

Easter Sunday

April 12, 2020

Colossians 3:1-4:

“This Morning of Light and Life”

- I. Some Last Words.
- II. Forgiveness, Salvation and Resurrection.
- III. Our Text.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

I have noted, on a couple of occasions, that often after a grave-side service for a Pilgrim brother or sister, as the pastors are walking out of the cemetery, we will glance at grave markers; names of the deceased, their birth and death dates and wonder, "Did the person make it? Did the person know God's love in Christ?"

The joy of the grave-side service for a Pilgrim brother or sister, in spite of the tears and hurt, is knowing that when Christ returns we will stand with them in our resurrected bodies in the presence of our loving and gracious Lord. And there will never again be another "good-bye", of any sort. Never again!

Psalm 90 is the great Psalm of Moses. In the 12th verse Moses says, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Of that verse Luther wrote:

Whether we call original sin a quality or a disease, ultimately the worst damage is that we shall not only endure God's eternal wrath and death, but that we do not even realize what we are suffering." (Quoted in the *Formula of Concord*, Solid Declaration, Article II, Tappert, p. 519.62).

That's quite a truth isn't it: "We do not even realize what we are suffering." We do, however, get a glimpse of it at the grave-side. We praise our Heavenly Father for the victory He impresses upon us . . .

THIS MORNING OF LIGHT AND LIFE

I. Some Last Words.

It is said that the woman who nursed the agnostic professor J. H. Huxley through his last moment witnessed an awful spectacle. As Huxley was dying he suddenly looked up at a sight invisible to mortal eyes and, staring awhile, fearfully whispered, "So it is true."

Philosopher, historian and economist, David Hume is reported to have said, "I am in flames." And Sir Francis Newport, 17th century politician and head of the England Infidel Club is said to have wailed in anguish,

Oh, that I could lie for a thousand years upon the fire that is never quenched, to purchase the favor of God and be united to Him again. But it is a fruitless wish. Millions and millions of years will bring me no nearer (to) the end of my torments than one poor hour. Oh, eternity, eternity forever and ever! Oh, the unsufferable pangs of hell!

And an atheist, with whom I had several discussions over 36 years ago, in the closing moment of his life on earth while at one of our hospitals cried out to two nurses "I'm burning up! My feet are on fire! I don't want to go to hell! I don't want to go to hell!"

Luther's statement hits: "We do not even realize what we are suffering." The fact is, as Scriptures teach, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked..." (Eph. 2:1-2a). That which is dead cannot make itself aware or alive. The Scriptures say, "All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Rom. 3:12). The reality of sin permeates every aspect of life. Just look at everything that has been happening - globally! Everyone has their final moment and an appointed meeting with the Almighty God!

II. Forgiveness, Salvation and Resurrection.

Listen again to what Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, said of his son's mission: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord (before Jesus,

the One Who saves!) to prepare his way, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins...". (Lk. 1:76,77). This is the focal point of all Scripture: **salvation in the forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ**. Listen: Where there is forgiveness of sins there is life. It's what Scriptures teach. "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23).

We stand before God naked in our sin. Condemned. But God, in His mercy, sent Jesus to take upon Himself our condemnation. Through faith we are clothed in His perfect life. Faith takes hold of it: "Whoever believes (in Christ's payment for their sin) will not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16). It might sound like "old hat" to some here, but if we're given time to stare face to face with our last moment those words will be the only words we want!

If we die today, the soul will go to heaven. We will know who we are and we will be in eternal joy. But there is another part to this. When Christ returns we will receive the resurrected, glorified body! As Scriptures teach:

So it is with the resurrection of the dead (that is, the body). What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor (in and of itself, there is nothing honorable about a dead body); it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (I Cor. 15:42-44).

We say with Scriptures, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law (that is, sin impresses upon us the inability to keep the law perfectly as God demands. Thus, we are condemned as lawbreakers; condemned to death and hell). But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 15:56,57). The victory is forgiveness of sin and eternal life. The resurrection says so, and is ours. Therefore our text . . .

III. Our Text.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1-4).

"...seek the things that are above...set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." That has to be our focus; yours, mine, our children. Please listen to this excerpt of an interview with the late Joe Bayly and his wife, Mary Lou. Joe Bayly was a Christian author and executive for David C. Cook Christian Publishing.

Joe: We are stewards of the children God gives us, and at any time God can interrupt that stewardship.

Mary Lou: Although this isn't something you can say to somebody else who has just lost a child or is in the process of losing a child, it is still true that if Jesus Christ is the creator and has planned in intricate detail each of His own people - then if we love one of them how much more He must. How can we compare our love to His? Our assignment from God is to simply prepare our children as a skilled craftsman fashions an arrow. But you always have to remember that the arrow may not always be shot out into adulthood.

The Baylys lost three children.

And if one should protest, "This is so morbid and depressing!" then everything Jesus said and did is morbid and depressing, especially his words, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt. 6:10-21). The reality of that is screaming at us, isn't it? Always has been. Commentator Harlyn Kuschel wrote:

“Such treasures, and not the temporary treasures of the world, are now to be the real concerns of believers raised in Christ...

“That does not mean that Christians will forget about their duties in this life or fail to fulfill the earthly tasks the Lord assigned to them...It does mean that, as they live their day-to-day lives in the world, they will always take into account that their real citizenship is in heaven.” (Harlyn J. Kuschel, *The People’s Bible, Philipians, Colossians*, Northwestern Publishing House, p.167).

We stand at the empty tomb and His Word stands in front of us: “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you will appear with Him in glory.” (Col. 3:3-4). This world isn’t our ultimate goal, and age has not one single thing to do with it. Christ is our life; now and forever. When He returns we will appear with Him in our resurrected bodies.

This morning of life and light that pours from the empty tomb into our lives lifts us from the sadness of this world and the grave. Our risen Lord Jesus Christ looks into each face here and promises, “Because I live, you also will live.” (Jn. 14:19b).

Blessed Easter! Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott