” ■

—MATTHEW 27:62–66; 28:1–20



THE MYSTERIOUS STAFF

IT WAS ONLY A COUPLE OF HOURS FROM JERUSALEM, but with our late start Matthias and I would be pressed to make it home before dark. We were trying to put some distance between us and the terrible events of the last few days, but they were too much a part of us.

“I wonder if He really was the Messiah,” I said. “Surely the Messiah wouldn’t have been executed like a common criminal.”

“Cleopas, how could the Messiah have let Himself be killed at all?”

“He was supposed to liberate us from our oppressors. He promised that from the start—or so we thought.”

“I never expected it to end this way,” Matthias said.

“I still don’t know if I believe the women who went to the tomb. There

was a glimmer of hope when they burst into the room where we were gathered, excited and out of breath, but...”

“Peter and John saw the empty tomb too, and they believe. At least John does,” I told my friend.

“People are saying that we took His body while the guards slept—that we faked His resurrection. We know that’s a lie because none of us had left each other’s sight, but someone else could have taken His body. ...”

Our discussion went in circles. What had happened to Jesus?

We were interrupted by the sound of footsteps coming up behind us. Someone was in an even bigger hurry than we were.

“Why so sad?” the man said in a lighthearted tone that caught us off guard. “You both look like you just lost your best friend.”

He’d only just caught up with us. How did this stranger know our innermost thoughts? “You might say that,” I replied.

“Surely it can’t be that bad,” the stranger said.

“Where have you been?” I asked. “Haven’t you heard?”

“Heard what?”

“You must have heard about Jesus?”

RANGER

“Tell me what you know.”

“He was a prophet out of Nazareth, and He did some amazing miracles! He fed thousands with one boy’s meal. He healed people who had been blind or deaf or crippled from birth. He even raised the dead! And when He spoke, there was power in His words!”

Then I told the stranger what had happened in the last week—the mock trial, the people turning on Jesus after He’d done so much for them, the verdict, the beating, the humiliation, the crucifixion, and finally the story of the women finding the empty tomb.

“It sounds like you have your doubts about that last part,” the man said.

“Wouldn’t you?” I asked.

Instead of answering, the stranger asked, “Don’t you know the Scriptures—that these things were all part

of God’s plan, which He revealed by Moses and the prophets? They knew it was going to happen like it did, and of all people, you, His followers, should have known too.”

How did this stranger know we were Jesus’ followers? We hadn’t said anything about that. “What prophecies are you talking about?” I asked.

The stranger seemed to know all the Scriptures—by heart! “Let’s start at the beginning,” he said.

“In the Garden of Eden, after the serpent tricked Eve into eating the forbidden fruit, God told the serpent—who was really Satan—‘Because you have done this, cursed are you! I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.’¹ Don’t you see? The Messiah on the cross—that’s the serpent striking His heel. And the Messiah rising from the dead and ultimately defeating Satan’s plan—that’s the serpent’s head being crushed.

“Why do you think God was pleased when Abel sacrificed a lamb?² And why did God command Moses to tell His people to sacrifice lambs without spot or blemish to atone for their sins?³ God was trying to show what the Messiah would do. The Messiah was the Lamb without blemish, sacrificed for the sins of the world.⁴ The ceremonies, the sacrifices—all of these things were merely foreshadowings of events that are now unfolding before your eyes.”

The more this stranger shared with us, the more the smoldering embers of our faith began to glow.

“Speaking of ceremonies, didn’t you just come from celebrating the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread? You know those ceremonies—you’ve done them every year for your whole lives. You also know why Moses commanded them—as thanksgiving to God for delivering our fathers from slavery in Egypt. Through Moses, God instructed His people to kill an unblemished lamb and smear its blood on their doorposts. All those who believed and obeyed were spared, ‘passed over,’ when God went through all of Egypt and killed the firstborn of every household. Again, this was a foreshadowing of the Messiah’s sacrifice, which delivers the believer from death.⁵

“And what about the sin offering and Day of Atonement? What is God trying to teach us with these? Can the blood of an animal actually pay for our sins? Is justice served? And why do these sacrifices need to be repeated every year? If such sacrifices atone for our sins, then why do they need to be offered again and again? Could it be that they were all

¹Genesis 3:14-15

²Genesis 4:1-4

³Leviticus 17:11

⁴Matthew 26:28; John 1:29; Ephesians 1:7;

1 John 1:7

⁵Exodus 11:4-7; 12:1-13

**MY HEART
WAS
POUNDING
SO HARD
FROM
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AND JOY
THAT I
THOUGHT
IT WOULD
BURST!**

intended to point to a greater sacrifice that was yet to come? And could it be that this greater sacrifice has just been made?”¹

The stranger was full of questions and we had few answers, but he was a patient teacher.

“Isn’t this what the prophet Isaiah spoke concerning the Messiah’s death? ‘All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth.’—Doesn’t that sound like your Jesus and the sham of a trial you described a couple of miles back?—‘He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.’—There it is again, the sacrificial lamb. ‘And they made His grave with the wicked, but with the rich at His death.’—Didn’t you say that He was executed with criminals, but buried in a rich man’s tomb?—‘And He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.’”²

We were silent as it started to become clear to us that God had had a hand in all these things.

“If your Jesus was the Messiah, and if the only thing required for the forgiveness of sin was His death, then why do you suppose He also suffered that scourging at the hands of His executioners?”

Again, we had no answers.

“Isaiah tells us in that same passage, ‘By His stripes we are healed.’³ What does that mean—‘By His stripes’—by His wounds—‘we are healed’?—Just as the Messiah’s blood was shed for the salvation of the spirit, His body was broken

for the healing of the body. The crown of thorns, the scourging, the nail and spear wounds—they were all to atone for your infirmities. The Messiah saved your souls with His blood, but He also purchased healing for your bodies with His sufferings. To save your bodies, it took His body.”

The stranger continued, “What did Jesus say on the cross?”

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

“That is just as King David prophesied.”⁴

As he explained more Scriptures, I realized that many of the other things that had happened to Jesus were just as it was written there—the crowds shouting as He entered Jerusalem; the betrayal, the blood money, the cruel mocking; the soldiers casting lots for His garments, then piercing His hands and feet but not breaking any of His bones.⁵ All of these things had been written hundreds of years earlier, and they were all about the Messiah. Everything suddenly made sense! But the stranger was not finished.

“David also said, ‘God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.’⁶ That’s an interesting word—‘redeem.’ Do you know what it means? It means to ransom—to buy another’s freedom. That’s what the Messiah’s death was all about—setting the believer free from death’s due. It’s right there in the book of Hosea—‘I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.’⁷

“As our father Abraham offered his only son in sacrifice to God, God offered His only Son in sacrifice for all, but with one very big difference. Abraham didn’t

¹Leviticus 16:15; 23:27; 2 Corinthians 5:21

²Isaiah 53:6-9,12

³Isaiah 53:5

⁴Psalms 22:1

⁵Zechariah 9:9-10; Psalm 41:9; Zechariah 11:12-13;

Isaiah 50:6; Psalm 22:16-18; Zechariah 12:10; Psalm 34:20

⁶Psalms 49:15

⁷Hosea 13:14

have to go through with his sacrifice, but God did.

“Just as Noah’s faith and obedience saved mankind—the ark providing a way of escape for him and his family and the animals—the Messiah, in dying for sinners, made a way of escape for all who will believe.

“And just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish’s belly before being delivered, so your Jesus promised that He would be delivered from death after three days, just as Hosea had also prophesied—‘After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.’¹

“Can you see it? These Scriptures all point to this very time.”

My heart was pounding so hard from excitement and joy that I thought it would burst! Jesus’ death was not

an accident or a mistake! It all happened exactly as God had planned!

No sooner had the stranger finished, than we found ourselves in front of my house. He said he needed to keep going, but when I insisted that he at least stay for supper, he agreed.

As is our custom, I asked my guest to bless the food. He offered thanks to God, broke the bread, and gave some to each of us. Suddenly we recognized that the stranger was actually Jesus Himself, our risen Savior!

Then just as suddenly—Poof!—He vanished.

Matthias and I were so excited about what had happened that we ran back to Jerusalem that same night to tell Jesus’ other followers what had happened—how our hearts had burned within us while He talked to us on the road and opened to us the Scriptures.² I still can’t stop talking about it! ■

(CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST.)

¹Matthew 12:40; Hosea 6:2

²Luke 24:32

The Promise of Easter

“Because I live, you shall live also” (John 14:19).
We need these seven words above to help us to endure
The changing world around us that’s dark and insecure;
To help us view the present as a passing episode,
A troubled, brief encounter on life’s short and troubled road.
For the fact that life’s eternal because our Savior died
And arose again at Easter after He was crucified
Makes this uncertain present, in a world of sin and strife,
Nothing but a steppingstone to a new and better life!

— HELEN STEINER RICE

The CROSS

at the BUS STATION

By IAN BACH

IT WAS EASTER 2002 IN JERUSALEM. The cries of merchants rang out through the narrow cobblestone streets of the old city, and the scents of a thousand exotic spices hung in the air. Colorful Palestinian embroidery festooned stalls displaying glittering oriental jewelry. Rhythmic Arabic pop songs blasted from music shops as throngs of tourists, pilgrims, and locals mingled. Beneath the surface gaiety there was tension, however. Small groups of Israeli soldiers nervously fingered automatic weapons on every corner.

Inside the high stone walls of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, mysterious low chants echoed through the darkened halls. Black-robed priests swung censers that dispensed incense into the stale air. I walked silently with a few companions through winding corridors that seemed to have no end, but eventually descended into numbing cold where the feeble light of lamps on the walls was almost swallowed up by the darkness. A priest barked a stinging rebuke at a mortified tourist who had unwittingly stepped across an invisible line on the stone floor onto forbidden holy ground.

Was this really the place where Jesus was laid to rest and rose again to inspire His followers to spread light, love, truth, and freedom throughout the world?

Later we visited the Garden Tomb, a more recent archeological find that some now believe to be the site where Jesus' body was entombed. Excavations have revealed a first-century garden in which there is a humble tomb, hewn out of a rock face. In front of the entrance to the tomb is a distinct rut where a stone would have been rolled to close it. Other findings seem to indicate that it may have been considered a holy place by early believers. There was a serenity along the garden's winding paths, shaded by olive and pine trees, that was hard to define. A young girl was seated near the tomb, meditating. Her face also reflected peace.

Near the garden is a cliff face with a strange formation that resembles a skull. Some have postulated that this is the "Place of the Skull" referred to in



The Garden Tomb

the Bible, where Jesus was crucified. The cliff now forms an unobtrusive backdrop to a local bus station, just across the road from the Damascus Gate, one of the main entrances to the throbbing corridors of the old city.

As I stood looking at the cliff and the bus station, I was struck by the apparent incongruity of the scene. In that place that might have been the scene of one of the most poignant and world-changing sacrifices in history, people were going about their daily lives, trying to make the best of the struggle. A laborer on his way home from work bought a bus ticket and looked wearily at his watch. A tired mother held a child with one hand and a shopping bag in the other. A sidewalk vendor sat looking disconsolately at wares that obviously only a few had the extra cash to buy.

My traditional church upbringing had always seemed to suggest a long walk from the court of Pontius Pilate where Jesus was condemned to a remote hilltop where He was crucified. “There is a green hill far away,” and “On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,” the hymns say. But when I looked in my Bible, there it was: “The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city” (John 19:20).

It would make sense for the Romans to have chosen a busy location to crucify Jesus and the two malefactors that died with Him; public executions have proven effective deterrents to crime and subversion.

But I couldn't help thinking that there might have been a deeper symbolism to the location. Perhaps Jesus didn't want to be crucified in a distant, remote place—unseen and untouchable—but rather beside the bustling thoroughfare where He could give His ultimate witness to the people He loved, where they could see and feel His pain, and where He, through His sacrifice, could ease



The Cliff and the Bus Station

theirs. I could almost sense those tender, tear-filled eyes still looking out over the divided city as He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

As our guide at the Garden Tomb informed us, archeology is at best a science of educated guesses. He didn't claim to know exactly where Jesus had been crucified or buried, and neither do I. It doesn't really matter.

But if I had to choose an Easter setting, I think I would choose the Easter of the Garden Tomb. The dark interior of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher reminded me too much of the agony of introspection and self-flagellation, the aching darkness of condemning guilt. By contrast, the Garden Tomb resonated peace and freedom that was as invigorating as the breeze that stirred the olive branches, as refreshing as the scent of the pine needles on the balmy April air.

And if I have a choice, I'll abandon the stylized, rarefied, inaccessible crucifix on the remote hill in favor of the cross near the city gate—the cross that touches our daily lives with its humility, the universality of its empathy, the nearness of its concern that still bleeds to see the pain we mortals inflict upon each other and longs to redeem us. I'll choose the cross at the bus station. ■

(IAN BACH IS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST.)

COLORED EGGS AND RABBITS ARE PERHAPS THE MOST POPULAR SYMBOLS OF EASTER, but we need look no further than the Easter story itself to find some more meaningful ones—and each has a story to tell.



I am the Bread. At the last supper the Master ate with His disciples before His death, He gave thanks and broke me, and shared me with them. “Take and eat,” the Master said. “This is My body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:24). He was the Bread of Life, sent from Heaven by God to give life to the world (John 6:33). Earthly bread can sustain for a day, but whoever comes to Him shall never hunger. “Man does not live by bread alone” (Matthew 4:4). No, you need something more. That something is Jesus.



I am the Wine. After the bread, the Master poured me into a cup. “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you” (1 Corinthians 11:25), He told His disciples. Even though He knew He was about to die an excruciating death, His heart overflowed with selfless love for others—and it does to this day. He would have shed His blood for you alone, and He would do it all over again, just for you. He loves you that much!



I am the Crown of Thorns. I was a nuisance growing by the side of the road—part of God’s curse for man’s sin—and, like the Master, I was cursed and despised. Then one night I was fashioned into a “crown,” intended as a cruel joke, a mockery (Matthew 27:29). But I became an emblem of glory when the Father transformed me into a halo of light.

SYMBOLS



I am the Reed. I also was intended as a joke (Matthew 27:29). But held in the right hand of the King of kings during His time of greatest trial, I too was transformed. Once a common walking stick, I became a scepter of righteousness, a symbol of the power and glory of the King whose kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).



I am the Scarlet Robe. Those who draped me over the Master’s body did so in jest, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Matthew 27:28–29). If only they had known how right they were!—And not King of the Jews only, but King of Heaven and earth, “King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:15–16).



I am the Cross. There once was a tree that grew strong and tall over many years, only to be hewn down and carted off in a day. But instead of being held and shaped by a master carpenter into something useful but ordinary—a chair or a table or a door, perhaps—it was fashioned into a rough cross that held the carpenter Master (John 19:16–18). I was the tree that became that cross. I held Him as He died for the world—even for those who killed Him. I was made an instrument of death, but I became a symbol of God’s unfathomable love and His gift of eternal life.

of EASTER



I am the Grave Cloth. Joseph and Nicodemus soaked me in sweet-smelling perfume and wound me around the Master's body in death (John 19:38–40). For

three days I held Him, until I was cast off as the cocoon is discarded when a butterfly emerges and takes flight. The Master had no further need of me, for now He is clothed in light.



I am the Empty Tomb. I held His lifeless body for three days and three nights, but the grave could not contain Him. In the twinkling of an eye, with a blinding flash

of light and a burst of power from on high, He conquered death—and not for Himself only, but for all who receive Him as their Savior.



I am the Garden. As dawn broke that first Easter Day, I was transformed from a place of mourning into a scene of great rejoicing when angels asked, “Why

do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!” (Matthew 28:2–6; Luke 24:4–6).

We know these things are true, for we were there. We were all touched and transformed by the Master. Let Him touch you today, and He will transform you too. ■

FEEDING READING

Why God sent Jesus

In Jesus we see what God is like.

Colossians 1:13b,15

Hebrews 1:3

2 Corinthians 4:4b

In knowing Jesus, we can know and understand God.

John 8:19

John 14:7–9

God showed us His love by sending Jesus to earth.

John 3:16

Romans 5:8

1 John 4:8b–10

Jesus came to proclaim the truth.

John 18:37b

Jesus came to destroy the power of the Devil.

1 John 3:8

Hebrews 2:14b,15

To know our human weaknesses and to sympathize with us.

Hebrews 2:16–18

Hebrews 4:15

Jesus showed us God's love by dying for us.

John 10:11

John 15:13

Jesus' death paid the price for our sins, and if we believe in Him, we receive God's gift of salvation.

1 Timothy 1:15

Luke 19:10

John 3:17

Romans 5:6–11

1 John 3:5

1 John 4:14

Revelation 5:9b

THE KING'S RETURN

**THIS TIME
HE'S NOT
COMING
AS A MEEK
AND MILD
BABE IN A
MANGER,
BUT AS THE
ALMIGHTY
KING OF
KINGS.**

When He came to our world nearly 2,000 years ago, He and His message of love and salvation were rejected by the leaders of His own people. Yes, they wanted a savior, a messiah, a great king, but not one born in a barn and raised as a poor carpenter, who chose humble fishermen, tax collectors, drunks, and prostitutes as His friends and followers. Few of the rich and powerful of His day were interested in the freedom of spirit He offered to those who would receive the truth He spoke. They only wanted freedom from Rome and Roman taxes. Nor did they desire the eternal treasures and rewards He promised to all who would believe in and follow Him. They wanted a messiah, a king who could make them a wealthy and powerful material kingdom there and then.

This man, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Creator of the universe, said, "All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). He could have taken over the world and made Himself king in one day! He told the Roman governor before whom He was tried, "You could have no power over Me at all, unless it was given to you by My Father" (John 19:11). And He told Peter, "Do you think that I cannot now pray to My

Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53).

When He hung dying on the cross where He was crucified, and the religious leaders taunted, "You saved others. If You're really the Son of God, save Yourself" (Mark 15:29–32), He could have done that. But He chose to die for you and me!

After He rose from the grave, He could have shown Himself to the high priests, the governor, or Caesar himself. He could have proved to them and the world that He was indeed the Son of God, the Messiah, and He could have forced them all to worship Him. Instead He appeared only to those who already believed in Him and loved Him, in order to comfort them and encourage their faith.

For 2,000 years He and His Kingdom have remained unseen to this world, manifested only in the hearts and lives of those who love and receive Him by faith. This is the mystery that many of His own people in His day couldn't understand, and that many today cannot seem to grasp: He offers each of us a choice to receive or reject Him. This is still the Age of Grace, of choice, when we must believe His Word and receive Him by faith.

But the day is coming very soon when this present age will be over and all the

world will “see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:29–31). For He has promised to come again, and according to numerous fulfilled prophecies describing world conditions immediately before Jesus returns, the time is at hand. We are now living in the final “Last Days” of man’s cruel and destructive rule on earth.

In fact, from all indications, the last seven years of man’s rule are almost upon us. This period will begin with the rise of a totally godless one-world government that will be led by a Devil-possessed dictator, the Antichrist. This imitation messiah will at first bring peace—but peace at a price: enforced worship of himself during the final three and a half years of his reign. This time is known as the “Great Tribulation” (Daniel 8:23–25; 9:27; 11:21–45; Matthew 24:15,21; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12; Revelation chapter 13).

Jesus said, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days ... the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the [wicked] will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:29–30). This time He’s not coming as a meek and mild babe in a manger, God in the hands of man, but as the almighty King of kings, and it will be man in the hands of God.

The trumpets of God will sound and Jesus’ mighty voice will thunder from the heavens, “Come up!” and all of His saved children will be caught up together with Him in the clouds, rising in immortal victory over the forces of the satanic Antichrist. When Jesus returns, a tremendous miracle takes place: the resurrection of believers.




The bodies of all of the saved people who have ever died will be instantly resurrected and come bursting out of their graves, and all of us believers who are still alive will be raised with them to meet Jesus in the air (Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:51–57; Philippians 3:21; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; Revelation 11:12).

Then we will all fly away with the Lord to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in Heaven (Revelation 19:6–9). It will be the greatest party ever held—a wonderful reunion with the Lord and all of our loved ones, our victory celebration. Meanwhile, the Antichrist and his followers will be left to suffer the wrath of God, hell on earth, until we return with the Lord to finally take over the world at the Battle of Armageddon and set up His Kingdom of love on earth—the happy new beginning!

Will you be ready to meet Jesus when He soon returns? The way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is to let the King of Heaven, Jesus, enter you. You can have Jesus and His heavenly love in your heart right now by simply praying this little prayer:

Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died for me. Please forgive me for all my sins and give me Your gift of eternal life. Amen. ■

(Since John Weaver wrote this article for the Family International in 1985, nearly two million copies in poster format have been distributed worldwide.)



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

I love you for who you are

In My heavenly kingdom, in the realm of the Spirit, all are happy and fulfilled, because they better understand My love. They do not question My love for them, for they have experienced the height and breadth and depth of it. They have great peace and great joy. There is no feeling that one is greater than another or that one is more loved, because they have found contentment in the knowledge that I love each of them for who they are. They understand that each is precious to Me. They understand that I died for each one, that I have redeemed each one, and therefore each one is very special to Me.

And so it is with you. You are special to Me! My love for you is personal. Don't ever think that you're just one in the crowd to Me. Don't ever think that because there are so many others, I don't have time for you or that My love will run out before it reaches you.

I know your innermost longings and your innermost fears and insecurities. I know your faults, too, and I love you just the same. I am love and

mercy and tenderness and forgiveness and sympathy. When you struggle, when you are tempted or weary or weak, I feel for you. When you are victorious, I rejoice with you.

I love and care about you, and I am not far away. I am right there beside you. Let Me shower you with My love. Let Me surround you with the warmth of My love. Let Me clothe you with the security of My love. Let Me fill you to overflowing with My love. Let Me show you how special you are to Me.