

## **Easter Day**

In his book "Defeat into Victory, " Field Marshal Sir William Slim recounts the Burma campaign against the Japanese in World War II. An invincible Japanese army had pushed the British back into India. This historical account is a powerful analogy for the Easter message we are exploring. Just as the British, initially overwhelmed by the Japanese, eventually achieved victory, so too did Jesus triumph over death at Easter.

While the jungle seemed an enemy to the British, it served as an ally for the Japanese. As a result, the Japanese became outstanding jungle fighters and were considered invincible.

It was a powerful myth that influenced the entire British Army operating in that region. Eventually, however, there was a victory—a battle was won. In fact, I believe Australians won it in New Guinea.

What did this mean? It signified the collapse of a myth, a legend – however you prefer to describe it. A so-called invincible army had been defeated. Yes, it was just a small victory, and there was still a long journey ahead, but the myth, the spell, had been shattered. You only need to defeat a tyrant once for the aura to dissipate.

Jesus conquered death. Humans have always feared it, yet it also holds a strange fascination. Death is the tyrant; it exists and, with time, picks us all off, one by one, indiscriminately.

However, through His death and resurrection, Jesus vanquished the power of this tyrant. The world would never be the same again; Jesus had triumphed over it.

'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' says St. Paul. (1 Cor. 15:54-55)

Its main effect is psychological. We still must endure suffering and death, just as Slim's 14th Army faced many hard battles. However, like them, we can now see hope and a future; we need not despair or resign ourselves to some dreadful fate.

Jesus, the first fruit, leads the way by rising from the dead. His appearances are not so much to say, 'Look at me', as to say, 'Come on, hurry up. This is what it's like over here; I want you here with me. This is the direction.'

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews refers to Jesus as the 'archegos'. In simpler terms, this means Jesus is the leader who goes first. In the past, when a ship was in trouble, floundering on rocks, the archegos would jump overboard and swim to shore with a rope tied around his waist. Once he had secured the line, he would wave to those on the ship who couldn't swim, and they would then pull themselves to safety along that secured rope. Jesus is the archegos who has gone ahead of us, overcoming death, and now beckons us to follow him to safety.

Jesus is the One who leads the way. He is the archegos. He has accomplished the most challenging part and now stands on the far shore, beckoning to us, showing the way, and encouraging us on. This is what Easter is all about.

'O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?'

We now turn to Jesus' appearances and quickly find they cannot be reconciled. German biblical scholars have attempted this and nearly had nightmares in the process. If they cannot reconcile

them, we can be sure no one else will succeed! Jesus seems to appear here, there, and everywhere. And all at the same time!

What does it mean? It suggests that Jesus now stands outside of time and history. He is no longer subject to the laws of nature. It also points to Mystery, which cannot be pinned down. 'He's here, no, He's there. Are you sure? He's over here. No, wait, He's there.'

This is God meeting humans on God's terms. What does this mean? It means God, being Mystery, cannot be defined or pinned down. In the past, God met humans on their terms—in the flesh, through miracles, with humans deciding God's fate and choosing the Cross for Him. But no longer. Now, we encounter God in a way that is beyond our understanding, in a truly divine way.

Humans now encounter God on God's terms. God is Mystery, and Mystery cannot be defined or pinned down. All attempts to reconcile the Resurrection appearances are destined to fail.

We now come to the third point I'd like to mention regarding the message of Easter. The Easter Gospel does not focus primarily on what is happening to Jesus; it is much more concerned with what happened to the disciples.

The reactions of men and women, Jesus' disciples, take centre stage in the Resurrection appearance stories.

Consider the Gospels—how they went to the tomb and discovered it empty. It states that they were amazed. That's an understatement if there ever was one! They weren't just amazed; they were floored; they were flabbergasted.

What do we see in these Resurrection appearances? We witness conversion, healing, forgiveness, and restoration. We observe Peter being forgiven and restored. We recognise that the other disciples, who had also deserted Jesus, are forgiven as well.

We observe the bitterness, anger, and hostility that likely existed toward the Jews and the Romans for their actions against Jesus; we see this dissipating and the healing process unfolding.

We witness their faith grow, and their understanding broadens beyond their wildest dreams. We see them restored to their positions as Apostles and disciples of Jesus – those who would carry the Gospel to all people. We observe conversions happening before our very eyes. Now, they recognise who Jesus truly is. The mist vanishes. They would proclaim, 'My Lord and My God' alongside Thomas.

This, too, is offered to us. We can be healed, forgiven, and restored. We need conversion every day of our lives. It's not a one-time event but an ongoing process in which our 'yes' to God ever deepens, leading us to a deeper understanding of the Resurrection and its implications for our lives.

We have examined three aspects of the Resurrection. First, we established that through His death and Resurrection, Jesus defeated the tyrant, death—it can never again exert the same hold and power over us.

We also see that, because of the Resurrection, we encounter God on His terms, not ours; we cannot confine Him; we meet Him in Mystery.

Finally, we view it as conversion—both for the disciples and ourselves. This Easter season, may our eyes always delight in its beauty, may our hearts embrace its joy, and may our spirits rise to its promise.