May the blessing of the resurrection be yours

*Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;  
My flesh also will dwell securely.  
For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.*

Psalm 16:9-10

As David wrote this Psalm, he was prophesying about the Christ, but also looking to the promise for those who die in Christ.

Jesus is, of course, the Holy One. Although He died and His soul went to Sheol, or the place of the dead, He was not left there. He had some work to do there while His body was in the grave, but He soon left there, leading captives free.

His body did not see decay; He was not dead long enough. His soul was reunited with His glorified body and He lived in the flesh once more.

David speaks of his heart and his glory. These are spiritual things. This is our soul. Believers will be present with the Lord when they are absent from the body; so our soul will rejoice in the presence of Christ when we die. But our flesh has something to look forward to also.

While our bodies may undergo decay, we will be resurrected at the call of Christ, and we will be made like Him (1 John 3:2). We will also then be holy.

When we are in Jesus, God will not abandon our souls to the grave and our flesh will dwell securely. Praise our good and powerful God!

In Christ’s love

John

4-9-23

John 20:1-18

Once again, we come together to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This is a celebration we participate in each and every year. Each of the Gospel accounts in the Bible contain the story of the resurrection. Each of them has a few different details or look at events from a different point of view; but they unequivocally tell us that Jesus, who was dead and buried, rose from the tomb and is alive.

God forbid that we should ever consider this celebration redundant or just the same old thing as before. The resurrection of Jesus is crucial for Christian belief; in fact; it is crucial for salvation. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15: “*if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain*” and “*and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins*.” Why? If Jesus has not been raised, then we have nothing more than a dead man in a tomb. All His teaching, all His words during His ministry were nothing more than morality and a nice way to live.

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we know that the power of God was at work. We know that His sacrificial death was sufficient to atone for our sins. We know that Jesus was stronger than the power of death. His resurrection was the guarantee and evidence that our sins are forgiven and we are made right with God by believing in Him.

So, is this the same account we have heard many times before? Yes. But it should never become old to us. It should never become old to me to tell you about it. As the apostle Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:12, “*Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you*.” If you are here as a believer in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, you are established in truth; in absolute truth. If you have not yet come to Jesus as a believer, I pray the word of God you hear will guide you into this absolute truth.

As I speak on these verses today, I don’t expect to tell you anything new. These New Testament Scriptures have been around for most of 2000 years. But that’s the thing about absolute truth: it never changes. And Jesus made a statement about the things He spoke: “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.*” Heaven and earth are still here; and so are the words of Christ.

So let’s consider this wonderous story of the resurrection of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. Let’s put ourselves there in the predawn darkness; where the pall of death hangs over the people involved; where they are unable to see in the dimness. Then watch as the sun rises to bring the light of day; when death is overcome by life; when the people can see the light of Christ.

Mary Magdalene had followed Jesus during much of His earthly ministry. She had been the victim of demonic possession. She was in the wretched position of having seven demons indwell her. The Bible doesn’t give us the account of Jesus freeing her of this possession; but we know from other accounts that all it took was a command from the Son of God to evict the demons from their stolen house. In gratitude, Mary became a devoted follower of Jesus. Out of her own means, she supported and served Jesus and His disciples.

Years before Paul wrote Romans 12:1, “*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship*”, Mary was living it. How much more should we who have been spiritually resurrected from the dead.

Mary’s devotion to Jesus was still strong, even in His death. Remember that Jesus had died very close to the start of a Sabbath, when no work could be done. Joseph of Arimathea had obtained permission from Pilate to take the body of Jesus. With the help of Nicodemus, Joseph wrapped Jesus’ body in linen, applied spices, and put him into a tomb. It was a nearby tomb that Joseph had had made for himself. There was not time for the proper cleaning and anointing of the body; so they did what they could and left.

Mary had come back to the tomb now on the first day of the week to properly take care of Jesus. The other Gospel accounts let us know that there were other women with her who would have helped. Approaching the tomb in the predawn darkness, she received a shock: The stone covering the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away.

Who knows what all thoughts went through the poor woman’s mind as she ran back to tell the disciples. You know how it is when you face something unknown and all sorts of thoughts enter your mind about what might have happened. We can get ourselves pretty worked up. Grave robbing was, unfortunately, quite common during this time. Or perhaps the religious leaders had come and stolen Him. Perhaps someone just didn’t like the idea of a criminal being buried in a nice tomb. There were all sorts of possibilities. As is usual with most of us when faced with this kind of thing, the truth didn’t occur to her.

She met with the apostles Peter and John, who quickly ran to the tomb. John was the younger, so he outran Peter and got to the tomb first. But he also didn’t go in; he bent down to look and could see some of the wrappings used on Jesus laying there. Peter came along, and never the one to use discretion, barged into the tomb. John then followed.

By this time it was daylight and they were able to see their surroundings. It was the grave of Jesus, yet He was not there. The linen that had wrapped his body was still laying there, the face-cloth was rolled up by itself. If there was any significance to the face-cloth being by itself, we don’t really know what it is. There have been several suggestions, but it remains a mystery to us why it was so. John included it in his account, so it must have had some importance, we just don’t know what.

John tells us that when he saw these things, he believed. But he also tells us that they did not yet understand the Scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. So John had some glimmer of understanding that Jesus was no longer dead in the grave. But he did not understand Psalm 16:10, “*For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay*.” This foretold that Jesus, the Holy One, would not be left in the place of the dead or that His body would undergo decay. To fulfill this prophecy, Jesus had to be bodily raised from the dead.

The two men each went to their own home. There was nothing else for them to do. For them to inquire further would have been dangerous. Anyone associated with Jesus could have been subject to the same treatment He received. Luke tells us that Peter “*went away to his home, marveling at what had happened*.” Although John had some small insight, he wasn’t much better off. Recall that Jesus had given His mother Mary into John’s care. He may have been going home to tell her what was going on.

Mary Magdalene stayed at the tomb weeping. She wasn’t ready to give up but didn’t know what to do. She and the other women had some advantage: In that day and time, those in authority would have paid little attention to what women were doing. They had more freedom to try to find answers.

Still overcome with grief, Mary is able to look into the tomb for the first time herself. How precious, that the Lord God would send two angels for her to see. You would think that the apostles would get to have an angelic visitation. But no, God does things His way and it is usually different from what we expect.

Allow me to diverge for a moment, and point out how much God gives honor and dignity to women in His word and in history. There are some things in the Bible that women may not care for; but, God has set things up according to His wisdom.

Just don’t miss the beautiful things He has bestowed. Clear back in Genesis 3:15, God promises that it is the seed of the woman who will defeat satan. It is not the seed of the man. That is why the virgin birth is so important. Half of Jesus’ DNA comes from the woman; the other half was miraculously provided by God through the life-giving Holy Spirit. Mary is truly the earthly mother of Jesus who defeated satan; He had no earthly father.

And here we see at the tomb, that women were the first to encounter the resurrected Jesus. Again, you would think He would go straight to the apostles and give them their marching orders. But our gentle Saviour gave the honor of His first appearing to the women. He was the seed of the woman, and in His resurrection body He appeared to them first.

How confusing it must have been to Mary Magdalene to see the two men sitting in the tomb; what in the world were they doing there? And then they asked her a stupid question, “*Why are you weeping*?” Well, she gave them a very reasonable answer. At that time, she didn’t realize that they were not seeking information; it was a gentle rebuke.

She had heard Jesus say that He would die, but also that He would raise from the dead. If she had perfect faith and understanding, she would have been looking for Jesus up and about; not in the grave. But Mary was in good company; none of the disciples understood.

Well, sensing someone else present, she turned and saw Jesus. He asked her the same thing the angels did. Exasperated by being asked stupid questions, Mary didn’t even answer. She went with her assumption that He was the gardener and asked for help in locating the body of Jesus.

The burning question for us is “Why didn’t she recognize Jesus?” I think it’s pretty reasonable that she didn’t. Firstly, she had been crying for a long time. Her eyes were puffy and swollen and still filled with tears. Secondly, if we see something that absolutely doesn’t make sense, our minds tend to compensate for it. If you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that someone is dead, and suddenly you see them, your mind will probably not let you realize it is them. Thirdly, Jesus had His resurrection body. It is likely that there are some differences.

How astonishing it must have been for her the hear Him say her name; for her to realize that it was the same way Jesus had said her name; to realize that it was Jesus. I picture her eyes and mouth wide open in shock; only able to whisper “Rabboni!” Then what joy overwhelmed her as her mind came to believe what she saw and heard.

In verse 17, with our modern culture and the way we do things, we picture Mary giving Jesus a big hug; embracing Him with all she had. But that is certainly not what happened. In that culture, men and women who were not married to each other did not embrace; and husbands and wives only in private.

She would have fallen on the ground and clung to His feet.

In clinging to Him as she did, she would have been afraid of losing Him again. But Jesus lets her know that He isn’t going to suddenly disappear. That is the meaning of Him not yet ascending to the Father. He tells her that He will ascend to the Father, but not yet; and He has some work for her to do. She is to report everything to Jesus’ brethren. This doesn’t mean His earthly half-brothers; the other sons of His mother, Mary. This means all the disciples; all His followers. Remember that believing on Jesus makes us sons and daughters of God; all of us become Jesus’ brethren.

The Bible lets us know that all of us look forward to a bodily resurrection. In 2 Corinthians 5, we see that when the Christian dies, his soul goes to heaven. In Luke 16, we see that the soul of a non-believer goes to a place of torment. In both cases, the body stays where ever it is, be it in the grave or at sea or elsewhere.

In 1 Thessalonians 4 is a description of the resurrection of those who died in Christ. Our bodies, no matter how long we have been dead, no matter what condition they are in, will be raised at the return of Jesus Christ. We will have our old bodies but they will be made new. They will never be subject to the ravages of sin again. We will live forever with Christ. Jesus is the first fruits of the dead. This means that He was the first to be raised from the dead with an imperishable body. He is also the first of many who will follow Him in faith.

In Revelation chapter 20, we get a glimpse of the resurrection of those who died rejecting Jesus as Saviour. They stand before a terrible white throne and receive judgement from God. They will then spend eternity in a lake of fire.

If you are a believer in Christ, I ask you to consider the resurrection anew and what it means for your eternity and for the glory of God. Renew your commitment to Christ, and offer yourself as a living sacrifice to Him. It is a joyous freedom to be bound to Jesus.

If you are not a believer in Jesus as Saviour, I ask you to consider what you have heard today. Look into God’s word, the Bible, and learn; ask the questions you need to know. I’m not asking for an emotional decision based on fear or compulsion. Choose based on fact; the absolute truth of God. And I pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you in your search.

Prayer

Blessed Lord God, thank You for this joyous occasion of the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You have decisively shown that You have power over death and have defeated it. You have disarmed satan of his weapon of terror. Death has become for us, a doorway to eternity with You. Death has lost its sting.

What a wonderful promise we have to cling to. As Mary clung to the feet of her Teacher, we cling to the promise of resurrection to eternal life through Jesus. Thank You Lord, for the certain hope of living forever in the righteous Kingdom of Jesus.

Now we ask for the help of Your Holy Spirit, that we may live our lives in a way that is pleasing to You; that we may be Your useful servants. Use us to advance the Kingdom of Christ, that He may be glorified forever.

In His precious name we pray. Amen