

"THE HEART OF EASTER"

What is the heart of the Easter message? It is that Christ...hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Tim.1:10). This note of triumph and victory needs to be sound ed throughout the world today.

In the Christian faith we find victory at Easter and on every occasion when the Christian triumphs in Christ. Those who minister to the bereaved and who conduct memorial services for the departed know what this means. Some families smile through the tears, others sob and have broken hearts as though they cannot go on in life. Without faith in the resurrection they are stunned and uncertain; but with faith they have an overcoming joy.

This Easter we are reminded again that Christ has taken away the power of death. Victory over death, that last enemy of the soul, is the most wonderful claim that was ever made.

The cynic scornfully derides the victory as false as he points to war and bloodshed. The pessimist cries out against such a view as he broods over the darkenss and despair of multitudes. The stoic refutes this event as he urges men to endure and have courage in the midst of life's trials. And many who walk amid the ruins of humanity are not certain that it is true.

When children dig in the sand on the seashore, they make a hole into which the tide comes. When the waves come in, the hole is engulfed; it is swallowed up by the ocean. So death is overwhelmed by the love and grace of God. Death is swallowed up in victory in Christ.

Death is an incident, not an end. It is a transition experience for a Christian, not a terminus. In death we are freed from much that burdens us here. The outward tent of the body is laid aside and the spirit finds release from every cramping, limiting, earthly thing.

Because Christ has tasted death for us, victory over death is offered to all who know and love him and accept him as Savior. For centuries people have viewed death as an experience of darkness. Christ has turned the light on it. Bringing it to light means that he has illumined it by the disclosures he made. He has told us that because he is risen, we too can rise. We are promised an incorruptible and unchanging life for eternity.

Even in the Old Testament the hope is offered that there is something beyond the prison house of the grave. But except for Job who spoke of his Savior as "living" (Job 19:25), there is never the offer of the fullness of faith as there is in Christ. It was the coming of Christ which was decisive. He drew aside the curtain and revealed something of the glory beyond death. He testified to the entire world that those who die may live.

Jesus Christ is the Master Light who points our way through "the valley of the shadow of death." (Ps 23:4). Our lives are filled with suffering, mysteries and enigmas; we have tangles and problems, and sometimes life seems to have no meaning or purpose. The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes the interpretation of human experience. He gives a purpose and perspective to life. From God's divine plan and purpose, a perfect pattern is found. God is not the God of the dead but of the living, and beyond death there is spiritual reality in eternity.

Those who die in Christ and know his redeeming grace have the certainty of life everlasting. All work and service in life is preliminary, partial and incomplete. In Christ is the completeness of expression and fullness of life such as we have never known here.

Your life may be monotonous and filled with drudgery. Yet remember, you are not working for an hour or for a day, but for eternity. When this body of corruption shall take on immortality, another part of our work will begin, for the Scripture teaches that his servant shall serve him forever.

Some time ago a man said to a minister, "You might be mistaken, for no one has ever come back from the grave to tell us."

The minister replied, "Sir, that's exactly where you are wrong. Someone has returned... his name is Jesus Christ, our Lord."

His death wasn't the end, as his enemies thought. He rose again from the dead, and the resurrection is the best attested and accredited fact of history. Because he lives, we shall live also. I am looking forward to living forever.

The resurrection is the foundation that guarantees life eternal to all who believe. We do not worship a dead Christ. We do not go on a pilgrimage to his tomb every year. He is a living Person. He is the Christ of the ages, the Christ of history, the Christ of experience, the Christ who is the object of our worship. His presence is ours during these perilous days in which we live. We are worshipping a risen Christ who rose from the dead. The resurrection is the one hope of the world. The proclamation of this message offers the greatest dynamic and power for life. This message has changed and transformed life, character and destiny. When we heed it, we are never again the same.

In Christ alone is found salvation. The crux of Christinity is the resurrection. If we give up our belief in the resurrection, we give up all Christianity. The reason Paul was beaten and imprisoned was that He preached the resurrection. The Gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no Gospel without a belief in the resurrection.

God raised Jesus Christ from the dead as proof that he had accepted the atoning work of Christ on the cross. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, Paul said that we would have been yet in our sins, and our faith would have been in vain. (1 Cor. 15:17). Jesus was raised for our justification, and because he lives, we who trust in him shall live also.

The resurrection of Christ means further that the moral life of man cannot achieve eternity destiny. Religion, culture and morality have their place in life, but in themselves they have no redeeming power of grace. Christ is the King of the cross. He sounds the trumpet blast of victory. Sin has been defeated and the terror of death has been removed forever from all who will put themselves in his trust and align themselves with his victory.

Have you surrendered your will and your heart to him? Have you entered into his resurrection by faith? The victory won by the cross and the resurrection is offered to you who will submit and believe: "Christ...hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Tim. 1:10).

We declare the resurrection as the most amazing and transforming factor of human history. Christ is alive forever more! Jesus was dead that day when they took him down from the cross and put him in a borrowed tomb; but Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had promised that he would rise again on the third day. The women made their way to the tomb that first Easter morning at sunrise to anoint a dead body. But they saw instead the angel of the Lord at the tomb. Inside, the grave clothes were folded neatly.

The angel gave the greatest message and the greatest news the world has ever known: "He is not here: for he is risen." (Matt. 28:6).

Christ is risen! What a message to give to a weary, disillusioned world! What a message to give to discouraged, frustrated men and women! What a message to give to a warring world!

Right now, by faith, you can accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You can know forgiveness and new life. You can have peace of soul and peace of conscience that Christ gives.