

APRIL 16, 1995

## BECOMING A RESURRECTION PEOPLE

Making a difference! All of us **do** make a difference. That is, we have "some" influence on the world around us. There is probably only one thing more devastating to our sense of being worthwhile than to believe that "it really doesn't matter what we do or even if we exist." The most devastating would be to believe that what we do has a negative impact on our world. At one time or another, most of us have experienced a sense of having no power and being unproductive. Life can be filled with *activities* and there can be long periods of no *results*. This can become totally frustrating to most of us. We work to solve a problem and feel as if we were just spinning our wheels. Even worse, we work very hard and actually solve the problem and then wonder if it was worth solving in the first place.

In the early seventies, one of the popular Christian songs written by Bill Gaither had these words: "Twas a life filled with endless desperation, Without hope walked the shell of a man. Then a hand with a nail print reached downward, Just one touch, and a new life began. And the old rugged Cross made the difference in a life bound for heartache and defeat. I will praise Him forever and ever, for the Cross made the difference for me." The events of the Cross did not end when they took the body of Jesus off the cross. The story wasn't over. There was more to come. As great as the teachings of Jesus were, as marvelous as were the miracles He did, and as selfless as was His death; His life and death would have had little influence if the Resurrection had not happened. This event was the demonstration of God's power over death and the forces of evil. It is that same power that resides in us and gives us assurance that our lives will count for something in the Kingdom of God. Paul had written to the church at Rome about this power. He said, "If the Spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you." This is Resurrection power and it makes a difference in our lives and allows our lives to make a difference in the world.

Before the small group of the followers

of Jesus had experienced the power of His resurrection, they felt helpless. They were just trying to cope with the circumstances they felt forced into. They wanted to do "the right thing" but experienced the ultimate frustration of the death of someone very close to them.

**LUKE 24:1-7** The women who went out early in the morning to anoint the body of Jesus would have done the same thing for any other friend who had died or been killed. It was not exactly business as usual though. They were putting themselves at risk of being arrested by the Romans or the Jewish leaders. Their fears of arrest were quickly replaced with confusion and perhaps with panic borne out of the discovery that the body of Jesus was no longer there.

Jesus did not live an ordinary life -- He did not have an ordinary death. On Friday the followers of Jesus were primarily concerned with providing a proper burial for Jesus. They had forgotten about what He said, but were relying only on what they saw. We find this type thing all the time. We have been taught that "seeing is believing" and some times what we see is not in accordance with what the word of God say on a particular subject. If they had really listened and believed what Jesus told them, then they would have been planning a celebration rather than an embalming. The women who were to take care of the spices for the body were treating this as an ordinary death, but what they found that Sunday morning was extraordinary.

The first situation out of the ordinary was that the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb was rolled away. As they approached the tomb they first wondered how they would get the stone out of their way so that they could be about their business of embalming the body of Jesus, then when they saw that it was roll ed away they wondered why and who had done it. Looking inside, they discovered that the body was gone. To them this was tragic. All kinds of bad things ran through their minds about what might have happen ed. This "tragedy" turned out to be the greatest symbol of hope mankind has ever had. The empty tomb is a symbol of victory -- even death will be conquered!

They didn't know what to do. Should

they look for the body, go for help, wait or what? Then they looked up and saw two angels. Luke described them as "men in shining garments." The women could tell that these two were not ordinary. They were struck with fear and immediately bowed down to the ground.

The question that the angel asked is a pertinent question for today. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" So many people are caught up in institutionalized religion and are, in effect, seeking the living among the dead. People come to these so-called churches looking for true life -- eternal life -- looking for Jesus -- and find nothing more that is typified in the death, than a graveyard. The angel gave sound advice: "Remember what Jesus said." We should always cling to the word of God. It is reliable and we can count on it.

On many occasions during His earthly ministry, Jesus declared Who He is to the people. The Resurrection validated His ministry by providing evidence beyond what was humanly possible and beyond any element of coincidence that Jesus was God Incarnate. Paul concentrates on the implications of such evidence in many of his letters that make up a significant portion of the New Testament.

**LUKE 24:4-8** The confusion was supplanted with fear and awe when they saw the angels. The angels made themselves visible to the women to give them an important announcement. Angels are messengers from God and what they told the women was the finishing touch to the Good News of the Gospel. "He is not here, but is risen!" This was the fulfillment of the hope of salvation. This message confirmed what Jesus had told His disciples that on the third day He would arise. The events of the previous three days, beginning with His arrest and culminating in the resurrection, were exactly as Jesus had told them they would be.

**LUKE 24:9-11** The things of the Kingdom of God sometimes seem too good to be true. Down through the ages God had intervened in the affairs of man with miracles that demonstrated His supernatural power. The birth of Isaac, the plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, manna in the wilderness, victories against overwhelming odds, and now Jesus has risen from the dead. The past miracles do not prepare us for the miracles that come into our lives in the

present. Not only do we have trouble believing that God will provide a miracle for us, we have trouble recognizing it when it does happen. In spite of the fact that Jesus had fed five thousand people, in spite of the fact that Lazarus had been called from the tomb, in spite of the fact that many were healed and that Jesus walked on the water; the disciples had trouble believing He was alive. Since then, people have continued to doubt. Heretical teaching denying the resurrection infiltrated the First Century Church. Paul addressed it in his letter to the church at Corinth.

**1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-17** Many people want to "spiritualize" the promises of God. When the Bible tells of miracles, they will talk about being born again as the greatest miracle of all and dismiss anything related to a physical happening. The Bible tells us we will lay hands on the sick and the sick will be healed. They tell us that God heals the sin-sick soul and deny anything related to physical healing. Some claimed the spirit of Christ was alive but the body of Jesus was not resurrected. Those who deny the bodily resurrection were not confined to the First Century; they are around today. Some argue the resurrection was just a metaphor for being born again. Others do not believe there will be a bodily resurrection of the dead when Jesus returns and many simply don't believe Jesus will return. Paul tried to correct the error of such thinking.

The consequences of believing that there will be no resurrection of the dead for believers (those who are in Christ) is that if there is no resurrection, then Jesus did not rise from death. If Jesus did not rise from death, then the gospel message is empty and the faith that people have placed in that message is also empty. If our faith has no power, then we are still in our sins and all that have put their trust in Christ who have already died have perished. Not only that, we also will perish because we have no means by which to be saved.

Paul could not accept the consequence of such belief. Those who claimed a physical resurrection would not take place did not believe all the consequences of the acceptance of such a belief. They would not accept the consequences of those that put their trust in Christ having perished in their belief, or that faith has no power in our lives, or we are still in our sins after we accepted the atoning death

of Jesus Christ.

If the hope that we have in Christ is only something that helps us have a good outlook on life -- like "positive thinking" -- and there is no more to it than that, then we are to be pitied because we are the most miserable of all people.

Paul continued with this argument and in doing so gave some insight into the nature of the resurrected body. It will not necessarily be as our earthly bodies are. It will be suited to its place in eternity. Just as a seed that is sown does not look like the plant it produces, the spiritual body will not be like the earthly body. In Paul's words it is sown corruptible, it is raised incorruptible. Mortality will be swallowed up by immortality. The defeat of death will be experienced by all of God's children.

**1 CORINTHIANS 15:56-58** Jesus has gotten the victory over sin and death and since we are in Christ we participate in that victory. In this we have our confidence and know that in Him our "labor is not in vain" and that we really do make a difference because He lives.