

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Easter Messages from the Psalms: Resurrection, Ascension and the Kingdom: Psalm 16:1-11; Psalm 68:1-35

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today*, where we have the fourth talk in the series centred on Easter. Last week, which as you remember was Easter Day, our subject was the Crucifixion and was based mainly on Psalm 22. I have no wish to repeat all that was said then other than to emphasise the centrality of the Cross in the Christian Gospel, so, therefore, I will quote the words of Leon Morris from his book, *The Cross in the New Testament*. (ISBN: 9780802817303) "The cross dominates the New Testament ... it is referred to as summing up the content of Christianity: 'We preach Christ crucified'; (1 Corinthians 1:23) 'I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Corinthians 2:2)."

These are just two Scriptures, of many that Morris uses, to concentrate our attention upon the cross. He goes on to state: "Each New Testament writer writes as one who has come to know salvation by the way of the cross. He writes, moreover, as one who longs to bring others into the same knowledge of salvation ... because they are convinced that there is no other way of salvation than this alone ... the cross dominates everything they write."

At the commencement of this week's broadcast, I pause to repeat again that there is no other way of salvation.

There is a chorus that was popular years ago when I was much younger which says:

*"There's a way back to God, from the dark paths of sin,
There's a door that is open and you may go in,
At Calvary's cross is where you begin,
When you come as a sinner to Jesus."*

E. H. Swinstead (1882-1950), Public Domain

You, also, could know these lines which might be simplistic, yet at the same time they suggest that the cross is God's only answer to the seeking sinner.

We must now leave the great subject of the crucifixion to consider the equally great matter of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, which also has always been at the very centre of the Christian Gospel, as preached by the Apostles. Whereas I have just stressed, at some length, the crucial matter of the cross, I am going to similarly stress the fact of the resurrection. During the many years I have listened to the preaching of the gospel, I have occasionally heard it proclaimed without reference to, or mention of, the resurrection. To illustrate what I mean, I recall a true incident when I was talking to a young student, brought up in a Christian home, who said that the most important element of the Gospel was that Jesus had died for our sins, not that He was raised from the dead. If such ideas are present in anyone listening to *Truth for Today* this morning, can I immediately point out a few Scriptures that will confirm that such thoughts are manifestly not biblical. One point of Peter's first sermon in Acts 2:14-29, is that the Crucified One has been raised from the dead. Acts 2:23 states: "...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." That quotation is from the English Standard Version of the Bible as other references that I use this morning will be also.

Just to further confirm my point about the resurrection being an essential part of our belief in the Lord Jesus, that identifies us as believers in Him, I will read Romans 10:9-10 "*Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*"

I would suggest Romans 10:9-10 are sufficient for us to grasp that it is supremely important for us to realise that the Lord Jesus is alive, and that His resurrection is an essential part of the historical events of that first Easter. These are truths that enable us, in the power of the Spirit, to have a relationship with the living God.

When the broadcasting team met, early in 2014, to think over the topics for the coming session, it was prayerfully decided that four Easter talks would be based upon those psalms that projected thoughts of the identity and work of the Messiah. Therefore, the psalms we have read in the previous weeks are Psalm 2, Psalms 40 and 41, and last week Psalm 22. This week our attention will be centred on Psalms 16 and 68. We have already almost delved into Psalm 16, as that was quoted by the Apostle Peter, in his first sermon, to which we have already referred. Acts 2 is seeking to show that God had declared the crucified Jesus to be both Lord and Christ. Perhaps it ought to be said at this point that the disciples were witnesses to the Lord's resurrection. They were already convinced that He was alive, having seen Him after He had been brought back, by God, from among the dead. They were now, as led of the Spirit, seeking to show that the Lord Jesus was the Messiah of God according to the prophetic Scriptures.

During His earthly ministry the Lord had, according to all three synoptic Gospels, used Psalm 110 as a messianic passage, applying it to Himself. For example, we can read in Mark 12:35-37 where the Lord quotes from Psalm 110:1 *"And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, 'How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.' David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?' And the great throng heard him gladly."*

We can learn two lessons from this; firstly, that the early church understood something of the identity of Jesus from His use of these Old Testament Scriptures and secondly, that such use provided a guide for the interpretation of other prophetic Scriptures.

In his first sermon Peter, following the Lord's example, in addition to being led of the Spirit, uses some prophetic Scriptures, amongst which are the verses from Psalm 16 which speak of the resurrection. From Acts 2:33 the Apostle claims, as all Christians still claim, that the exaltation of the Lord Jesus is a direct fulfilment of God's promises. Acts 2:25 quotes Psalm 16:8 *"I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken."*

We shall discuss the ascension of the Lord Jesus in a few minutes; suffice to say now that He has ascended to the seat of all power, majesty and might.

I will read Psalm 16:10-11 which Peter uses in his sermon, to emphasise that the resurrection of the Messiah had been foretold: *"For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures for evermore."*

These words are quoted by Peter as applying to the Lord as Israel's promised Messiah. David, who wrote the psalm, could not be speaking of himself, for he indeed was dead, and had been for many years, as the presence of his tomb in the city testified. Neither did he ascend into heaven. David, therefore, must have been prophesying about the coming Messiah, whom Peter argues was Jesus of Nazareth. The evangelists of the early church took up the same theme that such verses could only refer to Jesus of Nazareth who had risen from the dead; so, therefore, He was the promised Messiah.

For clarity's sake, I ought to emphasise that Peter, and the other apostles, did not need the verses we have cited to initiate them into the truth of the resurrection of the Lord. They had seen and talked with Him, at various locations, in the days and weeks following His death on the cross. They had no doubts that He was alive again. Mark 16:5-7 state: *"And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."*

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus was witnessed by many of His disciples, and followers, as described by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7, *"...and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep."*

I emphasise again that the verses in the psalms, that we are considering this morning, were not the proof that He had risen. Rather was Peter using them in Acts 2 to validate his claims that the Lord Jesus was the promised Messiah.

We must move on now to consider further prophetic truth regarding the Messiah, but before we do, can I welcome anyone who has joined us since we commenced our broadcast, which is being brought to you by *Truth for Today* and which concerns the claims of the Apostles that Jesus of Nazareth is the long promised Messiah.

My next point concerns the ascension of the Lord and is found in Psalm 68:18, *"You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there."*

I am of the opinion that the ascension of the Lord Jesus is a neglected truth among us Christians. We emphasise, and so we should, the resurrection of the Lord, yet rarely centre upon His ascension back into heaven itself, where He is waiting for that glorious day when all His enemies will be made the footstool of His feet (see Hebrews 10:13). Though Peter did not quote this psalm directly, he did point out its truth in Acts 2:33: *“Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.”*

As we are running out of time, it must be sufficient to state that the ascension brings before us the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. One of my favourite verses in Hebrews is found in Hebrews 9:24, *“For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”*

Note that last phrase of *“...now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”* The truth of the ascension is not some academic exercise to tease the minds of theologians. Rather is it a practical and important aspect of our Christian life and faith. We have One in the presence of God who is the great High Priest over the House of God.

I have only written letters of protest to the BBC twice in my life, one of which concerns the time, many years ago now, when they stopped playing a hymn on Ascension Day before the 8 o'clock news in the morning. I would be on my way to work when the following words filled the air waves:

*“Hail the day that sees Him rise,
To His throne beyond the skies;
Christ, the Lamb for sinners given,
Enters now the highest heaven.”*

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Such words speak of a spiritual truth that puts a spring in our step, especially as we face the start of a new working day. Needless to say, my protest resulted in nothing more than a polite letter of explanation!

Our final point this morning concerns the kingdom of the Messiah in Psalm 68, from which we have already quoted some verses concerning the ascension. Now I will read Psalm 68:32-35, *“O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God; sing praises to the Lord, to him who rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens; behold, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice. Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the skies. Awesome is God from his sanctuary; the God of Israel - he is the one who gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God.”*

The verses we have just read are some, of the many, in the Old Testament, which refer to the Kingdom which will be set up when the Messiah reigns. These closing verses of Psalm 68 tell us that, since the kingdom of the Lord extends to all nations, the Lord is calling upon those very nations to acknowledge His sovereignty. Calvin's comments on the concluding verses of this psalm are quite pertinent: *“...the psalmist argues, that should God liberally supply the wants of His people, the consequences would be, to increase the fear of His name, since all ends of the earth would, by what they saw of His fatherly regard to His own, submit themselves with greater cheerfulness to His government.”*

What is plain from Psalm 68 is that God remains awesome in His deeds and that He alone is the strength of His people.

We at *Truth for Today* believe that all of these 'kingdom' Scriptures have yet to be fulfilled. Only on the day when the Lord Jesus returns and reigns as the Messiah in Jerusalem will the fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven be known.

Meanwhile we can pray that 'His kingdom come' (Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2) while we wait His appearing. The kingdom now is in mystery form hidden in the hearts and lives of His people. I say hidden, yet the effects of the rule of the Lord Jesus in our hearts should be visible in the lives of each one of us. There is no sense in which the Lord reigns now in this world, for there is far too much evil and wickedness for us ever to sing that He reigns. He should, however, dominate our thoughts and affections, for He is the Lord, supreme and glorious in the heavens. He has been into this world to suffer and die to release the love and power of the living God into the lives of His believing people. He dominated death and rose victorious to ascend to the throne of all power and might.

Though the minutes allocated for this broadcast have now elapsed, I still have a couple of questions to ask each one of us, as we conclude our time together.

1. Are we believers in the Lord Jesus who died on the cross, then arose victorious from the grave to ascend into heaven, waiting for that day when He will return in glory?

2. Do we allow Him to reign in our hearts in the power of the Spirit of God, thus enabling us to live as His disciples?

He is the risen, ascended Lord of All, shortly to return to this world where he will reign as King so let us kneel before Him this day in adoration and worship.

Good morning and thank you for listening.

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