

Easter – 4-23-00

Did you ever wonder how the Sunday of Easter is decided? The Nicean Council in the 4<sup>th</sup> century determined that Easter would fall on the first Sunday after the first full moon in Spring. The latest possible date for Easter to fall is today's date. To me Easter is the most special day in Christendom for it is the day we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord. It's Victory Day over evil.

Let's begin with a tradition started in the first century. Someone would say, "He is risen" and others respond, "He is risen indeed" - Let's do that together... We say that with a great deal of joy and enthusiasm, but we should remember that it was sometimes shouted from a Roman cross and the response would echo from Christians hiding in caves in the surrounding hills. The reality of the resurrection to that first century church came from eyewitness accounts of One they had watched die and later saw powerfully alive.

Let's go back to that time almost 2 millenniums ago and see and feel with the disciples. Those men who had camped with Jesus for the last three years had come to place their complete trust and expectation in this man, Jesus. He had showed them unconditional love and taught them things that changed the way they looked at life. It affected them so much that they had given up their jobs and businesses to be with Him full time. They'd seen Him heal every kind of sickness, raise the dead, cast out demons, confront hypocritical religious leaders. They had even experienced Him empowering them to perform similar acts.

They were sure that, as Peter confessed, Jesus was indeed, the Son of God. - But He kept talking about dying and meeting them later in Galilee. Then came the betrayal by one of their own, Judas. They had all promised they would not desert him but they all did. And then to their shock and horror it all came crashing to end with the crucifixion. Their Savior, like a common criminal, was beaten and nailed to a post. How could this be?! He was the Son of God! He could raise the dead but now He was dead.

Fear took over, and they hid behind locked doors. After two sleepless nights and still in mourning their loss, the women came knocking on the door with some incredible tale of angels and an empty tomb. They told the message that Jesus had said to them almost a week earlier. "Meet me in Galilee." But their hearts were in too much pain to dare to believe. Women, they get all emotional. No wonder the law says not to believe their testimony. How could He have escaped those trained soldiers guarding the tomb even if He did come back to life?

But Peter and John both ran to the tomb. John outran Peter, but Peter ran into the tomb. The linen that Joseph of Arimathea had wrapped the body in was laying there and the head shroud neatly folded. John began to believe – but Peter could not bring himself to it. If Jesus is alive, he has to face Him. He has to confess his failure and denial, his fear and love of life.

Back in the locked room two of the brothers came to visit. They brought the story of meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They told how they were downcast and then this stranger started to explain the Scriptures, how their hearts burned within them as He spoke. And then when He broke the bread, their eyes were open - It was Jesus!

After the two men left for Galilee, arguments flew back and forth - He was alive. No, it is someone who looks like Him. He told us this was what was going to happen. No, you misunderstood Him. It's all over. Peter spoke up and said he had seen Him but he would not say any more. --And then suddenly – right there in the middle of them all – He stands. How can that be? The door is locked. He is dead. They saw the spear plunged into his side. Maybe it's his ghost.

"Fear not" he says. And then He showed them the wounds, and it was if those wounds meant something special to Him. Only later did they realize He was displaying His love for them. Some stood trembling, others dropped to their knees. Then He rebuked them for their unbelief. He tells them again, to meet Him in Galilee.

And suddenly, He is gone – just like He came. Silence fills the room, and then weeping. But not the kind of weeping that had been heard the day before. "He's alive!" one says. "He is risen," says another and another and another and John declares, He is risen indeed. Finally they leave Jerusalem and head toward Galilee.

We could go on, but we should pause here and realize with the disciples – He's alive! No one else in any age has conquered death on their own. What does that mean?

First it means that death cannot hold Him. Acts 2:24 It means that He has the power over death itself – in other words – He holds the keys of death and Hades Rev 1:18. He shared our humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Heb 2:14,15 Is someone dying in this congregation? If they are a believer they can say with Scripture, "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1Cor 15:54-57 Pastor Ed Reyes lost his father this week. But He isn't lost, for Ed knows where he is. He is celebrating the Resurrection in the physical presence of Jesus!

Secondly it means God the Father accepted the sacrifice. You see when Jesus died with the sins of you and me and all mankind upon Him, if He was not an unblemished perfect sacrifice then the payment for sin would not have been accepted. But because He rose from the dead we know that shout that was his last breath was a shout of victory. The translation you hold may say "It is finished." But

that same Greek word is stamped on paid Roman invoices. It means the debt is cancelled. Payment has been accepted. Now you know why Jesus shouted that one last word! Resurrection is proof of payment accepted.

Thirdly – it means right now – **today, if you die to your self-life – with Jesus on the cross - you can experience the resurrection with Jesus.** (Repeat)  
Let me ask you – individually – have you experienced the resurrection of Jesus? Not read about it, not thought about it, actually experienced it? Listen to the Word “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Read all of Romans 6 about resurrected life. In Col 3 Paul tells the Colossians, Since then you have been raised with Christ... Have you been raised with Christ? 1Pt1:3 ‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who in his great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope – HOW – Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.’ And the clincher is Eph 2:6 ‘And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.’ On the throne with Christ – not in the future, but now, – seated – past tense. Are you there? If not die with Him and in being raised with Him you will be there.

Fourthly - it means that one day our physical body – the molecules – though scattered across the ocean – will one day be gathered and transformed and you will physically be raised. Skeptical? Tell me how did Jesus call up the decomposing stinky body of Lazarus. You don’t think God has the power? His word can stop a storm, or recreate a destroyed nerve, or make a world out of nothing. For in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet...the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 1Cor 15:52 “ ... because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in His presence.” Eph 4:14

1. Death has been defeated
2. God accepted Jesus’ sacrifice in your place
3. Right now you can walk in resurrection power
4. Everyone who dies in Christ will be physically raised as He was

Satan hates resurrection because it means He is defeated! He bribed the guards through the priest to lie about it. The Apostles duty was to bear witness of the resurrection. Not just with words but by walking in the power of it. -He’s alive! He has risen. ... Is your life witness to that fact? If not, it can be. If you will die with Him you can be raised with Him to new life right now, this morning!

One last verse from the Apostle Paul’s last recorded message:

2Tim 2:8 REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST, RAISED FROM THE DEAD, DESCENDED FROM DAVID. THIS IS MY GOSPEL!