

# ***Easter 2010 – We Preach Christ Crucified “Crucified, but Risen Again”***

**Text: Luke 24:1-8**

*He is arisen! Glorious word! Now reconciled is God, my Lord;  
The gates of heaven are open.  
My Jesus did triumphant die, and Satan's arrows broken lie,  
Destroyed  
- hell's direst weapon.  
Oh, hear what cheer!  
Christ victorious riseth glorious,  
Life He giveth--  
He was dead, but see, He liveth. Amen (TLH #189)*

Dear Christians, this is the day, this is the morning, where our Lord finds us lying prostrate at the foot of the cross, still mourning over our sins and the damage we have inflicted, and yet there gently takes us by the hand and says, *"Get up, dry your eyes. I am alive and my suffering is at an end. Your sins are forgiven."* Dear Christians *this* is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen.

The text that will guide our thoughts and hearts on this most hallowed morning is found recorded in the Gospel of Luke, the 24<sup>th</sup> Chapter, beginning with the First Verse:

**NKJ Luke 24:1-8 Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.<sup>2</sup> But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.<sup>3</sup> Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.<sup>4</sup> And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments.<sup>5</sup> Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"<sup>6</sup> "He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee,<sup>7</sup> "saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.' "<sup>8</sup> And they remembered His words.**

These are the Words of our God. In humble and joyful thanksgiving we thank our God for these words of comfort and peace, and we ask him to refresh us spiritually through this message as we pray, ***"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Dear Fellow Heirs of the Forgiveness of Sins:

A father called his sons in from where they were playing and told them of a job he wanted them to complete. Since he not only wanted the job done but also wanted to teach them to think and problem-solve for themselves, he didn't tell them how to *do* the job, just that he wanted the job done. While two of the sons began to argue among themselves as to who would do what and how, the industrious middle son devised a clever and unique solution and actually finished the job while the other two argued. He then called his brothers out to show them the finished project, at which point the other brothers (who neither came up with the solution nor carried out the work) remarked simply: *"Well, that's not the way I would have done it."*

Leave it to brothers to find a way to compliment themselves, while at the same time helping to prevent a brother from getting too full of himself.

Mankind tends to look at Easter in much the same way, don't they? It started with the disciples. Jesus informed them that he was going to go to Jerusalem, and that there he would be betrayed, turned over to the Jews, condemned, and crucified. But he didn't leave it there; he also added that he would rise again on the third day. Their reaction? No way. Not a chance. That, in their humble opinions, was simply not an acceptable plan. They presented several alternate courses of action – all of them involving some sort of heroic, lay-down-our-life actions on their part. And they began to arm themselves. Their way was, after all, just how things got done in the real world. Jesus dismissed their plans with a biting, ***"Get behind me, Satan!"***

They went, of course, with Jesus' plan – which unfolded, not surprisingly, exactly how Jesus had predicted it would, including Jesus' crucifixion, death and entombment. We can only imagine the thoughts of the disciples as they watched their Lord die from a distance, and later when they huddled in fear behind locked doors. *"We tried to tell him."* *"We knew it would come to this!"* *"Now what?"*

Easy for us to look back today in condescension and condemnation at the lack of faith displayed by Christ's followers. Weren't they listening? Shouldn't they have reasoned that if the first part of Jesus' prediction had come true (his betrayal and death) that the second part would also come true (his resurrection on the third day)?

Mankind's collective reaction to the empty tomb on that first Easter morning? *"Huh. Well that's not the way I would have done it!"*

Human beings are still reacting that way today. That's just not how we would have done things, is it? In fact even knowing what we do today, that's still not the way we would have done things. That's just not the way things get done in the real world, is it? In the real world, things get done by strength and force. In the real world, those who commit the crime have to do the time. Those who sinned have to ante up and pay the penalty.

But that's not Christianity. In fact that's exactly what makes Christianity so wonderfully unique. Every other world religion takes the same path Jesus' disciples first suggested. *Man* must do; *man* must pay; *man* must supply whatever is needed to make up for the wrongs that have been committed. Christianity alone tells us: *You can't do that. You have nothing with which to pay. You have no currency that holds any value to a just and holy God. The only thing that God accepts is perfection – consistent, unmarred perfection. If you cannot produce before God, the Righteous Judge, a life of unblemished perfection, you will be damned.*

Obviously Christianity never heard of political correctness. Our society condemns condemnation. Our society believes in "good enough" and "happily ever after." That's why our society looks at the empty tomb sort of like a cow looks at a new gate and mutters, *"Huh. That's not the way I would have done it."*

Jesus replies, *"No, but that's exactly why this is the way I had to do it."*

That's also why you and I love Easter as we do. Easter represents the wisdom of God as he solves man's seemingly insurmountable problem. Our natural inclination is always to "make it up to God" through our own actions. We have no problem recognizing our own sinfulness. In fact we are reminded of it every single day. It just therefore feels right that we should also have to supply whatever is needed to fix the problem, and we are naturally frustrated and embittered when we run head first into the reality that we cannot. Trying to do the right thing can never make up for doing the wrong thing. Trying to shine up imperfection can never change it into perfection.

That's exactly why God sent his Son, isn't it? That's why, as far as we are concerned, God *had to* send his Son. It's the only reason we can now regard God as just and merciful, rather than some sort of a monster. Only a monster would send his own dear son to suffer unspeakable torment when another path, another "bridge across the chasm," another salvation plan was available. God sent his Son precisely because there was no other way for you and me to avoid an eternity in hell.

Our problem, again, was one of currency. We had nothing to offer God in payment for sin. God knew that such goodness had to come from an outside source, and he mercifully decided to supply that outside source by sending his Son. Jesus' mission was, therefore, at the same time incredibly simple and incredibly difficult. He had to leave the perfection of heaven, be born a human being – thereby placing himself under the demands of the law – he had to keep that law perfectly, and then offer that perfect life as the sacrifice for the sum total of the sins of all mankind. Incredibly simple and incredibly difficult.

On Good Friday, Jesus completed his work. With his resounding ***"It is finished!"*** he declared that his part, his mission, was completed. As far as mankind was concerned, only one thing, one test or sign remained: God's official judgment as to whether or not Jesus had actually done what he had set out to do, whether Jesus had adequately provided that outside source that was necessary to pay for our sins.

In advance God had set up a simple test, a simple sign: If the tomb is empty on the third day, Jesus was successful. If it was not, Jesus has failed, and along with him man's only hope for salvation.

That is why we take such joy and comfort in the message of Easter Sunday. The tomb is empty! God the Father has made his immutable, binding decree that the full fury of divine justice has been satisfied. That outside source of goodness that man needed to pay for his sins has been more than adequately provided by Jesus Christ. ***"There is now therefore no condemnation to those who are in (who believe in) Christ Jesus."*** You and I, by God's own decree, have been declared not guilty.

That, dear Christian, is the meaning of Easter morning and the empty tomb. Jesus Christ, our Champion, has triumphed over sin, death, and Satan. Nothing is left to do. Nothing! *His* victory is *our* victory – as also the Scriptures teach: ***"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (1 Corinthians 15:57). Again the Holy Spirit revealed to us through Paul in that same Book and Chapter, ***"If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!<sup>18</sup> Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished... But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."***

This, as we said, is the source for the Christian joy on this great day; yet that is not to say that all understand, nor that all have always understood. Our time of grace on this earth is lengthened for precisely this reason. You and I have been called to dispel the confusion that still today surrounds Jesus Christ and the pure, simple gospel of salvation through faith in him alone. Satan has been enormously successful in clouding these great truths, and thereby denying their saving power to the masses. To this end he is overjoyed when he sees Christian churches holding Easter Egg Hunts and when he sees frail, benighted human beings succumb to the notion that Easter is all about springtime, family meals, flowers, and the like.

This confusion defines and directs our calling in life. Our message is simple, but absolutely critical. That's also why we hear or read the words of our text for this morning as so much more than just a story or anecdote. These simple words represent God's message of pardon and peace in the life and death of Jesus Christ – a goodness that we could never earn, but that has been mercifully supplied for us by our dear Savior. The message is all-inclusive and applies equally to every single man, woman, and child who ever has or ever will be born, which is why our message to every human being is the same: The debt for *your* sins has been paid. Believing this, your salvation is secure and not even the very gates of hell can prevail against it.

Good Friday taught us something about the horrible consequences of our sin. The empty tomb now teaches us something about God's mercy and love. Here we learn of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ. On this sure promise we stake our eternal futures. Though human expectation might fear God's vengeance on the Day of Judgment, let the promise of our God grant you the peace and comfort that our God certainly intends on this great day. Weep no more, for the time of mourning is at an end. Rejoice and celebrate – yours sins are forgiven and your Savior lives.

That's not the way I would have done it?

But that's the way God did it.

Amen.