

“Resurrection Man”

Colossians 3:1-4

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=colossians+3:1-4

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Greenhouse: “Resurrection Man”

*(Since my books and guitars started out as plants, the story I have for you is
A greenhouse.)*

A man was standing in line at the bank when there was a commotion at the counter. A woman, obviously caught in the grip of our uncertain economy, was very distressed, exclaiming: “Where will I put my money?! I have all my money and my mortgage here; what will happen to my mortgage?!”

It turned out that she had misunderstood a small sign on the counter. The sign read: WE WILL BE CLOSED FOR GOOD FRIDAY. I suppose that Jesus and Easter and resurrection were not upper-most in her thoughts; because she thought the bank was going to be closed “for good” that coming Friday.

Our lady at the bank was expressing emotions a lot of people are feeling in this country and around the world these days. Folks who have lost jobs or love someone who’s lost a job are flat-out scared. It takes a lot of time to create and develop any worth-while effort in life, and the results of all devoted energy can vanish in an instant; often due to circumstances quite beyond anyone’s control. Experiencing loss like that hurts. Dwelling on the possibility of such pain usually causes fear. And you guys know what that is like:

Song: “Down In A Hole,” By James Taylor

*Watch your head on the root
Got to let your eyes adjust
Sorry about your suit
Can’t do nothin’ about the dust*

*Welcome down underground
Hunker-down a spell
Gets to feel like home to me
Though I know it looks like hell*

Chorus:

*Down in a hole,
Lord, it’s deep and the sides are steep
And the nights are long and cold
Down in a hole,
Light and love and the world above
Don’t mean nothin’ to a mole*

*Never gets real hot down here
Fifty-five degrees
It’s always a little bit damp, I fear
Though I’ve never seen it freeze
Mushrooms and earthworms
Fancy stuff to eat
A world of quiet contemplation
Just below the street... **chorus***

*I’m in a hole, since I lost my Jesus
Living in a hole, since I lost my Lord*

*Sometimes I give-up on God’s grace
Sometimes I wallow in defeat
Subterranean commitment to fear*

Isn't it amazing what fear can do to us? In particular, the fear of "**not having**," or, stated another way, the fear of "**being without**." Seems to me, that in these times of "economic adjustment," there's a lot "out there" that could scare us. If you're a working-stiff in this country and not in the upper management of a financial institution which received a government bail-out and therefore got a bonus, there's a lot of treasures you could no longer have! What "treasures," that is, what priority items in your life are you afraid of being without?

Personally, I've lived in twenty-one addresses in my life, so, even though it would be painful and hard to find new lodging, a house, to me, is a house. If the bank took over my car, I'd still have my bicycle. Also, I have sold (Ouch!) guitars I've owned before, I could do it again, if need be, and still keep singing. Not having my wife, Ruth, around would take a lot (a WHOLE LOT) of tears to get used to. Furthermore, any of my kids being out of work just strips my gears! I suppose I could make friends with not being able to work out, but, it wouldn't be easy.

This particular personal understanding of my life's priorities has arisen out of a love for Christ, the struggles daily to stay on course, mixed with a redirection of my working goals inspired by less money in the house. I don't think it's wise to look for our treasures in things like possessions, or securities, or vaults. Relationships can't be kept in a vault. When folks went looking for Jesus after his crucifixion, they didn't find him in a vault, that is, tomb. No sir, Jesus had gone beyond what we, the people, think is crucial. Just how do we conclude what is important, that is, what defines a treasure in life?

A long time ago in this country there were some folks who went to great lengths to get what they deemed important. It appears that the means they used to justify their ends were of similar greedy criminal intent as the financial and blind government wizards that got our economy where it is today.

These guys employed the services of a rather resourceful guy they called "Resurrection Man." He was a thirty-six-year-old salve, purchased for \$700 (a considerable sum in those days) off an auction block in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1852. His buyer and Master was the Medical College of Georgia. His mission was morbid but simple: to provide the medical school with fresh cadavers.

Most everyone knew his real name was Grandison Harris. But the doctors at the school playfully plastered him with the nickname "Resurrection Man;" once he got good at robbing the local black cemetery and bringing bodies back to the school.

Resurrection Man was good at his task. According to an eye-witness, he would go to the cemetery late at night, with only the moon watching. He would quickly dig down to the upper end of the box, smash it with an ax, reach in with his long, powerful arms, and draw the body out. He would place the cadaver in a big sack, place it on a cart, and then, after restoring the grave to good order, carry the body back to the medical school.

Mr. Harris was really a glorified grave robber; not a Resurrection Man. He didn't bring the dead, or anything else back to life. He did, in fact, desecrate a cemetery and cart its lifeless bodies back to the doctors of the medical school. The closest he came to witnessing a resurrection was when he took a break one night after completing a job. He parked his loaded wagon in an alley and went into a saloon to refresh himself.

Two medical students had been watching Harris, and when he disappeared they removed the body from the sack and hid it. Then one of them climbed into the sack. When Mr. Harris returned to his wagon, the student groaned in a somewhat spooky voice saying: "Grandiaon...Grandison...I'm cold. Buy me a drink."

The results were predictable...probably the same as the soldiers and disciples who found an empty tomb on resurrection morning...or, in point of fact, what any of us would feel at the prospect of suddenly not having what we feel is necessary: namely, confused and scared witless.

Like out-of-touch C.E.O.'s trying to explain their bonuses, the Roman and Jewish authorities had an explanation for the tomb being empty: it was grave robbers! "The disciples of Jesus dun it," they said. The chief priests and elders of Jerusalem gave a large sum of money to the Roman guards who had "guarded" the tomb insisting that they spread the story: "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were sleeping" (**Matthew 28:13**) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+28:13). Resurrection, grave robbing; there's a long-standing link.

Topics like this make us uncomfortable. The thought of tearing the lid off a tomb is enough to make our skin crawl; and disturbing the dead in their place of final rest is one of the world's most enduring taboos.

But it can be staggering to learn the lengths of what people will do to have the bucks they feel are required to get what they believe they want. At the Egyptian Museum in Cairo there is a 7th century B.C. papyrus of a grave robber. The text describes a scandal in Luxor where one official accused another of looting the tombs in the Valley of the Kings. The account traces how royal investigators initially exonerated the accused, but, upon further examination found him guilty and had him soundly whipped.

In China, three men were executed in central Hubei for robbing ancient grave sites and destroying corpses.

In New York in 2001, Tiffany expert, Alistais Duncan was sentenced to prison for two schemes dealing in Tiffany stained-glass windows that were stolen from mausoleums in the New York metropolitan area.

So, Easter is a really bad time for grave robbers. Contemporary coffin-cracking criminals, whether stealing cadavers or pilfering people's savings and their futures, are being caught; and this is a good thing. We really should slap the cuffs on thieves who plunder for other people's treasures.

The resurrection fact of Easter is always a lousy time for grave robbers, because nothing upsets a grave robber more than an empty tomb. On the day of resurrection, Mary Magdalene and a group of women arrive at Jesus' grave. They carry ointments and spices fully expecting to be greeted by the stench of death. The ladies were predictably prepared for not having; they had gotten themselves ready for being without. But when they go into the tomb and find no body there, they assume that grave robbers have been there and done their dirty work. Mary cries to Peter, "They have taken the Lord, and we do not know where they have laid him" (**John 20:2**) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+20:2)!

Peter then runs to the tomb, climbs in, and looks around. The only treasure he sees is a pile of cloths...hardly a valuable find in itself.

The really cool part is the fact that the real treasure of the tomb is already available; it just takes a while for the fear to shut-up so the new reality can sink in. After Peter goes home, Mary stands weeping outside the very empty tomb, still convinced that it has been robbed and she will forever be without. It is only where Jesus appears and calls her name that all fear vanishes and she discovers that her teacher has been raised to NEW life.

Song: *"Another Day," by James Taylor*
Wake up people, put your faith on
Walk with me into His Light
Finally this morning I'm feeling whole again
It was a hell of a night

Just to be with you, by my side
Just to have you near me, in my sight
Just to walk a while in this Light
Just to know that life goes on
Wake up people, put your faith on
Walk with me into His Light

Another night has gone, life goes on, another dawn in breaking
Turn and face God's Son, one by one, the world outside is waking
Jesus' Light has driven away all the shadows that hide your way
And night has given away to the promise of another day

Another day, another chance that we may finally find our way
Another day, God's Son has begun to melt all our fear away
Another day, another day
Oh, wake up people, put your faith on
Walk with me into His Light

There is no treasure in the tomb. There is no heirloom, no stock certificate, no sports memorabilia, no job description worth living for in the vault. The reality of resurrection is outside the grave; beyond whoever or whatever is not here anymore.

Resurrection lives WAY beyond what “was” and moves all the way to “what can become!” In point of fact, there cannot be a resurrection without a death. Just ask any Monarch Butterfly you run into this summer. That little critter will tell you it’s not good to worry over what you think you can’t live without.

The most valuable, life-giving treasure is not wrapped in a shroud. Jesus the Christ, the Lord of all Life, is not going to be found in a tomb or vault of any kind; “He is not here,” proclaim the dazzling angles on Easter morning. “He is not here, but has risen” (**Luke 24:5**) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+24:5). **He is out and about help us turn what we assume are dead ends into livable lives.**

Because of Easter morning we have it all. We have been given a treasure more valuable and important than anything plucked from the Titanic, unearthed in Africa’s diamond mines, compounded on Wall Street, or stolen from King Tut’s tomb. The love of God for us in the resurrection of Christ is the gift of **LIFE**, not death; **it is the power and presence of the risen Lord that teaches we are never without because we already have what we need.** Treasures simply don’t get better than that.

Because he lives we live. If we are in a graveyard existence...feeling like we are cadavers ourselves, decomposing through sinful actions, lost work, dead-end relationships, unfulfilled dreams and stone-cold spirits...Jesus rises before us, makes himself known, calls us by name, offering new, re-definable life. He offers us forgiveness and guidance, inspiration and salvation, asking that we stop trusting fear and trust him instead, living in his way.

Jesus teaches that a resurrection life is a new kind of life; one that doesn’t fear sin or sickness or loneliness or less income or death. **Rather, resurrection focuses on all things possible in an everlasting life that begins and ends in God.**

The treasures of this new, resurrection life are not stored up on earth, like Egyptian treasure that gather dust in museums. Nor do they amount to mere numbers on balance sheets or things that can be bought and sold. These treasures given to you are of God and heaven and your eternal life, not only the time spent on this earth. These treasures are life in an eternal relationship with God.

There are no curses in these gifts from God, like the legendary treasures of the Pharaohs. There are no equally legendary IRS tax infringements on them, either. There are only blessings. Only hope. **There is only the promise of beating any grave at its own game.**

So, in identifying and defining your priorities in life, go ahead and put your trust in this Resurrection Man; Jesus, the Christ.

Song: “Jesus Christ,” (based on “Copper Line,” by James Taylor)
Even some good folks never knew, why they called him like they do
I’ve been wondering since they age of two, Oh, my Jesus Christ
“Messiah” this, and “Savior” that; blaming God for their stress attacks
All the while carried on his back, Oh, my Jesus Christ

Trying to love and my spirit creaks
So burdened by the time I am weak
Time to let God’s Spirit speak; through my Jesus Christ
We begin with Jesus Christ

An invitation to Creation’s mind, Jesus sets up Suppertime
Simple bread and forgiveness wine, Oh, my Jesus Christ
One time I saw my Dad a’dancin’,
Watched him movin’ like a man in a trace
He said, “The Spirit will do it if you give him a chance;
Tryst in Jesus Christ”

*Bath water and that cup of wine,
Forgiveness fits my soul just fine
I'll stay with him with Grace and time, Oh, that Jesus Christ
I'm in love with Jesus Christ*

*The first disciple choice I took, was like a page from romance book
My heart opened and my mind shook, Oh, my Jesus Christ
Oh Wow!, that Jesus Christ*

*Took some falls from some faithful heights
I ran from living trying to hold on tight
And pray for love enough just to last all night
From my Jesus Christ...
 Day breaks and this boy wakes up
 And the dogs barks and the birds sing
 And the angels sigh,*

*I tried to stay down as if I could
All loved on from Dogwood
But raised up, raised up good
In my Jesus Christ*

*I doesn't come as a surprise to me,
It fulfills God's memory
How we're lifted up and rising free
'Cause of Jesus Christ*