

How God Sees Your Tears

Two years ago, my family and I went to Branson, Mo., to visit my mom and stepfather. At the time, Ellie was 4, Kenny was 2 1/2, Lindsey was 1, and I was a couple months pregnant with Jessica. One day, we decided to take the kids to a beautiful lake not too far from where we were staying. We loaded up all the gear we would need—towels, sunscreen, plastic inflatable toys, water shoes—and headed for the lake.

It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining, and it was warm, but not too hot (especially considering that we are used to Texas summers). The scenery was gorgeous. The water was perfectly clear. Best of all, since it was fairly early in the morning, there was only one other family at this little beach.

We staked out a spot and headed for the water. The two younger kids wanted to stay where it was still quite shallow, so I sat in the water as they played around me. We even noticed about a million little fishes that swam by just a little further out. Wow! Fish! Right there! The kids were excited, though a little scared.

My husband took Ellie on one of the inflatables out into deeper water, where he could pull her along and she could float. They were having a grand time, and so were we, playing together. It was all brand new to the kids. I felt so relaxed, sitting in the water and feeling it lap around me, being just the right temperature, enjoying the beautiful scenery in the sunny quiet, and being with the people I loved most in all the world.

All too soon, it was time to go. The kids were getting tired. So we got out of the water. I made sure the little kids were following me. Lindsey ran on ahead as we made our way toward where we had left our towels and other stuff. Kenny trailed behind.

Actually, Kenny was what we call “dinking around”—that is, not following promptly. I encouraged him one more time to follow me, and then I turned away and began walking—slowly—hoping he would decide to follow.

Instead, after I had taken a few steps, he began to wail.

I turned back to see him rooted to the spot where he had been when I turned away from him. He was wailing, the tears flowing down his face.

It was a clear that Kenny felt abandoned and afraid.

Immediately, I turned back. I went to him, hugged him, and then scooped him up into my arms, holding him close and saying, “It’s OK, Kenny. Mommy’s here.”

I carried him back to the van that way, secure in my arms, comforting him with my touch, my voice and my nearness.

It wasn’t until later that I thought about how this reflects our relationship with God.

Sometimes it feels like God is walking away, doesn’t it?

Leaving us behind. Abandoning us.

Maybe we’ve gone through a season of hurt where it felt like instead of being close to us, God was more distant than ever before.

Maybe it felt like we were falling further behind, getting more and more desperate, until finally we were so far behind we could only see God disappearing in the distance.

What do we do during those times?

Sometimes we get angry. We get mad at God for not making us feel better. For letting us hurt. *Fine*, we think, *walk away. I’ll make it on my own, if that’s what I have to do.*

Sometimes, like Kenny did, we simply wail out our anguish, as God (we think) gets farther and farther away.

What should we do? What is the right response when we feel distant from God and we're afraid and we desperately need Him?

Do what Kenny did.

Cry out.

Wail out your anguish to God.

You see, if I, as a human mother, heard my son's anguish, was moved with compassion in my heart for him, and responded, how much more will God, the perfect parent, respond to our heart's cry?

Dear friend, it's true that sometimes God won't fix our situation. Sometimes, no matter how much we cry out, the pain and grief will not disappear. They are something to be worked through, not something to get rid of.

But though He won't always respond by fixing our situation, God will respond with Himself.

You see, God has promised. And He cannot and will not lie.

When you need Him, cry out. He's there. It may look and feel like He's far away, but He's as close as your heart and ready to respond when you need Him.

Is life going well for you right now? Call Him. He's there to rejoice with you.

Is life more painful than you ever imagined? Cry out to Him. He's there to grieve with you.

Crawl into his lap, lay your head on His chest, and feel His loving arms around you, holding you close.

Or if you can't even crawl, then just cry out.

He will come to you.

Psalm 55:17—Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress,
and he hears my voice

Megan Breedlove *is an author, blogger and a stay-at-home mom with five children. Visit her web site Manna for Moms.*

Do You Agree With What T.D. Jakes Says About 'Heaven Is for Real'?

Bishop T.D. Jakes, a producer of the new movie *Heaven is for Real*, said fascination with the story of Colton Burpo, a 4-year-old boy who claims to have glimpsed heaven after a near-death experience, reflects a “growing wonder” in the afterlife that spans religious backgrounds. The Dallas megachurch leader answered emailed questions about the film, which opened in theaters on Wednesday.

Some answers have been edited for length and clarity.

The book on which the film is based was a best-seller and is again. Why do you think it has prompted so much interest?

People are attracted to the simplicity of Colton's story. The vivid detail and the certainty of his experience are the most compelling elements. I also believe that there is a growing wonder about life after death in our culture. The notion of heaven captures people's imagination regardless of their religious predisposition. The need to find purpose in life is often driving that curiosity. Believing in the hereafter provides an anchor for the soul, and a resting place for one's

faith.

I also think that people relate to a father wrestling with unbelief, and struggling to find meaning in his son's experience.

Your previous movies have had predominantly black casts. Is there a reason you're branching out?

I have always said that I want to make the type of movies that I want to see. I recognized early on that there is a vast movie-going audience that wants to see films on Saturday night or on a Sunday afternoon with their families and not be embarrassed. That task is larger than any one race or people group. To think of that objective in terms of race is to be far too narrow in one's definition. Building an exceptional body of work was always the objective.

My casts to date have reflected the story that was being told and from a perspective that is not often represented in American cinema. There are still far too few scripted roles for actors of color. In the faith space, actors of color are rarer still. I am delighted that *Heaven Is for Real* will reach a larger audience and provide additional opportunities to speak to people that don't look like me or think like me. Jesus said to go into all of the world, to preach the gospel. He didn't send me just to the black world.

Do you think *Heaven Is for Real* will answer people's questions, or prompt them to ask more?

I think that the role of the moviemaker is to prompt people to ask questions, to leave the theaters with perhaps just as many questions as answers so that they may continue to explore and to seek answers to life's mysteries. You can't solve the world's problems in 90 minutes. What you can do is set the context, provide the ammunition and hope that people carry the task forward, especially now as this movie comes out Easter weekend. We want people to explore the death, burial and

resurrection of Christ.

The Danger of Presumptuous Prophets

“Dr. Livingstone, I presume?”

Many of you have heard the story of Henry Stanley, the ambitious American reporter who went to the Dark Continent in search of Dr. David Livingstone, an 19th-century missionary who explored sub-Saharan Africa.

When Stanley finally tracked down the famed **evangelist**, his first words when approaching the only other white man in Ujiji, Africa, were, as the story goes, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” The white man’s identity may have seemed like a no-brainer to the young journalist, but if he had been a **prophet**, Stanley’s presumption would have landed him in a heap of trouble. That’s because **presumption** is on God’s blacklist.

What does it literally mean to presume? And what exactly is presumption? Webster defines *presume* as “to form an opinion from little or no evidence” and “to take as true or as fact without actual proof.” *Presumptuous* is defined as “to overstep due bounds” and “to take liberties.” Those definitions outline some critical prophetic dos and don’ts.

First off, there is no room for personal opinion in the prophetic. Our “proof” must come from the **Holy Spirit**, not our own spirits or some other spirit. As mouthpieces for God, others take our words and insights very seriously, and we cannot abuse the grace people perceive on our lives.

We must not fall into the trap of filtering **prophetic** utterances through our own biases and in doing so deceive the hearers. What would cause the prophet to think anyone wants his opinion, anyway? (We'll get to that in a minute.) The function of the prophet is to reveal the mind and will of God, not the mind and will of the **prophet**.

Second, **prophets** must recognize boundaries and not take the liberty of overstepping their prophetic authority. Yes, where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, but not the liberty to speak outside our God-given spiritual jurisdiction.

That jurisdiction begins in the local church and expands as the prophet matures. Even the president of the United States, with all his authority, would be presumptuous to issue a decree over another nation. His words would fall to the ground because he would be overstepping his bounds.

Doubtless, God hates **presumption**—and He has good reason. There are several variations of the Greek word *presume*. Typically, the word portrays insolence (insultingly contemptuous speech or conduct), pride, arrogance or audacity (bold or arrogant disregard for normal restraints). Considering that the Lord includes a proud look and a false witness among the seven abominations, presumption is not something to be taken lightly.

In fact, while the **Bible** only mentions the words ***presume***, *presumed*, *presumptuous* and *presumptuously* 11 times, it almost always leads to death. Indeed, there are few things worse than a presumptuous prophet. Deuteronomy 18:20 declares, “The prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die” (NKJV).

Mercy! Of course, we are living in a time of grace and even the most presumptuous prophet probably won't be struck dead for this sin. But we must ask ourselves: What is happening

inside of us, in our spirits, when we presume? Selah.

If you think God likes presumption any better in the New Testament than the Old Testament, then think again—or ask the apostle Peter, who was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost when he revealed that those who walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise government (authority) are presumptuous, self-willed and slanderous (2 Pet. 2:9-10).

After pointing out that these presumptuous ones love to indulge in evil pleasures, revel in deceitfulness, possess an insatiable lust, lure people into sin and train themselves to be greedy, among other sinful qualities, Peter finally connects them with Balaam, the presumptuous prophet.

You remember Balaam. King Balak sent messengers to him with a sinister request and rewards of divination in their hands. Balak offered to pay Balaam to curse the Israelites. Wicked story short, Balaam initially refused to pronounce the curse but eventually helped King Balak defile the Israelites by giving him a strategy involving sexual sin (Num. 31:16). Balaam wound up committing treason (fighting against the Israelites), and his end was death. Listen to how the apostle Peter refers to Balaam's presumption:

“They have wandered off the right road and followed the footsteps of Balaam son of Beor, who loved to earn money by doing wrong. But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice. These people [Which people? Presumptuous people!] are as useless as dried-up springs or as mist blown away by the wind. They are doomed to blackest darkness” (2 Pet. 2:15-17, NLT).

Remember our friends, young Stanley and Dr. Livingstone? Livingstone's fascinating books sold in huge numbers all over the world as he pursued his dream to open the continent to make a way for other missionaries to preach the gospel.

Stanley, on the other hand, was notorious for changing the facts to suit his purposes—or even making them up—in his books.

Stanley even lied about his heritage. He fought for the South in the American Civil War and then committed treason (like Balaam) and served the North when captured. He later helped the king of Belgium fulfill his greedy purposes (like Balaam) in Africa. Like Balaam, Stanley's greed and pride caused him to compromise his professional ethics. Stanley eventually became a mass murderer.

It seems the fate of the presumptuous is ultimately the same throughout history. Thank God we have a Savior. We can repent of such sinful works. We need to pray like David. In Psalm 19:13 he cried, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then I shall be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (KJV).

You can download a sample chapter of Jennifer's new book, *The Making of a Prophet*, by clicking [here](#).

Jennifer LeClaire is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including The Making of a Prophet.

You can email Jennifer at [@](#) or visit her website [here](#). You can also join Jennifer on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.

Are You Investing in Heaven?

Most of us invest in our future. We plan, save and strategize to be debt-free and to have something for our retirement years. Yet not many people even consider investing in

eternity. The retirement years are few, but eternity is a long time. It would be prudent to have an eternal perspective and invest in our lives beyond this temporal existence.

The most important investment we can make in heaven is to bring people with us. We can take nothing with us when we die—except for other souls. Jesus stated that if a man has one hundred sheep and one goes astray, He will go after the one and rejoice much when the one is found (Matt. 18:12). Jesus went on to explain in verse 14, “Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish” (KJV). He was showing the importance of one soul that is saved—how precious that one soul is to God.

It takes effort to share the gospel with others, and many times there is opposition to our witness. It is easier for us as Christians to read our Bibles, go to church and then do little else. But God wants us to have His perspective and try to influence as many people as possible in order for them to come into the kingdom.

God desires to bless people, and it is up to us to open our mouths and share the way of salvation. Jesus told us in Mark 16:15, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” This is not a suggestion but a command. As Charles W. Spurgeon said, “Soulwinning is the chief business of the Christian; indeed, it should be the main pursuit of every true believer.”

It is interesting that as people get close to death, it is usually easier to talk to them about the afterlife. It is an unfortunate fact that many times it takes a tragedy, severe illness or some other catastrophic event to be able to have a conversation with someone about God and the afterlife. I suppose many people think any discussion about God will cramp their lifestyle, so the conversation is put off until they are faced with something serious.

Usually people will make some preparations for death. We may prepare a will or set up a trust fund. We carefully consider our final plans, visit with our families and say all the important things we need to say to our loved ones. Some people desire to see a priest or person of the cloth when they are on their deathbeds.

If a person does not know Jesus, I have observed there is usually an overwhelming fear that comes over them as they approach death—and they should be glad it does, as this fear places them in a position to listen and be open to the truth (Job 33:15-22). Jude 23 tells us, “And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.” That is the only time some are willing to talk about and listen to the way to heaven.

But if we are already a Christian, then we know we are ready to leave this life. We have peace with God in our hearts because we are trusting in Him. As Christians, we have full assurance of our salvation and our eternal destiny (Is. 51:6; Acts 17:31; Heb. 5:9; 1 John 2:25).

The one thing a Christian normally desires more than anything else before they pass on is to be certain their families are also Christians. The rich man came to realize when he arrived in hell that his brothers needed to repent of their sins or they too would end up in that horrible place of torment (Luke 16:30). He was concerned for them and didn't want them to suffer as he was suffering.

But we cannot force God's love and forgiveness upon anyone. We can only share His plan of salvation, and each person must decide for themselves. We need to pray that people will discover the truth before it's too late—like it was for the rich man in hell. When we arrive in heaven and see those whom we helped influence to see the light and accept the Lord, it will be a most valued reward.

As Christians, do we have an eternal perspective? Are we

concerned about those who do not know the way of salvation? Are we doing things that will count for eternity? Will we choose to live for God, or will we choose to live for ourselves? We are not giving up anything of value to live for God, and He even rewards us if we do. It is not a loss but much gain.

It is actually scriptural for us to desire the rewards God promises. Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount that we will obtain rewards (Luke 6:23). But as Charles H. Spurgeon wrote, "At the mention of the word reward, some will prick up their ears and mutter, 'Legality.' Yet the reward we speak of is not of debt, but of grace. It is not enjoyed with the proud conceit of merit, but with the grateful delight of humility."

David Shibley writes, "Every now and then I run across people who will say, 'Well, I'm not doing this for rewards. It will be reward enough just to be in heaven.' This misses the whole point—and it's bad theology. Heaven is not a reward; it is part of our redemption gift package when we come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Further, to place little value on what heaven says has great value insults the very Lord who offers these rewards."

The Bible states there are many rewards given in heaven to those who were obedient on the earth:

- Psalm 19:11: "And in keeping of them [commandments] there is great reward."
- Psalm 62:12: "For thou renderest to every man according to his work."
- Proverbs 11:18: "But to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward."
- Proverbs 13:13: "But he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded."
- Jeremiah 31:16: "For thy work shall be rewarded."
- Hosea 4:9: "And I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings."

- Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you ... for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven."
- Matthew 6:1, 4: "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. ... And thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."
- Matthew 16:27: "And then he shall reward every man according to his works."
- Mark 9:41: "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward."
- Luke 14:13-14: "But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."
- 1 Corinthians 3:8: "And every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."
- Colossians 3:24: "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."
- Hebrews 11:6: "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."
- Revelation 11:18: "Thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name."
- Revelation 22:12: "And my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

Perhaps one of the greatest rewards we could be given in heaven will be time allowed with Jesus. To be able to walk and talk with Him would be the most precious gift of all.

Could it be that the more time we spend with Him in prayer here, the more time we will have with Him in heaven? It is not that we could ever earn it, but the Bible does say, "He is a

rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). In addition, Galatians 6:7 says, “For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

If we sow time with Jesus here, will we reap more time with Him in heaven? Just a thought!

Bill Wiese is the New York Times *best-selling* author of 23 Minutes in Hell and his new book, What Happens When I Die? He speaks internationally and has appeared on numerous TV and radio shows. He and his wife, Annette, live in Southern California.

How do we keep an eternal perspective during our time on earth? Watch Francis Chan talk about it at .

5 Life-Changing Truths You Should Know About the Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the bedrock of the Christian faith. That is why it has been the target of the most vicious attacks by those who oppose the Christian faith. If the physical resurrection of Jesus can be disproven, then the entire Christian faith comes crashing down. But if the resurrection is true and Jesus Christ is alive today, then at the end of the day, nothing else really matters and He and His cause are worthy of our absolute devotion and faith.

Here are five life-changing truths you should know about the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

1. The Resurrection Is a Historical Fact

A few nights ago, Bill O'Reilly stated that his book *Killing Jesus* does not contain the word *Christ* because, he said, "It [his book] is based on history, not faith." His statement revealed a certain mindset, based in liberal theology, that has divorced the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history. Beginning in the 19th century, and driven by modern skepticism, the propagators of this thinking theorized that the Gospels were written not by contemporary eyewitnesses but by later followers of Jesus who embellished His life with all kinds of mythical stories of miracles and a resurrection.

There thus emerged a false dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith and a quest by many to find the Jesus of history hidden behind the supposed unreliable stories of the Christ of faith in the Gospels. But let's be clear: There is no dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. They are one and the same! The Gospels contain reliable eyewitness accounts of Jesus, His life and His resurrection.

This was the general belief for 1,700 years in the Western world, until the recent advent of modern rationalism and skepticism. Modern rationalistic professors may sit in their stuffy offices indulging in all sorts of speculation about the historicity of the Gospels, but those who have been willing to do the real work of empirical investigation have, again and again, been convinced of the historicity and truthfulness of the gospel account of Jesus and His resurrection.

A Harvard Law Professor Is Convinced

Dr. Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853) was the Royal Professor of Law at Harvard University and one of the principal founders of Harvard Law School. He authored the famous three-volume work *A*

Treatise on the Law of Evidence, which is still considered one of the greatest single authorities on judicial legal procedure. Greenleaf, a nonbeliever, originally set out to disprove the biblical testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believing that a careful examination of the internal witness of the Gospels would reveal the myth at the heart of Christianity.

But after months of carefully examining and cross-examining the testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, this legal scholar came to the conclusion that the witnesses were reliable and that the Resurrection did, in fact, happen. As a result, he became a believer and wrote a book entitled *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice*. Greenleaf concluded that, according to the jurisdiction of legal evidence, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best-supported event in all of ancient history.

A Skeptical Professor and Archaeologist Is Convinced

Sir William Ramsay believed and taught that the New Testament is a second-century document filled with myths and embellishments and not a reliable source of history. He set out to prove this theory by retracing Luke's account of Paul's travels in the book of Acts. He assumed that by carefully examining the places, people, laws and histories mentioned in Acts, he would be able to show all the mistakes and demonstrate with finality that the New Testament does not contain reliable history.

However, after years of archaeological digs and excavations in the cities and locations along Paul's route as recorded in Acts, Ramsay's view of the New Testament was completely changed and he acquired a very high regard for Luke as a historian. He wrote, "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense; in short, this author

should be placed along with the greatest of historians. You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian's and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment."

If Luke was this careful to get his facts right about names, places and dates, can we not be confident that he was also careful to get his facts right concerning the more important things about which he reported, such as the resurrection of Jesus? At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke says that he has thoroughly investigated the matter at hand, including interviews with those who were eyewitnesses of the events about which he is writing. We can be confident that if there had been any smell of conspiracy or hallucination from these eyewitness accounts, Dr. Luke would have detected it.

2. The Resurrection Removes the Fear of Death

"Don't be afraid of death, because I am the Resurrection" were the words I heard at one of the most devastating times of my life. The ministry my wife, Sue, and I had begun shortly after our marriage had died, and we had lost everything, including a place to have our meetings and a place to live. In spite of the loss, I continued meetings with a small group of people in homes because I knew the vision for a congregation and teaching center were from God.

Then I received word from Oklahoma that my brother had been killed in an accident and I had to depart to attend the funeral. Everyone was discouraged, and no one had the motivation to continue the meetings and they ceased. Chris, my mother-in-law, later said, "That was when it all died."

Thank God for the Holy Spirit, for one evening, while in prayer, I sensed the Holy Spirit rising up out of my innermost being, and I began to pray in other tongues. All the time I was praying in the Spirit, I was hearing those words: "Don't be afraid of death, because I am the Resurrection."

I was reminded that this was the word of Jesus to Martha as they stood before the tomb of her brother, Lazarus, and she had stated her theological belief that her brother would live again at the resurrection. Jesus had replied, "I am the Resurrection." I also, at that moment, realized that the resurrection is not just a future event but is personified in the Person of Jesus Christ, and is a present reality in the life of the believer

As Paul said in Philippians 3:10, "[For my determined purpose] is that I may know Him ... and that I may in that same way come to know the power out flowing from His resurrection" (AMP).

A resurrection did occur in our lives and in that ministry. A yielding to God, a determination not to quit, a step of obedience and resurrection power flowed forth. The ministry that came forth was not the same as before, for it came forth in His resurrection power and in ways we could never have planned or strategized.

Perhaps there is some area of your life that you feel has died—a relationship, a dream, a career, a project. Maybe you have suffered the loss of a spouse in death or in divorce. On the eve of this Good Friday, I felt to share with you those words the Lord spoke to me years ago in the midst of death. He said, "Don't be afraid of death, because I am the Resurrection."

3. Resurrection Power Is at Work in You as a Believer

The power that God works in the life of the believer is the very same power by which He raised Jesus from the dead. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 1:15-23, where he prays that the Ephesian believers will be enlightened to know what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe. The English word *toward* is a translation of the Greek preposition *eis*, which means "into" or "in." This mighty power that Paul wants them to know about is directed "into" the believer; or

we could say it is at work “in” the believer. But what kind of power is this?

Paul then makes clear the nature of this power. He says this power is according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:19-20). This resurrection power that is at work in you will make you an overcomer and will strengthen and heal your physical body, as Paul says in Romans 8:11: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal body bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

My friends, you do not need to run here and there looking for some special anointing. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is already at work in you. Believe that, and act like it is true.

4. The Resurrection Ushered in a New Era of Freedom for Women

The Gospel writers are very explicit in noting that it was Mary Magdalene to whom Jesus appeared first after His resurrection. The importance the evangelists attach to this fact indicates it was no accidental occurrence but that Jesus purposely appeared first to Mary Magdalene in order to make an important statement to His followers.

When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, He gave her certain, specific instructions. Matthew 28:10 records His words to Mary to “Go and tell my brethren.” In other words, He sent her on a specific mission defined by the words “Go and tell.” The Greek word *apostolos*, from which we get the English *apostle* simply means “one who is sent” or “one sent on assignment.” Mary, therefore, was a “sent one” and as such received the first apostolic commission from the risen Lord. It is for this reason that, throughout Christian history, Mary has often been referred to as “the apostle to the apostles.”

This commissioning of Mary by Jesus was revolutionary since the Jewish male of this time normally began his day with a prayer that included thanks to God that he was not born a Gentile, a slave or a woman. Women were barred from studying Scripture, and a rabbi considered it beneath his dignity to speak to a woman in public. Neither Jewish nor Roman courts of law would allow the testimony of women.

Jesus challenged this deeply ingrained religious and cultural bias by appearing first to Mary and sending her forth as the first apostolic witness of His resurrection. By appearing first to Mary and giving her the first apostolic commission after His resurrection, Jesus made a clear statement that women would be included in leadership and ministry in His church.

5. The Resurrection Guarantees That Everything Jesus Taught Is True

Jesus taught many things about heaven, hell, eternity, God, the future of the human race and the fact that He would always be with us. He also predicted that He would die and rise again from the dead on the third day. Now, if He did not rise from the dead as predicted, then everything else He said is cast into doubt and question. But if He did rise again on the third day as predicted, then it stands to reason that everything else He taught is true and will come to pass.

He did rise again on the third day, and His resurrection guarantees that everything He promised is true. He will return to this earth again. He will raise from the dead all those who have put their faith in Him. There is a place called heaven prepared for those who love Him and look for His appearing. There is a glorious future for this planet and for all those who trust in Him. His promise to be continually with us and never leave us is validated by His glorious resurrection and expressed so well in the following old hymn:

He lives, He lives,
Christ Jesus lives today
He walks with me and talks with me,
Along the narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart;
You ask me how I know He lives,
He lives within my heart.

Dr. Eddie L. Hyatt is the co-founder and president of Hyatt Int'l Ministries, and his passion is to see the contemporary church return to the New Testament pattern of simplicity, humility and a radical dependence on the Holy Spirit. He is an author and his latest book, *Pursuing Power: How the Quest for Apostolic Authority & Control Has Divided and Damaged the Church*, is available from Amazon (including Kindle) and from his website at

Passover, Good Friday and the First Blood Moon

“I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all. ... I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt” (Ex. 12:12-13).

“Then Moses said ... ‘Go ... slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. ... When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides

of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down'" (vv. 21-23).

"Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7).

"The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31).

What could Passover, Good Friday and the first lunar eclipse of 2014 have in common? Think about it with me.

Passover began at sundown Monday. It is a time set aside by God's people to remember their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Other than creation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there has never been a more dramatic demonstration of God's power than the event we refer to as the Exodus.

Passover remembers the time when the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. When Pharaoh defied God's command to let His people go, his mind had to be changed. So God sent to Egypt a series of plagues one at a time, each giving Pharaoh opportunity to repent of his defiance: the water turned to blood; then frogs, gnats, and flies covered the land, followed by the death of the livestock, boils on men and animals, hail, locusts, and darkness. When Pharaoh hardened his heart against God and refused to let God's people go, the final plague was sent. And it was the worst.

At midnight, God executed His final judgment on Egypt. The angel of death went throughout the land and struck down all the firstborn. From Pharaoh on his throne to the prisoner in the dungeon to the livestock in the barn, the firstborn died. The only ones saved from His judgment were those who placed the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their homes and remained inside, Israelite and Egyptian alike. As a result, Pharaoh repented of his resistance and let God's people go.

But Passover is not only a remembrance of the power of God to save His people from judgment and to set them free from bondage. It is also a beautiful prophetic picture of another event that will be celebrated this week.

Good Friday is a sacred, holy day that commemorates an event that took place 2,000 years ago when Jesus Christ was not just crucified but was sacrificed as God's Lamb on the actual day of Passover. When you and I apply by faith the blood of Jesus shed on the cross to our own hearts and lives, then the judgment of God for our sin passes over us, and we are not only saved from the penalty of sin but saved from the power of sin. We are set free from spiritual bondage.

On this year's Passover, in a unique way, God seems to be putting a sign of His blood on the doorposts of the heavens. Because on that very day, the moon was to turn to "blood" as it entered into a total lunar eclipse. Could God be warning Planet Earth that judgment is coming and giving us opportunity to repent before it does? Could God be reminding you and me that the only salvation from His judgment is to take refuge under the blood of the Lamb?

I can't answer those questions, but I do know one thing. I want to make sure that I have been to the cross, repented of my sin and rebellion against God, and claimed the blood of Jesus as my covering. I want to make sure I am safe—saved from God's judgment whenever it does come, whether it comes this year on earth or at death, when I step into eternity and face a holy God.

This Good Friday, would you thank God for the blood of Jesus by making sure you have applied it to the doorposts of your heart and life?

Anne Graham Lotz, founder of AnGeL ministries, has proclaimed God's Word worldwide for more than 30 years. Her newest book, *Wounded by God's People*, is available at .

Reality: Yeshua Rose From the Dead on a Jewish Holiday

There has been a conspiracy! Whether earthly or in the spirit world, I don't know. But this Sunday, at least in heaven, they will mark the greatest of all the Jewish Holidays—and *it isn't called Easter*.

There is a secret Jewish holiday that no one wants to talk about. Well, maybe I'm being a bit dramatic, but the fact is that Yeshua rose from the dead on a Biblical feast day. If you look in Leviticus 23, verses 10 and 11, it says...

“Tell the people of Israel, ‘After you enter the land I am giving you and harvest its ripe crops, you are to bring a sheaf of the **firstfruits** of your harvest to the cohen, that is the priest. He is to wave the sheaf before Adonai ... the cohen is to wave it on *the day after the Shabbat*” (Lev. 23:10-11).

These verses clearly say that the feast of Firstfruits is on the first Sunday, after the first Saturday, after Passover. Not so fast—the Pharisees and the Sadducees had a disagreement about this. The Pharisees claimed that since Passover itself was a rest day, it was the Sabbath—so Firstfruits would be the day after Passover. However, the Sadducees maintained that the Sabbath was referring to an actual Saturday—not a special Jewish holiday. So Firstfruits would always fall on a Sunday.

Yet, we don't hear much from the Sadducees after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Thus, the pharisaical view became the dominant view in Judaism. In fact today, many Jews confuse this Firstfruits with the Firstfruits during Shavuot (Num. 28:26).

I think the Scriptures are clear that the Sadducees got this one right. How do I know? We'll, we are commanded in the very next passage to count seven Sabbaths from Firstfruits to the feast of Shavuot—or Pentecost.

“From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off 50 days up to the day *after the seventh Sabbath*, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord” (Lev. 15-16).

If Firstfruits did not begin on an actual Sunday (“on the day after the *Shabbat*”), then you could not count off seven Sabbaths. God said that it must be exactly 50 days, ending “the [Sunday] *after the seventh Sabbath*.” In other words, while Passover day is considered to be a day of total rest—a Sabbath—whatever day fell 49 days after that would not necessarily be a Sabbath, as the day of the week would change every year.

Why is this Important?

There is a powerful reason I am sharing this. If the Feast of Firstfruits is on the Sunday after the Saturday after the beginning of Passover, then that means that Yeshua not only died on a Jewish Feast day (Passover), but rose from the dead on the Jewish Feast of *Bikorim*—Firstfruits! Paul understood that Yeshua rose from the dead on the feast of Bikurim (despite being a Pharisee), for he said in his famous discourse on the Resurrection of Yeshua in 1 Corinthians 15:

“But the fact is that the Messiah *has* been raised from the dead, the *firstfruits* of those who have died. For since death came through a man, also the resurrection of the dead has come through a man. For just as in connection with Adam all die, so in connection with the Messiah all will be made alive. But each in his own order: the Messiah is the *firstfruits*; then those who belong to the Messiah, at the time of his coming; then the culmination, when he hands over the Kingdom

to God the Father, after having put an end to every rulership, yes, to every authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:20-24).

Yes, Yeshua—the first among the resurrected sons of God—rose in newness of Life on Bikurim, the feast of Firstfruits. Yet, is it really the greatest of all the Jewish holidays? When you consider that it pointed to the resurrection of the Messiah, I think it is safe to elevate to the top—but that is just one man’s opinion.

This Sunday, make sure to remind your friends (in a spirit of humility) that it is the Jewish Feast of Firstfruits, when Messiah conquered death, hell and the grave!

Ron Cantor is the director of Messiah’s Mandate International in Israel, a Messianic ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Cantor also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of Tiferet Yeshua, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book is Identity Theft. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.

For the original article, visit .

What Makes Jesus’ Blood the Most Powerful Force in All the Universe?

There are many Christians today who longingly reflect on certain periods in history and the amazing Old Testament heroes and conclude, “Wow, those people enjoyed some

incredible experiences in God's presence. I wish I could know Him like ... ,” and you fill in the names.

Moses. David. Daniel. Isaiah. Ezekiel. Abraham. Without a doubt, these individuals experienced the presence of God in extraordinary, miraculous ways. But should we consider these Old Testament encounters the benchmark for what is available to us today? Some believers do. In fact, some of us think that what these “special” Bible times people enjoyed is off-limits to “ordinary” Christians like us in the 21st century. Not true.

Jesus' Blood Has Brought You Into *Better!*

Perhaps you go back further—all the way back to Eden, where Scripture paints this beautiful portrait of man and God walking together in the Garden (Gen. 3:8). Many times, I have heard believers talk about how they long for Eden. I, for one, am guilty of looking back and wishing I had what they did. After all, is there anything that could be better than walking *with* God like Adam and Eve did?

Yes, and it is the blood of Jesus Christ that makes this incredible reality possible for you and me today!

To truly grasp the supernatural power of Jesus' blood, we need to journey back to the Old Testament. The author of Hebrews recognized this, and thus, he did an amazing job at escorting the audience of his day (and us in the 21st century) through the Old Covenant system that was a prophetic foreshadowing of the new reality that Jesus would inaugurate through the Cross (Heb. 10:20). One of the central themes of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus' work at Calvary has brought you and I into a better covenant with better promises. In short, Jesus' blood has brought you into *better!*

Jesus' Blood Has Brought You Into a New Identity

As Christians, we are doctrinally aware that the blood of

Jesus cancels out our sin debt and assigns us a new creation identity—the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21). This act of bloodshed will be celebrated throughout all eternity. Consider that the song of heaven is the song of the Lamb (Rev. 5:11-13). Yes, He will emerge as the conquering King and prevailing Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5). Yes, Jesus eternally wears the victor's crown. Praise God for this!

However, it is significant to note that the song of heaven is the song of the *Lamb* (Rev. 15:3). There is something unparalleled about Jesus' identity as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Good Friday reminds us of this.

So I humbly invite you to behold the Lamb anew today and take a second look at what His precious blood purchased for you. Yes, it made provision to forgive your sins. Yes, it secured you a home in heaven when you leave this world. Yes, it delivered you from the bondage of law, works and religious performance. But on this Good Friday, I want you to consider how this blood ushered you into the very presence of God—and ultimately, brought His holy presence into you!

Jesus' Blood Has Brought God's Presence Into You!

Consider that under the Old Covenant, one wrong move in God's presence would mean certain and sudden death. In fact, the high priest who served in the Holy of Holies—the place in the tabernacle where the manifest presence of God dwelt—was actually prepped for the possibility of death in the presence. If the high priest did not adhere exactly to the protocol of ministering in the presence, he would die. Why? Because sinful human flesh must meet God's holy specifications in order to come before His presence. Reflect on this word—*before*.

Most certainly, one of the high honors of Old Covenant ministry was to come before the divine presence of God. In a way, this shadow of divine communion reflected the longing for

Eden being satisfied in part—mankind being able to walk with God once again.

While we celebrate and study what God did in the Old Testament, we must stop longing for what happened back then and start evaluating whether or not we are experiencing our better New Covenant inheritance. Are we enjoying the extraordinary dimension of intimacy with God that the blood of Jesus purchased for us?

In the Old Covenant, priests approached before God—this was as close as they could get. Now, because of the Jesus' blood, this very glory of God has been brought into us!

Jesus' Blood Has Brought You Into a Covenant of Better Things

My occasional drawback when studying the Bible is the tendency to skim right over passages that my mind has trouble making sense of. Rather than running from these truths, I pray that we would make ourselves uncomfortable as we ask the Holy Spirit to bring our level of understanding up rather than us trying to bring God's Word down to our human comprehension. Jesus' blood really is as glorious and as powerful as Scripture describes!

Consider these passages:

"Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:22).

"But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (Heb. 8:6).

"To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:24).

What is the repeated word? *Better*.

The blood of Jesus is better, and it has ushered us into

greater realities than our minds can safely wrap around. I pray that on this Good Friday we would experience a *better* revelation of Jesus' precious, powerful blood.

The power of Jesus' blood brought us into a better reality than Eden. In Eden, God walked with man. Because of Jesus, God lives *in* man through the Holy Spirit (John 14:17).

The power of Jesus' blood brought us into a better glory than the Old Covenant. In the Old Covenant, priests could die because of their behavior in the presence; because of Jesus' behavior, we can live as a people inhabited by God's presence (2 Cor. 3).

The power of Jesus' blood made it possible for our tent of human flesh, stained by sin in the Garden, to become a fit dwelling place for the holy presence (1 Cor. 6:19).

Jesus' Blood Made You Fit to Be God's House on Earth!

This absolutely overwhelms me. The presence of the Genesis 1:1 God (who spoke the worlds into existence!) now resides in our mortal, human flesh. Reflect on it even further ...

The blood of Jesus made it possible for our flesh to remain intact while housing the eternal, immortal, indescribable glory of God. The Holy Spirit is not a second-class citizen. He is not some lesser Person of the Trinity. He is God Almighty, and it is He who has come to live in you!

I invite you to make this your Good Friday meditation this year. The Holy Spirit lives within you. This means that God, the creator and sustainer of all things, has come to take up residence in your body. There is no closer He can come than inside of you! And get this—His presence has not come to visit, but to remain. Not for a season. Not while you're good enough, when you become perfect or when you finally have it all together. This reality is not a temporary, Old Testament deal where the Holy Spirit comes upon you for a season or a

task, then leaves. No. Jesus said that the Spirit would abide with you forever (John 14:16).

The blood of Jesus made it possible for you to be indwelt by God Himself. Truly, this is a testimony of the power of Jesus' blood and what makes it the most powerful force in all of the universe.

The holy presence of God that no temple or tabernacle could truly contain now resides in your tent of redeemed flesh and blood. The glory that Moses could only behold in part, lest he be completely vaporized, now inhabits your mortal frame. Bricks and mortar were never God's ultimate design—they simply gave us a prophetic picture for the glorious house that Jesus would lay down his life to build: a people filled with God that see God's glory cover the earth as the water covers the sea!

Larry Sparks is the author of *Breakthrough Healing* (Destiny Image, 2014). He is a conference speaker, blogger, columnist and host of the weekly radio program *Voice of Destiny* (). Featured in *Charisma* magazine and on CBN's *Spiritual Gifts* webcast, Larry is also founder of *Equip Culture*—a ministry that equips believers with the tools and resources to live victoriously through the supernatural power of God. Subscribe to his blog at [larryvsparks.com](#). Follow him on Twitter @LarryVSparks.

Can You Escape the Food Trap?

Millions of people are hooked, emotionally dependent on food. I remember when it finally hit me that I was addicted to it. Very honestly, it was very hard for me to say, "I am addicted to food."

Food addiction is a habit that you develop over many years. You have thoughts and behaviors connected to this habit. I made a decision that I was never going to try the world's way of dieting again and asked the Lord for help in this area of my life.

I heard that still, small voice say, "Break the habit!" I didn't realize how hard that was going to be. Two years later, however, the habit is gone and I have lost 80 pounds, which I do not plan to find.

I have "tasted and seen that the Lord is good" (See Psalm 34:8). The food trap has nothing to do with weight—whether you are overweight or underweight. The food trap is when you allow food to be an emotional pickup. You love the way it tastes, how it makes you feel, but hate what it does to your body and how it controls you.

When you eat for emotional pickup, it then becomes the weight that so easily ensnares you!

"...Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1 nkjv).

Food is a natural source for deception and dependency. We must have food to survive and thrive; we are physically dependent on food. God created us to need food and to enjoy the taste of food. Food becomes a trap when it is used as a substitute for comfort. It becomes a rollercoaster ride of emotions, a love-hate relationship. Its obsession fills your thoughts and actions and robs you of your self-esteem, holds you captive and has life-damaging consequences. How much power have you given food over you?

Habits can be broken and as a child of God we have a Helper, the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). Job said, *"...I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12 nkjv).* Hosea 4:6 tells us, *"My people are destroyed for lack*

of knowledge ... ”

We need to start by humbling ourselves, admitting that we can't do it alone and that we need God's help. Ask the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your understanding. Study nutrition and how different foods affect your body and control that “feel good” part of the brain. Remember, you are breaking a habit that has taken years to form, so rest in the Lord, be faithful and diligent in your relationship with God, be transformed by renewing your mind, and your body will follow. As the food habit is broken, the weight falls away!

Food has served the devil well since the Garden of Eden when he used food as a temptation for the fall of mankind. Why should we be surprised he is still using food today to keep the child of God from walking in the joy and peace that belong to him or her through Jesus Christ?

Until you face the fact that addictions are rooted in a spiritual problem, you will stay on the roller coaster fighting the battle of the bulge. There is a power greater than your taste buds!

After I surrendered my food addiction causing my weight problem to God, He gave me a battle plan that started on the inside and worked 80 pounds from my body!

“‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12 esv).

Joyce Tilney is author of *Why Diets Don't Work—Food Is not the Problem*. Visit for more information about her walk in breaking this addiction. Follow her on Facebook; to share your extraordinary moments with God in your journey to freedom! Joyce is founder of Women of God Ministries, teaching women today, from women of yesterday. Visit: for more information.

Should Christians Celebrate Passover?

For Jews and Christians, the Passover season is a special time for reflection on the rich spiritual truths contained within this remarkable holiday. Indeed, we can all observe the command to remember the incredible Israelite deliverance from bondage in Egypt.

For Christians, the events of a momentous Passover some 15 centuries later have given added meaning to this holiday, so that the truths of the first are reinforced in the latter. Deliverance from Pharaoh's taskmasters became freedom from slavery to sin. The blood of a lamb on the doorposts became a typology of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

Yet the parallels between Pesach and Easter were lost for centuries to most Christians when the early church fathers deliberately severed our faith from its Jewish roots. In time, this hostility to Judaism produced vicious blood libels against Jews at Passover.

Today, however, multitudes of Christians are rediscovering our Hebraic roots. Indeed, *Time* magazine recently identified growing Christian interest in our faith's Jewish heritage as one of the 10 top trends of our day.

Even respected Jewish scholars have started joining Christian theologians in rediscovering the "Jewishness" of Jesus and the Hebraic origins of Christianity. One notable expert in this regard is the late Prof. David Flusser of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, considered the leading Orthodox Jewish expert on the Second Temple era and Early Christianity.

Flusser placed Jesus within the Pharasaic tradition and viewed Him as among the great sages of his time, such as Hillel and Ben-Shammai. But Flusser concluded that the Galilean preacher went boldly beyond the classic Judaism of that day, for instance by proclaiming the advent of the kingdom of God and espousing a radical ethic of loving one's enemy.

As a result of such groundbreaking scholarship, the Feast of Passover is one occasion when the lineage and cultural identity of Jesus as a "son of the covenant" now holds so much more meaning for Christians. In fact, nothing reattaches Christians to their Jewish roots faster than realizing the Last Supper was actually a Passover seder meal being led by a Jewish rabbi.

Thus, we can now see in the Gospel narratives just how closely Jesus held to Jewish traditions in presiding over the Passover meal with His disciples—or rather, His *talmidim*.

For instance, He followed the custom then developing in first-century Judaism of serving four cups of wine at the Passover meal to mirror the four great "I wills" of Exodus 6:6-7. When Jesus took the third cup—considered the "cup of redemption"—He used it to seal a new covenant with His followers.

Interestingly, He also used customary Jewish words of betrothal at that same moment, promising to go build them all mansions in His Father's house and to come back for them one day as a bridegroom for His bride (John 14:2-3).

In serving them wine and unleavened bread, Jesus further played off the command to remember the Passover by instructing His disciples to always partake of it "in remembrance of [Him]."

Then one of the most extraordinary moments of the Last Supper came when He washed the feet of His disciples.

Like other great rabbis of His day, Jesus had developed a

unique preaching style by telling parables, many of which are universally known to this day, such as the parables of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son. But He was different in the way He also practiced what He preached. In washing the feet of His disciples, the rabbi Jesus taught by deed and not just words what it means to be a servant in His kingdom (John 13:14-15).

And finally, Jesus demonstrated tremendous grace that evening when He gave the place of the guest of honor to His immediate left to Judas, even though He knew this was the one about to betray Him. What a difference it would have made down through history if Christians had understood that Jesus was never bitter toward Judas.

Sadly, it is too late to change that history. But we are witnessing a sea change in Christian attitudes towards the Jewish people today as we understand better the Jewish matrix of our faith. This historic shift is helping to build Christian support for an embattled Israel at a critical hour. And just as importantly, it is shielding multitudes of Christians against modern-day blood libels and other anti-Semitic lies now being hurled at the Jewish state.

David Parsons *is an ordained minister who serves as media director for the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem ()*.