



**The
Living Reality**

**of the
Resurrection**

James A. Fowler

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by James A. Fowler

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I observed a sign outside of a local church building this last week. That seems to be the “in-thing” in ecclesiastical circles these days – to post trite sayings on a display sign so the world can observe their superficiality (or stupidity). This sign read, “The CROSS – That’s My (God’s) final answer.”

(What do you think of that statement?)

As a take-off from the contemporary television program, “Who Wants to be a Millionaire,” where each contestant must verify, “That’s my final answer,” I found the statement cute and catchy. Theologically, I found the statement inaccurate and misleading.

If the cross is God’s final answer, then what are we doing here today? Is Easter an irrelevancy?

If the death of Jesus on the execution instrument of a cross is the final answer, then Jesus is just a martyr figure that Christians rally around to persuade others to join their cause -- in this case, their religion.

Martin Luther King is such a martyr figure for the blacks in America, allowing them to emphasize their cause of victimization in the history and policies of America.

Che Guevera is such a martyr figure for the Hispanics, serving as a focal point to emphasize their oppression at the hands of others.

Sayyid Qutb is such a martyr figure for the Muslims, serving as a springboard for radical Islamic terrorism to combat Western civilization. Maybe Saddam Hussein will become a martyr figure for some Arabs in the years to come.

But is that all that Jesus is for Christians?

If the cross is an end in itself, i.e. “God’s final answer,” then all the gruesome execution of Jesus can do is create a martyr figure that allows people to focus on the death of this individual in order to perpetuate a particular ideology. Granted, that is how much of the Christian religion operates in our day, but is that what Christianity was intended to be?

What happened on the cross, the death of Jesus, represents a remedial action. A remedial action is action taken to remedy a problem of deficiency. Many students, for example, are required to take remedial math or remedial English courses in order to qualify for college level courses. The remedial courses remedy and correct the problem of these students’ deficient understanding of the subjects. The problem that needed to be remedied for the human race was a deficiency that disqualified mankind from being man as God intended, and thus from participating in the course of life as God intended man to live.

Original man (represented by Adam and Eve) was given the choice of life and death in the garden. The life choice was to receive from the “tree of life” which represented the derivation of God’s life operative in man. The death choice was to partake of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” concerning which God had said, “In the day that you eat thereof, you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Was that a threat by a God who

would take punitive action if His intents were violated? Or was that simply a statement of inevitable fact, indicating that the rejection of the power of God's life would be to open themselves up to the only alternative of "the one having the power of death, that is the devil" (Heb. 2:14) functioning in them?

The original sin of the original couple (who represented all humanity) allowed death to reign (Rom. 5:17) in the human race. The resultant deficiency of divine life in mankind (fallen man is "devoid of the Spirit" – Jude 19) disqualified humanity from being man as God intended. That is why remedial action was necessitated – so that man could enroll again in the course of life!

The Son of God, who was incarnated as the man, Jesus, was willing to enroll in the remedial course of death on man's behalf – as an alternative representative man for humanity. He was willing to submit to death, though personally undeserving of such for He was "without sin" (Heb. 4:15; II Cor. 5:21), so that representatively He might substitutionally assume the death consequences of mankind's sin, and allow His divine life to overcome the "power of death" and make His life available to humanity again.

It makes a difference how we interpret the death of Jesus. Was God the Father an offended deity demanding that a penalty of death be paid for sin before He would forgive mankind? A popular view of the crucifixion seems to cast God as an angry, blood-thirsty, death-dealing God who poured out His punitive wrath and judgment upon His own Son, Jesus, because "somebody's gotta pay!" Jesus, the Son of God, is often portrayed, on the other hand, as a loving and forgiving side of God who was willing to express divine grace in order to redeem man instead of demanding justice and judgment. What does such a perspective do to God? It divides and divorces the intents of the Father and the Son. It severs the Trinity asunder. The Father is *against* us; the Son is *for* us. The Son is acting as our legal advocate attempting to convince the Father, the Judge, to let us off the hook. What a tragic mangling of the oneness of the Triune God.

On the contrary, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit had a unified intent to restore humanity to the divine intent. God was wholly *for* us in His divine love and grace, and was desirous that death, and "the one having the power of death" (Heb. 2:14) be defeated by assuming death undeservedly via the Son's assumption of mortal humanity. The restoration of God's life *to* man required the assumption of death *for* man. God's affirmative "*Yes*" to man's redemption and restoration, required the "*No*" to the death invasion of sin. Via the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross, God said "*No*" to the misuse and abuse of humanity by the diabolic death-dealing antithesis to the living God, "the god of this age" (II Cor. 4:4). God would no longer tolerate the "one having the power of death" (Heb. 2:14) to hold man hostage (II Tim. 2:26).

The death of Jesus on the cross was the undoing of the Adamic downfall as Jesus voluntarily accepted the death consequences of humanity's sin. "Obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8), Jesus was "made sin" (II Cor. 5:21) on our behalf. He was personally sinless, however, and "it was impossible for Him to be held in death's power" (Acts 2:24), by the usurping death-agent, "the one having the power of death, that is the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

From the cross, Jesus exclaimed, "*Tetelestai* – It is Finished!" He knew that in the death He was dying, He would "accomplish what the Father had sent Him to do" (Jn. 17:4) as a mortal man. He knew that He would "finish" the death captivity of man by

the death-dealing destroyer (I Cor. 10:10) of man. He knew that His assumption of death would inevitably allow for the rising forth of divine resurrection life made available to all men for their restoration.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was God's "Yes" to the restoration of His divine life in humanity. If our theology does not go beyond redemption in the death of Jesus on the cross, to the restoration of God's life in humanity by the resurrection, then it ceases to be Christian theology. God's "final answer" was not the cross. God's final answer was (and is) the resurrection! In the resurrection of Jesus divine life overcame death, God overcame Satan (I Jn. 3:8; Heb. 2:14). That was historically enacted on that third day when Jesus arose from the dead and exited the tomb, but it was for the purpose of resurrection being personally and spiritually enacted in those receptive to Christ by faith.

It is a sad indictment of contemporary Christian religion to observe how the resurrection is regarded and taught in the churches today. It has become but a token recollection in the annual church calendar.

There will be many sermons in the pulpits of the churches across the world today that adduce a list of apologetic arguments as proofs that the resurrection of Jesus really took place as the gospel writers record. They will be attempting to prove that the physical resurrection of Jesus was indeed an *historical miracle* that attests to the supernatural power and ability of God. They will be building scaffolding around the doctrine of the historical resurrection of Jesus, apparently concerned that this tenet of their faith might crumble and fall if they cannot convince people that God is capable of accomplishing such an historical miracle, and that it really did occur as an historical event. When the primary objective of popular preaching is to attest to the possibility and accuracy of the historical miracle of Jesus' resurrection, it tends to have a boomerang effect on the preaching of the gospel. If the historical resurrection needs to be propped up with all this scaffolding of support as the preachers engage in apologetic defensiveness, then what kind of an impotent God do they believe in? If we believe in a sovereign and omnipotent God, then we can accept the miracle of the resurrection as an historical "given."

Many other Easter messages will be approaching the resurrection of Jesus as a *theological argument* to verify and prove the deity of Jesus Christ. They seek to explain that the historical miracle of the resurrection lends credence to the Christian claim that Jesus was really God in the flesh. Why do Christians spend so much time and energy trying to apologetically defend the basic tenets of their faith? If God is a God of miracles, as He is, and Jesus is the divine Son of God, as He is, then why don't Christians begin to build a practicum of application that pertains to the practical ramifications of Christ's resurrection in contemporary life? If it doesn't apply to our daily lives, then Christianity is just an historical society for the remembrance of the events of Jesus' life, or a theological society to contend about the varied explanations of His life. Let's get on with life!

Still avoiding the present implications of resurrection life, another *theological argument* based on the resurrection of Jesus is to use the historical miracle of the resurrection as verification for the expectation of the future resurrection of Christians after death. This was, of course, Paul's argument in that great "resurrection chapter" of I Corinthians 15, but a more comprehensive study reveals that the over-all emphasis on resurrection in

Paul's epistles is not just to connect the past resurrection of Jesus in history to the future resurrection of bodies in heaven. Paul's primary concern was to demonstrate how the historical resurrection of Jesus served as the triumphant presentation of life out of death, the victory of divine life over diabolic death.

The need of the hour in Christian preaching and teaching is to proclaim the resurrection as a *living reality* wherein the living Lord Jesus is presently indwelling Christians and living out His resurrection life in Christian behavior. Though Christianity has historical foundations and theological explanations, the vital dynamic that validates Christianity is that Jesus Christ is alive today by the Spirit to indwell the spirits of receptive individuals who will allow Him to live out His life and character in their behavior.

In declaring the purpose of His coming, Jesus said, "I came to give My life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45). He came to die and to allow His death to take the death consequences for all men, releasing them from the grasp of the death-dealing devil. He also said, "I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). He knew that His death would result in resurrection, life out of death, for the sin-source and death-dealer would not be able to capture Him, the Sinless One. His resurrection would allow God's life to become operative in mankind again as each individual with freedom of choice was willing to receive such life.

The power to bestow and restore God's life to sinful and fallen mankind was given to Jesus upon His resurrection. Paul explains, "He was declared the Son of God with power (the power to convey life out of death) by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). "Christ is the power of God" (I Cor. 1:24) for the re-living, the spiritual regeneration of humanity.

In that great resurrection chapter of I Corinthians 15, Paul wrote, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam (Jesus) became a life-giving spirit" (I Cor. 15:45). The first representative man, Adam, became a living soul when God breathed into him the breath of lives (Gen. 2:7), the spiritual life of Father, Son and Holy by which he could have functioned as God intended by deriving God's life. But he made the death choice rather than the life choice. Jesus, on the other hand, is the other representative man who came to restore God's life to man. He is called the "Last Adam," the Eschatos Man, the last in a sequence of two alternatives. Earlier in the same chapter, Paul wrote, "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (I Cor. 15:22). All men are united representatively and spiritually with either Adam or Christ, in either spiritual death or spiritual life. The "last Adam," Jesus Christ, who came as God-man to die on our behalf, became (by His resurrection and ascension and Pentecostal outpouring) the "life-giving Spirit" to give God's life to the spirits of receptive persons. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "Now the Lord (Jesus) is the Spirit" (II Cor. 3:17), and "the Spirit gives life" (II Cor. 3:6). The risen and living Lord Jesus now functions as the "Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9) restoring spiritual life to those seeking, desiring, and willing to receive it.

This spiritual life that the Spirit of Christ makes available to mankind is not a detached package of "eternal life" that is but a "benefit" of believing in Jesus. The life that the living Lord Jesus makes available to mankind is Himself. "I AM the resurrection and the life" (Rom. 11:25), Jesus said to Martha, identifying Himself with the I AM

of God (Exod. 3:14). "I AM the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6), Jesus explained to His disciples. Jesus is the modality (way), the reality (truth), and the vitality (life) of God Himself. The need of fallen mankind is the restoration of the presence of God's life in their spirit to energize their behavior in soul and body. The Spirit of Christ is that life. Life is a Person. "I AM the life" (Jn. 14:6), Jesus said. Divine life, spiritual life, eternal life, resurrection life are all the life of the risen and living Lord Jesus. The Apostle John explained, "He that has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (I Jn. 5:12).

How does man partake of the life that is the resurrected Jesus? The apostle Peter indicated that we are "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. 1:3). The resurrection of Jesus was the prerequisite to the restoration of divine life in man. Using the metaphor of birth for the initiation of life, Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (Jn. 3:7). "Unless one is born from above" (Jn. 3:3), receiving the spiritual life that is God's life, an individual will not be restored to God's intent, for God so designed man that it requires the presence of God's life in man for man to be man as God intended man to be. While still speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus made that most familiar statement, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever *believes* in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). To *believe* is more than just mental assent or affirmation to historical or theological data. To *believe* is to *receive*. John wrote, "As many as *received* Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who *believe* in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn. 1:12,13). There are no proprietary procedures for an individual's reception of the life that is Jesus. It doesn't have to happen in a church by walking an aisle, or raising one's hand, or repeating a "statement of faith." It doesn't have to happen by consenting to "four spiritual laws" and praying a "prayer of faith." An individual simply has to get real with God and desire the life that only God can give.

Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (Jn. 5:24). The one who believes and receives the Spirit of Christ has "passed out of death into life" (I Jn. 3:14). When one becomes a Christian in this way, he participates in a spiritual re-enactment of the death and resurrection of Jesus. To the Roman Christians, Paul explained, "Do you not know that all who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" (Rom. 6:3). "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. 6:5), "in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Rom. 6:8). "So consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). The person that we were, the "old man," "has been crucified with Christ" (Rom. 6:6) and "laid aside" (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), and the Christian is now a "new man" (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), a "new creature" in Christ (II Cor. 5:17), "raised up with Christ" (Col. 3:1), raised up to newness of life by His resurrection life. To the Colossians, Paul wrote, "You were raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the

dead... He made you alive together with Him” (Col. 2:12,13). The divine life that we receive as Christians is His resurrection life. “Christ is our life” (Col. 3:4).

The Christian life is the Christ life dwelling within us and operating through us. “Christ lives in me,” Paul exclaimed, “and the life that I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20). “Do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?” (II Cor. 13:5), Paul asked the Corinthian Christians. “For me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21), Paul explained to the Philippians. The power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is the living power that is now working in us (Eph. 1:18-21), Paul revealed in his prayer for the Christians of Ephesus. Christianity is Christ – living His resurrection life in us.

If the only explanation for me, and the life that I live, is not the living Lord Jesus, then I’m not being Christian. If I’m not different because Jesus is alive in me and living through me (not weird-different or sensational-different, but character-different), then what good is all this resurrection-talk? If the resurrection life of the Spirit of Christ is not lived out in us, validating the *living reality* of the resurrection, then let the Christian historians dabble with their archaeological data; let the Christian theologians argue about their religious explanations; let the Christian preachers and their parishioners “play church;” for it is all an exercise in futility. If the resurrection doesn’t become *living reality* in our lives, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of every week of every year, then Jesus died and rose again in vain. The *historical miracle* of the resurrection and the *theological explanations* of the resurrection are meaningless if the *living reality* of the resurrection life of Jesus does not affect our living and our dying.

Christianity is not just another ideological option that one can stack up against other ideas, and by human reasoning “take it or leave it.” Christianity is not an epistemological belief-system – a “believe-right” religion. Christianity is not a morality system of right and wrong – a “do-right” religion. Christianity is Christ. Christ is life. The option that human creatures have because of Jesus Christ is life or death. Divine life is available in Him, but the choice is ours. As choosing creatures, we can passively choose by our non-choice (i.e. rejection) of Jesus to participate in the only other alternative, the present and everlasting consequences of death. Remember, God is not the punitive, death-dealing God that has determined to judge people and send them to hell. God doesn’t send anyone to hell, but He does respect mankind enough as the choosing creature that He created him to be, to allow an individual to choose the perpetuity of identification with “the one having the power of death, that is the devil” (Heb. 2:14). “God is not willing that any should perish, but that all might come to repentance” (II Pet. 3:9) and life in Christ Jesus.

The issue, my friends, is life or death!