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Victory Over The Grave!

BECKY COMBEE

It's Easter time, and again this year, I am thrilled with the emphasis on the resurrection. Although I was raised in church and quickly bowed at the foot of the cross in honor of the Lord's sacrifice for my sins, it was years – many years – before I understood the significance of the resurrection. I watched theatrical dramas that masterfully brought Jesus out of the tomb, but I was always perplexed. I didn't even know why I was confused. It just seemed that something was missing.

After years of study, it is now clear to me that the missing ingredient was knowledge of the three days Jesus spent in hell. Although I saw the tomb, I did not realize the agony of His suffering for our sins in that place of punishment. The book of Acts records, "Christ's soul would not be left in hell."¹ This is far from my childhood image of Jesus lying in the tomb for three days until He arose and walked out of that place of burial.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, His eternal spirit was clothed in human flesh. At death, His body – His flesh – lay in the grave, but His spirit descended to the place of punishment to defeat Satan for us. After three days, His body and spirit were again reunited. The apostle Peter described this day in his sermon on the day of Pentecost when he spoke of the "resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption."²

Certainly, you cannot be LEFT in a place that you have not visited. I have never been to Japan, so it is impossible that I would be left there. Yet I remember waiting for Wayne to park our rental car in Germany. I mean, waiting, checking the time, and waiting some more. Then, after some confusion, Wayne finally arrived, leaving us only time enough to run through the airport and board our plane. We were almost LEFT in Germany—at least for a short time.

Those three days of punishment Jesus spent in hell or Hades are very significant. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, we learn that Hades is the home of departed spirits. It had two compartments,

Lifeforce

SUZANNE D. WILLIAMS

They took Him away. Hated. Shunned. Turning their faces aside because the form and shape of Him was so gruesome. Unrecognizable.

But inside, deep down where it counts, where the core of all decisions and choices are made, in the center of His being, was a Man who knew exactly how they felt. He recognized every sadness they'd ever dealt with, knew depression and mental anguish, anxiety, panic.

They didn't look at Him, but He looked at them. With love in His eyes. Compassion. Mercy. For the very people who through fear and greed, lust for power and things, reasoned with themselves it was all God's fault.

God did this. Save Yourself!

Yet beaten, bruised, mauled by their actions, He submitted, willing to take the blame for all the horrible things they'd ever done, ever would do. For generations of men led astray by the deceit of darkness. For those who worshipped Him not, had no respect or regard for His actions. Those who debased and devalued this moment in time.

For them He bore it all. All. Every. The lot. The entire weight of people with no clue that the Man they sought to extinguish was the very One who could save Him.

They thought they knew better, thought they'd figured it out, charted their paths, set their feet the direction they wanted to go, when all along what they were walking on was shifting, sending them deeper and deeper into the sands of time where

separated by a great chasm. One compartment was a place of blessing called Abraham's bosom, and the other was a place of punishment, called hell. The Scripture declares that the rich man died and, "in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments."³ Here, hell was not the place of final judgment prepared for the devil and his angels, but it was the place of punishment at that time.

In Hades, Jesus stood in our place! He carried our sin to that place of damnation, making full payment for every fault, flaw and error. Second Corinthians 5:21 reads, "For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for OUR sin."⁴ He paid for our sins! He paid for the sins of the entire world!

Now, if I paid your electrical bill, then you would not have to pay it. If I went to the store for you, you would not have to go. It is the same with Jesus' sacrifice. The wages of our sin is death, but Jesus was punished for us. He paid our bill! Through Him, we

are free!

As God's offering for man's sin, Jesus faced our enemy, Satan, and, after three days, defeated him. The Word of God says, "[Jesus] disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publically by his victory over them on the cross."⁵ The King James Version declares that Jesus spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them. When Satan was disarmed or spoiled, he was stripped of all power and authority. This victory over Satan was for every man and every woman who will accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

So, in this great season of celebration, let's magnify God's glorious victory. Let's raise our voices and sing triumphantly of resurrection. Jesus died and on the third day, He arose in victory. Because of Him, Satan was defeated and we are free! Jesus purchased our freedom and we are free indeed!

¹Ac 2:31 NLV ²Ac 2:31 ³Lk 16:23 ⁴NLT ⁵Col 2:15 NLT

once moored, they'd never get out. Never.

Unless at the bottom, stuck in place, faced with their own demise, they'd look up and see He did this for them. For their sins. For their mistakes. For their problems, turmoils, and troubles.

For the kid who ran away from home. For the child molested by his father, brother, neighbor. For the teen who got into drugs and grew up addicted. For the man in prison who stole or robbed or murdered. Yes, even for him. For those who've done the worst, most horrible crimes society can imagine.

As well as the housewife, who yelled at her husband. The husband who worked too late and swung at her. The children who viewed it and crouched together, eyes wide, wishing it'd stop.

The sailor, the soldier, the hero, the fallen. Those who died in wars, sacrificing themselves for the greater good. The victims of holocausts whose lives were snuffed out without care. The cancer sufferer. The cancer survivor. Anyone captured by decay and disease. Accident or misfortune. Natural calamity. Complete disaster. Ignorance.

He didn't limit His act to the church goer, the saint, the clean-skinned college grad, the upright in their pressed pants and shiny shoes. This Man surrendered Himself to false judgment though all of these people and millions more, born and unborn,

turned aside, gave Him the cold shoulder, discounted His death as just another one of those. Something ugly and awful and too hard to look at.

They took Him away, but they couldn't put out his Lifeforce. They had no idea that what looked like the end wasn't the end at all because the power behind Him still burned, an unquenchable force capable in one instant of time of wiping the slate clean for the entire world.

The entire world! Those same ones who think they know what they're doing. That still today look another direction rather than at some poor Man who died so tragically. That fashion for themselves gods of silver and gold, paper and plastic. Stone gods who without eyes or ears or mouths can't do anything more than stare back unfeeling, unmoving. Empty vacuous air without any ability to heal and mend.

What they meant for loss was instead their gain. What they shed to bring death, instead gives life. What they tried to extinguish is instead brighter than it ever was and able to fix whatever is broken. It's a task already completed. A victory already won. Success. Triumph. The big prize.

Accomplished while people weren't looking. By a Man who looked like nothing but can change your life into something. If you'll believe it.

**This is Suzanne's paraphrase of Isaiah 53:2-5.*