

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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"He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:6). Such was the joyful message of the angel to those frightened women on that first Easter Day. They had come early in the morning, as they thought, to anoint the dead body of Jesus. Instead, they found the stone rolled away from the door of the sepulchre. Jesus was no longer dead. The message today is still the same. He is risen! So at the start of this Easter Day, let us also rejoice in this good news!

It may seem a long time ago to you that we were celebrating Christmas with that other good news of the birth of the Lord Jesus. In other respects, the time seems to have whizzed by so that we wonder where all the days have gone! And yet there is a very close link between Christmas and Easter. I don't mean just the fact that one major supermarket was reported as selling Easter eggs on the day it opened after the Christmas break!

Do you remember that at Christmas time we were thinking that the Bible leaves us in no doubt as to the reason why Jesus was born as a Babe in Bethlehem's manger? The message of the angel to Joseph was, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21). The message of the angels to the shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem laid that same emphasis on Jesus the Saviour: "For there is born to you in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." Later, when Mary and Joseph brought the young child, Jesus, to the temple as the Law required, we read that Simeon the priest "took Him up in His arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel'" (Luke 2:28-32).

The rest of the New Testament fully bears out that same emphasis on the Lord Jesus as the Saviour. So Paul would write to his young son in the faith, Timothy, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). Similarly, John writes, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John 4:14). Finally, Peter told the Jewish leaders, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Saviour" (Acts 5:31). It is interesting, too, that in his short letter of three chapters, written just before his death, Peter describes the Lord Jesus as Saviour no fewer than five times (2 Peter 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2 and 3:18).

Easter, then, not only invites us to consider what it meant to the Lord Jesus to be the Saviour but shows us how He brought about our salvation. That is what I want us to think about in the remainder of our time this morning. Before we do so, it is worth reflecting on a real cry from the heart of the patriarch, Job. You may recall how God had allowed Satan to afflict Job to within an inch of his life. Job had lost everything - his children, his fortune, his possessions and was covered in boils from head to toe. Even his wife seems to have deserted him as she tells Job, "Curse God and die" (Job 2:9). Job seems to feel that God has deserted him and mourns the fact that he cannot make contact with God: "For He is not a man, as I am, that I may answer Him, and that we should go to court together. Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:32-33). That lament of Job must have echoed and re-echoed in many hearts down through the centuries prior to the coming of Christ. The apostle Paul provides us with the answer when he writes, "God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:3-5).

When the Lord Jesus was born at Bethlehem, He entered our world in just the same way as each one of us has done. He fully took upon Himself our humanity, sin apart. That humanity was clearly seen in His life - rejoicing with those who rejoiced, weeping with those who wept. He was hungry; He was tired. He experienced the pain of rejection. Yet, at the same time, He never ceased to be fully God. He stilled the storm. He fed more than 5,000 people with a boy's picnic lunch. He gave sight to the blind. He brought the dead back to life. So the apostle John declares, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth" (John 1:1 and 14).

So the Lord Jesus is uniquely able to be what Job longed for - that Mediator who can "lay His hand upon us both". As God manifest in the flesh, He has fully revealed God to us in all His love, in His holiness, in His abhorrence of sin, in

His grace. As Man, He can fully act before God for us, even to the extent of taking our sinfulness upon Himself and answering to God for that sin.

Good Friday is all about the Lord Jesus answering to God for man's sin. But first, we should note that only a totally sinless Man could answer to God for man's sin. None of us could answer to God for our sins, for that would be to suffer His righteous judgment against our own sin that would result in our being forever separated from His presence. That is solemnly true of each one of us from the so-called best to the so-called worst for Scripture plainly declares, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). All human experience only serves to prove the truth of that statement. We have a saying, "The man who never makes a mistake never makes anything" - such is our flawed and failing humanity.

It is quite striking how the events of that first Good Friday highlight the total innocence and absolute perfection of the Lord Jesus. Firstly, Pilate's wife sent a message to Pilate while he was interrogating the Lord Jesus: "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him" (Matthew 27:19). Pilate himself, having listened to Jesus, had to say to the multitude crying for Jesus' death, "I find no fault in Him". And note, for it is important, Pilate made that statement not just once, but three times (John 18:38; 19:4 and 6). Yet despite these protestations of Jesus' innocence, Pilate lamely surrendered to the crowd and had Jesus crucified! Two thieves were crucified with Jesus. One of them taunted Him, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us". But the other, having heard Jesus' prayer from the cross for those who had crucified Him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do", recognised that the Lord Jesus was completely different from themselves. Luke tells us, "But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.' And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:39-43). Note those two all-important words, 'nothing wrong'! Finally, the centurion in charge of the crucifixion, when it was all over, had to confess, "Certainly this was a righteous Man" (Luke 23:47).

The Lord Jesus, because He had no sins of His own, was the one, and the only one, who could take upon Himself God's judgment for our sins. Peter, years later, would write of the Lord Jesus, "...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

The well-known children's Easter hymn puts it so simply and yet so powerfully,

*He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to do us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by His precious blood.*

*There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin:
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.*

But Easter is not only about the forgiveness of our sins, wonderful though that is, but it is also about freedom - the freedom to live before God in the power of a new life, Christ's resurrection life!

Do you remember all that snow we had in January? In Liverpool, where I live, the snow usually misses us. But this year we had 2-3 inches of it, followed by heavy frost so that it all iced over. My wife and I felt like prisoners in our home. We did not like to take the car out in case we skidded; but neither did we like to walk outside in case we slipped and broke some bones. Perhaps some of you felt the same! But what a sense of freedom we experienced when the snow had finally gone and we were able to walk outside freely!

That experience in the physical realm is only a picture of the far more serious sense of being trapped in the spiritual realm which many experience. The Apostle Paul wrote out of his deep personal experience, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing...Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:19 and 24). Perhaps you have gone through just such an experience. But Paul goes on, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! ...There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 7:25; 8:1).

You see, the good news of Easter is not only that Christ died for our sins on that Good Friday, but that on Easter Sunday morning He rose from the dead! The women who, early on that morning went fearfully to the tomb expecting to anoint the dead body of Jesus, to their great amazement found the tomb was empty! The great stone that sealed

the front of the tomb was rolled away - not to let the Lord Jesus out, but that they and others might look within and know with the assurance that it was truly empty. He is risen!

We do not have time this morning to go into all the evidences for the resurrection of Jesus. After this broadcast, you might like to read 1 Corinthians 15 - a great chapter which sets out the facts and the consequences of Jesus' resurrection. It is worth remarking that Frank Morison was an unbelieving lawyer and journalist who set out to demolish the truth of Jesus' resurrection. After critically reviewing all the evidence for and against, he found himself compelled instead to believe it and became a convinced Christian. He subsequently wrote the well-known book, *Who moved the stone?*

The resurrection of Jesus is about freedom - freedom from the penalty of sin, of freedom from any doubts that we may have about His work at Calvary, of freedom to be the kind of men and women God wants us to be in the power of the new life that only the Lord Jesus can give.

You might wonder, Can the death of the Lord Jesus at Calvary really answer to God for my many sins? Listen, if only one of your sins was not covered by the death of the Lord Jesus and His blood shed at Calvary, then He must have forever remained dead in the tomb. The empty tomb proclaims to all the world that the price has been paid! There is indeed now no condemnation! One of our hymn writers has put it this way:

*All thy sins were laid upon Him,
Jesus bore them on the tree;
God, who knew them, laid them on Him,
And, believing, thou art free.*

Because of all that took place on that first Easter, God now offers eternal life to all who trust in Christ. John 3:16, perhaps the best known verse in the Bible, tells us, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." But this eternal life is nothing less than the life of Christ Himself, His resurrection life. The same apostle John would later write, "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). The apostle Paul knew something of the power of that life when he wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

"Christ lives in me!" This Easter Day let all of us who have accepted Christ as Saviour joyfully proclaim that fact. This new life in Christ sets us free to be the kind of men and women God wants us to be.

After Jesus' death, His disciples went and hid themselves away in an upper room, fearful that they, too, might follow the same fate as their Master. What was it that changed that bunch of frightened disciples - Peter who had denied his Lord three times, the rest who had run away and left Jesus when He was arrested - that changed them into men who would go out and fearlessly proclaim to the world His death and resurrection? Some of them were even prepared to die for what they believed! Nothing less than the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit could have brought about such a transformation.

What men saw in Jesus when He was here in this world they may, by His grace, see in us too in the power of that same indwelling Holy Spirit! The apostle Paul writes, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23)

In closing, may we make the words of Katie Barclay Wilkinson our prayer this morning.

*May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing,
This is victory.*

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