

Easter '03 Firstfruits

1 Corinthians 15:12-23

We have come to celebrate the most important day in all of history. This day, of all days, is about His story. It is the climax of Jesus' ministry, the verification of its authenticity. Without the resurrection there would be no real hope for mankind. It followed a heart-wrenching week. The disciples understood Jesus' clear and repeated prediction of His betrayal and death. Peter tried to talk Him out of it and was rebuked for that effort. Jesus was determined to see it through. After their last supper together, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to steel Himself for what lay ahead. He sweat drops of blood anticipating what was coming. He timed His capture and death to coincide with Passover. When the soldiers came to take Him, His disciples deserted Him.

One mock trial followed another until Pontius Pilate pronounced the sentence of crucifixion. Jesus was beaten, humiliated and suffered the lashes of a Roman whip that shredded His back. He carried the cross beam to the post of crucifixion at a place called Skull Hill. It was here that the worst of criminals were executed in public view. The disciples must have watched in disbelief as Jesus' prophetic words came to pass. He died at the time of the afternoon sacrifice on Passover. How fitting that the Lamb of God would bleed and die when priests were sacrificing a lamb for the nation. This is what Passover was all about.

The Jews celebrated Passover to recall how God delivered them from the angel of death. They celebrated by going through some of the same rituals that they did that first Passover night. They killed a lamb and ate it together. They ate unleavened bread to remind them of how quickly the Lord delivered them. They did not have time to let the bread rise. The bitter herbs of Passover remind them of the hardships they endured. But most of all, they were recalling the blood of the lambs on the doorpost that notified the angel of death that they were off limits to him. The original Passover foreshadowed this ultimate Passover, when the Lamb of God would die for the sins of the world. His blood on the doorposts of our heart keeps death from claiming us.

Strange, unexplainable events took place at the time surrounding Jesus' death. There were three hours of utter darkness. Once He cried, "It is finished!" and gave His spirit to His Father, tombs broke open. Some of the departed saints walked the earth. The veil of the Temple that separated man from God was torn from top to bottom. Yet, He was dead. Wealthy followers of Jesus laid His body in a tomb. Romans sealed the tomb and guards were placed there. The disciples hid in fear that they would be the next to die. They mourned their Master's death. It looked as if all was lost.

Was this utter defeat? It looked like a similar day, *June 18, 1815, the Battle of Waterloo. The French under the command of Napoleon were fighting the allied*

forces of the British, Dutch, and Germans under the command of Wellington. The people of England depended on a system of signals to find out how the battle was going. One of these signals was on the tower of Winchester Cathedral.

Late in the day it flashed the signal: "W - E - L - L - I - N - G - T - O - N - - - D - E - F - E - A - T - E - D - - - ." Just at that moment a fog cloud made it impossible to read the message. The news of defeat quickly spread throughout the city. The whole countryside was sad and gloomy when they heard the news that their country had lost the war. Suddenly, the fog lifted, and the remainder of the message could be read. The message had four words, not two. The complete message was: "W - E - L - L - I - N - G - T - O - N - - - D - E - F - E - A - T - E - D - - - T - H - E - - - E - N - E - M - Y!" It took only a few minutes for the good news to spread. Sorrow was turned into joy, defeat was turned into victory!

Source: Jonathan Mcleod

Such was the victory that Sunday morning when the tomb was found to be empty! What looked like defeat was the greatest victory of all wars. The war over the souls of men was won by Jesus.

J - E - S - U - S - - - D - E - F - E - A - T - E - D - - - D - E - A - T - H !

The Feast of Weeks had begun the day after Passover. It was a week of celebration in which the first ripened grain was brought to the Temple. This sacrifice of the long awaited new crop was a sign of faith that God would ripen the rest of the harvest. It is hard for us, today, to relate to that agrarian culture. Imagine watching your stock of grain dwindle between harvests, wondering if you were going to run out and go hungry. Finally, the new harvest begins to ripen, and God expects you to take the first ripened sheaves and give them to Him. That takes faith. It also says that you recognize everything is from God and belongs to Him.

If Passover was just a portent of the Crucifixion, then what does Firstfruits represent?

1 Corinthians 15:12-23 (NIV) *12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

Christ rose from the dead as the firstfruits from the dead. His victory over death during the celebration of Firstfruits tells us the rest of the harvest is coming. Jesus was the first sheaf of ripe grain. (Exodus 23:10-11) The whole field is going to be harvested when it ripens. Because Jesus rose, we know that we will also be raised. He said so! (John 14:1-3) Now, if He did not conquer death, we would have no evidence to believe that His death satisfied God's justice for our sins. But because He did rise from death we know God found no fault in Him and accepted His sacrifice in our place. Resurrection is the proof that the payment for the sins of the world was accepted. Later in the same chapter Paul tells us that death has no sting for us. The sting of death is sin. (1 Corinthians 15:55-57) But Jesus took care of our sin.

I'm afraid of what will happen to my body when I die, the pain I will endure, the process, but I look forward to the transition. The resurrection of Jesus is my guarantee. Jesus said in John 11, "I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?" That is the question isn't it? How do I know it happened? First of all, you have the transformation of His followers. If there was no resurrection, how did they go from hiding in a locked room for fear of meeting the same fate as Jesus, to becoming bold witnesses of His resurrection? All the disciples but John died as martyrs. I can see them trying to start a religion, but martyrdom meant they had to be convinced.

The second reason is the lack of a corpse. You can bet the enemies of Jesus would have been showing off the corpse if there were one. That would be a sure way to counteract the claims of resurrection. The latest archeological find in regards to this event is the bone box of James the brother of Jesus, but there is no bone box for Jesus!

The third reason is the 100s of witnesses. Evidence is now conclusive that the Gospel of Mark was written while those who experienced the events were still living. The witnesses that saw the resurrected Christ were testifying to the truth of it. If they did not, the Gospel would have quickly been condemned as a hoax. Jesus was who He said He was, or He is the biggest hoax the world has ever seen. Resurrection says we have a victor over death. That Victor calls Himself The Resurrection and The Life. (John 11:25-26)

But I believe in the resurrection because of the change He has made in my life. I have personally experienced His transforming power. That is the sure way to know. Taste and see that the Lord is good. (Psalm 34:9) He rescued me from the destructiveness of sin.

Pfc. Jessica Lynch was in a rear-eschelon supply unit that mistakenly went down a road that ended up behind enemy lines. We don't know all that she endured during her 10 days of captivity, but we do know she had fractured legs, arm and spine. Held in a hospital in Nasiriya, she survived on orange juice and crackers.

コメントの追加 [notes1]: 10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: 11 And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. Lev. 23:10-11 (KJV)

コメントの追加 [notes2]: 1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. John 14:1-3 (NIV)

コメントの追加 [notes3]: 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. 15:55-57 (NIV)

コメントの追加 [notes4]: 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26 (NIV)

コメントの追加 [notes5]: 8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Psalms 34:8 (NIV)

41 Fedayeen guards protected her, but someone was praying! A lot of people were praying. And somehow an Iraqi lawyer visiting his wife, a nurse, slipped past the guards. He witnessed the hulking black clad captor slapping her and was moved with compassion. Hiking six miles, he notified the American soldiers of her whereabouts. A plan was set into action and Jessica was rescued. On the rescue helicopter, she held the hand of the doctor and asked him to make sure the soldiers that rescued her wouldn't leave her. She was safe! It took awhile to realize she was truly free. In her hometown of Palestine, W.Va. the road signs gave the credit where it was due. They read: THANK YOU GOD FOR SAVING JESSIE! PRAYER BRINGS MIRACLES HOME.

I've been a prisoner of war too. So have you. We were taken captive in this cosmic war for the souls of men. Unlike Jessica, my captor had a right to me because I had rebelled against my Maker. The enemy of your soul doesn't treat his captives any better than the Fedayeen do. He worked me over pretty good using my own ingrained rebellion. But one day someone took pity on my condition and prayed for me. They went to the LORD in prayer and asked that I be rescued. The Lord set in action a plan to set me free. He dealt with my sin on the cross. That broke the enemy's claim on me. Then He sent the angels who are sent to help those who will be heirs of salvation to guide me. His Special Op Holy Spirit did a work in liberating me, and Doctor Jesus said He'd never leave me. Now I'm still recovering from some of the wounds, but I'm on our side of the lines now. Prayer brought a miracle home. Pretty soon they're going to fly me to that home. I know that because the Doc said He is the Resurrection and the Life. He already made the journey to blaze a trail for me. He's been in the presence of the Father who promises to keep His word.

Look back at our text. We have learned what it means that Jesus was the firstfruit and that we will follow in time. We've got some ripening to do. That ripening is described in the Bible as sanctification. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4) Without that work in us, we wouldn't be as pleased with heaven. That process is kind of like the healing which Jessica is undergoing. It takes time.
12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

If that Great Physician that held my hand, Doctor Jesus, never really conquered death, then the whole thing is worse than a waste of time, it's a lie. But I know from the evidence that He is telling the truth. I know because I am in the healing process, that He really is Doctor Jesus. The process of sanctification I am undergoing convinces me that everything He says is real. In fact, I find it

コメントの追加 [notes6]: 3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;
4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable,

1 Thess. 4:3-4 (NIV)

impossible to believe that such a man, who is God, could lie. But if, just if, He didn't rise from the dead, then I'm preaching a lie. If He didn't rise, we've got a real serious problem. Our sins aren't dealt with. The enemy still has rightful claim to us. He can come take us back anytime.

Thank God that is not the case! He rose! He is victorious over death. He is transforming me. He is the resurrection and the life. Evidence proves it, and my experience verifies it! That is what Easter is all about. Resurrection!

The first law of Thermodynamics says that no mass or energy is ever destroyed, that it merely changes form. When a piece of wood is burned, it is not gone. Some of it becomes heat; some deteriorates into the ashes. But it is not destroyed - it just changes. When a lake dries up, the water is gone. It has evaporated into the air, only to fall to earth again someday. If we can see this all around us in the physical world, is it so hard to conceive of it in the spiritual world?

Harry Emerson Fosdick said, "Can it be that God is the most unscrupulous waster in the universe, making great personalities, only to throw them utterly away." If we can see it in nature, can we see it in the sphere of faith? We, too, can have the same confidence that the apostle Paul had when he said, "We shall all be changed." (Source: Mark Hensley) That is the promise of Jesus the firstfruits from the dead. We shall all be changed!

That bodily resurrection will happen someday off in the future, but resurrection is also for the present. In [Colossians 3:1](#), Paul tells us that since we are raised with Christ, we are to set our hearts on things above. We are already resurrected because we were busted out of our dead prison existence. The results should be that we are living in that transformed life. We let go of earthly desires and set our hearts on heaven. Like Moses, we give up Egypt to live a hard life of pilgrimage to a new land, along with our brothers and sisters who are all in the process of transformation with us. The journey is tough at times, but Doctor Jesus is holding our hand. His presence with us reminds us of the promise of firstfruits. I'll get ripe, and so will you. He'll finish what He started. Then the harvest will come. The wheat will be gathered into the Father's barn. We'll go home, because He is risen! ([1 Peter 1:3-5](#))

コメントの追加 [notes7]: ¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Col. 3:1 (NIV)

コメントの追加 [notes8]: ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:3-5 (NIV)