

## The Transition to Resurrection

Stories are important to our understanding in life, especially in times of transition. It was noted that a Sunday School teacher was approaching this discussion with her young students and asked the question, "How do we get to heaven?" There were many answers, but one that stood out clearly from the rest of the class, a young boy who said, "You have to be dead". His answer was very clear but perhaps too abrupt?

So, the author of the Gospel of John gives us two chapters (18-19) of preparation describing the death of Jesus and finishes with the greatest of news ever, the Resurrection. These chapters are often referred to as stories of "The Passion". The word passion is defined as the trait of being intensely emotional. Who would deny that, when someone is in the process of dying, emotions are very intense with a variety of thoughts and feelings that are not always rational. These chapters then do not necessarily deal with the rational reasons for Jesus' death but the variety of scenes and stories that built up over the many decades before this Gospel was written. As we have noted before, the Gospel of John is different in many ways from the Synoptic Gospels. Part of the opening introduction to this Gospel in The Oxford Study Bible shares the viewpoint of many Biblical scholars. *"This Gospel seems to record a tradition independent of that reflected in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, a tradition which may well go back to John, the son of Zebedee (see 21.2 n.) to whom the book was ascribed in the late second century. In Christian tradition John is often called "the Spiritual" Gospel, because of its attention to the spiritual import of the incidents it reports."*

Keep in mind that this Gospel clearly states the primary reason for the crucifixion of Jesus in 11:47-53. In the middle of this portion Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said, *"You have no grasp of the situation at all; you do not realize that it is more to your interest that one man should die for the people, than that the whole nation should be destroyed"*. This outline from the Jerusalem Bible will help me summarize the events as they are given to us.

- 18:1-11 The arrest of Jesus
- 18:12-27 Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas, Peter disowns him
- 18:28-19:11 Jesus before Pilate
- 19:12-16 Jesus is condemned to death
- 19:17-22 The crucifixion
- 19:23-24 Christ's garments divided
- 19:25-27 Jesus and his mother
- 19:28-30 The death of Jesus
- 19:31-37 The pierced Christ
- 19:38-42 The burial
- 20:1-31 The Resurrection and Appearances

These occasions in John, as well as those recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, become the focus of Lent, a period of 40 days beginning with Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. Lent is marked by fasting, both from foods and festivities, and by other acts of penance and the traditional color is purple that many places use today during a time of mourning and sorrow. Tradition encourages people to give up a vice of theirs, add something that will bring them closer to God, and give time or money spent doing charitable purposes. It is known in Eastern Orthodox circles as the season of "Bright Sadness." It is a season of sorrowful reflection which is punctuated by breaks in the fast on Sundays. In liturgical churches the use of any Alleluia or the Gloria in Excelsis Deo are not used again in worship until Easter. The last two weeks are traditionally known as Passiontide with the week before called Holy Week that gives special attention to the events in the last week of Jesus' life. For further information about other customs you can visit: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lent>

Recently, after the Second Vatican Council, Easter Triduum, Holy Triduum, or Paschal Triduum is the period of three days that begins with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on the evening of Maundy Thursday (the vigil of Good Friday) and ends with evening prayer on Easter Sunday. It recalls the passion, death, burial, and

resurrection of Jesus, as portrayed in the canonical Gospels. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter\\_Tridentum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Tridentum)]  
With so many people today who are not as faithful as they once were in times past, this has become a popular venue for the preparation for Easter in many churches. The Eucharist on Holy Thursday, that usually includes the washing of feet, imitating Jesus washing his disciples feet at this supper, is now the beginning of a much shorter period of our modern Lent.

Reminded of the fact that Easter was the first and foremost of all Christian Holy Days and that the Liturgical Calendar Year was gradually formed before and after this most significant of days we call Easter, I sincerely hope that we reclaim the importance that it should have today. Resurrection implies a transformation to a new form of life and is not resuscitation that simply returns one to their physical body to continue living as usual. In the time of Jesus, when the world was flat and the center of the universe, there was little to even begin to realize what resurrection really meant. The authors of the Gospels did their level best to put into words what they were experiencing in their visions of Jesus who was with them in a new and mysterious way. When we try to literalize what they said and wrote we only create a larger problem in trying to communicate this marvelous transition in the realities of our 21st century. We recognize that "matter can neither be created nor destroyed" as a notable Theory of Science today. We function now with Einstein's Theory -  $E = MC^2$  - even though many people cannot fully understand this concept of reality either. This foremost Feast of Easter is too important for all humanity to insist on literalism or ignore our growing awareness of life in all its fullness!

We are privilege to have many Biblical Scholars alive and well in the church today, people like Marcus J. Borg, The Rt. Rev. John Shelby Spong along with other notables. These people give their 21st century understanding of Christianity in modern times with solid convictions and genuine belief.

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I start with some quotes from Marcus Borg in an Essay he wrote and published online in May 2011. It is not a long Essay and I hope you will read it completely to see it all for yourself. We are blessed, in this 21st century, to have OnLine versions of what these well informed people have to share with us. Marcus has written many books that you will find easy to read and understand on his website to help you bring your thoughts about God and Christ up-to-date.

<http://www.marcusjborg.com/2011/05/16/the-resurrection-of-jesus/>

*I was recently invited to write an essay on whether the resurrection of Jesus was "physical and bodily" or "spiritual and mystical." The distinction is helpful: it makes clear that Christians have understood the meanings of Easter in different ways. But for more than one reason, including the common meanings of these words in modern English, I don't like either option.*

*I begin with the positive – with what we can say with certainty about the meaning of Easter in the gospels and the New Testament. It is twofold: Jesus lives and is Lord.*

*Both convictions are grounded in experience. Some of Jesus' followers experienced him after his death as a figure of the present, not just of the past. And they experienced him as a divine reality, now "one with God" and "at the right hand of God."*

*A Physical/Bodily Resurrection?*

*Because of the common meaning of "physical/bodily" in modern English, I do not think the resurrection of Jesus means this. Physical/ bodily means fleshly, molecular, protoplasmic, corpuscular existence.*

*A Mystical/Spiritual Resurrection?*

*And given the modern world-view in which the physical and material are assigned a greater reality than "the spiritual," to speak of the resurrection of Jesus as "spiritual" assigns it a lesser and commonly unimportant significance. It's "just spiritual" not really real.*

*This is unfortunate, for the ancient meanings of "mystical" and "spiritual" suggest a reality that is more important, more significant, than the space-time world of our ordinary everyday experience.*

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Next I would like you to consider some of the six essays that Bishop Spong has written about "The Meaning of the Resurrection" on his website called, "A New Christianity for a New World". These essays can only be read in their entirety if you sign up on his website to be able to view them. <https://johnshelbyspong.com/sign-up/> While you can actually sign up for one month free and read these specific essays, I would invite you to consider at least a three month subscription for only \$9.95. When you see the value and credibility of what Bishop Spong says about the meaning of the resurrection, you may be encouraged to sign up and continue to learn more. This series will give you the dates and the order in which the various Biblical books cited by him were written to sense the progression of what may have transpired over almost ten decades of writing. His method will clearly give you the basic methodology of how many scholars study scripture and how they gather knowledge and understanding.

*In his first essay, "Now in this post-Easter time of the Christian year, I would like to subject the resurrection stories of the New Testament to the same sort of critical biblical analysis, recalling that St. Paul also said that Jesus was raised "in accordance with the scriptures." Perhaps in the process of this series, we will learn that in freeing theological truth from the biblical text, something does not have to be literal to be understood as true and that the experience of the resurrection has little to do with a body being resuscitated from death back into life. Indeed, the resurrection of Jesus means something far different and far more significant than that."*

*In the second essay Bishop Spong begins by looking for the source. "We begin our probe into the meaning of the Easter moment by asking who it was who stood in the center of the Easter experience. People do not always recognize that the claim of revealed truth requires both a revelation and a receiver of that revelation. The revelation may be of a timeless truth, but it has no effect unless someone, who is bound by both time and space, receives that revelation or that new insight and shares it." So the question is asked, "**Who Stood in the Center of the Easter Breakthrough?**"*

*In the third essay he notes, "When people have a life-changing experience, they tend to freeze in their minds forever where they were and even what they were doing when the news broke or the new awareness entered their world. **Where Were the Disciples When They Saw?**"*

*In the fourth essay he asks, "**What is the Meaning of Three Days?**" In the fifth essay, "**The "How" Question — What Was the Context in Which Easter Dawned?**"*

*In the sixth and final essay in this series his concluding topic is, "**Seeing Through a Glass Darkly**". "At some point, however, something brought them back and, more than that, they were brought back with convictions that were so unshakable that the Christian movement was born. If the tradition is correct, its leaders were willing to die for the reality of their new vision. What can account for so dramatic a change?" The Bishop's conclusions in this last essay on the resurrection may help you to see clearly how people today are still changed by an encounter with a personal vision of what the disciples came to see and know. Unfortunately there is no way that I can do any more than to encourage you to read these essays for yourself to see the validity of their faith and to perhaps find that same faith in your life.*

### **Easter is not just a day - it's a way of living:**

Easter is a celebration of resurrection - new life. Easter began as a life experience for the disciples as they followed Jesus. It was a daily confrontation with the Realm of God as they watched and learned from the ministry of Jesus among the people. They watched as Jesus gave them new life by what he said and did, so the meaning of Easter was caught as much as it was taught. The concept of Easter did not begin as a special holiday on one Sunday of each year but developed as a way of life for the early Christian church. As the early church

was formed and grew it proclaimed Sunday, the first day of the week, as "The Lord's Day" celebrating their new life in Christ. One of today's popular songs might reflect a summary of their minds and hearts then, "**You Raise Me Up.**"

*When I am down and oh my soul so weary  
When troubles come and my heart burdened me  
And I am still and wait here in the silence  
Until you come and sit awhile with me.*

*You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas  
I am strong when I am on your shoulders  
You raise me up to more than I can be.*

[*"You Raise Me Up"* is a popular song in the inspirational mold. The music was written by Secret Garden's Rolf Løvland and the lyrics by Brendan Graham, a veteran songwriter from Ireland.]

### **Easter is a happening that is inexplicable:**

Then, after the death of Jesus, they began to have a conscious awareness that Jesus somehow was still alive. He told them that he would die and go to be with his Father, but that he would return. That God would give them the Spirit to guide them into all truth. They remember that Jesus said that because I Am - You are. Jesus told them that they would, in fact, even do greater things than they had seen him do after he was gone. They developed an inner consciousness of their own life in God and their interconnection with the resurrection and eternal life. Easter later became a Day of Celebration, a feast day of the amazing on-going reality of life itself. A special Day to celebrate the activity of life in the Realm of God one day at a time. So what is this Consciousness we experience as humans? Does Consciousness end when we do?

You might enjoy watching "Through The Wormhole - Is There Consciousness? What is Consciousness?"

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6VGIYm2L-A&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6VGIYm2L-A&feature=youtube_gdata_player)

Since the time of Jesus' resurrection a larger question has continually grown - is there life after death? Stories of the afterlife have become larger than a way of life now and more like a promise of "pie in the sky by and by", a reward for being good and a dream of a better life after we died, looming large with wild promises of Mansions, streets of gold, eternal bliss and happiness, all the things that people wish for now in this life. When Scripture is taken literally these ideas can exist. Easter is not just an imaginary concept in this life or a wishful thought for the afterlife.

### **Easter is now and always:**

When we study and think about Easter today we have a lot more information in both Science and Religion. We have expanded our view of the Universe immensely compared to those who tried to describe what transpired in the early centuries of the common era. While we certainly cannot claim to have all the answers about the mysteries of life and death, we have much more information to think about. Our knowledge and understanding about these matters will only broaden and improve to more fully capture the realities that lay ahead. It reminds me of a few verses at the end of 1 Corinthians 13, "*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became mature, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*"

So far, in both religion and science, people have a variety of beliefs, opinions and theories. When it comes to life after death some believe more than we can imagine while others believe little or nothing. It seems to me that the Theory of Relativity suggests, what I might call death and birth, an on-going recycling of everything? If we accept that matter, since the beginning of our universe, can neither be created or destroyed then it continues to

be, die, and become new, at least for as long as the universe exists. So, we at least have the question, is there life after death? Enjoy this brief segment of "Through The Wormhole" as a present day contribution.

Through The Wormhole - Is There Life After Death?

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFvzHEepPQE&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFvzHEepPQE&feature=youtube_gdata_player)

I have one last paper that will be a summary of my thoughts about the comprehensive gift that we have in this, The Gospel of John. The title of this paper is, "The Way, The Truth, and The Life", taken from chapter 14:6 that are said to have been a reply from Jesus. I admire the author of this Gospel because he covers the vision of God's Realm as a modest summary of scripture from the Beginning to his time of writing. In Colossians 1:17 we have this claim about Jesus as it appears in two translations, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" [NIV] and "he is before all things, and by him all things consist." [KJV] It is my contention that the Gospel of John shows us that Jesus does "hold all things together" as the Word and also that "by him all things consist" as the Verb. In a much broader way then, the Gospel of John demonstrates that Jesus was in many ways the way, the truth, and the life in what he said and did.

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.