**EASTER MESSAGE – “The Cross to the Empty Grave”**

This Resurrection Sunday I want to continue to focus on the “*finished work of the cross”,* even as we celebrate the empty tomb. So much of the beautiful significance of the crucifixion and the resurrection is lost when you *separate* the story between Good Friday and Easter.

Good Friday: Jesus spent at least six hours on the cross before He died, suffering excruciating pain while his blood poured out of his wounds, out of His body down the cross, and onto the ground.

**The Death of Jesus:**

**Mark 15:33**“At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. **34**And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, *“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”*

*(1st verse of Psalm 22:1Aramaic for “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”)*

*This is said to be the moment that “He who knew no sin, became sin”, and “God laid on Him the iniquity of us all”*

Jesus spoke these words in Aramaic, the common spoken language for those gathered, as a quotation of Psalm 22, words of David.

Throughout Psalm 22 we see direct correlations to what was happening on the cross. *(“I am mocked, I am thirsty, they divide my clothes and cast lots for my garments”, it even says “They pierced my hands, and feet” )* It was a prophecy of Jesus’ crucifixion where *spikes were driven into both his hands and feet as he was nailed to the cross.*

**Mark 15:35“**When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.” **36**Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.”

*Remember, the Jews are always waiting for Elijah because he is prophesied to come before the Day of the Lord “"See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.” (Mal 4:5 – the last chapter of the Old Testament) This was fulfilled through John the Baptist.*

**Mark 15:37“With a *loud cry*, Jesus breathed his last.”**

*“What was that “loud cry”, He uttered before He breathed his last?”*

*John, who was right there at the foot of the cross, tells us what he saw and heard in that last moment of Jesus life;*

**John 19:30** *“He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.”*

***Jesus died…****HE REALLY DIED!*

*Jesus said, “It is finished.” …Then He died!*

***What was “finished”?***

***His life? His teaching? His ministry?***

***It is what we call “His finished work on the cross”***

**By His Crucifixion, He saved us from sin and death!**

**“…Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”**

**AND THEN HE WAS DEAD.**

**Silent…**

**No longer crying out in pain,**

**No longer struggling to breathe,**

**No longer saying anything from the cross,**

**He breathed his last, hung His head, and died.**

***[have you ever been with someone who had just died? There is an eerie silence and emptiness that you can’t explain, but you can feel it intensely.]***

**The words that Jesus spoke were hanging in the air against the silence.**

**“IT IS FINISHED!”**

**“IT IS FINISHED!”**

**What was finished? His breathing?, His life?, His mission?**

The night before he died, Jesus went before the father in prayer,

Jesus told the Father;

**John 17:4** “I have *finished* the work you have given me to do.”

The work Jesus was sent to do was to “seek and save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10), to provide atonement for the sins of all who would ever believe in Him (Romans 3:25).

What was also “finished” was the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies, criteria, and foreshadowing of the coming Messiah. From Genesis to Malachi, there are over 300 specific prophecies detailing the coming of the *Anointed One*, all fulfilled by Jesus.

His *work* was finished *(“the finished work on the cross”)*

The sufferings Jesus endured while on the earth, and especially in His last hours, were finally over.

God’s will for Jesus was accomplished in His perfect obedience to the Father.

Jesus Death marked the completion of God’s plan for redemption for all mankind. That’s why when we celebrate communion, we do it to **“*proclaim the Lord's death until he comes”***

***(Resume the gospel account in Mark)***

**The Burial of Jesus**

**Mark 15:42-47 “**It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, **43**Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. **44**Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. **45**When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.

[ Crucified victims could sometimes live for days before eventually dying from bleeding out, or asphyxiation]

**46**So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. **47**Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid” …

**MARK 16:1-7 “**When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. 2Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

4But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

…****…

6“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

**HE WAS RISEN, “JUST AS HE SAID”**

Ponder: If Jesus had just lived the life He lived, and then died without rising from the dead, He would have been a very great man, perhaps the greatest that ever lived. His only flaw would have been that He said He would rise again and did not.

He would have just been another false prophet, or false Messiah, and would have been easily forgotten altogether.

This fact, (the part about Him dying and coming back to life) is often too much for some people to believe. It sounds preposterous to the logical mind. We tend to rationalize and say, maybe He never *fully died* on the cross, or maybe the apostles stole his body from the grave and only *“claimed”* that they saw him and spoke with Him afterward, or maybe someone else who looked like Jesus stepped in as an impersonator and fooled them all.

If this happened, would it still be OK to still follow Jesus and obey His word here in the modern age?

I mean, Christianity offers a good moral foundation for civilizations, it teaches ethics and moral and usually keeps people from killing each other, it actually encourages Love and Charity. So, if the whole “literal Resurrection” thing is not even true, some would say that Christianity still has its merits.

The problem is that if it’s not true, All of us who follow Jesus today and have ever lived and died for Him in history are according to our own Bible “Useless and pitiful”.

Jesus’ Death and Resurrection cannot be separated, it was all one act of God for our justification. (It may help to think about it as: *“Deathurrection”.)*

**The Resurrection is of Vital Importance!**

**1st Corinthians 15:12-19**

**“12**But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead?

**13**For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. **14**And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. **15**And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can’t be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. **16**And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. **17**And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. **18**In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! **19**And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.”

Why would we be “more to be pitied than anyone in the world?”

Here’s why, not only because we would be believing in something that was untrue, but also Because if there was no resurrection, there would be no justification.

We were justified, by his resurrection!

**Romans 4:25** “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

We were “justified”, by his resurrection! *What does that even mean? : ]*

* **Justification**:

This is a legal word, a verb that comes from the noun “made righteous.” The result of the resurrection is that we are justified “made righteous” by Jesus’ death. This is the basis of our doctrine of “Justification by faith” (salvation simply by believing).

**Romans 6:4&5,9** “4And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.”**“5**Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was.”

“**9***We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead,* and he will never die again.”

***“We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead”***

It **IS** finished, and Jesus proved it to us.

If he *did not rise* from the dead, we would never know, we wouldn’t be *“sure of this”.*

But he DID rise from the dead, Over 500 people witnessed him alive again after the resurrection, and a substantial number of contemporary eye-witness historians wrote about, or verified it.

*(There is more verifiable proof of Jesus Resurrection than Alexander the Great’s death at the age of 33 or Julius Caesar ever lived!)*

*Because* ‘it is Finished’;

We can be assured we are ‘saved’.

We don’t need to ‘fear’ death and eternal damnation.

We have ‘confidence’ of eternal life.

Jesus conquered the grave, accomplished His mission, and “finished the work” both on the cross, and in the tomb”.

**[ Phoebe’s Song “FINISHED” ]**

Now, there is only one thing that WE need to do… “BELIEVE!”

**Romans 3:23-25** “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood —to be received by faith [believing].”

If you DON’T believe in Jesus’ death and especially His resurrection, you cannot be sure of your salvation.

**John 3:16**“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that ***whoever believes*** in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

The Devil wants, more than anything else to keep you from believing.

He uses pride, doubt and deception as his tools to try to prevent you from believing.

But you must resist the devil, and believe!

If you struggle with fully believing in Jesus’ Resurrection, you are not alone, but you CAN overcome it;

Set aside your pride, silence your doubt, and be willing to take a step of faith that has been the enduring faith of billions of people throughout history and all over the world, leading to freedom from sin, and everlasting life.

**Romans 10:9&10“**If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heartthat God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10**For it is with your heart that you believe and are *justified*, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

This Easter, I urge you to confess that Jesus died for your sins, declare Him as Lord, and believe “in your heart” that God truly did raise Him from the dead for your justification.

Let this special day this year lead to a new season of a new level of ‘believing’.

If you wish to fully surrender and declare your faith in Jesus, and your firm belief in His death and resurrection for your salvation, pray this prayer with me right now…

***“Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner,***

***I ask for Your forgiveness and justification.***

***I believe that You died for my sins and rose from the dead.***

***I repent of my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life.***

***My desire is to trust you and follow You***

***as my Lord and Savior from this day forward.”***

If you prayed that prayer, the Lord heard your heart. We celebrate with you!

Now, walk in it! Rejoice in it, and tell someone about it!

**Resurrection Sunday is New Life Sunday!**

**Resurrection means “New Life”**

**May this Easter be the first day of your brand-new life in Him.**