There, over the next 23 years, the world’s greatest language scholars puzzled in vain over the stone’s meaning. Frenchman, Jean-François Champollion puzzled over the three inscriptions. Champollion was fluent in Coptic, a modern Egyptian and Ethiopian language with ancient roots. He knew the Coptic language shared some characters with the ancient Demotic language. And Champollion also knew classical Greek, the one part of the inscription that was fully known. Slowly, laboriously, through a combination of brilliant linguistic scholarship and sheer guesswork, Champollion reconciled the hieroglyphics, one by one, with the classical Greek using the Demotic language as the bridge between them.

It took months to puzzle out one hieroglyphic character; but gradually, the process of discovery picked up speed until Champollion knew the meaning of every hieroglyphic carved into the black stone slab. Had the Rosetta Stone, the cryptic key, not been discovered, this breakthrough would not have been possible. Egyptian hieroglyphics would likely be a mystery today. In the science of cryptography, possessing the key is everything.

Jesus is the key we need to understand what happens after death. Specifically, the resurrection of Jesus is the key to unlock the mystery of life after death. Hear the Colossians text again, but from a different angle in in Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase, *The Message*: “Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ — that’s where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life — even though invisible to spectators — is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you’ll show up, too — the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.”

The resurrection of Jesus is nothing less than the Rosetta Stone which decodes the meaning of life. Faced with life’s mysteries and absurdities, its pointless sufferings and setbacks, we may be tempted to declare that the narrative of our human lives means nothing more than a nonsensical jumble of letters. That is, until we discover the encryption key, until we hear the good news of the resurrection of Jesus. The terrifying randomness of life is still there. But, along with the very human trials and tribulations, there is the message communicated by the angel on the first Easter morning: “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay” (Matthew 28:6). This message breaks the code. This message bridges earth and heaven for us.

We may never fully understand the resurrection or be able to explain how the risen Jesus showed up inside a locked room, or how he broke the bread for Cleopas and his companion at Emmaus, then vanished from their sight. We may not understand Matthew’s words as he describes how, after Jesus’ resurrection: “The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:52-53). It’s okay if we do not get it: our lack of understanding does not diminish the effectiveness of the resurrection. Theologian Douglas John Hall once admitted that he, too, is mystified by the resurrection. “I don’t claim to understand it,” he wrote, “but I do stand under it.” That is the key: even if we do not understand the resurrection, we still stand under it. Ain’t a that good news!

When asked whether you must first understand the resurrection to believe it, a wise person once said that the resurrection functions like a bridge. You do not have to be a mechanical engineer and know everything about the physical properties of steel beams and how they are riveted together to drive across the bridge. In the same way, although we do not totally grasp the *how* or the *why* of the resurrection, we still benefit from Christ’s work at the cross. We stand in God’s good grace because Christ took our sins upon himself, dying and rising that we might have new life now and everlasting life with God later. What Jesus accomplished for us in the resurrection may be encrypted, beyond our comprehension, but we can catch glimpses in Scripture, and in faithful community, of what life in Christ can be. Let those glimpses be enough for now.

*Amistad* is the true story of a mutiny aboard a slave ship in 1839. The incident created a legal and diplomatic crisis for our country when the slaves’ former owners, in far-off Spain, sued in an American court to get their human property back. Eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the slaves of the *Amistad* were free to return to Africa.

A Christian missionary visited the men in prison as they awaited the ruling, leaving behind an illustrated Bible. None of the slaves knew or could read English, but they looked at the pictures. One of the men, Yamba, spent many hours studying the illustrations. Cinque, the leader of the group, looks at him and says, “You don’t have to pretend to be interested in that. Nobody’s watching but me.” Yamba looks up and says, “I’m not pretending. I’m beginning to understand it.”

Yamba invites Cinque over and explains the pictures to him, at least, as he imagines their meaning. The first picture is of Jewish people being attacked by lions. “Their people have suffered more than ours,” he says. Then Yamba flips ahead to a picture of the baby Jesus, crowned with a halo of light, “Then *he* was born, and everything changed.” “Who is he?” Cinque asks. Yamba admits he does not know, but he says this child must be very special. Yamba shows Cinque pictures of Jesus healing, protecting, and embracing people. He shows him a picture of Jesus riding a donkey, with a cheering crowd lining the road and a large halo over his head. “Everywhere he goes,” says Yamba, “he is followed by the sun!”

But Yamba discovers there is more to the story. “Something happened,” he says, glumly pointing at a picture of Jesus in chains, surrounded by soldiers with spears. “He was captured, accused of some crime.” Cinque insists, “He must have done something.” “Why?” asks Yamba. “What did *we* do?” (Fair point!) Then, through tears, he asks, “Do you want to see how they killed him?”

When Cinque reminds him that it is only a story, Yamba shakes his head. It’s becoming more real to him than that. “But look,” he goes on. “That’s not the end of it. His people took his body down from…” At that point he pauses and draws a cross in the air. “They took him into a cave. They wrapped him in cloth, like we do. They thought he was dead, but he appeared before his people again. And he spoke to them. Then, finally, he rose into the sky.” Yamba continues, “This is where the soul goes when you die here…This is where we’re going when they kill us.” The final engraving is one depicting heaven as a beautiful place filled with glorious light. Stroking the picture gently with his fingers, Yamba muses, “It doesn’t look so bad.”

We do not need to know everything about the resurrection. We do not need to comprehend its every detail before we can grasp its essential truth. We who are followers of Christ have already died, says Paul; died to our old lives of sin and hopelessness. Our true lives are now hidden, encrypted, in the risen life of our Savior. Just as Yamba studied the engravings and grasped the basics of the good news about Jesus, we, too, can look at the resurrection and discover all we really need to know about God’s great love for the world, and for us. The resurrection functions as our Rosetta Stone. The resurrection is God’s triumphant love, translated into a message we can begin to appreciate.

And so, as the Scriptures urge us, “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is…” (Colossians 3:1). Look not to the things of this world for your salvation. In Christ you have died and no longer belong to death. Look, rather, to Jesus who greets you, risen from the tomb.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that my life is hid with Christ in You. As I die to self and live for Christ, may my life reflect Your love, gentleness, compassion, and truth. Help me to keep the eyes of my heart on Jesus and the glorious eternal inheritance that You have reserved for me and all who have trusted Jesus as Savior. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

**Source:** Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (NavPress, 2002), Colossians 3:2-4.

**Encrypted in Christ**

Sunday, August 3, 2025 [Colossians 3:1-11](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3%3a1-11&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

What true statement can you make that no one in history has ever heard? “You died.” Those words sound logically absurd. If the statement is, “you died,” then who could the listener be? A cemetery is one place where the chilling sentence, “you died,” makes sense. In that solemn place, truer words were never spoken. Yet, like the philosopher’s famous tree that falls in the forest where no one is around to hear, are you really having a conversation?

So, just what does the apostle Paul mean when he says to the Colossians, “you have died” (v. 3)? The second part of verse 3 may help us out: “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” So, it seems, life does not end with death after all! Life flies off to a mysterious, unearthly realm; someplace unimaginably distant, a place where the risen Christ dwells on high. There is not much we can say about that place because it is, as the Scripture reminds us, “hidden.”

The Greek word Paul uses for “hidden” is *krypto*. It is a word we still use, as in *cryptocurrency*, the digital currency traded through computer networks. Or *cryptography*, the study of secret ciphers; or *cryptograms*, word puzzles that involve deciphering codes; or *cryptic*, a puzzling remark with a hidden meaning; or *encryption*, a way to keep files and passwords private as they navigate the internet. Or *crypt*, the repository for a casket which keeps a body hidden until that glorious day when all are raised to new life in Christ.

To hide something away is to encrypt it. Think of how that changes the way we read Colossians 3:3. If we translate the verse literally, it reads, “For you died, and your life is encrypted with Christ in God.” What happens after death is a mystery beyond our intellectual capacity. Death is like one of those cryptogram puzzles. Unless we can work out the key, we cannot read it. Once we figure out the key, though, it comes easily.

Perhaps the most famous code-breaking device of all time is a slab of black, granite-like stone that Napoleon’s soldiers dug up in the village of Rosetta, Egypt, in 1799. The Rosetta Stone is inscribed with three languages: Egyptian hieroglyphics, another ancient Egyptian tongue called Demotic, and classical Greek. In the fog of war, the British grabbed the Rosetta Stone and hauled it off to London as a prize. They knew that what they held in their hands could be incredibly valuable. No person in that time could translate Egyptian hieroglyphics. It was a completely lost language.