

Praise God for Easter Monday!

By Glenn Hoburg

In the midst of the grind Christ proclaims, "Behold, I am making all things new."

In his song, *The Beginning*, Michael Card writes: "In the beginning was the beginning, in Him it all began / All that they had was God and the garden, the woman and the man / Before creation learned to groan, the stars would dance and sing / Each moment was new, every feeling was fresh, for the creature king and queen" Chorus: The beginning will make all things new, new life belongs to him / He hands us each new moment, saying, My child begin again..."

Sin has the effect of wearing things down until they die. We see it most clearly in ourselves and those we love: We grow old and die. Recently my mother discovered some pictures from my 20th high school reunion. As we flipped through the photos, I was startled by the appearance of my aging friends. "Look at him," I said. "He looks . . . well . . . older."

"What do you think you look like?" my mother replied. Sin makes us old even if we don't feel it.

Sin also produces "toil," that continual labor against thorns and thistles. In Genesis 3 the Lord tells Adam that he should now expect this. "*By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*" With those words he pronounces both the struggle (sweat) and monotony of life (till you return). Struggle and monotony equal toil. "Monday Morning" has come to denote much of this feeling of toil. Words like "drudgery" and "daily grind" come to mind—"same ol', same ol'": We sit in the same traffic, drink from the same mug, pass the same scenery, listen to same the songs. We glance at the people beside us and see it in their faces, too. All of us have felt something of the experience Bill Murray so well depicts in *Groundhog Day* and *Lost in Translation*. There is little new.

Monday Morning Can Last a Lifetime

The feeling of Monday Morning isn't just a 9-to-5 phenomenon—it

permeates the rest of our lives. James Taylor writes in *Another Grey Morning*: “She hears the baby waking up downstairs / She hears the foghorn calling out across the sound / Repetition in the morning air / is just too much to bear.” The expectation that there is little new infects every area of our existence. We begin to believe, “I know my wife . . . my roommate,” and stop asking questions. We begin to believe, “Things will never change at work . . . or at home,” and our days are punctuated with cynical sighs. Perhaps some cause or mission to which we’ve been devoted gradually becomes futile. We seek to generate or recover a sense of newness by finding something new: a new spouse, a new boyfriend, a new job, a new hobby, or a new purchase. But our new job inevitably begins to feel like “work,” and we discover last year’s toys no longer pulsate with life. They were only inanimate, after all. The new form of hand-held technology—the one we gazed at longingly, played with on the subway, and proudly introduced to friends and co-workers—holds about as much fascination as a garage-door opener.

When this feeling of “Monday Morning” extends into the whole of our lives and then persists for months or years, we’ve arrived at full-blown depression. The thought of living then becomes old. James Taylor concludes: “She said make me angry, or just make me cry / But no more grey mornings—I think I’d rather die.”

The Resurrection: A Shockwave of New Life

In the midst of all this we find a resurrected Jesus proclaiming at the end of Revelation: “*Behold, I am making all things new.*” For those who are keenly aware of oldness—its prevalence and pervasiveness—this is staggering statement, both in its boldness and range. “Behold, I am making *all things* new.” Only someone who had overcome death would dare to make such a statement.

But the risen Lord’s declaration raises a question: Doesn’t the writer of Ecclesiastes sum up our earthly life as “toil”? Do we not all live under the curse of the Fall as death indicates? Isn’t Jesus talking about future newness? In reverse order: Yes, Revelation 21 is giving us a picture of the final renovation of all things, but the Bible teaches that it is the completion of a work in progress, initiated by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Concerning our present experience of the curse of sin, there are some effects of Christ’s resurrection that will only be experienced on the final day, but many are experienced now. As one theologian put it, Jesus’ resurrection sent a “shockwave” into the world—a shockwave of new life. Sunday Morning has extended its daylight into Monday Morning, and beyond. Lastly, although we are not immune from toil, the resurrection of Jesus causes us to toil differently. We now toil

with *expectation*. Why? Because the same power which exploded death is living in you.

I remember once leading some junior high students in a pool relay. Each one was dressed in a heavy, gray jogging suit, and had to swim to the other side and back. Needless to say, it was slow going. We know this feeling, dragging through life wearing the heavy, soggy clothes of the Fall. And mustering up our willpower won't shake it off. This is where Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17–20 provides such needed hope. He prays: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him . . . that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you . . . *and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.*" Someone very big has entered our souls.

The One Who Declared "I am making all things new," Lives in Me.

Our hope for newness corresponds directly to our sense of power or powerlessness. Someone who had struggled with depression once said to me, "*If you asked a group of depressed people how many of them feel their lives are out of control, every hand would be raised.*" There is a perceived lack of power, and so lack of hope. For those who are not connected to the resurrected Jesus, the sense of powerlessness is well founded. Paul understood himself as "dead in sin" (Ephesians 2) before Jesus entered his life. If some of us feel enslaved to drudgery perhaps we haven't personally encountered the risen and living Jesus.

Once Paul met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, and understood that the Holy Spirit had united him to this Jesus, he was at a loss for words, reaching for every superlative in the book. It's not just "power," but "*the immeasurable greatness of His power.*" It's not just "might," but as John Stott points out, "*the energy of the might of His strength.*" Paul knew who Jesus was and what it meant that he was united to Him. And yet he grasped for words.

And he prays the same thing for us: to *know*. Notice that Paul's prayer isn't a prayer for power, it's a prayer to *know* the power, to recognize what has been given. And this mere recognition brings loads of new hope and strength. We are neither able nor responsible to muster the power to renew our lives. It is vain and futile to even try. We end up exhausting ourselves chasing every new self-help trend and spiritual gimmick, and then finally burning out.

The power for renewal is without and within us at the same time—Christ!

Paul knows the most important first step to recovering the hope of newness: Pray for wisdom and knowledge to Get It: Christ, who is immortal, lives in me! Christ, who shook off death, has bound Himself to me! Christ, who with a word will restore all the color, fragrance, and music of a worn and faded world, is at work now. The One who has declared, “Behold, I am making all things new,” has taken up residence in me.

Paul is constantly teaching this way. He spends a great deal of time (the first half of Ephesians) convincing us of what God has given, before he says, “Now, go do!” He does the same thing with the resurrection and newness. At the deepest part of our “Mondayness” is the hidden belief that nothing can change. We believe it about ourselves, one another, our jobs, and the causes to which we are devoted. It is the cloud that hangs over our relationships: *He'll never change. She always does this.* My wife and I learned early on to strike the words “never” and “always” from our marriage vocabulary. Treating someone with that sort of pessimism shows that we don't live by grace ourselves, and really underestimates the resurrection power of Jesus. Here's how it plays out: We live lives that require very little of God's supernatural power, and so when we find ourselves in need of it, we get depressed and give up. Christians should know that real change happens supernaturally; that the gospel is all about God doing things for us that we can't do for ourselves. These are things wherein He alone could be the Author, or take the credit. A life that expects little newness and embraces the belief that “nothing is new . . . nothing will change,” denies the resurrection.

But we know better, and so we begin to expect newness in every area of life. This is what Paul rolls out in the latter part of Ephesians: new words, new convictions about the truth, new sex lives, new marriages, new work ethics. Did you once use the truth on people in a way that left them emotionally doubled over? Christ spoke the truth in love, and now you can. Did you once treat your marriage as a drive-through for your needs? Christ gave Himself, and now you can. Did you once work hard when the boss was looking? Now you work hard because your Lord is looking on approvingly.

So this is what Paul affirms: *I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me* (Colossians). Toiling with expectation—because the resurrected Jesus lives in him. We need to take the fact of the resurrection to the very area in our lives where we feel most hopeless, and ask God to display His power. Is it an addiction to alcohol, food, or pornography? Family relationships, marriage, our wayward kids, our relationship to parents? Or are your problems bigger—neighborhood, city, country, world? Jesus didn't rise from the dead to a place of passivity. He is advancing His kingdom, and that means renewal.

Returning to Michael Card: “The Beginning will make all things new. New life belongs to Him. He gives us each new moment and says ‘My Child begin again.’” This may sound naïve to those who have weathered years of the old self: “Yeah, I used to be optimistic, but then I grew up.” If you’re cynical about new beginnings, it’s because your former hope was misplaced. Only God can grant new beginnings, by way of His grace. We see forgiveness in single digits and he raises us seventy times seven. The Psalmist writes: Sing to the Lord a new song, *for He has done marvelous things! His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him.*” The Lord expects us to sing new songs because “His mercies are new every morning” (Lamentations 3).

In *Schindler’s List*, grays and blacks depict the horrors of Nazi death camps. Yet hope reappears throughout the film—in the form of a little girl dressed in bright red. She stands out as the symbol of life and newness amidst the cruelty, death, and despair. The resurrection of Jesus offers believers a similar vision. In it, we begin to expect new things. In referring to the original experience of creation, Card writes: “*Every moment was new, every feeling was fresh.*” We experience the flashback as a young child collects a lifeless, gray rock and says: Hey, look what I found! But, the resurrection offers us more than nostalgia. It teaches that the Lord Jesus rose to inaugurate a work of re-creation—new hearts, new words, new marriages, new songs, new lessons, new cities. This is the very thing for which we ache and the very thing that Jesus promises. The New Heavens and Earth will be a place of endless expectation and eternal newness, but the Lord of Life has already begun the work. Easter Monday is here.

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