

"The Meaning of Life"

By Allan Pole



Theme: The here and now finds purpose in the hereafter.

Text: Hebrews 6:2

Here's a thought: If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? - Tim Keller

The British preacher, W.E. Sangster, began to lose his voice and mobility in the mid-1950s. He had a disease that caused progressive muscular atrophy. He recognized the end was near, so he threw himself into writing and praying. In the midst of his suffering he pleaded, "Let me stay in the struggle, Lord. I don't mind if I can no longer be a general but give me just a regiment to lead."

Sangster's voice eventually failed completely, and his legs became useless. On Easter morning just a few weeks before his death, he took a pen and shakily wrote his daughter a letter. In it he said, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice with which to shout, 'He is risen!' - but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout."

The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was a highly debated issue in the first century, when the two prominent sects of Jews were the Pharisees, who believed in a bodily resurrection, and the Sadducees, who did not. Intending to establish a solid foundation for Jews who became followers of Jesus, the unknown author writes in Hebrews 5:11-6:3:

11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. 6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity,

not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, **the resurrection of the dead**, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so. NIV

The meaning of life is defined by:

Our Lord's Resurrection



It is totally human for us to think that life is all about who and what we experience here on earth. This is natural because this is all we know. We assume our skin colour is the only one until we see others. We don't realize there might be another language than our own until we hear one spoken. Snow or palm trees are only in photos until we actually see and touch them. We think everyone drives on the right side of the road until we visit a country where they drive on the left (the wrong) side of the road. It's hard to imagine what life is like on the other side of death until we actually go there.

The apostles and the other followers of Jesus believed that He was the Messiah, the Saviour, but they missed the prophecies and references to His death and to His resurrection. They didn't seem to have a place for this in their theology and expectations. The Jesus in their minds was not yet the God who is but the God they wanted Him to be. As a result, they were dumbfounded and devastated when their rabbi was beaten and crucified with thieves on a cross. Since their life with Jesus was all about the here and now, their hopes and dreams died on that cross too.

Then came the Sunday morning after in Luke 24:1-12:

1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" 8 Then they remembered his words. 9 When they came

back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. NIV

Five-year-old Brian had a pivotal verse to recite in an Easter program: “He is not here, he is risen” (Luke 24:6). Unfortunately, he could not remember what to say, and the director had to quietly remind him of his line. He then confidently grabbed the microphone and triumphantly shouted, “He’s not here; He’s in prison!”

These people thought they had put the puzzle together on Palm Sunday, when Jesus was finally getting the recognition that He deserved. When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, however, the puzzle pieces were seized from them and scattered everywhere. In the days following the Lord’s resurrection, the pieces were gathered up again and reassembled. They had to sort this out in their heads and in their hearts. Thankfully, our God is patient and helps us to process His words and His ways – at least as much as we need to move forward.

We learn in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that Jesus appeared to a variety of women and men. If two or three credible witnesses can be found who agree on the critical facts of a crime, then a judge or a jury is almost certain to believe them. According to the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrected Christ appeared to more than 500 witnesses!

On one occasion Michelangelo (1475-1564), the great artist, turned on his fellow artists in a spirit of indignation. He asked:

Why do you keep filling gallery after gallery with endless pictures on the one theme of Christ in weakness, Christ on the Cross, and most of all, Christ hanging dead? Why do you concentrate on the passing episode as if it were the last work, as if the curtain dropped on Him with disaster and defeat? That dreadful scene lasted ... a few hours. But to the unending eternity, Christ is alive; the stone has been rolled away and He rules and reigns and triumphs!

Without the resurrection of Christ, the crucifixion was a terrible tragedy. Unless Jesus was raised, everything He said and did was a horrible waste. Thankfully, the historical records and testimonies of more than 500 witnesses give us ample reasons to embrace and believe this wonderful demonstration of power!

American theologian Tim Keller explains:

If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.

What part in Christ's resurrection story impacts you the most? How does the resurrection of Jesus affect your daily life?

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When Jesus arrived at the home of Mary and Martha, their brother Lazarus had died and been placed in the tomb four days earlier. We get to hear the conversation that Jesus had with Martha in John 11:20-27:

20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." NIV

We tend to focus on the resurrection of Lazarus here in John chapter 11. We are justifiably amazed at what Jesus did by raising him from the dead, but let's not miss the significance of what Jesus *said* here. Resurrection is focused not upon a past or future event, but upon a person. *Jesus* is the resurrection and the life. Our hope rests not upon our intellect, good deeds or even our statement of faith. Our resurrection stems not from *Christianity* but from *Christ!*

This is why the Apostle Paul made it his life's goal to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:10-11, NIV).

A man and his five-year old son were driving past a cemetery and noticed a large pile of dirt next to a freshly dug grave when the little boy shouted, "Look, Dad, one got out!"

Legendary physicist Stephen Hawking passed away on March 14th, 2018 at the age of 76, after battling motor neuron disease for 55 years. He spoke candidly in a 2011 Guardian interview about what he believes happens when people die. He told the Guardian that while he "wasn't afraid of death," he was in no hurry to die. "I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail," he said. "There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark." It should come as no surprise that Hawking was an atheist. In Hawking's 2010 book, *The Grand Design*, Hawking said a creator is "not necessary" in the narrative of how the world was created (from www.usatoday.com/story/tech/nation-now/2018/03/14/heaven-fairy-story-what-stephen-hawking-says-happens-when-people-die/423344002/).

Hawking was probably an atheist from an early age. His family was nominally Christian, but in reality, they were intellectuals and atheists. As a school boy at St. Albans school, he argued with his classmates about Christianity. During his college years at Oxford and Cambridge, he was a well-known atheist.

His first wife, Jane, whom he married in 1965 and divorced in 1990, was a devout Christian. It is clear they were never on the same page about religious matters, and this was perhaps one of the reasons why the two decided to go their separate ways.

"We are each free to believe what we want, and it's my view that the simplest explanation is; there is no God. No one created our universe, and no one directs our fate." This leads me to a profound realization that there probably is no heaven and no afterlife either. We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe and for that, I am extremely grateful." (from <https://owlcation.com/humanities/Stephen-Hawking-Says-There-Is-No-God-Heres-Why>)

I wonder what Stephen Hawking believes now? His statement of faith is the exact opposite of what the Bible says about eternity. In fact, David declares in Psalm 14:1, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" NIV David does *not* write, "The *stupid* says in his *head*, 'There is no God.'" This is not a matter of Intelligence Quotient or IQ. While 95% of the population ranges between 70 and 130, Stephen Hawking scored 160 (www.scienceabc.com/humans/who-are-some-of-the-people-with-the-highest-iq.html). Wisdom and foolishness stems not from the head but from the heart. Out of the heart flows life or death (Proverbs 4:23). Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). It is in the heart – not the head – where our life's decisions

are ultimately made.

John Calvin taught in the 16th century:

Let us consider this settled, that no one has made progress in the school of Christ who does not joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection.

The Apostle Paul's life focused on the resurrection. He invested his time, energy and money in the hereafter. What would be the point of his life and ministry if this life here on earth was all there is? He concluded in 1 Corinthians 15:32 that if there is no resurrection, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." NIV

What kind of experience have *you* had with death? How does your approaching resurrection shape your priorities of time, energy and money?

Lloyd Schuetz is a long-time friend of my parents and a senior who I admire. He served as a pastor and missionary for decades and is now in his late eighties. He continues to preach in churches and seniors homes, to write, to read and watch what the Lord is doing around the world, and to disciple or mentor an 80-year-old neighbour in a relationship with Jesus. While most people his age focus on retirement and leisure, Lloyd continues to be motivated by his Lord's resurrection and by his own resurrection.

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