

The Blessings made possible by Resurrection

Preached: 4/04/2021, Easter Sunday; Germantown;

Scripture

Luke 23:50 - 24:12 (ESV)

Opening Prayer

Scripture

1 Peter 1:3-9 (ESV)

Message

A Living Hope

What are your Easter traditions? How do you celebrate this day?

- Hiding Easter eggs
- Visits from the Easter Bunny
- Family Gathering
- A big meal – including some traditional dishes unique to your family
- Attend a Sunrise Service or Easter Worship Service

These special practices are special to us and bring joy to us. But as we engage in these holiday festivities, as Christ followers, we don't want to lose focus on the significance of this holiday. If we ask people "on the street" what is the true meaning of Christmas, it is likely that many people will know recognize it as the Birthday of Jesus. But do they understand the theological or spiritual significance of that event. If we ask what is the true meaning of Easter, it is likely that many people will say "It is the day Jesus rose from the dead." But do they understand the theological or spiritual significance of that event. Have they ever sat down and reflected or thought about what that means. I wonder how many people who would identify themselves as believers would have a good understanding of what it means that Jesus rose from the dead. It is a good idea to dig in to the Scriptures and try to discern what it means that Jesus rose from the dead.

In the Bible, the gospel writers tell us the stories of the resurrection.

- Jesus' body is taken down from the cross
- He is placed in a tomb
- There is no time to properly prepare his body for burial – washing and anointing
- The tomb is secured so no one would steal the body
- Jesus' disciples observe the Sabbath while Jesus' body lies in the tomb
- Several of Jesus' female followers come to the tomb after the Sabbath to properly prepare his body for burial
- When they arrive they find that the stone is rolled away and Jesus body is gone
- The women are told by angels that he has come back to life
- One of the women encounters Jesus himself
- The women go and tell the disciples
- They run to investigate the tomb for themselves
- Jesus comes and meets them

Those are the realities of the events. The disciples are overjoyed that Jesus is no longer dead. But they still do not grasp all that it means. It is only as they reflect, guided by the Holy Spirit, that they begin to understand why it is so significant. We learn about their discoveries as we read their sermons and read the letters that they write to the early believers. Their conversations moves from "Here is what we witnessed" to "Here is why it is important". I encourage you to read what they write about the resurrection to discover how that event impacts your spiritual life.

I want to take a few minutes today and look at this passage that I read from Peter's first letter. Now, whenever we are looking at a passage of Scripture, it is important for our understanding to think about who is writing the passage. What was their story? Based on what we know about this person, why did they write what they did. And it is helpful if we are going to understand the passage to take a few minutes and learn about the recipients

of the letter. Why did this author say this to this group of people. In this case the passage becomes so much more meaningful when we keep that information in mind.

As we read the gospels, we learn about Peter. One of Jesus' first disciples. Liked to talk before he thought. Liked to brag about being Jesus' favorite, most loyal follower. But when Jesus needed someone to speak up for him at his trial, Peter says "I do not know this man!" Three times. Peter was broken hearted when he failed Jesus. Jesus later gives him the opportunity to seek forgiveness and welcomes him back, but I wonder if Peter was ever able to forget his failure. After Jesus returned to heaven, Peter becomes a leader, perhaps the leader of the twelve. He is a preacher and teacher. He is writing this letter to encourage a group of people. He addresses this letter to believers who are scattered, perhaps undergoing persecution for their faith in Jesus. Peter is writing to encourage them to "Hang on", persevere in their struggles.

Peter begins this letter with a "doxology" a song of praise to God. (Vs. 3) ³ ***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*** In these verses that I read, Peter lists several blessings and benefits that God has provided to us. The key thought that I want us to see in this section is that Peter is convinced that all of these blessings are made available to us "**through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**" Let's look more closely at these blessings that Peter says are made possible by Christ's resurrection

He has caused us to be born again: When Jesus met a man who was one of the religious leaders of the Jewish people, Jesus told him that in order for a person to belong to God's kingdom, that person had to be born again. Jesus was referring to a spiritual birth – a re-orienting of our life, becoming a believer, a follower of him. How many of us have had days where we would like a "do over" a chance to start over, when our past would be washed away and we could start out fresh and new. I'm sure that Peter was someone like that, especially after that evening when he messed up so badly – denying Jesus. How he would have longed for a new identity, to be no longer known as the man who denied Jesus but as the man who loved Jesus. When Peter encountered Jesus after he had come back to life after being dead, Peter got that opportunity. The resurrection is an affirmation that God has accepted Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, and that now our past can be forgiven and we can be made new! We can have a new identity.

Secondly, because of Jesus' resurrection, Peter says that **we now have a living hope for an inheritance in heaven.** (Vs. 3-4). Sometimes those who are not believers in Jesus think that the Christian hope for eternal life is just a grasping at straws. It is just a pipe dream, but not a reality. But Jesus' resurrection assures us that there is life after death. Death was not the end for Jesus and it does not have to be the end for us. Death does not have the last word. Even in death there is something to look forward to. Peter says that this inheritance that awaits us in **imperishable, undefiled, and unfading!**.

Thirdly Peter assures us **the God who brought again Jesus from the dead is protecting us, guarding us and assuring us of victory.** In verse 6 Peter mentions that those who are reading this letter are being grieved by various trials. As the Church grew and spread, it began to be viewed as a threat. Christians were persecuted and some put to death for their faith. But no matter what comes against us, God's power is greater and stronger. He brought Jesus back to life again after he had been dead. I can't think of anything greater than that power. And even if we experience suffering or hardship in this world, we are assured of our ultimate victory. God's salvation will win, will be revealed in the end. So do not be overcome by fear. I don't know if you are currently going through a difficult time – sickness, covid, financial difficulty, anxiety about the future, concern for parents or children. Do not be overcome by fear!

Finally, Peter says **these difficulties, these sufferings that we experience have a purpose** – to prove to the world that your faith is genuine. The way you come through difficult times will result in other people praising God and giving Him glory. Now, how do we know that God can use the hard things to make us stronger. When we are going through a difficult time, it is hard to remember that something good or positive can come from this. But the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is proof that God will not be overcome. He will use what we are going through for His glory.

I hope that you will have a joy-filled holiday celebration. Enjoy those times with your family and friends. Enjoy your holiday traditions. But remember the true significance of this holiday. Jesus is alive after being dead for 3 days, and that changes everything!