

Monarchs and Resurrection
John 11:21-26; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NIV)

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will raise again.”

Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

As a fifth-grade schoolboy, I lived in paradise! A fine gravel road ran in front of our home where I could walk barefoot and enjoy an endless supply of stones for my slingshot. I could walk a mere hundred yards from my front steps and wade in a stream, too small to be called a creek, so we just dubbed it “The Branch.” The Branch wound its way from behind Bobby Hendrix’s house, crossing Shelton Beach Road beside Myers Memorial Baptist Church. From there, it curved somewhat north to cross Old Citronelle Highway right beside Buddy Brink’s house. It then meandered through a woods until it merged with Eight Mile Creek, where the currents of both streams formed one fine swimming hole! I’m telling you, I lived in paradise!

I spent many an hour wading in the Branch from Bobby’s house to Eight Mile Creek. I learned where the Crawdads lived, and how to catch them without being pinched by their claws. I watched Mrs. Squirrel build her nest high in the Sweet Gum tree, away from predators and snoopy little boys like me. I could sit so still at times that Mrs. Rabbit and her children would walk within ten yards of me and not notice me. I learned to spot Cottonmouth Water Moccasins before they spotted me; and I was a bird watcher years before I knew of the Audubon Society. I learned to trap the Flying Squirrel, tame him, and make him my pet. I’m telling you, I lived in paradise!

One fine Tuesday after school and homework, I was wading down The Branch when I noticed movement in my peripheral vision. Upon investigation, I found a big ole ugly caterpillar in the beginning stages of spinning a cocoon around itself. I was ecstatic! This was exactly what we had just studied in science class. I stood for what seemed an eternity, watching that caterpillar spin the cocoon around itself. I could hardly wait until morning to tell Mr. Black, our science teacher, about my incredible experience.

Mr. Black used my discovery to review in class our studies about the pupa and chrysalis stage of insects. Here, in this fifth-grade class room, I first heard and understood that jaw-breaker of a word with Greek origin: *metamorphosis*—“changed from one form to another.”

Mr. Black told me approximately how many days it would take for that ugly caterpillar to complete the chrysalis stage and a butterfly would chew itself out of that cocoon. I returned every single day, sometimes several times in the same day, to that cocoon, determined to be present when that butterfly appeared.

My diligence was rewarded on a fine, Blue-Bird spring Saturday in April. As I approached that cocoon, it was moving, bumping, and swinging from its mooring. I stood in holy awe and watched as a tiny hole appeared in the end of the cocoon. The hole got bigger, then, first one long black spidery leg appeared, and then another and another, until finally this creature pulled and struggled and finally popped out of that cocoon. Wet and wrinkled, but alive and beautiful beyond description, right before my eyes, was the most gorgeous Monarch Butterfly I have ever seen.

I watched it repeatedly wipe its wings with its legs, fluttering those distinctly patterned orange and black wings, drying them in the warm spring air. Suddenly it lifted up on the breeze and fluttered away in that erratic, Monarch-distinct flight. I ran after it for a long way before it rose up and over the trees and out of my sight.

And then, here is what I did: I ran straight home, reached under my bed and pulled out my treasure box filled with National Geographic Magazines. I found that issue whose front cover consisted of a photograph of tens of thousands of Monarch Butterflies, gathered together at some distant place in Mexico. The National Geographic article explained that Monarchs migrate from all parts of North America; even from as far as New York and Canada. They gather at this particular place in Mexico by the millions and millions. The front cover of National Geographic testified to this truth.

I am telling you, that as a fifth-grade school boy, I really did live in a paradise!

I am reminded of this bit of my childhood this Easter season, as I have read and re-read the Gospel accounts of the Passion of Jesus. From Ash Wednesday until Palm Sunday, I have followed Jesus from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross of Golgotha. And it was when He turned to the thief on the cross and said, "*Today, you will be with me in paradise.*" that I realized how God, in His infinite wisdom, had prepared me in my childhood to really understand the Easter miracle.

You see, as that small boy, I explored my paradise after school and on Saturdays. But on Sundays I attended Myers Memorial Baptist Church where I explored the Bible. So it was that when "Cotton" Causey stood in the pulpit on Easter Sunday morning and told us that God had the power to change ugly sinners into beautiful saints, I believed him! Why, I had seen the power of God change an ole ugly caterpillar into a beautiful Monarch Butterfly with my own eyes!

And when Bro. Causey said that God's power had raised Jesus from the dead and left behind an empty tomb, I believed him! Why, I had seen with my own two eyes the empty tomb of a cocoon! I could believe that Jesus was alive because I had seen with my own eyes the new life of that Monarch!

And when Bro. Causey said that if we trusted Jesus, one day God's power would take us to heaven to be with Jesus, I believed him! I figured that if God's power could guide those frail, tiny butterflies all the way from New York and Canada to a certain place in Mexico, that he surely had the power to show us humans the way to heaven!

And as Bro. Causey preached, I remembered a recent Sunday School lesson where Jesus said that unless you became like one of those little children he was holding, you could not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. As a fifth grade school boy, I felt like Jesus was talking about me. And I believed.

And so do I believe.

So on this Easter Sunday morning, I fondly recall that paradise of my childhood and I dream of the paradise to come. And when my three-score-and-ten years are up, I believe God will metamorphosis this old body into my glorified body, and raise me to new life, leaving behind this old cocoon and one more empty tomb.

"...do you believe this?"

And all of God's people said, AMEN & AMEN !!