
The Delayed Miracle

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints of who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:50–53).

The miraculous signs that immediately followed our Lord’s death will stand forever as divine corroboration of the authenticity of the sacrifice of Jesus. God gave His word of testimony to the greatest event of all time—through the rending of the temple’s veil, the earthquake, and the opening of the tombs. These signs came in rapid succession right after “Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit” (Matthew 27:50). The time of these occurrences makes it certain that they were given to confirm the divine nature of the crucifixion of Jesus.

There is a fourth sign that grows out of the third sign—the resurrection of the saints. God gave it as somewhat of a delayed miracle. It began minutes after Jesus expired, but was not completed until Jesus had risen from the dead on Sunday morning. Matthew wrote, “The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints of who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:52, 53).

How are we to understand this miracle? What lessons should be gleaned from it?

To begin with, these resurrections show the power of God over our dead bodies. Matthew reported, “The tombs were opened, and many *bodies* of the saints of who had fallen asleep were raised” (Matthew 27:52; emphasis mine).

One of the most fascinating truths in the Bible is the truth of God raising the dead. Three resurrections are seen in the Old Testament and five occur in the New Testament. These

mysterious acts are true acts of God. They were always the acts of the will and Word of God. They illustrate, among other things, that God has power over, not only life, but also death. He gives life to our bodies, takes it from our bodies, and He can, if He chooses, give life back to our bodies. Job, in the midst of his great loss, cried, “Naked I came from mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

We are reminded anew by these resurrections that God is the God of testimony. Throughout the earthly ministry of Jesus, God confirmed to us with miraculous signs what He was doing through the life of Jesus. This particular supernatural event declared that God was present at Calvary in His purposes and plans for the salvation of the world. He withdrew Himself from Christ as He became sin for us, but He gave His approving acknowledgement of what had happened and was happening through the darkness, the rent veil, the earthquake, and the opening of the tombs.

If one accepts the source, the integrity of His revealing Word, he has to accept the fact that God was speaking to the world through these signs. If I turn on my radio and hear a preacher saying, “I’m in revival at Millsap. Last night we raised a man from the dead. He has been dead for five years, but we brought him back to life.” I just reach over and turn off the radio. I do not believe that happened because I do not believe the source. The man was deluded, mistaken, or misled. However, when the Word of God tells

me that bodies were raised shortly after Jesus died, I praise God for giving us this irrefutable testimony. I know that what was reported happened. The Bible is the only totally accurate Book in the world; and if it reveals that bodies were raised, I believe it.

These resurrections clearly convey that Christ is the first fruits of those who are asleep. This fact graphically illustrates that Jesus' resurrection is paramount. We cannot help but notice Matthew's wording, "And coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many" (Matthew 27:53; emphasis mine).

Some years after this powerful illustration, Paul wrote that Christ was and is the first fruits from the dead: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Other resurrections had occurred prior to Jesus' resurrection. Six of them can be named: the son of the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17–24), the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:8–37), the man who was raised when his physical remains came into contact with the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20, 21), the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–15), the daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9:18–25), and Lazarus (John 11:1–44). These were different from our Lord's resurrection. Paul said that Jesus arose from the dead to die no more: "Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him" (Romans 6:9). Those who died before Him were only brought back to life and would need to die again. Apparently, these who were raised right after Jesus' resurrection, after appearing to some in the city, must have been carried up into heaven. Their resurrections were similar to Jesus'.

J. W. McGarvey wrote:

There has been much speculation as to what became of these risen saints. We have no positive information, but the natural presumption is, that they ascended to heaven. These resurrections were symbolic, showing that the resurrection of Christ is the resurrection of the race.¹

¹J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel* (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Standard Publishing, n.d.), 732.

One saint was taken to heaven in the patriarchal age—Enoch; one was taken in the Mosaic age—Elijah; and a few saints were taken after Jesus' resurrection.

We see broadcast in these resurrections that the death of Jesus saves us from death itself. Why did God choose this type of evidence? Why did He not cause lightening to strike the cross? Why did He not smite with death all of those who had a part in the crucifixion? Surely the reason must have been that He wanted a sign that was not only supernatural, but was also instructive about the power and nature of Christ's death.

This sign of the resurrections has four great, remarkable features: First, it has the opening of the graves. Second, it has their remaining open until Sunday morning. Third, it shows us the uniting of the spirits with the bodies in the resurrections. Fourth, it has the confirming of the resurrections by the appearances of the saints in Jerusalem before many residents. Possibly, a fifth feature is the thought of the saints ascending to the presence to God. Could a more graphic picture be given of how our Lord delivers us from death than this one?

Jesus told Mary at the tomb of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die" (John 11:25, 26a). After his detailed discussion of the resurrection of our bodies in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul ended his great chapter with the immortal words: "'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55–57). Again, Paul wrote in Romans, "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23).

We could say that the raising of the saints after Jesus' resurrection is one of the most amazing miracles of the Bible. It has all the elements of uniqueness to it. It asserts the truth that Jesus is the first fruit of those who are asleep; it reveals God's testimonial nature; it says that God has power over our dead bodies; and, in its greatest teaching, it proclaims that through

Jesus' death our bodies and spirits are delivered from death.

Eddie Cloer



“When one comes to the raising of the bodies of the saints, . . . he is confronted by a matter which clearly involves pure supernaturalism. No forces or means are known to man . . . whereby life can be created. Medical scientists confess that, while they can outline the steps which eventuate in birth, they cannot begin to explain the “how” of the birth of a child.

So when life is gone, there is no power, knowledge,

or force known to man whereby life can be re-created or restored. It is instructive to note, while medical science has taken long strides in the prevention and healing of disease, on the basic issues of life and death, medical science is helpless. No doctor, medical scientist, biochemist or pathologist, even to this day, has been able to produce a means for the raising of the dead or the reintroduction of life. Thus, when we learn the dead were raised in connection with the death of Christ, we must recognize, this was a case of pure supernaturalism. It was the immediate working of God, nothing less.²

²Gordon H. Girod, *Words and Wonders of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1962), 145, 146.