

LOVE LIVES FOREVER (MARK 16:1-14) 04/08/12  
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ATCHISON, PASTOR LEE HENDON

BY EASTER MORNING THE 12 DISCIPLES HAD BECOME THE 11 DISCIPLES. I LUV THESE GUYS! THEY WERE SO LIKE YOU & ME. EVEN WE CAN BE DISCIPLES! THE BIBLE SAYS:

1. THE WOMEN HEARD THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT, "HE HAS RISEN, HE IS NOT HERE." THIS WAS NOT OLD HAT FOR THEM, NOT AN EASTER RERUN WARMED UP, IT SCARED THEM SPEECHLESS & THEY RAN AWAY AS FAST AS THEY COULD!
2. WE READ THAT JESUS APPEARED TO SOME PEOPLE WHO TOLD THE DISCIPLES ABOUT HIS BEING ALIVE. THE DISCIPLES WERE SKEPTICAL - THEY WERE SO OVERCOME BY THE GRIEF OF HIS DEATH THAT THEY JUST WOULD NOT BELIEVE HE WAS ALIVE.
3. JESUS AT LAST APPEARED TO THE 11 AT MEAL TIME & RAN THEM UP ONE SIDE & DOWN THE OTHER BECAUSE THEIR HEARTS WERE SO HARDENED THEY WOULD NOT BELIEVE THE TRUTH ABOUT HIS RESURRECTION - SUCH WAS THE LAST THING ON THEIR MINDS.

TODAY WE GATHER TOGETHER ALMOST 20 CENTURIES LATER TO CELEBRATE & THROW AN EASTER PARTY. LET'S NOT BE TOO PRESUMPTUOUS, TOO FAMILIAR WITH THE STORY LINE ABOUT THE EASTER EVENT TO BE CHANGED BY THE IMPACT OF RESURRECTION. WE HEAR THE STORY & THINK IT IS ABOUT US, WE HOPE IT IS ABOUT OUR VICTORY OVER DEATH. WHEN ALL ALONG THE POWER OF RESURRECTION IS ABOUT JESUS, ABOUT THE MARVELOUS POWER OF GOD & GOD'S LOVE.

WILLIAM WILLIMON, IN AN EASTER SERMON AT DUKE UNI-VERSITY CHAPEL SAID, "EASTER IS NOT ABOUT THE RETURN OF THE ROBIN IN SPRING OR LILIES OR A BUTTERFLY COMING OUT OF A COCOON, NOT ABOUT AN EASTER BUNNY OR ANY OF THAT PAGAN DRIVEL. IT IS ABOUT A BODY THAT SOMEHOW GOT LOOSE. THE GOSPEL-ACCOUNTS STRAIN TO DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENED BUT DO NOT MAKE ANY MISTAKE ABT IT, THEY ARE TRYING TO DESCRIBE SOMETHING UNEARTHLY - DEATH WORKING BACKWARDS. SO I CANNOT TALK ABOUT '*THE ETERNAL REBIRTH OF HOPE*' OR '*JESUS LIVING IN OUR HEARTS.*' WE ARE TALKING HERE ABT A CRUCIFIED, DEAD JEW, WHO CAME BACK TO HARASS US & IT SCARES THE HECK OUT OF US." OR AT LEAST IT SHOULD! HAVE YOU BEEN TO A FUNERAL LATELY? I HAVE HAD 182 OF THEM

SINCE I HAVE BEEN IN ATCHISON. WELL, YOU EXPECT THE BODY TO STAY PUT, DON'T YOU? HOW WOULD YOU HAVE FELT IF THE BODY WAS MISSING? EVERYBODY WOULD BE UPSET, TO PUT IT MILDLY. THERE YOU HAVE THE FIRST EASTER...PEOPLE SHOWING UP FOR THE FUNERAL BUT THE BODY WAS GONE & NOBODY KNEW WHERE IT WAS!

WHENEVER 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SOPHISTICATES TELL ME ABOUT THEIR DOUBTS & *DIS*-BELIEF OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS (I MEAN IT IS CERTAINLY BEYOND REASON & SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION) I CANNOT HELP BUT SMILE TO MYSELF & TELL THEM THAT THEY ARE IN GOOD COMPANY, THE EARLY DISCIPLES & FOLLOWERS DID **NOT** BELIEVE IT EITHER! IN FACT, THE ACCOUNTS ABT JESUS' RESURRECTION WERE BORN OUT OF THEIR **DIS**-BELIEF & FEEBLE ATTEMPTS TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF WHAT DOES NOT MAKE SENSE. THOSE WHO FIRST PROCLAIMED THE STORY OF HIS RESURRECTION WERE THEMSELVES TOTALLY UNPREPARED TO BELIEVE IT, DETERMINED NOT TO BELIEVE IT & CAME TO BELIEVE IT IN SPITE OF THEMSELVES. THEY THOUGHT WHEN SOMEONE **DIED** THEY STAYED **DEAD!** IN NO WAY COULD THEIR MINDS HAVE BEEN PREPARED FOR THE UNCHARTERED WATERS OF RESURRECTION.

THE RESURRECTION TELLS US MUCH ABOUT GOD & OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD. FIRST, IT AFFIRMS **THE REALITY OF DEATH** AS A PART OF OUR HUMAN EXPERIENCES. GOD IS NOT GOING TO PULL ANY PUNCHES, PLAY ANY FAVORITES TO HELP EVEN HIS ONLY SON TO BY PASS THE EVENT & PAIN OF DYING. HEARING THE STORY, TELLING THE STORY OF EASTER DOES NOT HELP US SKIP DYING & GO STRAIGHT TO "**GO-HEAVEN.**" THERE WAS ONE THING CERTAIN IN THE MINDS OF THE ROMANS, THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS, THE CROWD, THE DISCIPLES & THAT WAS, JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED & DEAD. END OF STORY!

THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO HONESTLY THINK THAT TO BELIEVE IN JESUS IS A PERSON'S TICKET FOR EASY-LIVING - NO STOPS FOR HARDSHIPS, PAIN, UNCERTAINTIES & CERTAINLY NOT DEATH. RESURRECTION IS NOT THE SOLUTION TO AVOIDING DEATH. YOU LIVE, THEN YOU DIE. SIMPLE AS THAT. SO DO NOT BE SURPRISED.

AN ANGRY YOUNG MAN SAT IN MY OFFICE ONE HOT SUMMER DAY & EXCLAIMED, "IF THAT IS THE KIND OF GOD WE HAVE, THAT

COULD LET MY MOTHER & FATHER DIE, THEN I CANNOT, WILL NOT BELIEVE IN THAT GOD! WHY HAVE A GOD AT ALL?" INDEED, WHY HAVE A GOD, A JESUS? IT IS **BECAUSE** OF THE REALITY & EVENTUALITY OF DEATH, THAT IS WHY!

THE EASTER MESSAGE IS GOD'S PROMISE THAT DEATH IS NOT FINAL. JESUS PROCLAIMED VICTORY OVER THE GRAVE, DEATH IS NOT THE FINAL EVENT IN LIFE. JESUS HAS GONE BEFORE US TO CLAIM VICTORY FOR HIMSELF & FOR US. **BEFORE** JESUS WE COULD NOT SEE THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GRAVE. **NOW WE CAN!**

THE RESURRECTION EVENT SETS CHRISTIANITY ASIDE AS PECULIAR & DISTINCTIVE. EVERY RELIGIOUS LEADER WHO HAS EVER LIVED - DIED & STAYED DEAD - EXCEPT FOR ONE - JESUS. JESUS LIVED - DIED - ROSE AGAIN ON THE THIRD DAY. WE HAVE THE NAMES OF MANY OF THE MEN & WOMEN WHO SAW HIM & TALKED TO HIM. WE HAVE THE NAMES OF PEOPLE WHO ATE WITH HIM & TOLD US WHAT HE ATE, WHERE HE WENT & WHAT HE SAID. THERE WERE OVER 500 IN ONE PLACE WHO SAW HIM & HEARD HIM SPEAK. SUCH A HAPPENING WAS/IS TRULY ASTONISHING & FASCINATING & BEGS FOR FURTHER EXPLANATION.

RESURRECTION WAS ACCOMPLISHED BECAUSE JESUS WAS **NOT ONLY MAN** BUT BECAUSE HE WAS **ALSO GOD**. BECAUSE JESUS WAS GOD HE HAD THE POWER TO NOT ONLY **GIVE UP HIS** LIFE BUT ALSO TO **TAKE IT BACK**. THAT IS WHY WE TRUST JESUS AS OUR PERSONAL SAVIOR - NOT BECAUSE HE WAS A GOOD TEACHER, A GOOD MAN BUT BECAUSE HE, BEING THE SON OF GOD WAS ABLE TO DIE & RISE AGAIN! THE MESSAGE OF EASTER PROCLAIMS, "**DIE WE MUST BUT DEATH IS NOT FINAL!**" JESUS SHOWS US THE WAY! JESUS IS IN CHARGE OF OUR LIVING & OUR DYING & OUR RESURRECTION. JESUS PIONEERED THE RESURRECTION EVENT - SHOWED US - WE CAN DO THAT TOO.

FINALLY, WE CELEBRATE THIS DAY BECAUSE THE EMPTY TOMB PROCLAIMS THAT **WE ARE NOT ALONE** IN OUR EARTHLY LIFE. JESUS SAID, "I AM WITH YOU TO THE END OF THE AGES." THE RESURRECTED LORD IS **WITH US ALWAYS**. COMPASSIONATE CHRIST WALKS WITH US EVERY DAY & ALL THE WAY. HE IS ALIVE EVER MORE - WHEN CLOUDY SKIES BLOCK OUR VISION - WHEN THE NIGHT BECOMES TOO DARK - WHEN WE BECOME AFRAID OR HURT - WHEN WE ARE TIRED & LONELY - IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS & TRIBULATIONS - IN OUR JOYS & HAPPINESS. THAT IS WHAT "I AM

WITH YOU ALWAYS” MEANS!

WE NEED NOT BE PERPLEXED & CONFUSED LIKE THOSE FIRST DISCIPLES ON THE FIRST EASTER MORN. THEY SAW THE EMPTY TOMB BUT DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO. WE KNOW WHAT TO DO. THE LORD HAS SHOWN US WHAT TO DO. HIS PERFECT LOVE IS A FORCE & POWER THAT CANNOT BE KILLED & BURIED. IT BREAKS FORTH TO ROLL AWAY THE HEAVIEST ROCK OF HATE, VIOLENCE & PREJUDICE, ANY EVIL FORCE. WE CAN BE HAPPY, FULFILLED PEO WHEN THE LOVE OF THE RESURRECTED LORD TAKES UP RESIDENCE IN US - WE ARE ALIVE - THOUGH ONCE DEAD. JESUS LIVES FOREVER IN US - HAPPY EASTER & GOD BLESS EACH OF YOU!