

But now Christ has been raised from the dead - Sunday 20th April 2014

***But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”
(1.Cor.15:20)***

Beloved in The Lord,

What distinguishes Christianity from all of the other religions in the world, whether great or small? The fact that Christ has been raised from the dead!

Mohammed died, he was buried and remains dead. Krishna died, was buried and remains dead. Buddha died, was buried and remains dead. Take whoever you want, take any prophet or leader or founder of any religion; any Guru, and once they have lived and died, they remain dead.

Jesus lived and died. On Good Friday at 3.00pm, Jesus surrendered His Spirit to The Father and died. A soldier even pierced His side with a spear. Joseph of Arimethea went to Pilate and asked for Jesus body. Pilate checked with the centurion whether Jesus was really dead and then released His body.

Because the Sabbath was almost upon them, they had to hurry. Jesus body was wrapped in cloths with expensive spices and laid in Joseph’s tomb. The religious leaders went to Pilate and asked for the tomb to be made secure, so that the disciples could not steal Jesus body and claim that He had risen.

You see, there was no doubting He was dead. But the tomb, even with the guards could not hold Him. Early on Sunday morning, the women went to the tomb in order to show their love for Jesus. They were coming to prepare His body for a proper burial. Surprise! The stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty. Two men in white shining clothes appeared and gave them the greatest news ever proclaimed: ***“He is not here, but He has risen.” (Luke 24:6)***

You see, it is the fact that Jesus rose again that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Our Lord lives. He is alive never to die again! He states:

“I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.” (Rev.1:18)

Jesus said that He is alive for evermore. Death has no more power over Him. You see, we do not worship a philosophy, a mere human, an idol made from wood or stone or gold, - No we worship and preach the Living Lord – The King of Kings and Lord of Lord’s – The Lord Jesus Christ!

Our God is alive and He loves us. Jesus so loved us that he died in our place, He took our punishment, so that believing on Him, we could be free from sin, death, and hell.

Jesus said: ***“After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also.”(John 14:19)***

Jesus spoke these words, shortly before His crucifixion. Before Good Friday, all those who were around Him, could see Him. He lived and walked amongst them, as one of them. Ah, but after Easter morning, only those who have faith could see Him. Those in the world, who do not believe cannot see Him, because He can now only be seen through the eyes of faith.

The one who sees Jesus by faith is truly living. Such a one is living in victory. Such a one has joy and peace and hope and love and knowledge.

The person who does not believe is not really experiencing life to the fullest. Life without Jesus is existence. Jesus said:

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

The one who does not live by faith in Jesus is subject to the thief – the Devil. He steals, kills and destroys. We see His work all around us. The damage that he is doing is great.

But Jesus said that we can have an abundant life. He has conquered the thief. If Jesus, had stayed in the tomb, then the Devil would have won. But He did not stay in the tomb. The Father was faithful and raised Jesus from the dead on the third day. Praise God. ***Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.***

This phrase “the first fruits” is vitally important. That means that others will follow. The first fruits are the beginning of the harvest. Every single person that has believed in Jesus, will one day rise from the dead to a new life in glory with Him. Jesus resurrection is at the very core of our faith.

Paul writes: ***“¹² Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵ Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.***

²⁰ But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

²¹ For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, ²⁴ then comes the

end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. (1.Cor.15:12-24)

I included this rather lengthy quote because it emphasises the importance of the resurrection to our faith and life. This is, as I stated, the very core of our Christian faith. If Jesus remained dead, then our faith would be futile. We would have no hope and no future.

The good news of Easter is that we do have hope, we do have a future, because Christ has been raised from the dead. Praise God. Do you believe this?

Jesus standing by Lazarus tomb said to Martha: ***“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26)***

This is the point where our destiny is decided. Where we will spend eternity lies in our answer to this question. Jesus said: he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Jesus is speaking about eternal death. Untold millions of believers in Jesus have died physically, but the resurrection to eternal life awaits them.

What about you? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe that He has paid your sin debt in full with His Holy and precious blood? Do you believe that He died, was buried and rose again and now lives for evermore?

If you do – praise God! Rejoice for your name has been entered into the book of life, written in Jesus blood and it is indelible. Know, that for you, death will be a simple transition from faith to sight, from this life to glory with Jesus. You will close your eyes in death and open them beholding Jesus loving face. He will receive you with outstretched arms and He will show you your place in The Father’s house. Live with this faith, with this beautiful conviction. Think about it every day.

But maybe you do not believe? You have doubts and are not really sure? Then the answer is today is your day. Do not delay. Come to Jesus before it is too late,

On Good Friday there were two others who were crucified, who died alongside Jesus. They were criminals who deserved the punishment meted out to them. Today 2000 years later one is in torment in hell, and the other is in glory with Jesus. What separated the two? Faith. One of them, through his pain simply turned to Jesus and said: ***“Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” (Luke 23:42)***

You see, He believed that Jesus would live and that He would reign in His kingdom. Dying, this wretched sinner was able to die in peace because Jesus answered: ***“Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)***

Will you die in fear or peace? The choice is yours.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus in faith. He loves you. He is waiting for you. It is because of you we have Easter.

Come to Him today.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.