



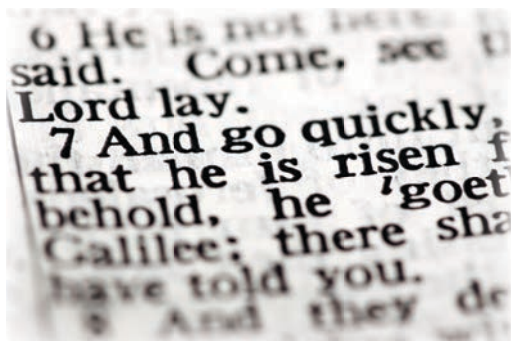
Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries ::::: Volume 6 ::::: Issue 5 :::::

Raised because of our acquittal . . . (Romans 4.25)

by Herb Montgomery



"Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you

are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15.1-8)

Since Western Christianity celebrates Easter each year, this spring I decided to take some time and do a podcast/eSight on the Resurrection. The response was so positive that I thought I'd share the article with you this month.

An emphasis on both the importance of Jesus' resurrection and Jesus' death, BOTH, is one of the key unique elements of the Christus Victor paradigm embraced by the early church that we looked at earlier this year. The early church looked at the birth, life, death and resurrection more holistically than most evangelicals do today.

I want to be up front from the very beginning. The resurrection is probably the most difficult aspect of the whole Jesus story for me to embrace intellectually. I'm not saying I don't believe it. I do. I'm just saying that believing it, on an intellectual level, doesn't come easy for me. Personally, I have never met anyone who has died and come back to life. Death, in my experience so far, is permanent. But if I did not believe Jesus' resurrection to be true, by inference, I would have to believe that the Disciples were either lying about Jesus' resurrection or that the Disciples were simply passing on something that had become exaggerated, something of a "legendary" nature.

After open-mindedly considering what we do know, in light

of the evidence that we do have, I find it even more difficult to believe the disciples were lying and still more difficult than *that* to believe they were simply passing down a detail of the story that had taken on something of a more legendary nature. Difficult as it may be to believe the verity of the resurrection, I think it is irrational to see it as a lie or a legend in the face of the evidence. I'd like to share with you, briefly, why I feel this way.

When it comes to Jesus' resurrection, we have every reason, even though it is contrary to our post-modern naturalistic worldview, to believe it historically took place. Let me explain.

First of all, I'm not assuming that Paul and the Four Gospels are the inspired word of God, but I'm simply looking at them as ancient documents. We must remember the standard rule of historical methodology. When you are dealing with ancient documents from writers who claimed they were recording history and they read like history, we should treat them as history. If a historian thinks that an ancient document is not a historical report, then the burden of proof lies with the historian to prove it wrong. The burden is not on the document to prove itself right. If this were not true then our history books would be a lot thinner. Most of what we know about what happened long ago comes from only one source and cannot be collaborated by another source. For example, almost everything we know about Ancient Judaism comes from only one source, Josephus, who wrote about the subject approximately 100 years later. Almost everything we know about Alexander the Great comes from only one source, Arrian, who wrote four centuries later. Everything we know about the Persian Wars comes from just one source, Herodotus, who wrote about them 70 years later. Almost everything we know about the Middle Ages comes from just one source, St. Bede, who wrote 200 years after that time period. Pliny, Tacitus and Josephus tell us Jesus existed. Josephus mentions both James and Ananus. Josephus and Celsus tell us Jesus was a "wonder worker." Josephus refers to Jesus as a wise man and teacher. Pliny tells us that Jesus' followers considered him to be Divine. Tacitus, Lucian, and Josephus created a record of the crucifixion. Tacitus and Josephus mention the role played by Pontius Pilate. Thallus even mentions the three-hour darkness that occurred during the crucifixion, which we spoke of in part four of our Christus Victor series. But, when it comes to Jesus' actual resurrection, we have something very exceptional by historical standards. We have five accounts in the first 20 to 60 years following the event, and 11 accounts within the first century of its occurrence.

The earliest account is Paul's, a portion of which begins this

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essay. This was written between 53 and 55 A.D. A hint of its early date is that Simon is referred to, not as Peter (later Greek) but as Cephas (early Aramaic). This could in fact indicate a very early origin. There are a few other notable features of this account as well.

First, Paul uses the phrase, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance." These words are technical rabbinic terms indicating that Paul is passing along what is established holy tradition by that time. The vast majority of New Testament scholars affirm that this passage is an old creed that goes back to Paul's visit to Jerusalem around 36 A.D. when he spent a couple of weeks with James and Peter (see Galatians 1). This places the resurrection as something held as "creedal" (a confession of established belief) within only 2 or 3 years of the crucifixion itself. This makes the theory that the resurrection was an exaggerated/legendary development reported in later writings highly improbable.

Second, Paul states that Jesus appeared to more than 500 at the same time, most of whom were still living and could attest to the truth of what Paul says here. This makes the claim that the sightings of Jesus after the resurrection were mere hallucinations not just implausible but impossible. I doubt that 500 people saw the same hallucination simultaneously.

In closing this week, I want to consider the words of the Apostle John. You can find John's own account of the resurrection in John 20, but I want to draw your attention to his words in 1 John 1.1-5:

"That which was from the beginning, which **we have heard**, which **we have seen with our eyes**, which **we have looked at** and **our hands have touched**—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; **we have seen it and testify to it**, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and **has appeared to us**. We proclaim to you **what we have seen and heard**, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. This is the message **we have heard from him** and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."

What makes John's account striking is that this isn't something he claims was passed down to him. This is his own first-hand account of what he claims he saw. This is not legend. What John is passing on to us is either truly what he saw or, quite simply, John is lying. And honestly, as difficult as it is to believe that some guy came back to life, to believe that John is purposefully lying is something even secular scholars agree is highly implausible (see the presentation online *Why Think This is True*). Even secular scholars say it is very unlikely the 11 were lying about all this. Many secular scholars believe that the Gospel is "legend" rather than "lie." However, the "legend" theory, when viewed alongside John's statement above, is, in my opinion, equally irrational. It's either true or a lie, but you can't say the resurrection is legend. There are too many "eye witness" testimonies for this to be a legend. There was not enough time for a legend of this size and nature to develop. Furthermore, the culture (first century monotheistic Jewish Palestine) did not have the fertile soil in which a legend like this could grow and develop almost overnight. It can't be legend. And almost all secular scholars agree that these early Jewish men weren't lying. So if it's not legend and it's not a lie, something else has to be driving the rejection of the

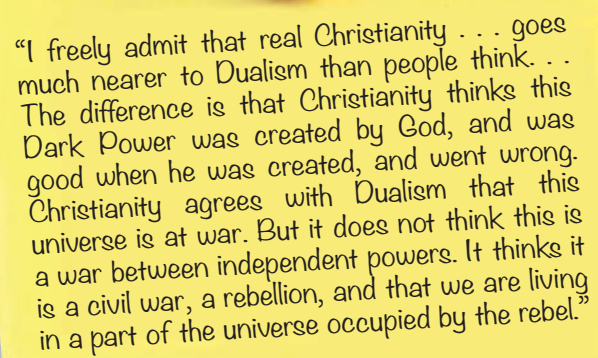
story of Jesus. (I believe that the story of Jesus has been abused throughout history by those who claimed to be believers, but that is a subject for an entirely different but much needed article.)

When one historically analyses the early accounts of Jesus' resurrection, he finds that they exhibit the qualities that set them apart from legendary documents (minor differences in the details of the accounts, irrelevant details, counterproductive details, historically significant details, etc.) To simply reject the story of Jesus' resurrection as legend rather than fact because it contains the supernatural is, in my opinion, biased. The naturalistic worldview (the absolute rejection of the supernatural or miraculous) is a theory. Natural laws are used to describe what we generally find in nature. Natural laws are not prescriptions of what we must always find in nature. In other words, we all agree that the world generally runs in accordance with natural laws. But on what basis can anyone argue or even prove that it does so exhaustively and that there can never be exceptions to these so-called laws? Naturalism is not a conclusion that is based on evidence or reason, for neither evidence nor reason is exhaustively available to warrant such an absolute conclusion. Instead, naturalism is an assumption, a presupposition. I think the words of R.G. Collingwood in his book, *The Idea of History* are applicable to those with a naturalistic worldview who reject Jesus' resurrection: "To the extent that one's research and findings are based on prior dogmatic assumption, such research cannot be considered critical or scientific research" (p. 139). If the supernatural or miraculous occurs, although difficult to explain, is an exception to natural laws or something that, from our current vantage point, is beyond what our natural laws can explain. But such an occurrence is not a contradiction to natural laws as some claim. There is much in this world that scientists admit they cannot yet explain. (Light, entangled electrons, the relative nature of time, objects that we have now discovered travel at speeds greater than the speed of light.) A truly open-minded scholarly approach would be to accept that when all available naturalistic explanations become implausible, we should consider explanations that go beyond our known natural laws.

With this in mind, it is my prayer that even someone who holds a generally naturalistic worldview (and I freely admit that I am one of them), might be able to embrace the plausibility of the resurrection of Jesus and all that this resurrection means:

In the words of New Testament authors:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his



"I freely admit that real Christianity . . . goes much nearer to Dualism than people think. . . . The difference is that Christianity thinks this Dark Power was created by God, and was good when he was created, and went wrong. Christianity agrees with Dualism that this universe is at war. But it does not think this is a war between independent powers. It thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel."

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1.3)

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2.14, 15)

For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive . . . The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15.21-26)

If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6.5)

But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1.10)

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection

from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3.7-14)

I want to be clear about all of this. I am not validating the way the story of Jesus has too often been used by some members of the Christian religion throughout history to oppress others. I, too, am opposed to the abusive uses of the story of Jesus. It's about a person, not a religion. What I am saying, the Christian religion's history aside, is that it is easier to accept the verity of the resurrection than any of its alternatives. And if Jesus' resurrection is true, it reveals a love that even death itself could not silence, could not kill, could not destroy, could not keep in a grave. Whoever you are, right now reading this, regardless of your race, gender, status, orientation, occupation, or evaluation, you could not possibly be more loved than you are at this very moment. This month, in light of God's indescribable, unquenchable love for you, live in this love! Let its light shine not only into your heart but through it to the world around you and go build the kingdom.

"Christ is risen! . . . He is risen indeed."

I love you guys,

Herb

MINISTRY UPDATE

The following is taken from the news page on our website. For more up to date news on each event involving Herb and RHM, please see www.renewedheartministries.com and look under the "News" tab.

Princeton University

April 20-21, 2012

First, I want to say how humbled and thankful I am to have been invited by the group on Princeton University's campus to come and share with the campus community. I also want to respectfully thank each of you reading this for the many prayers that were sent out for this event. The irony is that in speaking to the mostly post-modern, naturalistic audience, I witnessed what I consider to be one "miracle" after another. As I shared in the email I sent out, I discussed three topics:

1) I discussed historical evidence for why thinking people within the context of the post-modern, naturalistic worldview can genuinely believe, despite the supernatural elements of the story, in the historical reliability of the Synoptic/Canonical story of Jesus, the existence of God, and that He is radically non-condemning, other-centered, and self-sacrificing as revealed by that Jewish carpenter of the first century named, Jesus. (This in no way legitimizes, defends, or justifies the abuse of this story that has been witnessed throughout history by the religions that bear Christ's name.)

2) I discussed the philosophical debate about human free will and the delicate balance of love, freedom, risk, capability, and

Divine ability that free will produces in an effort to understand how a God who looks like Jesus could really be "out there" while people in this world suffer so much pointless and seemingly arbitrary pain.

3) And lastly, I talked about the overwhelmingly beautiful self-revelation of God given to us in the Crucifixion narrative when we begin to see it through the lens of Jesus' own understanding of the purpose of His death as the means whereby He would deliver/ransom His enemies from the very Powers that held them in captivity, by giving Himself out of love and forgiveness for them (1 John 3.8; Hebrews 2.14).

The response was overwhelmingly tremendous. We are still getting emails from those who attended, and I'm am continuing to dialogue with a number of those who attended for whom these thoughts were very new and who are seriously considering the implications of what it would mean for them to become followers of Jesus.

For all of you who were praying for this event, thank you. These presentations are now available on our website at:

<http://www.renewedheartministries.com/AudioSermonSeries.aspx?series=28>

Testimonials

We were guests at your sermon on Friday night, and we plan on attending more! We just wanted to say a special "thank you" for your sermon on Friday night! It was very touching to both of us, and we could relate to your message! You are the first person who has actually made me want to return to church! A true blessing from God! We wish you were local so we could attend all the time! So we are now listening to your sermons online! We both just wanted to say "thank you" very much for making us feel comfortable! You truly are a blessing for us! Praise the lord! Thank you, Jesus, for Herb Montgomery!!! - **AC**

Your sermons have given me hope that I thought I'd lost all sight of. The devil has worked very hard to "take me out," and as of the last few years, I've struggled immensely with "trust and faith" issues. I was just listening to one of your sermons and heard you say that you struggle with your faith in that you have to "wrap your head around things" to understand and [that you] have a lot of questions! Well, I'm one of those persons and I too have a lot of questions about things I don't understand yet. I'm looking for peace of mind, a long sought after quietness for my soul. I no longer attend any church. It's a long story, but perhaps one day we could dialogue, and I could come to a better understanding and find that peace that I'm so longing for. Thank you so much for your sermons. May God continue to bless your efforts abundantly. - **YB**

I wanted to tell you how much I appreciate what you did for me. It was something I've never experienced before. I've never thought that somebody is capable of bringing me to tears talking about the Gospel. I felt your compassion, your energy. You showed me a different way to look at Jesus' cross. I see it and feel it so deep that I can't explain. Usually when I hear a sermon that impresses me I think about it for a few days and then the feeling is gone. Not with what I heard from you. I will never forget your message, never. I saw the Holy Spirit in you. I'm sure God is speaking through you. I felt it; my whole being was shaken. The last night of the meetings when you asked to say a word to describe how we feel I wanted to shout MOVED AND CHANGED because I am. Even now when I'm saying all this I want to cry out. Thank God for you. I needed this. Thank you, and God bless you and your family. - **D**

Schedule

MAY 27 - JUNE 2, 2012

North Carolina
Camp Meeting
Lake Junaluska, NC
704-596-3200

JUNE 5-6, 2012

Dakota Camp Meeting
Bismark, ND
605-224-8868

JUNE 8-16, 2012

Heavenly Valley
Adventist Church
South Lake Tahoe, CA
530-544-3525

JUNE 30, 2012

Miracle Meadows School
Salem, WV
304-782-3628

JULY 19, 2012

Oklahoma Camp Meeting
Wewoka, OK
405.721.6110

AUGUST 31 -

SEPTEMBER 1, 2012

Willits Adventist Church
Willits, CA
916.787.7756

Sermon of the Month



Jesus came to "destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3.8 One of these "works" was the devil's effort to obliterate the image of God (i.e., Love; see 1 John 4.8) in the human race. Dark were the misconceptions that abounded concerning God in our world. That this darkness might be lifted, that the world might be won back to God, that this world might be delivered from the devil's grip (John 12.31), and that God's love might be reawakened in the human race, the deceptive power surrounding God's character had to be broken. This was work that only one being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Only one could say, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." (John 14:9, Hebrews 1.3) Only one could deliver us from our captor. (Hebrews 2.14, Matthew 20.28) This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's kingdom. He desires only the service of love. And love cannot be commanded. It cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. If you would like to experience God's transforming love more deeply, we invite you to take advantage of this month's free featured presentation

The Awakening — by Herb Montgomery

Renewed Heart Ministries provides many of its resources free of charge. In order to provide this service, we are dependent on the contributions of our supporters. If you would like to make a one-time gift or offer monthly support,* please send your contributions to the following address:

Renewed Heart Ministries, P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901

Contributions can also be made online at: www.renewedheartministries.com

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