

Christ Is Risen

“He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

—Matthew 28:6

DURING THIS MEMORIAL

season we are once again reminded of the fact that many Christian people from around the world also celebrate our Lord Jesus’ death on the cross, and his resurrection by the mighty hand of his Father. The Easter season is looked forward to as being a very joyful time, and one of the most popular church-related festivals that occur throughout the year. Many honest-hearted Christians are uplifted as they hope for a better day that they believe is promised to faithful believers in Christ Jesus.

ANTICIPATION AND JOY

The angel’s words ‘he is risen,’ that were spoken to the women who sought Jesus’ body early that morning, related to the most momentous event that had ever taken place in the world’s history up to that time. The proclamation that our dear Lord Jesus, who had left his heavenly home to become a perfect man on the human plane of life and then die for Adam and his race, was absolute evidence that the Heavenly Father’s plan of reconciliation

for the sins of the world had taken a major step forward.

THE SCRIPTURAL ACCOUNT

The Gospel record of this wonderful event is most inspiring, as we read, “When the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

“And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.”—Mark 16:1-8

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Many Christians who profess their faith in Jesus and his resurrection from the dead, may not fully understand the importance of our Lord’s earthly ministry, his death and resurrection. Few relate to the Heavenly Father’s ultimate plan and purpose

for the reconciliation of the whole human family from the sentence of death. Fewer, still, appreciate the invitation to the spiritual High Calling in Christ Jesus that went out from that time forward and throughout the present Gospel Age.

There are many questions concerning death and what happens after death. Some may teach that there is no death at all, while others believe that death is merely a gateway to some other form of life. When celebrating the great event of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the question may arise, if there is no death then how can we commemorate his resurrection? These and many other varying beliefs have created much confusion among many sincere Christians relating to the subject of death and the resurrection.

Turning to the Apostle Paul's letter to the brethren at Corinth, we read, "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not."—I Cor. 15:12-15

FOUNDED ON FAITH

Paul has addressed the importance of faith as it relates to Jesus' death and resurrection. Faith, established by scriptural teachings, is fundamental to a proper understanding of our Lord's earthly ministry, death, and resurrection. This belief would

be in vain and meaningless if it had no foundation and nothing to justify it.

When writing to the Hebrew brethren, the apostle explained the power of faith. He wrote, “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” (Heb. 10:38,39) Paul gave examples of many faith-inspired worthies of old, those who gave their lives for their faith in God. He explained, “Now faith is the substance [ground, or confidence, *Marginal Translation*] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) This is the very foundation of our Christian life, and Paul taught its vital importance. In his letter, he continued, “Without faith it is impossible to please him [God]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”—vs. 6

Paul explained the matter more clearly to the brethren at Corinth. He said, “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming [presence—Greek, *parousia*].” (I Cor. 15:20-23) It was necessary for Jesus to die as a substitute for Adam, who had disobeyed God’s righteous laws. He had received the penalty of death for his actions and had plunged the whole human family into death.

FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISES

The Christian's faith is based on the promises of God, but these would be empty promises if there was no hope for a resurrection of the dead. In Luke's Gospel, he states, "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him." (Luke 20:37,38) Luke made reference to the scripture concerning Moses at the burning bush. The record states, "Moreover he [God] said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God."—Exod. 3:6

All of God's prophets believed that there would be a resurrection of the dead that would take place during the future time of a promised kingdom of righteousness. They worshipped and served him because they had confidence in his promises, and that he would ultimately bless all the families of the earth. (Gen. 22:17,18) They trusted God to fulfill his promises by restoring them to life and giving them an opportunity to live forever on a perfected earth. It was their faith in God that gave them the courage and strength to endure the difficulties of a sin-sick and depraved world. We read that some suffered "cruel mockings and scourgings," "bonds and imprisonment" while others were "stoned." Paul speaks of those who were "sawn asunder," "tempted," and "slain with the sword." Still others "wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, [and] tormented."—Heb. 11:36,37

These prophets and other worthies of old endured these depravities not for present advantage, but for a future reward. They suffered and died, refusing to accept deliverance at the hands of their enemies, that they might obtain a better resurrection. (vs. 35) How vain all of these experiences would have been if Jesus had not been resurrected from the dead. Without trusting in this fundamental truth, their faith would have been in vain.

MANY MANSIONS

The wonderful house of the Lord has many mansions, and in John's Gospel he records Jesus' words to his disciples during the closing scenes of his earthly ministry. He told them, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." (John 14:1-4) Jesus explained to his disciples that they would have life as spiritual beings in a heavenly, or spiritual, mansion.

David and others who lived in the distant past will share in the blessings of a perfected earth. He says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy

shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”—Ps. 23:4-6

David had developed this strong sense of trust because he had faith that, no matter what happened to him, he would eventually ‘dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.’

He expected to be resurrected from the dead, and at a future day to dwell in God’s wonderful and perfected earthly mansion. His faith and his life of faithfulness would all have been in vain when that future time had come if God had not resurrected our Lord Jesus.

In Jesus, we have a most wonderful example of faithfulness even unto death, and the promise of a future perfected kingdom. He was inspired and encouraged with the words of David, where we read, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [grave—Hebrew, *sheol*]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:10,11

Those who respond to the High Calling in Christ Jesus during the present Gospel Age will receive the blessings of the heavenly inheritance. Paul explains, “If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.”—Rom. 6:8,9

THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER

Paul testified, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the

throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” (Heb. 12:2,3) Jesus was not only shown this narrow way which leads to eternal life, but was given the necessary strength by his Heavenly Father to walk therein. He had great faith in the promises of his Father to restore him to a spiritual life in his own due time and manner.

In the upper room the night before our Lord was crucified, his disciples were saddened and did not fully understand that he would soon be leaving them. He proclaimed to them, “The hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:32,33

SHARING IN HIS DEATH

The footstep followers of Jesus who are being called from the world during this present Gospel Age are also privileged to suffer persecution and tribulation for their faith in him and for the Truth. We know that Christ is risen from the dead and that the class of consecrated will soon be complete. Those who are found faithful to their calling will share in the administration of Christ’s earthly kingdom.

At the present time, the Lord’s people are still invited to suffer and die with him that they might live and reign with him in his kingdom. We have accepted the invitation to be buried with him and

we believe that we will be resurrected to a heavenly plane as promised. Jesus is preparing for us to share with him in the grand future work of blessing the entire human family.

The death of the flesh was a joy to the Apostle Paul because he was assured that when his resurrection took place he would receive the crown of life, the Divine nature, and be with Jesus in the heavenly mansion that he went away to prepare. During his ministry, the apostle was warned that bonds and imprisonment awaited him if he went to Jerusalem, and some of the brethren tried to dissuade him from going there. Then Paul answered, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."—Acts 21:13

Paul was ready and willing to suffer and die at Jerusalem because he had absolute confidence that Christ had risen. He also trusted the promises of God concerning the raising of the little flock in the first resurrection. He believed that they would reign with Christ and share in the great program for the restoration of the world to life in the general resurrection. He was inspired by the wonderful hope of receiving the Divine nature in the first resurrection, and to have a part in God's wonderful plan. Nothing in the present life could compare with the fulfillment of this wonderful promise.

Again Paul wrote, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count

them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”—Phil. 3:7-11

The promises of the resurrection were sure, and the apostle knew that Jesus had been raised from the dead. We read, “He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”—Acts 17:31

LIGHT AFFLICTION

The Scriptures teach that during this present Gospel Age our loving Heavenly Father has sent out an invitation to the followers of Jesus to seek the heavenly kingdom—“To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, and honour and immortality, eternal life.” (Rom. 2:7) With such a wonderful inheritance in store for the faithful, we learn to tread lightly the things of this earth, and to trust our loving Father’s blessed promises that even during the most severe trials of life they will soon pass.

We are reminded, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen

are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (II Cor. 4:17,18) These words bring every trying experience of life into proper perspective and give us a true sense of values when estimating the worth of trivial earthly things.

BEING STRONG

Paul wrote to Timothy, saying, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (II Tim. 2:1-3) When the apostle wrote these encouraging words to his dear brother Timothy, he was a prisoner at Rome for the second time; and continuing, he said, “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”—vss. 11-13

It is a ‘faithful saying’ that those who die with Jesus will also live with him. We can depend fully upon the Heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus, and the written Word of Truth because it does not change. We read, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” (Heb. 13:8) Paul’s faith was not in vain because Jesus had been raised from the dead, and he testified to this wonderful event in the plan of God, when he said, “Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”—I Cor. 15:8

This was a tangible and mighty witness to the fact that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead.

Paul also said, "What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."—Eph. 1:19-23

BAPTISM INTO DEATH

Our faith in preaching the Word of Truth is not in vain because Jesus has been raised from the dead, and this great and fundamental truth should revolutionize our lives. We are now walking in newness of life—"We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Rom. 6:4,5) In connection with the apostle's words, the revelator also wrote, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10) The 'crown of life' symbolizes the Divine nature, the highest of all forms of life originally possessed only by the Heavenly Father.

As a final testimony of this, John the revelator also said, "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness

of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. . . . This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:4-6

THE MEMORIAL OF HIS DEATH

This is the season of the year during which many Christian people from around the world come together to celebrate our Lord’s resurrection. They do this every year on Easter Sunday. Jesus commanded his disciples and faithful followers to commemorate his death on its anniversary date. They are to do this in memory of him after sundown on Nisan 14, which is the first month of the Jewish New Year, and in compliance with their reckoning according to the Hebrew calendar. This fulfilled Jesus’ death as a Jew under the Law Covenant, and as the antitypical Passover Lamb of God. The eating of the lamb with his twelve apostles in the same night in which he was betrayed, and yet in the same day that he died, points to the peculiarity of Jewish time calculations wherein each day ended and the new day began at 6:00 P.M. in the evening, rather than at midnight.

In carrying out these distinctive features of the Law, we see represented Jesus’ own sacrificed life for the sins of Adam and subsequently for all mankind. The faithful members of his bride who will

share with him in the great work of his future heavenly kingdom have this great hope, “By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.” (Heb. 10:20) The human family will also come to know Jesus and the value of his sacrifice. “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:5,6

ALIVE FOR EVERMORE

The importance of Jesus’ death and resurrection will be made manifest to the whole sin-sick and dy-ing race under the administration of his soon-to-be-established kingdom of blessings and righteous-ness. To the accomplishment of this ultimate pur-pose of our loving Heavenly Father, we read the revelator’s account concerning Jesus, who said, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [the grave] and of death.”—Rev. 1:18

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