

## Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

April 11, 2017

You may know that today is the Passover Celebration for our Jewish friends. And as we make our way through the Christian "Holy Week," one of the best ways to observe these days is to re-read the New Testament book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews does a magnificent job of putting this week into eternal perspective.

And here are a few other vignettes for pondering as we make our way to the Cross and the Empty Tomb (emphasis added):



### Robert Webber was a well-known professor of Worship Arts:

I was traveling on a plane from San Francisco to Los Angeles a few years ago. I was sitting next to the window, reading a Christian book. The man next to me, obviously from the Eastern hemisphere, asked, "Are you a religious man?" "Well, yes," I said. "I am too," he responded. We began talking about religion. In the middle of the conversation I asked, "Can you give me a one-liner that captures the essence of your faith?" "Well, yes," he said. "We are all part of the problem, and we are all part of the solution."

We talked about his one-liner, a statement I felt was very helpful. After a while I said, "Would you like a one-liner that captures the Christian faith?"

"Sure," he responded.

**"We are all part of the problem, but there is only one man who is the solution. His name is Jesus."**<sup>1</sup>

### Mike Silva is a pastor:

Most people would be a little embarrassed to have unexpected company when their house was a mess. My family was staying at a hotel in Nigeria, West Africa, one time when I heard a knock on the door. I opened it and found a smiling Nigerian gentleman ready to clean our room.

I was so embarrassed! My family had travel bags, curling irons, and crumpled clothing sprawled across our unmade beds. Wet towels were all over the bathroom floor. I apologized profusely, but the young man replied graciously, "**No problem, sir. For this reason I have come, to put your things in order.**"

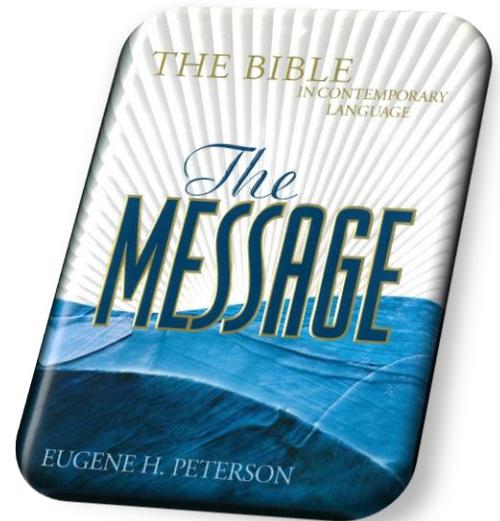
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<sup>1</sup> Robert Webber, *Who Gets to Narrate the World?* (IVP, 2008), p. 26.

The Bible says this is exactly what Jesus Christ came to do for us. To put our lives in order! He doesn't demand that we first straighten up our mess. Instead, He offers to clean up for us.<sup>2</sup>

**Eugene Peterson is a pastor and the translator of *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible:**

- The do-it-yourself, self-help culture of North America has so thoroughly permeated our imaginations that we don't give much sustained attention to the biggest thing of all: resurrection. And the reason we don't give much attention to it is because the Resurrection is not something we can use or manipulate or control or improve on. It is interesting that the world has had very little success in commercializing Easter, turning it into a commodity, the way it has Christmas. If we can't, as we say, "get a handle on it," and use it, we soon lose interest. **But resurrection is not available for our use; it is exclusively God's operation.**<sup>3</sup>



- There is a text for [finding Christ in daily events] in St. Mark's Gospel: "*He has risen, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him as he told you*" (16:6-7). In every visit, every meeting I attend, every appointment I keep, I have been anticipated. The risen Christ got there ahead of me. The risen Christ is in that room already. What is he doing? What is he saying? What is going on?

In order to fix the implications of that text in my vocation, I have taken to quoting it before every visit or meeting: "He is risen. He is going before you to 1020 Emmorton Road; there you will see him, as he told you." Later in the day it will be, "**He is risen. He is going before you to St. Joseph's Hospital; there you will see him, as he told you.**" When I arrive and enter the room I am not so much wondering what I am going to do or say that will be pastoral as I am alert and observant for what the risen Christ has been doing or saying.<sup>4</sup>

**Timothy George is the Dean of the Beeson Divinity School at Samford University:**

As a capstone to his lifelong interest in the central texts of the Christian faith, Jaroslav Pelikan edited (with Valerie Hotchkiss) what could only be called a second magnum opus: *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, a four-volume critical edition with a one-volume historical and theological guide called simply *Credo*.

<sup>2</sup> Mike Silva, *Would You Like Fries With That?* (Word Publishing, 2005), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Eerdmans, 2005), p. 232.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994).

Judaism has its Shema and Islam its shahada, but Christians, responding to Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" have produced literally thousands of statements of faith across the centuries.

Pelikan's collection includes several hundred of these, among them the Maasai Creed. This creed Africanizes Christianity by declaring that **Jesus "was always on safari doing good."** It also declares that **after Jesus had been "tortured and nailed hands and feet to a cross, and died, he lay buried in the grave, but the hyenas did not touch him, and on the third day, he rose from the grave. He ascended unto the skies. He is the Lord."**



This creed was brought to Pelikan's attention by one of his students, a woman who had been a member of a religious order working in a hospital in East Nigeria. Pelikan commented on his reaction to this text: "And so she brought it to me, and I just got shivers. **Just the thought, you know, the hyenas did not touch him, and the act of defiance—God lives even in spite of the hyenas.**"<sup>5</sup>

#### **A. N. Wilson is a British Christian philosopher:**

Early in his career, many had hoped A. N. Wilson, a brilliant philosopher, would become the next C. S. Lewis. But as a young man, he began to wonder how much of the Easter story he accepted. By his thirties, he had lost all religious belief and publicly repudiated his Christian faith, becoming an atheist.

He soon embraced the role of a harsh, cynical critic of Christianity and any faith in God at all. At one point he even wrote a book claiming Jesus was a failed messianic prophet (2004's *Jesus*). But on the Saturday before Easter in 2009, he wrote a shocking piece for London's prestigious newspaper, *The Daily Mail*, in which he shared his experience of participating in a Palm Sunday service. He writes:

"When I took part in the procession last Sunday and heard the Gospel being chanted, I assented to it with complete simplicity. My own return to faith has surprised no one more than myself. Why did I return to it? Partially, perhaps it is no more than the confidence I have gained with age. Rather than being cowed by them, I relish the notion that, by asserting a belief in the risen Christ, I am defying all the liberal clever-clogs on the block. . . .

"But there is more to it than that. My belief has come about in large measure because of the lives and examples of people I have known—not the famous, not saints, but friends and relations who have lived, and faced death, in the light of the Resurrection story, or in the quiet acceptance that they have a future after they die. . . .

"Sadly, [the secularists] have all but accepted that only stupid people actually believe in Christianity, and that the few intelligent people left in the churches are there only for

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy George, "Delighted by Doctrine," *Christian History & Biography* (Summer, 2006).

the music or believe it all in some symbolic or contorted way which, when examined, turns out not to be belief after all. As a matter of fact, I am sure the opposite is the case and that materialist atheism is not merely an arid creed, but totally irrational.

“Materialist atheism says we are just a collection of chemicals. It has no answer whatsoever to the question of how we should be capable of love or heroism or poetry if we are simply animated pieces of meat. **The Resurrection, which proclaims that matter and spirit are mysteriously conjoined, is the ultimate key to who we are.** It confronts us with an extraordinarily haunting story. J. S. Bach believed the story, and set it to music. Most of the greatest writers and thinkers of the past 1,500 years have believed it. But an even stronger argument is the way that Christian faith transforms individual lives—the lives of the men and women with whom you mingle on a daily basis, the man, woman, or child next to you in church tomorrow morning.”<sup>6</sup>

Joy-full Eastertide to you!!

Dave



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<sup>6</sup> A. N. Wilson, “Religion of Hatred: Why We Should No Longer be Cowed by the Chattering Classes Ruling Britain Who Sneer at Christianity,” *U.N. Daily Mail* (4-11-09).