

Easter Sunday – Apr. 20, 2014 “The Resurrection...”

Matthew 28:1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. **2** There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. **4** The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. **5** The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. **6** He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. "Come and see the place where he lay. **7** Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." **8** So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

A new TV series has some revealing plot lines. Everything is coming out into the open after being long buried. Or I should say: those who have died are coming back after being long buried. The series is called... Resurrection. Here's what an online review has to say about it:

"...every returned (individual) is exposing secrets that have remained buried since their deaths." In one case, this is about a wife's infidelity. In another, it is about a husband's past that he kept secret from his wife – prior to being married to her, he had been engaged to another woman. Then, there is an unsolved crime, where justice catches up with the guilty person. [source: online review forwarded from www.io9.com]

Interesting TV? Yes. A resurrection where our past catches up with us... how appealing does that sound to you? Not so much. Think of where this premise would leave you. If this were really what life after death consisted of, how comfortable would you be feeling about your relationships? If all my past wrongs are going to be aired, that's a pretty scary future.

And think beyond the human relationships; think of what this would mean in your relationship with God. God: "I know your secrets. The things your parents never found out about in all your years growing up. The past you never quite felt safe enough to share with your friends. The feelings about which you are ashamed, because of the way they've affected your actions toward those closest to you – your spouse, your children, your friends, etc. I know it all." How do you feel about that? |

How do you feel about standing before God? | How do you feel about Resurrection from death? | If you have the TV version, where “everything catches up with you,” I can only cringe away from such a Resurrection scene.

I read an article that cited an author, Nicholas Wolterstropp, whose son died in a mountain-climbing accident. He wrote through the grief from that loss. He saw a stark reality – one that has dogged humanity through the years – drawn out all the more in our modern setting. He wrote: “When we have overcome absence with phone calls, winglessness with airplanes, summer heat with air conditioning – when we have overcome all these and much more besides, then there will [remain] two things with which we must cope: the evil in our hearts and death.”

Evil and death are as widespread as humanity. Wherever people have gone, these two have followed. Their presence is recognized by anyone with any sense of insight and honesty. But overcoming them... that poses an impossibility for mere mortals whose ingenuity seems otherwise limitless.

Oh, there are reams of books, TV shows, & movies on the matter of death. You can tell it's something for which we want answers. But how dependable are the answers? Let's be clear on this: God does not leave you to sort through the opinions and competing ideas that are out there. On this critical truth, He does not want us hunting for answers from the varying accounts of near-death experiences. On the matter of death, we've got the ultimate & only Authority at our fingertips. The only One who died and then lived to never die again ~ his Word stands throughout time to tell us about it. The One who laid down his life, and had the power to take it up again. Jesus.

So what is his answer to the critical questions people have: “Will there be Resurrection from death for me?” “What will it be like for me... to stand before God?”

Let's look to the words Jesus says **after his resurrection**. Today we'll see how important His Words are for us, who live almost two thousand years later.

First question: Will there be a resurrection from the dead for me? All we have to do is look to the first Easter Sunday:

Allow God to take you to the tomb on Easter morning. God's mighty, heaven-sent being now stands where Roman guards have collapsed in fear. The stone is rolled away. The angel greets the women with a message no enemy can keep sealed away from the world: “Jesus was crucified. He was buried here. But he is here no longer. He is risen!” “...was...” & “...is...” Our forgiveness, our life, our future – our peace for this life and our sure hope for the life that comes after death – all of it hinges upon these powerful words.

As we stand outside the tomb on Easter, the importance of Friday is not lost. “Jesus was crucified.” It's still a little jarring to hear. Even after all the times I've heard it repeated. It was

only earlier the same week Jesus was healing people in the Temple courts. It was just two miles back – in Bethany – and a few more days removed that Jesus had stood in front of Lazarus' 4-day-old grave and called life into Lazarus' stone-cold body. Jesus is God. God the Son was crucified.

Now ... “He is Risen.” Legs still a little wobbly from the angelic encounter, the women speed from the tomb, joy like you've never seen before breaking through days of grief.

Then ... Jesus. Jesus meets them. Jesus greets them. Jesus calms them: “Don't be afraid.” Jesus gives them his Word to share with his disciples: “Go, tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Jesus... alive again! ...after a torturous death. Jesus... risen with power over death, proving He alone can free you and me from our graves. But that knowledge alone isn't enough to bring us peace. For we still need to know what he said after he had risen. What assurance do I have that the evil that stains my life now will forever be removed, ■ that my past won't haunt me, ■ that I won't have any reason to cringe away from my God, but that my relationship with Him is made right forever?

After the Resurrection... Jesus called his disciples “my brothers.” Do you realize how significant this is? He doesn't operate like we would, if people deserted us. He doesn't seek out a new set of disciples to do a better job at following him. Wouldn't we expect that he'd at least wait for those who abandoned him to seek him out? Maybe with a certain amount of groveling, their apologies as the first thing to break the silence of these past 3 days? No. The disciples don't initiate. They're hidden away in fear! Jesus sends the Word to them: I'm coming to you. He sends that news attached to this most wonderful Easter gift: at the first opportunity – on His Resurrection morning – he referred to them as part of His family – God's family. Jesus chose this moment as the very 1st time that he ever called them “my brothers.” Just let this sink in: Jesus doesn't say, “Go and tell those deserters.” He calls these men who had wronged and failed him: “my brothers.”

This can only mean: something had been done about the barrier that stood between them and Jesus. The disciples hadn't done a thing about this. They couldn't have, even if they'd tried. The only way to remove the record of evil from our hearts and stain of sin from our lives was for God to join our human family. Jesus, God in the flesh, alone was able to absorb the guilt and punishment of all of humanity's sin in his very person. He took the sentence of hell in our place. All who trust in him, who know and rely he is the only Way to heaven, receive the benefit of everything He did: the barrier of our sin that stood between us and our God has been removed for us – his people.

And on Easter morning he tells the news to his disciples: “the sin that bound you in chains of guilt and shame – the sin that sentenced you to hell – I've conquered. And I've brought

with me this gift for you: forgiveness. Freedom. Know this: Because of what I've done for you, you're at peace with me."

This is the same Lord who has looked for you. Who has brought you here to hear his Word. The words he speaks after his resurrection give us an answer for our question: "What will it be like to stand before God?" Believe in him! And when you stand before God, you will have on your record the perfect life of Jesus.

But there is a warning for you and me, which we should note. People sometimes try to deal with guilt themselves when they realize they've wronged others and God. But no attempts to make up for wrongs can rid our record of sin. People sometimes try to pretend the guilt doesn't exist. It's too painful to confront. But that doesn't change the fact that it's there. And if it isn't removed from the record, it will condemn you in the end.

Freedom from our past, with all the guilt that comes with our sins, can't come from efforts to bargain or to work our way out of it. It can't come by ignoring it and pretending it isn't there. Sadly, people stand before God having taken these approaches through life. The only verdict God can give them is: "Your sin remains with you, its guilt stains your record, it deserves hell: you have no place with me... depart... forever."

As your eyes close in death, it is my prayer that you rest your confidence in the *cry of Jesus, shortly before his death ~ when he was done with hell's torture: "Paid in full!"*

Then, what will come at the Resurrection? For those who hold to this saving truth - Jesus will get you through. Arms reaching for you - still carrying the marks of the nails that pierced him to the cross. Jesus will lift you out of the grave alive, to live with Him -our God - forever. Freedom! Sheer freedom to live in a place that has no sin. No pain. No sadness, betrayal or cruelty. No guilt. No shame. No fear.

That's what you - dear Christian - have to look forward to at your resurrection! Amen.