

# Stuck in the Muck?

Jesus told them over and over – He would be beaten and crucified. Then, on the third day, He would rise again from the dead. But His disciples and other dear followers just didn't get it. What was the problem? It's hard to believe that they didn't hear Him.

Then, they saw Him lay down His life. They watched His agony in Gethsemane, His beatings, his stripes and crown of thorns, and then the tortuous crucifixion on Golgotha. Now, He'd predicted the course of these events (Mat 17:12,22,23; 20:18; 26:31,32; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33...) and the scriptures were amazingly specific from the stripes to the crucifixion to the piercing of the spear to the criminals on His side to the rich man's tomb and much more. But still, they didn't get it. That was Friday.

Fundamentally, they didn't believe He'd return. (Mark 16:9-11) It was one thing, I guess, to see Him raise the dead, open the eyes of the blind, heal the lepers, feed the 4000 and then the 5000 on a few scraps of food, to still the raging sea, to cast out demons...they saw it all and yet they couldn't believe He'd return. They saw Him transfigured on the mount and in dialog with Moses and Elijah. They heard the voice of God Almighty declaring Jesus as His Son. But He'd also been wrapped in linen grave cloths and they didn't believe He'd return. That was Saturday.

When hopes are dashed and grief is raw, that's Saturday. When all your purpose seems absolutely purposeless, that's Saturday. When your heart hardens into a callous pursuit of self-gratification or worldly comfort – that's Saturday. When doubts and fears surround and you feel like hiding – that's Saturday.

When faith is set aside in favor of besetting sin, when your will to obey the Lord seems like a vapor, when ministry becomes just a job and service a duty, when life's circumstances seem bigger than God, when it seems like He doesn't care – that's Saturday.

And many, if not most of us get stuck there to some extent. Stuck, because like the disciples, we don't believe He'll return – not like He said He would – not imminently, not really. Perhaps you've not noticed, but like them, we're seeing many miracles - many prophesied signs of the last days coming to pass – but, we often behave like it's Saturday. Oh, we grant intellectual assent, even verbal 'atta-boy's' to the notion, but how many of us honestly expect the imminent return of Jesus Christ and reflect that expectation in our lives? It's easy by comparison to believe that He'll come someday, but that falls short of what He wants us to believe. What's the problem? Personal agendas? Higher priorities? Better deals? Like the disciples, could it be that many of us just aren't 'getting it'?

As believers, we get to live in the expansive joy of Sunday morning. We get to share in the fantastic reality of resurrection and eternal life. You see, that Sunday is not only the confidence of His resurrection but of His return, the fulfillment of His redemption. It's called in the Bible the "blessed hope" (Tit 2:13). Imminence, looking for His return – here's what the Bible says:

*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.* (Mat 24:36).

*"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those*

*who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: "Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" (Mat 25:1-6)*

*Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming-- in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning --lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!* (Mark 13:33-37).

*And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.* (Rom 13:11-12).

*And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.* (Rom 16:20).

*...so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ...* (1 Cor 1:7).

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...* (Phil 3:20).

*Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.* (Phil 4:5).

*...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the*

*dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.* (1 Thes 1:10).

*Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.* (1 Thes 5:6).

*...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...* (Titus 2:13).

*...so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.* (Heb 9:28).

*For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry.* (Heb 10:37).

*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.* Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (James 5:7-9).

*But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.* (1 Peter 4:7).

*...keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.* (Jude 1:21).

*Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.* (Rev 3:11).

*Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.* (Rev 22:7).

*He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."*

*Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*  
(Rev 22:20).

Whether it is filled with travail or slumber, Saturday is like the 'valley of the shadow of death'. It's not the place the Lord wants us to linger in but rather to pass through. Following Jesus means passing through this worldly state of mind, this Saturday if you would. And pass through we must. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Mat 16:24) So how did Jesus get to Sunday and what does it mean for us?

It was God's doing. And the same is true for us who will follow. No matter how hard we try, how many gimmicks we use, we won't 'unstick' ourselves from the muck and stupor of Saturday; we can't somehow pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and land in the Sunday of that blessed new life and truly imminent expectation. We must call out to the Lord. Yes, though we often miss it, it really is that simple and that serious.

Randy Alcorn, in his book 'Edge of Eternity' described a character who was in a similar fix. He had trodden the long red road toward heaven, he had been saved by faith in Christ, and he had been helped along the way by an angelic 'soldier'. But at one point, he finds great difficulty:

*Marcus led me away from the others to the north side of the road. After we'd gone a half-mile, we descended into a storm of wind and lightning. The horizontal rain pelted me, washing my eyes. I turned to Marcus, trying to see him through the blur. He'd disappeared.*

*As the rain beat down on me, I stood at the foot of a hill, wet leaves slick under my feet and blowing in my face. I didn't want to climb it, but if I'd learned anything here, it was that what I wanted wasn't reason enough to do or not do something. I climbed for an hour and soaked to the bone, arrived at the top. There stood a lonely, gaunt tree, about nine feet tall. It had only two long limbs, spread horizontally about five feet, in macabre stick-man fashion. Wet leaves blew against it haphazardly, hanging on for a moment until they were blown off. As I came near it, mud grabbed at my feet. It thickened with every step. I tried to plod to drier ground but couldn't.*

*The mud rose to my ankles. With every effort to get out, I sank deeper. It was now at my knees.*

*"What am I supposed to do?" I cried, hoping to bring back the warrior who'd abandoned me.*

*I reached out grasping for branches that weren't there. Then I saw someone in the distance watching me. He sat on a delicate white mare. Was it Marcus? No. It was a gentle rider with fierce eyes. The King!*

*I felt like a child at bat whose father just showed up at a baseball game. I was determined to pull myself out of the mud, to show him what I could do and how much I'd learned. I tried harder and harder, yet the mud kept swallowing me. It came to my waist now. For a few minutes I stopped trying altogether. Perhaps that was what he wanted. But I continued to sink. So I redoubled my efforts to escape, while the churning mud rose to my chest.*

*'Why doesn't he come for me? I've traveled so far; I'm so close to*

*the city. Is this where I'll end, buried alone in muddy quicksand?'*

*Finally the King got off his horse and approached me. He stopped about twenty feet away. I waited for him to speak, but he said nothing.*

*"What can I do?" I cried.*

*"You're not using all you have to get out," he said.*

*"But I am," I whimpered. I flailed my arms and wrenched my back and twisted my body to prove I was using all I had. The mud was now at my neck. I quaked with fear.*

*"No," he said again, "you are not using all you have to get out." He spoke with infuriating certainty.*

*"I am! Can't you see that? What else do I have? What do you want me to do?" I spat out mud with my question. The King I'd come to trust was letting me choke on mud? Why?*

*"You are not using all you have to get out," he said, "for you have not asked me to help you."*

*He said it slowly and clearly. He gestured to the barren tree with its shaft crossed by the thick ugly branches.*

*As mud oozed into my mouth, in desperation I cried, "Help me, Lord, please help me!"*

*As soon as I spoke, he put his left hand on the tree branch and leaned out toward me, one foot stepping into the goo. He stood on the mud, reached down with his right arm and pulled me up.*

*A moment later I stood on the mud beside him. He drew me to him, embracing me, his white tunic now covered with my mud.*

*"I'm sorry I got you so dirty," I said.*

*"It isn't the first time," he said. "I know what it is to be made dirty. I planted this tree for you, long before you were born."*

Now, lest I leave you with the impression that living in the hope of His imminent appearance means some sort of 'hyper-spiritual' (is there such a word?) fanaticism or enormous works trip, let me relate a story from dear Francis of Assisi. One day as he was working in his garden a disciple asked him what he would do if he absolutely knew that Christ would be back in five minutes. He replied, "Why, I'd finish this weeding!"

The blessed hope can't be worked up or feigned. It must be real in our hearts and it will always conduct us to the place where we live in the confidence that who we are and what we're engaged in is pleasing to the Lord. It's a peaceful place yet filled with eagerness. It's a patient place and ultimately a fruitful one as well.

May each of us look for and hasten the day! (2 Pet 3:12)

*If you have never come to know Jesus Christ as your Savior and King, the One worth following even with a cross to bear of your own so to speak, please understand that you can never please God apart from simple faith. You'll never merit eternal life by how good you try to be or how much effort you put forth. Serving our wonderful King will only come AFTER submitting to His plan of salvation. He wants us all to know Him and receive His love. It is out of that relationship that we desire to see Him return. Open your heart to Him now and invite Him in – confess your sin, ask for His forgiveness and begin a new life. Read Romans 3:23, 6:23, 10:9,10, Ephesians 2:8,9, Rev 3:20, and John 3:16. They're for you!*