



THE EASTER VISION: CHRIST'S RESURRECTION, REIGN AND RETURN

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Our faith is an adventure, a way of life that involves taking steps and making crucial decisions. Faith often begins with a vision from the Lord through His Word, which is our blueprint. We share the same vision for the assembly: to exalt the Lord; to evangelise the unsaved and disciple them; to edify, equip and encourage the saints. It usually induces excitement, enthusiasm and enlightenment. However, obstacles will arise to test our faith, often leading to doubt and despair. Will our response be to go forward, stay still, or fall back? The good news of Easter is that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can live with a great Easter vision. This is best presented at the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17), where we are given a vision of Christ's glory in His resurrection, reign and return. May the Easter vision of the glory of Christ give us a deep sense of what we are to have, be and do. The Easter vision provides us with direction to serve Him, and aligns and energises us to achieve the Lord's purpose for our lives and assembly. May it instruct and inspire us on how to live and labour for Christ in our worship, witness, work and warfare.

What we need today is a new awareness of Christ and His glory. We need to see Him 'high and lifted' in His resurrection (past), reign (present) and return (future). Let us mark out the practical ways the Easter vision can motivate us to align with God's will to accomplish great things for Him.



(I) The Easter vision of the Lord's resurrection

When the Lord rose from the grave, He met His followers with outstretched hands, and they were full of blessings and gratitude. The Easter vision to Mary, who had a sad heart, was one of comfort: 'Woman, why are you weeping?' (John 20:15). To the disciples, among whom was Peter, with a stained conscience, it was one of peace: 'Peace be with you!' (John 20:19), and it was gladness to all. To doubting Thomas, it was one of faith acknowledgement: 'My Lord and my God' (John 20:28). To John and future readers, it was one of Christ's great commission (John 20:21) and, finally, the Holy Spirit's promise of His blessings and benefits (John 20:22–23).

Let us hold on to this part of our Easter vision with close attention. We must feel this great mystery and miracle of the Lord's resurrection. We are overwhelmed with His first coming and completed salvation for humanity. Our souls are convinced that His most significant revelation was Himself, in His birth, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. From the moment He appeared in the incarnation to the ascension, He transcended every situation, using all His circumstances as the means to show forth His matchless glory and magnificent grace. He brought love into hate, truth into falsehood, humility into pride, and sympathy into suffering. He proved His sufficiency for the meeting of every need and the satisfying of every longing soul. He served, and His service involved suffering. He suffered, and His sufferings involved sacrifice. His sacrifice became the means of salvation for sinful men. And because of what He had accomplished, God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory (1 Pet. 1:21). Faith in Christ's resurrection is essential before we can: acknowledge Him as our Lord and Saviour; crown Him as conqueror over death, sin, hell, grave and Satan; be transformed



by His resurrected power to have victory over sin in our daily lives; and obtain forgiveness whenever we fail Him. It is fitting to pause and bow our hearts to worship the One we love.

(II) The Easter vision of the Lord's present reign

The Easter vision also includes Christ's present reign in His place of glory and ministry—the ministry of the risen Christ continues, and has never ceased. He was given the highest place of all at the right hand of God (Mk. 16:19). He was crowned with glory and honour (Heb. 2:9). His place of glory at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Heb. 8:1) is also the true holy of holies. It is repeatedly stated that when He reached heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God. This was necessary to prove that His work on earth was finished and completed (Heb. 1:3). All that God required for the salvation of sinners was completed when Christ died and rose again, with the finished work of Christ constituting the glorious theme of the gospel. The New Testament further reveals that Christ also engages in a present ministry—a very vital ministry by Christ before the presence of God on our behalf, as our Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14; 9:24). To become the High Priest of His people, it was necessary for Him to be the Godman—truly God and truly man. When He was

on earth, He was God's representative before men. In heaven, He is the representative of man before God. As God, He can strengthen (Heb. 2:17), and as man, He can sympathise (Heb. 2:18). He is our complete sufficiency.

Our hearts should be moved by the following aspects of Christ's present reign:—

a) The Lord Jesus Christ who occupies the highest place in the heavens (Heb. 8:1) is willing to make His reign in the hearts of those who own Him as Lord and Saviour (Psa. 138:6; Eph. 3:17). Let us trust, love, obey and rest in Him.

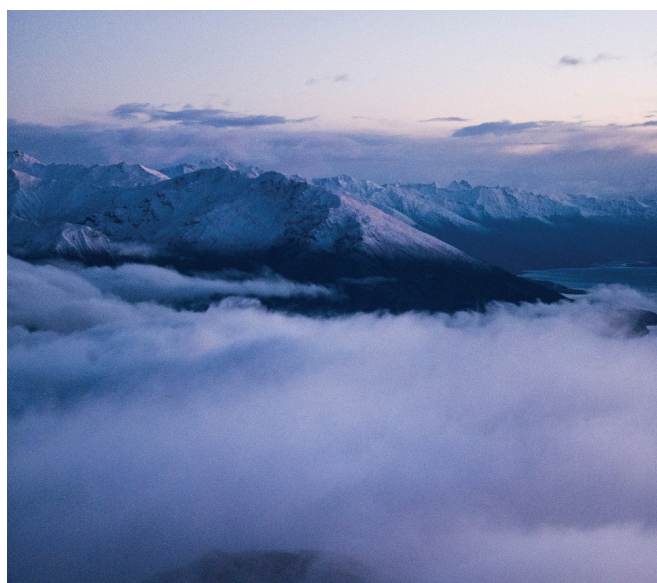
b) The place at the right hand of God is a true holy of holies (Heb. 8:2, 5). Because of the finished and perfect work of Christ on the cross, we can draw near to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us; we can now come boldly to the throne of grace, so that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). Let us bring our brokenness, pride and weakness to His throne of grace for healing, humbling, sanctification and sustenance. Ultimately, it is the character and credibility of Christ that gives us access to the throne of grace.

c) It calls for our hearts' strongest desires and aspirations to worship and witness for Him. We are to be occupied with the things above because they are the things associated with the glorified Christ. The things of this world should grow strangely dim, for our longings should gravitate towards heaven and Christ (Col. 3:1).

(III) The Easter vision of His return

From the risen Christ in the past to the reigning Christ in the present, we now come to the ruling Christ in the future. What a vision it is of

the promise of Christ's return! When our Lord ascended on high, He took His place at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Heb. 8:1). In Psalm 110 verse 1, God the Father welcomed His Son to this place of glory. This statement clarifies that the present occupancy of the throne of the Father by the Son is not a permanent one; it is only until the Son's final triumph and victory that His enemies are made His footstool. That time will coincide with the fulfilment of His promise to return to this world.



This Easter vision of the Lord Jesus was directly linked with the promise of His coming again by the appearance of the two men in white apparel (Acts 1:10–11). If the two men were angels, then the Saviour's promise (John 14:3) received angelic confirmation. While the disciples were gazing up to heaven, no longer seeing the One who had just ascended, these two came down from heaven with a specific message about His return: He would come in like manner as they had seen Him go into heaven. Just as Christ had ascended personally, He will return personally; the work involved in the coming will not be delegated to any other. He also made a personal promise to His disciples: I will come again and receive you unto myself (John 14:3). He ascended as man, and He will return in the

same humanity: 'this same Jesus' (Acts 1:11). The body in which He lived, died, rose again and ascended on high is the same body in which He will return. It will be a personal and physical one. He will return visibly, in power and glory, with clouds, and every eye shall see Him (Rev. 1:7). When the time comes for Him to return, He will come for His own first, before He manifests Himself to the world (1 Thes. 4:13–18).

There can be little question that this is one of the main objects of this Easter vision. The vision is inexhaustible, but enough has been said to encourage our hearts to look forward to Christ's imminent and inevitable return. It is only suitable for us to have the coming glory of Christ deeply impressed on our minds. How often are we apt to forget it. Unfortunately, sin, selfishness and superstition abound, blurring our vision of His imminent return. The greatest wonder of it all is that the One who is so great and high is also our Saviour. He has undertaken our cause and has pledged Himself to bring us to where we shall be with Him, beholding His glory throughout eternity (John 17:24).

May the Lord use His Easter vision to motivate us with clarity of purpose to build our lives and ministries to last. Those who have trusted in Him await His return to unfold His glory as the Lord of lords and King of kings. For the assembly, it will be a resurrection for the dead in Christ (1 Thes. 4:16), the rapture of the church, transformation of the living saints with the beautiful thought of reunion with our loved ones, and rejoicing in the Lord (1 Thes. 4:17). May the resurrection, reign and return of Christ impress on us to 'live soberly, righteously, and godly' (Tit 2:12) in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:12–13).



RISEN REALITIES — STAND UP FOR JESUS!

PAUL'S PERSONAL REVOLUTION, AND OURS...

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Extra, extra exclusive, read all about it! Extra, extra, read all about it!

'Body of Jesus the Nazarene stolen by his disciples under Roman watch!'

It was the most gripping headline that rocked the first century Roman province of Judea! But a young and zealous Pharisee named Saul from Tarsus was not too impressed. After all, Jesus claimed that He is the Son of God, but the Pharisees and other key authorities called Him a fraud and a troublemaker.

'Don't you trust Him!', they said.

'Now we know, He's a liar! But why then did the crowds follow Him?'

'Well, no doubt, He helped the poor and even performed many miracles, but if his disciples faked His resurrection . . .'

"Aha! another one of those false Messiahs!"

With all this controversy and confusion, Saul was one of the most unlikely followers of Jesus. Yet, when he wrote to the Romans many years later, he called himself the slave of Christ Jesus. Thus, Jesus was either the 'Greatest Liar of All Time' or the 'Greatest Lord of All Time'—and it all hinges

on the answer to this question: *Did He really rise from the dead?*

SAUL'S EXAMPLE FOR US

When we look at Saul's personal revolution, we can get some answers. Let us first consider the **impact of His rising on Saul**. After he met the risen Christ, Saul turned from condemnation to conviction (Acts 9:1–22). Initially, he hunted down Jesus' followers and even cast them into prison. However, after Jesus appeared and commissioned him on the way to Damascus, he became the convicted proclaimer of Jesus' gospel, of His divine identity and anointed office (Acts 9:20, 22).

Oh, what a reversal! But how long would it last? Was Saul just hallucinating?

No, and this was just the start, as Saul himself summed it up in Romans chapter 15 verse 19—he preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Aside from the long distances he travelled, the many challenges he faced preaching to diverse cultures (e.g. the Philippian slave girl telling fortunes through a spirit (Acts 16:16)), there were also perils of ancient sea travel (e.g. their shipwreck enroute to Rome (Acts 27–28)).



Map source: *Biblical Places Maps, Logos Bible Software ver.9*

Also, in Acts chapter 23 verse 11, we read that Saul witnessed for Jesus not only in Jerusalem but also in Rome, probably the two most dangerous places for Jesus' heralds at that point in time. The ancient Roman empire did not view the message of a risen Son of God and His promise of universal peace hospitably. Saul's witness was even too revolutionary for the ancient Greek thinkers on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17); even a theoretical resurrection was out of the picture for them.

From the hardships he endured in his ministry and his audacious courage to be counted as foolish by the nations he was sent to (1 Cor. 1:22–25), Saul proved himself as Jesus' loyal servant.

Saul's changed life was also different from one meeting his soccer idol, favourite music artiste etc. and being inspired to follow in their successes or artistic achievements. 'Foolish' Saul not only lived for this life, but also for the life to come (1 Cor. 9:24–27); he worked for an incorruptible reward and crown.

Similarly, we should reflect on our goals and ambitions. For us who have had the privilege to meet our childhood heroes, even Christian ones, are we following them instead of our risen Lord and Saviour? Would meeting the risen Christ impact us the way it had Saul?

CHRIST'S IDENTITY FROM SAUL'S WRITING

Let us now consider the clues to Christ's identity by looking at the details of what Saul wrote at the start of Romans.

'From Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God' (Rom. 1:1)

Saul called himself Christ Jesus' slave right from the start. In the same breath, he acknowledged that his mission was from Jesus and even linked this mission back to God Himself. Thus, he equated being sent by Jesus to being reserved for God's good news to the whole world. This tells us that he considered Christ to be equal to God!

As a well-taught Israelite, Saul was not only familiar with God's promises to His own people of Israel, but also to ALL the other nations (Gen. 12:1–3). Towards the end of the letter (Rom. 15:8–12), Saul quoted four Old Testament passages (Deut. 32; Psa. 18; 117; Isa. 11) that related to the rejoicing of the Gentile nations

(i.e. us) together with His native people (i.e. the Israelites).

Although he was writing to the Romans who were mostly Gentiles, Saul quoted from the Hebrew scriptures throughout Romans. He urged them to accept the truths found in them, perhaps because these truths also mattered to them as Gentiles.

'the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures' (Rom. 1:2)
'... now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith' (Rom 16:26)

The scriptures of the prophets were recorded 'in many portions and in many ways' (Heb. 1:1) over a millennium (from Moses to Malachi), and God's gospel was promised in it. Saul's message had divine authority that was the source of his conviction.

Thus, we could perhaps reflect: In our reading of God's Word today, do we see the roots of our eternal life in the promises and covenants of God with Israel, even though we are not the direct recipients? How can we deepen our understanding of the gospel by reading the Old Testament?



CHRIST AS FULLY GOD AND FULLY HUMAN

'concerning his Son who was a descendant of David with reference to the flesh, who was appointed the Son-of-God-in-power according to the Holy Spirit by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom. 1:3–4)

Now, let's look at some other aspects in verses 3 and 4:

Jesus is God's Son—something controversial, even considered blasphemous by the Jews.

Descendent of David—with the right to rule, but also with a genealogy that can be traced, even by the Roman censor (Mt. 1–2).

Son of God—with power and authority even over death, as shown by the resurrection.

Our Lord—Saul seemed to include the readers (mainly Gentiles) under the Lordship of Christ; he continued to use inclusive language like 'we', 'our' in the rest of Romans.

Saul identified Jesus as truly human and his distant cousin from Judah in one sentence, then quickly declared Jesus' divine identity in the next verse, and finally addressed Him as Jesus (human) Christ (Anointed by God), our Lord (over all of life and death).

COMMON DOUBTS TO JESUS' RISING

Here I share my adapted acronym R.I.S.E.N which addresses common doubts to Jesus' rising (other authors use C.A.S.E or R.I.S.E).

Really died (crucified) versus He just fainted—swoon theory

Intelligent reaction versus the flustered and desperate disciples stole His body to salvage their sinking ship—corporate lie theory (Matt.

28:11–15).

Skeptics believed versus the disciples' blind loyalty made them willing to die for a fraud, making up fairy tales.

Empty tomb versus wrong tomb—the women and disciples were so sad that they went to the wrong tomb—depression/hallucination theory. The gospels specifically recorded that the tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea.

New or changed lives of the early followers of Jesus, including Paul, versus the fear and shame of following a false Messiah who could not even save Himself.

IMPOSSIBLE REALITY OF THE INCARNATION

I also want to briefly consider the **impossible reality of the incarnation**: This can be summarised in two points—(a) humanly, that a virgin had to bear a child; and (b) spiritually, that God can be contained in a human body even when the heaven of heavens could not do so (1 Ki. 8:27, Isa. 66:1–2).



Only with this impossible incarnation can God die as a human. Only when God (holy perfection) dies can the gospel have any effect or saving power. Only after He dies can a resurrection have any real meaning (no theoretical deaths and no fake risings).

Thus, the resurrection is dependent on the incarnation, and both have components which are impossible. Let us reflect: is my faith in a risen Christ just a blind faith or a reasonable one? Does the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus give me real and powerful convictions that are rooted in God's promises and His gospel; convictions to preach it and to share our life-changing experiences after knowing and believing in Jesus?

OUR MISSION

Through him we have received grace and our apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of his name.' (Rom 1:5)

In this verse, we bridge the passage of time and consider now the **implications of the resurrection for our times**. What is our mission? It is to 'bring obedience of faith to all the nations' (Acts 17:30–31).

We see that Paul received his life mission to share God's truths with the other nations, unto the uttermost parts of the known world of that time. Indeed, he went from Tarsus (his hometown) to Tarshish (Rom. 15:24).



Map source: Google Maps with Terrain view, annotations by author

Although Paul could advance to the heights of the Jerusalem's ranks of authority, he chose to be equipped and enabled by God and His Spirit to make many disciples in Christ's name (Mt. 28:18–20). He even witnessed before kings and endured various sufferings (Acts 9:15–16).

The Greek word translated to resurrection is 'ἀνάστασις'—Anastasis. One literal meaning is to stand up (from the dead). Will you stand up for Jesus Christ our Lord in our present times?

Let's be:

Ready to proclaim the risen Christ who has brought true peace to Israel and the nations.

Convicted witnesses

Defenders of the truth

Proclaimers of the gospel

Lovers of God

I conclude with this prayer closing the letter to the Romans in chapter 16 verses 25 to 27:

'Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.'

Extra, extra, read all about it—the resurrection was and is revolutionary news! Personally for Paul, for the Romans, and for us!

Author's note: Besides the Romans chapter 1 verse 1 quotation earlier on, note that I used 'Saul' in most of this article, until 'New Life' of the R.I.S.E.N acronym. This was done deliberately to illustrate the radical change in Paul's life. May our life stories also add to our corporate witness for the RISEN Christ!