

“What the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ Really Means”

(Published in *The Morning Sun* on Saturday, April 30, 2011)

Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This past Sunday, Christians all over the world celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, from the dead. They gathered in their churches to sing hymns of praise to their Resurrected Lord, who has opened the door to everlasting life to all who believe. They were heard shouting the Easter Proclamation with joyful hearts and confident faith: “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” Their ears were filled with the glorious Good News shared with the women who had gone to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body early on Easter morning; the glorious Good News shared by the angel: “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” (Mark 16:6). But, while Christians the world over joined in the celebration of our Lord’s Resurrection, what they had preached to them about this glorious Good News varied greatly from church to church.

I spent Monday and Tuesday of this week resting and recovering from a very busy Holy Week. I sat in my chair and read. I watched a few movies. I just plain “vegged out,” and it felt mighty good. But, I also spent some of my downtime on the internet reading, listening to, and watching several Easter sermons/messages preached by pastors of differing Christian denominations. I probably should have stuck to reading books and watching movies, because hearing what was preached about our Lord’s Resurrection in many places this past Sunday frustrated and saddened me.

The sad reality is that while all Christians join in confessing that Jesus Christ is risen, they differ greatly in their understandings of what His rising from the tomb means. According to many of the preachers I heard (read, or watched), it means that Jesus has unleashed the power for Christians to live perfect, pain-free, blessed lives if only they would “agree with God” and “believe in the power of the Resurrection.” One preacher put it this way: “Jesus rose from the dead to authenticate our ability to be victorious in our Christian walk.” Then, that preacher went on for a half hour screaming enthusiastically at those in attendance about what they must do to live “Resurrected-Powered Lives!” Huh?

Another preacher made it loud and clear that if Christians experience any pain and suffering in this life, it is only because “they have failed to tap into the power of the empty tomb!” Who knew an empty tomb had power?

Joel Osteen, pastor of the largest Christian congregation in America, preached an Easter Sunday message titled, “Leave a Legacy of Faith,” during which he urged his hearers to believe and confess: “The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is on the inside of me. I am going to totally defeat this enemy; I’m going to conquer this addiction, this anger, this low self-esteem, this depression. I am not going to let it linger in my family line any longer.” For Joel, the Resurrection of our Lord empowers us to defeat all of our enemies and to live in such a way as to earn God’s favor and blessing not only for ourselves, but for future generations in our family line. For him, “leaving a legacy of faith” has nothing to do with faith, but everything to do with making “mercy deposits” in our heavenly “mercy accounts,” so that God will have no choice but to look favorably upon us and upon our descendants because of our “good works.” Wait, what?

Evidently, the apostles of our Lord, and the earliest Christian communities our Lord established through them, were unable to tap into the power of our Lord's Resurrection. Rather than living lives free from pain and suffering and filled with earthly favor and blessings, they learned the hard way what our Lord meant when He prophesied that they would be hated, persecuted, and even put to death because of their faith in Him. If our Lord's Resurrection serves to provide the power for "victorious living," which God rewards with earthly "health, wealth, and prosperity," as many preachers proclaimed this past Sunday, the apostles and earliest Christians were pitiful and miserable failures.

But, thanks be to God that this is most definitely not the case, my friends. Jesus did not rise from the tomb on the third day to establish some mystical "Resurrection Power" people could tap into in order to "live their best lives now" and experience a plethora of earthly blessings. One wonders what Bible these preachers are reading. Jesus rose from the tomb to open the way to everlasting life to all who believe. His Resurrection is vindication of the victory over sin, death, and the devil He finished on the Cross; it's the Father's stamp of approval on the salvific work His Son accomplished by living the perfect, sinless life we can't live and by making the perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world on the Cross. That Jesus rose from the tomb alive in the flesh on the third day assures us who believe in Him that we, too, will rise from the tomb alive in the flesh when He returns in great glory on the Last Day. Thus, His glorious Resurrection is not about temporal, earthly blessings, but the eternal blessings we will receive when our bodies are raised imperishable and incorruptible to dwell with Him and all the angels and saints in the Eternal Kingdom (i.e. "the New Heavens and Earth") He will usher in on the Last Day.

Until that day, you can expect to experience much pain and suffering while you remain here in this "vale of tears." Being a Christian does not exempt you from this, and there is certainly no mystical "Resurrection Power" you can tap into to avoid it. But, the Resurrection of our Lord assures that there is coming a Day when we will finally be free from sin and all its effects; a Day when all our tears will be wiped away and we will dwell in perfect, glorified bodies in the Paradise of our Lord's Eternal Kingdom, where there will be no more mourning, no more pain, no more suffering, but only bliss, joy, peace, and comfort. The Resurrection of our Lord assures us that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

That's why we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, my friends. Our future is secure. Jesus has paid for our sins in full. The way to everlasting life has been opened to us who believe, and we shall dwell in glory unknowable! For, our Lord Jesus is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Because He rose, we shall, too!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In Christ,

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