EXPLORE THE MIRACLES OF CALVARY

The story of Easter is often told in three parts—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, Jesus was not the only person to die and be resurrected in the Bible. What, then, makes the events that took place on Calvary truly unique? In Miracles of Easter: Unveiling the Story of the Cross, William Nicholson dives into two of the six miracles of Easter to reveal how the two events—the open graves and the revivals to life in the Calvary graveyard—help to clarify the meaning and purpose of our Savior’s suffering.


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introduction

Miracles of Easter
Unveiling the Story of the Cross

Each year, we seek to reflect the glory of the resurrection in churches across the nation in both the simplest and most extravagant productions. Yet no staged glory can compare with the grandeur that the true story of the resurrection delivers to
the human heart. In these pages, adapted from William Nicholson’s book, The Six Miracles of Calvary: Unveiling the Story of the Resurrection, you will find the purpose behind the suffering of our Savior and the meaning behind two of the supernatural wonders at the moment of His death. As we examine two of these events—the miracle of the opened graves and the revivals to life of the saints in the Jerusalem graveyard—you will find the glory of Easter born anew in your heart.

Dan Schaeffer, editor
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The Miracle of the
Opened Graves

*The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open.*
—Matthew 27:51–52

The midday darkness is the first of the six miracles that happened during Jesus’s crucifixion (Matthew 27:45). It is the beginning of the divine procession of signs that heralded the death of Jesus Christ. Second came the supernatural tearing from top to bottom of the curtain of the temple. The third miracle was the earthquake and the splitting of the rocks (v. 51), while the fourth was the opening of the graves in the vicinity (v. 52). The fifth miraculous sign was the condition of the empty
tomb, and the last miracle was the resurrection of many saints who had died (v. 53). These were the six miracles of Calvary, all of them linked directly to the death of Jesus Christ.

Some of these miracles occurred in the heavens, others under the earth, yet they all established a unique class of miracles—each of these signs played a part in the miracle of Christ’s eternal act of redemption. Each miracle, in its own special way, elucidates the meaning and purpose of the depths of our Savior’s suffering. Together, all six surround Christ in His death, guarding carefully the truth of our deliverance.

Here we will look at the fourth of the Calvary miracles—the opening of the graves.

The disturbed graveyard has a distinct place among the miracles. It is the climax of all the previous miracles, even as it anticipates the miracles that will follow. Let’s consider the facts related to us in the gospel.

“When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.”

“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs
broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life” (Matthew 27:50–52).

We can clearly see that it was by means of the earthquake that the graves were opened. We may also conclude that most of the graves were located at or around Calvary. The earthquake would likely have been the most violent at its point of origin—the epicenter of Jesus’s disturbing death. It is certain that a graveyard existed near Calvary, since Jesus was laid nearby in Joseph’s tomb (John 19:41–42).

**The locality**

Where these resurrections took place is important. If this miracle was meant to be a testimony to the power of Christ’s death, it would necessitate the graves being in close proximity to the cross. Further indication that these graves were close to Jerusalem is seen from the fact that when the saints were resurrected, they immediately entered Jerusalem (Matthew 27:53).

It can also be reasonably implied that these particular graves were rocky tombs, holes carved into the rock whose entrances were sealed by large stones rolled in front of them. We can infer this because of the obvious connection between the two statements “the rocks split” and “the tombs broke open.”

Since it appears that the opening of the graves is so closely connected to the splitting of the rocks, why separate these two events? The reason is because there is a significant distinction between them. The splitting
of the rocks was evidence of *force*, while the opening of the graves was evidence of *design*. The splitting of the rocks did not, by itself, foretell anything to come. The opening of the graves, however, was like the first budding of the coming resurrection glory.

As an event, the earthquake was not simply the means to open the graves but an independent miracle with its own distinct meaning. In the same way, the opening of the graves was not simply the logical result of the earthquake but an event with its own unique meaning and importance. It was the instantaneous result of the earthquake, in the same way that the earthquake was the instantaneous result of Christ’s shout of victory from the cross. And like the earthquake, it occurred in response to that shout. The moment Christ died, the graves opened.

*All four gospels describe the moment of Jesus’s death, which occurs just before the earthquake. Three of the gospels say that Jesus called out loudly (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46), and John notes that at this moment Jesus said, “It is finished.” Christ had accomplished His mission to reconcile us to God.*

**Whose graves were they?**

Significantly, it was only the graves of saints, God’s children, who were opened. Not one person’s grave was opened whose soul did not have a saving interest in the death of Christ, to which the opening of the graves was the marvelous answer.
It is such a beautiful picture. All those graves of God’s children, each and every one of them individually and lovingly selected, were to His eyes the most important places in the entire world!

While the graves were opened at the moment of Christ’s death, the bodies did not arise from them till after His own resurrection—on the third day. “They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection . . .” (Matthew 27:53, emphasis added). The record makes it plain that they were not raised until He was.

For the moment we are not considering the resurrections themselves, but simply the opening of the graves. The opening of the graves had a significance beyond simply being necessary to release the resurrected from their tombs. The opening of the graves was not simply a physical necessity for the resurrections, any more than it was a mere physical consequence of the earthquake.

It was, in fact, a marvelous act of preparation that needed to be accomplished at the moment of Christ’s death and timed to occur at precisely the moment our Savior Himself entered among the dead. It could not be put off until He returned from the dead, although what He intended to accomplish among those who would be resurrected had to be delayed until then.

In view of all these circumstances, how powerfully does the miracle assert itself! We are overwhelmingly convinced that God’s intervention here is one of the clearest and most powerful of His precious testimonies to the death of Jesus Christ. The sense
that something precious is being revealed to us seems warranted by the clear facts of the matter. The fact that the graves were opened at the instant of Christ’s death, but the resurrections did not take place until the third morning afterward, shows that the opened graves were intended to be an exhibition.

If the sealed rock tombs were opened by the earthquake merely to permit the resurrected bodies to escape, then the earthquake should not have taken place until the moment of their resurrection. But those graves were opened from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning and exposed to thousands of spectators. No attempts to seal them back up during the intervening Sabbath would have been permitted. Doesn’t it seem clear, then, that the opening of the graves was intended to be an exhibition—that it had a story to tell?

**What kind of resurrection?**

Again we ask, why were the graves opened at all? What sort of resurrections were these? Were they examples of what the apostle calls the “better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35), the final glorified resurrection body?

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God’s intervention here is one of the clearest and most powerful of His precious testimonies to the death of Jesus Christ.
Or were they, as in the case of Lazarus, merely the resurrection of their mortal, earthly bodies?

It can be proved through Scripture that they were the latter, as I shall show later in this chapter. The point to be made here, however, is that the opening of the graves implies an earthly resurrection, because the idea that the gravestones needed to be moved aside so that their spiritual resurrection bodies could be released is illogical. A spiritual body has spiritual properties. In His resurrection body, Jesus entered the room where the apostles were assembled without going through the door (John 20:19, 26). It is His resurrection body that is the true model for all resurrected saints.

Would this kind of a resurrection, therefore, be dependent on an open grave? No, in the same way that the departure of our human spirits from earth is not dependent upon breaking down the walls and ceiling of the room in which we die.

**Christ’s resurrection is different**

We see this truth demonstrated in the coming forth of Jesus’s body from the grave. Although the great stone that sealed His tomb had been rolled away, Jesus had left the tomb before that event took place. The removal of the stone soon after His resurrection was to show the disciples that the tomb was empty and therefore convince them of His resurrection. An angel accomplished this removal of the stone, but at the moment it was performed, Christ was no longer there.

On the other hand, when Lazarus was raised, he
was called back into his original body, and therefore the command was to “Take away the stone” (John 11:39).

For these reasons it becomes clear that the opening of the graves at Calvary is consistent with only one conclusion: what they experienced was only their natural earthly bodies being resurrected. They had not yet received their final glorified resurrection bodies.

Those saints who were raised from their graves were not, by themselves, an adequate expression of the victory of Christ in the sense that is expressed in 1 Corinthians chapter fifteen, for they were not yet risen from the dead but only revived from the dead.

But it was such an amazing event that it nevertheless illustrated and affirmed the truth of the better, future resurrection. When Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), He then proceeded to revive the dead body of Lazarus to illustrate the truth of the resurrection, even though what Lazarus was experiencing was not the final and glorified resurrection.

This explains why only a limited number of graves were opened. This was not their final resurrection and God was not playing favorites by raising only a few chosen saints. All of God’s children are dear to Him, but reviving just a few believers suited the purpose of what He was teaching them and at the same time sufficiently called attention to the occasion. Enough graves were opened to provide an illustration of the power of the cross, and the power displayed by
those open graves furnished an example for all God’s people for all time.

What is really happening here? This is a true miracle, but it is also symbolic. A symbol is a sign that represents an idea. For example, a lamb is the symbol of meekness because a lamb does not resist. In the Old Testament a slain lamb was the precursor of Christ crucified. In the same way, the opening of the tombs and their inhabitants coming back to life is a small picture of the future for all of God’s people.

Symbol of the resurrection

The opening of the graves symbolized the removal of all obstructions to the final glorious resurrection because it removed the obstacles to raising the revived dead bodies of the saints. But sealed tombs, even when sealed with rock, are only flimsy obstacles compared with the difficulty involved in the final, glorious resurrection.

Consequently, it signified that the better resurrection was now in operation. Whatever had made it impossible for the corrupted physical bodies of the saints to be raised in incorruption was now—
by virtue of those opened graves—removed.

And since the resurrection body implies the presence of the spirit to which it belongs, whatever had made it impossible for the disembodied spirits of the Old Testament saints to leave Hades

and receive their glorified resurrection bodies, that too, by virtue of those opened graves, was now removed.

**Hades (HAY-deez)** is a term used in the Bible to describe the place where the dead dwelt until Christ’s resurrection. The Greek word occurs eleven times in the New Testament. Although some English translations render the term as hell, the word is never used to describe the place of final judgment.

Thus, the opening of Hades was the counterpart to the opening of the graves. That is, the entire nature of death—the spirit’s separation from the body as well as the body’s natural decay—was now virtually abolished for the saints.

Every saint in Hades could then be removed from Hades and be reunited to their bodies, now glorified and incorruptible. There was no longer any obstacle preventing it, and it was now only a question of God’s appointed time.

**What about Hades?**

In light of the victory that was accomplished, God’s saints will no longer enter Hades, that place where God once comforted His Old Testament saints, though their freedom was restricted. Ever since the
resurrection and ascension of Christ, they have ascended to Him, far above all heavens.

Not only that, but Jesus brought back with Him all those Old Testament saints who had gone into Hades, when He Himself returned from there, and carried them with Him into heaven. The gates of Hades did not prevail against His church.

How beautifully symbolic, then, that it was by the earthquake that the graves were opened! In other words, the victory of the Savior’s death had reached into “the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40) and had demolished the gates that had barred their passage.

That victory in “the heart of the earth” reverberated to the surface. The trembling earth and splitting rocks were symbols of the joyful revolution that had been accomplished for the Old Testament saints in Hades. We can see, therefore, that a part of what was accomplished for the spirit, symbolized by the opening of the graves, has already become the blessed experience of those who have died in Christ.

Meanwhile, that which was done for the body, likewise symbolized by the opening of the graves, all
God’s people are still waiting for. It was accomplished and is as real as though it were now true. Every obstacle to the full and blessed resurrection of the soul and the full resurrection glory of the body was violently removed, and we believers wait only for our divine appointment to be revealed in glory. It was the death of Jesus Christ that accomplished such a wonderful victory for us.

When were the graves opened? Precisely at the instant of His death. That instant is emphasized because the dead bodies weren’t revived to life until Christ arose on the third day. The graves were opened, even though the actual coming to life was not going to take place yet. This signified that there was a direct connection between the death of Christ and the opening of the graves.

**Christ destroyed the power of death**

Christ’s death opened the graves. His death destroyed the power of death. The power of death is sin. Death entered into the world by sin and is the penalty of sin. Therefore, the death of Christ, who was sinless,
enabled Him to bear the penalty of sin for His people. But death mainly consists in the separation of the soul from the life of God, the decomposition of the body illustrating merely the shadow of death.

Therefore, when Jesus died and bore the penalty of sin for His people, His death was not only in His body but much more terrifyingly in the awful affliction of His soul. He was cursed for our sake that we might be saved from the curse. In this way He extinguished the penalty of sin for us and made it possible for us to escape all the condemnation of our sin.

This was, therefore, the symbolic purpose behind the opening of the graves at the instant of His death. The power of sin to bring death was broken by His death, and all obstacles to our attaining true eternal life, both of soul and body, were entirely removed.

The prison doors opened

Jesus’s death opened those prison doors, removed the guard, and cleared the way. His own resurrection was the first use of that new freedom.

His death guaranteed for His people the blessings of their resurrection in that it abolished the obstacles to that new life. His resurrection was the imparting of that blessedness upon His people.

His death allowed us to be legally freed from the penalty of sin; His resurrection is the actual deliverance itself.

His death allowed us to be pardoned from sin;
His resurrection is the proof that the payment was accepted.

His death opened Hades; His resurrection emptied Hades. His death is the grave opened; His resurrection is the dead bodies of His saints rising from their graves into life incorruptible and eternal!

Such is the redeeming power of the death of Jesus Christ. “The tombs broke open” (Matthew 27:52). As a result, there no longer remain any obstacles to anyone being personally delivered from eternal death. “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me,” Jesus said, “has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24), and “will never die” (John 11:26).

All who place their trust in Christ have been freed in their conscience from the condemnation of sin and live now as children of God, because they have already passed from death into life. In the meantime, their mortal bodies wait for their divine appointment, because all obstructions have been removed. The path from the grave up to the very presence of God, where nothing but eternal joy and pleasure await them, has been cleared.
The work is finished

At the instant of Christ’s death, the graves were opened. Remember that. At the very instant of His death, all our sins were completely answered for. The graves were not just partly opened; the obstacles were not just partly removed.

There is nothing left for us to achieve in regard to our pardon and acceptance with God. We are able to add nothing to the work of Christ. Our salvation from sin is in Him at this very moment, and it is perfect.
two

Revivals to Life in the Calvary Graveyard

...the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. —Matthew 27:52–53

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he sixth miracle of Calvary was the revivals to life that accompanied the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The text reveals to us that certain graves were opened by the earthquake at the death of Christ, and that the dead bodies arose
and came out of them after Christ Himself had risen, and that they went into Jerusalem and appeared to many. It is a statement of one of the grandest miracles, an incredible example of supernaturalism in the sense that it was completely miraculous.

**Self-evidencing marks**

To this statement belong certain historical evidences. It stands in the same line as the other miraculous events of the time. It harmonizes with and explains the wonder of the opened graves in the same way that the opened graves were the product of the miraculous earthquake. And the earthquake was the miraculous counterpart to the tearing of the curtain, and the curtain was the answer to the shout of victory from the cross whose dying Sufferer had just emerged triumphant from the horrors of the symbolic darkness! So if all the previous miracles of Calvary were historical, then in order to maintain their harmony, this is the only conceivable way the great series of miracles could end.

Moreover, it is in complete accord with the whole teaching of salvation. Instead of being amazed that the
resurrection was accentuated by such revivals to life in the Calvary graveyard, we would say instead, upon hearing of the incident, that, “It has a right to be here. It is credible because it expresses the pledge of the coming resurrection, when, from all the graveyards of the world, wherever the mortal remains of a saint may lie, this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality!”

When Paul, the writer of 1 Corinthians, says that “this corruptible shall put on incorruption,” he is speaking of exchanging our mortal earthly bodies for immortal bodies that will never die and decay.

Marvelous silence

Then again, consider the reticence of this statement. In that restraint we see a sign of truthfulness, where incredulous babbling is forced into silence, and even the severest criticism must express admiration. The evangelist tells his story of wonder; but we also have a curious story to tell on him, one barely less wonderful than his own. Our story is amazement that these few words are absolutely all he says.

He tells us that when the Lord was resurrected certain of the departed saints arose, left their graves, and went into Jerusalem, appearing to many. But he says nothing more. Who were they? How many were there? Did they go into the houses of the people or only walk the streets? Whether they appeared only once, or
from time to time during the forty days of the Lord’s appearances, isn’t told us. How did their return from the dead affect them? Did they speak of the realms of the dead or of Christ’s recent entrance into those realms? How and when did they finally disappear, or did they continue to live? On all these questions there is not a word, not so much as the faintest recognition of the possibility of such questions being asked.

Nor does the writer even mention whether the risen saints had died recently. At first glance, it might be inferred that this is implied in their appearing to many, for why should they appear, except to be recognized and identified? And yet, Moses and Elijah were recognized by the disciples at the Transfiguration, although they had never before seen either one. Certainly the Holy Spirit is able to make known to people those who were strangers before. The Spirit is able to do it as easily and quietly as the light shines or a new idea comes into the mind.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is recorded in three places in the Gospels (MATTHEW 17:1–13; MARK 9:2–8; LUKE 9:28–36). The disciples Peter, James, and John accompanied Christ to an unidentified mountain where Jesus’s face “shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light” (MATTHEW 17:2). Moses and Elijah joined the four on the mountain.

In fact, the thought in this text is not simply that they “appeared”—which doesn’t fully express the original—but that they were plainly recognized. It is not said that they were recognized by their names.
The only thing implied is that they were plainly recognized as people risen from the dead. Now how do we respond to such restraint? Was there ever a myth in any fiction story that had such a brief setting? If history can be judged by the manner in which it chronicles events, then this is history. Furthermore, it is a divine history, for what uninspired historian ever practiced such a repressed imagination? The desire to pry into the secrets of the other world can be unbearable. One of the oldest superstitions is that of trying to speak to the dead. It was forbidden in the Law of Moses. It was one of the world’s mischievous pursuits in the ignorance of earlier centuries. And yet we see a revival of it even now in our intellectual age, when human beings think they have finally gained a mature knowledge of life.

Necromancy, or attempting to communicate with the dead, was also called divination. This was explicitly prohibited under the Mosaic law (Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:10).

So, I say, the silence in our text is almost as wonderful as the miracle itself. No one, writing about a miracle of such magnitude, would have said so little.

What was the nature of their revivals from the dead? There are two kinds exhibited in Scripture. We are told of six resurrections that were only restorations to this present mortal life. The son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17), the Shunammite’s son (2 Kings 4), the resurrection caused by the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20–21), the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:40–56), the son of
the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–15), and Lazarus (John 11). In every one of those cases, it was only a revival of the natural body that would die again, and which, in those particular cases, undeniably did die again.

**The resurrection**

Furthermore there is 1 Corinthians 15, where a resurrection body of an entirely different kind is promised to us who have placed our hope in the day of the Lord’s coming. “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:43–44). That is the actual resurrection—the true rising from the dead.

But in which of these two categories should we place those who came out of their tombs? Were those bodies examples of the resurrection body described in 1 Corinthians 15—spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal? Or were they only the natural body restored to this present life, like Lazarus and the others we referred to? Does the Scripture provide the means for us to answer this question?

In 1 Corinthians 15 we are told that all who are Christ’s shall be made alive in the resurrection body described there (v. 22). However, we read, “But each in turn” (v. 23), each one of the “all” who will be made alive will be made alive in his own order.

And what is that order? “Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him” (v. 23). Christ will rise first, and He did rise in that kind of
final resurrected body—then afterward, at His coming, every one of the “all” who are His will be raised in that same way.

Paul referred to Jesus’s rising from the dead as “the firstfruits.” Jewish believers knew exactly what Paul had in mind when he used that concept. Just before gathering the main harvest, Jewish farmers would go out into their fields and harvest a small portion. They would then take that portion and present it in the temple as an expression of gratitude to God and an indication of their confidence that a full harvest of the same grain would soon be gathered in. The firstfruits were gathered in anticipation of the rest of the harvest.

Note it well. The apostle doesn’t say that only those who haven’t risen before will rise at Christ’s coming. His language is absolute and all-inclusive—“those who belong to him”—he says, without making any exceptions. All those who belong to Christ shall rise, every one who is His throughout the ages. Then he adds, “but each”—every last one—“in turn,” and their turn he explains as being “Christ, the firstfruits,” and then only “when he comes.”

Notice how careful he is to tell them that this order affects all, throughout all the ages, who were ever meant to take part in that kind of resurrection.

Therefore, it is clear that none of Christ’s people have yet received the spiritual immortal body, and none shall receive it until His coming. Those saints at Calvary rose from their graves, but only in their natural revived bodies. They are still waiting for their
true resurrection bodies until that moment when we are all raised up to Christ, from all the ages. No one shall precede another, no one will be perfected before another. God has provided something better for us, so that those saints who were raised at Calvary will not be made perfect without us.

What is God is teaching us here? He is teaching us the truth and certainty of the final resurrection. The teaching is symbolical. The revivals to life of the saints at Calvary foretell the greater coming glory. They were not the resurrection, but they were a resurrection; not the thing itself, but the shadow of it. Yet they were a substantial shadow, requiring nothing less than omnipotence. This was the greater meaning behind the revivals: they were a rehearsal of the more glorious scene to come.

God has assured us numerous times of that coming resurrection glory, but here He demonstrated it for us. When Christ was finished with His work and His time had come to leave the world, the great final resurrection was hinted at on a small scale, with an expenditure of power sufficient for us to trust what He can accomplish in the future. It was a farewell display of His purpose and power, a pledge and guarantee of the Savior’s return to be glorified in His risen saints.

**God’s purpose**

We can’t know what other purposes God may have designed for them. At the least it was for this. When Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John
11:25), and proved this truth by raising Lazarus from the dead, the proof didn’t lie in what kind of body Lazarus was raised with. Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians demonstrates the meaning of Jesus being the resurrection and the life. But the proof lay in the fact that restoring Lazarus to natural life—the shadow of the true resurrection—visibly displayed the omnipotent power necessary for both resurrections.

Indeed, seeing the historic and the symbolic together is a significant feature of the entire series of Calvary miracles. The three hours of darkness, though real, were likewise a symbol. The tearing of the curtain as though an artisan’s blade had cut it from top to bottom was a symbol. The earthquake that split the rocks was a symbol. The opened graves were a symbol. The grave clothes of Jesus, whose marvelous arrangement was a demonstration to John of his Lord’s resurrection, were a symbol. And here, these revivals from the dead—living realities yet still only symbolic—completed the harmonious arrangement of miracles.

**A basis of assurance**

With that powerful scene in mind, how forcefully vivid does our assurance in the final resurrection become! When an event that has actually occurred is understood to be representative, its symbolism becomes more than just a verbal expression of ideas but an acting out of them as well.

One of the most beautiful things Jesus ever said
was “I am the vine; you are the branches” (John 15:5).
Were an artist to paint a picture of vine and branches on his canvas, you would have a picture of the essential union of Christ and believers, but still only a picture. But let us say you were looking at a particular grapevine and came to understand that God planted it for the specific purpose of serving as an analogy to you of your union with Him. Think of how much more impressive your sense of the union between Christ and believers would become!

In the same way, the white robes seen on the multitude in Revelation, while a symbol of their final resurrection glory, were only a picture, for they did not yet actually exist. But the situations in the Calvary graveyard were actual instances of death destroyed for a specific time and natural life restored in the grave—instances of God’s omnipotence working amid human decay and producing restoration. Those revived bodies of saints walking the streets of Jerusalem were designed by God as a representation, a foreshadowing of immortality and eternal glory, but as actual occurrences they also demonstrated the certainty of what they represented.

**Grandeur of the plan**

Furthermore, what an amazing impression is made upon us of the grandeur of God’s plan! When we consider that those saints did not have the body “sown in weakness” and “raised in power” (1 Corinthians 15:43), God’s purpose in making the final resurrection a
beautiful expression of the unity of the Body of Christ, the church, is clarified.

“Those who belong to him” (1 Corinthians 15:23). No member of the Body will be glorified before another. Its eye, its hand, its foot, its greatest and its least, whether the remains be under the snows of Greenland or the burning soil of Africa, they shall together be ushered into the fullness of eternal life. At that time the whole Body, drawn from throughout the ages, shall come forth at exactly the same moment in a perfect harmony of beauty and glory.

Another lesson is that only in the personal deliverance of Christ Himself are His people delivered. The saints of Calvary rose from the dead only after and because Christ Himself rose from the dead. “They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city” (Matthew 27:53).

While it is true that their revival was not their final resurrection and their restored bodies were not yet created like His glorious resurrection body, yet they still lived in their restored bodies, the magnificent symbol of the final resurrection. Being such a symbol, they are immediately and deliberately placed in view following Christ’s resurrection. They went forth from their graves, so to speak, on the very heels of Jesus. They followed Him as meaning follows language, as vision follows light.

In other words, only by extinguishing the curse of sin and conquering it in His own person has Jesus Christ succeeded in removing it from His people.
Since He was the One designated to bear the sins for us all, had He not personally been declared righteous before the Father through the accepted offering of His perfect sufferings, we could have never been justified by faith. Had He not achieved true resurrection Himself, neither would we have been able to. Consequently, His people are in Him and are one with Him. His death was their death; His life is their life. “Because I live, you also will live,” He said (John 14:19).

Oh, the immeasurable assurance of our promised heritage! We are joined with Christ in the same bundle of life. Even now “your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3) and a time is coming when “[He] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

Every saint—because everyone who believes in Jesus is a saint—will rise to live an everlasting life and will never be condemned.


Editor Dan Schaeffer, an award-winning writer, pastors Shoreline Community Church in Santa Barbara, California. He is the author of In Search of the Real Spirit of Christmas, Defining Moments, and When Faith and Decisions Collide.
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