

Spring 2017 Newsletter
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ONE MORNING AT SUNRISE

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.” Luke 24:5,6

The sun was barely peeking over the horizon, but Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna and Salome were up and hurrying to the tomb of their beloved Master to anoint his body with spices. There was barely enough light for them to see their path, but their hearts burned to render Jesus this last tribute of love which the Sabbath had prevented their doing sooner.

What horrors they had witnessed in the last few days— what wrenching sorrow as they saw their beloved Master taken by the Pharisees and handed over to the Roman governor for execution. How had this happened? Jesus was the personification of love. He had healed the sick, cheered the broken hearted, taught holiness and love for all, and even raised the dead to life, but the gentleness and compassion for all that marked Jesus’ teachings had exposed the pride and hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees. Their animosity toward Jesus had been growing as time and again he thwarted their attempts to discredit Jesus by trapping him in his words. Their breaking point came after Jesus restored Lazarus to life after he had lain dead for four days. Their malice could no longer be contained.

They were, therefore, gathered in council to consider what they should do. Jesus was a threat to their privileged position in society. They feared that if they lost the esteem of the people to Jesus, the Romans would no longer support their position in the nation. It was Caiaphas, the high priest that year, that showed them how to rid themselves of Jesus. He said, “it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” (John 11:50) They even considered killing Lazarus. (John 12:9-11)

Writing his Gospel years later, the Apostle John explained why God had permitted what, at the time, seemed only a horrible calamity, and tells us, “And this spake he [Caiaphas] not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.” (John 11:51,52) Little did those malevolent religious leaders of Jesus’ day know that they were, in fact, cooperating in God’s plan to rescue the condemned human race. (Matthew 16:21; Romans 5:8,18,19)

God has frequently used unholy agencies in advancing his purposes. He used the heathen nations to punish Israel when they were unfaithful. (Deuteronomy 28:15, 48-51; Judges 4:1,2) Jesus came to give his life a ransom for all as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29; 1 Timothy 2:5,6)

So the scheming priests brought Jesus before the Roman governor who could put him to death. Recognizing the jealously sadistic purpose of the Pharisees, Pilate thought to free Jesus by invoking the custom at Passover to release one of the condemned. The fierceness of the Pharisees, however, prompted him rather to send Jesus to Herod for judgment since he was a Galilean.

Herod was delighted and gratified to have Jesus sent to him. He had heard about Jesus and hoped to see him work some miracles. Jesus, however, did not speak or perform for him, so Herod and his men abused him and sent him back to Pilate.

Pilate then sent Jesus to be beaten, thinking that that would appease the Jews. He handed Jesus over to his soldiers who flogged him mercilessly, and made him a crown of thorns to mock him. Pilate then showed Jesus to the people beaten and humiliated. He gestured toward Jesus and said, “BEHOLD THE MAN.”



Surely, thought Pilate, when the people looked upon this meek and sinless man their compassion would rise and they would ask for his release. Instead, the chief priests and officers and their followers screamed, “Crucify him,” and demanded that Barabbas, a murderer, be set free.

So, to satisfy the mob, Pilate handed Jesus over for crucifixion. Crucifixion was the most brutal form of execution ever devised. It was death by prolonged torture. The victim would hang for hours, sometimes even days, dying slowly from suffocation and the build-up of toxins in the body, while suffering the most excruciating pain from dislocated joints and inflamed nerves. (Psalm 22:14-18) In fact, the word “excruciating” is derived from the word “crucifixion.”

So, Jesus was put on the cross like a criminal, between two thieves. He had made no effort to resist, but “gave himself for our sins.” (Galatians 1:4; Titus 2:14) He offered himself, “the just for the unjust, that he might

bring us to God.” (1 Peter 3:18) “He [God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin [a sin offering] on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NAS; Hebrews 9:11-14,24-28)

After his baptism, Jesus had gone into the wilderness to pray and learn God’s will. After he had fasted forty days and nights, Satan came to tempt him. The account is in Matthew 4:1-11. His temptations consisted of using his power to comfort his flesh, make a miraculous display to announce his Messiahship, and being disobedient to God’s ways. Having resisted all these temptations, Luke tells us in his account, that the devil “departed from him for a season.” (Luke 4:13)

Now, at the end of his life, as Jesus hung on the cross in exquisite pain, the same temptations were being hurled



at him from the chief priests and rulers who jeered at him and defied him to save himself as he had saved others. They challenged him to come down off the cross and they would believe in him. (Matthew 27:41,42) The soldiers taunted him saying, “If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.” (Luke 23:37)

Jesus had taught his disciples that they must love their enemies if they wished to be children of God. (Matthew 5:43-48) This, now, was the ultimate test. Would Jesus fail in his divine commission by saving himself or even by entertaining thoughts of anger or revenge toward his persecutors? Had he done so, his sacrifice would have been marred, imperfect and, therefore, not acceptable to God as man’s ransom price. (Leviticus 22:21)

At the ninth hour, 3 p.m. our time, Jesus died. He had been on the cross for six hours. Since the next day was a Sabbath and the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Jews had asked Pilate to have the men taken down from their crosses. To speed their deaths, the soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves, but when they came to Jesus, they were surprised to find that he was already dead so none of his bones were broken. (John 19:31-37; Psalm 34:20)

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member and, secretly, a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate to ask for his body. Perhaps because he had not wanted to have Jesus put to death, Pilate granted permission for Jesus’ body to

be taken for burial. His body was wrapped in linen and placed in a newly hewn tomb in a garden not far from Golgotha. (Isaiah 53:7-9) A huge stone was rolled against the door. It was to this place that the women came to anoint the body of Jesus on that early Sunday morning.

As they walked, they considered between themselves how they would roll away the heavy stone that closed the entrance. To their surprise, they found that the stone had



already been moved. They entered the tomb and saw that the body of Jesus was not there. Then suddenly there were two men in shining garments standing by them. The women were frightened and dared not

look up at the men, but lowered their gaze. The men asked, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen." Then they reminded the women that Jesus had told his disciples about his being crucified and rising from death on the third day. Yes, they remembered and in their joy, they ran to tell the eleven and all the rest of the disciples.

Peter and John were next to run to the tomb. John hesitated outside but Peter entered and saw the linen cloths lying empty. (John 20:7) Mary Magdalene had also returned. As she stood outside the tomb weeping. she turned around and saw a man who asked, "Woman why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" The man Mary saw was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him, but took him to be the gardener. She asked if he knew where the body of Jesus had been taken. Jesus answered with one word, "Mary." That familiar voice immediately opened Mary's eyes and she knew Jesus. She would have clung to him, but he told her to go and tell the others he would be with them a little longer. (John 20:11-18)

The same day, Jesus joined two disciples as they walked



to Emmaus. They thought him to be a stranger and did not realize that they were talking with Jesus until they sat down to their evening meal and recognized him by his familiar mannerisms.

Then he vanished out of their sight, but that same evening Jesus appeared suddenly where the disciples were

gathered in a locked room. For forty days Jesus was with his disciples, though most of the time they did not see him. The Apostle Paul said that he was also seen by five hundred brethren on one occasion, and by the Apostle himself who saw Jesus' resurrection body, "as a light from heaven, brighter than the sun." (1 Corinthians 15:5-8; Acts 9:1-6; 26:13) These appearances were of great importance to provide a body of witnesses to Jesus' resurrection—a witness for which they would often forfeit their lives.

Jesus' resurrection was proof that his sacrifice for "the sin of the world," (John 1:29) was unblemished and accepted by God. It is because of his resurrection that we can come to God. "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." (Romans 5:10)

Paul discoursed on the importance of the resurrection. "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. ...And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." (1 Corinthians 15:13-22)

Because Jesus was raised out of death, we also can hope in the resurrection. The Apostle Peter wrote "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3) The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is a pivotal truth of the Christian faith. Everywhere the Apostles went they taught it. (Acts 4:10-12; 5:29-32; 13:32-37; 17:22-33) We should cherish it!

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