

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message #36 Man's Sin; God's Salvation (Easter Sunday Message)

Scripture Luke 23:44 — 24:8

Friday we celebrated the most significant day in human history. The death of Jesus Christ made possible a restored relationship between God and mankind. Today we celebrate the culmination of the death experience of Jesus — His resurrection, the new life which came out of His death. I'm going to talk about both events because they cannot be separated.

For a period of time at the beginning of human history, Adam and Eve enjoyed a close fellowship with their creator God. They had been created in the spiritual image and likeness and purity of God Himself. In the poetic language of the Old Testament, the three of them walked together and communicated openly and freely.

God made available to Adam and Eve everything they needed for a comfortable and satisfying and everlasting existence on the planet. God had designated them as His stewards to look after the physical needs of all the rest of His creation. It was their responsibility to maintain harmonious relationships within all aspects of God's creation.

Unfortunately, there came the day in which Adam and Eve were tempted into disobedience, and this drastically changed the nature of their relationship to God, to each other, and to everything around them. Through their disobedience, they acquired a nature that the Bible calls sinful. God, because of His holy pure character could no longer continue His fellowship with His now fallen creation, and He had to withdraw His Spirit from them. The result was their immediate spiritual death and the gradual onset of their physical death.

What a dilemma the human race was in. They were unable to live up to God's standards of absolute holiness. Furthermore, they were not in a position to atone for their own sins. On their own, they had no way to please God nor could they regain the eternal life of God which had been lost.

God understood the human dilemma, and recognized that the means of salvation of humanity had to originate from Himself. Only He had the capability to provide the solution which would satisfy His own integrity and the requirements of holy justice. His holiness made sinners the target of His wrath, and His holiness demanded the death of every sinner. Justice demanded that the penalty for sin be paid in full.

God had to step into the human predicament in order to salvage His creation. There was no other pathway of hope for people except for God to offer Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, as the redeemer of sinful humans. As God in fleshly form Jesus was perfect and holy. As God He could satisfy the Father's requirement of sinless righteousness. But only with human flesh could Jesus have the ability to die, and only by means of death could Jesus be a sacrifice for sins. Understanding the predicament of human sinfulness, God "gave His one and only Son" to save the world (*John 3:16-17*).

On the same day that Adam and Eve sinned, God introduced to them His plan for the future redemption of the human race. The offspring of the woman would crush the source of evil. From time to time, throughout the following centuries, more and more details were added to that first promise. God gave to His people in the Old Testament both words and rituals to help them understand His plans. There is a passage in Isaiah which explains a lot about God's plans.

Read Isaiah 52:13- 53:12

Finally, in what was described as "the fullness of time," God, in the person of Jesus, appeared on earth, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the body of a virgin. As God He was holy and righteous. As man, He lived in obedience to the Father without sin. He was, in every respect, spiritually and physically, qualified to be the Savior of mankind.

Jesus was publically introduced as the Lamb who would be sacrificed for the sake of fallen mankind. He did not come to rule militarily and politically. Rather, He was born to die. As we read, "He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. The LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all." (*Isaiah 53:5-65*). The death of Jesus on the cross of Calvary was the redemptive payment that reestablished the spiritual connection between God and mankind.

Our text from Luke's Gospel describes how this happened.

Read Luke 23:44-49

While on the cross Jesus experienced separation from the Father. On the cross Jesus bore the collective sins of humanity, literally becoming sin for us even though He was without sin. As our Substitute, He suffered the consequences that we deserved to suffer. Because He was the Sin Bearer, the Father had to turn His back on the Son and, in fact, to pour out His wrath on His Son.

This separation from the Father was a totally new experience for Jesus. He had been, up to that point, eternally united with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Godhead was "one." For Jesus, the time on the cross was a time of separation from the Father. As the Sin Bearer, He was in utter spiritual darkness. It was an experience infinitely worse than His physical pains. During this experience, Jesus was physically alive but spiritually dead. From the Gospels of Matthew and Mark we know that Jesus, in the agony of this time, cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (*Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34*). The reason? He was under the judgment of God and paying the penalty for our sins.

Luke mentions two events which indicated the significance of Jesus' time on the cross. The first was the darkening of the sun between 12 noon and 3 pm. The physical "light of the world" was reflecting the Father's judgment in similar fashion to the way the Son of God, the spiritual "Light of men" was experiencing judgment. There are several Scriptures which link darkness with God's judgment. It was a time of great darkness.

Sometime later, the relationship between the Father and Jesus was reestablished. After the holy and righteous requirements of God in regard to the penalty of sin had been satisfied, the Spirit of the Godhead returned to Jesus. This spiritual reconnection with the Father was the indication that all the conditions for the salvation of humanity had been accomplished. Jesus then had the freedom to let go of His physical life. He said, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." After enduring the terrible agonies of the wrath of the Father, there was once again in Jesus' mind the calm assurance of communion with the Father. And "when he had said this, he breathed his last." Jesus did not die because He was killed. He released His life because there was nothing more for Him to accomplish on earth. His mission was completed.

The second event which was of symbolic significance was the tearing of the curtain of the temple. This was undoubtedly the curtain which separated the two rooms known as the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Priests regularly went in and out of the Holy Place, the outer room, in carrying out their temple service activities. However, only the High Priest was allowed to enter the inner room, the Most Holy Place, and he could do that only on one day each year, the Day of Atonement. The Most Holy Place represented the presence of God among His people. By tearing the curtain, God was indicating that access into His presence was available to everyone, any time.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews said this: “When Christ came as high priest ...He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves. He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” (*Hebrews 9:11-12*). A few verses later we read, “For Christ did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the High Priest enters the Most Holy place every year. ... But he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ... Christ was sacrificed once to bear the sins of many people” (*excerpts from Hebrews 9:24-28*).

Many people witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus. Beginning in verse 47 we can read about their reactions to Jesus’ death. The Roman Centurion was powerfully impressed by the events of that day. He saw the hand of God in the events and he praised God. He acknowledged that Jesus “was a righteous man,” a way of stating that Jesus was an innocent man.

Verse 48 mentions the people (literally, “the crowd”) “who had gathered to witness the crucifixion.” When these people saw what happened “they beat their breasts.” This is an idiom indicating guilt, grief, and fear. Keep in mind that there had been a period of supernatural darkness in the middle of the day. Matthew, in his gospel account, mentioned an earthquake. The crucifixion of Jesus was an awesome, somber occasion, made more so by the supernatural aspects.

Probably some of the people in the crowd had been among those who demanded that Pilate put Jesus to death. They must have recognized, along with the centurion, that a tragic mistake had been made, and that an innocent man had been crucified.

Verse 49 describes the helplessness of those who knew Jesus. They stood at a distance. They would have been filled with grief, in shock. Their hopes and expectations were shattered by the crucifixion. They were unable to comprehend what had occurred.

Read Luke 23:50-56

The burial of Jesus in the new rock-hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea was the prologue to the resurrection events. Joseph was a wealthy and distinguished man, and a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin which had condemned Jesus and insisted on His crucifixion. Luke specifically notes that he had not consented to the decision and action of other Jewish leaders. Luke notes that he was “a good and upright man” who was “waiting for the kingdom of God.” We also might observe that he was a fearless man. He risked ridicule and persecution from his peers by going to Pilate and asking for Jesus’ body. In addition, by handling the body, he became ceremonially unclean and ineligible to participate in the remaining activities of Passover week.

Jesus died about 3:00 pm. The Sabbath began at sundown. Joseph did not have much time to get permission, take the body down from the cross, wrap it in linen cloth, carry it to the place of entombment, and place it in the tomb. Verse 55 mentions that the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph. Apparently they did not help with the placement of the body in the tomb, but the text indicates their intention to return at the first opportunity to further embalm the body with more spices and perfumes.

Now we come to the joyful part of the story.

Read Luke 24:1-8

The women were required to rest on the Sabbath day, but they moved into action early on Sunday morning. Upon arrival at the burial site, they were perplexed by what they saw. The stone at the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away, and the body of Jesus was missing. And then they were surprised and frightened by the sudden appearance of two angels. Angels had proclaimed the glad tidings of Jesus’ incarnation, and there they were again proclaiming the good news of Jesus’ resurrection.

The angels chided the women for not remembering the words of Jesus. He had said on previous occasions that He would rise on the third day. (*See Luke 9:22, 43-45; 18:31-33*) Neither the crucifixion nor the resurrection should have been a surprise, but such were the assumptions of Jesus' followers that they failed to believe what Jesus had prophesied concerning His victory over death.

It was the assignment of the angels, and their joyous privilege, to assure the women that the living Lord would not be found among the dead. The angels quoted the words of Jesus, which He had spoken while still in Galilee: "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again." At that point, I think the light went on in their minds. They remembered the words of Jesus, and suddenly, I think, the empty tomb made sense to them. What the women should have understood earlier was made clear by the missing body.

The Easter season is the time when all of us should get the fog out of our minds concerning the person of Jesus Christ and the importance of His sacrifice for our sins. This is the dominate theme of Scripture. The incarnation, life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus were prophesied in the Old Testament. The Gospels describe how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies; how He was the sacrificial Lamb of God who joyfully endured the cross to provide redemption to sinners, and was raised from the dead as proof of His victory over sin and the forces of evil. The book of Acts describes how a small group of disciples, who were briefly despondent and perplexed, confidently and enthusiastically carried the good news about their Savior and Lord into the world. The New Testament epistles place the sacrificial death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus at the center of the life of the Church. And from the last book of the Bible, which is named the Revelation of Jesus Christ, we discover how the risen Christ will return to earth to establish His kingdom as the glorious Victor over the grave, death, and hell. This theme of what God has done and will do, for sinful humanity runs through the Bible from beginning to end.

Jesus has overcome, is overcoming, and will overcome the influences of sin in our lives. He personally overcame death and was raised to life, He raises those who place their faith in Him from spiritual death and gives them eternal life, and He will some day make all this known even to people who refuse to acknowledge Him. I hope you can say with me, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!"