

The Great Cosmic Switch

by Pastor Marty

There is something inherently appealing to us as human beings in the idea of a switch or exchange of characters from radically different stations in life. Whether the situation is meant to be funny, suspenseful, serious, or inspiring, we are drawn to the idea of a prince or princess changing places with a pauper or scullery maid. There are simply too many examples of this in literature and media to name them. Likewise, we are fascinated with the situation when poor people discover they are royalty or the wealthy find themselves on the street and are forced to wash dishes for a living. Recently, I watched *A Knight's Tale* again, and I still find I am moved when William officially gets the gift he never expected to be his—to really change his stars. Even many of our archetypal superheroes have secret identities that are polar opposite of their heroic lives, such as Superman and Clark Kent or Batgirl and Barbara Gordon. This concept is even seen in a tale as old as time with a beauty and a beast. All these stories describe a type of fundamental exchange between extremes.

Something about a fundamental change appeals to us in the core of our beings.

I just watched the new biblically-based movie *Risen* last weekend. While *The Passion* is the story of the crucifixion, this movie detailed the next part of the story—the resurrection. To be honest, there were a few spots in the movie where I felt that things were underemphasized, and I would not quite put it on the same par with that first movie, but it was very faithful to the gospel message. This is very important, for there are many Christians who have—without knowing it—preached only half of the gospel, minimizing the full message. Of course, even if the gospel is incompletely preached, it can still touch people and transform lives. However, we must do all we can to speak the full message so

that we do not unintentionally make converts who become immunized against becoming full disciples. Any part of the good news we leave out of our message is a part of our lives we may leave un-regenerated and un-transformed. This is why Paul writes to the believers at Rome and tells them that he is excited about the prospect of preaching the gospel to them, to born again Christians who already knew everything needed for them to be saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Spirit. There was more they needed to know just as there is more we need to know.

Being “saved” does not preclude us from discovering there is more to the gospel.

Probably about 20 years ago, I was in a church where a visiting speaker came to give a talk on how we can identify error in cults and even within sects within Christianity. Of would be expected, he used the “faith movement” as an example of the latter—a judgment made a bit too quickly in the Church today. However, the valid and invalid aspects of that conclusion are not the focus of this newsletter; instead, my focus is on one of the litmus tests provided by the speaker that turned out to be an unbiblical point of theology in their understanding of the gospel: the necessity of the resurrection. The speaker stated that everything related to our salvation was finished at the cross. This seems to make sense, for Jesus did say, “It Is Finished” on the cross after He took our sins, providing a way for us to be completely forgiven and made right with God. The speaker then stated—again referencing the Prosperity and Faith Movement as an example of heresy—that “any theological position that states that the resurrection was a necessary part of our redemption is heresy.” I (and only one other person out of the entire group present) pointed out the problem with his statement: Paul himself unequivocally says,

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.” According to their position, the point of the resurrection is just to prove that everything Jesus said is true.

The Resurrection is not just proof that everything Jesus said was actually true.

Some theological positions identify all of the New Testament miracles as signs that Jesus was who He said He was, and that what He said was true. Although the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles describe some miracles as proof signs, ascribing all miracles as such does harm to our understanding of God’s character and nature. It is clear in the Gospels that Jesus often healed and delivered people because He was “moved with compassion” for them; we even see times when people were instructed not to tell others about the miracles. If we accept “God is love,” then we must accept what the Bible says about God’s character in 1 Corinthians 13. The ancient Greek philosophers said that God is not moved by emotion, being too “perfect” for such fleshly things as compassion and empathy, and sadly, some Christian theologians have accepted that idea. As Tertullian asked almost 2000 years ago, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” His point was that some inherent parts of Greek philosophy, such as the view that God is never influenced by emotions, are incompatible with Christianity; the Old Testament clearly presents a picture of a God Who experiences pleasure, sadness, love, anger, grief, and joy. If Jesus is the perfect representation of the Father, as He said He was, then ascribing emotionlessness to acts that are associated with emotion is doing a disservice to our understanding of the Trinity.

Ascribing emotionlessness to passages He associates with emotion is unsound.

If Jesus did at least some of His miracles simply because of love and compassion, it tells us a great deal about the God we worship. Still, we know there were some miracles that were

performed as signs for the people, such as His cursing the fig tree, stilling the storm, etc. What we need to see is that some miracles actually fit both categories—being a sign to prove what He said as well as being motivated by compassion for the person; some of the healings as well as feeding the multitudes are described both ways in the Gospels. It would be incorrect to assume that God can never have more than one single motivation for any of his actions. A reading of the Old Testament reveals that there are times when God ascribes one motivation to a work He does but a different purpose later. In other words, God can act out of compassion while He simultaneously uses that action as a sign and to express a message. The major question we face then is whether the resurrection was just a sign to prove Jesus was who He said He was, if it had another purpose, or both. In Acts 17, Paul says the Father “furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead,” so we know the resurrection was proof of the gospel message. However, there is evidence that it also had a further purpose. In his letter to Corinth, Paul explains that a physical death comes prior to a spiritual resurrection. He explains in chapter 15 that as a seed “dies” to bring forth a plant, so the old has to die for the new to be born. If we read this in light of the numerous verses that say we “have been” raised with Christ—along with verses talking about baptism—we find the resurrection actually completes our salvation.

In light of all of Paul’s teachings, the Resurrection completes our salvation.

I have heard Clay McLean use the story of David and Goliath to explain this. As we see, Goliath challenged Israel to send a champion to fight for their entire nation while Goliath would fight for his nation. Each champion would be a representative so that the outcome of the fight would be the outcome of the war. In ancient Middle Eastern cultures, this is more than just symbolic: when a person represents the nation,

there are very real spiritual benefits as well as consequences. God made this clear to Israel under Joshua when the sin of one single man caused the entire nation to lose the battle. Paul likewise explains that sin in one member of the body affects the entire body, speaking of the body of Christ. As I heard Clay explain it, when David fought Goliath, everyone in Israel was “in David” at that moment, either to win or lose. When he defeated the giant, the entire nation was victorious over the Philistine army. What happened to David happened for all of Israel. This is especially important when we recognize that as Christians, we are “in Christ.” Paul does not describe us being “in Christ” repeatedly for no reason, nor is he just being poetic; this is a factual statement of our spiritual reality. We are as much “in Christ” as we are “in body” at this very moment—except that we are usually much more aware of our physical bodies than our spiritual reality. Whether we recognize it or not, we, as believers, are existing within Christ.

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From our human perspective, we begin our spiritual identification with Christ when we are baptized. We confess, believe, and even witness before that, but Paul clearly describes water baptism as the action of identifying with Him in His death—and also in His resurrection. In this respect, water baptism is sacramental, a physical action connecting to a spiritual reality; however, there are many Christians who do not understand the actual power involved in this action. It is not just a symbolic step we take for the purpose of making a public witness to our Christian faith. Such a minimalist interpretation has done great damage to the spiritual life of believers and the effectiveness of the Church over the years. In the New Testament, Paul is very clear about the importance of baptism—so much so that he actually states that “baptism saves you” at one point. Of course, he does not

mean just the wetting of the body with water, as he also clarifies, for that would be legalism and going through the motions; instead, he is careful to explain how water baptism actually breaks the power of the sinful nature. When we are baptized, we are taking a purposeful step to identify ourselves with Christ in His death and resurrection, and that step actually changes us.

When we purposefully identify ourselves “in Christ,” our intrinsic nature changes.

Jesus (and Paul) tells us that if we deny Him before the world, He denies us before the Father. This is not something to take lightly, for it shows our actions have serious and eternal repercussions. The early Church considered it so severe they debated whether such a person could ever be received back into fellowship. If a believer in sexual sin with his mother-in-law could still be received back into fellowship after repenting, why would the Church view a sin in a moment of weakness in the face of torture or death much worse? They realized the physical act of denying Christ was more than just a sign of the depth of a person’s conversion; it was a de-identification from Christ, disconnecting the person from the source of life that gives power to live the Christian life. Thankfully, we have an example in Peter to know we can recover even from that; still, it was not an easy lesson for him, so it should not be taken lightly by us. We must recognize our physical acts have spiritual and eternal consequences. We are more than thoughts and emotions within physical bodies; we are also spiritual beings in a spiritual reality. Our being “in Christ” in Heaven at the same time we are “in bodies” on Earth is how we are able to receive the supernatural power to live beyond our physical limitations. Christians are actually bi-dimensional beings, living in two completely different realities at the same time.

Christians are bi-dimensional beings, “in Christ” and “in bodies” at the same time.

If we take seriously what Paul wrote on water baptism, the act of identifying with Christ in His death puts our sinful nature to death. Of course, as is true with many spiritual truths, it is something we do repeatedly (the identifying, not the being baptized) until it fully becomes a reality in our lives. However, Paul does not limit his discussion to identifying with Christ in His death; he also says we identify with Him in His resurrection. This is why the resurrection is a practical and necessary part of our salvation. It is a parallel between our physical and spiritual lives: we will die physically, after which, we will rise to eternal life; in baptism, we die to the sinful nature and rise in a new spiritual nature. If we identify only with His death, we miss the power to live the new life; as Paul says, it is the power of the Holy Spirit, who raised Jesus from the dead, who gives life to our mortal bodies. It is not an automatic thing that takes place apart from our involvement, however, for we have to continually practice God's Presence until He is more real to us than this physical world. As we continually identify with Him, His Presence and His nature are manifest in and through us. This identification is vital to our spiritual growth and formation. However, we also know that we are only able to do what He has first done for us. It says that we can love because He first loved us. We can identify with Him because He identified with us first, back when we were still in our sin.

We are only able to identify with Christ because He had first identified with us.

The early Church described this first act of identification as *THEOSIS*, or deification. It is a term to describe Christ's identification with us that changes our very nature. It first began with His becoming 100% fully human, like us in every way except the sinful nature. God became man, and it was not just "like" man but was fully and completely "man," with all the temptations and weaknesses human beings experience. Paul is clear that Jesus laid aside all of His Godhood in

the process. This means He resisted satan as a man with human emotions and feelings; He healed the sick and raised the dead as a man, anointed by the Holy Spirit like the prophets did in the Old Testament; and He bore the turmoil of Gethsemane as a man, feeling such anguish and anxiety that He sweated drops of blood. It is in His scourged sufferings and death on the cross, however, where He began the process of theosis. At that point, He took our sickness, our pain, our sin, and our death into Himself. Jesus fully and completely identified with us when He was on the cross. It was not just symbolic, nor was it just a metaphorical association; He literally became one with us in every way. At a single point in eternity, God chose to become Sinful Humanity. (The Greek says He became SIN at that point, identifying with every human being and every sin that ever was, is, or will be).

He did not just symbolically identify with us; He fully became what we are.

This is not the entire story, though. He identified with us in death so that all of our sin and our sinful nature would be taken into Him. That is love, but it was not enough by itself to redeem us. As Paul said, if He was not raised, we are still in our sins. Jesus became like us for a reason: when He took our human nature into Himself on the cross, He did not drop us when He rose three days later; we stayed in Him as the Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead. We were still in Him when He stepped out of the tomb and ascended to the Father. We can say with conviction that we are seated with Him in Heavenly places because we are still in Him. He identified with us in our sin and death so we can now identify with Him in His resurrection and righteousness. He became like us in every way so we can become like Him in every way. As He became man, we have now become gods (small "g"). We have been raised with Him into a new life. As children of God, deified in Jesus, we are more like Jesus than like Adam and Eve.