

Resurrection and Life – Easter Sunday - March 31st 2013.

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “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)

Beloved in the Lord,

Easter has dawned. Easter morning is a great morning in the Church Year as it is a bright and happy day. Easter comes with Good News: “Jesus is alive.” The grave has not been able to hold Him and the power of sin and death is broken forevermore. Jesus is alive forevermore, never to die again. He is Risen to live eternally.

The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a central event in our Christian faith. If Jesus had not risen from the dead on Easter morning then we would be in a hopeless situation. We would have no hope whatsoever.

Paul writes to the Corinthians: “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? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 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. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.” (1 Cor.15:12-20)

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is at the very centre of our faith. If Jesus had stayed in the tomb, then death would not be overcome, it would still have power. Paul rightly says that if Jesus is not risen from the dead, if there is no life after the grave, then we are wasting our time. Our faith is in vain and we are to be pitied above all men. Ah, but praise God Christ has risen from the dead. Our faith is not in vain. The resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning is a fact that cannot be denied. The tomb is empty. There is no body, no remains. He appeared alive to not only His disciples, but to about 500 other eye witnesses.

Many have tried to deny the resurrection, deny Jesus, wipe Him out, but they cannot because He is alive. One day every single person that has ever lived will stand before Him and bow the knee and have to proclaim that He is LORD. Those who made that confession in this life will enter eternity with Him in the Father’s house. Those who denied His Lordship in this life will proclaim that He is Lord as He passes judgement on them and they are sent to eternal damnation. “Depart from Me you workers of iniquity. I have not known you...”

What we need to get clear in our minds and hearts is that every person that is born, will die one day and in God's time will experience a resurrection and in their resurrected state they will spend eternity either with God in Heaven or in hell.

Listen again to our foundation text: "²⁵ **Jesus said to her, "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."**

In order to properly understand what Jesus is saying we need to understand what death is. Death is not the cessation of life, but separation from God. Death is not the end of life but death in the Bible is separation from God. When Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, he did so knowing that God had said that on the day he did so he would surely die. Adam went on to live over 900 years, but on the day he ate of the fruit, he died spiritually. The relationship with God, the fellowship with God was broken. Sin had separated him from God.

This separation lead to physical death, but physical death is nothing more than the soul and spirit being separated from the body. Only the body dies, becomes lifeless and decays. The spirit and soul are eternal and they continue to live. On God's ordained day they will be reunited with a resurrected body.

The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus suffered and died in our place. He died our death, took our punishment in order that we may be reconciled to God. On Good Friday as Jesus blood was shed , it was shed as the payment for our sin. His blood paid our sin debt in full. He shed His blood for all who would believe on Him, that they may inherit eternal life with God in Heaven.

***"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸ He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."* (John 3:16-18)**

We need to read these words together with our foundation text for today. Having said; "I am the Resurrection and the life" Jesus asked "Do you believe this?"

Faith is what determines our eternal destiny. God desires for us to spend eternity in His House, in His Kingdom. This is why Jesus came. When we have faith in Jesus, then even though we must die physically, we die knowing that we will be raised to eternal life with Him. Jesus promised it: "**he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,** ²⁶ **and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die."**

The last statement is not contradicting the first, because Jesus said that whoever dies believing in Him will never die in the sense of separation from Him. Remember we said that death is separation from God.

For a Christian death is very different than for a non believer. For those in Christ death is falling asleep here to wake up with Jesus in glory. Absent from the body, present with The Lord. Death is a transfer from this life of incompleteness to a new life complete in Jesus. From dishonour to honour. We hear these words at funerals:

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;⁴³ it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.⁵⁴ But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Cor.15:42-44;53-54

Do you see how God has so beautifully provided for those who believe in Him. Death can be blessed. This life is not our permanent residence, our citizenship is in Heaven. This life is not all there is – thank God! This is only a precursor to eternity.

Now for those not in Christ, who do not believe the picture is not good. There is nothing good to look forward to. The unbeliever will also experience a resurrection, but this will be in order to face up to the great white throne judgement where a pronouncement of eternal death (separation) will be made. There is no turning back.

This is why Jesus asked Mary “Do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life?” He is asking you the same question today. Do you believe? Have you entrusted your life to Him? Is your name written in the Lamb’s book of Life with the Blood of Jesus? Are you sure that when the last trumpet sounds and the dead in Christ will be raised to eternal life with God in Heaven you will rise up with them?

You can be. God wants you to be. God wants you to be able to say with Paul: ***“For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2. Corinthians 5:1)***

Can you say I know! I believe! This is an extremely important question. If you can, praise God! To you the Bible says: ***“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” 1. Corinthians.15:58***

But, if you are not sure than to you Jesus says: “Come”. “Come to Me and receive my gift of life. Call upon Me today. Look to Me and be saved. For you I died – COME! Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.