

R I S E N

50 REASONS WHY
THE RESURRECTION
CHANGED EVERYTHING

STEVEN D. MATHEWSON



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To my children and their spouses

Erin and Manuel DeAnda
Anna and Grant Vander Ark
Benjamin and Nicole Mathewson
Luke Mathewson

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Colossians 3:1

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Foreword

Does it ever seem like Christians devote more attention to the cross than to the empty tomb? Churches that follow the historic, liturgical year often pay special attention to Lent, the forty days leading up to Good Friday and Easter weekend. Many people “give up” something for Lent, particularly certain kinds of food. The whole point of the season is to prepare spiritually for Christ’s crucifixion.

Other denominations or congregations do not pay that much attention to the church calendar. After all, nothing in the Bible has established it; it’s just a longstanding tradition. Still, many of these groups of believers in recent years have developed at least partial parallels to Lent, with forty days of focused study of some key topic appropriate to this time of year.

But what about the resurrection? There is little comparable to Lent for the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost. The church calendar does label each of the Sundays during this period as “The First Sunday after Easter,” “The Second Sunday after Easter,” and so on, but that’s about it.

For all the theological debates about what Christ accomplished on the cross, and all the intricacies to the doctrines that were developed to answer this question, the resurrection seems to get short shrift in comparison. Christian teaching often focuses more on the question of the believability of the resurrection narratives than on their

theological meaning. This is an important topic, to be sure, but not the most central one in most of the Scripture's teaching on the topic.

Why not take the fifty days after Easter, then, and embark on a simple yet profound study of the meaning of Jesus's resurrection? One can read any of the chapters in this book in as short a time as it takes to read the classic one- or two-page devotions in the booklets issued monthly that many families or individuals read at mealtimes or just before bed. One can also take the time to look up any or all of the Scriptures cited in each little chapter and turn that study into something considerably meatier.

Of course, nothing says you have to use this book just during late spring! It will enlighten and encourage you no matter what time of the year you take it up. Would you have guessed that the New Testament directly ties the resurrection into so many different matters—not only Christ's own person and work, but how we are saved, grow as Jesus's disciples, and look forward eventually to a glorious eternal state? It does, and Steve Mathewson makes it crystal clear.

Dr. Mathewson is already well-known among religious-book readers for his magnificent manual *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, published by Baker Academic in 2002. He is well-known among preachers as an outstanding expositor of God's Word. He regularly contributes to such journals as *Leadership* and *Preaching Today*. Those who have attended the churches he has pastored know him as a wonderfully caring shepherd as well. Most recently, he has been the senior pastor of the Evangelical Free Church of Libertyville, Illinois, in the shadow of Trinity International University, with students and professors consistently in attendance. Even the most critically inclined of them recognize Steve's many gifts and his faithful, godly use of them.

Now Steve has gifted the world with this treasure trove of reflections on the resurrection. Take it, read it, savor it, and digest it. You'll be a better person for having done so.

Craig L. Blomberg
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Denver Seminary, Littleton, Colorado

Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything. It is the best possible news for human beings who live in a broken world and who enter that world separated from God because of their sin. In fact, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of his two massive accomplishments that together form the gospel or “good news.” The apostle Paul makes this claim in the New Testament letter we identify as 1 Corinthians. He says that this gospel that saves people—the gospel that they received and believed, the gospel that he delivered to them as of first importance—consists of two elements (1 Cor. 15:3–4):

- “that Christ died for our sins”
- “that he was raised on the third day”

Both elements took place “according to the Scriptures,” and both elements were witnessed in history.¹ The death of Christ was witnessed by his burial (v. 4). With one hundred pounds or so of spices and gummy substances encasing his body, and with a typical Palestinian rock-cut tomb requiring a stone weighing close to two thousand pounds to cover the entrance, it is farfetched to suppose that Jesus was not fully dead when he was buried. The circumstances surrounding a typical first-century burial in Jerusalem rule out any idea that Jesus

had only passed out and somehow revived in the cool of the tomb, thus enabling his escape.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was also witnessed in history by his appearance to more than five hundred people after he was raised to life (15:5–8). The sheer number of the witnesses and their backgrounds—at least one, James, was an unbeliever prior to seeing the resurrected Lord—testify to the reality of this event. In fact, when the apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, most of these witnesses were still alive and thus available to be interviewed (v. 6).

Ironically, we often pay less attention to the resurrection than to the death of Christ. We glory in the cross of Christ, as we should (Gal. 6:14). But we give scant attention to the resurrection until Easter Sunday approaches.

This little volume, I pray, will correct this problem and will put you on a soul-stirring journey to explore the way the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything. It will show you how the resurrection converges with some tremendous biblical themes: the new covenant, the new heart we have received, and the new heaven and earth. It will show you how the resurrection of Jesus Christ shapes your present existence. This is a critical area of exploration because the “New Atheists” and the “New Gnostics” proclaim alternative worldviews for people in search of meaning.

New Atheists like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens flatly deny the metaphysical (“beyond the physical”) claims of Christianity.² Hitchens even tries to portray Christians as confused about the nature of the resurrection body. He writes: “To this day, Christians disagree as to whether the day of judgment will give you back the old wreck of a body that has already died on you, or will reequip you in some other form.”³ This is completely false. When our journey brings us to the great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, we will see that the Bible is clear that we do not get back “the old wreck of a body” that was buried when we died.

New Gnostics embrace a metaphysical worldview that differs radically from biblical Christianity. Salvation from our problems stems from an inner knowing that supposedly provides an intimate connection to the souls of other beings. In this scheme, the body is simply “condensed awareness,” and yoga or some form of meditation becomes the framework for this intimate, spiritual soul-connectedness that leads to a revolution in our relationships. Death is simply an

opening into the spiritual realm. As you read this book, someone else is reading Eckhart Tolle's *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*, a book Oprah Winfrey has popularized by including it as a selection in Oprah's Book Club. What humanity needs, claims Tolle, is a transformation of consciousness. This consciousness "can flow into what you do and spread into this world" through "three modalities in which you can align your life with the creative power of the universe"—acceptance, enjoyment, and enthusiasm.⁴ No wonder Oprah Winfrey tells readers, "Get ready to be awakened."⁵ Where does the resurrection fit in? It does not, at least not along the lines envisioned by the Bible. Deepak Chopra, writing in *Reinventing the Body, Resurrecting the Soul: How to Create a New You*, denies the physicality of the body, arguing that "your physical body is a fiction."⁶

But Scripture presents a much different vision for our spiritual bodies and grounds this vision in the future bodily resurrection of Jesus's followers—a reality guaranteed by his own resurrection. In fact, the apostle Paul "speaks of the future resurrection as a major motive for treating our bodies properly in the present time (1 Cor. 6:14)."⁷ Physicality is not diminished or denied but celebrated and brought into the realm of holiness. Yes, the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes the way we view and express our physicality in the present. It shapes our eternal existence. So it makes sense to set out on a journey through this little book and the Scripture passages it explores.

You can take your journey in one of two ways. First, you can read this volume like any other book. With only fifty brief chapters, it will not take you long to devour the contents and grasp how the resurrection changes everything. Second, you can read through this volume at the rate of one reading a day. Let each reason for Christ's resurrection fill your mind for the day. Reflect on the Scriptures that communicate each reason. You can begin any time of year, but the best day to get started is Easter Sunday. This is where the number fifty comes into play. I am not claiming that there are exactly fifty reasons why Christ was raised. There may be more, or there may be less, since many of these fifty reasons overlap. The biblical writers often look at the same reality from different angles. But the number fifty is ideal because anyone who reads a chapter a day beginning on Easter Sunday will complete the last reading on Pentecost Sunday—the day the church celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit following Jesus's resurrection and ascension. Even if you or your church does not make much

of the church calendar, I think you will agree that spending fifty days thinking about Jesus's resurrection will imprint this theme on your mind for the rest of your life.

Now, before we begin our fifty-chapter journey, we should consider briefly the meaning of *resurrection* and how it differs from other popular ideas about what happens to people when they die. Jesus's resurrection—and the promised resurrection of his followers—refers to a rising from the dead into a new kind of bodily existence not marred by sickness, aging, deterioration, or death.⁸ Resurrection is more than resuscitation—coming back to life in the same kind of physical existence as before death. Resurrection is not disembodied existence, becoming an angel, or reincarnation.⁹ Nor does the Bible teach annihilation—the view that you experience no life of any kind once you die but rather simply cease to exist. Resurrection, as we will see, involves a body. The immaterial part of believers, which continues to exist after death, is reunited with a new body.

All right, let the journey begin. Spend the next fifty chapters thinking deeply about the reasons why Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. When you are finished, I hope you will be moved and will join the church around the world in this joyful cry: “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!”

To Give Us Eternal Life

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

John 11:25–27

In the movie *Braveheart*, William Wallace got it right when he said, “Every man dies, not every man really lives.”¹ Yes, this is a fact of life. Everyone dies. But not everyone truly lives. While you cannot change your appointment with death, you can ensure that you live before you die—and live after you die. Jesus is the one who makes this possible, because he is the resurrection and the life.

In John 10:10, Jesus makes this announcement about the impact his coming has on God’s people: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” This is in contrast to the religious leaders of Jesus’s day, who sucked the life out of God’s people by adding extra rules and regulations. Their intentions were noble. They offered these extra rules and regulations to help people obey God’s Word. But the effect was just the opposite. They created a religion that stifled life. Jesus came to offer people eternal life (3:16). He defined eternal life as a relationship with God the Father and with Jesus himself (17:3). This life begins here and now, yet it extends throughout all eternity.

But how can anyone live forever when everyone dies? The answer is that Jesus is the resurrection and the life (11:25). In the New Testament, the term *resurrection* is a picture word. It literally means “standing up.” It refers to a person’s dead body being raised to new life. Most Jewish people in Jesus’s day believed in a general resurrection of all people at some point in the future. What they did not anticipate, though, was that one person would be raised in advance of this general resurrection.² In John 11, Jesus demonstrates that he is the resurrection and the life by raising—or more precisely, resuscitating—his friend

Lazarus from death to life. This foreshadowed or anticipated Jesus's own death and resurrection, which he had already predicted (2:19–22).

At first, Jesus's claim sounds like a contradiction as he admits that believers will die and then claims that they will never die. However, in the first case, Jesus acknowledges physical death. Then, in the second, he acknowledges what comes after physical death. When believers in Jesus die physically, they immediately enter his presence (Luke 23:42–43; Phil. 1:21, 23). For a believer, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). Now this is life after death, but it is *not* resurrection. The dead in Christ still await resurrection, when their spirit or immaterial part of themselves is reunited with their bodies. Human beings were made to live in bodies. One day, believers in Jesus will experience bodily resurrection to live in the presence of God on a restored earth. This is “life after life after death!”³

To believe in Jesus, then, is to choose life *before* we die and *after* we die. Jesus is the one who connects us to the presence of God. Without God, all we have is the empty print and trace of the true happiness that the human race lost when it rebelled against God. French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal argues that people try in vain to fill this empty print and trace with everything around them. However, “none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.”⁴ The psalmist simply says of God:

In Your presence is perfect joy;
Delights are ever in Your right hand. (Ps. 16:11 NJPS)

As we will discover, the resurrection of Jesus provides for us a new quality of life right here and right now (Col. 3:17). But this life is not over when we die. Yes, we will all die. But, “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us . . . to himself” (2 Cor. 4:14).

To Show His Power over Death

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Acts 2:24

For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

Romans 6:9

Toward the end of my wife's pregnancy with twins, her obstetrician left for a week of vacation. "Don't worry," the doctor told her, "it's unlikely that these babies will arrive before I return." Two days before her doctor returned, my wife went into labor. There was no way she could hold back little Anna and Ben. The apostle Peter uses this image to make a key point about Jesus's resurrection, declaring that death could not hold on to Jesus any more than a pregnant woman can hold her unborn child in her body.

In the very first sermon recorded in the Acts of the apostles, Peter describes God's act of raising Jesus from the dead as "freeing him from the agony of death" (Acts 2:24). The word *agony* is literally the expression "labor pain." What a remarkable picture. Death is in labor and is unable to hold back its child, the Messiah. To emphasize this point, Peter then adds: "because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." Why was this impossible? The answer is that God made Jesus both Lord and Christ (v. 36). As Lord, Jesus is to be identified with *Yahweh*, the personal name for God used in the Old Testament (Ps. 110:1, which Peter quotes in Acts 2:34–35). Jesus is also to be identified as the Messiah (Christ), the Anointed One who would deliver God's people by leading them out of bondage. No wonder death could not keep its hold on Jesus!

The apostle Paul makes a similar point in Romans 6:9, emphasizing that, as a result of Jesus's resurrection, Jesus cannot die again. Think about the difference between Jesus Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of Lazarus. Douglas Moo writes: "Unlike Lazarus's

‘resurrection’ (better, ‘revivification’), which did not spare him from another physical death, Christ’s resurrection meant a decisive and final break with death and all its power.”¹ To make sure we get the point that Jesus cannot die again, Paul restates this for emphasis: “death no longer has mastery over him” (v. 9).

Notice that the emphasis here is on Jesus. *He* cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over *him*. But what difference does this make for us, Jesus’s followers? When you follow the apostle Paul’s argument in Romans 6, you find that our union with Christ—that is, our connection to him—makes this true for us as well. In fact, verse 9 is connected grammatically to verse 8, which says: “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”

But how are we united to Christ? This union or connection to Christ comes through faith (Rom. 1:17; 3:22, 25–26; 4:5; 5:1). Peter makes the same point at the end of his sermon in Acts 2, calling people to repentance (a turning from sin to God) and baptism (a sign of belonging to the people of God) in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38–39).

So then, Jesus’s victory over death is a victory in which we share when we are united with him. What a comfort this is when we face the sting of death. I will never forget the day I helped a funeral director place the bodies of three teenage boys in their caskets. These three young men and their driver’s education instructor died in a tragic car accident. The funeral director had taken so much care preparing the bodies that he was short on time and needed help before the boys’ families arrived for the viewing. I felt tremendous sorrow as I helped lift the boys’ lifeless bodies into their caskets. But I found comfort in the knowledge that each one of the boys and their instructor had placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. All four were—and are—connected to him. All four will be raised to new bodily life. Because of our connection to Jesus Christ, the one who died and rose from death, we can be confident that death will one day have no mastery over us. Hold on to that encouragement the next time death confronts you.

To Heal Us

Then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Acts 4:10

I cannot imagine better news than learning that a cure has been found for cancer, heart disease, cystic fibrosis, and clinical depression. The truth is, there is a cure. One of the great benefits of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is our healing. Acts 3 tells the story of the apostle Peter healing a beggar who was lame from birth. Peter and John encountered this man as they were about to enter the temple to pray. He asked them for money. But Peter said: “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6). Peter took the man by the hand and helped him up, and the man’s ankles and feet instantly became strong. The man walked and jumped and praised God.

Peter then tells the astonished crowd that the power for this miracle came from the God who glorified Jesus by raising him from the dead (vv. 12–15). Then Peter adds: “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see” (v. 16). So it is through faith in Jesus that healing begins. Peter then reiterates this in Acts 4:10, after he and John were jailed for proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead, and were subsequently questioned about the source of power and authority behind the lame man’s healing.

There are two key points to keep in mind about the healing Jesus provided through his death and resurrection. First, while this healing includes physical healing, it involves much more. The term *healed* in Acts 4:10 means “whole, well, healthy.” In the statement Peter makes immediately prior to this, the term *healed* is actually another Greek term that means “saved” (v. 9; see also v. 12). So the healing to which

Peter refers in Acts 4:10 is healing from all the effects of sin. It is healing from the physical, emotional, legal, relational, and spiritual consequences of sin.

The second key point has to do with when this happens. If Jesus's death and resurrection really provide for our healing, then why do some Christians struggle with depression and emotional pain? Why do some Christians need wheelchairs or dialysis or chemotherapy? The answer is found in Peter's sermon in Acts 3, and it is the second point we need to keep in mind about healing.

In Acts 3:19–21, Peter talks about “times of refreshing” and “the time for God to restore everything.” Christians will experience complete healing when the time comes for God to restore everything. Until then, we live in the times of refreshing. The healing process has begun. But we should not assume from the healing of the lame beggar that every last person who trusts in Jesus during this age will receive complete physical healing now. Sometimes God will allow us to struggle with physical or emotional wounds in order to show us that his grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:7–11). My godly grandmother was only fifty-eight years old when she died three months after being diagnosed with cancer. But through all our struggles with emotional and physical illness, we can have confidence that the God who has begun the healing process will bring it to completion through the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has healed us “already but not yet.” Thank God that he has started the process, and that complete healing will eventually come.

To Receive the Blessings Promised to David

God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.”

Acts 13:34

I have a friend whose company occasionally receives complimentary tickets to sporting events from one of their clients. A few years ago, my friend gave me a couple of these tickets—two courtside seats in the United Center to watch the Chicago Bulls play the Philadelphia 76ers. My son Luke and I had better seats than some of the celebrities in the crowd sitting *behind* us! My friend’s blessing resulted in me being blessed. Sometimes, we are most blessed when someone else is blessed. That’s the case with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are blessed because the resurrection enabled him to receive the blessings promised to David.

King David holds a special place in the storyline of the Bible. After God removed Israel’s first king, Saul, from office, he made David Israel’s king and even described him as “a man after my own heart” who “will do everything I want him to do” (Acts 13:20–22). From David’s descendants, God brought his people the Savior Jesus (v. 23). The apostle Paul reviewed this fact when he offered a word of encouragement one day in a synagogue during one of his mission trips. According to Acts 13:34, he made the point that the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David” (Isaiah 55:3), anticipated the resurrection of Jesus.

The logic is this: Jesus is the descendant of David who will receive the blessings and fulfill the promises made to David. Since death makes it impossible for him to receive these blessings and fulfill the promises, God had to raise Jesus from death!

But what exactly are the blessings God promised David? One aspect of the blessing is the resurrection itself. Like Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:27), Paul quotes Psalm 16 as an anticipation of the resurrection

(Acts 13:35). In Psalm 16:10, David wrote: “You will not let your holy one see decay.” The argument is that David could not possibly be referring to himself. After all, he died, was buried, and his body decomposed (Acts 13:36). The one God raised from the dead who does not see decay is clearly someone else (v. 37).

This leads to the second aspect of the blessing. In 2 Samuel 7:12–16, God promised to raise up a dynasty through David—a dynasty through which God would establish an everlasting kingdom. While verses 12–15 refer to Solomon, verse 16 expands the promise by saying: “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” This can simply mean that a descendant of David would always occupy the throne.

Yet Isaiah the prophet expands the promise even further. In a remarkable prophecy, Isaiah argues that God will replace his people’s gloom with glory, their darkness with light (Isa. 9:1–3). In Isaiah’s day, the gloom and darkness came from oppression by the Assyrian empire. How would God bring light into this darkness? The answer is that he would decisively defeat Israel’s enemy (v. 4). But how would he defeat the enemy? The answer is that he would end war altogether (v. 5). But how would he end war altogether? The stunning answer is that God would do this through the birth of a child—a child who would rule and would be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (v. 6). Amazing! This child would possess all the qualities that people in the ancient Near East looked for in a king—a counselor, a mighty warrior, a father, and a prince who had the authority to rule. This child would also be divine—one who is truly wonderful, who exists as God, who is everlasting, and whose rule brings peace. Then, Isaiah informs us that this child “will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom . . . from that time on and forever” (v. 7).

The resurrection of Jesus makes possible the eternal rule of a righteous, powerful king in the line of David who will bring peace—a life in which everything is whole, complete, and exactly right. This encourages us when our lives seems fragmented, unfulfilling, and frustrating. Our longing for relief, for security, for wholeness, and for peace will be satisfied in the rule of David’s offspring, King Jesus, who was raised from death to life.

To Forgive Our Sins

But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay. Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Acts 13:37–38

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

1 Corinthians 15:17

The words of a well-known hymn capture the sheer joy of knowing that God is not counting our sins against us when we are connected to his Son, Jesus Christ:

My sin—O, the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin—not in part but the whole
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!¹

What may surprise us is the role Jesus’s resurrection plays in the forgiveness of our sins. We are used to thinking about Jesus’s death as the basis for our forgiveness. After all, Ephesians 1:7 says about Jesus Christ: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Similarly, Hebrews 9:22 claims that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” The Scripture is quite clear that Jesus Christ died for our sins as our substitute, taking on himself the penalty that we deserved (Rom. 5:8; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

Yet the apostle Paul, in his sermon recorded in Acts 13, proclaims the forgiveness of sins as a result of Jesus’s resurrection. The term *therefore* at the beginning of Acts 13:38 establishes this connection. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 15:17 Paul makes it clear that we are still in our sins if Christ has not been raised. So while the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were separate events, they are inseparable elements when it comes to providing forgiveness for our sins. After

all, the gospel, or good news, consists of two elements. First, Christ died for our sins (v. 3). Second, Christ was raised on the third day (v. 4). Both events happened according to the Scriptures, and both had historical confirmation. Jesus's burial confirmed his death, and his appearance to eyewitnesses confirmed his resurrection. It is this gospel in which we stand for our salvation (vv. 1–2).

But why do we need forgiveness? The answer in one word is *sin*. When sin entered the world through the rebellion of the first human beings, it separated humans from God the Creator, cutting us off from God's life-giving presence. It placed us under a death sentence. Romans 5:16 describes it like this: "The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation." But by the gospel—Jesus's death and resurrection—we are saved (1 Cor. 15:2).

Salvation is God's act of saving (or delivering or rescuing) us from our sin and from all the problems our sin has created. One of the huge aspects of this salvation is *forgiveness*. This term, as it is used in the New Testament, refers to letting go or releasing something. When God forgives us, he releases us from the penalty we deserve. God has the right to exact that penalty. In fact, he must exact that penalty in order to be just. For God to look the other way would be as unjust as a judge excusing convicted murderers or rapists from the penalty they deserve. But through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God satisfies the demands of his justice. The penalty is paid, and so God is able to release us from his personal right to exact the penalty for our offense.

Clearly, Jesus's death provides the grounds for forgiveness. It provides payment of the penalty. The New Testament does not spell out quite as clearly how the resurrection provides forgiveness. But if forgiveness comes through Jesus, as Acts 13:37 insists, then he must be risen for there to be any power or authority for issuing forgiveness. Both his death *and* resurrection are needed for God to forgive sinners.

The resurrection, then, gives us hope when we sin. To be sure, we are not supposed to sin as followers of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:5–6; 3:6, 9–10). But the fact is, Christ-followers still sin (1:8–10). When we fail and fall into lying, cheating, lusting, gossiping, stealing, or coveting, we can be confident that Jesus's resurrection provides the power and authority for God to be faithful and just, to forgive our sins, and to purify us from all unrighteousness.

To Elevate His Power and Authority

And who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 1:4

Suppose you are writing a letter to a group of Christians who need to understand what God has done about their problem with sin. Where would you begin as you describe the gospel, the good news about what God has done through Christ? The apostle Paul's majestic presentation of the gospel in his letter to the Romans begins with the resurrection. The gospel to which Paul has been set apart (Rom. 1:1–2) centers on Jesus the Messiah. This is the point of Paul's reference to Jesus as "his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David" (v. 3). Jesus is the Anointed One, a king in the line of David who would reign forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16). Romans 1:4 then announces that this Messiah-King was appointed to a new and even more powerful position by his resurrection from the dead!

To understand Paul's argument, we must carefully consider his words. The term translated *appointed* is used consistently throughout the New Testament to mean "appoint, determine, fix."¹ Through the resurrection, then, Jesus was designated or appointed "the Son of God in power." The expression "in power" might describe the verb, meaning that the declaration or designation was done with power. But it is more likely that the expression "in power" modifies the words it immediately follows in the Greek text: "Son of God." Finally, Paul reveals the identity of the one designated "the Son of God in power." It is Jesus the Christ (Messiah) who is also "our Lord."

However, saying that Jesus was *appointed* Son of God sounds like the heresy of Adoptionism, a view from the second century AD that denied the eternal sonship of Jesus. According to this view, Jesus was not the Son until he was adopted at his baptism or at his resurrection. But Paul is saying something much different when he declares

that Jesus was “appointed [to be] the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead” (v. 4). He is not describing a change in *essence* but a change in *status*. The exact wording of Romans 1:3 assumes the preexistence of the Son of God—“who became from the seed of David.”²² This recalls the apostle John’s statement that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). So, God has designated Jesus to be the Son of God in a new way at his resurrection. Through the resurrection, Jesus is exalted to a greater level of power and authority than he previously had.

Douglas Moo explains this well: “The transition from v. 3 to v. 4, then, is not a transition from a human messiah to a divine Son of God (Adoptionism) but from the Son as Messiah to the Son as both Messiah *and* powerful, reigning Lord.”²³ This is consistent with the apostle Peter’s conclusion about Jesus, the one whom God raised from death (Acts 2:32). Peter concludes: “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (v. 36).

Notice that the instrument of this designation is the “Spirit of holiness” (Rom. 1:4)—certainly a reference to the Holy Spirit who, Paul says elsewhere, “raised Jesus from the dead” (8:11). So a new age of salvation has begun! In this age, Jesus reigns as the Son of God who is both Messiah and Lord.

Like millions of others, I have an account on Facebook, the social network that has taken the culture by storm. My friends and I use our “status” on our Facebook page to tell others why we are excited. We are about to become parents, or better yet, grandparents. Our volleyball team won the district championship. The forecast for the second week of October is for sun and seventy-degree temperatures—a cause for joy if you live in Chicago or Montana. But the one reason for excitement that outdoes all others is that King Jesus has been appointed to a new and even more powerful position by his resurrection. His reign as Messiah-King means salvation from life’s deepest problem (sin) for all those who believe. Yes, thanks to the resurrection, the gospel *is* the power of God for salvation to all who believe. Put that as your status!