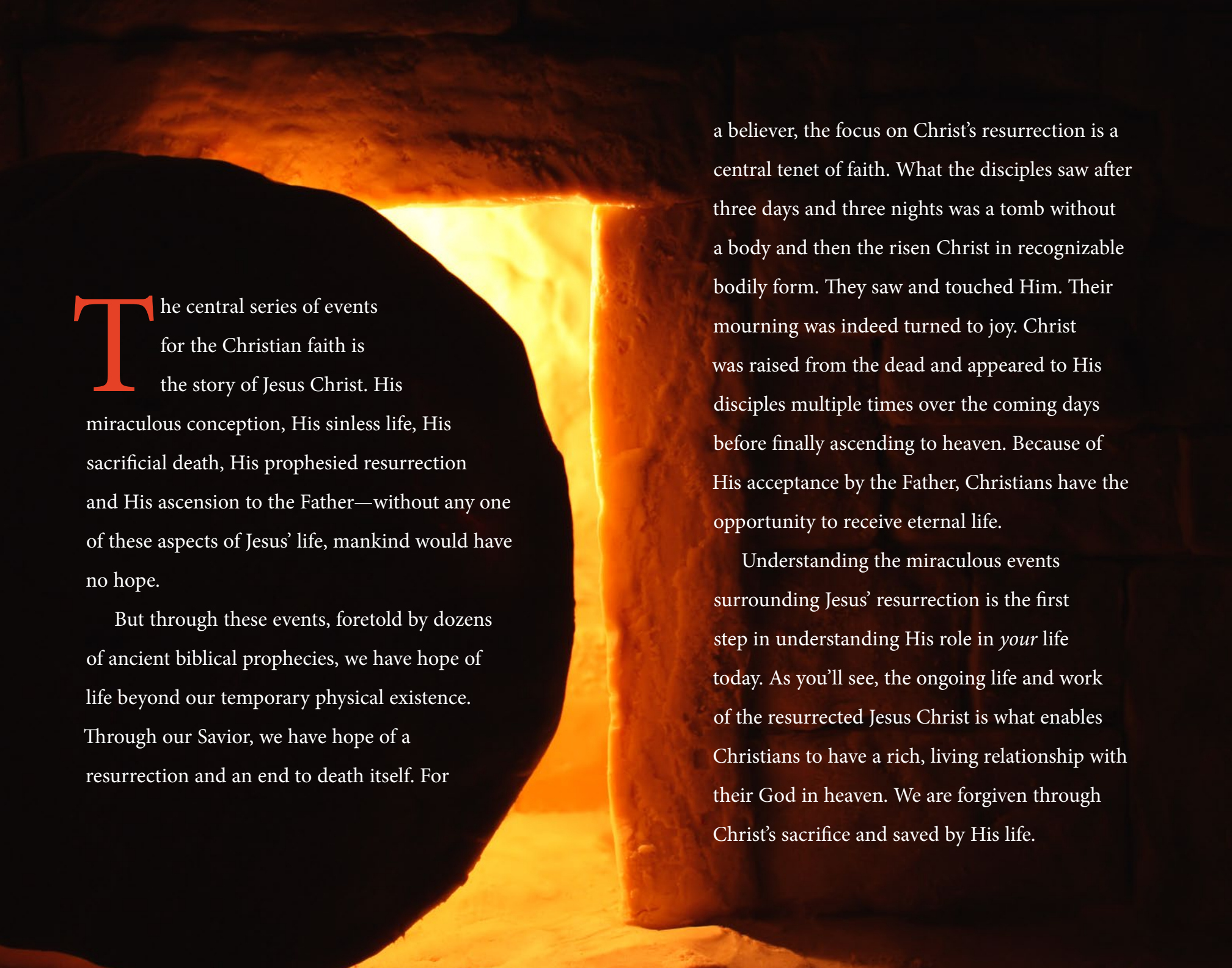


Jesus Christ

Saved by His Life

BEYOND
TODAY

A Bible study aid presented
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The central series of events for the Christian faith is the story of Jesus Christ. His miraculous conception, His sinless life, His sacrificial death, His prophesied resurrection and His ascension to the Father—without any one of these aspects of Jesus’ life, mankind would have no hope.

But through these events, foretold by dozens of ancient biblical prophecies, we have hope of life beyond our temporary physical existence. Through our Savior, we have hope of a resurrection and an end to death itself. For

a believer, the focus on Christ’s resurrection is a central tenet of faith. What the disciples saw after three days and three nights was a tomb without a body and then the risen Christ in recognizable bodily form. They saw and touched Him. Their mourning was indeed turned to joy. Christ was raised from the dead and appeared to His disciples multiple times over the coming days before finally ascending to heaven. Because of His acceptance by the Father, Christians have the opportunity to receive eternal life.

Understanding the miraculous events surrounding Jesus’ resurrection is the first step in understanding His role in *your* life today. As you’ll see, the ongoing life and work of the resurrected Jesus Christ is what enables Christians to have a rich, living relationship with their God in heaven. We are forgiven through Christ’s sacrifice and saved by His life.

“He has risen!”

Two men ran through the streets of the city, trying to see if it was true. Over the final sprint one outran the other and arrived on the scene first. Stopping, he stooped down and looked into the space and noticed the linen cloths that had once wrapped a body. Astounded, he didn't immediately enter.

His friend, not hesitating, tucked his head and went inside. He also saw the same linen cloths, with a separate piece lying nearby. He too was stunned.

Then the other joined him inside. Staring at the empty, rock-carved room, they came to realize something beyond human belief had occurred.

These two men, Peter and John, were standing in the empty tomb where a little more than three days and nights earlier the dead body of their Master and Teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, had been placed (see John 20:1-10).

They had come to an empty tomb and, on soon discovering what this meant, their lives were transformed. Jesus was not there. He had risen from the dead.

Everything had changed.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ

A miracle of the ages

After the sudden arrest, illegal trial, conviction and crucifixion of Jesus, His disciples were in shock. Everything they knew was turned upside down—their Master dead, their fellowship in hiding and their hopes crushed. Their time of rejoicing was at an end, and a funereal fog descended on the earliest disciples.

Certain women among them—including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome—approached the tomb while it was still dark to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, following the custom of the time.

Finding the heavy stone that covered the tomb entrance rolled away, they entered and were shocked and afraid when they saw “a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side.” The man told the women, “He is risen!” and instructed them to

go and tell Jesus' other disciples (Mark 16:1-8).

Mary Magdalene and the other women went to tell Peter and John, who then rushed to the tomb. But the only things they found there were Christ's burial wrappings. After they left, Mary stood weeping and confused, then “turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus” (John 20:14). She did not recognize someone she knew well. She assumed He was the gardener. What followed next was a startling

recognition.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him, ‘Rabboni!’ (which is to say, Teacher)” (John 20:16). The impossible dream came true—the unbelievable had happened!

This particular moment of recognition is perhaps unsurpassed in all of history. A weeping, distraught woman who thinks everything is lost suddenly realizes her Savior is alive and well and standing before her! The wave of emotion that swept over her must have been indescribable. Jesus simply addressed her in the same way He had so many times before while He was still a human being.

Most of us have had the experience of unexpectedly seeing someone we know well whom we have not seen for a long time. The emotion we experience is difficult to adequately describe. But imagine if it were a loved one over

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25).

whose brutal death we had just been mourning!

And here He was alive again, though no longer as a man of flesh. When God resurrected Jesus to spirit life, He apparently passed right through his burial wrappings as though they were not there.

The apostle Paul tells us that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). So Christ’s resurrection to eternal life was as a glorified spirit being (Philippians

3:21), of the same divine essence as the Father. Yet Christ’s

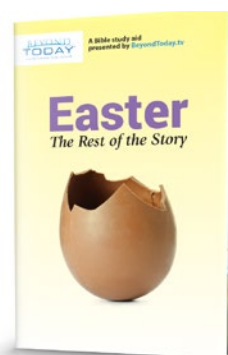
resurrection appearances took a wonderful variety of forms. The Gospel accounts show us that no one recognized Him unless He wanted them to see Him as He was.

And so it was that this woman—Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus had cast seven demons—was the first human being in history to see the resurrected Christ in person and recognize who He was. What an honor!

For us today, what is the real significance of Christ’s resurrection?



Christ’s Resurrection: Bigger Than Easter



The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the key historical and spiritual reality for a Christian. Without His resurrection, “your faith is futile” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Christ’s resurrection is the culmination of the most important series of events that ever happened.

It’s surprising then, that the day most people celebrate to remember this most important of events actually obscures the truth of Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection. Easter customs not only have non-Christian origins, they actually change the story and keep Christians from fully understanding the truth of salvation. To learn more about the truth of Easter’s origins and how it obscures the simple truth of the Bible, read our free study aid *Easter: The Rest of the Story* online (at www.ucg.org/booklet/easter-rest-story).



A defining teaching

Have you looked into that tomb and considered what it means? Have you seen that Christ has indeed risen from the dead? Have you allowed your life and your thinking to be transformed by this event?

Jesus Christ's resurrection is a defining teaching of the Bible. So let's examine it directly from Scripture, without traditions that were added later.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ formed a central part of the announcement that the apostles took to the world. Peter stated in his first recorded sermon: "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it . . .

"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:22-36).

Over the next 40 days some of these men and women personally saw the resurrected Christ and heard His teaching about the Kingdom of God. They saw and accepted this as a fact that confirmed their faith and enabled them to take the gospel to the peoples of their day.

Their testimony, written in the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul, is firsthand evidence—eyewitness testimony of Christ's resurrection.

The apostle Paul showed that the resurrection is central to the Christian

hope: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures . . . Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 12).

Did it really happen?

The chief priests and Pharisees went to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate to request security guards at the tomb so that Jesus' disciples would not come and steal the body to claim He had been resurrected. They remembered that Jesus said He would be raised after three days and nights in the tomb. Pilate gave them a guard detail, and the stone that had been placed in front of the tomb entrance was shut with a seal (Matthew 27:62-66). The authorities knew this, both Roman and Jewish. Precautions were taken.

Matthew's account goes into detail to show there were eyewitnesses to an earthquake and that an angel had rolled back the stone covering the tomb entrance. The guards shook with fear to the point of being frozen into inaction (Matthew 28:2-4).

These same guards—and keep in mind they were not Christ's disciples—went and reported what had happened, what they saw with their own eyes, to the authorities. They were bribed by the officials to keep quiet. This was a commonly known fact among the Jews for many years (Matthew 28:11-15).

People *knew* about the resurrection of Jesus. There were multiple eyewitnesses.

Paul reported that the risen Christ

was seen by all the apostles and that He was also seen by more than 500 others (1 Corinthians 15:5-8)—these in turn having given eyewitness testimony to thousands!

The point is that this was not done in a corner, covered up and then dragged out to dress up an effort to create a new sect the disciples wanted to start.

Think about this. These unlearned fishermen, tax collectors and women were the least likely of people to start a new religious movement—especially one built on the story of a man who had been crucified as a criminal and then raised from the dead!

Paul makes the case to the Christians in Corinth that they have a Savior and a hope of salvation. He wanted there to be no doubt in their mind of this truth. For you and I there can be no doubt as well. "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty . . . And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Corinthians 15:13-19).

Either Jesus Christ rose from the dead or He didn't. This is a deep issue of faith for a believer. Our modern world is geared to rip from our mind and heart any belief in God or that Jesus of Nazareth was the divine Son of God, sent to earth, born of a virgin, who died and was resurrected to life eternal and sits today at the right hand of God the Father, waiting for the time to return in all power and glory.

This is the most important of matters in this life for you and me to resolve!

Sign of the Messiah

Mainstream Christian tradition holds that Jesus was crucified on Good Friday and resurrected on Easter Sunday. But if Jesus were in the tomb only from late Friday afternoon to sometime early Sunday morning, then the sign He gave that He was the prophesied Messiah was not fulfilled. The claim of His Messiahship rests on the fulfillment of His words.

When we allow the Scriptures to interpret themselves, all four Gospel accounts accurately harmonize and attest to the validity of Jesus' promise that He would be in the grave a full three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40, Luke 11:29)—not just part of that time.

Several Bible translations recognize that more than one Sabbath is discussed in these events. In Matthew 28:1 some Bible versions, including Green's Literal Translation, Ferrar Fenton's Translation and others properly translate a phrase occurring here as "after the sabbaths."

Some stumble over Mark 16:9, not taking into account that there is no punctuation indicated in the original Greek. Therefore, to be in harmony with the material presented in the other Gospels, a better translation of the verse would be: "Now having risen, early the first day of the week He appeared first to Mary Magdalene . . ." So it's not saying that Jesus rose early on Sunday morning, but that He appeared early on Sunday morning to Mary Magdalene, having already risen some time earlier.

Christ our Passover



There is a site in Jerusalem called the Garden Tomb. Years ago some proposed it as the tomb where Jesus was laid after His death. Further study has proven this to not be the case. Nevertheless, it does give an idea of what a rolling-stone tomb of the first century A.D. looked like—and it sits in a beautiful garden setting, as Christ’s tomb did. Today you can visit that empty tomb in Jerusalem and get a good idea of what the disciples saw.



If you walk down the garden paths around the tomb it’s hard not to think about the impact of the resurrection. In a rock-cut tomb like this you can imagine all the events described by the Gospel writers.

Christ’s body was carried in and laid on a rock-cut bench inside the tomb. Oils and special herbs would have been applied to the body, which was then wrapped in linen cloth. The round stone was then rolled across the entrance, sealing the room in darkness.

Three days and nights passed in silence and darkness. And then a flash of light penetrated the dark, and life returned to the body—not the same physical life but a spirit life beyond what any human being had ever experienced. The fullness of God energized the lifeless form, and it was transformed into spiritual glory. Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, and mankind had a Savior!

Without a resurrection, Christianity is nothing more than a human philos-

ophy on par with all other creeds and teachings. With the resurrection, all of that is made nothing by this central fact and truth. With it everything becomes possible.

Symbolism in Jesus’ last meal before dying and the festival that followed

On the final evening before His death, Jesus had a meal with the disciples. Commonly called the Last Supper, it was actually a Passover meal. But on that evening Christ made some significant changes.

Notice what Paul tells us: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My



blood. This do, as often as you drink it [i.e., every Passover], in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

Our hope of eternal life as part of God's family in the Kingdom lies in receiving the life of Christ within us.

The events of Christ's death and resurrection took place at the time of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These festivals are first described in the Bible in Exodus 12 at the time Israel departed from Egypt under Moses. Christ's death and resurrection breathed new meaning into these festivals.

The apostle Paul eloquently summed up these festivals to the group of

believers in Corinth. He was drawing to the attention of this non-Jewish, mostly gentile congregation the fact

that God's festivals are to be observed with new meaning and relevance.

Notice what he told them—and, by extension, us today: “Your glorying

[a reference to their pride in tolerating sin in their midst] is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sin-

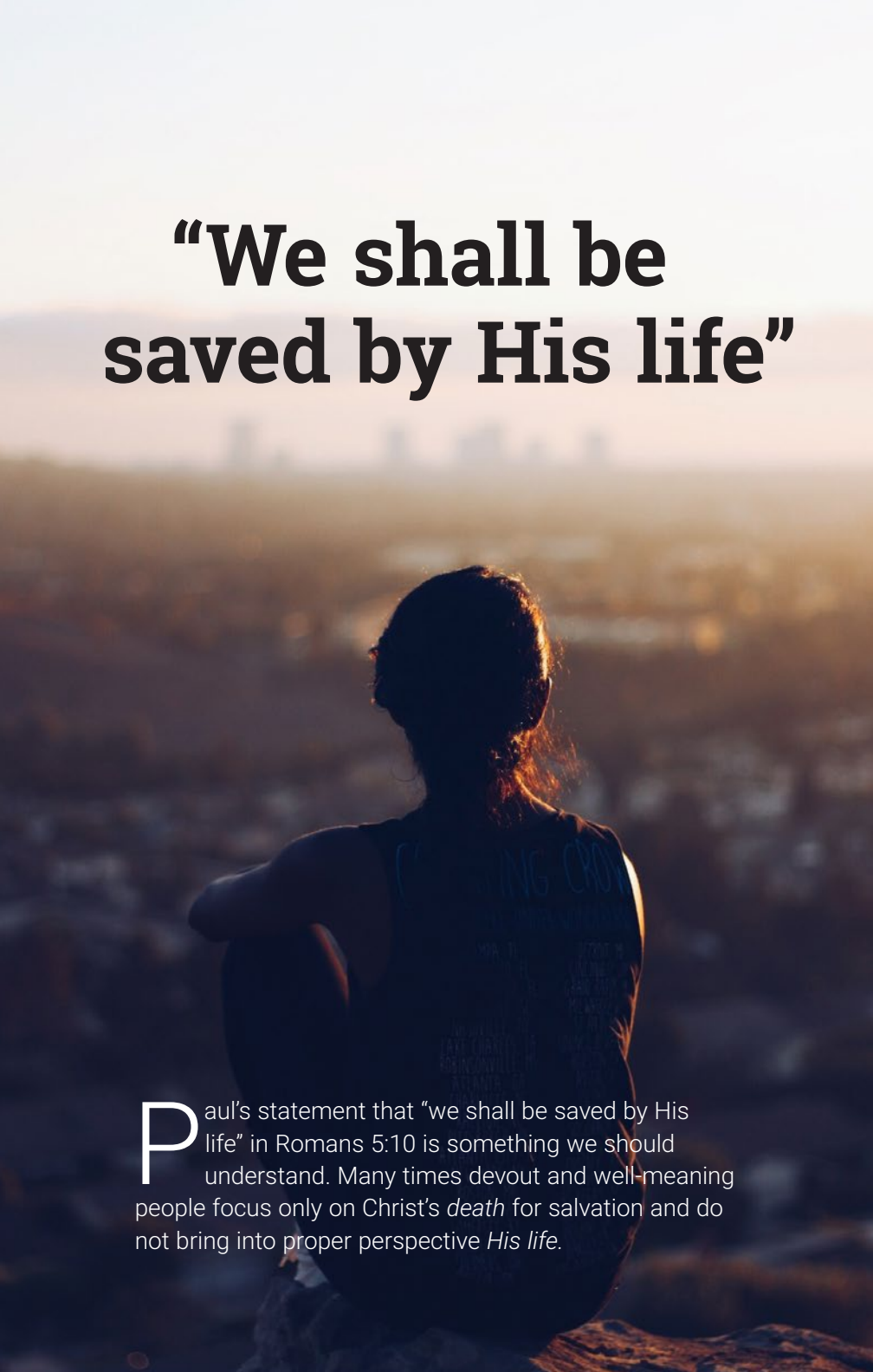
cerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Jesus Christ, our Passover, fulfilled the symbol of the lambs killed each year for centuries as part of the Passover service. His sacrifice, once for all time (Hebrews 9:28), was part of God's plan of salvation from the outset.

Christ's sacrifice paid the penalty of death for sin (Romans 6:23). That judgment is lifted from us when we repent and accept His sacrifice for the remission of sins. This begins the process of salvation for us. But our hope of eternal life as part of God's family in the Kingdom lies in receiving the life of Christ within us. Understanding this vital key is critical. Look at what Paul writes in Romans as he conveys this truth:

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:8-11).

“We shall be saved by His life”



Paul's statement that “we shall be saved by His life” in Romans 5:10 is something we should understand. Many times devout and well-meaning people focus only on Christ's *death* for salvation and do not bring into proper perspective *His life*.

His passion and death are very important aspects of God's plan. His death provides us with the sacrifice necessary for the reconciliation with God and the forgiveness of sin.

But this only begins the process. That Christ lived again, was resurrected from the grave, and lives today is necessary for us to have any hope of eternal life. For it is the risen Christ who helps us to continue in obedience to God and intercedes with the Father when we fall short.

Yes, God forgives us and saves us through His grace—the gift of His divinely bestowed favor. We do not earn salvation (eternal life) through obedience. Nonetheless, God requires as a condition of His gift of salvation that we cease from practicing sin as a way of life and start obeying Him. Follow on in Romans 6: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (verses 1-2).

Sin is a word that many don't like to use today. People do not want to accept the idea of conduct that violates the law of God. Our physically saturated world dulls our sensitivities to a spiritual dimension of life that is real. So many tend to think the physical is all there is to life.

As a result, the existence of spiritual laws that govern how we live is a foreign concept. Man is a physical being but with a spiritual dimension that allows us to connect with God and have a relationship with Him. The spiritual laws He revealed, when obeyed, enable us to live free of a lot of the pain and suffering brought on by bad decisions and behavior.

This is what Paul meant in Romans

12:1-2 when he wrote: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (New International Version).

Most people don't realize that a wonderful, blessed life, a new standard, is in store for them if they are open to the transformation God offers. As Christ described it: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together [to make room for more] and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38, NIV).

Christ's resurrection paved the way for us to experience, to taste and see, to know God better and to live the abundant life He has for us (John 10:10). We begin to think differently, and our lives have the potential to be more than we ever imagined—for they can be what *God* imagines!

Our eternal salvation depends on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He had to live again to serve as our High Priest who intercedes for us with the Father. He had to live to send the Holy Spirit and live in us through that Spirit to help us stop sinning and keep obeying God. He had to live to later return as intervening King to save the world from destroying itself—and to at that time “raise [us] up at the last day” (John 6:44). Without a risen Savior, we would be doomed. But the wonderful reality is that He lives—and that we shall be saved by His life.



This life is filled with challenges. Sometimes these challenges will push us to our very limits—physically, emotionally and spiritually.

But thankfully we are not limited by our own strength. As Paul wrote, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). In fact, Christ lives in the hearts and minds of believers to help us succeed (see Galatians 2:20).

When the burden feels too great to bear and you are in danger of losing hope, take heart that hope remains alive because Jesus Christ is alive. You can fill the hole in your life with a new hope that only a relationship with God through Christ can provide. You are created in God’s image, and through His risen Son He can help you in any difficult period of your life. These challenges are opportunities to grow in the undeserved favor of God in Christ.

The hope that’s maybe missing in your life comes through the knowledge and assurance that we are saved by His life—the awesome, invincible life of Jesus Christ.

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