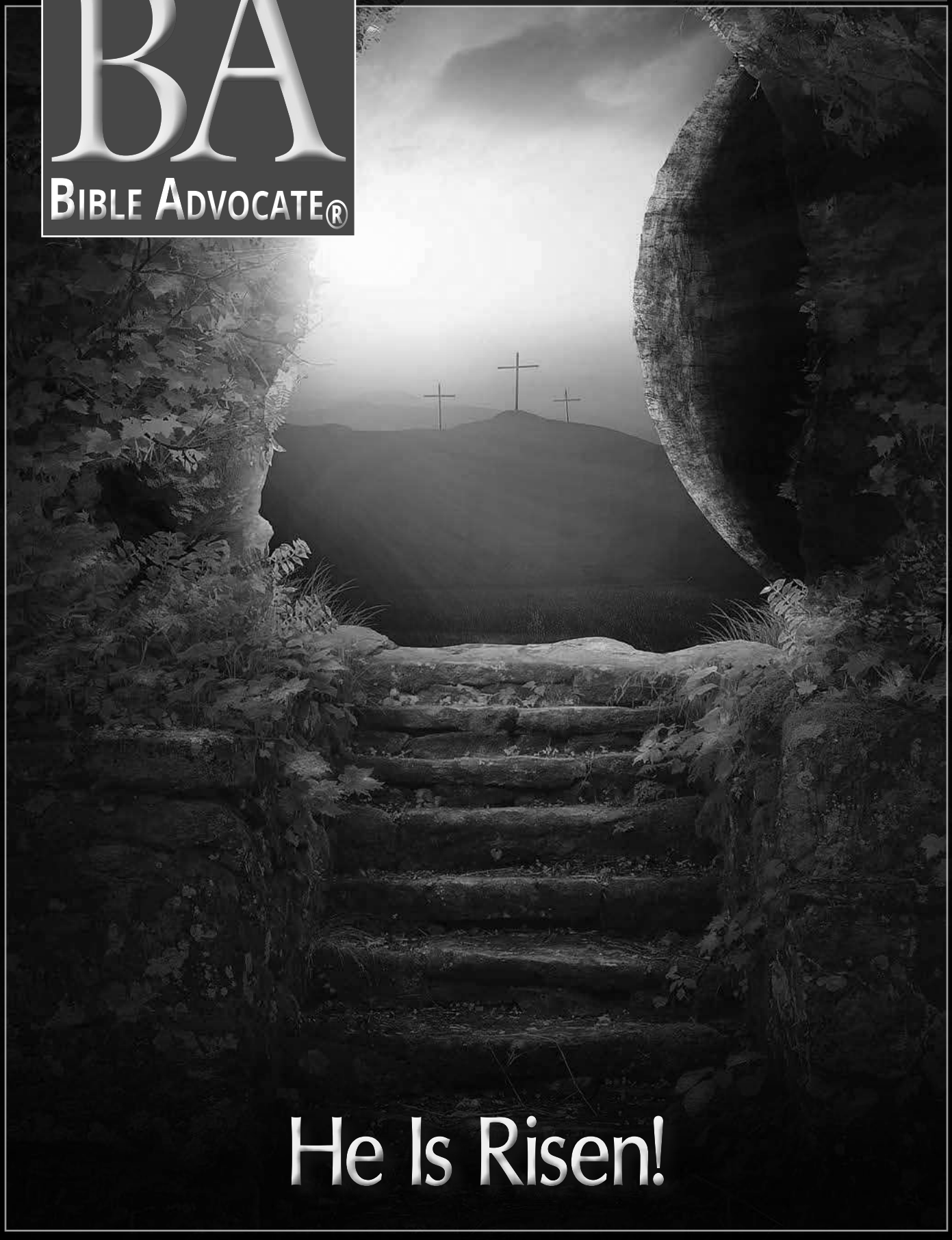
BA
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# He Is Risen!




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# 2026: The Story of Jesus



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# An Empty Tomb

My little country church in Jasper, Arkansas, has its own cemetery. The plot of land set aside for this purpose was empty when we bought the land and built our church. In the thirty years since, our graveyard has been filling up. It seems as though I've officiated too many burials over the years — most recently, my dad's.

From the pulpit I often refer to these dear departed ones as "seeds." We've planted them in the soil just within sight of our sanctuary, and Christ will raise them at His coming. Jesus used this seed analogy with His disciples just before His own death and burial: "unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24).

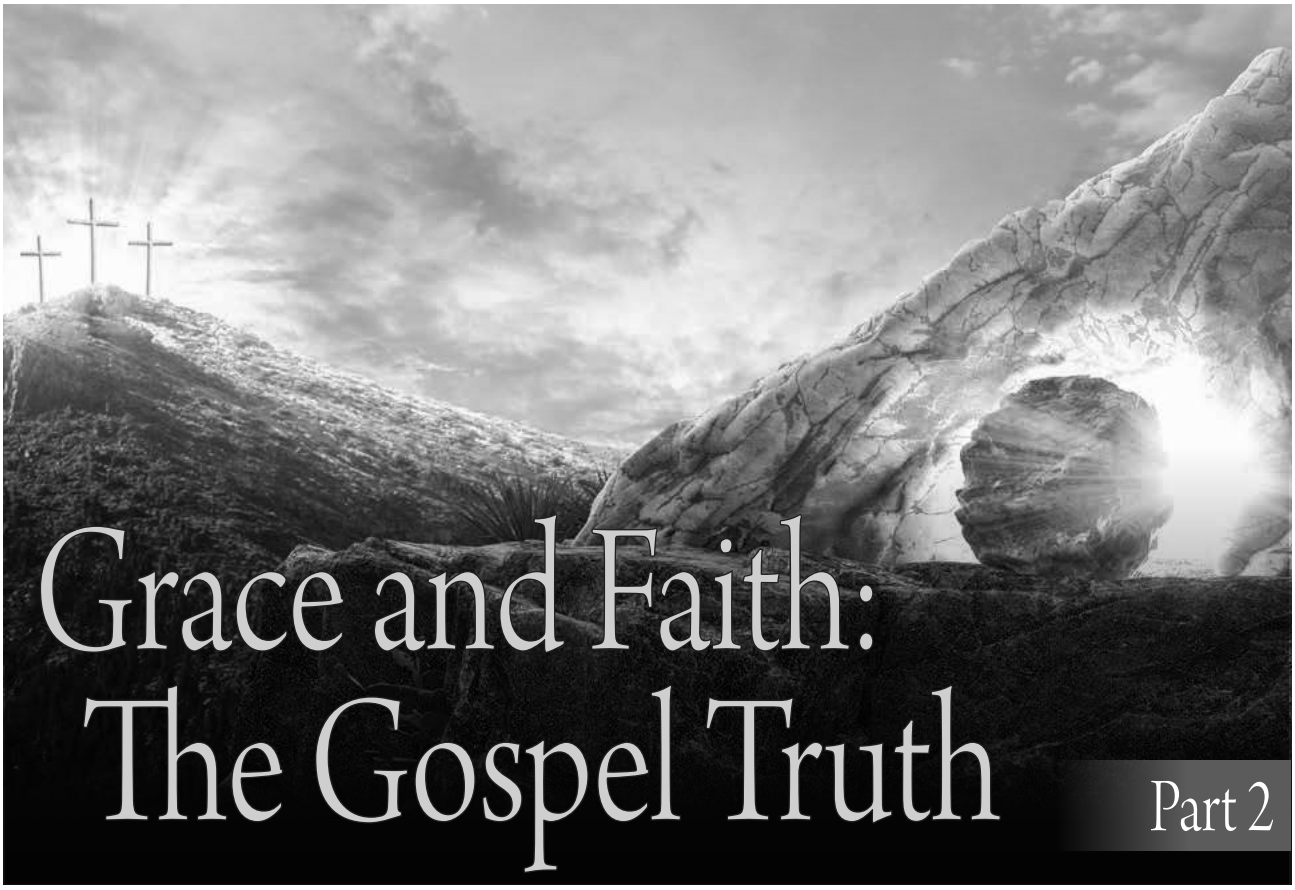
On a recent trip to Alberta to attend the memorial service of Pastor Nick Nimchuk, I visited another country cemetery at our sister Church of God in Acme, Alberta. I recognized names of old friends there, a long way from Jasper but near in the faith. I experience a counter-intuitive feeling of peace and joy in these old church cemeteries. I can account for that only because I believe that the tomb was empty: *Jesus is risen!* And because of that, our little graveyards are fields of hope, representing a great harvest to come.

The resurrection of Jesus was disorienting to those first witnesses. The empty tomb made no sense then and makes little sense now. It's nearly impossible for the earthly mind to comprehend the defeat of death, but that is exactly what the Resurrection means: "Death is swallowed up in victory," Paul cries, quoting Hosea. "'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'" (1 Corinthians 15:54, 55). The victory is ours because the tomb was empty. Jesus is not only risen but coming; coming for the living and the dead.



The declaration *Jesus lives!* means we need not fear, we need not doubt. We sow gospel seeds with boldness and grace, knowing that soon, the graves in our cemeteries will be empty too. *Resurrection!*

*—Jason Overman*



# Grace and Faith: The Gospel Truth

Part 2

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What comes next in God's plan of salvation?

**by Loren Stacy**

Ephesians 2:1-9 destroys the idea that people can save themselves from the wrath of God against sin. Most religions focus on things one must do or not do to merit God's favor. But, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul insists that salvation is by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. That is the essence of biblical Christianity.

As we read verse 10, however, we see that Paul immediately anticipates a dangerous misunderstanding: If good works do not save us, why should we be concerned with good works at all? Why learn God's Word and try to obey it? Why not just live any way we may please?

Paul answers these questions: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (v. 10).

We are not saved *by* good works, but we are saved *for* good works. As the early reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin famously insisted, we are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. True and saving faith in Jesus Christ is the gift of God to those individuals who have been born again (John 3:3, 7). Such persons have been regenerated by God, spiritually transformed by God — from dead in sin to alive in Christ. The evidence of that transformation is the good works that always result from that transformation.

## Workmanship

Ephesians 2:10 reveals several important things about those who have truly been born again.

First, it tells us that we who are saved are *God's* workmanship. *Workmanship* is translated from the Greek word *poyaymah*. It means something that has been skillfully crafted, like a beautiful work of art, music, or literature. Paul reminds us that there is no room for human pride when it comes to the work of salvation because that work is

*God's* work. God saves us from Himself (from His wrath against our sin), by Himself (salvation is His work, not ours), and for Himself (for His glory).

## New creation

Second, verse 10 tells us that we are re-created "in Christ Jesus." As someone has said, Christianity isn't just another self-help program, behavior modification, or moral improvement. Authentic Christianity is radical, to-the-core transformation. We are not just repaired or improved; we are re-created! We are regenerated spiritually, born again in Christ Jesus: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Once again, God's Word is driving home the point that our salvation is God's work, not ours. Before we were born again, we were

> dead in the trespasses and sins in which [we] once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Those who are dead know nothing and do nothing. They cannot re-create themselves or bring themselves back to life. So how did we who are new creations in Christ become new creations in Christ? Verses 4, 5: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved." And why has God given us new life in Christ? According to Ephesians 2:10, "for good works."

## Salvation's fruit

Third, good works are the purpose, not the cause, of our salvation. This is a crucial point that so many miss. They place so much weight on God's grace that they deny the importance of good works. Others place so much weight on doing good works that they deny God's grace.

Ephesians 2:1-10 tells us the truth of the matter. We are saved by God (by His grace through a fully saving trust in Christ that God gives us) for the purpose of doing good works. Those works are not the root of our salvation, but they most definitely will be the fruit of it. No one is saved by doing good works, but anyone who truly is saved does good works.

This is a critical concept. The biblical gospel is that God grants salvation as a gift of His grace through faith and that true salvation leads us to do good works. Our salvation, therefore, truly is by God's grace alone, through a God-given faith alone, in Christ Jesus alone, to the glory of God alone. Any "gospel" that says you must perform certain good works to earn salvation is a false gospel. Any "gospel" that says you must obey or sacrifice or do certain things to earn salvation is a false gospel. Any "gospel" that says you must add something of your own work to the work of Christ to earn salvation is a false gospel.

The true gospel is not "Jesus plus something more." It is that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. Jesus said:

> "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit [i.e. good works], for apart from me you can do nothing. . . . By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit [i.e. good works] and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:5, 8).

> "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."

## Beforehand

Fourth, God himself prepared these good works that true believers do. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that He "created [us] in Christ Jesus for good works, which [He] prepared beforehand."

This is another acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. Not only has God ordained our salvation, God also has ordained the transformed lives that we live once we are saved. And verse 10 says that He did this beforehand. Before He saved us. Before the foundation of the world.

## New walk

Fifth, we have been created in Christ Jesus to fulfill God's plan. God ordained the good works of each true believer beforehand so "that we should walk in them." Before God gave us new life and faith in Christ, we "walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" (v. 2). After God gave us new life and faith in Christ, we walk, following the path of good works that God created for us beforehand. We walk following Christ. We walk following the Holy Spirit.

## Beware

Taken altogether, Ephesians 2:8-10 provides an amazingly concise statement of God's plan of salvation. In these three brief verses, it tells us how we are saved and why we are saved. We are saved by God's grace through a God-given faith in Jesus Christ, and we are saved to do the good works that God prepared beforehand for us to do. Our salvation, from start to finish, is God's work.

There are two deadly errors that derail too many people. First, beware of trusting in yourself for your salvation and that your knowledge or good works can earn salvation.

Second, beware of taking God's grace and mercy for granted. Beware of any thought that God's grace and mercy are a license to sin now, repent later, and be forgiven. None of us should presume upon God's grace. Habitually doing so is evidence that we've never really received it.

Ephesians 2:1-10 is a statement of the gospel, and Ephesians 2:8-10 is a three-verse summary of it all.

> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. BA

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**Loren Stacy** is the former president of the General Conference. He writes from Lodi, CA, where he lives with his wife, Karen. Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.




**"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker" (Psalm 95:6).**

**We are excited to announce our 2027 Adult Quarterly Series. The BAP joins the General Conference Convention in making "In His Presence" our theme for next year. Written by Elder Whaid Rose and BA Editor Jason Overman, this four-part series will explore biblical worship in all its wondrous and diverse detail.**

**The quarterly is available in English, Spanish, and French, so set up your standing order at *https://store.cog7.org/*. Don't miss out. Let's worship together!**



# Do All Religions Lead to God?

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**by Oscar Mata**

In some so-called Christian circles, it has become common to hear a phrase that sounds kind, conciliatory, and apparently humble: "All religions lead to God." Many people repeat it, thinking they are promoting peace and respect among others.

However, in light of Scripture, that statement is not simply another opinion. In reality, it contradicts one of the most fundamental pillars of the gospel.

The problem is not that many religions exist in the world. It's when someone claims that all of them lead to the same God, while also saying they believe in Jesus Christ. The message of the New Testament never presents Jesus as one spiritual option among many but as the only way to the Father.

Jesus himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). This declaration leaves no room for a religious pluralism in which every path is equally valid.

In light of the Resurrection, the apostles held exactly the same conviction. Peter publicly proclaimed, "nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Likewise, Paul affirmed that "there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

These statements do not arise from religious intolerance but from biblical monotheism. The first believers did not think they were founding a new religion. They were living the culmination of the faith of Israel — the same faith that proclaimed, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Within this framework, claiming that many religions lead to God not only dilutes the gospel but also destroys the coherence of biblical monotheism. The apostolic reasoning is simple: If there is only one true God, then reconciliation with that God cannot come through multiple contradictory religious paths. That is why Paul connects both ideas in 1 Timothy 2:5: "*one* God and *one* Mediator. . ." (emphasis mine).

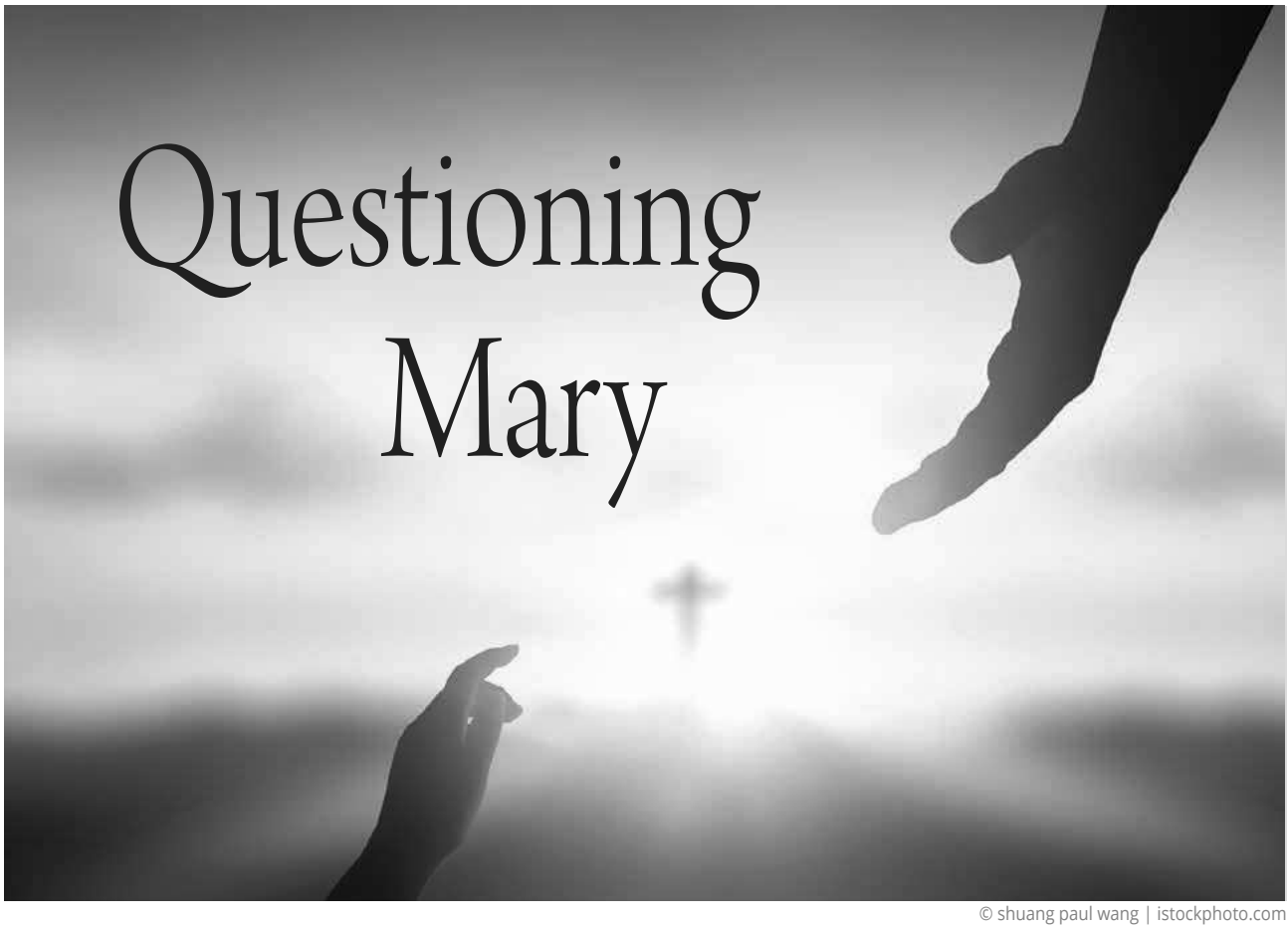
When someone claims that all religions lead to God, they are saying that Christ is not necessary or that His work is not unique. And if Christ ceases to be the center of access to God, the gospel ceases to be the gospel. It becomes something else. That is why the apostle Paul was so emphatic when he warned, "If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9).

It does not matter whether this idea comes from ignorance, stubbornness, or poor teaching. The result is the same: People end up following a different gospel.

Some try to soften the issue by saying, "What really matters is being a good person." But Christianity never taught that reconciliation with God is obtained simply by being a good person. Paul explained that if the foundation of the gospel collapses, faith becomes empty (1 Corinthians 15:14).

*continued on page 14*

# Questioning Mary



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Sometimes questions tell us more than answers do.

**by Matthias Hoefler**

"They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, . . . ," Mary Magdalene tells the disciples (John 20:2).

John and Peter run there. They look in. They enter. She's right: Jesus isn't there.

John and Peter return home. Mary stays behind weeping. The easy thing would be to go home too. But Mary loved this man Jesus who did so much for her. The pain she feels is all she has left of Jesus, so she sits there in that pain. Sometimes that's all we have left.

We have felt what Mary felt. We've loved people and lost ones who really added to our lives. I think of the ache I felt when my mom died.

Mary's world is in pieces at her feet, glass shards too small to mend. And she doesn't know where what's left of her world has gone. "They have taken away the Lord . . . and we do not know where they have laid Him" (v. 2).

With tracks of her tears on her face, Mary looks up from her hands and into the tomb a second time. Maybe she doesn't even know why. When she does look in, the Bible doesn't say she sees the folded grave clothes that John and Peter noted. Instead, she sees two seated angels, wearing white. "Then they said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'" (v. 13).

Did taking a second look — sitting with her pain and confusion a while, lingering — lead to seeing these angels? Maybe there's something in the angelic concern for her that nudges Mary toward belief. The angels' concern reminds Mary of the concern Another had for her, this Man who loved her like no other.

## A second look

Thinking of that concern, Mary turns from the angels and "sees" Jesus again. He repeats the angels' question but adds something, nudging her even closer. "Why are you weeping?

Whom are you seeking?" (v. 15).

Mary doesn't recognize Jesus. A trick of the light? She can't see through her tears? She thinks He's the gardener. She still wonders where Jesus has been taken.

"Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away" (v. 15). She must see Jesus' body treated as it should be.

Mary gets so much more than she's hoping for. Did anyone say her name the way He did? When Jesus speaks her name now, Mary knows it is He (vv. 14-16). Excited and filled with joy, she embraces Him (v. 17).

## Rewards

If you're in pain today, be encouraged: Sitting in a painful tension — often all we can manage — is rewarded here. Like Mary, we can reach toward Jesus, trusting He will reveal Himself in His time, as He did to her. This is the same tomb Peter and John *just* looked into and even walked around in. They saw what they saw.

But with this second look, Mary saw something quite different. She was rewarded with seeing beings beyond this mud-and-grass world that very few people have ever seen. And then she got to welcome Jesus back to the earth with an embrace.

Why was Mary's experience so different? Was it because Peter and John were men and Mary was a woman? Was her faith stronger? Was it something about her way of relating to Jesus before He was murdered? Maybe something else we would recognize had we spent time with them? Mary was forgiven much. Perhaps her experience was different because she loved much (Luke 7:47) or because He had made her whole (8:2).

However it is, John, Mary, and Peter would each be thrilled to see Jesus that morning, but only Mary did, initially. And she had the privilege of becoming His messenger to the remaining disciples (John 20:18).

## God's questions

Sometimes struggling with a question is revelatory. The Lord often uses questions as tools. He asked Adam, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). The Lord asked Jacob, "What is your name?" (32:27). Job was asked by the Almighty, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38:4). And Jesus asked many questions, including "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15); "Do you want to be made well?" (John 5:6); and "Do you also want to go away?" (6:67).

The questions are about us — often what we want and need. But in trying to answer, somehow, we can be led to the Lord Jesus.

On top of her own questions about her Messiah's baffling death, Mary received questions from the angels, and more from Jesus. As the queries mounted, what did she hear that morning? Maybe hearing "Whom are you seeking?" echoed in her mind as well as in her overwhelmed, aching heart. Maybe the questions centered Mary on Jesus even more intensely, whose death had all but emptied her. Were the questions necessary to prepare her for the shock of seeing Him again?

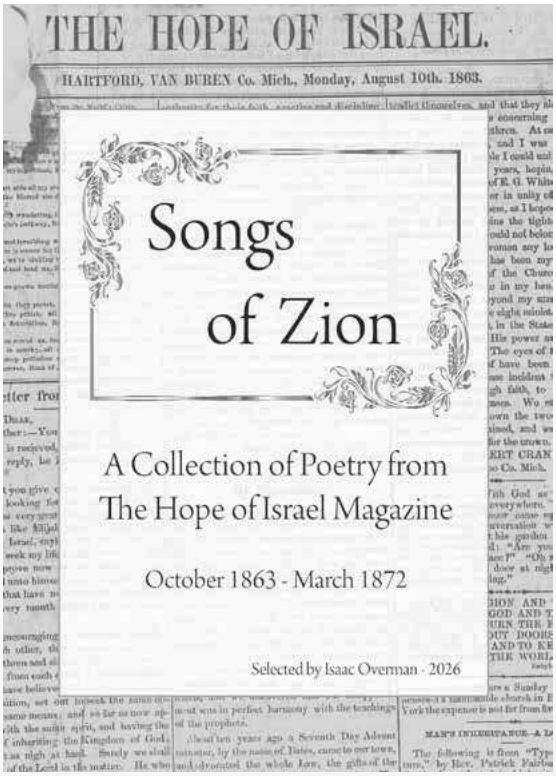
Mary stayed by Jesus' side, even after He was gone, and received a reward beyond all price.

> "Sometimes struggling with a question is revelatory. The Lord often uses questions as tools."

Let's follow her example and stay as near Jesus as we can. For in Christ, all of us have received much more than we could have hoped for, just as Mary did that day. BA

**Matthias Hoefler** writes from Kent, OH.






# "Songs of Zion" - New From BAP!

This past summer, my son, Isaac, spent four weeks digitally archiving the first 70 years of the *Bible Advocate*. Part of Isaac's plan was to curate a collection of old poetry from among the 30,000 pages he scanned.

Christ-centered, Bible-based poetry has always played a significant role in our pages, especially in the early years. We are pleased to introduce our first volume, *Songs of Zion*, a selection of 52 poems from 180 poems published in the *Hope of Israel* from 1863 to 1872.

In honor of the GC Convention coming up in Greensboro, North Carolina, next summer, here is a selection (not included in the book) written for a similar conference way back in 1864. It still resonates today.

You can order a copy of *Songs of Zion* at *store.cog7.org* beginning in January 2027. It's a unique gift for lovers of Bible-based poetry and CoG7 history.

*— Jason Overman*

## No. 9. CONFERENCE HYMN

By H. S. Dille

1. We come with prayers upon our lips;
   Our Bibles in our hands;
   The Law of God within our hearts,
   His law of 'Ten Commands.'

2. The very 'faith' that Paul once kept,
   To win bright glory's crown,
   We cherish all its precepts yet,
   The 'faith of Jesus' own.

3. We pray for all our Elders dear,
   Upon this Conference day,
   That God may be in wisdom near
   And teach them what to say.

4. We pray that love may here abide;
   That all, with one accord,
   May preach of Jesus crucified,
   And our soon coming Lord!

5. We pray for those who cannot come,
   God bless them where they are,
   Thy Spirit be with those at home,
   Is now thy children's prayer.

6. Bless us in all we say and do;
   Help us pray and sing;
   Keep us in all our journey too,
   Dear 'Prophet, Priest, and King."

7. Lord, lead the Royal army on,
   And strengthen us to fight,
   Till thou in clouds of heaven come,
   And faith is lost in sight!

8. Jehovah, bless our little bands,
   Though we are weak and few;
   Give palms of victory to our hands,
   When all things are made new!

*[The Hope of Israel - April 10, 1864]*




Need a fresh breeze of the Spirit's presence in your life? Got a little glowing ember that needs to be fanned into flame? Join us for Convention '27, where worshipping "in His presence" is the cry of our heart!

All members and friends of the General Conference Church of God (Seventh Day) USA and Canada are invited to attend this special Biennial Convention in Greensboro, North Carolina, June 28 – July 3, 2027. (Delegates from our sister conferences are welcome as well.)

Tune up the car. Buy that plane ticket. Grease the skateboard wheels. However you roll, put the plans in the works to join your church family as we dive into His presence!

More information is continually being added to the website at *cog7.org/convention*. Registration will begin in January, so keep checking back!

Convention '27 is sneaking up on us, and it's getting louder!




## Invitation: Video Testimonies

Has being "in His presence" changed you? Is there a moment or circumstance in your life when God showed up undeniably? Did the Spirit of peace visit you when you most needed it? Do you have a "God moment" when your worship met His sufficiency?

If so, would you share your story? The Convention Committee would love to consider your submission for sharing on our website and other social media leading up to Convention '27. For an example, look for the "In His Presence" video on the GC YouTube channel. If your video is selected, you will be contacted for more information. Please send it (no longer than three minutes) to Kristi Lang at *kristenlang09@gmail.com*. Be sure to include the name of the person(s) in the video and the city or church you attend.

The submission window is now open!



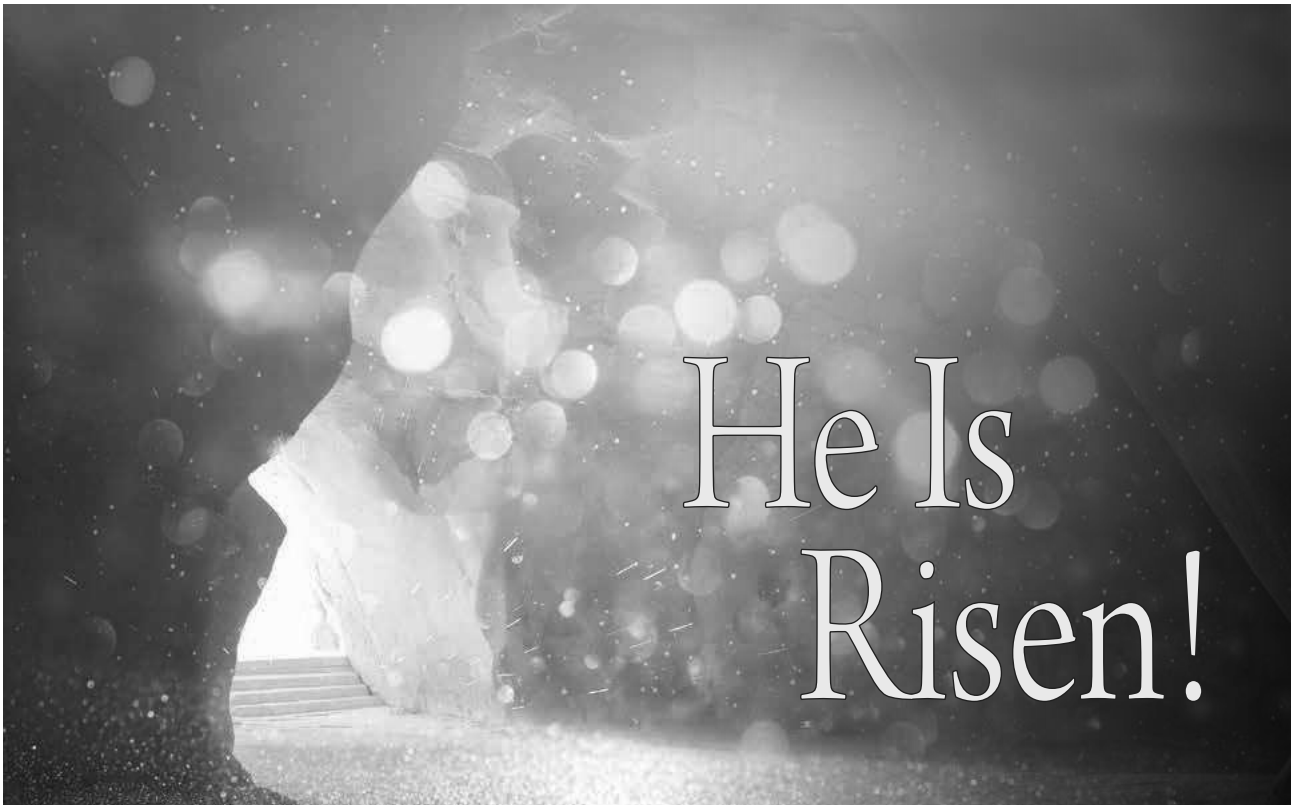
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## Calling All Volunteers!

You've heard it said "It takes a village." Well, not in our context, but it does take a body! What a privilege we have at convention to practice unity in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4). Our events thrive when people come to fill a role and volunteer to meet a need.

How might you serve? There are many ways to assist in the nursery, children's/youth/young adult programs, ushers and greeters, security, setup and takedown, and more. All available opportunities will be listed at *cog7.org/convention*. You can indicate your desired area when you complete your registration form.

Until registration opens in January, pray about where God is calling you to assist.




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A closer look at the event that changed everything.

**by Ruhama Tewodros Assefa**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has never been merely a cherished Christian belief but has always been one of history's most debated claims. For some, it is the foundation of faith. For others, it is thought an impossibility — an event too extraordinary to be accepted in a world that prizes what can be observed, measured, and analyzed. If miracles cannot be reproduced in a laboratory or explained by natural laws, many conclude they simply could not have happened.

In some ways, I understand why the Resurrection raises questions. As a medical student, I have spent hours studying the remarkable complexity of the human body. I have learned how intricately life is designed and how fragile it can be.

Through anatomy and pathology, I have also come face-to-face with an undeniable reality: death. Once life has departed, every human effort reaches its limit. Medicine can diagnose disease, relieve suffering, and sometimes prolong life, but it cannot reverse death by its own power. Death remains humanity's greatest enemy — one that no physician, scientist, or ruler has ever conquered.

Even during a high school debate — before medical school — I wrestled with whether the Resurrection could truly be defended as more than a religious idea. That is precisely why the resurrection of Jesus is so astonishing. Christianity does not claim that He narrowly escaped death or simply recovered from severe injuries. It proclaims that after truly dying and being buried, Jesus rose again by the power of God.

If the Resurrection is false, Christianity loses its foundation. As the apostle Paul declared, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (1 Corinthians 15:17). But if it is true, then it changes not only history but every human life.

## From defeat to victory

To understand why the Resurrection changed everything, we must first understand what the cross meant before the empty tomb.

Today, the cross hangs in churches, adorns necklaces, and serves as one of the most recognized symbols of hope in the world. Yet in the first century, it

represented shame, humiliation, and suffering. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst criminals and rebels. It was designed to not merely kill but to disgrace. No one looked at a cross and imagined victory.

For Jesus' disciples, the Crucifixion must have felt like the collapse of every hope. They had followed Him, believing He was the promised Messiah. They had witnessed miracles, heard His teachings, and anticipated God's kingdom. Then they watched Him arrested, mocked, beaten, and crucified. The One they trusted now lay in a borrowed tomb. From every human perspective, His mission appeared to have failed.

But the Resurrection revealed a completely different story. God overturned what humanity thought was defeat. Resurrection transformed the cross from a symbol of shame into a symbol of salvation. It declared that sin had been atoned for, death had been conquered, and Jesus truly is the Son of God. The Father vindicated the Son by raising Him from the dead, confirming that His sacrifice had accomplished exactly what it was intended to do.

Without the Resurrection, the cross remains a tragedy. With the Resurrection, it becomes the greatest victory in history.

## Transformed people

If the empty tomb announced that Jesus was alive, His appearances revealed what His resurrection could accomplish. The risen Christ did not return merely to prove that He had conquered death. He sought out fearful, grieving, and doubting people, meeting them where they were and transforming them from the inside out.

Peter's story beautifully illustrates this. Only days earlier, he had denied knowing Jesus three times. Fear had silenced his faith, and guilt surely weighed heavily on his heart. Yet the risen Jesus did not reject Peter. Instead, beside the Sea of Galilee, He gently restored him and recommissioned him to care for His flock (John 21:15-19). Soon afterward, Peter stood before thousands on the day of Pentecost and boldly proclaimed that Jesus was the risen Lord (Acts 2). The difference was not Peter's personality; it was his encounter with the living Christ.

Thomas struggled in a different way. He could not believe the testimony of the other disciples and insisted on seeing Jesus for himself. Rather than condemn Thomas for his questions, Jesus graciously appeared to him and invited him to examine the wounds in His hands and side. Faced with the risen Savior, Thomas responded with one of the most profound confessions in Scripture: "My Lord and my God!" (20:28).

Peter and Thomas weren't the only ones transformed. After the Crucifixion, the disciples hid behind locked doors, fearful that they, too, would be arrested. Yet after meeting the risen Jesus, those same men courageously proclaimed the gospel across the Roman Empire, despite imprisonment, persecution, and even martyrdom. They believed because they had encountered the risen Christ.

The Resurrection did not simply change an empty tomb; it changed human hearts. The same Savior who restored Peter, welcomed Thomas, and strengthened the frightened disciples continues to transform lives today.

> "If the Resurrection is true, then it changes not only history but every human life."

## New mission

The story of Jesus raised to life does not end with His appearances. Before returning to the Father, He entrusted His followers with a mission that would shape history: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, . . ." (Matthew 28:18, 19).

The Resurrection was never intended to remain private news among a small group of disciples.

It was a message meant for the whole world. Those who had witnessed the risen Christ became witnesses to others, carrying the good news beyond Jerusalem and eventually to the ends of the earth.

After giving this commission, Jesus ascended into heaven. At first glance, His departure may have seemed like another farewell. In reality, it marked His exaltation. The crucified and risen Savior now reigns at the Father's right hand with all authority. His ascension did not end His work; it expanded it. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ continues to lead, strengthen, and empower His church. The mission continues because the King still lives.

## Because He lives

More than two thousand years later, Jesus' resurrection remains profoundly relevant. Death still brings grief. Fear still paralyzes hearts. Doubt still finds its way into our minds. The world still wrestles with suffering, injustice, and uncertainty. Yet the empty tomb reminds us that these realities do not have the final word.

Because Christ conquered death, believers have hope that extends beyond the grave. Our confidence is not rooted in positive thinking or human optimism but in the historical reality that Jesus lives. His victory assures us that God's promises can be trusted even when circumstances seem impossible.

The Resurrection also gives us courage. Peter's boldness, Thomas' renewed faith, and the disciples' fearless witness remind us that God delights in using ordinary, imperfect people. Our weaknesses do not disqualify us from serving Him. The risen Christ still restores the broken, strengthens the fearful, and calls His followers to share the hope they have found.

The Resurrection gives our lives purpose. We are not simply waiting for a new heaven and new earth; we are invited to participate in God's work today. Every act of love, every word of truth, and every faithful step of obedience points others to the living Savior. We serve not a memory but a reigning King who is present with His people and who has promised to return.

## More than a miracle

As I study the human body, I am continually reminded that death remains humanity's greatest limitation. No scientific discovery, medical breakthrough, or human achievement has ever permanently defeated it. Yet the gospel proclaims that Jesus Christ did what no one else could do: He entered death, broke its power, and rose victorious.

That is why the Resurrection remains the heart of the Christian faith. It is more than a miracle to admire or a doctrine to defend. It is the assurance that sin has been forgiven, death has been conquered, hope is alive, and Christ reigns forever.

Because He is risen, everything changed. And because He lives, everything still can. BA

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**Ruhama Tewodros Assefa** writes from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*.



# Do All Religions Lead to God?

*continued from page 7*

The same principle applies here. If we remove Jesus as the only way to the Father, the gospel loses its heart. Biblical monotheism becomes an empty idea, the cross loses its meaning, and Christianity ends up reduced to just another religious message among many.

At that point, Christianity stops being a proclamation of truth and becomes spiritual confusion.

Saying Christ is the only way is not an act of arrogance or a lack of love for others. Sometimes love requires speaking with clarity, and truth is not always comfortable.

That is why it is worth asking ourselves an honest question: If we truly believe that Jesus is the Lord and Messiah sent by God, can we, at the same time, affirm that any religion leads equally to God? Because if all religions lead to God, then Jesus is not the only way (John 14:6).

And if Jesus is not the only way, then the gospel preached by the apostles is no longer the gospel we are believing (Galatians 1:9). BA

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**Oscar Mata** and his wife, Nancy, live in Sioux Falls, SD, where Oscar is a pastor and works as a hospital chaplain.



# Questions & Answers



**The Christian faith hangs on the historical reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection. What evidence is there that it is true?**

Jesus' bodily resurrection is the absolute foundation of the Christian faith and an undeniable truth because of the available evidence. Paul declares that if Christ has not been raised, faith is useless, preaching is empty, believers are still in their sins, and the dead in Christ have perished (1 Corinthians 15:14-17). The apostle John saw, touched, and fellowshipped with the risen Lord (1 John 1:1-4). When a preacher had been allowed to deny the bodily resurrection to believers, the Beloved Disciple wrote his second letter to correct that teaching and warn against contributing to his work because it made them partakers "in his evil deeds" (2 John 1:1-13).

The Gospels state that Jesus literally rose from the grave after being dead three days and three nights. As a singular, miraculous, historic event, the Resurrection cannot be directly observed, measured, or tested by experiment. Still, like any other historic event, it can be tested against the evidence for its veracity.

Naysayers provide alternative theories, but those are flawed. Mass hallucination, theft of the body, or the "swoon" hypothesis fail to account for the combined data. Core minimal facts (the historic validation of the Crucifixion, empty tomb, disciples' transformation after seeing the risen Christ, the apostolic record, etc.) are widely accepted by modern historians. All of them deny the claims of alternative theories.

Ultimately, believing in Jesus' bodily resurrection as a fact of history is a matter of divine faith, bolstered by reliable evidence. But faith seeks understanding. The honest and accurate truth of the following evidence proves the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*Empty tomb.* The location of the tomb was well-known, being documented by biblical and extra-biblical records. No one — neither Jews nor Romans — ever produced a body to refute the disciples' claim of Jesus' bodily resurrection.

*Eyewitness accounts and conversion of skeptics.* Any fabricated accounts would have used men, not women, as the first witnesses of Jesus' bodily resurrection. Ultimately hundreds of men and women saw Jesus alive after He rose from the grave. Skeptics and nonbelievers before the Resurrection became Jesus' disciples. The Lord's half-brother, James, became a church leader. Saul of Tarsus persecuted the early church and was abruptly converted after seeing the risen Jesus.

*Disciples' transformed behavior.* The disciples changed from weak, fearful men to martyrs for Jesus after His resurrection, even in the very city where He had been crucified only weeks before. Who would put their life on the line for a lie?

*Early church testimony.* Extra-biblical documents written within a few decades of Jesus' death show that Jesus' followers firmly held to the Resurrection. Writing around AD 96, Clement of Rome mentioned the apostles' preaching and their deep conviction based on Jesus' resurrection. Ignatius of Antioch wrote around AD 110, affirming that Jesus was truly raised from the dead and that the disciples touched Him and believed. Polycarp wrote around AD 110–140, speaking of Jesus who endured death and was raised by God.

Finally, and most important, the true disciple of Jesus Christ knows He is alive by faith and because of the indwelling power and transformation from the new nature experienced in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17; Hebrews 11:1-3; Psalm 14:1; 53:1).

*— Elder Chip Hinds*



# Seeing and Believing

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Revisiting the Resurrection in John's unique account.

**by R. Herbert**

The Gospel of John includes not only a great deal of distinctive material about the events surrounding the death of Jesus [see "The Disciple at the Cross," September-October '26 BA] but also many insights into the resurrection of Jesus not found elsewhere in the New Testament.

In his account, John gives seven "signs" of Jesus' messiahship and divinity, revealed in seven great miracles. These culminate in His raising Lazarus (the sixth sign) and His own resurrection from the dead.

John then proceeds to tell of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances in detail. Three of these are uniquely recorded in his Gospel: Christ's appearances to Mary Magdalene, to Thomas and the other disciples, and to Peter and the disciples by the Sea of Galilee. We can learn from what John tells us about each of these three events.

## Three appearances

**Mary Magdalene (20:11-18).** Although the other Gospels show that a number of women went to Jesus' tomb early on the first day of the week, John mentions only Mary Magdalene — doubtless as the leader of the group (the other Gospels all list her first). John alone mentions that Mary saw two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the feet (v. 12). This clearly parallels the two angels who flanked the mercy seat in the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 25:17-22), a detail that fits John's stress on Jesus' divinity.

John also records Mary's conversation with the resurrected Jesus in which He tells her "Go . . . to my brothers . . ." (John 20:17). In this tiny detail, John shows how Jesus — who had at first referred to His followers as servants, then disciples, then friends — now calls them siblings after His resurrection!

**Thomas (20:24-29).** Only John gives us the story of the disciple Thomas, or Didymus. He was not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them, and he said he would not believe

unless he himself saw Jesus and touched the scars of His wounds.

We all know this story of "doubting Thomas," as he is often called. But the Gospels show that Thomas was not alone in his doubts (Luke 24:25). John himself did not believe till he saw an indication of the Resurrection (John 20:8). And when Jesus did appear to Thomas, he immediately affirmed his belief by exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28).

Thomas is actually the only person recorded in the Gospels making this confession — actually calling Jesus God — making this event an important one for the central theme of John's Gospel (1:1). Jesus did not chastise Thomas for his initial lack of belief, and His words to him ("blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed," 20:29) were recorded for our sake, not for Thomas'.

**Peter (21:1-23).** Rather than the Ascension, the story of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to Peter and the other disciples in Galilee forms the vital capstone to John's Gospel. The story is familiar to all of us. Before talking with the disciples, and Peter in particular, Jesus appeared on the beach as they were struggling to fish, and helped them to obtain a huge catch. John gives us a detailed transcript of the conversation between Jesus and Peter because this was Peter's reinstatement after his triple denial of Jesus earlier. Jesus' repeated question to Peter ("do you love me?" vv. 15-17) gave the disciple the opportunity to turn from each of his earlier failures and to resume his relationship with Jesus.

John shows us a key point that can encourage us in this story — that the resurrected Christ focuses not on our faults but on working with us individually to provide us forgiveness, renewal, guidance, and a job to do. Our calling could be like Peter's: to directly feed Christ's sheep in a ministerial-related role. Or it could simply be to live godly lives and support God's work. Regardless, Jesus' reinstatement of Peter is a powerful reminder of the loving reinstatement He offers us when we fall. This is a natural outcome of the limitless nature of Christ's sacrificial death, and it should inspire us that John makes the reinstatement story the climax of his whole Gospel.



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## Gospel of belief

Ultimately, however, John's Gospel is all about belief in Jesus.

Although he usually makes only indirect references to his own role in his account, John tells us that he was the first disciple to believe in the Resurrection (20:8). He uses the word *believe* (Greek: *pisteuō*) almost one hundred times — far more than any other Gospel writer.

The apostle is also unique in specifically telling us that he recorded Jesus' miraculous signs and His post-resurrection appearances so that the reader might believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah and obtain eternal life (vv. 30, 31). Perhaps this might be the goal of all the Gospels, but none of the other accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus makes the point more clearly or repeatedly.

John even tells us why he stresses this unique viewpoint: "The man who saw it [John himself] has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe" (19:35).

John was the first apostle to believe in the Resurrection, and his whole Gospel was designed to help us come to, and abide in, that belief as well. BA

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**R. Herbert** (a pen name) holds a doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.




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# Ministry in

**by Brian Franks**

In recent years, I've given much thought to how artificial intelligence (AI) will impact ministry, training, and churches. If you've not considered such possibilities before, the impact is coming whether you know it or not. AI has already been integrated into nearly everything tech related. Each computer or phone update seems to add AI features. AI is developing at breakneck speed both because of the arms race among the pioneering companies and because AI is even developing itself!

Given the situation, how should Christians proceed? Do we try to avoid AI at all costs, pretending it isn't happening? Do we view it as the Antichrist, lock it from our lives, and warn people about it? Do we abstain from AI on moral grounds? Do we dare use AI to do ministry? All fair questions, given AI's revolutionary nature.

These questions are profoundly relevant to us because Christians are called to live as ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20) as long as the world exists. We should be lights in the darkness, the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13-16), and people with wisdom (see Proverbs) who know what the times require (like the sons of Issachar, 1 Chronicles 12:32). In short, we should be equipped to address times of challenge and change, while living lives focused on honoring God.

Though we don't have Bible verses that address AI specifically, we do have biblical principles, the Spirit and wisdom of God, and many historical precedents to give us guidance.

## Breakthroughs

Various technological breakthroughs have come along and changed the world and the church: The printing press, mass transportation, radio, microphones, television, the Internet, email, the smartphone, YouTube, Zoom. Each can be used for secular goals, both good and bad, and each has been integrated, to different degrees, into how we do ministry. Some increased the ease of travel. Some changed how church looked or sounded, and others made communication and connection instantaneous. It's hard to imagine a world without these breakthroughs and how they made ministry better and more efficient.

The way we use any of these technological advances should be based on our identity as Christians. Most often that results in two tests: 1) Can this technology help people proclaim/live out the gospel? 2) Can it be used ethically? Considering these tests, I would like to suggest a few possibilities and boundaries for use of AI in ministry.

## Boundaries

We can ethically use AI to do tasks that save a pastor or small church time so we can focus on more important things only humans can do. This includes using AI to . . .

- summarize, analyze, and create reports;
- manage aspects of our calendar and reminders;
- lay out a plan to break up a large project;
- improve outreach and community communications in text and visual style;
- add music or video to presentations;
- produce nearly instantaneous captioning or translation

# an AI World

in our services, broadcasts, and meetings to help us communicate more efficiently with others;

• find bugs in the code of a church website or IT platforms, etc.

These are all ethical as long as we cite the use of AI in producing the content above. If AI can save a pastor or church administrator a couple of hours a week to give them more time for direct ministry or time with their families, it is a blessing. The church accomplishes more in less time.

However, there are unethical ways to use AI, including . . .

• writing a sermon or "enhancing it" (e.g., asking AI to help you make people cry or want to give more money);

• providing counseling to anyone;

• writing articles, research papers, or interview responses for Artios.

These are unethical for what should be obvious reasons. Aside from being in the spirit of plagiarism, they remove the prayer and development of the preacher as he seeks God, reads the Word, and considers his audience. They remove the human touch, intuition, and empathy from counseling. They present a lie, claiming writing or research as your own work and thus deceiving others.

Instead of getting to know a student or candidate and evaluating them for ministry, the Artios staff is reviewing AI's work. We know AI can summarize a vast amount of human content and make a polished, perfect paper or provide answers in ten seconds. But the hours of study and work and struggle to write the content is a form of development that ultimately makes the student a better minister and shows the church more about a candidate.

## Integrity and caution

These are matters of ethical restraint for Christians. While the world might be okay with AI writing presentations or pulling heart strings, Christianity is about authentic connection with God and conveying it honestly. This will always be an experience for humans and God to share.

We can use AI as a tool to make ministry more efficient, but not in unethical or misleading ways, nor in ways that usurp our relationship with God. If AI can help us proclaim the gospel ethically, let us use the tools at our disposal.

So as we proceed with integrity and caution, we should continuously evaluate these possibilities as AI continues to develop. There might come a time when the church should pull away from AI. Or AI might merely settle in as just another tool churches use to proclaim and live out the gospel, while we keep our focus on our relationship with God. BA

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**Brian Franks** lives in Colorado Springs, CO, with his wife and four children. He is also the dean of Academic Affairs at Artios Christian College. *Editor's note: The BAP's AI policy can be found at* baonline.org/write-for-us-2/.

**Be sure to watch "Artificial Intelligence: Navigating the Good and Bad of AI's Rapidly Expanding Landscape," a webinar presented by Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership. Visit *artioscollege.org* (Resources).**



# Highly Exalted

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Thinking through the implications of the Ascension.

**by Dr. David R. Downey**

> Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight (Acts 1:9).

The heady days of the Crucifixion and Resurrection must have been earth-moving for those who witnessed them or had even heard the excited testimony of eyewitnesses. Even those who rejected this truth that was acted out in front of them must have had questions that caused them unease. They saw the miraculous events brought by the teacher Jesus and witnessed His righteousness. They would have sensed the unfairness of the show trial, and, though they lived in a brutal time, they would have winced at the brutality of Jesus' punishment.

Finally, a person would have to be in a cryonic state not to be aware of the resurrection of the Lord. Still, some simply would not see the truth of the events "whose minds the god of this age has blinded" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

## Time in between

Surely the events after the Resurrection drew some attention as well. Jesus walked the earth as an even more supernatural "visitor" for forty days before He went to be with the Father (Acts 1:1-3). This was not a secret, as Jesus appeared to many and, according to Paul, appeared at one time to "more than five hundred brethren" (1 Corinthians 15:6).

The Bible recounts significant events during this time.

After the Resurrection, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9) and later to the men on the road to Emmaus. These two men, having no other introduction, were randomly chosen to receive the revelation of the resurrected Jesus and to take the message to the disciples. Their hearts burned within them, as ours would (Luke 24:32). Jesus appeared among the disciples

several times, often in a surprising way — right in their midst (vv. 36, 37; John 20:26). Jesus also appeared to the disciples on the seashore and restored Peter to full service (John 21). In like manner, He reinforced the faith of Thomas (20:25-29).

## Clearing confusion

The forty days of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances culminated in His ascension (Acts 1:4-11). With the Incarnation, God sent His Son into the world (John 1:14; Galatians 4:4). The Ascension bookends that first event, with the Son returning to the Father in heaven as the last event.

Some people confuse the Ascension with the Transfiguration. I believe this is not a confusion of the concepts so much as the words. They have similar connotations, and both are concerned with Jesus "being lifted up."

But at least in one respect, the Transfiguration and the Ascension have the same theme. The Transfiguration places Jesus with luminaries of the Old Testament and reveals Him in His true glory. The Ascension places Jesus in His final place — a place of glory and authority. Having completed His work, the Lord is seated at the right hand of the Father.

## A closer look

It appears to me that the Ascension gets scant attention sometimes, being passed over as a simple conclusion. We should look more closely to draw out the meaning of this significant event.

**It points to completion.** If it is true that "All good things must come to an end," then Jesus' work on earth would fit there. What greater work is there than what Jesus had planned to do through redemption? An effort to deliver redemption would not be good if it were not completed! Thankfully, Jesus finished what He came to do.

He's not at all like a young would-be pastor I read about who, with no experience in preaching, started a sermon and didn't know how to stop. Jesus had a perfect plan in mind and was committed to finishing it, as the Scripture said, in the fullness of time (Ephesians 1:7-12). The night before His death, Jesus prayed to the Father, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4; cf. 4:34; 5:36).

There was no guessing, and God does not have an eraser. His plan of redemption was finished. Just one thing remained: the Ascension, Jesus' very last act to return to the One who sent Him.

**It points to fulfillment.** The Bible is not a history, but it does flower in the bed of history. God's plan was, in fact, prehistoric. The Lamb of God was slain before the foundation of the world, even before creation, and each of us He foreknew were written in the Book of Life at that time (Ephesians 1:4; Matthew 25:34; Revelation 13:8). That is a powerful concept, but one part of it is significant for our text (Acts 1:9): The Ascension was the exclamation point at the end of this biblical revelation.

Old Testament prophecy is rife with promises of the Messiah, and so, Jesus' coming and His work. The first messianic prophecy in the Bible is in Genesis 3, man's history having barely begun. God promised the Messiah from Eve's seed, who would crush Satan's head, despite receiving a wound in doing so (death on the cross, Genesis 3:14, 15). Many prophecies of the Messiah follow. I wish to lift a few out of this historical narrative.

God promised Abraham a people, a nation, and a land through his offspring ("seed"), providing the setting for the Messiah (Genesis 17:8, 15,

> "Jesus ascended with a glorified body, revealing the goodness and expected renewal of all creation to come."

16; 18:18; 22:17, 18; 26:4, 5; Exodus 32:13). Moses was sent as a leader of the Israelites to foreshadow God's ultimate freeing of His people from bondage while delivering the law, through which their inadequacy would show them a need for a Savior (Romans 8:4; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 3:23, 24; 1 Peter 1:18, 19).

King David helped secure the way by honoring the Lord. God gave him victory and established the throne of David, which the Messiah would occupy (1 Kings 2:1-4; Psalm 16:10; Acts 13:34-37; Daniel 7:13, 14; Luke 1:32).

And what can we say of the prophets, such as Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, et al.? Their incredibly accurate prophecies pointed to the coming of the Messiah, whose crowning earthly message was ascending to heaven.

> "The prophets' incredibly accurate prophecies pointed to the coming of the Messiah, whose crowning earthly message was ascending to heaven."

**It points to victory.** While on earth, Jesus' deity was hidden in a great measure, but the veil was lifted at the Transfiguration. His glory was revealed while speaking to Moses and Elijah on that mount, and Peter was so excited, he wanted to build huts and stay awhile. Then, at the Ascension, Jesus was elevated to the right hand of the Father in heaven (Mark 16:19). Unlike after the Transfiguration, Jesus did not go back down the hill (Matthew 17:7-9). Earthly conquest was over.

The Ascension tells us this new beginning is also a settled victory and the hope of creation. Jesus ascended with a glorified body, revealing the goodness and expected renewal of all creation to come (Revelation 21-22). It is a culmination of Jesus' first coming that points us to His second, as apostle Paul wrote in Philippians. As a result of Jesus' faithfulness through the crucifixion,

> God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

Certainly, more knee-bowing and tongue-confessing is yet to be. *Every* means all. But the Ascension showed the work of redemption was done. It is all over but the shouting!

## Our work

As the disciples and other observers stood on Mount Olivet on that great day, they saw Jesus ascend, and the cloud took Him out of their sight. I can imagine them standing with their mouths open. Acts 1:10, 11 tells us that two men dressed in white (undoubtedly angels) said, "Why do you stand gazing up into heaven?"

It is normal in such a time to bask in the afterglow, but Jesus had spoken to His followers just before this event: "Tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49) and "You shall be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8). The disciples had to prepare to receive power to do His work!

Today we can enjoy the presence of God, but we have more to do. This settled victory tells us our work is not finished. It is a perpetual new beginning, but we go forward from a disposition of victory. Time is short, as the Lord "will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). BA

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**Dr. David Downey** writes from Burleson, TX.



# David Discovers Real Faith



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**by Marcia Sanders**

"Nana, I think Thomas got a raw deal!" David exclaimed.

David's grandmother smiled. "How's that?"

"Well, he got labeled 'Doubting Thomas,' but the others doubted too. I was just reading about the Resurrection in the Gospels, and none of the disciples believed Jesus had risen when the women told them."

"What do you make of that?" Nana asked.

"Well," David pondered, "I guess their faith wasn't strong enough. But they had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. And Jesus told them that He'd be in the ground three days. So shouldn't it be easy to believe, since they'd been with Jesus when He did these things and taught that stuff?"

"Have you ever listened carefully to your teacher's lesson, but then find you can't remember all that she said during that class?" Nana asked.

David grimaced. "Well, sure. All too often."

"Now think about how much the disciples were learning from Jesus, how many new ideas He shared. Is it reasonable to think they might have forgotten some of the things He taught?"

"I guess so," David conceded. "But what about all the miracles they saw — even Lazarus being raised from the dead? Shouldn't that have told them it was possible?"

"And Who was doing all of these miracles?" Nana queried.

"Uh, Jesus," David muttered. "I see what you're getting at. They depended on Jesus to do the miracles, and they had seen Him die that horrible death, so they probably kinda lost hope."

Nana smiled. "I think that's a safe assumption. Everything was so new to the disciples. They had faithfully followed Jesus, believed all He taught them. But when left on their own — or so they thought — they were frightened and lost their focus."

"Maybe their own faith hadn't really developed," David said. "They were depending more on what they could actually see."

"It's like a baby living off the mother's body before birth," Nana explained. "Then, after birth, the baby has to live independent of her. Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the evidence of things not seen. The disciples were deep in the 'not seen' part. How would that change things?"

"Well, they couldn't rely on watching Jesus teach or perform a miracle. They had to believe that what He had said would happen, even if they didn't understand how it could be. That would be really tough, I guess."

"But the disciples learned from their mistake," Nana reminded David. "Think about all that happened in the rest of the New Testament. How much stronger they were in believing, carrying the gospel to other places — even when it meant being persecuted for what they taught."

"I guess that's the important part, huh?" David grinned. "Our faith grows when we admit our mistakes and learn from them." BA

**Marcia Sanders** writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy.





# My Favorite Verse Micah 6:8

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**He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8, NASB).**

**by Marcia Sanders**

For many years, I taught the high school class at church. They would often laugh when I'd exclaim, "This is my favorite verse!"

"How many favorite verses do you have, Sister Marcia?" they'd ask.

"Quite a few," I'd usually respond with a smile.

But I do believe that my absolute favorite is Micah 6:8. I love the simplicity of it. Just three basic things.

First, we are to do justice, to do what is fair to those around us, as the Golden Rule says: Do to others as you would have them do to you. If we treat others the way we want to be treated, wouldn't we be doing justice? I taught elementary school for several years, and I found that if I treated my students the way I wanted teachers to treat my own children, I would have no issues with parents. We all want to be treated justly.

Second, we are to love kindness, not just do kind things. We can act in a kind way to someone without truly feeling that kindness in our heart. We must feel compassion and mercy toward others, not just perform a duty.

Third, Micah says to walk humbly with God. Don't think more highly of yourself than you should, or don't take yourself too seriously. Take God seriously. I like the saying "Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less." It's honestly assessing your own strengths and weaknesses while realizing the true source of those strengths: God. This reminds me of 2 Corinthians 12:9: "'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (ESV).

It's easier to walk humbly with God when we remember that He is the source of our strength and that our weaknesses simply provide a better platform from which His power may shine.

Through these three steps, we draw closer to God, live more like His Son, and enjoy the comfort and security of His Spirit living in us. BA

**Marcia Sanders** writes from Fort Smith, AR.



**Editor's note:** "My Favorite Verse" is a new column in the BA. Submit a reflection on your favorite verse to *jason.overman@cog7.org*.

# On Patmos

Imprisoned on this lonely isle,
In a stone hut by the sea,
Midst storm and famine, cold and drought,
My Savior comforts me.

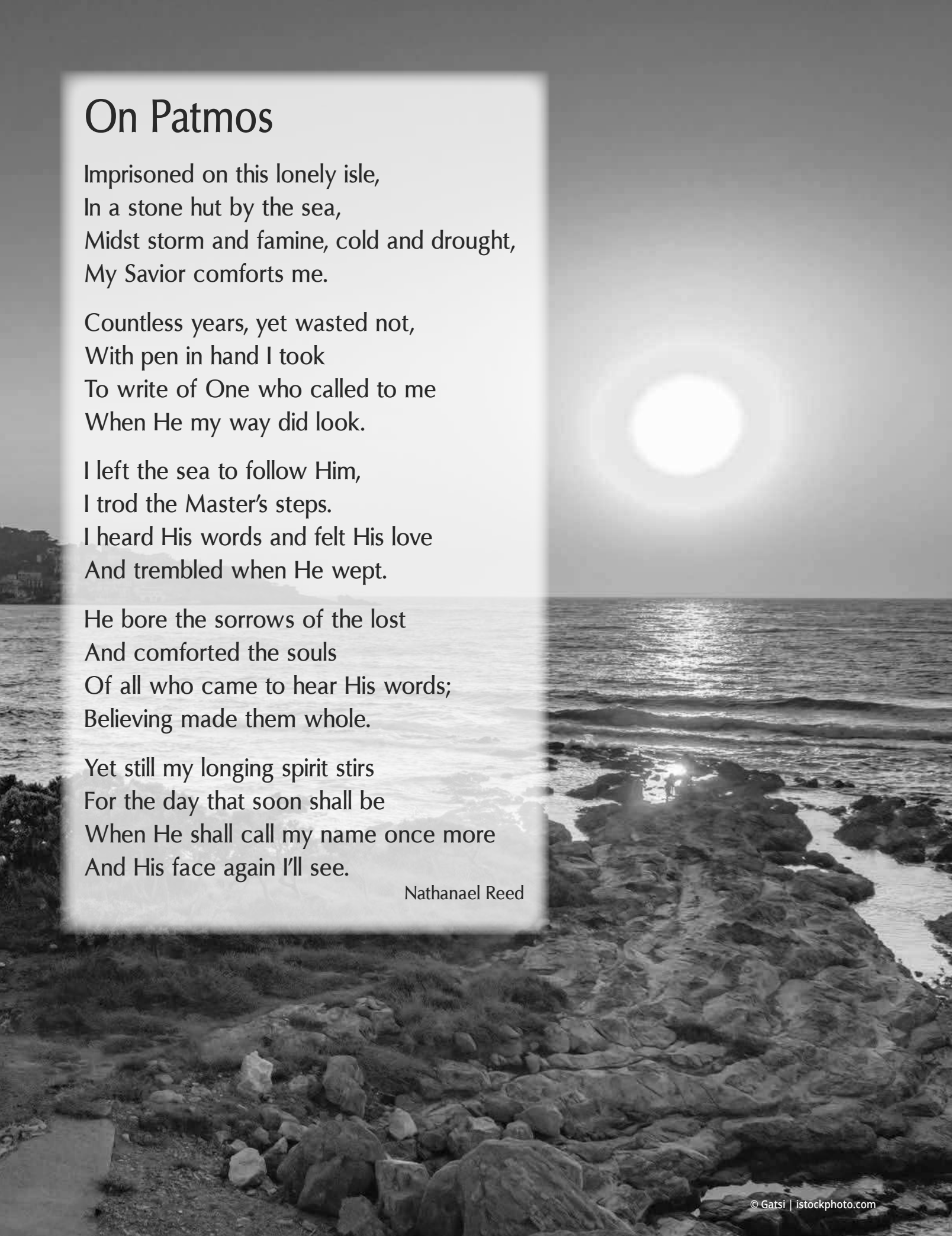
Countless years, yet wasted not,
With pen in hand I took
To write of One who called to me
When He my way did look.

I left the sea to follow Him,
I trod the Master's steps.
I heard His words and felt His love
And trembled when He wept.

He bore the sorrows of the lost
And comforted the souls
Of all who came to hear His words;
Believing made them whole.

Yet still my longing spirit stirs
For the day that soon shall be
When He shall call my name once more
And His face again I'll see.

Nathanael Reed



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# Reorganized GC Missions



**GLOBAL MISSIONS**



**CHURCH PLANTING**



**EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP**



**COMPASSION MINISTRIES**

As we continue strengthening the ministry of the General Conference and aligning our work with our Articles of Incorporation to "promote the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the foundation of our faith," it has become increasingly important that we communicate the full scope of GC Missions with clarity, consistency, and unity.

## Four primary categories

Historically, our mission structure has been organized into four areas: Missions Abroad, Church Planting, Home Missions, and Special Managed Project Fund.

While these categories have served us well and reflect decades of faithful ministry, some areas have been more fully developed than others. We are deeply grateful for the many churches, leaders, and members who have been blessed through the work that has grown and borne fruit over the years. At the same time, we acknowledge the challenges that remain and the need to renew our commitment to strengthen those areas that have not received the same level of development. The United States and Canada, and the world, will be equally blessed by the full expression of GC Missions.

## Updated Missions categories

To communicate this biblical vision more clearly and effectively, we are renewing our focus on the following four main categories. Each reflects the same purpose, expresses the mission entrusted to us, and incorporates updated language where appropriate.

**Global Missions (formerly Missions Abroad).** Provides an avenue for churches and individuals to minister in foreign countries by establishing and maintaining missions and sister churches outside the United States and Canada; provides literature, training, and salaries; distributes Bibles and constructs churches and medical clinics.

**Church Planting (name retained).** Assists districts and local churches in membership growth by planting new Church of God (Seventh Day) congregations in the United States and Canada, encouraging and developing existing fellowships, and assisting healthy congregations prepared to plant missions of their own.

**Evangelism and Discipleship (formerly Home Missions).** Assists local churches and Missions in bringing the lost into a relationship with Jesus Christ, bringing new believers into vibrant fellowship, increasing cooperation within the General Conference, and challenging the Church to spiritual renewal.

**Compassion Ministries (formerly Special Managed Project Fund).** Whenever possible, GC Disaster Relief Fund works through the national and international infrastructure of the Church of God (Seventh Day) to meet the varied needs of disaster victims. This fund provides basic

*continued on page 30*



## Alternative Learning Transfer Credit Program

Students may be able to earn credit for work that is documented and demonstrable through the Alternative Learning Transfer (ALT) Credit Program. They can submit the Alternative Learning Trade Credit Pre-Screening form located at *artioscollege.org/credit-by-demonstrated-competency*.

This program is intended to grant credit toward a bachelor's degree from Artios and must be paired with earning an Associate of Christian Leadership through Artios in the typical way. Students may not be able to earn all of the needed credits solely through this transfer program to be granted a bachelor's degree from Artios.

Learn more about the ALT Credit Program, including what will and will not be considered for transfer, on the website.

## Online Merchandise Store

The online merchandise store is open! If you want to buy apparel, a novelty item, or other CoG7-branded merchandise, the best way is to visit the website: *merch.cog7.org*.

Check out our catalog for items that showcase your identity as part of the CoG7 family. More styles and items will be added in the future. Your participation is vital so the store can become bigger and better.

## GC Missions News

Want to know what GC Missions is doing? Subscribe to their newsletter today.

Visit *cog7.org/news*.

Continue supporting the work of GC Missions by sending your donations in one of the following ways:

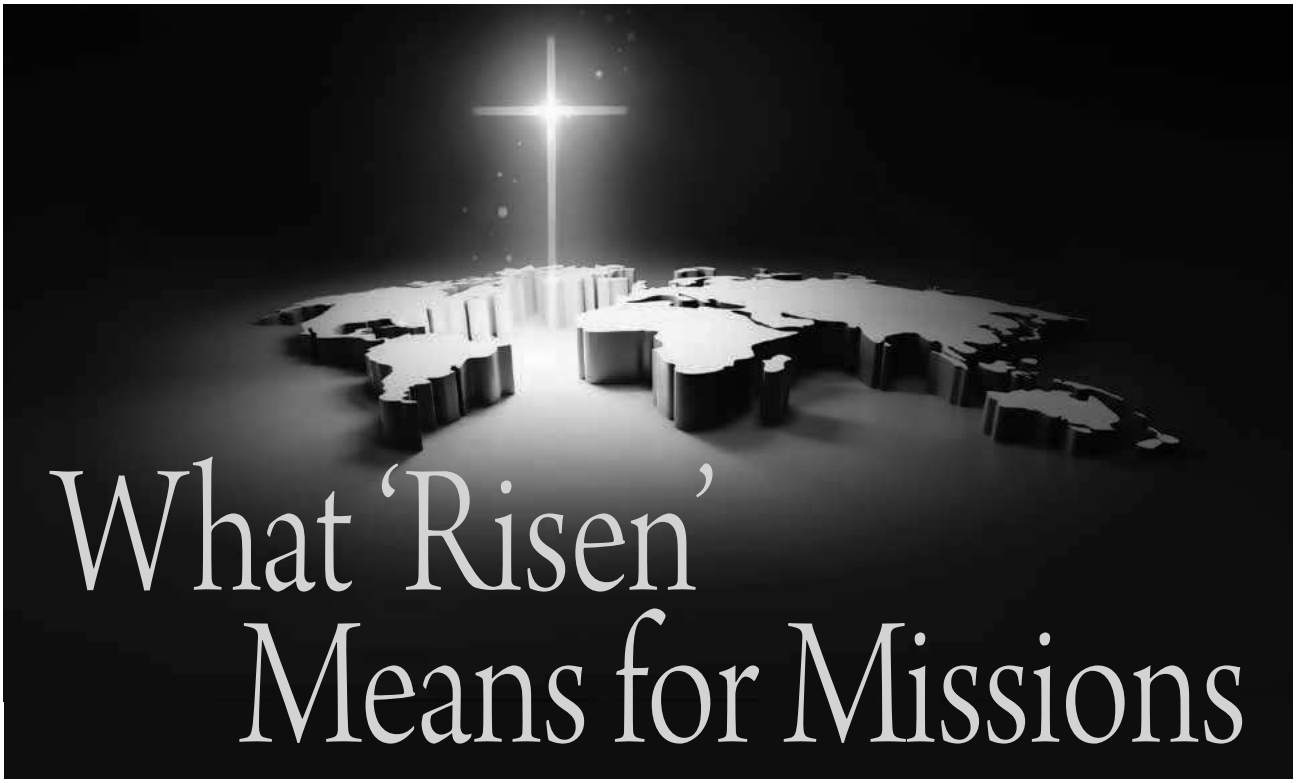
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- check, mailed to P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233 (make sure you write "GC Missions" on the memo line);
- online, at *secure.cog7.org/giving*.

## Federation Annual Sabbath

The first Sabbath of November has always been set aside to promote and give to world missions. November 7 is this year's Federation Annual Sabbath.

The theme is "From the Heart to the Harvest," motivating the Church to support those who are sent to share the love of Christ to a broken world.

We invite churches in the General Conference to save the date, celebrate the work that God is doing around the world, and give to the work of many laborers who take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Please send your donations through your district treasurers or directly to *international-federation.cog7.au/donate.html#support7z*.



# What 'Risen' Means for Missions

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How the Resurrection motivates us to go!

**by Moises Capetillo**

When my brothers and I were young, Sundays had a specific meaning. School ruled the weekdays. Church filled our Sabbaths. But Sunday was Dad's Day — the day for yard work, hauling, fixing, painting, and whatever projects he had lined up. We knew the routine. Once Dad realized we were awake, it was time to work and "earn our keep."

So my brothers and I developed a strategy: Try to sleep as long as humanly possible. When that ended, we invented a game called Say It Louder that only adrenaline-charged children could think was a good idea. One brother would whisper a phrase, the next had to say it louder, and so on until someone was practically screaming. On Sunday mornings, with Dad having awakened hours before and working right outside our window, the phrase we chose was "Good morning, Daddy! What do you want me to do?"

We'd shout it at the top of our lungs, then freeze, waiting to see which one of us had just volunteered the entire group for a full day of manual labor. Looking back, maybe we were born adrenaline junkies. But buried in that childhood chaos is a message for the church today.

Our Savior is alive! He is resurrected! And perhaps the posture of a resurrection people should be the same bold, eager question: "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Not whispered. Not mumbled. Not avoided. But declared — even shouted —with the urgency of people who know their King is alive. And at that resurrection is where our story begins.

## Resurrection. Commission. Mission.

"He is risen! He is risen indeed!" We say the words easily. We sing about the empty tomb and preach about the stone rolled away. We celebrate Christ's victory over sin, Satan, and death. And we should.

The Resurrection is not a side doctrine; it is the center of our faith. It is the hope of our belief (1 Peter 1:3). Paul says plainly that if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and our faith is futile (1 Corinthians 15:14).

Everything stands or falls on the resurrection of Christ. But knowing Jesus got up from the grave is only half the story. The

empty tomb was never meant to produce a church that simply meets, sings, listens, goes home, and repeats the cycle next week. Jesus didn't rise so we could merely celebrate His resurrection. He rose so we could live resurrected lives.

Imagine the disciples as they watched Jesus die. They saw Him beaten, mocked, crucified, buried. Their hopes were sealed behind a stone.

Then everything changed. The tomb was empty. Jesus was alive! If ever there was a moment to stop and celebrate, this was it. But Jesus didn't let them stay there. He used that grand victory as the foundation of our next movement: "All authority has been given to Me . . . Go therefore and make disciples . . . " (Matthew 28:18, 19).

The movement is unmistakable: Resurrection → Commission → Mission!

Jesus rose, then Jesus sent. The gospel doesn't end with "He is risen." It continues with "Go."

Before ascending, Jesus told His followers again, "You shall receive power . . . and you shall be witnesses to Me . . ." (Acts 1:8). Then He ascended, and the disciples stood staring into the sky until two angels asked, "Why are you standing here looking up?" In other words, you have your orders. You have the power. You have your mission. *Go*! These instructions stand in power and purpose to this date.

## Ministry tension

Unfortunately, some things can hinder the call to go, like living as though Jesus isn't alive when we know He is.

I've felt this tension in ministry. I can preach that Jesus is alive. I can teach it. I can sing it. I can encourage others to believe it. But when life gets heavy, when prayers feel unanswered, when ministry drains me, it's easy to start living as though everything depends on me.

Maybe you've been there too. We believe in a risen Savior, yet sometimes we pray as though no one hears. We face impossible situations as though Jesus is still behind the stone. We look at our families, churches, and communities, and quietly wonder if anything can really change through our message.

But the book of Revelation gives us a different picture. John sees the glorified Christ and collapses. Jesus places His hand on him and says, "Do not be afraid; . . . I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore" (1:17, 18).

That changes everything! Jesus is not a historical figure whose teachings survived Him. He is alive! He reigns! He listens! He intercedes! He calls! He saves! He sends! And He is coming again! Imagine the impact on missions if the church actually lived and believed this.

## Life change

We often talk about the Resurrection in past tense: Jesus rose. We also speak of the Resurrection in future tense: One day, we will rise as did the King and Ruler of this world. This is the meat of the gospel message we share with others.

But Scripture also ties the Resurrection to how we live today. Romans 6:4 says that just as Christ was raised, "we also should walk in newness of life."

> "Resurrection changes what we pursue. It changes what we love. And it changes our focus from ourselves to the world."

Colossians 3:1 says, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above."

Resurrection is not only something we believe in or anticipate. It is something we embody. It changes what we pursue. It changes what we tolerate. It changes what we love. It changes how quickly we forgive. And it changes our focus from ourselves to the world.

If Christ raised us to new life, we cannot keep living

comfortably among the things He died to free us from. If we are not changed, we can't expect others to believe the transformative power of the gospel.

## Get up!

Maybe that's the message some of us need today. He is risen, so get up!

Get up from complacency. Get up from secret sin. Get up from bitterness. Get up from spectator Christianity. Get up and serve. Get up and reconcile. Get up and preach. Get up and disciple. Get up and go!

Across the street. Across the city. Across the country. Across the world.

The Great Commission was not given to only missionaries. It was given to resurrection people. Perhaps all those goals remain lofty. God may be calling us to just go across the church and make peace with our brethren.

Some of God's greatest work happens when ordinary believers simply make themselves available. Not because they feel fully prepared. Not because they have endless resources. Not because they know exactly how things will unfold.

They simply say, "Lord, if You can use me, here I am." God repeatedly takes ordinary people, ordinary churches, ordinary obedience and does far more than we imagined.

Resurrection is God's specialty. He brings hope out of despair. Purpose out of failure. Mission out of fear. Life out of death. Perhaps the greatest testimony to the resurrection of Christ isn't just an empty tomb in Jerusalem. Perhaps it's a church full of people whose lives make no sense apart from a living Christ.

The first disciples didn't stay at the empty tomb. They went. They preached. They served. They suffered. They planted churches. They made disciples.

They gave their lives because they were convinced of one thing: Jesus is alive!

Once we truly believe that, staying inactive becomes difficult. So as we celebrate those victorious words again — He is risen! — may we hear the challenge inside the celebration. The Resurrection was not the finish line. It was the beginning of the mission.

The question now is whether His church will get up with Him.

Say it louder: "Lord, what do You want me to do?" BA

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**Moises Capetillo** serves as assistant director of GC Missions and senior pastor of the congregation in Albuquerque, NM, alongside his wife, Victoria, and six children.

STATEMENT

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# Reorganized GC Missions

*continued from page 26*

food supplies, temporary housing, community feeding projects, and construction projects like churches, individual homes, and bridge and road construction. The fund falls under the auspices of the director of Missions Ministries.

## Purpose of the update

This refinement does not change our mission; it clarifies it. It allows us to

- communicate our ministry more effectively;
- present GC Missions as a unified, multifaceted ministry;
- strengthen alignment between our bylaws and our public-facing identity;
- highlight the full breadth of our calling.

By organizing and clarifying our work within the above four categories, we are better equipped to communicate who we are, what we do, and how every church and member can participate in the mission before us.

We present this updated structure with confidence that it will strengthen our collective efforts to proclaim the gospel faithfully and boldly throughout the General Conference and to the ends of the earth.

*GC Missions Team*
*Daniel Flores*
*Moises Capetillo*
*Priscilla Weekes*



# Eye on the Prize

> I also count all things loss . . . for Christ . . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection . . . if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:8, 10, 11).

Yes, and amen. We long with Paul for that great day of bodily redemption (Romans 8:23), when mortality will be clothed with immortality and corruption overcome with incorruption. Yes, even death itself will be swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54).

For Paul, no personal sacrifice was too great to attain such glorious hope. "I count it all loss, I sacrifice it all, I count it all rubbish" (see Philippians 3:8). Paul's life, in word and deed, testified that nothing he sacrificed, endured, or suffered for Christ could be compared to the hope, both his and ours, of the resurrection from the dead.

Today, we live in a world where the temporal pervasively seeks to invade the eternal — that is, where a focus on the immediate aims to redirect our choices away from what will endure for time and eternity. In Paul's case, he faced a choice: a temporal, yet esteemed, standing among peers and family by aligning with Judaism, or his eternal standing in the righteousness of Christ by faith alone. This conviction would inevitably lead to his estrangement from those he loved.

The resurrection of the dead is the great hope of the believer. Are you living in the light of that glory? Can you see it afar off as did the heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11:13)? Are your choices reflective of God's precious promise that this age will soon become a mere footnote, no longer remembered (Isaiah 65:17)?

Our day is not so different from Paul's. We also face choices and consequences. Have we, with Paul, counted all things loss for Christ? Have we put the world in the proverbial rearview mirror and abandoned it — not grudgingly, but willingly and eagerly, seeing all that would threaten our hope *as mere rubbish*?

God has promised the redeemed a resurrection and, with it, a restored creation (2 Peter 3:13). I am not ashamed to say I long for that great day. The trump will sound, and we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:52).

In a time when temporal pleasures and immediate gratification are ubiquitous, the enemy of man, in his rage and hopelessness (Revelation 12:17; Matthew 25:41), all too often uses the lure of the present to steal our hope and turn our hearts away from God's promise (John 10:10). But we must remember this hope we stand in. For in remembering we know, no matter our lot — whether through flame or flood, abandonment or ridicule, loss or sorrow — *God has promised, and He will deliver* (Hebrews 10:23).

The angel told Daniel, "Go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days" (12:13). What a promise! In the face of worsening times, may we remember this and Christ's words as well: "When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28).



*So, look up, church! He is coming, and we shall be raised!*

*— Greg Lincoln*

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