

RAISED from the DEAD

by Merv Buckmaster

Preamble

From the apostle's words to the Colossians in chapter 3 verse 1, *"If, then, you were raised with Christ"* it may be inferred that Paul was applying his thought to his day, which was a continuation of Christ's ministry, and by extension to the Gospel Age. And if that is the case, being raised must be in a spiritual sense, because the Colossians had not been raised from the grave as Jesus had, nor were they raised to sit on the right hand of God as Jesus was.

This is supported by the closer translation of 'raised' as 'spiritually revived' (Strong 4891) from which the verse may be rendered, *"If, then, you have been spiritually revived through Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is"*.

An alternative view is that Paul was challenging the Colossians to respond more positively to Jesus' words by looking to the future; to *"Seek first the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 6:33; KJV) in the hope of the resurrection, since he wrote, in verse 4, *"when Christ who is our life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory"*. The revealing of the Lord and the church, in glory, will be in the kingdom age.

In both cases Paul wrote that Jesus' life is the pattern for our life, and that *"your life is hidden (covered or kept private; Strong 2928) with Christ by God"* (verse 3). Underlying these words is Paul's oft-repeated explanation that through the New Covenant, sealed by Jesus' sacrifice, a new life has become available to the believer.

To the Corinthians he wrote, *"if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things have passed away: all things have become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17; NKJV).

To the Ephesians he wrote *"be renewed in the spirit of your mind and that you put on the new man"* (Ephesians 4:23,24; NKJV); and to the Colossians he wrote, *"put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge"* (Colossians 3:10; NKJV).

For the duration of the gospel age putting on the new man and becoming a new creature carries the obligation and consequence of, not a new life but a new way of living. The believer does not die and be given a new life, but the life given at birth continues, and as it continues it has to change; to be spiritually revived to conform to the pattern Jesus himself set for us when he was *"made flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14; KJV).

The spiritual revival brought about by commitment to Jesus' example of the new way of living could be regarded as a new life; that is, a new spiritual life, having been raised from the spiritual death of disobedience and godlessness, as God had promised through the prophecy in Jeremiah, that he would *"put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts"* (Jeremiah 31:33; NKJV).

At a future time those who are chosen to be included with the joint-heirs will be given a new life, and a new name (Revelation 2:17), when the Son of God will call them from the grave at the first resurrection, for God has promised that through Jesus, *"Behold! I make all things new"* (Revelation 21:5; KJV).

Introduction

While the development of the new way of living is a life-long work for the believer, the giving of life is the miracle of creation. Of the beginning of human life we are told what is necessary and sufficient to reveal God's power, and that record begins in the second chapter of Genesis.

"The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath (neshawmaw, wind) of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7; NIV).

After the Fall, God said to Adam, *"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return"* (Genesis 3:19; NIV).

Solomon defined the truth of man's existence when he wrote; *"Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before ... man goes to his eternal home ... and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit (ruwach, breath) returns to God who gave it"* (Ecclesiastes 12:7; NIV).

"For in the grave where you are going, there is neither working or planning nor knowledge nor wisdom" (Ecclesiastes 9:10; NIV).

This is the uncluttered truth from the creator: a living human being is a physical body made miraculously from the elements of the earth and to which has been given the breath of life. When that breath ceases the body dies and decays to dust. The living being does not then exist; nothing remains. The existence of that person is retained in the memories of those who were acquainted with him or her, and most importantly in the memory of the creator himself.

The creation of living things is a demonstration of God's power, acknowledged by King David when he said we are "*fearfully and wonderfully made*" (Psalm 139:14; NIV).

And in stark contrast to the joyful wonder of life is the grievous horror of death, the condition in which there is no breath and the body has become dust, dispersed to mingle with the earth. When neither body nor breath remain, this is the state of the dead; the state of non-existence.

Among the many amazing events recorded in the Bible are those reports of dead people being restored to life, further demonstrations of God's power to create living things, quite distinct from the ability of those living things to produce their own kind.

1. The son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17)

The first of these episodes is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of the first book of Kings. Elijah had been directed by God to tell King Ahab that there would be drought and famine in the land of Canaan. Elijah was fed miraculously by ravens beside Cherith brook until it dried up as the drought took hold. He was then directed by God to go to Zarephath to meet a widow, and to ask her to feed him. The widow had only enough flour and oil for one meal for herself and her son, but Elijah insisted that she feed him also. After she had fed Elijah, the flour and oil were miraculously replenished to provide for all three people for three years until the rains returned and the famine was over.

During that time the widow's son died, and she berated Elijah for "*reminding God of my sins and so cause my son's death*". Elijah prayed, "*O LORD my God, let this boy's life (nephesh: breath, Strong 5315) return to him*". The LORD answered Elijah's prayer; the child started breathing again and revived.

This is strictly not a case of being raised from the state of non-existence because the body of the boy still existed. It had not returned to dust. The boy was dead because he had ceased to breathe, due to a cause not given in the account, but his breath was restored and his body was thus restored to life. He was raised from the dead to become once more a living being.

2. The son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-16)

In the next account, recorded in the seventh chapter of Luke's gospel, the son of another widow was restored to life. As Jesus and many of his disciples neared the gate of the city of Nain, a dead man, the son of a widow, was carried out. It was probably the day after the man's death because the Jews had been instructed under the Mosaic Law to bury the dead on the day following a death. Jesus felt great sympathy for the mourning widow. He halted the funeral procession and told the widow not to weep; then told the dead man to rise from his death bed.

The man sat up and began to converse with those around him. Although the witnesses were frightened by the display of supernatural power, they glorified God. The event is described in the barest of outlines. A dead man was being carried to the cemetery when Jesus told him to get up from the bier. The breath of life was re-commenced in the body which still existed. The man had life restored to him as the continuation of the life that was given to him at birth. It was not a new life, and it ceased when that life span came to its appointed end.

3. The daughter of the ruler of the Synagogue (Luke 8:41,49-56; Mark 5:22,35-43)

In the next chapter of Luke is recorded an event that took place after Jesus had driven the evil spirits out of the wild man at Gadara. A ruler of the Synagogue, named Jairus, pleaded with Jesus to go to his house because his daughter was dying; presumably to have Jesus heal her, since his healing powers had become widely known, by curing the lame, the blind and driving out evil spirits.

On the way to Jairus' house Jesus and the crowd were delayed by the incident of the woman who secretly touched his garment and was healed. Then a servant came from Jairus' house to report that the girl had died, and suggested that those who were pleading for Jesus' attention to the girl should trouble him no longer.

Jesus told Jairus to retain his belief that had been displayed in his initial request to the Lord, and it seems that if he did so his daughter would be healed. At the house Jesus told the crowd to stop wailing, and he went inside with the girl's parents and Peter, James and John. To the girl he said, "*Maid, arise*". Her breath

(pneuma, Strong 4151) returned and she stood up. Jesus had restored the breath of life to her. She had been restored from a dead being to a living being.

4. Lazarus (John 11:1,3-6,11-15,17-23,30-35,38-44)

Near to Jerusalem was the town of Bethany where sisters Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus lived. Jesus was at the river Jordan when he heard the news that Lazarus had died. He waited there near the river for two days then decided to go back into Judea and said *"I am going there to wake him up"*. The disciples thought that the Lord thought that Lazarus was asleep, but Jesus stated that he was dead. As they neared Bethany Mary, together with Jews who were trying to comfort her, met them. Jesus was troubled by the expressions of grief and also wept. At the grave, which was a cave blocked by a stone, Jesus commanded that the stone be rolled away and prayed to God, thanking him that his prayer had been heard, then he called Lazarus from the tomb. The man who had died emerged alive, still wrapped in the grave cloths, a napkin at his face. Many Jews who had witnessed the miracle believed that Jesus was sent from God.

There are several side issues involved in this account, but again there is no detail of the affliction which took the life of Lazarus.

Bethany was near Jerusalem and some of the Jewish leaders had gone there to console Mary and Martha on the loss of their brother.

When after two days from hearing of the death of Lazarus Jesus decided to go to Bethany, some of his followers said that it was too dangerous to do so, because the Jewish leaders in Judea had tried to kill him. Jesus' response was to declare that it was safe to travel while it was daylight, but difficult to avoid an attack during darkness.

At first Jesus said that Lazarus was asleep and that he was going to awaken him. That prompted the disciples to think that rest would enable Lazarus to recover, but Jesus stated plainly that Lazarus was dead. Furthermore, he pointed out that he was satisfied that his absence from Bethany gave him another opportunity to display the power of God and so strengthen their belief in him.

Martha went to meet Jesus and lamented that he was too late to save her brother. In the short conversation which followed Martha declared her belief in the resurrection, and Jesus assured her that he had God's power to restore life.

Martha went to get Mary who met Jesus at the same place outside the town. She had been followed by other mourners, and their display of grief so affected the Lord that he also wept.

At the tomb Jesus caused some consternation by commanding that it be opened. He then gave a short prayer of acknowledgement that God had responded to a request Jesus must have made previously, so that the attending crowd would realise that God had sent him to display the power of God and call them to believe in him.

The intense emotion of the occasion is revealed by the tears that were shed at the tomb-side. And if grief is the price we pay for love, the emotion there was heightened when *"Jesus called with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!'"*.

The man who emerged from the tomb was still wrapped in the grave-cloths. It was the same Lazarus who had died and whose earthly life had been restored.

5. Dorcas (Greek, or Tabitha, Aramaic) (Acts 9:36-41)

Early in his ministry when he was at Lydda, Peter received a call from disciples in Joppa where a woman called Dorcas had died. Upon his arrival at Joppa Peter was shown into the room where Dorcas had been laid. He dismissed the women who were mourning her death and he prayed.

Peter then spoke to her and said *"Tabitha, arise"*. She opened her eyes, saw Peter and sat up. He then led her from the room and presented her to those who were there. The miracle brought many to believe in the Lord.

6 Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12)

When Paul was in Troas he talked to a congregation there and continued his address until late into the night. Eutychus, a young man who was listening to Paul from a window seat, fell asleep and fell three storeys and was picked up dead. Paul went down, put his arms around him and declared, *"He is alive!"*. Paul returned upstairs and talked until daylight, while the people took Eutychus home, joyful that he had been restored to life.

At the present time medical knowledge has enabled us to restore life to some people immediately after they have died. In these cases the cause of death is usually severe shock which arrests either heartbeat or breathing. If the heart and lung function can be restarted life may return, although sometimes impaired by residual damage to parts of the body, particularly the brain, and the damage caused by decay begins immediately the being dies. This process of restoration is called cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and it must begin immediately after death.

In none of the cases listed above was cardio-pulmonary resuscitation used to restore life to the six people who had died. Their lives were returned to them by the power of God exerted, in turn, through Elijah, Jesus, Peter and Paul. Those who died had lost the breath of life and it was miraculously given back to their bodies which had remained after death.

7. Jesus.

In the first six cases, a boy, three young men, a girl and a woman had their earthly lives, which had been cut short by disease and/or accident, restored by miracles. In the case of the Lord the situation is significantly different.

Jesus suffered scourging and was crucified. He did not die because of disease or physical accident. He died by giving up the breath of life (pneuma, Luke 24:46). His body was wrapped and placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. A stone was rolled across the mouth of the tomb to seal it, and the two Marys sat beside it. The next day the Pharisees set a guard to prevent anyone going to take the body away. At dawn on the third day, the first day of the week, there was an earthquake and an angel rolled the stone away and sat upon it. The guard fainted.

The two Marys went to the tomb with the intention of embalming the body, and the angel said to them, *“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay”* (Matthew 28:5; NIV). The tomb had not been used before and when it was opened it was empty. The grave cloths were lying by themselves but the body was gone (Luke 24:12; John 20:6,7). David's prophecy of the Lord's death included the point that after death his body would not be abandoned in the grave, nor would it suffer decay (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:31; NIV).

It would seem that Jesus was raised from the dead, but he was actually given a new body and a new life, raised as a life-giving spirit being (1 Corinthians 15:45).

On the day of Pentecost, Peter addressed the gathering, and in his speech he declared *“Men of Israel, listen to this. Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles ... which God did among you through him. ... This man ... was handed over to you, and you, with the help of wicked men ... put him to death. But God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact”* (Acts 2:22,23,32; NIV).

“I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried. ... But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants upon his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ” (Acts 2:29-31; NIV).

Jesus had given up the breath of life, and his body did not exist for a period from internment until the third day, when the two Marys met him in the garden. At first Mary Magdalene did not recognise him because his re-appearance was completely unexpected. Others of the disciples doubted that it was he who met them, but they were convinced by the scars of his crucifixion, and by his personal knowledge of them. He explained to two of them on the road to Emmaus all the things in the scriptures that concerned himself. Jesus had been raised complete with the knowledge and personality that made him who he was.

Many, many more people met Jesus during the following forty days, witnesses to the miracle that he had been more than just raised from the dead; he was resurrected, raised to life from a state of non-existence.

This was the first resurrection.

It is the seal of God's promise to make all things new (Revelation 21:5).

It is the foundation for Peter's prophecy of the reconstitution of all things (Acts 3:21).

It is the assurance of our hope in the life to come, the convincing evidence of those things which we have not seen but which we, in faith believe.