May all the blessings of the resurrection be yours

*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.*

 John 11:25-26

It is hard for us to comprehend how a flesh and blood human-being can also be what we might consider abstract ideas such as resurrection and life. This is where it is important for us to remember that Jesus is also God. As God, He has life in Himself and is able to bestow life where He chooses.

Additionally, the Bible is clear that God the Father brought Jesus back from the dead, but it is also clear that Jesus was able to raise Himself. Again, this only makes sense if the Father and Son are one; but also, distinct persons. Jesus is the resurrection; it comes through Him and is a resurrection to eternal life in the fullest sense of the word.

To believe in Jesus is a guarantee of our personal resurrection. All of His promises are true. Even though we may die physically, we will live again when Christ comes back to establish His Kingdom. Also, our spirit will never die even when our body does. Our spirit will reside with Christ in heaven until the time for our resurrection.

It is important to catch all of the last phrase of our Scripture. “*Everyone who lives and believes in Me*.” There are many who believe that Jesus Christ is real (for example, the demons) who will not inherit eternal life. The reason is that we must also live in Jesus. He must be the Lord of our life; we must recognize Him as our personal Saviour; we must have a true union with Him apart from simply acknowledging that He exists.

Believe in Jesus, allow Him to be Lord of your life, live your life as a citizen of His Kingdom; and you will receive the sure promise of eternal life.

In Christ’s love

John

 4-17-22 Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-7

All four Gospel accounts announce the historical fact and foundational Christian belief of the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The witnesses are clear: Jesus was fully a man and He was crucified on a Roman cross. He died on that cross; from which He was taken down and placed in a tomb. But on the third day, on a most blessed Sunday morning, Jesus was brought back to life; life in a physical body that would never die again.

That is unique to Christianity; we don’t worship or follow the teachings of a dead man. Jesus is very much alive right now and will remain alive forever. The Bible tells us that He is currently seated at the right hand of God the Father where He continually intercedes on our behalf. While Jesus is a man, He is also God and is therefore unencumbered by any human limitations. As He constantly intercedes, He still always has time and ability to listen to our prayers; and it is His joy to listen as we pray. Jesus will come back again one day. He will set up His rule on earth and root out the last of evil before the creation of the new heavens and new earth.

How kind our Lord God is to sinners. How gracious Jesus is to all His people. Mary Magdalene is the first person to recognize Jesus after His resurrection. Jesus had cast seven demons out of her, and she became a faithful follower of His. It was a group of women who received the honor of discovering the empty tomb and hearing the news that their Saviour was alive. How fitting this is, when we consider back to Genesis 3:15, where in spite of Eve having been the first to sin, salvation for the world would come from the seed of the woman.

Angels are servants and messengers of God. This angel served by rolling the stone away from the mouth of the tomb once Jesus was resurrected. Certainly, this was not so that Jesus could get out, but so that the witnesses could see in. This was important; the angel invited the women in to see where Jesus had been placed just a few days before. They knew He was not there.

What message was there for us; that the angel used the stone that was supposed to seal our Lord into a place of death as a seat? That heavy stone that took many men to move was no more effective at restraining Christ than a little stool would have been. Death could not stop our Saviour; a stone door wasn’t going to. He is even able to move our stony hearts so that He may enter in and stay with us.

Even though the fierce Roman guards were paralyzed with fear, the women were given comfort and assurance. No one needs to fear when they are seeking Jesus. He will always see to it that we are guided to the place where He is. He came to this earth to save us; He went through the agony of the cross to save us; He is not going to hide. He wants us to come to Him, He will even seek us out. Such is the love of Christ that He invites any and all to come to Him.

But what He offers is a gift; it is not forced. That’s why in the letter to the Hebrews we are encouraged, “*Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts*.” The tomb had no choice but to let the Christ go free; the stone had no choice but to move when the angel pushed it; but you have the choice to soften your heart to the call of Jesus and allow Him entrance into your life; or, to deny Him access. But at least make your decision knowing that Jesus is the only way to eternal life; there is no other way.

But notice also that although grace and salvation are free, once we have it, there is work to do. As soon as the angel spoke with the women, he sent them on a mission. They had a message to take to all the disciples who weren’t there. If we read on in this chapter a few more verses, we find that as the women returned, they met Jesus Himself. He also gave them encouragement but sent them on the same errand the angel had sent them on. The Christian life is entirely based on faith in Christ; but the citizens of Christ’s Kingdom have much work to do.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the resurrection of Jesus is foundational to Christianity. There are some things in the Bible that are not clearly spelled out and leave room for different practices among Christians. Some examples are methods of baptism, whether full submersion or sprinkling, infant or adult; how often we celebrate the Lord’s Supper; how many elders and deacons a church should have or if they have them at all. In these and many other things we can hold different opinions and practices, yet we are still Bible believing Christians and we can worship together.

However, there are certain Biblical doctrines that are foundational or pillars of Christian belief. If one of them is removed, the Christian ideal that is built on them collapses. Just a few examples are salvation through faith in Jesus alone; that salvation is by grace from God and not by our works; the virgin birth of Christ; that Jesus is completely God yet completely man; and that His death was the atonement for our sins. These are some of the non-negotiable elements of Christianity. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is one of them.

In Romans chapter 4, Paul emphasizes the necessity of faith in Jesus. As the patriarch Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, so when we believe on Jesus Christ for salvation, we are covered in His righteousness. When we become believers in Jesus Christ, the penalty for our sins has been paid by Him, and we have His righteousness: then God will declare us “Not Guilty”. At that point, we have been justified.

Now, what does Paul tells us about this in Romans? “*[Jesus] was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification*.” “Delivered over” means His crucifixion and death; “raised” means His resurrection from the dead. Both are necessary for our salvation. In suffering death and rising to everlasting life, Jesus secured for us forgiveness of our sins and the declaration of “Not Guilty”.

In 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, Paul specifically lets us know that the fact of the resurrection is critical to Christianity and our salvation. He says: “*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.*”

Those are some tough words; they are some scary thoughts. To think our faith is in vain and worthless. Knowing that if we are still in our sins then we cannot stand before God and we are automatically sentenced to eternal torment; that we must pay the price of our sins ourselves. There would be no hope of being reunited with believing loved ones who have already died.

If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then where is the evidence of His victory? The wages of sin is death, so, Christ had to die to pay the price for our sin. But if death still held Him, then the wages would not have been fully paid and we would be subject to eternal death. If Jesus did not raise from the dead, then death would have proved itself stronger than God, and our hope of the resurrection that we have in Christ would be pitiable.

But no; Jesus did rise from the dead. God is more powerful than death. Jesus’ victory is complete as He has paid the wages for our sins and gained for us eternal life; spiritual and physical. The resurrection of Jesus is the proof of His victory, a victory He graciously promises to give to us, if only we will accept it.

In Romans 8 Paul writes: *Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us*.

This is our assurance: We don’t earn our justification; God pronounces the verdict “Not Guilty” on the basis of Jesus Christ. If God pronounces, no one can take it away or change it. If the verdict is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus, then it is perfect and irreversible. Jesus is alive and in the very presence of God as the visible evidence that we are saved. This is the assurance of any who have accepted Jesus as their one and only means of salvation.

In Colossians 3, the apostle Paul lets us know how this works out in the Christian life. This is information for those who have accepted Jesus and already have salvation; what Paul says here can only be achieved by the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

*Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

The Christian is pictured as having gone through all that Jesus did. We have died, we have been brought back to life, and we are citizens of heaven. Currently, this is spiritual; in time, it will also be physical. We consider ourselves to have died to sin. Very simply put, someone who is dead can’t sin. Now, in this we must deal with the fact that we are all sinners and as long as we live, we will sin. The hope here is twofold; one, that this knowledge will help us to resist temptation in everyday life; two, that we will stop living in sin. Living in sin is being in a constant state of a sinful condition. Examples would include carrying on an adulterous affair, habitual stealing, or habitual lying. Living in sin has no place in the Christian life.

Having died we are also raised up with Christ; we are alive in Him. Here’s a tough concept: We are in Christ, and Christ is seated in heaven; so, in some spiritual sense, we are also in heaven. (The Bible actually tells us that in Ephesians 2:6.)

As we live for Christ and the Holy Spirit works in our lives, the things of this world should become less important. There are important things here and there are things we have to do. But we need to remember that one day we will leave this life and only what we have stored in heaven will be waiting for us. If Jesus is our Saviour, our perspective changes as to what is important.

This is a day to celebrate a joyful occasion. It is a welcome day after the somberness of the last few days. This is a restoration of hope that the disciples had lost when Jesus was crucified. Jesus is raised from the dead; He is alive forevermore. And we who believe in Him share in that eternal life with Him.

Prayer

Eternal God, You are worthy of all praise and honor; we worship You who is the only God. You are holy and there is none like You and no one can compare to You. You are creator of all that has been created. In Your great love and mercy, You have made a way for us; that You can be our God and we can be Your people.

We offer thanksgiving to You, Lord Jesus Christ; for in You alone is salvation and You bestow it upon all who will have it. You finished the work of redemption on the cross and then established complete victory in Your resurrection. You defeated the last enemy: death. Although satan and death still wage war, they are defeated and we await their final destruction.

Thank You for rising from the dead. In Your resurrection we have that sure hope of our own eternal life with glorified bodies that will be perfect in You. Help us and guide us that we may attain to that resurrection; that we may do the work You have for us; and that we may keep our thoughts and desires focused on heavenly things; and on the inheritance that You have gained for us.

Lord Jesus, we pray these things in Your most holy name

Amen