

RUMINATIONS OF A FORMER HEATHEN

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Resurrection 3

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The resurrection of Christ proves that the grace of God is real and that we can look at the future, not with anxiety, but with great expectation.

Who gets to receive grace? Who will go to heaven and who will go to the place of torment, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched? The story of Lazarus and the rich man tells us that the rich man was in a hot place of torment. When Jesus told that parable, was he just trying to scare us? Frighten us into following him? Was he interested in the feeling of power that would come with having a band of people following him? Was he trying to coerce us into believing on him, because he would get something out of it, the adulation that would elevate him above just being the son of a carpenter? Or was he giving us direction? This way you shall live, this way you shall die.

It is all tied to credibility. If Jesus was an inspired man, a man ahead of his time, revealing the purity of character possible in a human being, he was indeed a great example. His teachings expanding the Ten Commandments on the relationship to our neighbour (no lying, no false witness, no stealing, no murdering, no adultery, no coveting the neighbour's possessions, etc.), and then clarifying who is our neighbour, his Sermon on the Mount, his incisive parables, those things alone would make him a great, if not the greatest, human who ever lived. All those teachings and instructions, if they were applied even by those did not believe in the God of the Bible, would greatly improve the lot of the heathen all over the world. But, as far I am concerned, it is not enough that Jesus was a great human being. I am going to put all my chips on that he is God himself, the only one capable of redeeming (buying back) the whole human race and me with it. I trust Jesus, the son of God, for getting me into eternal life.

The question continues, who gets to receive grace? Personally, I believe that grace is available right now to everybody in the world. But not everybody will avail himself of it. Grace will be wasted all over the world. God is not willing that any

should perish. But he is not going to make people to believe on him by heavy persuasion. He could do it, if he wanted to. He could just reveal himself to every person in the world in a completely convincing way. He could get into people's heads and make them see what the reality is, that he is God and that there is no other. But, no, he doesn't want to do it that way. He has made us in his own image, we are tremendously smart. He wants people who are curious, people who ask the basic questions. Is there, really, eternal life? Where do we go from here? He wants people totally dedicated, totally subservient, totally grateful, totally obedient, to give eternal life to. The years of my youth are gone. I have good health now, but deterioration is what is ahead. If heaven is not my home, and God does not exist, what is there to live for?

John 1:17 says: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." How can that be? Was there no grace and no truth before Christ? That cannot be, because the Law, the Torah, was given by God who is totally gracious and truthful. The only way I can understand the verse is that Jesus was the embodiment, the personification of grace and truth. When he came, grace and truth went beyond abstraction. He was grace and truth in person, in the flesh. He did say I am the way, the truth and the life.

Obviously, there was grace and truth before Christ. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and the Law God gave to Moses is the word of God, therefore, it is the truth. Grace existed long before the Law was given to Moses and way before Christ. Why did Noah find grace in the sight of the LORD? Because Noah believed God, and God counted Noah's belief for righteousness. What was it that Noah believed? All he had was a voice telling him to build an ark, a vessel, a refuge against the coming destruction. Was it an audible voice? Or did he hear the voice in his head? I suppose that if he heard a voice with his own ears it would have been easy to believe that it was God talking. I don't know what Noah heard but he believed that it was God himself telling him whatever it was. Noah believed God and God counted it to him for righteousness. It is an important beginning to believe that God *is*. Easy to say, hard to do. Paul says that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and you

believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. Is it a matter of blind faith? You put your hand over your eyes and say the words? That's not going to do it. You have to believe in your heart. It is easy to confess with your mouth. You can confess with your mouth all day long and still not have the belief in your heart. How do you get that belief in your heart? You cannot fake that. Is there a place, an event, a moment in time that establishes a marker, a thing that cannot be moved? You can fake you believe, you can fake you are a Christian. You can say with your mouth you are a Christian, you can go to church, etc. But how do you get to believe in your heart, where nobody can see, where you can't fake it? You can't control that, it has to be an internal conviction, some realization, something coming together in your mind. The belief in your heart comes when there is something of which you are totally convinced. The conviction in your mind of the resurrection of Christ is the transforming experience. The moment you are convinced that the resurrection really happened is the moment when you will fully trust God. The resurrection of Christ is the marker that cannot be moved

As a former heathen, stubborn, opinionated, cynical, distrustful, I could start by saying that the resurrection of Christ did not happen. Anybody can say what they want. If the Christians want to say that Jesus came back from the dead, fine, let them say what they want, it's a free country. But if I deny that the resurrection happened, I have to answer the question, what happened? If I say I don't know what happened, I still have to recognize that something happened. I don't know what happened, but something happened. Whatever happened changed how we count time. A point in time was established way back there, that says something happened. Because when I sign a check I have to write the date and the date always goes back to A.D, Anno Domini, the year of our Lord, the year of the Master, the year of the one who dominates. The Chinese have their calendar, 4707 (in 2009), the Muslims have the date 1400 something, the Jews have 5769, the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Mayans, they all have a calendar, take your pick for the date. There are calendars all over the world with different dates all claiming legitimacy, but if you don't use Anno Domini, the year of our Lord, for the date on your check the bank will not accept it. I don't

care who you are, Anno Domini is the marker that rules.

What happened to make Anno Domini the marker? Something happened to make that demarcation. What happened long ago in history to cause all that?

From the very beginning, at the very core of Christianity, the base of everything, of every doctrine, of every dogma, of every claim of authority, everything is based on the resurrection of Christ. That being the case, and Christ having so many enemies right from the beginning, why is there no challenge to the resurrection coming from that period of history? Why don't we have historians of that time challenging the resurrection? Why is there only silence regarding the resurrection? One would think that the enemies of Christ would have a case against the resurrection by now. Absolute proof it didn't happen. That is a very curious period of history. Two things stick in my mind from that time. One is the story that says Jesus came back from the dead; the other is this weird silence. When I try to deny the resurrection that silence bothers me. Why is there no one to challenge the resurrection? Historians, and many Christian theologians, don't say much about the resurrection. They talk about Christ, his deeds, his wonderful teachings, his death at the hands of Pilate. The general conclusion is that, because of his teachings, Jesus was a revolutionary, a person who was challenging the system and the Romans felt compelled to kill him. A wonderful man unjustly killed, blah, blah, blah. Then they jump forward to the time of Constantine who declared Christianity legal, more than three hundred years later. And, of course, the Crusades, the Inquisition, etc. But the silence regarding the resurrection is strange. The resurrection is not acknowledged, but at the same time, it is not challenged.

Not done yet.