

“Into Thy Hands I Commit My Spirit”

Luke 23:44-49

Easter Sunday, March 27, 2016

He is Risen!

This morning we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the blessed hope that all who trust in Him will also be raised to eternal life and joy in His presence. I want to begin this morning by emphasizing that the resurrection is more than just a matter of fact or doctrine for the future, but has remarkable implications for how we live our lives. Let me suggest two reasons why it is so important that we believe in a God who raises the dead!

1. The hope of the resurrection will carry us through the most severe of trials.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 – *“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.”*

I don't know exactly what trial Paul was facing, but it was so severe that he was being pressed right up to the very brink of what He could humanly handle. Paul uses 4 expressions to describe the severity of his trials. He says they were

- “burdened excessively”
- “beyond our strength”
- despairing even of life
- having the sentence of death within ourselves.

Earlier in 1 Cor 10:13, Paul had promised that *“God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape also, that you may endure it.”* So Paul knew that God would be faithful. Paul knew that God would not give more than he could endure with faith. And yet in the middle of Paul's suffering, he was so overwhelmed that the last ounce of hope that Paul could hold on to was believing that God raises the dead. *“We're not getting out of this one alive so our last ounce of hope is to believe that*

because we are one with Christ, God will raise us from the dead!” Notice that this is the very purpose of Paul's trial at the end of vs. 9: *“we had this sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.”*

So do you see why it is so essential that we cling to a theology of the resurrection? There may be times in our life when God will bring trials so severe to strip us of any self-reliance that the only hope left for us to cling to will be that death is not the final word, because our God raises the dead. In the face of the most severe testing, we can look beyond our suffering to the risen Christ and say, *“It's okay if we don't make it out of this trial alive, because we believe in the God who raises the dead!”*

So the hope of the resurrection will sustain us through the severe trials.

2. The hope of the resurrection will give us the courage to take any risk of obedience for the kingdom of God.

What if God were to call us to serve Him in a time and place that would require risking our very lives or the safety of our families for the kingdom of God? Think about believers in the Middle East or Korea today where it is illegal, or at least very dangerous, to be a Christian—where serving Christ could cost their very life, and yet they go on sharing the gospel and worshiping Jesus. When you find yourself in a place like that, your theology of the resurrection is not just theoretical or doctrinal, it's empowering. *“What if we get caught? What if we are sentenced to death or assassinated on the spot? We believe that death is not the end. We believe that God will raise to life those who die trusting in Jesus.”*

Hebrews 11 tells us that it was this kind of faith—believing that God raises the dead, that strengthened Abraham's faith to embrace the ultimate risk of obeying God. Abraham received the ultimate test—would he be willing to offer up Isaac, as a sacrifice to God? Abraham loved Isaac more than his own life. What went through Abraham's mind as he determined to honor God with his obedience, even if it cost him his own son? Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us: *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was*

he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type." Abraham proved his willingness, but God provided a way of escape—God provided a ram for the sacrifice as a substitute for Isaac. The only one who would sacrifice His only begotten Son was God Himself. Isaac became a foreshadow of that sacrifice of God's son.

What does all this have to do with Easter Sunday? I believe the very hope that sustained Paul in his greatest testing, and the very hope that bolstered Abraham's faith is the very hope that carried Jesus through the cross.

Let's go back to the two points we just made and see how they relate to Jesus suffering on the cross:

- **The hope of the resurrection will carry us through the most severe of trials.**

There has never been a trial more severe for any human being to bear than what Jesus endured at the cross. His physical suffering was more than a human should bear, but the scourging was not His greatest suffering; the crucifixion was not His greatest suffering. His greatest agony was the anguish, mentally, spiritually and emotionally, of bearing the weight of our sin and guilt under God's holy wrath, and experiencing the forsakenness of hell as he bore it.

How did Jesus do it? How did He walk through utter darkness, bear the hellish weight of God's judgment, and stare into death's cold eyes without faltering? I Peter 2:21-23 gives us some remarkable insight: *"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously..."*

This is how Jesus endured the suffering leading up to His death. This is how He endured the reviling, affliction, and threats: "He kept entrusting Himself—continually entrusting Himself—to God who judges righteously!" He had this underlying conviction that He could trust in the character of God to render a final judgment that would vindicate His righteousness even though His present circumstances raged against Him. And what was the one way God would vindicate His righteousness? By raising Him from the dead,

and restoring Him to the glory which He had before the foundations of the world (John 17:5, 24).

1Peter 4:19 goes on to call us to follow Jesus' example: *"Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."*

- **The hope of the resurrection will give us the courage to take any risk of obedience for the kingdom of God**—the ultimate risk, of course, being death.

We have already seen how Jesus kept entrusting Himself to God through His suffering. Now we see in His final word from the cross that it was with the same confident trust in His Father that Jesus gave Himself over to death.

Jesus prayed, *"Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit."* In order to understand the significance of these words, keep in mind what had just transpired in the preceding hours. Not only had Jesus endured the worst that men could do to Him, He also endured divine judgment. For three hours darkness consumed the earth (vs. 44-45). We know from Matthew 27:51 that with the darkness came an earthquake. Why all this phenomena? We are told in Luke 23:48 that when the spectators at the cross saw what was taking place, they began to return to Jerusalem beating their breasts. They knew what had happened. God had come in judgment.

They understood supernatural darkness to be associated with divine judgment and the trembling of the earth to indicate that God had come in His fury. What they failed to understand, was that in that judgment atonement was being made—for their sin! Divine judgment was falling on Christ for the sins of the people. During those long hours of agony, Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" Not only did Jesus endure the presence of God coming in Judgment to lay on Him the punishment of man's sin, He also experienced the absence of God's presence to comfort. Never before had Jesus experienced the displeasure of His Father. Never before had He experienced life without His Father's comfort. No wonder He cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"

Finally after 3 hours of darkness, the Father's wrath was fully spent. The cup was empty. Atonement had been made. We know from vs. 45 that the veil

of the temple was torn in two indicating that access into God's presence was now available through the blood of Christ. He had secured salvation for all those who would trust in Him. So Jesus declared, "it is finished." He had endured the Father's fury, making an end to all our sin. Now the only thing left for Jesus to do was actually die.

How would He do it? Would He resist and fight against death? No. Would He be overcome by death like an animal of prey? No. With amazing strength and resolve He would pray, "*Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.*" He entrusts Himself into the hands of God. He entrusts Himself to the only One who can ultimately be trusted in death—the only One whose character is perfect and just, the only One who can vindicate the righteous by raising them from the dead.

Notice that once again there is fellowship between Jesus and His Father in this simple prayer. A fellowship by way of faith. Even though the cup of the Father's wrath has been finished, Jesus' physical suffering continues on in the final agonizing moments of the crucifixion. Yet even in the worst of earthly, human conditions, Jesus seeks His Father's presence and entrusts Himself into His care. "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit."

A.W. Pink: "...Communion with God may be enjoyed independently of place or circumstances. The Savior was on the cross, surrounded by a taunting crowd, His body suffering intense agony; nevertheless, He was in fellowship with the Father!...It is our privilege to enjoy communion with God at all times, irrespective of outward circumstances or conditions. Communion with God is by *faith*, and faith is not affected by things of sight. No matter how unpleasant your outward lot may be...it is your unspeakable privilege to enjoy communion with God. Just as the three Hebrews enjoyed fellowship with the Lord in the midst of the fiery furnace, as Daniel did in the lions' den, as Paul and Silas did in the Philippian jail, as the Savior did on the cross, so may you wherever you are! Christ's head rested on a crown of thorns, but beneath were the Father's hands!"¹

One of the things that just amazes me about this this final prayer of Jesus from the cross is the absence of bitterness. He had just suffered the worst of what men could do to Him. He had endured the infinite rage of God's wrath for someone else's wrongdoing, and yet He humbly entrusts his spirit

into God's hands. What an incredible example this is to us when we suffer unjustly in this world. We don't have to be bitter. We can have fellowship with God and entrust our souls to our faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19). So trusting in the God who raises the dead can carry us through the most severe trials. It was true for Paul. It was true for Jesus, and it's true for us. Trusting in the God who raises the dead can empower us to take any risk of obedience for the kingdom of God. It was true for Abraham. It was true for Jesus, and it's true for us.

Yet it's essential for you to understand that this hope only belongs to those who are in Christ—those who believe in Jesus through the gospel.

Let me take you back to the Luke 23:44-48 now, to show you a picture of the gospel through the imagery and events that happen here at the cross, and how they relate to you.

Judgment for sin falls on Christ (vs. 44-45a)

- Darkness/gloom encompasses the scene for 3 hours (noon – 3pm)
- Ever been in weather as dark as night in midday? Makes you want to run for cover. Danger is looming over you.
- Not random solar eclipse or freak weather (3 hours during full moon). This is supernatural. Who controls the weather? God!
- What does this mean? Why does God do this? In the OT, God's judgment and wrath was associated with darkness, gloom, and earthquakes. The dark gloom and fury of God's judgment and wrath against sin is falling on Christ.

Atonement is made—rending the barrier between God and man (vs. 45b).

- The veil in the temple separated the terror of God's holiness (in the holy of holies), from sinful people deserving of God's wrath. It was a reminder that sin has created a separation or barrier between God and man. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the most holy place through the veil to make atonement for the sins of the people with the blood of the sacrifice.
- This veil was a massive, thick curtain, 60 feet high and 30 feet wide made up of 72 plaits of fabric. Mark 15:38 tells us that when Jesus died it was torn in two from top to bottom. Who tore it? It had to be God. Why? Signifying that when Christ died, atonement was being made for sin, removing the barrier between God and man.

Fellowship is restored (vs. 46)

¹ A.W. Pink, *The Seven Sayings of the Savior on the Cross*, pg. 137-138.

- As Jesus speaks His final words from the cross, He speaks as through fellowship has once again been restored with the Father. Earlier as He bore the judgment of God for sin, He cried, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me.” But now that the final drops of God’s wrath had been poured out, He prays, “Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.” Their fellowship is restored.
- Remember that everything Jesus did at the cross was on behalf of those who would trust in Him. So if you are in Christ...
 - God’s judgment for your sin fell on Him.
 - He made atonement for your sin
 - He reconciled you to God

Two possible responses:

1. Spiritual Sight (faith) → joyful expectation of salvation

(Centurion praising God; vs. 47)

- Hardened & calloused for the purpose of execution
- Mark 15:39 – when he saw the way He breathed His last, said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”
- Died like no other man
 - He didn’t die cursing, but hoping in God
 - He wasn’t overcome by death (like an animal of prey), but sovereignly took death by the throat.
 - With a *loud voice*, He gave up His own life (John 10:18 – “no one takes My life from Me; I lay it down on My own initiative”)
 - not in and out of consciousness, overcome by blood loss and asphyxiation, and ultimately death; He gave Himself in death to the Father
- suddenly saw Jesus through eyes of faith, in a way that glorified God

2. Spiritual Blindness (unbelief) → terrifying expectation of judgment

(crowds beating breasts; vs. 48)

- Vs. 48: when they saw what happened, they left beating their breasts
- They knew that they had erred greatly; they walked away from the cross in despair, not understanding the deeper purposes of God
- They sense God’s displeasure but fail to see Christ as Savior.

What does all this have to do with You? → **visual**

God, the divine Judge, demands that all sin must be paid for. Yet, in His mercy, He has made a way for it to be paid by Christ. Either your sin against God will be paid for *by you* for all eternity, or it will be paid for *by Christ* through the cross. If you remain as you are without repenting of your sin (turning from your sin), then the wrath of God looms over you (John 3:36—“He who abides in the Son has eternal life; but He who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”). Apart from Christ, you will fall (like a soldier in battle) into the hands of the living God and the only possible outcome is the “terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume [His] adversaries” (Heb 10:27). “It is a terrifying thing [for sinners] to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31). This is what the Bible calls hell—the eternal judgment reserved for those who refuse Christ as the payment for their sin.

But there is a better option: to repent, to turn from, your sin and put your full trust in what Jesus did in payment for your sin at the cross. When you do, the judgment of God against your sin falls on Christ. If you are “in Christ” He absorbs the wrath of God for your sin and you are saved, reconciled to God. Therefore, you can entrust your soul to God as your Father with the joyful expectation of heaven. “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:11-12).

Which direction do you want your life to go?

Which direction is your life headed in right now?

Is your life headed toward God as your Father or are you running away from God as your Judge?

You can’t go both directions at once. You need to make a choice. You must do a U-turn. You must repent and believe.

- The first step of repentance is to confess your sin—to acknowledge that you have sinned against God.
- The first step of faith is to confess Jesus as Lord.

The way you effectively renounce sin’s claim on you, is by turning your allegiance to Jesus as Savior and Lord.

It doesn’t work to say, “I want my sins to be forgiven but I still want to be in charge of my life instead of God.” Forgiveness is granted to those who surrender to Jesus’ loving authority in their lives.

My friend, Jesus died under the weight of God’s judgment for *your* sin. He took *your* place. And having perfectly and completely served your sentence,

God raised Him from the dead and offers eternal life to you if you will take Jesus as Savior and Lord.

I wonder if you are ready to respond to Jesus with an honest prayer of confession: *“Lord, I admit that I have sinned against you by living my own way. I acknowledge that my sinful thoughts, words, actions, and attitudes have broken your law. Jesus, I need Your forgiveness that can only be granted by means of your death on the cross. I surrender to Your authority as Savior and Lord. Make me new as only you can. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*