



Writings of W. Burney Overton

As I See It to Be

The Resurrection of Victory

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*“You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here.”*  
(Mark 16:6)

With these and similar words, the Gospel authors tell of the most amazing, mysterious, and electrifying event of history, apparently not recognized as such at the time of the event. The author of John says only this, *“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”* (John 20:2).

The tomb was empty. That was evident. But, *“as yet they did not know the scripture, that He must rise from the dead.”* (John 20:9). That the tomb should be empty seemed a mystery, but hardly an indication of victory, or a reason for rejoicing—only a time of puzzlement and confusion.

All of that began to change as reports came that Jesus had been seen alive. People had talked with Him and eaten with Him. *“Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord.’”* (John 20:18). Others reported, *“The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.”* (Luke 24:34) or just, *“We have seen the Lord.”* (John 20:25). And it seems that it was when they talked with Him and ate with Him, that they were able to recognize Him, and to know that He was alive.

There was no question but that He had died. His enemies had conspired against Him and caused Him to be nailed to a cross until the life was gone out of His body. They made sure it was so before they would allow His grieving friends to take Him down from the cross.

He was dead all right. Death seemed to have triumphed. Those who found Him, and His way of life, and His message such a threat had succeeded in destroying Him, and with His destruction, the threat to them and their way of life. They were the victors -- or so they thought.

They might well believe themselves to be the victors, for everyone knew that death was final—the end of life. There was no way back. Those who died did not live again. What He was, what He stood for, what He preached was shown to be of no avail when they caused the life to leave His body.

They didn't understand that life is more than breath and heartbeat. Death involves more than that the lungs stop breathing and the heart stops beating. There is death even when the body is alive, and life even when the body is dead. It seems that much more is involved in the death and resurrection of Jesus than that He was killed and then His body came back to life. Apparently, those responsible for Jesus' death did not realize any more was involved. Nor did the disciples and others associated with Jesus until after they had experienced His resurrection.

Jesus had told them that He would be killed, and, the third day, would rise. They did not want to hear anything about His dying, and had never experienced anything that would give meaning to His assurance that He would rise from the dead.

Jesus knew things about life and death that they did not know—not yet. He knew that life was more than the body. He knew that death could come to the body, and a person be alive. He knew that a broken relationship was a kind of death, that the fear of death kept a person from being alive, that trying to save one's life meant to lose it. He knew that those who had chosen to try to be their own gods had chosen death, that the battle between them and those in relationship to God must go on until death conquered or was conquered, that the effort to destroy Him must go all the way to His death so that all could know it would not ultimately destroy Him. He knew that only when people believed that He had risen from the dead would they live. Only then would they be free from their fear of their own death, and be able to get on with living.

The Bible does not give many details about the experience of the resurrection of Jesus. What it does confirm over and over that the resurrection victory is victory over death. Death could neither hold nor remove Jesus. Those who were His enemies could take the life from His body, but they could not kill Him. As He had said, on the third day He arose from the dead, victor over death. That victorious event – mystery though it is – became the focal event of history.

When the truth finally got through to the disciples and the other followers, there was fearful and awed celebration. At first, the words were, over and over, “HE IS ALIVE!” As they went on with their contemplation of this event, and as Jesus, in whatever form He was, appeared to them on various occasions, it began to get through to them that as He was alive, they also were alive. This I understand to be the great truth that finally came to them.

Before his crucifixion, the disciples had been very afraid for their own lives. They ran away and did not want anyone to know that they had been with Jesus. After they experienced the reality of Jesus alive, though He had been killed, they began to understand they need fear their own death no longer. It was not necessary for them to focus on trying to save themselves. Death had been overcome. They were not dead anymore. A sense of what it meant to be alive with Christ began to dawn on them.

Very often, the victory of the Resurrection is believed to be the assurance that after this life is over, there is life with God in Heaven. This may be the meaning of life after death, but, the promise of life after death alone could not inspire the disciples and other followers as they were inspired following Jesus' Resurrection.

Not much had changed in their life situations. The religious leadership was adamantly determined that nothing about Jesus should be known in the land. The Roman government was as powerful as ever. There was just as much danger that their own lives would be snuffed out of their bodies. The only thing that had changed for them was that they were no longer afraid of dying. Therefore, they could be about the witness of that which they had come to know without fearing what those who were threatened by their witness might do to them.

I deduce from this, therefore, that the real message in Jesus' Resurrection had to

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do with their living of their lives from that point on. They had a new understanding of what life was about. They had a new understanding of what it meant to be the children of God. They had a new understanding of what it meant to be loved totally and completely. They had a new understanding of the reality that life is lived in response to unconditional love – and most of all – that no power on earth could conquer that love or kill the life that lives in response to that love.

Small wonder that the Resurrection of Jesus is the focal event of the history of Christendom. Small wonder that, in response to the power of the disciples' witness, hundreds and thousands came to be followers of the way of Jesus. Small wonder that they felt the power of the Holy Spirit in and through them as a rushing, mighty wind, and as fire upon their lips.

It is of the utmost importance that the Resurrection Victory not be made too small. While there is much to give promise of life after this life, the great and glorious message of Jesus' Resurrection is that because He lives, we too live –here and now.

The testimony of Jesus' life was clear. There are values greater than preserving life in the body. There is more to life than breathing. There is more to life than freedom from struggle and conflict.

The most important dimension of life is faithful response to the love and will of God in this life. Until I come to the realization of this truth, I remain dead. When I believe the life that Jesus lived with such completeness and such totalness of belief that I do not fear for my life, then I, too, am alive.

This is the Resurrection Victory.