



He's Alive

As a small child I loved Easter for many different reasons: spring is in the air, we received baskets full of candy, we decorated eggs, and we spent time with family. What a wonderful time. As I have grown from a child to an adult I have also grown in my faith and find Resurrection Sunday to be even more exciting than when I was a small child. Christ's resurrection marks the day that I am no longer considered an enemy of God, but His child and friend.

When I study the events of Christ's crucifixion, death, and resurrection, I have always taken special note of Joseph of Arimathea. We are told in the Gospel of Luke that Joseph was a member of the Jewish Council, and that he did not agree with what they did to Christ. The Gospel of John records that Joseph was a "follower of Jesus," but that he followed Jesus secretly because he was afraid of the Jews. Here is a high-ranking Jewish official that followed Christ and his ministry in secret to avoid severe consequences. But we are told later, in John chapter 19, that after Christ's death Joseph asks for the body of Christ to bury him. He was willing to risk everything he had worked so hard for just to see that Christ had a proper burial. We don't know what inspired Joseph to step up after Christ's death, but we do know this, Joseph was willing to give up everything for a dead God. You see, he had no idea that Christ would be coming back in three days, he just knew that Christ, even in his death, was worth giving up his life for.

How exciting it must have been for Joseph when three days later Christ came back from the dead!

Joseph's life is an encouragement and challenge for me...If Joseph was willing to give everything for a dead God, how much more should I be willing to give for a living God. You see, Christ did come back from the dead, he paid our penalty, and no longer is Christ amongst the list of the dead religious leaders; He is the only one on the list that is a living God.

Christ is risen,
He is risen indeed!

*Love God, love others,
Jason Wood, NCCC Executive Director*

Why do you seek the living among the dead?
He is not here, but has risen.



What a pain!

I don't like pain. I want life to work on my terms, but it doesn't. Plans fall through, longings go unmet, dreams are shattered. That's painful! It's so easy to become disillusioned with life. It can even be tempting to question what God is actually doing, if anything. You may ask, "God, do you hear my prayers? Are you listening at all?" When you feel like God isn't with you in your pain, you may try to cope in self-destructive ways: substance abuse, shallow relationships, anger, bitterness, self-pity, demanding you are heard and seen. When you start putting your needs and opinions first you lose sight of others. You can become self-obsessed.

Jesus speaks to this in Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." These aren't suggestions, they are commands. To violate a command of God's is to sin. When you allow your pain to drive you toward self-obsession, you cannot love God or others. Now, I want to make a distinction here, there is a difference between self-care and selfishness. Self-care is making sure you are healthy enough mentally and physically to be of service to God and others. Selfishness is to demand life works out on your terms. However, in order to "love your neighbor as yourself," you do need to love yourself as the standard for loving others. Self-loathing is a pretty poor standard for loving others.

And, now we come to the rub. **How can you love yourself in a non-selfish way so that you don't violate the command to love others?** By recognizing how destitute and fallen you are, and realizing how much God loves you anyway. He's your biggest fan! When you let God love you, you are freed to love others. When you love God and others, something impossible starts to happen: your pain lessens and your plans don't seem as urgent as what God is doing. Freedom from needing your own plans to work is freedom indeed. Freedom from the pain of unmet expectations, unfulfilled longings, and selfishness. You can let your pain drive you into a deeper dependence and relationship with God. Will this lead to a pain-free life? Not on this side of glory, but the words found in James 1:2 start to become a reality, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds." Loving God and loving others can turn your pain, as impossible as it may seem, into pure joy.

*In Christ,
Aaron Johnson, MA, LPCC*

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