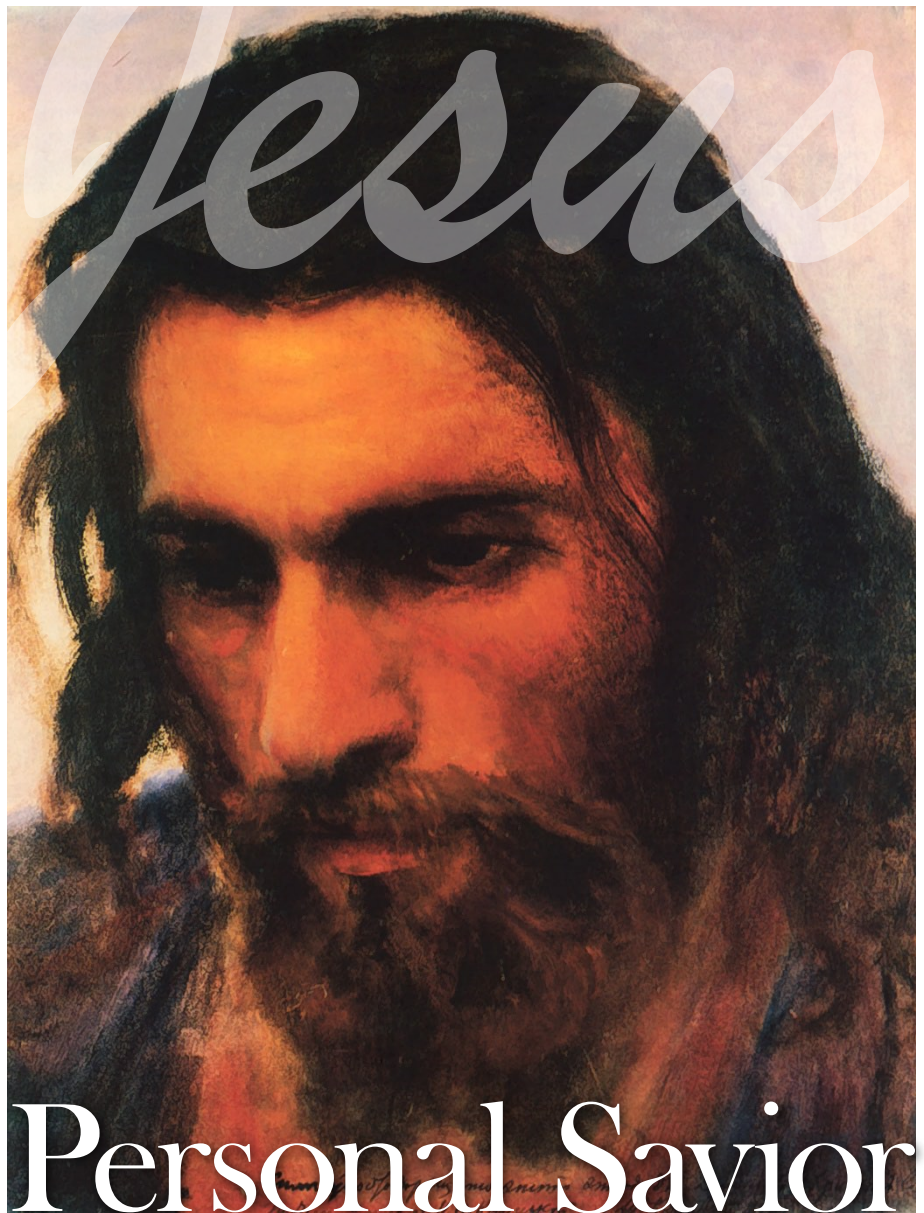


God could, had He pleased, have been incarnate in a man of iron nerves, the stoic sort who lets no sigh escape him. Of his great humility He chose to be incarnate in a man of delicate sensibilities who wept at the grave of Lazarus and sweated blood in Gethsemane. Otherwise we should have missed the great lesson that it is by his will alone that a man is good or bad, and that feelings are not, in themselves, of any importance. We should also have missed the all-important help of knowing that He has faced all that the weakest of us face, has shared not only the strength of our nature but every weakness of it except sin. If He had been incarnate in a man of immense natural courage, that would have been for many of us almost the same as His not being incarnate at all.

C.S. Lewis



THE HUMAN MIND HAS A DIFFICULT TIME wrapping itself around the resurrection and the events that followed. On one level, we must abandon our inherent disbelief regarding the very concept of bodily resurrection—that someone who has thoroughly and completely died could come back to life. On another level, we struggle to grasp that that body, though physically tangible, could still pass through walls and closed doors, and instantaneously be in one place and then another. On yet another level, after we finally accept the truth of the first two, we are then left wondering why Jesus, now raised from the dead and having fulfilled His reason for coming, would linger on earth forty more days. Putting ourselves in His position, we imagine we would have wasted no time racing back to heaven, and sweet reunion with the Father.

But then, we are not God.

Few things illustrate Christ's gentle condescension and compassion like His willingness to tarry on earth after His resurrection, comforting and encouraging those who would follow after. They not only would be His envoys, carrying the gospel throughout the world, but they had been and still were His dearest friends on earth. He cared about them; their feelings mattered to Him.

Beaten Up

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

1 Corinthians 15:3-5

When I was in junior high, the local high school football games were an opportunity not to follow the game, but to see what mischief my buddies and I could devise in the shadows behind the bleachers. One Friday night we were happily lobbing ripe berries into the stands when suddenly the high school biology teacher—and my next-door neighbor—stood up in the midst of the crowd, pointed a long finger in my direction, and quite loudly announced my last name to everyone in the county.

In that moment I could have crawled under a rock. I was publicly humiliated—and rightly so. And I imagine the apostle Peter must have felt something like that when, after publicly denying his relationship with the arrested Jesus, his Master turned and looked at him.

After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Luke 22:59-62

By the time Jesus stepped out of the tomb, Peter was pretty well beaten up. After his disappointing performance during the trial and crucifixion, the impetuous, pugnacious disciple no doubt was convinced that Jesus would disown him. Instead, grace was embodied when Jesus specifically sought out the hurting disciple, and restored this one who would become a strong, founding pillar in His church.

Fears and Misgivings

We know very little about Christ's earthly family. We do know that His mother, Mary, had children after Him—at least four sons, as well as daughters:

"Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

Matthew 13:55-56

It is generally accepted that His brother James wrote the epistle by that name, and that he became the leader of the church at Jerusalem. But early on Jesus' family—including, presumably, James—did not support His ministry.

For not even His brothers were believing in Him.

John 7:5

It is easy to see why Jesus, after His resurrection and before returning to heaven, would make it a point to visit James personally. Imagine the emotional turmoil of James! How he must have struggled with the person of Christ Jesus. Here was his older brother. They had grown up together, in the same house, the same family. He knew Jesus first as just another sibling. Perhaps, as with younger brothers from the beginning of time, he grew weary of how he was always expected to live up to the stellar reputation of his sibling. Perhaps the teachers pestered little James about his poor showing after the good grades of his older brother.

But then Jesus became something more than just a sibling. Can we really blame the members of His family for wishing to quietly put Him away, after they heard the revolu-

tionary things He was saying and doing?

When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."

Mark 3:21

No doubt James immediately received word that his brother was no longer in the grave. *Now* what was he to think? What did all of this mean? He desperately needed to know—face-to-face, from Jesus Himself—just what was the truth behind everything he had heard. So Jesus went to His brother privately to put his mind at rest, to calm his fears and misgivings. In that moment Christ's love and compassion were played out in a tender way, and the one who had once wanted no part of Jesus' ministry, became one of the strongest voices in this new and fragile community of believers.

An Everlasting Love

Jesus still visits those who are confused and hurting. He still makes house calls to those who are in need of encouragement and affirmation. He still cares that we know the truth about our relationship with Him—that we are not left discouraged, despairing, when sin or doubt cloud that communion.

Some people forget that the one who loved enough to die, still loves. The one who cared enough about confused, frustrated individuals to put down His own life in their stead, still cares about them on that same deep, visceral level. That is why we refer to Him as our "personal" savior. Now, as then, Jesus is not ashamed to tarry a while in our midst, to leave the pristine avenues of heaven to tread the muck of earth for those He loves.

That is why we love Him—because He loved us first. 

*O Love Divine! that stoop'st to share
Our sharpest pang, our bitterest tear,
On Thee we cast each earth-born care,
We smile at pain while Thou art near.*

*Though long the weary way we tread,
And sorrow crown each lingering year,
No path we shun, no darkness dread,
Our hearts still whispering, "Thou art near."*

*When drooping pleasure turns to grief,
And trembling faith is changed to fear,
The murmuring wind, the quivering leaf,
Shall softly tell us Thou art near.*

*On Thee we cast our burdening woe,
O Love Divine, for ever dear;
Content to suffer while we know,
Living or dying, Thou art near!*

Oliver Wendell Holmes