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RESURRECTED SONS

By Duane V. Maxey

"This my son was dead, and is alive again.." (Luke 15:24).

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INTRODUCTION

Both actually and typically, various resurrected sons are mentioned in the Bible -- sons of whom their father or mother could actually, or in effect say, "This my son was dead, and is alive again." In presenting these cases, I shall endeavor to illustrate from each something relative to Christ and His Salvation.

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01 -- THE SOVEREIGN SON -- JESUS

First, and foremost, I would mention the Only Begotten Son of God as a Son Who "was dead, and is alive again." When John the Revelator saw Him standing amidst the seven candlesticks, we read in Rev. 1:17-18 "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: **I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.**"

To trembling devils and unbelieving men, the crucified Jesus is even now by God's Word "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). However, the hour fast approaches when by the Revelation of His Returning Son, God shall in effect declare visibly to the assembled universe: "THIS MY SON WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE AGAIN"!

In that awesome hour, none will doubt the resurrection of Christ, nor will any dispute his Deity and Sovereign Authority, "Because he [God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

While devils quake and wicked men call for the rocks to fall upon them to hide them from Christ's face, "then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the LORD: for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth: [and] He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth" (Psa. 96:12-13). The saints and every part of God's creation unsullied by sin will in that hour realize and rejoice that their eternal redemption has come, but when by His Returning Revelation God displays to evil men and devils that "THIS MY SON WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE AGAIN" they shall all be dumb-struck by their imminent doom and damnation.

Can we not see in Psalm 98:8--99:3 both the great joy and great awe that shall strike the earth at the Return of the resurrected Son of God?: "Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together before the LORD; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity. The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved. The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people. Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy."

After St. Paul preached in Acts 17:31, quoted above, concerning the coming Judgment by the resurrected Christ, we read in Acts 17:32: "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked," but none will mock about it on the Day of the Lord! Evil men will be "shocked" and "rocked" but Jesus will not be "mocked" when as the resurrected Son of God He commences to Judge the World from His Great White Throne. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mat 11:15).

Let us now consider others in the Bible of whom it could be said, "This my son was dead, and is alive again.."

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02 -- THE SACRIFICED SON -- ISAAC

In effect, Isaac was a resurrected son. In obedience to the Divine command Abraham took his beloved son Isaac to one of the mountains in the land of Moriah to offer him there, a slain sacrifice to the Lord, and, when "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son" (Gen. 22:10), nothing would have stopped him from ending Isaac's life but that second Divine command, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad" (Gen. 22:12).

Commenting on these dramatic events, Heb. 11:17-19 tells us: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

In the mind of Abraham, when he descended from that sacrificial mount, he could well have said to himself: "This my son was dead, and is alive again"! The whole story is a beautiful picture of the sacrificial death of God's only, and beloved Son, Jesus Christ. In the foreshadowing event, God spared Abraham's son, but in the fulfillment of that dramatic type, the Word tells us that God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32).

For Isaac, there was a substitute, but for Jesus no such substitute was available. His prayer, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39) was a prayer impossible for His Father to answer, for there was "none other name under heaven given among men, whereby [a lost world could] be saved" (Acts 4:12). But we should not say that it was absolutely impossible for God to answer that prayer. Jesus' statement in Matthew 26:53 suggests otherwise: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" But it WAS impossible for God to let the cup of death pass from Jesus and still provide salvation for a lost world, and Christ's statement in Matthew 26:54 recognizes that fact: "But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" At Calvary, then, God spared not His own Son, and Christ spared not himself in becoming "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

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03 -- THE SOLD BUT SENT SON -- JOSEPH

In the mind of Jacob, for years his beloved son Joseph was dead, the victim of a ravenous beast. Then came the astonishing message recorded in Gen. 45:26: "Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not."

Finally, however, as the convinced old father made his way toward the deeply moving and dramatic reunion with the son whom he had long considered dead, "Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive" (Gen. 46:29-30).

Once again, as had been the case with Abraham, Jacob might well have thought to himself, "This my son was dead, and is alive again"! -- and again we see another beautiful type of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Joseph had been sold for twenty pieces of silver by his murderous brethren. Jesus' murderous brethren bought His betrayal by Judas for thirty pieces of silver.

When Joseph had revealed his identity to his brethren, he told them: "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Gen. 45:7). His cruel brethren had SOLD him, but God had thereby SENT him to bring about a great deliverance for all of Israel's household. Later, in quieting the fears of his guilty brethren Joseph said to them: "As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

Thus too, it was with Jesus: He was SOLD by Judas, but SENT to the cross by God to bring about a far better and greater salvation -- a deliverance not just for one family, but for the

entire world, and a deliverance not just for time, but for eternity! As for the devil and all guilty of the death of Christ, they intended it for evil, but God "meant it unto good, as it is this day" for all who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus. How ironic! How marvelous! -- that God so often turns the most vicious acts of satan into the most precious achievements of His grace!

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04 -- THE SORELY SICKENED SON OF THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

During the draught prayed down by Elijah, God instructed him: "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee" (1 Kings 17:9). Every student of the Bible knows the story of how God miraculously supplied the needs of Elijah, the widow, and her son -- all three -- when the woman put first things first: "She went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days" (1 Kings 17:15).

What a miracle that was! -- but "it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" (1 Kings 17:17).

Then came an even greater miracle than supplying food to keep a starving son alive -- the miracle that brought that same son, sickened unto death, back to life!: After her son died and she gave the dead boy into the prophet's hands, we read that "the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth" (1 Kings 17:22-23).

Happily, the sorrowing widow saw that "this my son was dead, and is alive again." However, for a while it had appeared, even to Elijah himself, that God had done wrong, and prior to the miraculous resurrection the prophet "cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" (1 Kings 17:20).

One lesson we can learn from this story is:-- **EVEN WHEN GOD APPEARS TO MEN TO BE DOING WRONG, HE IS DOING RIGHT!** When a loved one dies, and great sorrow has struck the soul, the grieving ones and the sympathizing ones must still realize that **GOD IS TOO GOOD TO DO WRONG, AND TOO WISE TO MAKE A MISTAKE!**

The misinterpretation of the reason for her son's death by both the widow and the prophet is strikingly similar to that of the grieving Martha, who said to Jesus: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21) -- the inference being, "Lord, you waited too long! You did the wrong thing by not coming sooner and thus letting my brother die!" Let me put Martha's complaint in even stronger, and modern terminology: "**LORD, YOU REALLY MESSED UP THIS TIME! -- AND NOW IT IS TOO LATE FOR YOU TO DO ANYTHING!**"

The following is roughly as I recall the story. I heard of a young woman who felt that she had prayed through that God was going to heal her cancer-stricken father-in-law, but instead, he died! Whereupon, the distraught intercessor queried the Lord with: "Lord, You said you were going to heal him! -- and he died!" The Lord then told her, "I HAVE healed him!" -- and indeed He WAS healed, and that eternally -- for her father-in-law was a saint of God, and now dwells where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

God does no wrong and makes no mistakes, and often the greatest healing He can bestow is that which He brings by taking one "across that ebbing tide which has no flow," into the eternal bliss of heaven. Happy indeed was the widow of Zarephath when in this life she knew that "this my son was dead, and is alive again," but far greater her joy if in heaven she has already seen, or shall see, that "this my son was dead forever to earth, but is alive forevermore in heaven"! Who can dispute that "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance" (1 Tim. 4:9).

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05 -- THE SUDDENLY STRICKEN SON OF THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN

This story is about a miracle during the harvest. If you know your Bible well, you recall how a certain Shunammite woman and her husband built a "prophet's chamber" in their dwelling where they graciously entertained Elisha and his attendant, Gehazi from time to time when they were in that area. And, you remember how through Elisha God rewarded this hitherto childless Shunammite woman with a son.

Then, some years later, during harvest-time, "when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died" (2 Kings 4:18-20).

Let me here make a spiritual application:-- the way in which spiritual resurrection does and does not come about during the Lord's Harvest.

After learning of the boy's sudden death, Elijah gave these urgent instructions to Gehazi: "Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child" (2 Kings 4:29). But, while necessary and good in the spiritual harvest, a sense of urgency and immediate action are sometimes not enough, for after following Elisha's instructions to the letter, Gehazi returned with the report: "The child is not awaked" (2 Kings 4:31).

What was necessary in this case beyond urgency was action that was both PERSONAL and PERSISTENT. The miracle of spiritual resurrections during Christ's Harvest do not come through those who do nothing more than delegate action to others! A man may be the Pastor, a District Leader, a General Superintendent, an Arch-Bishop, or a Pope -- but if he does nothing more than give orders to others to go out there and do this or that to bring about miraculous spiritual resurrections, then often it is highly unlikely that anything will occur.

Yes, chains of command are necessary in church organizations, but too often top leaders are not "hands-on" workers in the harvest, and are content to delegate all of the close-up personal work to those beneath them. To Elisha's credit, it should be noted that he fully intended a personal follow-up in this case and was on his way when he delegated Gehazi's action. But, a second-hand ministry here did not do the job. The necessary action was akin to the spirit of Ezekiel's statement, who said, "I sat where they sat" (Ezek. 3:15). Elijah had to do some PERSONAL and PERSISTENT work before the miracle occurred:

"He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes" (2 Kings 4:33-35).

Here we see Personal Work of the sort that cannot get closer up! Elijah did not concern himself about "catching" whatever disease may have killed the boy -- he got up close enough to be exposed to the boy's effluvia and whatever bugs he might have had! His actions are not typical of a Church or Christian Worker that insists on always staying at arm's length and far-removed from a sin-sickened and spiritually dead world, with such an over-concern about "catching" their bugs that nothing can be done to bring about spiritual resurrections in Christ's Harvest!

When Christ said in Matthew 25:36, "I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me," I venture to say He was including the spiritual application as well: "I was spiritually sick, and ye visited me: I was spiritually in prison, and ye came onto me." Jesus speaks here of the type of close-up personal work that is often necessary in order to bring about the spiritual resurrection of needy souls.

It is true that Christian Personal Workers cannot back their vehicle down into the same ditch as those who are stuck therein and expect to pull them out, but there is an area where Christ expects, and even demands, the sort of going into all the world that takes the Personal Worker into close-up encounters with those who are spiritually dead and who desperately need a spiritual resurrection.

In such work, it is inevitable that there ARE some risks involved, but in Elisha's close contact with the dead son of the Shunammite he had such spiritual vigor in his bones that he was virtually immune from whatever infection he might have contracted when he was on that mission! Indeed, his old bones had such an anti-death power within them that long after those bones had lain in Elisha's grave a dead man sprang to life when his body touched them! (2 Kings 13:21).

Often it is more inward spiritual INSULATION that the Church should have instead of more spiritual ISOLATION from those who need their close-up, spiritually life-giving contact. More of the former and less of the latter sometimes might produce many more spiritual revivals in Christ's Harvest.

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06 -- THE SOLE SON OF THE WIDOW OF NAIN

"And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people" (Luke 7:11-16).

Once again in this story we see how a life-giving miracle was performed by personal contact. The sight of this sad funeral procession touched the heart of Christ so much that He touched the bier, stopped the funeral, raised the dead son from death, and brought great joy into the heart of that mother who realized, "This my son was dead, and now suddenly HE IS ALIVE AGAIN!"

The fear of God fell when that dead son rose -- "and began to speak"! Likewise, yet today when Jesus is moved, touches and spiritually resurrects one who is dead in trespasses and sins, suddenly ending that soul's journey along the doomed path of sin, and instantly causing him (or her) to "begin to speaking" aloud the praises of Christ -- the fear of God will fall, and folks will say, "That God hath visited his people"!

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07 -- THE SIN-CONFESSING PRODIGAL SON

A number of accurate monikers could be attached to the Prodigal Son, whose story is found in Luke 15:11-32.

We might call him the SELFISH SON, for he was more interested at first in "the portion of goods that falleth to ME" than he was in what good he could contribute to his father and family by working hard toward their mutual benefit.

We might call him the STRAYING SON, for soon after gathering together all that his greedy hands could acquire, he "took his journey into a far country," removing himself from all contact with his loving father and daily saddening his heart.

We could also call him the THE SPENDTHRIFT SON or SQUANDERING SON (terms quite synonymous with the most commonly used moniker, PRODIGAL SON), for in that far country he foolishly "wasted" his entire "substance".

We could label him as THE SINFUL SON, for he engaged in "riotous living" that disregarded all of the restrictions of "righteous living" and that indulged passions and pleasures without restraint.

We could next name him the SOCIALLY ABANDONED SON, for when he had no more money he soon discovered that he also had no more friends. When he "began to be in want" he also found that "no man gave unto him." His father had given and given and given to him, but now that he was broke and famine had struck he found not one person who was willing to give him anything! His plight was like that of the Psalmist who said: "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (Psa. 142:4).

We could disdainfully call him the SWINE-FEEDING AND STARVING SON. In his plight he started to do what no upright son of Jacob would ever do, he "joined himself to a citizen of that country; [who] sent him into his fields to feed swine. And [the famished prodigal] would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat." The son of a father who had always well-provided for him had now become like one today who scrounges in the garbage dumpsters behind grocery stores for some digestible, though detestable, morsel to eat.

We might next think of him as the SOBERED AND SELF-FACING SON, who finally "came to himself, [and] said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!"

We may next see him as the SORRY AND SEEKING SON, who said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" -- and "he arose, and came to his father."

We learn next that he was the SEEN AND SWIFTLY-EMBRACED SON, for "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

Then it is that we may call him the SIN-CONFESSING SON, who no doubt with both shame and tears admitted to his loving father, "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

When the Prodigal resolved to make this confession while still back in the hog-pen, he purposed to add to it the request, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." But the forgiving father cut short his penitent son's confession! He was not interested in having him back as an hired servant, but as a resurrected and fully restored son!

How like Jesus this is! Many times before the broken and sobbing penitent has finished saying all he, or she, intends to say in their prayer, he breaks in upon them with the bright assurance of His complete forgiveness and with the spiritually resurrecting power of the new birth! The Prodigal's father wanted his home-coming and his heart-felt penitence more than he wanted his son's hard work! -- his love, more than his labor.

When a deeply penitent, heart-broken sinner sobs his way back to God, the Heavenly Father does not say, "This my SERVANT was absent, and is returned to the job!" No, like the Prodigal's loving father He says, "This my SON was dead, and is alive again!" He does not order, "Bring forth the best tools and put him to work! He owes me a lot of back time and he had better earn his keep from henceforth!"

No, God isn't interested in creating hireling servants! When the returned sinner is fully penitent, the Forgiving Heavenly Father says as it were, "Bring forth the best experience of salvation and put it in his heart, plant the assurance of his restoration to my family indelibly into his consciousness, and cause his spiritual feet to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace! Bring hither the angelic choir to peel forth into his ears the sweet songs of deliverance. Load the table with the most delectable spiritual food this hungry soul has ever tasted! Then, LET US EAT AND BE MERRY, FOR THIS MY SON WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE AGAIN; HE WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND!"

Should one of His professed, but legalistic sons complain that such carryings-on are out of place, especially when done so quickly and so generously, the Heavenly Father's reply is always: "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

As the returned, sobbing, and totally penitent Prodigal was warmly, quickly, and enthusiastically raised into "newness of life" by his forgiving father, "even so in Christ shall all be made alive" by Him Who is "able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 15:22; Heb. 7:25).

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THE END