

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Tim. 2-19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

An Easter Meditation - Christ Living in Us — *Bob Hoekstra*

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.

In these sublime words, we are given profound insight concerning the grace of God at work through our intimate relationship with Christ. This majestic statement begins with our spiritual death, that another might live in and through our lives. Finally, we are told how we are to respond, so this divine arrangement can proceed as intended.

First, our spiritual death is in view. "I have been crucified with Christ." If we are believers in the Lord Jesus, we died with Him upon that cross. The cross of Christ is now our testimony of rejoicing, for by that cross we escaped the dead world of unredeemed humanity. "But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" Galatians 6:14. Although the cross is the end of our old life in Adam, that is not the end of our story. "Even when we were dead in trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) " Ephesians 2:5. By His grace, we were raised with Christ. We died with Him, that we now might live with Him. "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" Romans 6:8.

The astounding consequence of these truths is that we are not the ones producing our Christian life. "It is no longer I who live." This reality is radically contrary to man's natural thinking. If we are not to manufacture our life with God, what other option could possibly be available? The wonderful answer is: "Christ lives in me." True Christian living is to be Christ living in and through our lives. How can this be accomplished? We still have an ongoing human experience in flesh and bones bodies: "the life which I now live in the flesh." Yes, but this life is to be lived by faith: "I live by faith in the Son of God." As we put our trust in Jesus day by day, He lives in and through our thoughts, our words, our choices, our priorities, our relationships.

Once again, this is God's grace at work through humility and faith. The humility is expressed by embracing this confession: "it is no longer I who live." And is expressed by counting upon this truth: "Christ lives in me."



From the Pulpit

Death Reversed – An Easter Message

Brother Paul Emerson

Calvary Mennonite Fellowship

2012

Our purpose today is not so much to think of the great truth of the resurrection, though we will treat that, but rather to look at the why of the resurrection.

The Apostle Paul as we have been reminded already would say that we are most miserable if Christ did not rise from the dead that our hope is faint, empty ([1 Corinthians 15:17-19](#)).

So what was all that about, how should we think about it? And as with all great truths that consideration begins in the book of Genesis and I would invite your attention to Genesis chapter 2 at the beginning when the reason for the resurrection happened.

And if you look with me at Genesis chapter 2 verses 16 and 17, “and the Lord God commanded the man saying, of every tree of the garden you may freely eat but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” [Genesis 2:16-17](#)

Here is the command of God and once again we tend to sideline ourselves as we look to the word of God we immediately start wondering about this tree, what kind of tree was it, what kind of fruit did it have? That’s somewhat beside the point, the point is that this was a test and that in the end, in the not very distant future in fact, Adam failed that test and the main point of the tree here, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was the test.

It was a test of whether man would remain in fellowship with God or whether in disobedience he would freely sever that fellowship with God and upon this event, the death that is here predicted was fulfilled in chapter 3 of Genesis, fulfilled physically in chapter 5 of Genesis when Adam died, but spiritually it happened immediately upon eating the forbidden fruit, upon this truth of death that came in this breach of fellowship this disobedience we have the foundation upon which resurrection is needed and it is built upon that whole foundation of death.

I would like us to think along those lines as we think of death reversed and look at some other passages of the Scripture in this regard this morning actually verse 17 of Genesis 2 at the end there “you shall surely die, in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” the original we are told basically says dying you shall die.

The choice of man and his untainted free will before sin was to turn his back on the direct command of God and then he was in need of a mediator then he was in need of a saviour and he was in need of a substitute or else he would justly, justly according to the justice, the unquestionable justice of God he would die forever and all his descendants with him.

That is the drastic situation that we have at the beginning.

The command of God was clearly given, it was a test, I think we waste a lot of time worrying about whether these were apples, pears or whatever they may have been nothing that we now know of, the issue is the test, and we also probably worry a bit more than we should what the knowledge of good and evil was.

It is clear that Adam was knowing good but not evil until he sinned but we can get ourselves involved in all these debates and miss the main point and the main point is that this was a test and he failed, before he had ever known sin prior to this he failed the test.

To think for one moment that any of Adam’s descendants, any of his natural descendants, would choose anything other than sin is to miss the point of Scripture almost entirely. Here Adam before there was sin in the universe, perfect you could say he was, he was without sin, at least neutral, and he fell into sin by his own will which will is tainted for all his descendants then as we shall see in a moment.

So that is the predicament that has to be understood as clearly as possible before we can come to Easter, the message of Easter, without that understanding Easter is sort of good news but good news about what? it is sort of nebulous good news, but if we understand the underlying truth that man wilfully disobeyed God and as a result fell, and that fall included spiritual death immediately which was separation from fellowship with God, it also included physical death though that was a little delayed, Adam would have lived for ever physically apart from this fall.

Everything came tumbling down for the human race right there when Adam wilfully sinned against God and brought death upon himself and the whole human race.

I think we have to understand that according to the justice and holiness of God He would not have had to do anything about that, God was not in a box He did not have to save anyone, the race in its entirety could have gone to destruction but out of the goodness and grace of God, unexplainable beyond that, He promised in chapter 3 that from woman's seed would come one to bruise the serpent's head or to crush the serpent's head.

That's out of the goodness and grace of God not necessary, as I would understand the thrust of the various passage of Scripture that speak to it God would have been fully justified, righteous and holy to allow the whole race go on to destruction.

So that is how awful and destructive this one act of Adam was where it says and sin passed upon all men through him and then Romans goes on to say that reminder for all have sinned ([Romans 5:12](#)).

You cannot look at Easter without looking at the predicament that lies beneath the great message of hope that we have and that we celebrate at this time, you cannot come to the gospel message without understanding the rebellion and disobedience that is a part of man, Adam and as his descendants we are dead in sin, spiritually dead, we are without hope in ourselves.

And moving on in the Scripture we are going to jump way ahead to Romans chapter 5 and I would like you to turn with me there if you will, I begin reading in verse 12 and this picks up the story and much has gone on between Genesis and Romans but this picks up the story in logical fashion, [Romans 5:12](#), Just as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin and thus death spread to all men because all sinned, for until the law of sin was in the world but sin is not imputed when there was no law.

Please let me pause there for a moment, that parentheses in verse 13 that sin was before the law, the law is a measuring stick for sin by the law we have a knowledge of sin according to Romans 3 but law does not create sin it just measures it, I'll have a few more words to say about that later.

Verse 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam who is the type of him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offence, for if by one man's offence many died much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man Christ Jesus abounded to many.

The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned for the judgement which came from one offence resulted in condemnation but the free gift which came from many offences resulted in justification, for if by one man's offence death reigns through that one much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through Jesus Christ. Therefore, verse 18, as through one man's offence judgement came to all men resulting in condemnation even so through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men resulting in justification of life.

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound but where sin abounded grace abounded much more so that as sin reigned in death even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. [Romans 5:12-21\(ESV\)](#)

Now this is a heavy passage but there is no passage of Scripture that we should not seek to understand and we understand it probably at various levels and we will stay at a fairly simple level Lord willing here as we look at this passage we have the solution to the predicament.

The predicament in Genesis 3 spoken of there when Adam sinned was dying you shall die, it was hopeless as far as man was concerned and this passage reveals, reviews again that sin of Adam that came upon all and so all of Adam's children are thus sinners and lost and sinners not only by nature but as this passage says by choice for all have sinned.

And so that is the predicament amplified but then the solution first of all is in the work that Jesus did in being the sacrificial Lamb of God the work that He did through his death that He died as a substitute for us that we might be resurrected in life, He paid the price for our sins.

And let me point out here that the law is spoken off again in this passage as a quantifier or as that which makes sin more clear it does not mean that sin began when the law was given but rather now we can calibrate it a little more, when it says thou shalt not covet we know that coveting definitely is sin, if we were in tune with God we would know coveting is sin without the law having said it and when one comes to Christ in surrender, a synonym for faith, he has a new life and a renewed conscience so that it is possible for him to spiritually know that he should not covet without the help of the law.

It does not make the law false it just allows the true believer in Christ to live at a higher standard than merely obeying the law.

So the law is that yardstick which the true believer in tune with the will of God by the power of the Holy Spirit may not need and yet it is helpful as a yardstick sometimes to see how we are doing in the light of our Christian life.

As we have often illustrated the law is like a mirror, you look in the mirror and you see your face is dirty but you cannot wash your face with the mirror it would not clean your face and might make it quite bloodied so it is that yardstick it's that indicator which the person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit does not need, he has the sense of those things although it is still helpful to check with the yardstick now and then to see whether in fact we are being deceived in our spirituality or whether we are in fact following the Lord as we are supposed to do.

You see there is this feeling and has been since Adam of opposition to regulation, it is in me, it is in all of you, we do not appreciate regulation, it was in Adam apparently for he violated a regulation in the fall.

Now being opposed to regulation there is a long term that is used about that attitude it is called antinomianism which simply means against law and in a very really sense we are all antinomians we don't like it, and yet we have to understand that if in fact we have to surrender to God in salvation you are not going to be saved unless you have surrendered to God completely and unconditionally for that is an extended definition of the word faith, then in fact if we have surrendered to God then the law is not offensive it is a helpful yardstick but we are called to live at an even higher standard than the law and so Christ said, it has been said, and He is quoting

the law, but I say unto you! And He raises the standard rather than eliminating it.

So the spirit of antinomianism which we all tend to have in our flesh this spirit of antinomianism is the spirit of sin and as I say I have it and I expect all of us have it but it is simply an advertisement when it comes out, it is an advertisement of the flesh in us because the one who is really spiritually minded the law does not offend him, he finds the spiritual work of the Spirit in his life and lives at a higher standard than the law, it is just there as a yardstick.

So as you think of the purpose of the law it amplifies sin and we see ourselves in our predicament, that predicament first of all was solved for those who will surrender, it was solved through Christ and His death and that He paid that price He died in our place shedding his blood that we might have life.

And so that which happened in the Garden of Eden is in the first instance reversed through Christ's death, a death to bring life to the dead.

And so as you look at Romans chapter 5 it reminds us that sin reigned in death, verse 21, but grace reigned through righteousness unto eternal life through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross for us and that is appropriated to us by faith or as I've said unconditional surrender.

Now that's the first instance of a solution to the predicament.

Now the 2nd would be in the passage that has been read some of it already twice and that is great because it is a very important resurrection passage in first Corinthians chapter 15 and if you will look there with me the 2nd aspect of all of this and the necessary aspect is resurrection.

And I begin reading at verse 17, And if Christ is not risen your faith is futile you are still in your sins.

We have just said that it is his death that provides the solution, yes, but his death in order to be meritorious has to be defeated so read on;

Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ perished if in this life only we have hope in Christ we of all men are most pitiable.

But now, verse 20, but now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death

by man also came the resurrection of the dead for as in Adam all die even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits afterward those who are Christ's at his coming. Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father when he puts an end to all rule and authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet, the last enemy that will be destroyed is death. [1 Corinthians 15:17-26](#).

So He died as an atonement for our sins that we might have life but for that death to truly be a completed work of God on our behalf in salvation He must rise.

Notice verse 50, now this I say brethren that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold I tell you a mystery we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed in a moment in a twinkling of the eye at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality so when this corruptible has put on incorruption and this mortal has put on immortality then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Oh death where is your sting? O Hades where is your victory. The sting of death is sin the strength of sin is the law but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. [1 Corinthians 15:50-57](#).

And so we come to the issue of the resurrection and I come back to our original question: What is this all about?

We are lost hopelessly in sin, Christ died for us sinners, shed his blood for the forgiveness of our sins that is certified by his resurrection.

And on the basis of that resurrection we too shall rise, we are spiritually renewed at salvation, we will be physically renewed at resurrection, our resurrection depends upon the truth of His resurrection.

Our resurrection bodies will be like His resurrection body.

As for those of you who want to go through doors when they are closed and so forth why I suppose you can do that if you're interested in doing that by that time, I'm not sure that you will be, but we will have a body like unto His glorious body.

That is the good news of the resurrection that it is not just a spiritual resurrection but it is a physical resurrection a changed body, a victorious body like unto His.

So as you look at this whole picture let us not look at it merely at the end but let's look at it at the beginning when we see what the problem is when we see that we in Adam are sinners and we by choice are sinners and we are rebels by nature. As I said we are all antinomians, we hate regulations, but Christ died to deliver us and that deliverance happens now, it will come to fruition and completeness when we see Him and have a body like unto his glorious body.

What does it mean for us now?

It means a change in the way we approach God, a change in the way we live and I'm going to reflect on the words of a hymn by Horatius Bonar and I believe that it reflects well the emphasis that we have been attempting to give here to this sort of whole picture view of the resurrection.

Bonar writes:

I was a wandering sheep,
I did not love the fold;
I did not love my Shepherd's voice,
I would not be controlled.
I was a wayward child,
I did not love my home;
I did not love my Father's voice,
I loved afar to roam.

The Shepherd sought His sheep,
The Father sought His child;
They followed me o'er vale and hill,
O'er deserts waste and wild;
They found me nigh to death,
Famished and faint and lone;
They bound me with the bands of love,
They saved the wand'ring one.

Jesus my Shepherd is:
'Twas He that loved my soul;
'Twas He that washed me in His blood,
'Twas He that made me whole.
'Twas He that sought the lost,
That found the wand'ring sheep,
'Twas He that brought me to the fold,
'Tis He that still doth keep.

I was a wandering sheep,
I would not be controlled;
But now I love my Shepherd's voice,
I love, I love the fold.
I was a wayward child,
I once preferred to roam;
But now I love my Father's voice,
I love, I love His home!

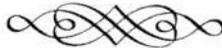
From Adam to Christ it represents the change that must take place in our hearts if we are to avail ourselves personally of the power of the resurrection.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father thank you for the privilege of reviewing a few of the principles relating to the purpose of the resurrection.

We praise you for reaching out to those unworthy, totally unworthy and providing salvation that we, through faith and unconditional surrender, may receive what we do not deserve, that we who love to roam can be brought under control by your grace.

We ask that you will guide us in our thoughts about these things, we pray in Jesus name. Amen



ORIENTED TO CHRIST

Life is a journey from birth to eternity. The most important factor on this journey is our relationship to Christ. An innocent child's relationship with Christ is one in which the child's sins are not imputed because Christ's sacrifice on the cross stands in the child's stead without any decision on the part of the child. At the most opportune time, God calls us to a decision between believing in Christ's sacrifice and accepting His plan for our life or rejecting Him and taking our own way. If we choose to believe and accept Him, we must also walk in obedience to His will for our lives in order to claim justification through Him. God gives the Holy Spirit as a guide on this journey to every born-again believer. We are made aware of God's will through the direction of the Holy Spirit. From this simple beginning, the new follower of Christ sets out upon this journey.

Very soon, the new Christian discovers that there are more decisions to make as he is given the choice between accepting or rejecting that which would either be an asset or a hindrance to his calling. To avoid erring in these decisions and being led astray proper orientation on this way is of much importance. We must consider then and understand well what this orientation is and from where we are receiving it. Our safe arrival at the much longed for destination, which is heaven, depends upon it.

The meaning of orientate, according to Webster, is "to face or turn to the east." It has also come to be used to indicate a setting where someone is properly informed about many details relating to some understanding or situation at hand. Although Webster does not include this second meaning, the purpose is to avoid failure through lack of information and understanding. For the Christian, then, to be properly orientated would be to face or turn to the cross of Christ, as the meaningful song says, "I have decided to follow Jesus ... [with] the cross before me, the world behind me"

According to the other meaning or common usage of orientation we could be very knowledgeable and understanding about the doctrine and practice and yet be erring in the course we are taking if it does not lead us to the cross. The cross leaves no room for the flesh (Romans 6:14)

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we have reason to be concerned about the many things we encounter that could lead us or our children astray and hinder God's witness to seeking souls around us. We care about the purity of the visible church. We have a faith to keep and hand on to those following. There are indications among us today that we are in

need of proper orientation.

Justification from our sin comes only through faith in Christ and His sacrifice. Consequently, Satan's every effort and temptation has one aim, which is to take our eyes off of Jesus. Thus we become disorientated, resulting in the loss of our faith.

The practical, everyday keeping of the faith once delivered to the saints involves many different issues regarding culture, practice, customs, and traditions. There are pertinent matters, such as our appearance, affections, usage of time and the spending of our money. This rightfully causes much discussion and concern among us. Much time, energy and thoughtful consideration are spent in determining what we should or should not allow.

Think of all the sighing and prayers, the tears that have been shed over these concerns through the years and especially in our day as concerned brothers and sisters have pondered the price we will pay if we drift from the faith! How important, then, to stay oriented.

Satan can allure us through the lust of our sinful flesh and our inclination for ease and pleasure. However, he can also detract us through misunderstanding regarding the practical applications of the faith for our day. May we always bear in mind that unity in practice will never of itself produce communion with Christ, but communion with Christ will produce unity in practice. It is possible to err through much "orientation" without being oriented.

There is a concern today of a difference among us regarding our understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith. The discrepancy is about the importance of or insistence on works and conformance as a result of faith. The difference between individuals and congregations regarding what is acceptable in "things" is causing questions and concern among us. One concern is whether we are drifting into an area where the emphasis is on faith alone, even though there is a visible resemblance to the world in affection or appearance.

As an answer to this question, Satan would have us focus on bringing our practice back to something we are comfortable with. If our flesh is not crucified there is a self-pleasing comfort in taking a conservative approach. However, when we find that our works are causing concern, we need to examine our relationship with Jesus. As long as our first love is set on Jesus, we are willing for our life and practice to be examined and corrected. Indeed, if we love Him as we should, we long for correction. The com-

mandments that fulfill all the law and the prophets, to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, strength, and our neighbor as our self, are especially meaningful here. For the cross to be desired, and in order to really live the faith, the motivation force must be a deep love for the Lord and an appreciation of what He has done for us. A deceptive, secret love for self will result in satisfying the flesh by being conservative or permissive.

In the orientation of our mission workers, the teaching of the faith, marriage counseling, child-training classes, or whatever aspect of orientation we give or seek for, may it always point dearly to the cross. If we, like the wise men of old, are following the Star, Christ Jesus, we may face ever so many perplexing and unforeseen difficulties in our path. Yet there will be clear direction and strength to carry it through. On the other hand, we could be ever so prepared and well-guarded against the dangers to our faith, but if we are not focused on Christ, we will lose the way. "But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus" Hebrews 2:8-9. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" Hebrews 12:2

Brother Mervin: Courtesy Messenger of Truth Gospel Publishers Kansas



HELL AND DEATH

"I am he that liveth, and was dead: and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" Revelation 1:18

Because of the fall of Adam, mankind is destined to go through the gates of death. All flesh must die and is bound for the grave and eternal death. This was the curse pronounced upon man for his disobedience—for the one sin of eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Through this one sin, man became exceedingly sinful and came under the power of death and the grave. Jesus came to this earth as a servant to ransom His fallen creation from the power of the grave. He took the curse of death upon Him and became the destruction of the grave.

"Who shall deliver [us] from the body of this death?" Romans 7:24. We should be thankful, with Paul, that God has made a way for us to be freed from the prison of sin. It is by the blood of the covenant God made with His Son that we can be made prisoners of hope.

We, like Esau, have all sold our birthright for a small disobedience, yet how great it was. It was an irretrievable loss. No amount of effort that we can put forth will give our birthright back. Our flesh will remain subject to this death. God, however, has made a way so we can be resurrected from this death. We can only be raised to spiritual life by the law of faith. God has set forth Jesus "to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" (Romans 3:25). This is why Jesus told Nicodemus, a lone man in the night, that he would need to be born again. This is why Jesus separated Paul unto Himself and gave him a vision of his need to lose all confidence in the performance of the flesh and realize that it is only through the grace of God that one can be saved.

We must realize, like Paul, that we are not saved by putting off the filth of the flesh by our own efforts. This is why we must first be converted to the gospel, like Jesus taught. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, a revelation of Jesus Christ. In the dispensation of grace, the Christians are a peculiar people because they are called out of the world by the Word of God. No longer are God's people a bloodline people. No longer is God's favour passed from generation to generation within a selected bloodline. In Christ, all true believers become a spiritual generation by the atoning blood of Christ—a generation from the death of Christ for eternity.

In the death of Christ, death was conquered. The saints who arose at the death of Christ are a witness to this fact. Death cannot separate us from the love of God. Even though our flesh must pass through the gates of death and the grave these cannot separate us from our spiritual birthright in the generation of Christ. In the old dispensation, the priests could not continue because they died. Jesus became our eternal high priest by offering Himself in death to conquer death.

This is what makes the chosen generation a peculiar people. They are a people called to come out of darkness into light—the eternal light in Christ Jesus.

The word church is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which often meant a people called out from among others by someone in authority. It is not a calling predicated on some fleshly bloodline, like in the old dispensation. Now Christ is called the head of the body, the Church. He is its beginning—the firstborn from the dead—not only in sequence, but in title, power, and authority. Jesus, the firstborn of God, came from God to the

lower parts of the earth, took on the body of flesh and became like one of us, only without sin.

Now Jesus holds the pre-eminence in all things. He is the only one who can free us from this body of death. Jesus came down to this earth to free us from hell and death because He held the keys of hell and death. We were all born in the prison of death and the flesh. The keys that were laid on the shoulder of Jesus open the door of that prison and liberate our spirit. We are set free to be servants of God, and He directs our lives. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection" Revelation 20:6. "Ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price" 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. It is the goodness of God that leads one to repentance (Romans 2:4).

If we, like the prodigal son, come to God with nothing, saying, "Make me one of your servants," He will meet us on the way and seal our seeking soul with His love and Holy Spirit. It is God's nature to forgive the sinner and give him salvation. God is longsuffering and wants everyone to come to the knowledge of the truth, repentance, and salvation (1 Timothy 2:4 & 2 Peter 3:9).

Paul said, "Death is swallowed up in victory... The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" 1 Corinthians 15:54-57

Only through the Son, Jesus Christ, can we be turned from our iniquities. "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Brother Lewis: Courtesy Messenger of Truth Gospel Publishers Kansas



MAKING IT THROUGH TO GLORY

I greet you this morning in Jesus name and may his peace and presence be with us as we continue to look into his word this morning.

Some of you perhaps remember Brother John's New Year's message, where he outlined 3 possibilities for the year ahead he said Number 1 we may live through the year, Number 2 we may die, Number 3 the Lord may

return, that was a possibility and my message this morning is somewhat of a sequel to that message.

At the time when I was asked several weeks ago if I would bring the message this morning I had been thinking of the passage in first Thessalonians particularly verse 23 in chapter 5 so we want to look at that this morning in the light of the possibility that Christ may return at any time.

I have titled the message “Making it through to glory.”

We are here in this life we are looking ahead hopefully and the message this morning is designed to wake us up to that possibility. Perhaps some of you are at least somewhat like I am we get so involved with the nitty-gritty of this life, the issues of this life, that we tend to forget the reality and the imminence of Christ’s return, it fades into the background, we are involved with the here and now and along with that busyness perhaps comes a bit of carelessness creeping in, hopefully though we are not as the people to whom Peter was writing in 2nd Peter he talks about scoffers, those scoffers derided the possibility of Christ’s return because it had been preached, nothing had happened and so they were saying, well, it probably just never will!

But we know the folly of such an assumption, Jesus promised that He would return and He is always true to his word and because his coming is delayed there is no excuse or no reason to doubt its reality or to grow lax in our anticipation our alertness and our preparation.

So in our text today and our Brother has read from the middle of the 4th chapter of 1 Thessalonians through the end of this 5th chapter but in our text today in its immediate context Paul has been giving the Thessalonians believers teaching and instruction on the Lord’s return, he had previously spoken to them off the imminence of the Lord’s return and that resulted in some of them thinking well it’s going to happen right now, so they became lax, they quit doing their normal activities, they neglected their normal duties and they were simply sitting around waiting for the Lord to return.

Others as we read the passage had concerns about their loved ones who had already passed on what would happen to them, how would they fit in to the

scheme of things when the Lord returned for his people? So Paul wrote to clarify these issues and then as he closes this first letter to the Thessalonians he calls them to turn to alertness, to alert watchfulness and holy living as they anticipate that day and then he closes with our text verse where he says, And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

So let's see what this text has to tell us this morning.

First of all there is anticipation and coupled with the anticipation there is the certainty as we notice the last part of chapter 4 Paul does not speak in nebulous terms but he said the Lord is coming and here is the way things will work out when He comes.

So there was certainty, it was a basic premise of his Ministry that Christ would one day return to earth to take his followers home to be with him in heaven and there be for ever free from the inroads of evil there to enjoy God's presence and favour for evermore. He had instructed the Thessalonian believers in this premise and it is the basic belief of all those who have accepted Christ's salvation, Jesus is coming again! Of that there is no doubt!

But we notice in the first part of chapter 5 that there is some uncertainty but the uncertainty is only in light of the timing of the event as Paul writes here. The timing was and is unknown, no one knows the day or the hour when Jesus will return in fact Jesus said there in Matthew 25:13 talking to his disciples He said watch therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh.

And in Mark 13:32 He said that knowledge belongs to the Father alone.

So in this passage then Paul describes two basic attitudes to the Lord's coming return.

There are those as Peter wrote who are scoffing, in verse 3 of this chapter there were some who were saying well peace and safety, everything is going on as it normally has why get all worked up about this possibility of the Lord's return?

Peter says that these scoffers are willingly ignorant of the fact of Christ's return, they did not want it to happen and so they denied it is a reality. But I wonder will that prevent it from happening, what do you think?

Then there were those who were anticipating the coming of Christ, living in reality, living with the awareness that Christ was coming back. He was writing to believers who are living in light of the Gospel aware that Christ would someday return, they were not scoffing, they were not asleep as we notice here in verse 6, they were living in anticipation and they would not be caught unawares.

So we might ask then well why was Paul writing to these people if they were aware of Christ's coming, if they were prepared, if they were alert?

Well as we notice in light of the uncertainty of the time as we note in verse 1 Paul was urging these people to continue in alertness and carefulness in their living as they awaited this event, he was encouraging them not to grow lax in their anticipation and not to allow the lesser things of life to derail the more important, he was encouraging them to keep the reality and the imminence of this event front and centre in their thinking.

Now we know how easy it is to allow other things to crowd out the reality of Christ's return, we get involved in the things of life and yes we give credence to the fact that Christ is returning but is it front and centre in our day be thinking? We need to be continually alert.

There is another factor here that Paul was encouraging among these people, alertness was one and carefulness was another, another factor in his concern, coupled with the urgency or the need to be alert they were to live carefully not allowing things into their lives that would have the potential to damage their relationship with Christ. Notice what he says here in verse 22 just prior to our text verse he says they were to abstain from all appearances of evil.

Not only from evil itself but the appearance of evil, they were to live carefully, Paul was saying don't allow anything into your life to marr your relationship to the Lord Jesus.

And that leads then to our next step, the next step in Paul's admonition and that is what we notice in verse 23, sanctification, he says I pray God your

whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless, may the God of peace sanctify you wholly.

Sanctification simply means holiness of life and character.

Now when we come to Christ, the Lord Jesus, for salvation and open our life to him He cleans us up and cleans us out, He takes away the filth of sin and makes us pure a fit dwelling place for his Holy Spirit as we read in 1 Corinthians 6:19, only God can do that, it is his work that is what we would call immediate sanctification, the purification of the life when we accept the Lord Jesus Christ into our hearts as our Saviour and Lord but then He expects us to grow in holiness.

Just as a baby grows and matures and develops so the babe in Christ the one who comes immediately for cleansing is expected to grow and develop in his walk with the Lord. 2 Peter 3:18 tells us that we must grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

The Christian life as we know is one of continual growth and spiritual development where we get in.

A little boy once fell out of bed and as his mother was putting him back in she said:

Sonny why did you fall out?

He said, I guess I stayed too close to where I got in.

And too many believers are that way they stayed too close to where they got in. The Lord expects us as we come to him to grow in our understanding of him and the application of his principles to life.

Paul as we noticed here in verse 22 urged them to abstain from the appearance of evil.

Evil and the purity resulting from sanctification simply don't mix, purification of life is a continual process the unholy must be kept out and that is why Paul prays that God will sanctify them wholly, completely, or through and through as the NIV states.

God wants the whole man to be sanctified to be made pure and clean.

Notice that Paul viewed man here as a trichotomous being, spirit, soul and body involving both the tangible and the intangible aspects of life.

Let's just for a bit examine these 3 elements and see how they fit in with Paul's desire that the people be wholly sanctified.

The spirit is the rational intelligent part of man it is the inner being of man, apart from possessing God consciousness, the conscious conscience, it is the immortal aspect of man is being the part that returns to God when life in the body ceases as we notice in Ecclesiastes 12:7 where it says the dust returns to the earth but the spirit will return to God who gave it. That's the spirit, the rational intelligent part of man.

The soul is described here as the basic life principle that which becomes extinct at death, it is self-consciousness or awareness that which relates to the physical world. And the body then of course is the outward man, the physical tabernacle housing soul and spirit.

I'd like to read an explanation of this that I gathered from my reading I do not remember which commentator it was to help us understand this concept of the 3 parts of our being, here is what he said: "The spirit as our innermost part is the inner organ possessing God consciousness. The soul is our very self a medium between our spirit and our body possessing self-consciousness and personality. Our body as the external part is our outer organ possessing world consciousness, the body contains the soul and the soul is the vessel that contains the spirit.

In the spirit God as Spirit dwells, in the soul our self dwells and in the body the physical senses dwell"

There may be some controversy over the use of the terms and some of them are somewhat interchangeable and we always talk about the soul going back to heaven, Ecclesiastes says it is the spirit that goes back to the Father who gave it, but at least there are 3 parts here and I hope we catch the significance, there is the life principle, there is the God consciousness principle and of course there is the physical body. But Paul prays here for these believers that this compound being, the body, the soul and the spirit be preserved blameless until the coming of Christ. He was concerned for the whole man.

The idea that he puts forth here is that sanctification is a continual process involving the whole man that one must open himself completely and cooperate with God's Spirit in the sanctification process.

So we might ask then, What is our part in this process this progression of sanctification which will yield us blameless, without reproach when we meet Christ?

This is where the rubber meets the road, this is where we cooperate with God in this process of spiritual growth, spiritual development, cleansing, our growth toward holiness. God has done his part He has provided salvation and He provides the means to sanctification, growth and development and now He expects us to cooperate with his Spirit in preserving our blameless state until He returns or until we meet him in death.

So how does this then work out, just what are our responsibilities to maintain purity or holiness of spirit, soul and body? How do we go about it?

Soul, as we noted, is the life principle given by God at conception, we have nothing to do with it and we cannot change it we are given life by God; however, we do have the responsibility to do nothing that would jeopardise or shorten or contaminate that life by unwise choices or harmful activities. Earlier in this Epistle Paul speaks to sexual purity, to honesty, to peaceful relationships all of these are issues that relate to a sanctified life a pure holy life.

He also spoke there in verse 22 to the broad aspect of abstaining from evil and from the appearance of evil.

So as soul and body are closely tied together what one does affects the other, what we allow in our body affects our soul, what we do in our soul in our life principle affects the body as well and its longevity.

The Scripture speaks against those things which shorten soul life, sins such as drunkenness, sexual impurity, gluttony, overwork, failure to care for our physical body which houses God's Spirit, these are things which damage and may shorten our soul life.

By contrast purity of life enhances the body and lengthens life.

The awareness that as believers we are not at liberty to mistreat the body which houses God's Spirit provides incentive for us for holy living and proper care of our physical body.

How do we in the spirit relate? Here is the crux of life, it is here in the spirit of man where decisions are made, it is here in the God conscious aspect of man's being that the struggle between good and evil takes place, it is here where life's direction is decided, it is here where God's Spirit pricks the conscience when we deviate from God's known will, it is here where we decide either to cooperate with God's Spirit and the sanctification process or to ignore his promptings and to go our own way and thus grieve him and perhaps jeopardise our eternal destiny.

As I was working on this message over the last several weeks one morning the Spirit spoke to me and said you know David you've got a couple of books on your tablet that you probably wouldn't invite the Lord Jesus to read.

And so what did I do? You know in situations like that don't we usually rationalise well they are not that bad, certainly Jesus would overlook some of the language that is used.

So I had a choice, I did the other thing I wiped them off.

Now did that earn me any brownie points with God? No, absolutely not, but what it did was it heightened my awareness of my responsibility to cooperate with God's Spirit in the sanctifying in the ongoing sanctifying process. We are works in process. But we are not alone in this endeavour of holy living notice what the apostle Paul says here in verse 24 he says faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.

He says that the One who has called us to this high relationship will not abandon us in our struggle He will stick with us and provide the means and the strength to see us through to glory, He will do it, that's his promise, and his promises never fail but we must cooperate with him in his work.

So I ask you this morning, Where are you in your walk with God?

I challenge you to examine your life and your relationship, your motivations, are you living in anticipation of his return or are you fearful, careless, unprepared or unconcerned? Take stock!

Are you preparing yourself actively for his coming or for meeting him at death?

Are you alert, careful, growing in holiness or have you perhaps stagnated in your spiritual growth and allowed your relationship with God to deteriorate? If so wake-up!

Are you cooperating with God's Spirit in the ongoing process of sanctification?

Are you continually consciously rooting out those things in your life which may lead to complacency or spiritual defeat?

Are you compromising issues which you know our suspect? Be alert!

Do you need to do business with God this morning?

Perhaps you realise that you have gotten off track, that you have allowed certain things or actions to supplant your dedication to God. Straighten things out with God today if that is the case, make certain of your eternal destiny, don't delay it could be fatal.

And remember it is God's will that we live blameless before him and are prepared to meet him in peace without spot and blameless.

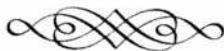
Perfection? No, but blameless because we continually open ourselves to the cleansing of his Spirit and cooperate with him in working towards sanctification.

Remember too He stands ready to help, turn to him in confession asking him to help you restore the relationship, He that calleth you is faithful, He will do it, He will see you through to glory.

That is his promise and it will not fail.

May God bless you.

Brother David, Calvary Mennonite Fellowship



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