

HERE, NOW, TODAY.

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As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked. He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

John 9:1-12

Through High School and College... So for about 5 years of my life... I worked for McDonalds. I actually quite enjoyed it. Well, I say I enjoyed it. I liked working in the kitchen, behind the scenes but I wasn't a big fan of having to deal with customers.

I liked working in the kitchen, because while we were putting dressings on a Big Mac or frying McNuggets, you could talk to your coworkers. Some days we would have some deep conversations. In fact, the manager used to joke with me and regularly he would say "What's the topic today Richard, religion or politics?"

One day I remember someone asked me...

"If there was no Heaven would you still be a Christian?"

Of course I would. I don't follow Jesus because I think he's my ticket to heaven.

I follow him, because I believe he is the way, the truth and the life,

I follow him because when I am closest to him,

when my faith is strongest, I feel most fully alive,

I follow him because when I choose to trust him, when I am closest to him I feel like a human being,

When I think about the times in my life when I felt like I was doing the right thing, it's always when I am doing the things that he has taught us to do.

When I think about the problems that our world faces I think that almost all of those problems would disappear if we actually loved our neighbours as we love ourselves; if we were willing to love selflessly and sacrificially and do the things that Jesus teaches us to do.

Yes, I would follow him whether there was a heaven or not!

I'll be honest with you and tell you that the answer I gave my friend while working in the kitchen at McDonalds wasn't anywhere near as well thought out or eloquent as what I just said to you. In fact I stumbled through an answer that basically just said, yes. But the question really made me think and I spent quite some time after that thinking, praying and studying.

Interestingly what I found was when we read the gospels and study the New Testament, we discover that for Jesus, his primary focus wasn't about heaven. He didn't come to teach us about the next life. He came to teach us about THIS life, THIS world, THIS time. For Jesus, his primary focus was on how we live our lives... **Here. Now. Today.**

In fact in the gospels you will find that Jesus hardly ever talks about heaven. He does talk about it. It is there, but again it's NOT his primary focus. His primary focus is on THIS life.

Think about his parables, like the Good Samaritan, perhaps his most famous parable. What was it about? Was it about heaven or was it about stopping and helping a neighbour? Even if you think they are your enemies, or they think you're the enemy, you still stop and help them. That's what it means to love your neighbour. Your neighbour... Where? **Here. Now. Today.**

Take the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps the most comprehensive body of Christ's teaching. When we read it, hear it and study it, we find very little in there about the afterlife and heaven. What we do find is a whole lot about how we need to take note of heaven's ethics, heaven's principles and live them and apply them here on earth. **Here. Now. Today.**

For Christ it isn't about a new life AFTER THIS ONE. It's not about the hope for something better somewhere else... in a galaxy far far away, but about the hope of something better in this life!! In THIS place, THIS world. **Here. Now. Today.**

When we read the scripture (John 9:1-12), we think of it as a story about healing, but it's actually much more than that. In the text it specifically says that the man was blind from birth! Why is there a need to tell us how long this man has been unable to see? Because this isn't a story about Jesus restoring someone's sight, this isn't a story about Jesus bring back something that used to work, this isn't a story about Jesus fixing something, restoring something or making something great again! This story is about Jesus creating something NEW... Something THAT NEVER exist before...

At that time there were lots of people that claimed they could heal. Every village had a shaman that claimed he could heal the sick...

Jesus isn't trying to prove that he is the Messiah because he can heal. Lots of people can heal... but only God can create something new!

Jesus giving this man sight is about NEW life, NEW birth, NEW opportunities, becoming a NEW creation IN THIS life... **Here. Now. Today.**

Jesus isn't promising the man his sight in a life after this one...

He creates sight in the ...**Here. Now. Today.**

This story follows on from the women at the well, the healing of the paralyzed man and the story of meeting with Nicodemus... where he was famously told to be born again, but this time, of water and of Spirit.

New life, new birth, new hope, a new creation is the subversive message of the entire Gospel of John. It's a new Genesis story.

Let me prove it to you...

The Gospel begins with the words "in the beginning" what other book begins with the words in the beginning? Genesis.

In John, Jesus is described as being crucified in a garden. Then it says he was laid within a tomb, that's in a garden.

Why in one verse does it mention a garden twice? Why does the text care so much about describing to us about the landscaping around Christ's tomb? Why? Where else in the bible is there a significant garden? Genesis, the Garden of Eden.

Three days after Jesus was crucified, Mary goes to visit his tomb but finds it empty. She frantically looks around trying to find what they'd done with Jesus, she sees him, but she doesn't recognize him. Who does she think he is? The gardener!

In John, the resurrection miracle is the eighth miracle in the gospel... eight, one after seven... What is God described as doing in seven days in Genesis? Creation. So, the eighth sign is that of a NEW creation.

In the gospel of John, Christ's resurrection is a new creation story. A new story about new life, new beginnings and becoming a new creation! **Here. Now. Today.**

It's not about the old being brought back to life, as Marcus Borg puts it "resurrection is NOT resuscitation". It's about dying to the old and being born to the new. It's about leaving the old behind; things that shamed you, haunt you, fill you with guilt and fear and being born a new creation with Christ.

And it's not confined to one person, in one moment of time, in one particular place, and in one specific way... but resurrection, new life, the road to Transformation can and does happen. **Here. Now. Today.**

When a drug addict defeats their addiction, that's resurrection!

When someone caught up in crime and unlawful activity, stops their destructive pattern of behaviour... That's resurrection!

When someone is lonely or house bound and they are reconnected with a friend and a relative... That's resurrection!

When we begin to see our neighbours as people of worth and as loved children of God, and not strangers, dangers and people to be feared... That's resurrection!

When someone receives a text message from their son or daughter they haven't seen or heard from in three years... That's resurrection!

When we feed the hungry, cloth the naked, visit the sick, to kind to a stranger, comfort the mourner, give money to charity, restore faith in humanity... That's resurrection! **Here. Now. Today.**

Those are all examples of resurrection I have seen in the church over the last twelve months.

Jesus didn't die, defeat death and rise again to prove to us that there is life after this one. Not at all... for Jesus' primary message wasn't about heaven and the afterlife. It was about our lives here. Now. Today.

John's gospel ends by simply says "as the father has sent me... so I am sending you."

What he is saying is... I came to embodied the love of God, to share God's mercy and grace and God's presence in the midst of suffering, I have embodied that for you... and now guess what... it's over to you. It's now your turn.

Our task is to also embody the love of God to other people. To show them that God is with us, and that God has not abandoned us, that God is with them in their suffering and pain and brokenness. Death, pain, fear, hate, sickness, racism, depression, anxiety, cancer does NOT GET THE FINAL WORD.

We are to work for justice, pursue peace, care for the poor, stand by those who are hungry or thirsty or in need, work to establish Zion. Where? In some

distant place? In another dimension? In another time? No. **Here. Now. Today.**

So demonstrate unconditional, sacrificial, never-ending, never ceasing, grace, generosity, justice, peace, compassion, hope, joy and love of God... as Christ has done for you.

Don't forget, that it ISN'T a one time deal, it's NOT get it right now or suffer the consequences. Christ's call is to everyone and for everyone, for All are called... no exceptions...

And it's a constant, never ceasing, never ending, always available... No matter who we are, no matter what we've done, no matter what we think... all are called by Christ... and Christ calls by simply saying: "Come follow me."

Follow me into the streets of Jerusalem, follow me to the temple, follow me to the upper room, follow me to Gethsemane, follow me to the cross, follow me on the journey towards resurrection, the journey towards new life, new beginnings, a new creation, to restoration. **Here. Now. Today.**

To die to the old and let a new creation burst forth. **Here. Now. Today.**

Not for heaven's sake but for .. **Here. Now. Today.**

For I once was blind, but now I see... **Here. Now. Today.**