

# ASLEEP IN BLISSFUL IGNORANCE?

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I received this email recently, and I thought you might be interested in my response. My correspondent wrote:

I've been pondering a question that you may be able to help me with. Please correct me if I misrepresent your beliefs here, but it is my understanding that according to your world view, a supernatural being (I'll use a capital 'G' God), created this planet and all forms of life on it. Apparently, this God set homo sapiens apart from all other creatures including homo erectus, homo habilis and presumably, australopithesines and other close relatives of our species.

Furthermore, homo sapiens are guilty of sin and therefore are not worthy of spending eternity with their creator God except for those (chosen?) few who accept that his divine son Jesus died, rose again, and thus allows for forgiveness and salvation through belief in this act of blood sacrifice. The reward for these select few, is the opportunity to spend eternity in reverence, praise, and servitude to this God. The alternative, according to your belief system, seems to differ from the traditional evangelical teachings of torment in hell, in that the unbeliever will remain in a permanent state of sleep, or blissful unawareness of reality.

This brings me to my question; what if a person was to say, "ok, if all of this is true, I choose option B. I don't want any part of the eternal worshiping scheme, I choose sleep."?

If I could preempt a possible reply that you might offer, I don't think the idea that, "serving God for eternity would be the closest thing to euphoria" is a good argument. People tell me that acid trips (LSD) are an amazing experience that allows the brain to perceive and experience amazing things, but at this stage, I'm still not keen to try it. I willingly choose ignorance in this matter. Likewise, I prefer ignorance to the option presented to me as outlined above (not that I believe any of it is true of course).

Anyway, I'd be interested in your thoughts.

As you can see, my correspondent writes with respect for views other than his own. He has given me the courtesy of first listening to my worldview, before proffering his own. The following is my response, and I hope it is worthy of the spirit he himself --- though not a Christian believer --- has shown. Sometimes non-believers can teach those of us who claim the name of Christ, a thing or two about decency! Anyway, here is my reply ...

You have represented some of my thoughts reasonably well, though if I had time and space (and if you really wanted it) I would like to modify your summation with some expansions and qualifications, because (and this is inevitable in a summary) overall it leaves a lot unsaid as far as my world view goes. And in so far as you represent some common misconceptions, there is consequently a hint of caricature, though you do not intend this.

If you are interested in my views on Adam & Eve and their difference from our animal 'relatives' as you call them, I suggest you get on my website [www.thebiblejesus.org](http://www.thebiblejesus.org) and read *Adam & Eve: Fumbled or Formed?* If you are interested in my views on "eternal punishment" I suggest you read, *Dan Barker: What The Hell is This?* This article goes a long way to answering your good question about choosing "a permanent state of sleep" over against "the traditional evangelical teachings of torment in hell".

However, to treat your question with the seriousness it deserves, I will add the following. Remember what I said about caricature? Well, the idea that the Kingdom of God will be an euphoric eternity, where perhaps you imply the saints and angels sit around playing harps and singing worshipful choruses forever, belongs in the realm of popular myth rather than to robust Biblical teaching.

Contrariwise, the Bible speaks about the Kingdom of God in terms of Him renewing this present physical world to its original pristine beauty. It will be a world with all the best things we already know, but minus everything

that currently dehumanises; a world where our bodies will be immortal, always in positive mental state and always in energetic physical health [that should be appealing to all the cross-fit junkies out there!]; a world with fulfilling social engagements; a world of amazing scientific developments and explorations; a world where there will be no hunger or thirst; a world where lion and lamb and children play together without fear or harm; a world with no pollution and pure water and air and fertile soils with crops that never fail or suffer blight or the ravage of pests; a world of juicy fruits and colourful flowers; a world where the water is "clear as crystal" a world where kindness, generosity, laughter, and goodness are ubiquitous; a world with sports and pets; a world of enthralling music and full development of the arts for artists, gymnasts, and theatre buffs; a world where the government is just and fair; a world where there is no fear, no sickness, no death, no fighting, no bloodshed, no prostitution or kidnapping, no "sugar daddies", and no long and final good-byes; a world of Edenic goodness. And above all, a world where people see and know the light and love of God uninterrupted.

So who wouldn't want to acknowledge the God Who has planned and prepared all of this for us? No doubt there will be the overflow of joyful thanksgiving to Him Who has prepared and accomplished all this by His wisdom and grace. There will no doubt be the ecstasy of hymns welling up from thankful hearts. Handel's classic *Hallelujah* chorus is no doubt a little foretaste of that coming anthem to the King of kings and the Lord of lords ... "And he shall reign forever and ever!" I am not exaggerating when I say that already I can't wait for what you call "the eternal worshipping scheme", for it will be worship spontaneously arising from the midst of all the physical and spiritual enjoyments I have briefly indicated.

Well, you get the picture. And if you choose to sleep in ignorant bliss forever through that, then to be honest, I don't get that, 'cause I want to be awake, with eyes wide open with all my physical capacities on full alert to take it all in. (I remember being on a boat trip in New Zealand trying to take in all the fantastic sights of the magnificent scenery, only to look across at some tourists all slumped over the table fast asleep! Fancy coming from the other side of the world, paying all that money to go on the holiday of a life-time, but sleeping in "blissful ignorance" of the surpassing greatness of the whole experience!)

The Scripture promises that "in the ages to come, God (I like the capital 'G'!) is going to show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2: 7). The Scripture assures us that "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the [glorious beyond imagination] things that God has prepared for them that love Him" ( 1 Cor. 2:9).

Now I know you will counter with something like, "Nice dream! Nice make-belief!" So let me pick up on your analogy about LSD trips to answer your objection. You write;

People tell me that acid trips (LSD) are an amazing experience that allows the brain to perceive and experience amazing things, but at this stage, I'm keen not to try it. I willingly choose ignorance in this matter. Likewise, I prefer ignorance to the option presented to me as outlined above (not that I believe any of it is true of course).

Firstly, I note you do accept the well-documented and countless testimonies of first-hand accounts of LSD experiences. You are prepared to accept as true something you have not personally experienced. This is acceptable and shows reasonable scientific deduction on your part. The empirical evidence in other words, is overwhelming that acid trips produce titivating, if only ephemeral, experiences for its participants.

Secondly, You exercise sound judgment in choosing to remain blissfully aloof from such proven experience, even though you fully recognise the validity of the data. In my humble opinion you are thus demonstrating "common sense" [more than likely based on deleterious side-effects you have also witnessed in those dabbling in such phenomena].

Thirdly, you categorically deny the reality of Christian faith-experience, saying you don't believe any of it is true. Correct me if I have inaccurately report your position, but if I have heard you rightly, I will now respond to each of your 3 points.

One. It is wise to weigh up and examine the data. As far as the claims of Christianity go, they are based on purported "eyewitness" testimony. Christianity welcomes investigation and the number of skeptics and doubters

who have accepted the challenge and become convinced by the historical evidence is legion. The quantity and quality of the historical documentary evidence is unprecedented in the study of any other ancient history. As John Dickson pithily states, "It is as if the Christian faith places its head on the chopping block of public scrutiny and invites us all to take a swing." <sup>1</sup>

However, this is not to say that because Christianity is "historical" this means *provable*: The claim is that Christianity is based on evidence that can be examined historically, using well-accepted scientific methods ... the same kind of empirical evidence you are prepared to accept when observing LSD trips. As Dickson further notes,

Professional historians, regardless of their religious persuasions, treat the New Testament and its portrait of Christ far more seriously than the general public realises ... There are literally thousands of scholars around the world who devote their time to analysing early Christianity. Some of them hold chairs in the most prestigious universities in the world. And they constantly publish their findings in the more than 100 academic journals dedicated to this subject. <sup>2</sup>

So, the fact that you are prepared to accept as true something you have not personally experienced [i.e. acid trips] based on solid testimony is the very same reason I am a Christian. It is evidence-based on reasonable deduction grounded on historical evidence from those who said they personally encountered the risen Christ. Of course, a lot more could be said, and you will challenge the interpretation of this historical evidence, naturally. And so you should! My advice to you is to leave no stone unturned --- including the big one that was moved to make way for Jesus to walk out of the tomb! <sup>3</sup>

**Two.** Everybody is perfectly free to wilfully engage in a personal way the evidence, or not. Some like the idea that acid trips promise psychedelic phenomena. Others see dangerous side-effects, so like yourself, choose to remain "blissfully ignorant".

When I see the dynamic life-transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ on that cowardly, confused, depressed, shattered bunch of disciples, I am convinced they actually saw the dead Jesus physically resurrected. Far from being gullible and easily convinced, they knew dead men don't rise again. But after many "infallible proofs" (Acts 1: 3) they became convinced that Jesus had come forward out of the fog to meet them and guarantee hope and life beyond the grave. So convinced were they that nearly all of them faced the cold steel of Roman swords or nails in wood, the hot heat of fiery pyres, the crunching teeth of beasts in the arenas, and not just with blank resignation, but with joyful hope and praise believing that death had already been conquered by their Lord.

**Three.** You are perfectly free to deny this overwhelming evidence of Christian faith-experience. You may as you say, "willingly choose ignorance in this matter". At least you are honest to say it is a wilful choice to remain ignorant.

QUACK, QUACK!

Now of course, as with acid trips, so with "religion". There are pitfalls and dangers. There are quacks and seriously deluded people out there in "Religion Land". For instance, it's true there are millions of Buddhists who are convinced they are on the path to truth, even though no one claims the Buddha's body did not decompose and turn to dust. Yet for them the Buddha has won through to the final state of fusion with everything --- Nirvana. But does anybody know whether Nirvana is real or not? That is a question of believing. And millions find that a satisfying philosophy of life. Unfortunately there is no sure way to know whether that philosophy is true or not.

And there are about a billion in the world today who are convinced that after Muhammad died he was at last transported to heaven on a white steed from Jerusalem. But does anybody know whether Muhammad reached Paradise or not? Again, this is a matter of birth, or upbringing, or predisposition. If it attracts you as a way to see

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<sup>1</sup> Dickson, John. *The Christ Files: How Historians Know What They Know About Jesus*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010, p 16

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p 17

<sup>3</sup> *Who Moved The Stone?* by Frank Morison, is a classic testimony of a lawyer who started out to prove Christianity rested on shaky improbabilities. In his examination he left no stone unturned and finally, "found himself compelled by the sheer force of [historical] circumstances to write quite another."

the world and to live and die, then you will believe the Koran is the word of Allah because Muhammad said so! But there is no way to test the claim ... and millions worship at Muhammad's tomb every year. You either believe it or you don't. You might even blow yourself up in the belief that as a Jihadi martyr you will get a ticket straight to Paradise with 70 luscious virgins to pamper you, but on what solid basis is this belief founded?

So why should it be different with the followers of Jesus? Could we not also follow a Jesus who lived and died and (we might also *like* to believe) ascended to "Heaven"? Yes. Certainly we could, except of course, that would not be Christianity as it was first proclaimed.

Christianity starts with an empty tomb whose enemies did everything they could to disprove the bold assertions that Jesus was alive. Nobody, whether friend or foe, was in any doubt that ***something remarkable happened*** to the dead Jesus. The empty tomb reasonably demonstrated God was behind this man Jesus of Nazareth. His life, teachings, claims, and ultimately his resurrection following a brutal State execution were put through scrutiny by Jew, by Roman, by Greek, by barbarian, by friend and foe alike, and did not fail the investigation.

Three days after his public execution, Jesus' body was not there. The place was abuzz with all sorts of folks meeting with an obviously alive Jesus, eating with him, touching him, talking with him, listening to him, and against all their skepticism and unbelief they became convinced Jesus was physically resurrected.

Those first Christian witnesses were sure ***Somebody*** had come forward out of the dark domain of death to meet them, and that he was therefore the Son of God. Death had lost its sting. God's promised future of "eternal life" was no chimera. Jesus himself was *back!*

Christianity was launched with Peter's announcement in Jerusalem that Jesus of Nazareth who had been publicly crucified 7 weeks before in that very place, and in front of that very audience, was now physically raised up from the tomb. Everybody from the top down knew the body was not in the tomb. This is the news that went triumphantly forth like an out-of-control bush fire from Jerusalem in spite of all the cold water the Jewish establishment and the Roman state had thrown and could throw against the fact.

Jesus was alive! This is the historic faith that shook the world to its core. And of course, it's the claim that makes Christianity vulnerable to questions about what really happened. This willingness to argue on the basis of historical events open to public scrutiny is one of the unique features of the Christian faith. No other religion in the ancient world did this.

It is not my intention to elaborate here on the reasonable historical grounds for the empty tomb. Sufficient to say there are no ancient sources, Christian or secular, which denied with convincing proof that the tomb was not empty. The enemies of Christ argued over *how* the tomb became empty, not whether it was empty.

To repeat. Just 7 weeks after the tomb was found empty, Peter stood up in Jerusalem right in front of the very audience that had been intimately involved in the execution of Jesus and who were aware of the startling news that Jesus was seen alive. It is significant that Peter did not announce the empty tomb; his speech assumed it was common knowledge. Peter did not need to defend the resurrection. He only had to explain the *meaning* of the empty tomb.

This was an historical event with world-shattering implications. Up till now, many Jews believed a day was coming at the end of this present Age when all men would be raised up --- some to everlasting shame and some to everlasting life --- but they never for a moment thought God was going to raise up one man before the end, as a kind of prototype, a model --- or to use a Bible word, the "firstfruit" --- guaranteeing what the rest of the harvest of the faithful at the end of the age would look like.

True. Typical Greek philosophy believed in the immortality of the soul, and it would not have at all sounded strange for them to hear that Jesus died and his spirit [or soul] ascended to heaven. Socrates himself had died with such a hope. But what the first Christians proclaimed was revolutionary and unheard of: For the first time in history

a human being had died and literally, bodily, physically, been raised to never die again. The body of evidence was on the side of the Christians! The risen Jesus was not a ghost nor a phantom nor an hallucination. <sup>4</sup>

So yes, the early Christians' willingness to preach and to die on the basis of historical events open to scrutiny is one of the unique features of our faith. Again, no other religion in the ancient world did this. Few religions or philosophies since that time have dared to do it. <sup>5</sup>

## CREDIBLE RELIGION

For a "religion" (I'm not keen on that word) to be credible it must do at least 3 things well ...

1. It must give a straight-forward answer to the question of whether God is real.
2. It must have something sensible and hopeful to say about the mess the world is in.
3. It must be more than just subjective "believing" because there are too many alternatives. I for one, cannot and will not base my life on something I would *like* to be true, or wish to be true. It must furnish a reliable foundation based on reasonable evidence. <sup>6</sup>

Historic NT Christianity meets these criteria in spades. Here are a few revolutionary implications for the world that arise (!) from the resurrection of Jesus.

### 1. THE GOD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS IS THE ONE TRUE GOD.

The Bible has unique historical qualifications that set it apart from all other religious literature. Perhaps the supreme difference is that the God of the Bible says He knows the end from the beginning. And it is a matter of historical record that hundreds of fulfilled prophecies announced hundreds --- and in some cases thousands --- of years before the events occurred, have come to pass exactly as the prophets predicted. Here I only mention the predictions of the resurrection of the Messiah. <sup>7</sup>

When Peter announced the resurrection of Jesus he affirmed this was fulfilled prophecy, for God had already promised He would not abandon His holy one to Sheol, neither allow His Messiah to undergo decay (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2: 25f).

When two disciples were confronted by the risen Jesus on the journey to Emmaus, they were depressed and shattered. The Stranger asked why they were so sad. "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" they asked.

And the Stranger asked them, "What things?" And they said to Him,

"The things about Jesus the Nazarine, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him up to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened.

"But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. And some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women had said; but Him they did not see."

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<sup>4</sup> The theory that the disciples were hallucinating when they claimed to see Jesus has been sufficiently disproved by many, but one of the best to deal with the question is by Bishop Tom Wright in his *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.

<sup>5</sup> The Mormons have tried to prove that Jewish emigrants sailed to America many hundreds of years before Columbus and lived alongside the native Americans, that there were elephants in the land (and many other anachronistic claims such as written records) but thus far not a skerrick of archaeological evidence has been found to verify their fantastic (i.e. imaginary) history.

<sup>6</sup> David Secombe in *The King of God's Kingdom: A Solution to the Puzzle of Jesus* outlines these points succinctly.

<sup>7</sup> My article *Prophecy Alive and Well* goes into some detail on this theme.

And the Stranger said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:18-27).

The resurrection of Jesus means that the God of the OT prophets is the one and only true God who keeps His promises.

## 2. JESUS IS LORD.

The resurrection of Jesus was a highly dangerous counter-revolutionary call. It meant that Rome did not get the final say. It meant the religious Jewish regime could not shut Jesus up. The politico-religious establishment thought they had eliminated Jesus as a pretend messiah and a rival caesar.

But the early Christians went forth with the stunning announcement that the God of Israel had reversed the world's verdict. The Jews said, "He's not our messiah. Away with "this fellow." The Romans said, "He is a fake king, a criminal against Caesar." But God vindicated Jesus by raising him up from the dead and declared him to be the legitimate king of the world. "Jesus is Lord" was the announcement that the world got it wrong!

And when the numbers of Christians had grown significantly, Rome took notice of those claims as treasonous. Rome now gave the Christians a choice. Just confess that "Caesar is lord". Indeed, they reasoned, there are many lords and many gods, and you Christians can escape martyrdom by toning down the claim that Jesus is the supreme Lord. Just bring a pinch of salt into the Roman Pantheon and swear loyalty to Caesar once a year and you can still keep your Jesus. He can sit right alongside every other lord in the empire. Surely we can all get along just fine!

But not on your [Christian] life! Jesus was the real deal because God had bodily raised him up and given him all authority in heaven and on earth as the prophets had foreseen. And what is more, God has "seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him as head over all things to the church" (Ephesians 2:20-22).

### ALL POWERS ARE UNDER JESUS' FEET

Haile Selassie was the King of Ethiopia until the socialist regime of Mengistu Haile Miriam overthrew the country and murdered Emperor Haile Selassie. But where did Selassie's body go? It just disappeared. What a mystery.

Some years later when Mengistu was himself tossed out of government, the new regime wanted to find Haile Selassie's body. When the servants of the palace were asked where he might be, they said, 'Dig up the tiled floor under the desk in Mengistu's office.' So the authorities dug up the tiled floor under the desk and found the body of Emperor Selassie.

You see, Mengistu had secretly buried the body of the murdered king under his desk, so that every day as he sat in his office, his "enemy" was literally "under his feet"!

And that was the attitude of every king and monarch and caesar in the ancient world. For instance, in the Cairo Museum of Antiquity there is a striking exhibit of a life-size statue of King Tut seated on his throne. His feet are elevated on a stool. Onto the surface of the stool are carved relief images of the king's enemies --- all have their hands tied behind their backs. The enemies are "under the feet" of Pharaoh.

And that's the ancient culture and mindset the Christians met head-on. They were so sure Jesus had conquered the grave that they were indomitable in their confession that he is Lord of all. The Kingdoms of this world belonged to him now. And ultimately his Kingdom would "crush and put an end to all these [other] kingdoms" and would "itself endure forever" (Daniel 2:44).

"Jesus is Lord" means God has not abandoned the world --- He is giving it to His Christ and to Christ's people.

"Jesus is Lord" means God has not left men and women to the slavery of corruption and decay (Romans 8).

“Jesus is Lord” means God has not abandoned this world to the baddies, to the polluters, the murderers, the terrorists, the greedy and the idolatrous. All beasts are conquered by the gentle Lamb of God!

“Jesus is Lord” means God is now preparing a people who are going to manage this world in righteousness and peace.

“Jesus is Lord” means a new world order is coming.

“Jesus is Lord” means he is now seated at God’s right hand waiting till all his enemies are put under his feet forever! (Psalm 110:1).

### 3. GOD LOVES US AND FORGIVES US

The resurrection of Jesus means God has forgiven *all* our sins. No more guilt. Period. No more shame. Full stop. No more fear of the coming Judgment when every man will answer to God for “the deeds done in the body”. Since God is for us, we now face the future Assize knowing He Himself has declared us right in His sight.

The resurrection of Jesus means “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 5:1).

When memory stabs us, when conscience disturbs us, we can answer the accusation, “Oh my accuser, Jesus is alive ... proof that every single last one of my sins is forgiven.” (If this is not true then Jesus would still be in the grave bearing our sins!) So, “who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one Who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is he who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who intercedes for us” (Romans 8:31-34).

Jesus’ resurrection proves “your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake” (1 John 2: 12). Amazing love of God!

### 4. GOD WILL JUDGE THE WORLD BY THE RISEN JESUS.

The resurrection means that,

“God now declares to all men everywhere they should repent, because He has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness through a man He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17: 30).

The resurrection of Jesus means he is “the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth ... and he loves us, and released us from our sins by his blood, and he has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father ... and behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him. Even so. Amen (Revelation 1: 5,7). A Day when wrongs will be put right is coming. Universal justice is guaranteed because Jesus is the risen King. That is good news for the poor, the defenceless, the abused, the victims of fraud, the neglected.

### 5. WE TOO WILL BE RAISED TO IMMORTALITY AND GLORY.

Have you read the remarkable story of the Australian missionary to Afghanistan and Pakistan when he was confronted by gun-wielding Taliban fighters? Grant Lock’s amazing autobiography titled, *Shoot Me First!* is a real heart stopper, and a testimony to God’s faithfulness and protection in the midst of a seriously dangerous environment where militant Islamists regularly dished out their brand of justice.

I shall always remember reading one story about the day Grant Lock was inside a school. His workers were outside doing extensions on the school that till then had only been allowed for boys. But now work was going on to enlarge the school so young girls could get an education as well.

Grant was suddenly confronted by a commotion outside. One of his workers rushed inside screaming that he had better get outside quickly because the Taliban had arrived and they meant business ... they were waving their guns and automatic rifles threatening the staff with bloody murder.

Grant Lock was confronted by the turbaned chief Taliban fighter waving his gun at his face and screaming, "I will kill all your workers if you don't order them to stop work on this school immediately!" (In that society of course, the education of girls is considered a blasphemous thing.)

In the face of this hostile and murderous gesture Grant Lock did not cower or take a backwards step. Not at all. He actually stepped closer and eye-balled the Taliban leader. "If you are going to shoot anybody", Grant challenged the gun-toting Islamic fighter, "then shoot me first!"

Such powerful Christian faith and testimony unnerved the Taliban chieftain. It seems he had never been confronted with such fearless testimony and courage before. He evidently respected and admired Grant's victorious faith. And to cut a long story short, Grant Lock had the opportunity to liaise with the Taliban and the school renovations continued under Taliban jurisprudence! Girls and boys were educated in that place.

Ah. The power of the Living Christ to confront the powers (both seen and unseen) of this world has not changed. This is powerful, historic Christianity at work. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive from the dead, never to die again. Jesus is Lord. And all who follow him will be raised to immortality to reign with him forever more. Jesus promises, "Because I live, you will live".

The resurrection announces that, "if the Spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

This is the apostolic New Testament faith that is not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

#### NOT BURIED, BUT SOWN

If I bury a bag of wheat, I never expect to see it again. But if I take that bag of wheat and instead sow the seeds, then I am expecting a crop. How significant that the Bible says Jesus was "buried" [the world never expected to see him again] but that in death his followers are "sown". Speaking of the death of our mortal body, Paul says;

It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body ... (I Corinthians 15: 42-44).

Thank God our family and our friends who are in Christ are not buried. They are sown! I like the old Saxon name for cemetery --- "God's acre". Around the world there are acres and acres of sleeping Christians who are sown in faith in the coming call to resurrection. They are said to be "asleep". And on the day of his return to planet earth, Christ Jesus who is the firstfruits of a whole crop of immortals, is going to awaken them to the glories of the new Age!

My friend, you wrote to me with such reasonableness. And I agree you are free to make your choice. You may choose to sleep blissfully ignorant if you wish. God is a Gentleman. He forces no man against his will. He respects the decision of every man and woman. But this will not guarantee you will not be awakened on that Day to confront the Son of man in whom God Almighty has invested universal authority and in whose hands the fate of everybody hangs, for as "the living One" Jesus testifies,

"I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Rev. 1: 18).

On the word of Jesus himself, all those raised to stand before him and who are not found worthy to enter that Kingdom, will weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth in anguish of soul when they realise too late what glories and joys they have forfeited. This will be anything but blissful ignorance.

I have yet to meet anybody who has walked with Jesus Christ and who, coming to the end of their life, was overcome with sudden regret saying, "I just wasted my life putting my hope in the hands of Jesus." They all, every last one of them, have gone to sleep blissfully with the full knowledge they will hear the voice of the Son of God on that resurrection morning, "Awake My daughter! Rise up My son! Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

