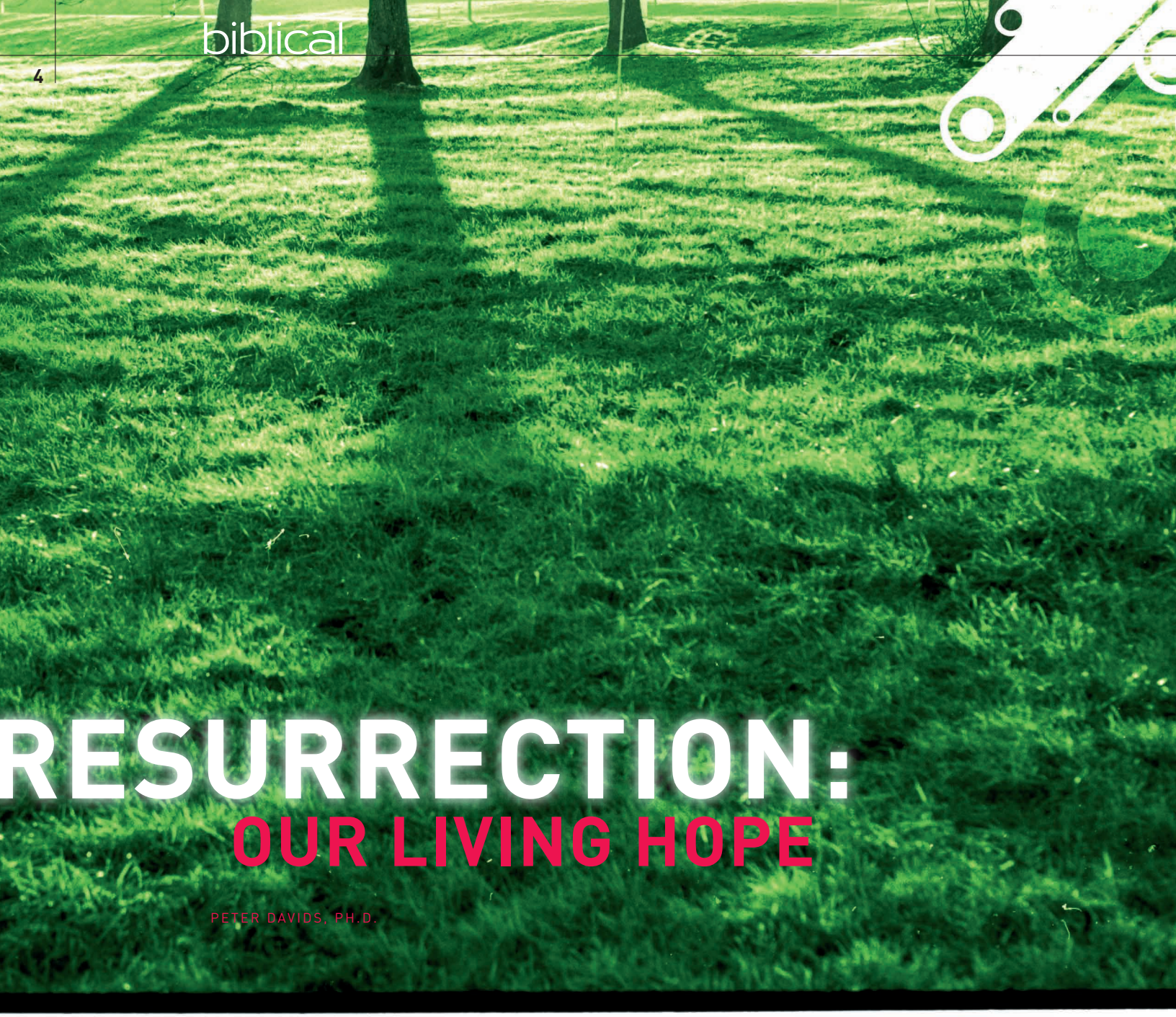


RESURRECTION: OUR LIVING HOPE

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When we talk of what the Father did for us in Jesus, we often focus on Jesus' death with the seeming implication that the resurrection is nice, a happy ending so-to-speak, but not that important in comparison. Nothing could be farther from the biblical truth.

THE CORE OF THE GOOD NEWS

When Paul wanted to cite the core of the good news, he proclaimed, *"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved"* (Romans 10:9-10 NRSV). The good news is that Jesus presently reigns (parallel to, and a replacement for "Caesar is Lord", the patriotic acclamation of good Romans) and in order for this to be meaningful, Paul says, one must be committed to the fact that God raised him from the dead. *No resurrection, no reign. No reign, no good news.* Paul proclaimed Jesus as resurrected, living Lord as the core of his good news (cf. Acts 17:30-31).

Paul's argument is carried further in 1 Corinthians 15, which mentions the death of Jesus (15:3), but then goes to great lengths to describe the resurrection (15:4-11). Then, Paul argues, *"Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ – whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied"* (1 Cor. 15:12-19 NRSV).



What brought up the argument was the denial of the resurrection of believers – it is clear that Paul knew that the Corinthians already believed in the resurrection of Jesus, for that had been the core of the good news that he had preached in Corinth. However, in making his argument he makes a number of points about the resurrection of Jesus: 1) the resurrection makes our commitment to Jesus valid, 2) without the resurrection we are still "in our sins", 3) without the resurrection those who die as believers are dead without hope (they have "perished"), and 4) without the resurrection believers are a pitiful, deceived lot.

In other words, what Paul is saying is that *Good Friday without Easter would have no value at all.*

THE CORE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

This Easter faith is assumed throughout the New Testament, where Jesus is proclaimed as living Lord. In the first proclamation of the good news in Acts, Peter says (without dwelling much on the meaning of Good Friday), *"God raised him from the dead . . . This Jesus God raised up . . . God has made him both Lord and Messiah"* (Acts 2:24, 32, 36). The resurrection is also the core of the good news in the presentations of the good news in Acts 3, Acts 4:10-12, Acts 5:30-31, Acts 10:36-43, Acts 13:26-31 and elsewhere in Acts and the rest of the New Testament; it is assumed by other passages that proclaim Jesus as the coming ruler and judge, as well as those which refer to his present rule from heaven (e.g. Jas 2:1; 5:9). It is the core of the Christian faith.

RESURRECTED LIFE ON EARTH

It is surprising, then, when one realizes that in most evangelism training the resurrection is hardly mentioned, all the focus being on the death of Jesus. It is likewise surprising when one goes to a Christian funeral and hears about life in heaven (about which the New Testament has little to say) and not the resurrected life on earth (about which the New Testament has far more to say) that is so closely linked to the resurrection of Jesus. How could this be?

WHY DO WE NEGLECT THE RESURRECTION?

Why do we neglect the resurrection? One reason for this situation might be that the metaphors used for the death of Jesus (redemption, sacrificial atonement, etc.) are difficult, and we therefore spend time explaining them (sometimes pushing them far beyond the aspect of the metaphor that the New Testament is using). But it may also be that we have picked up a bit too much Greek distrust of matter, and so are embarrassed by the physicality of the promise of bodily-resurrected life on a renewed earth under the rule of a very physical (if glorified) Jesus. Finally, it may be that at least one of the implications of the resurrection is something that we wish to avoid: Jesus is Lord. If Jesus is resurrected and sitting on the throne of the universe, then what we do matters, for he is not a king who does not care about what his people do, but the living Judge, who directs his church now and will return to reward those who have followed his way and punish those who have been unfaithful servants.



The fact is that, whatever the reasons may be for downplaying the theme, the resurrection of Jesus is the core of our faith, the basis of our allegiance to him. In the resurrection, God vindicated Jesus. In the resurrection, Jesus triumphed over death and the abode of the dead – coming out with the metaphorical "keys" so that he can release any of us who should die before his return to rule (Rev 1:18). In the resurrection, Jesus became "the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev 1:5).

Because he is a ruler, he has a kingdom, and can therefore make us a "kingdom of priests" (to use the biblical metaphor) as we submit to his rule and come into his kingdom. In the resurrection, Jesus became the Lord of the people of God that we now call the church, and since he is the living Lord he can direct his church. We are not just inspired by his teaching (foundational though it is), but are led, shepherded, directed, ruled by his living presence through the mediation of the Holy Spirit (since he is embodied and thus cannot be everywhere at once).

THE FOUNDATION OF OUR PLEDGE

In short, the resurrection is not just a doctrine to be defended, a way to distinguish the orthodox from those who are not orthodox ("Do you believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ?" being the diagnostic test question). The resurrection of Jesus is the basis of our salvation (without it we are still in our sins), it is the foundation of our pledge of allegiance that we made in coming to faith (i.e. "Jesus is Lord"), it is the core of our proclamation of the good news, it is the reason why we can presently expect direction from the living Lord, it is the ground of his being the "Great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20, indicating his present care of his people), it is our hope of our own eventual resurrection (or transformation should we be alive when he returns), it is why he can return to this earth to reign and to judge the living and the dead. In other words, it is the core of the good news, part of the basic teaching about Christ (Hebrews 6:1-2).

OUR LIVING HOPE

We as believers are followers of the resurrected Jesus. Without Easter, we do not have a faith – in fact we are without God and without hope in this world. With Easter, we not only have a resurrected, divine Master and Lord, but we also have a connection to the Father, hope in the present, and the coming renewal of this world where we will live under, with and for him in eternal joy. Easter, the resurrection of Jesus, is not just important – it is the core of all that we have and hope for in him, our glorious Lord.

WE ARE EASTER WORSHIPPERS

It is indeed something to sing about, for it is the reason we can bow before a living Lord in worship rather than make sad pilgrimages to the tomb of a dead prophet. We are Easter worshippers.



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