

"We Shall Overcome"

In the 1950s the civil rights movement began its struggle to secure civil rights for the black population in America. Its key leaders, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife Coretta Scott King, stressed non-violent tactics in their struggle for justice. The major theme song of movement was "We Shall Overcome." When the non-violent protesters found themselves in dangerous and even life-threatening situations, they would often join hands and sing the theme song, which expressed their hope in the ultimate victory of their cause. But on what basis was their hope founded? Not all the civil rights activists were Christians. Many were secularists. Why then were these secularist so convinced, they were on the winning side? Where did they find their hope and strength to continue the struggle? How can anyone have hope without a solid foundation? I firmly believe there is only one sure way that we can be assured of victory. We can sing "We Shall Overcome" because Jesus Christ has already won the victory over sin, death, and Satan. The living Lord can sustain our moral commitments. Dr. Richard Mouw aptly observes that moral hope is "possible only because of a "bodily resurrection" - a real body came out of a real tomb on Easter morning."

The resurrection of Jesus really happened! It is not a myth, nor a fairytale from the dim past. The resurrection is the most important single fact in Christianity. It is so for this simple reason. Had there been no resurrection we would never have heard of the cross. No blood would have been shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Had there been no Easter we would never have heard of Good Friday. The very fact of the Church is the proof of the Resurrection. On the resurrection the church was founded; without it the church would never have existed. The Easter event we celebrate each year reminds us that Jesus is more than a role model and a mentor; He is a living Saviour, a loving Lord, and an everlasting friend to all who trust in Him. A careful reading of the Gospels makes it clear; whenever Jesus foretold His death, He also foretold His resurrection. When Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God", Jesus shocked him and the other disciples by explaining that He must go to Jerusalem and that "He must be killed and on third day be raised to life" (Matt. 16:21).

Clearly the resurrection is the most important of all historical events, without the Easter event there would have been no Christian faith. When Jesus met two men on the road to Emmaus, He joined in their conversation. The men said something that summed up the feeling of all Jesus followers: they told Him how they had loved Jesus, how they had built their hopes on him, and then there comes the wistful, pessimistic saying, "We had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). This one sentence expressed all their grief and loss of hope. They were on their way back to their village and their old ways of life. Why go on hoping and believing when all their expectations had come to nothing? But then Jesus revealed His identity! The two men's despair turned into joy. It was the discovery that Jesus was not dead, but most gloriously alive that convinced them they had not come to the end of the road. They were standing, instead, on the threshold of a new life of the like of which they had never dreamed. Easter is the story of the empty tomb, the risen Lord and transformed disciples. The early Christians constantly risked their freedom and their lives to proclaim

the Resurrection. It seems beyond all belief that if they themselves had fabricated the story of Jesus' resurrection they would have been prepared to die for proclaiming it. No doubt a man might die for a dream and a delusion, but not for a lie which he himself is concocting. Witness the attitude of the disciples. The whole apostolic company was filled with utter despair. They were broken men. Their dream was gone. Their hopes had been crashed. But after the resurrection there was a dramatic change. Peter, the leader of the apostolic company, who denied his Lord three times with an oath and curses, had a total turn around. This same Peter is now filled with a courage that nothing could shake. Peter had seen the empty tomb and the risen Jesus. We see Peter standing before the very council that condemned Jesus to death, and saying to them, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you completely healed" (Acts 4:0). A little further on, when this council commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus, we hear Peter and John tell them, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help but speak about what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19,20). Something tremendous must have happened to account for such a radical and astounding moral transformation as this. Nothing short of the fact of the resurrection, of having seen their Lord, can explain the transformation of the disciples.

Because Christ has risen, believers in Him can have a supernatural victory over sin already in this life, for Christ lives to provide the supernatural power for it. The writer of Hebrews says, "Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them" (7:25). In the same way Jude says that the Lord is able to keep us from falling (vs.24). Before His ascension Jesus promised to be with us always. Jesus is as really present here today as He was in Palestine long ago. This means we are always living in the presence of the King of kings. Surely that means that we must seek to honour Him in all that we do and say.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is also the unshakable evidence for our own resurrection. Because He lives we shall live also. That is why Paul says, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil.1:21). The resurrection means for us that the fear of death is gone. Instinctively people have always feared death. Many regard death as an end and a conclusion. "Dead is dead. There is nothing beyond this life," they say. The Scottish author R. L. Stevenson wrote a beautiful but grim four lines:

I have trod the upward and the downward slope;
I have endured and done in days before:
I have hoped for all and bade farewell to hope;
And I have lived and loved and closed the door.

He regarded death as the closing and the closed door. But for a Christian death is the gateway to life and a greater life than ever this world can offer. It is not entering the dark night of oblivion but entering the palace of the King of kings. As an old hymn joyfully declares,

Jesus lives and death is now
But my entrance into glory.
Courage, then, my soul, for thou
Hast a crown of life before thee:
Thou shalt find thy hopes were just;
Jesus is the Christian's trust.

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