

The Biggest Surprise Ever!

‘The call to worship had just been pronounced, starting Easter Sunday morning service in an East Texas church. The choir started the processional, singing “Up from the Grave He Arose” while marching in perfect step down the center aisle to the front of the church. The last woman was wearing shoes with very slender heels. Without a thought for her fancy heels, she stepped onto the grating that covered the hot air register in the middle of the aisle. Suddenly the heel of one shoe sank into the hole in the register grate. In a flash she realized her predicament. Not wishing to hold up the whole processional, without missing a step, she slipped her foot out of her shoe and continued marching down the aisle. There wasn’t a hitch. The processional moved with clock-like precision. The first man after her spotted the situation and without losing a step, reached down and pulled up her shoe, but the entire grate came with it! Surprised, but still singing, the man kept on going down the aisle, holding in his hand the grate with the shoe attached. Everything still moved like clockwork. Still in tune and still in step, the next man in line stepped into the open register and disappeared from sight. The service took on a special meaning that Sunday, for just as the choir ended with “Hallelujah! Christ arose!” a voice was heard under the church shout-

ing, “I hope all of you are out of the way ’cause I’m coming out now!” The little girl closest to the aisle shouted, “Come on, Jesus! We’ll stay out of the way”.’

That church had a “surprising” Easter service that day! First, the lady’s shoe got caught in the grate. Second, the grate came up with the shoe when the man tried to pull the shoe free. Third, the next man fell in. Fourth surprise, his “disembodied” voice sounded from beneath the floor. Surprise five, the girl mistook him for Christ Jesus Himself! Well, we should all know by now, that God just loves surprises! Because, well, while nothing is a surprise to Him, He absolutely delights in surprising us!! And He is sure to include glory surprises in all His perfect plans!

[“The Perfect Plan” video]

We just saw a modern-day Peter and Lord Jesus. True to form, Peter was surprised by every one of Lord Jesus’ answers. But most by the arrival of the soldiers to arrest the Lord and take Him away. And that reminds us, oh so disturbingly, how our supposedly democratic governments have taken to suddenly appearing in the middle of the night and brusquely, often brutishly, arresting upstanding citizens because they hold the wrong opinions, or refuse to accept unwanted medical injections, etc. Though we’ve never suffered anything even remotely approaching what our Lord willingly went through, He knew all about it in advance!

While Peter and all the rest of the disciples were taken by complete surprise at the totally unexpected turn of events after

Lord Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem just days before—that was more like it!—nothing prepared them for His arrest under cover of darkness, the kangaroo trial, and crucifixion just hours later the next day! He was supposed to save Israel from oppression and expel the Romans. But instead, He up and lets them kill him! But, as if to leave the very best for last, the greatest surprise of all, on the third day, today, He arose! He came back to life, and this time in a transformed body. Physical, just like before, but yet different. No longer mortal, but immortal. This new resurrection body would never decay, never change, never get sick, never tire, never hurt, never die! The patriarch Job, in a burst of prophetic vision, foresaw that though he would physically die, yet, somehow, he would with his physical eyes in a new body, still see God his Redeemer, which is Christ Jesus, standing on this very earth.

So you see how all of this was just part of God's perfect plan? But totally unexpected and awesomely surprising to all of us human creatures. For though Christ Jesus had spoken repeatedly that He would be killed in Jerusalem and rise from the dead, somehow, His words went in the disciples' ears on one side and promptly exited out the other. But consider the one who most lusted for Christ's death. The devil has been trying to outsmart God from the moment he first felt the tingles of pride, and he's been struggling to thwart God's plans for mankind ever since. And now, finally, on Good Friday, he's finally succeeded through his inciting of Judas Iscariot, to get Lord Jesus just where he

wants Him—nailed, bleeding and dying on a Roman cross! Hot diggity dog! Finally, satan could freely torment humanity, and thus thumb his nose at Father God, forever and ever. What sweet revenge! But, but, but. What's this? Lord Jesus tells this one murderous thief that he will be with Him in paradise, *today*? Today? How could that be? Well, surprise, surprise! The Spirit of Christ Jesus, now separated from his dead physical body, took a trip down to the netherworld, hell, where the imprisoned demons and unsaved humans go, and there, according to I Peter 3:19, our Lord strutted among them, showing them that they've no hope ever of getting out and terrorizing the earth again. For because Lord Jesus died on the cross, paying the punishment for all of human sin, these demonic spirits in the abyss no longer have any legal recourse to be released ever again. So as much of a wondrous surprise it was to the disciples and us that Christ rose again, it was even more of a shock to satan on Sunday morning! He'd lost his last chance to thwart God's plan to redeem us! So he had to change strategy. No longer able to prevent our redemption, he now seeks to keep us from coming to God to be saved in the first place. Confusing, deceiving and concealing the truth from us and all people in every way possible. Even the Walt Disney company has succumbed to his wiles. You, do not!

As is our recent tradition, let's now sing from our hearts, in spirit and in truth, the joy of Christ's resurrection, in "Easter Song".

["Easter Song" video]

