

Getting More Than What We Asked

Last week, we joined the crowds in Jerusalem welcoming Jesus and shouting "Hosanna!" as He entered the holy city. Those shouts of "Save us!" from those who lined the street into Jerusalem were heard and answered by God, just as that plea by the Israelites had been heard and answered many times throughout history. Over the next week, those shouts of "Hosanna" changed to "Crucify Him" and today we shout "Alleluia!" because the tomb which symbolized death was found to be empty. We realize that those shouts of Hosanna had been answered by God; not in the way in which the people were hoping but in a much greater way. Jesus saved us from that which no rebellion or uprising could ever achieve. Jesus saved us from death.

They say two things in this world are certain - death and taxes. While this may be true, what happened to Jesus that first Easter morning changed the game; it changed the definition of death. For those who do not believe in Jesus' Resurrection, life is finite - it has a beginning and an end. Once the end is reached, then the game is over, the lights go out and you are dead.

However, for those who believe in our risen Savior, death no longer is finite. Bodily death is now a threshold into another life, it is a transition. We enter another dimension but not like the dimension of the "The Twilight Zone." The dimension we enter is one of glory and light and love. It is unlike anything that we have ever experienced here on earth. There are some religions that talk of eternal life, but one notable difference between those religions and Christianity is that in those other religions, it is by the individual's efforts and their accomplishments that allow them to eventually reach paradise. Christians, on the other hand, believe

that our way into heaven is given to us by Jesus Christ. We cannot attain heaven by our own efforts. As a response to God's love for us, for thanking God for sending Jesus to pay that debt of death for us, we do the same kind of good things that followers of those other religions do in order to get to the next level.

By His death and resurrection, Jesus has restored a right relationship between God and us. It is this relationship that gives us life, the kind of life Jesus referred to when He talked with Nicodemus about being born from above and the Samaritan woman about life-giving waters. It is only through Jesus are we given eternal life. In the Creation story, two trees are mentioned that are at the center of the garden. The fruit of the tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was eaten by Adam and Eve and causing sin to enter the world and resulted in Adam and Eve being expelled from the garden. The other tree, the tree of life, was guarded by a flaming sword to keep humanity away from it. It is through Jesus' death that we now have access to that tree of life.

The empty cross and the empty tomb are game changers. No longer is death defined in physical terms. When considered in the physical sense, death defines being and not being. When death occurs, the 'game' is over, we are done and the only way we live on is through the memories of those who knew us. But eventually, fewer and fewer people will know who we are and our name will only be known by a grave marker. But Jesus has changed that. By bringing the tree of life to us, by removing that flaming sword that kept us away from it; by giving us the living waters; by giving us the bread of life; by leading us as the good shepherd; by being the gateway to God; by being the light to the world; by being the resurrection and the life, Jesus has transformed death from being a finality to being a threshold. A

threshold that leads into a life with God that is everything that God envisioned at creation.

The other part of the Good News of this is that we do not have to wait for the physical death to be transformed by the love of Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be transformed to see the world as Jesus saw it and live as if heaven is here already. However, we know that just because we are given eternal life through the empty grave our lives will not always be one big high after another. To get to the empty grave, we need to go to the cross. We will experience loss and pain. Sometimes that loss and pain may actually be greater because we do believe in Jesus. There will be good times and there will be bad times. We do live on this side of the Resurrection where there is temptation and sin. But by the empty cross and grave, we know that God has forgiven us our sins and with repentance will continue to forgive our sins, always welcoming us back to the road that leads to eternal life, a road that goes by the cross and does not stay there because of the empty tomb.

On this side of the Resurrection, we may never know why bad things happen. However, knowing that the Resurrection is real, we have the hope that one day we will live in the full glory of the Resurrection. Just as God did not forget Jesus on the cross, the nadir of a 'bad time' for Jesus and brought Jesus through the empty tomb, we too have that promise that God will not forget us in our times of need and despair, bringing us to new life.

May we live today in the glory of the Resurrected Christ, reflecting God's love for us to the world around us.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/9j9ygjG4KX8>

Service: https://youtu.be/6aNY_aDnzYQ