

April 5, 2015

## THE BEST ECLIPSE EVER

1 Peter 1:3

### INTRODUCTION

As you know, Carissa and Michael live in the town of Meridian, Mississippi. Michael is a flight instructor at Meridian Naval Air Station where he teaches new Navy and Marine Aviators how to fly a jet as they prepare to become fighter pilots. Meridian is not tiny as it has a population of 40,000, but in many ways it is awfully limited. Carissa has had some interesting experiences adapting to a town that has a very different culture from her Southern California background. She has been writing a blog about the new experience of living in this town. It's pretty funny stuff. She wrote that the downtown looks like something out of a horror story. She said around downtown there are "what I assume to be historical homes...but they really do look like something out of a slasher movie, complete with peeling paint, broken windows, and trash strewn lawns." She went on to say, "every other building downtown is either abandoned, condemned, about to be condemned or so frighteningly decrepit only the very brave will enter it."

The terrain around Meridian is, for the most part, as flat as a pancake and covered with forests. Driving there is like driving through a tree tunnel in Carissa's words. It is a several hour drive from the Gulf of Mexico and hundreds of miles from any beach that actually has surf. The people are also interesting. While we were visiting them last summer Carissa had an ear infection and had to see a doctor. Laurie went with her. While they were in the waiting room they encountered a young woman, probably in her late teens, who looked at Carissa and asked, "Are you a professional surfer?" It was so unlikely, so random that it was hilarious.

In case you are wondering, both Carissa and Michael, though they are enjoying their lives there, do not love Meridian and are hoping to return to southern California. What makes their stay there most bearable for them is that they have hope. Michael will be assigned there for 2 more years and then they will be getting out. Hope makes them able to make the best of the situation. It keeps them from being resigned and unhappy. Hope makes the difference for them. It makes the difference for all of us. 1 Peter 1:3 says hope is possible for us all.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,

## EXPOSITION

### THE RESURRECTION IS THE SOURCE

1. Peter claimed that he and anyone who puts faith in Jesus has hope “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Peter believed that Jesus actually died and rose from the dead. He claimed it actually happened, and that the resurrection was the thing that gives hope.
2. Who could believe a man rose from the dead? Do you know anyone who died and came back to life? When people die it’s game over. Death is a one way street. And yet Peter insisted that there was a huge exception. In the case of Jesus of Nazareth it wasn’t game over. Jesus staged the most shocking come back of all time, coming back to life after being dead. He did not merely have a near death experience, or as Miracle Max said in *The Princess Bride*, he wasn’t mostly dead. He was totally flatlined. He was thoroughly dead, but on the third day he was alive once more.
3. But why should we believe Peter’s claim? After all, he was an ancient person who lived in a superstitious age. On top of that he was one of Jesus’ most loyal followers. He’s hardly an objective source of information. That is all true, but no matter what you believe you have to admit that something remarkable happened back in the first century. How was it that Jesus died, and within weeks of his death suddenly he had thousands of followers, far more than he had when he was alive? And how was it that the movement kept growing, despite brutal opposition and persecution, until it changed the course of history? Something radically dramatic caused that to happen. Otherwise there is no explanation for that movement.
4. Historians affirm that while we like to think of ancient people as superstitious in fact they viewed the idea of someone rising from the dead as absurd and impossible. So they were not prone to buy such tales. Yet the Bible insists that many did believe Jesus walked out of his tomb alive. What alternatives are there to Peter’s claim that Jesus came back to life? There are two possibilities that make some sense. The first is that Peter and his buddies cooked up a story about Jesus rising from his grave, in other words they lied. Maybe they just wanted to believe it so badly that somebody caught a glimpse of a person in a crowd who looked like Jesus and claimed it was him, sort of like people who are sure they saw Elvis at a gas station in Montana. Once one person said it everybody jumped on the bandwagon. Yeah, me too, I saw him too. He’s alive! The other

- possibility is that the resurrection story was actually a legend that grew over time. Peter and the others never claimed Jesus rose from the dead. It was only people much later that came up with that fanciful tale. This last is the most commonly held position today. It claims the stories about Jesus grew and morphed, becoming more astounding as years went by until eventually it was claimed that Jesus rose from the dead.
5. There are some fatal flaws with that theory. The main one is that legends require time to develop. If Jesus in fact, did not rise from the dead, the legend that he did could not have sprung up until his contemporaries had passed off the scene. Prior to that time his opponents could have trotted out the dead body, witnesses of the events would have protested that no such thing happened, and the whole story would have died, never to be resurrected (if you'll excuse the pun). Historians know that such legends generally require at least a couple of generations to spring up, usually much more. And that's where the problem occurs. The Apostle Paul, among many others, puts that theory to death. He was a flaming militant Jesus hater, until the moment the risen Jesus confronted him. But who was Paul opposing prior to that? People who already believed in the risen Jesus. They were claiming Jesus was risen and alive in the years immediately after Jesus lived and died. Paul's conversion happened only 2 or 3 years after Jesus lived. That would require a legend to spring up immediately, something that simply couldn't have happened. Some of Paul's own writings which are full of mention of his resurrection, were written within 15 years of the life of Jesus. There was no time for said legend to have grown. Paul's life proves that people believed in the resurrection immediately after the supposed event. The legend story is not possible. By the way, I also think we can safely assume that Peter didn't believe it was a legend since he was an eyewitness of the events.
  6. That leaves us with the conspiracy theory. Maybe Peter, James, John, Andrew, Thomas and all the rest of those guys lied about the resurrection. Maybe they stole Jesus' body and hid it, then claimed he'd risen from the dead to sort of keep the movement Jesus had started going. That seems reasonable. Couldn't you imagine some really dedicated followers of someone wanting to keep their legacy alive? But even apart from the fact that such a theory does not fit with what we know of the character of those men, there are some major problems with it.
    - a. The first is that they would be telling a lie. That is quite common among humans, but what is not likely is the reason they did it. People

lie to gain something for themselves. But what did those guys gain? They got opposition, rejection, imprisonment, ostracism and lots of persecution. And they knew that's what they would get. No one lies knowing what they'll get for their lie is that kind of treatment.

- b. Second this required that they lie and keep the conspiracy going when the persecution began. Faced with a life or death choice were they likely to keep saying something they knew was not true? That's just not how human nature works. The late Chuck Colson got caught up in the Watergate scandal as part of the Nixon Administration and ended up going to prison for it. One thing he learned from his experience was that conspiracies crack. When people are lying for some supposedly good cause and are faced with dire consequences someone will cave in and tell the truth. That reality brought down President Nixon. It would have brought down the resurrection conspiracy too.
  - c. Yet history tells us that no one ever cracked. No one ever admitted that the whole thing was a lie. They didn't because it was the truth.
7. But that only leaves us with the idea that Jesus did come back to life after dying. But as I said earlier, who could believe that? As I said, death is a one way street. It is the most permanent thing on the planet. Once a person dies that's the end. I've known people who have died. I have loved ones who have died, and they all have one thing in common, they stayed dead. Coming back to life is just not possible. Right, and that was exactly the point. Jesus claimed to be the Almighty God in human form. How could he prove his identity? He didn't carry around a drivers license that identified him beyond doubt. So he took on that one impossibility, that one thing that we cannot defeat. He took on death itself and won. He defeated our most fearsome enemy and thus demonstrated that nothing has power over him. He had promised that he would give his followers eternal life. He promised that if we believe in him we too will experience life after death. Others have promised such things, only Jesus proved he could do it.
8. It is that event that gives us new birth. It changes our entire outlook on life, because as Peter says in Christ we have a living hope.

## HOPE IS THE RESULT

### *1. Hope of victory over death*

- a. No one likes to talk about or think about death, yet none of us can get away from its shadow. The Greek philosopher Epicurus said, “Against all other things it is possible to obtain security, but when it comes to death we live in an unwalled city.”
- b. In a recent interview in *GQ* magazine actor Nick Nolte said, “I cry every day...I cry when I try to get out of bed, because I’m in my 70’s and my body hurts...Once my joints are moving I’m all right, but those are my first tears in the morning, wondering if the pain is going to get worse or better. At my age a lot of your friends start dying, and that’ll always bring on a good cry. Last summer it was Paul Mazursky...His wake was classic. I saw faces I hadn’t seen in years. Mel Brooks, Richard Dreyfuss...It was a great wake, but then you can’t help but think about your own funeral and what that might be like.”
- c. Back in 2013 Google announced that they are funding a company named Calico. According to a press release Calico “will focus on health and wellbeing, in particular the challenge of aging and associated diseases.” In other words, Google and its CEO, Larry Page, are concerned about dying. The name Calico stands for California Life Company. Bill Gates criticized the effort as egocentric people trying to fund things so they can live longer. They are seeking to alter the nature of human existence by solving the problem of death. I’ve got a book they should read. It’s called *One More Tomorrow* because that very issue comes up in the book. I know because I wrote it.
- d. Death ultimately nullifies everything and makes a mockery of our lives. It takes away our meaning and our significance. It dooms us to live in fear and in the pain of loss. My dad died 18 years ago. He left a real hole in the lives of those who loved him. But my kids at this point don’t have a lot of memories of him. They have some, but not a lot. And their kids won’t know anything about him. By the time their kids are adults he will have been all but forgotten. True of all of us.
- e. Recently there have been some characters on some television shows that represent the current view of life that is popular with many of our intellectual elites. They don’t believe there is a God, and they are convinced there is no life after death, and thus life has no real meaning. It turns those characters into hardened, cynical people. One

such character was Gregory House, the brilliant but irascible doctor on *House M. D.* The new Sherlock Holmes on the CBS series kind of fits in this category. Another is detective Rustin Cohle in HBO's *True Detective*. He calls the world a giant gutter in outer space and says we live with an illusion of self. He says we're programmed to believe we're special somebodies when in fact everybody's nobody and death proves it. He says, "The honorable thing for our species to do is to deny our programming. Stop reproducing. Walk hand in hand into extinction, opting out of a raw deal." When asked how with such a worldview he gets out of bed in the morning he answers, "I tell myself I bear witness. But the real answer is that it's obviously my programming and I lack the constitution for suicide."

- f. Of course his failure to have a solution for death and for the emptiness of a life without hope produces not just cynicism, but misery. His marriage has crumbled and he abuses drugs to keep going, a theme found in the cases of Sherlock Holmes and House as well. Yes, these are just characters on television shows, they're not real, but the writers of those shows are telling us what they see. Without hope we stop living. Yes, we continue to exist, but our existence is miserable.
- g. Hope changes everything. It gives us new birth, new life. It gives us freedom from fear, it gives us reason to be joyful, life affirming, to look forward even as we grow old and life begins to wane. It gives us motivation to care about life, about other people and to keep moving with enthusiasm, no matter what may be going on in life.
- h. Back in January my brother, Jerry, who lived in Seattle for nearly 4 decades and is a dedicated Seahawk fan, came over to my house to watch the NFC championship game between Seattle and Green Bay. You may have seen the game. Green Bay totally dominated the game but failed to make the most of its opportunities. Nevertheless late in the game they led 19-7. With a little over 5 minutes to go Seattle got the ball, obviously needing to score quickly. Jerry had pretty much been suffering through the whole game due to the dismal performance of Seattle's offense. Their only score came on a trick play, a fake field goal. Jerry had been moaning and saying he couldn't take any more, that he should just quit watching and go home. But there was still a chance, so he didn't give up. On the first play Russell Wilson's pass was intercepted, seeming to end any chance Seattle had. Hope was not

even a faint glimmer at that point, at best a barely glowing ember. Jerry was just going to leave but before he did due to the fact that Green Bay played ultra-conservatively Seattle stopped them on three straight plays, using time outs to stop the clock and forced a punt with 4 minutes left. Deciding there was still a little hope, Jerry chose to watch a little longer. You probably know the story. In just under 2 minutes Seattle took the ball down the field and scored a touchdown. With a little over 2 minutes left in the game it was 19-14. An onside kick, always a slim possibility, was their only hope, but there was hope. Suddenly Jerry was totally focused in, hoping against hope. To everyone's astonishment the onside kick worked and Seattle got the ball back. Seattle took only 4 plays to strike for the go ahead TD. Green Bay came back to kick a tying field goal, but then Seattle won the game in overtime. All that so they could get a yard away from winning their second Super Bowl in a row and then melt down.

- i. My point in all of that is the difference that hope made. Hope kept Jerry engaged in the game. Had there been literally no hope he would have given up. When we have no hope we may keep going through the motions, but that's all we will do. I can tell you that aging is not a pretty picture. I have been having problems with my left shoulder lately. My med school son, Toby, examined me and diagnosed a rotator cuff strain. What's frustrating about this is I have not done anything that could have caused such a strain. I just woke up with it one day. In other words I injured myself sleeping! I looked up the possible causes of rotator cuff injuries. There it was on my computer screen. One of the possibilities was...age. Great. If this is how this is going to go it's pretty discouraging. Is there anyway to be joyful and enthusiastic even as my body is falling apart and the trend is only going to get worse? The only way that can happen is if I have hope. Hope is what gives us motivation, enthusiasm, optimism and joy. And that is just what we have through resurrection.
- j. A Bible verse that is dear to us in the Anchor Church is Hebrews 6:19, "we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." It is this hope that anchors our entire lives.

## ***2. Hope of an incredible future***

- a. The resurrection of Jesus means there is a God. He's real. He's proven it. He showed up in human history to reveal himself. It means he cares

about us and that we can be loved by him and connected to him. It means there is hope of life after death and that because of that our lives have real significance and real meaning.

- b. Just before Jesus left the planet he gave his followers a promise. In Matthew 28:20, some of his last recorded words were, “Surely I am with you always.” What do you think he meant by “always”? Was he using “always” the way we do when a wife says to a husband, “you always leave the toilet seat up”? Is it true the husband *always* does it, that there’s never been an instance in his life when he put the toilet seat down? The wife there is using always to mean that it is something the husband commonly, maybe even habitually does.
- c. Is that what Jesus meant? If so it’s not really much comfort for us. If he’s there commonly but not always, there could be a crucial moment when we need him and he’s not there. What we need is an always that means utterly without fail. Laurie and I enjoy watching the television show *Castle*. In it the lead character, Richard Castle, best selling novelist, teams up with homicide detective Kate Beckett. But, of course, he falls in love with her and tries to win her heart, which is difficult because she is resistant to him. A key component of their relationship becomes his loyalty and faithfulness to her. On multiple occasions he says to her, “I will always be with you.” He has to prove that promise through many tough situations, but he comes through. She needs to know that he means it, he will always be there.
- d. Which did Jesus mean? He tells us. He will always be there, “to the very end of the age.” He will be with us until this world is no more. In Hebrews 13:5 the promise is recorded again when God says, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” Is there ever a moment when Jesus will bail out on you, that he won’t be there for you? Unless he’s a liar, the answer is no. He will always be there.
- e. This has one huge implication for us. I’m pretty confident that I will be resurrected, come back to life after I die because Jesus promised I would and proved it by doing it himself. So I feel good about that. But what I don’t look forward to at all is the process of dying. Laurie will tell you that I am a real wimp when it comes to the dentist. I’m a man. I can go by myself and I can take it. But Laurie schedules dental appointments for us both at the same time. It makes it easier to go



through it with her. In fact, everything is easier if I don't have to do it alone. But I am going to have to die alone. Oh, I don't mean that people won't be there when I die. They may well be, but they won't go through it with me, and that thought is unpleasant for me.

- f. But here's the great news: I won't go through it alone. Jesus promised he will never leave me, not even at the moment of death. He is going to go through the process with me, and I won't be alone. In fact, I have a suspicion, and it is only that, that I will sense him more in that moment than I have at any time in my life. He is going to strengthen me and comfort me and welcome me as I go through that process. Doesn't that comfort your soul? It does mine.
- g. As they say on the commercials, but wait, there's more! Peter says in 1 Peter 1:4 that what comes after we die is an inheritance that will never spoil, perish or fade. In Romans 8:18 Paul wrote, "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." This world contains some pretty harsh suffering that we may experience. As you all know Laurie and I went through the nightmare and devastation of surviving the death of a child. Our poor little son, Joel, only lived 4 months. His death was crushing for us, but his brief life was so hard. The little guy had open heart surgery when he was only 3 weeks old and weighed 4 pounds. He experienced so much pain. He almost lost his left arm as a result of the surgery. It survived, but it was paralyzed. However, as time went on the nerves began to regenerate and he began to get some use of it back. But do you know what that feels like when a body part has gone to sleep and it starts to come back? Laurie had to exercise his arm and he would howl in pain. I would come in the room when she was doing it and they'd both be crying. It has been 31 years since Joel died, but to this day I can't bear to think about the pain he went through in his short life. It still hurts me.
- h. Paul says, "take the worst suffering you have ever known, the worst that this life has to offer, and that cannot even begin to compare with the glory that you are going to experience, to the beauty, the joy and the wonder of the life Christ has in store for you." What is the worst thing you've ever experienced, or the worst you could ever imagine experiencing. Medical people these days ask you to gauge your pain on a scale of 1 to 10. Well envision something so awful it is a 10. It

pegs your pain meter at maximum. Paul says what you then need to do is multiply that by a thousand and reverse the polarity. Instead of a negative it's a positive. That is what awaits you in Christ. It is so cool, so majestic, so profound and joyful, that whatever you go through in this life will feel utterly unimportant compared to it.

- i. The worst and the best that this life has to offer will be eclipsed by the amazing life, the glory and joy that awaits us. They will disappear the way the stars in the sky do when the blazing sun comes out. Don't picture clouds, harps, wings, rather picture life on this earth as God meant it to be. It will include physical bodies living on a planet, but none of it will be degraded and distorted by sin, decay and death. It will be life without fear and full of beauty.
- j. The late Ray Stedman said of that glorious life, "we will be more alive than we ever were here." In their book, *The Sacred Romance*, John Eldredge and Brent Curtis wrote, "the best human life is unspeakably sad. Even if we manage to escape some of the bigger tragedies (and few of us do), life rarely matches our expectations...Friends move away. Our careers don't quite pain out...Of course we're disappointed—we're made for so much more." They go on to say, "If...we believe that this life is our best shot at happiness, if this is as good as it gets, we will live as desperate, demanding, and eventually despairing men and women."
- k. But what will that amazing life be like? Imagine that you could have a conversation with a baby in the womb as it nears its day of birth with some trepidation. The baby says, "I am happy here in my little room. Why do I have to leave? I'm scared. What will life be like after I'm born?" You say, "This life that you're about to enter is what you are created for. You won't really experience life until you are here in this world." The baby will say, "I don't know what you mean. I'm happy here. I just want to stay." You say, "Yes, but you're going to experience so much more. You'll find love and laughter in ways you cannot imagine. You are going to see things you've never seen before." The baby says, "Well, what kind of things?" You say, "Well, the beauty of the sun setting..." and the baby interrupts, "What's the sun?" "Oh, well, it's this glorious enormous light," and the baby interrupts, "What is light?" You're a little stumped. How do you explain light? Finally you say, "Well, I can't explain it to you, but it's

wonderful. You'll see what I mean when you get here. Anyway, when the sun sets over the ocean," and the child again interrupts, "What's an ocean?" You know now there's no way the kid will ever understand. The baby simply has no way to comprehend the glory of the life ahead, but you know that this life is what it has been made to experience. Finally all you can do is say, "Look, you'll just have to trust me, but you're going to love this. I will tell you again, that you were made for this life, and you will know when you're here that this is truly living, not what you have now."

1. We are as incapable of envisioning or comprehending what the next life will be like as that baby in the womb. But it is the life we were created for. It will be spectacular. C. S. Lewis wrote in his book, *The Weight of Glory*, "The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last."

### **3. *Hope that is alive now***

- a. Peter tells us this is a living hope. It is alive even now. We have this hope in us changing us, strengthening us. The hope is not just that something good will happen in the future, though that is powerful, but that something good is happening in us right now. Jesus is with us right now, working, causing us to experience life in a whole new way.
- b. It means that I can experience God's love, I can be hopeful that he will sustain me and that he is using what's happening in my life right now for good purposes. I can have peace and joy, even today. I can be a person who exudes his goodness, grace and love in whatever situation that comes along.
- c. I had a friend who was dealing with a difficult situation in his life, one that just seemed endless. At one point he told me he felt like giving up. He was tired of dealing with it day after day with no hope of it ever getting better. I asked him, "what are you putting your hope in?" As soon as I asked he knew the answer. He was putting his hope in the situation getting better, defined as him finally getting what he wanted. I asked, "has God promised that you'll get what you want? Has he said this life is all you've got and you deserve what you want here?" He admitted that was not the case. So I suggested that maybe his hope should be in something else. Hope was the key element to him being able to persevere. Without it he would quit. But I told him the hope he

could count on was that Jesus was with him. Jesus loves him. Jesus makes it possible for him to begin experiencing some of the quality of the life that awaits us in eternity even now. Jesus promised that as he trusted in him my friend could experience peace, joy, patience with the situation, the ability to be kind and the ability to love. And Jesus promised that in that day in the future when our eternal hope is revealed that he would rejoice in how he persevered in the situation. That's the hope we have every day of our lives in Christ.

- d. Last week Laurie baked an apple pie. My birthday occurred last month and she sort of extended the celebration of it for several weeks. There can be no debate, Laurie makes the best apple pie the world has ever seen. It has ruined me. I can't eat other apple pies because they don't taste like the real thing. But on this occasion the thing that I want to talk about is what happened in our house when Laurie was baking it. I was in a room that was as far from the kitchen as you can be in our house, yet even there the aroma of that pie filled the room. It filled the entire house. It was delicious smelling. It was just an awfully pleasant experience. It occurred to me that's a little like our living hope in Christ. It fills every nook and cranny in our lives. And it doesn't end there. Filled with the hope of what Jesus has done for us and has given us it begins to over flow so that everywhere we go we give off the aroma of that hope. In other words we fill it with the aroma of his kingdom. We can be so full of his grace and his character that we give off that pleasant aroma, and that is a wonderful thing.

### CONCLUSION

Pastor and author Tim Keller says that one night while asleep he had a terrifying nightmare. In the awful dream his entire family was slaughtered. He doesn't tell the details of the dream because they were so horrifying that they are too painful to even recall. When he woke up from that nightmare and realized it had just been a dream he was overjoyed. In the dream he had experienced unimaginable pain and horror, but now he had his beloved family back. They were all alive, the nightmare was over. He said he experienced an explosion of joy. He couldn't even look at his family members without crying in sheer joy.

That is what the future resurrection that awaits those who put their faith in Jesus and make him their Lord are going to experience. The nightmare will be over and the relief and joy will be unlimited. The great thing about what Jesus brings us is that we can now even now that the nightmare is over. We can live in the joy even

today of the nightmare being no more. It's not wishful thinking, it's real, and we know it is real because Jesus has proven it by rising from the tomb.