

Alive Again!

[Jesus] is not here: for he is risen, as he said (Matthew 28:6, *KJV*).

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20

Song: “Christ Arose”

You can imagine the astonishment of Walter Dixon’s family when the young soldier returned home . . . two years after his own funeral service! Dixon, serving in the Korean War, had been wrongly reported as being killed in combat but had actually been taken prisoner and placed in a prisoner-of-war camp. After his release and return to the US, we can only imagine how incredulous—and overjoyed—his relatives and friends were to see him alive again!

When the women arrived at the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body, they were fearful and astonished upon hearing the angel’s message. How elated they must have been when Jesus himself met them as they ran to tell the disciples the good news. Not only had they heard the testimony of Christ’s resurrection from an angelic messenger, but they also saw the living Lord themselves!

For those who have long been Christians and often heard the Easter story, the danger exists that the miracle of the resurrection will have lost some of its thrill. But if we can put ourselves in the place of Jesus’ brokenhearted followers who witnessed the crucifixion and thought that His death was the end, we can begin to contemplate the incredible joy they must have felt to see Him alive again!

Father, I rejoice today that You are our *risen* Savior! In Jesus’ name, amen.

April 24–30. **David Madsen** lives in Wisconsin with his wife and four daughters. He teaches at a Christian college and enjoys serving in his local church.

God of Judgment and Mercy

Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil (Joel 2:13, *KJV*).

Scripture: Joel 2:1-15

Song: “Come, All Christians, Be Committed”

In East Windsor, Connecticut, 5 adults and 29 children were in the Sports World Complex soccer dome when the complex’s manager received a tornado-warning alert from the National Weather Service. Within two minutes of evacuating the complex, a tornado struck the dome and blew it across a busy nearby road. But because of the warning, all 34 people were saved.

The prophet Joel ministered to Judah during a time of spiritual backsliding. He warned that Judah’s sin would bring the consequence of a locust plague that would devour everything in its path. Joel’s warning of potential judgment, however, did not come without the hope of God’s mercy. The prophet challenged the people to turn back to the Lord—not by outward show of tearing their clothes but by having a real change of heart. Joel reminded Judah that God was merciful. He would pardon their sin and save their land if they only repented.

As in Joel’s day, God’s people today may also be enticed by things of the world and wander from God and His truth (James 1:14-15). The Bible gives strong warnings about consequences of sin that, sadly, too often go unheeded. But those who turn to the Lord with their whole hearts will experience His great mercy and forgiveness.

Father, help us to turn from sin and accept the rich mercy You give. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Lord's Greatest Ambassador

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (Hebrews 1:1-2, *KJV*).

Scripture: Hebrews 1

Song: “Fairest Lord Jesus”

In 2017, King Salman of Saudi Arabia appointed a new ambassador to the US to represent his country—and *him*. Although many qualified people could have filled the post of ambassador, King Salman decided the best person to represent him was Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz—his own son! That would mean that when US officials talked with the prince, they would be talking to a kind of mirror image of the king himself.

The writer of Hebrews reminds his readers that God sent prophets to the nation of Israel to declare His truth. Often, however, that truth included a call for Israel to turn back to Him from their sin. Yet prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, had little success in turning the people's hearts back to the Lord. The author of Hebrews tells us that God finally sent an ambassador into the world who would draw men's hearts to himself in a way no mortal prophet could. This ambassador was God's own Son!

How marvelous that God sent His only Son to enter our world, to live among us, and to sacrifice himself for us so we could be redeemed. God could send no better representative of His love and grace than Jesus Christ.

Father, thank You for sending Your own Son to save us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our Advocate in Heaven

Of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Hebrews 8:1, *KJV*).

Scripture: Hebrews 8:1-13

Song: “Jesus, My Advocate Above”

In Harper Lee’s classic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Tom Robinson, a black man in the Deep South during the 1960s, is accused of a crime he didn’t commit. Atticus Finch, a prominent white lawyer, is appointed to defend Robinson in court. Despite public pressure on Finch to refuse representing Robinson because of his race, Finch serves as advocate for Robinson, vigorously arguing for the man’s innocence and finally vindicating him in the minds of the public—if not the jurors.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that after Jesus’ work of atonement on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, the Savior ascended into Heaven to sit at the Father’s right hand. Jesus’ role in Heaven is not a passive one but an active one. Just as Old Testament priests interceded for the people by offering sacrifices to God, Jesus intercedes for His people before the Father based on His sacrificial death.

Jesus’ death on the cross paid for our sins, but that is not the end of Christ’s work on our behalf. At God’s right hand, the Savior—our advocate—intercedes for us. We could have no better representation than from the one who loves us and gave himself for us.

Father, we thank You for Your Son, our advocate in Heaven. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Real Deal

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:12, *KJV*).

Scripture: Hebrews 9:8-22

Song: “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness”

Rummage sales are great for finding bargains—and sometimes even treasures! An article in *The Washington Post* told of a man in New Haven, Connecticut, who bought a porcelain bowl at a rummage sale for \$35. On a hunch that he had found an item of special value, the man contacted Sotheby’s, a rare-goods auction house, and discovered that the bowl was a genuine fifteenth-century Chinese artifact from the Ming Dynasty, worth \$500,000! What seemed most likely an imitation ended up being the real deal.

The author of Hebrews points out that Old Testament sacrifices could never really wash away sin. Otherwise, they would not have had to be offered again and again. Instead, they were only a “shadow” or illustration of the true sacrifice that was to come. When Christ died for the world’s sin, His genuine one-of-a-kind sacrifice atoned for our sin once and for all (Hebrews 9:12).

The law with its sacrificial system is meant to teach us both the severe penalty for sin and our need for redemption. Yet the sacrificial system was only symbolic of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross, which would vanquish the power of sin forever. Through the death of God’s perfect Lamb—the only effective sacrifice for our transgressions—we can have true and perfect redemption.

Father, thank You for sending Jesus, who died once for our eternal salvation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Preparing Our Hearts for the Lord

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in (Psalm 24:7, *KJV*).

Scripture: Psalm 24

Song: “Is Thy Heart Right with God?”

One of the highlights of my tenth-grade year was having the then US vice president, Dan Quayle, visit my high school in the early 1990s. Extreme care was taken to prepare for his arrival. After we cleaned our lockers and removed anything that might appear questionable, Secret Service personnel checked the premises thoroughly for any danger. Students dressed up, and the teacher gave me her camera for taking pictures when Vice President Quayle entered our classroom. We were ready for the momentous occasion!

In Psalm 24, David admonished the Israelites to prepare their hearts for fellowship with the Lord. David described the person with whom the Lord would commune: one who has clean hands, a pure heart, humility, and honesty. After stressing the people’s need to be intentional in preparing their hearts, David then called for the “gates” and “doors”—most likely the ones of their lives—to be opened because the Lord, the “King of glory,” would enter in (Psalm 24:7).

Likewise, we can have close and intimate fellowship with the Lord only when we have prepared our hearts to receive Him. God wills for us to be intentional in laying aside sin and taking seriously the honor of communion with Him. When our hearts are rightly prepared, fellowship with the “King of glory” will be especially sweet.

Father, help prepare our hearts for fellowship with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Near and Far Away

Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8, *KJV*).

Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

Song: “Spread the Tidings”

What started out as a local ministry at one mall now reaches millions around the globe. Mary Kay Beard, who received Christ while in prison, had noticed incarcerated mothers packing items like soap and toothpaste into boxes for their children at Christmas. Upon her release in 1982, Beard visited prisoners and asked what gifts their children wanted during the holidays. She then wrote the items on paper angels and took them to a local mall for sponsorship. This Angel Tree ministry (part of Prison Fellowship) began growing and now delivers millions of gift boxes to needy children worldwide.

Before Jesus’ ascension, He commissioned His disciples to evangelize the world. But first they needed to evangelize their own local area of Jerusalem. Once they shared the good news there, they needed to expand their ministry to nearby Samaria. From there, they were to take the gospel to the whole world.

None of us knows the extent to which God will use us. But the biblical pattern is for us to be a light locally, to next reach out to nearby areas, and then finally to remote locations. As we are faithful to serve where we are, God may well open doors for us to minister far beyond where we began.

Father, stir my heart anew to share the gospel near and far. In Jesus’ name, amen.