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Daniel 12:1-3. English Standard Version

“At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued. ² Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace. ³ Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever.

Matthew 28:1-7. English Standard Version

Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.

² Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. ³ His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. ⁴ The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

⁵ Then the angel spoke to the women. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying.

It’s beautiful here!

Our first Bible passage today is from the Book of Daniel, and it’s considered the only completely unambiguous reference to the resurrection of the dead in the Old Testament. The Israelites did not have anywhere near as strong a belief in resurrection and the afterlife that Christians have. The Book of Daniel is set during the Israelites’ exile in Babylon, which is around 600 B.C., but many believe

that the book itself wasn't written until about 4-or-500 years later. The first part, which is mostly a history book, is written in Hebrew. The second part, which consists largely of wild visions on the part of Daniel the prophet, was written in Aramaic, the language of the Israelites in exile and the language that was later spoken by Jesus. Remember that the prophets often made their predictions of God's eventual favor and God's future punishments via visions. The book opens with King Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of Babylon, ransacking Jerusalem. He takes the elite of the Israelite society back home as his prisoners in Babylon. Daniel, a young man at the time, is one of them. Importantly, Daniel avoids being corrupted by the pagan Babylonian society, while making himself useful to King Nebuchadnezzar by interpreting his dreams. Nebuchadnezzar learns his moral lesson and accepts God as being supreme. His grandson, Belshazzar, takes over, but he turns out to be horribly sinful and corrupt. Daniel predicts that Belshazzar and his kingdom will fall – and they do. Then comes the wild part of the book of Daniel, where Daniel has visions that symbolize future events.

Our passage comes from the end of the Book of Daniel. In it, Daniel has one of his visions. The Archangel Michael is sent by God to do battle. Michael stands up to protect God's people, and Daniel predicts that at the end of time, some people will rise *"to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting*

disgrace". Here's something interesting about this passage. Many scholars consider this final piece of the Book of Daniel, with its discussion of the glorious resurrection of godly people, to be a metaphor for the eventual freedom of the Israelites from Babylonian captivity.

I'm going to shift to looking at our New Testament view of resurrection – the resurrection of Jesus Christ after three days of death. But I'd like to talk about two things before doing that. First, this passage in Daniel is considered extremely important because it demonstrates a dramatic shift in the spiritual mindset of ancient people in this region of the world. The surrounding culture was largely Greek – and Greek people did not believe in resurrection and eternal life. This passage shows that at least as of the time the Book of Daniel was written – at least a couple hundred years before Jesus died, Jews did believe that there would be an end time when people were resurrected and live for eternity in happiness.

The second thing I'd like to talk about before I move on to Jesus' resurrection has to do with a woman that Wendy and I know very well. She's about our age. Let's call her Rebecca. She lost an adult daughter recently, the result of an accident, and it of course crushed her. Now, she told a story to Wendy, one that Rebecca then repeated to me. Rebecca's mother, the

grandmother of the dead young woman, is still alive. She is elderly and is terminally ill. Her memory has become very poor. Rebecca spends a lot of her time taking care of her mother. Just days after the death of Rebecca's daughter, and we'll call her daughter Stella, Rebecca drove to her mother's house. She had told her mother about the death of her mother's granddaughter, Stella, but Rebecca wasn't sure if her mother would remember. I think Rebecca was worried about having to go through the process of telling her mother once again that Stella was dead. Rebecca didn't want to relive it. She walked into her mother's house and called out to her. I'll get back to this.

Let's talk about Jesus. Our second passage is a classic Easter Bible quote. In it, an angel tells two Marys: *"I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He isn't here! He is risen from the dead."* One of the Marys is identified as Mary Magdalene. The second Mary is probably the sister-in-law of Jesus's mother, i.e., the sister of Joseph; but some think she is the sister, not the sister-in-law of Jesus' mother, and that yes, the two sisters were both named Mary.

So, what about this passage? There is more to this passage than just the obvious, that Jesus had risen from the dead and escaped the tomb. There is something similar between the concept of bodily resurrection at the end of time,

as we read about in Daniel, and the resurrection of one person, long before the end of time – that is, Jesus. It's the concept of being dead, gone, finished - and yet rising up and being alive again. There are some who say that the resurrection of Jesus is both a literal thing and a symbolic thing, just as the resurrection of the good and evil people in the book of Daniel was a literal thing about the end of time, and a representation of the eventual freedom of the Israelites. Jesus rose literally, but his resurrection also represents us rising up - which is what we do when we decide to accept God into our lives and incrementally work to live the way Jesus taught: by treating all people with love and respect, by forgiving those who wrong us, and by living in a humble, modest way. This isn't an instantaneous thing. It takes time. It has to be done in a deliberate fashion. We rise up after being spiritually dead, just as the Israelites rose up, under the protection of God, regained their freedom and their nation, and became alive again.

There's something else here. Three of the four Gospels, Matthew, Luke, and John, end with the resurrection of Jesus. A common preoccupation over the last half century has been to debate the historicity of Jesus. Can history prove that he really existed as a person? Well, the ends of these Gospels, along with the Book of Acts, by the way, tell us that we shouldn't look for Jesus in history – because he isn't dead. He has been resurrected. He's alive.

I'm going to make this a short sermon. Let's get back to Rebecca, the woman who lost her daughter Stella. When Rebecca went into her mother's house, she heard her mother talking in another room. Rebecca walked into that room, but there was no one else there. "Who were you talking to?" asked Rebecca of her mother. "Why, Stella, of course." Rebecca's heart dropped into her gut. But before she could say that Stella was dead, Rebecca's mother spoke again. "Stella told me that she's happy now. She said, Grandma, I'll see you again, soon, and you'll like it here. It's beautiful here."

I'd like to end with the tail end of Matthew. Jesus appears to the Apostles many times over a period of 40 days after he is resurrected. Here is what is called the "great commission", what Jesus says to his Apostles: *"Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Jesus is alive. Jesus' death is what enabled us to be made right with God. But through his resurrection, he is alive within us. That is why we strive to be like him. Rebecca's mother is at the end of her life. She believes in God – and she has spoken to someone who is going to be waiting for her in the next life. We are resurrected now as followers of Jesus and we will be resurrected literally one day.