

Easter Pastoral Letter 2020

When considering the dark days in which we live, it seems most appropriate to meditate on the narratives the gospels provide on what we call Good Friday. For certainly those disciples who had followed the Lord Jesus for three years were helpless to understand, yet alone try to explain what was happening to Jesus. As darkness literally descended over the land, even though it was only midday, their hearts and minds must have been full of dark thoughts and forebodings as, despite Jesus' warnings, they could see no light at the end of the tunnel, only failure and deep disappointment.

If we were meeting at the chapel this Friday, we would read a number of passages from any of the four gospels and I would give a short address from one before we shared the Lord's Supper together. Can I suggest that you read **John chapter 19** all the way through, but let me just point you to **verse 30** and the simple cry of the Lord Jesus, 'It is finished', as he bowed his head and gave up his spirit to his Father. Despite what a few liberal theologians will say, this was not a cry of defeat, but the cry of the perfect God-man who was completing, with joy, even in the midst of great suffering, the work that the Father had given Him and he had willingly assumed from all eternity. This was no less than the saving of a people from every tribe and nation to be a holy bride for the Son to the glory of God, and to bring all things together in Christ Jesus when he returns in power and glory. When, from the human perspective of the disciples, all seemed lost and darkness had prevailed, the Lord Jesus had gloriously triumphed over all our enemies and won the ultimate victory for us. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

It is finished the Messiah dies, cut off for sins, but not his own;

Completed is the sacrifice, the great redeeming work is done:

Yes, finished! All the debt is paid, justice divine is satisfied,

The grand and full atonement made; God for a guilty world has died!

Let us pray together the words we often use at the communion table:

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden; Cleanse the thought of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In our prayers let us remember:

Our Government and all those in the health and care services.

In particular, please pray for the staff at Beechmore Court as it appears that a resident returning from hospital may have brought the virus into the home. Many care homes in Bromley, as well as elsewhere, face similarly difficult circumstances

Thank God that Henderson is recovering well from illness, and that Lynette has had great news after her surgery. We praise God for His care of his people

Minister: Christ is risen!

Response: Alleluia!

Minister: The Lord is risen!

Response: He is risen indeed!

While Christ's atoning work was completed on the cross and the victory over sin, death and the devil triumphantly accomplished, the disciples were still in fear and darkness and so would we be if Christ had not been raised from the dead and ascended to the Father to reign in power and glory. Let me wish you all a Happy Easter and, despite our circumstances, may we know the joy of the Lord, and sing praises in our hearts with thanksgiving.

I would suggest that our reading for Easter is **Matthew 28.1-15**. Matthew writes about events that the other gospels do not, such as the raising of some of the saints, the earthquakes and the cover up of the role of the guard and the fake news regarding the disciples stealing the body of Jesus.

Why does Matthew relate these events while the other gospels do not? We cannot be absolutely sure, but Matthew is writing to Jews perhaps in the region of Jerusalem many of whom would have heard rumours of these events or even witnessed some of them and so He wants to set the record straight.

Some quick thoughts:

- Notice the difference in the fear and terror that freezes the unbelieving guard and the righteous fear accompanied with joy of the women after being told by the angel that Jesus had risen.
- The reminder of the angel that the other gospels emphasise that this was ‘just as He told you’. When we disregard, forget or disobey the words of God, we always miss out on blessing.
- The women meet Jesus and fall at his feet in worship, just as Thomas was to do a week later. The resurrection clarifies for his followers that this Jesus of Nazareth is both Lord and Saviour, both God and man, and therefore, for strongly monotheistic Jews, it was both right and proper to worship Him as God.
- Notice the love and care of the Lord Jesus for those disciples who had deserted him just days before as He calls them brothers. The wonder of the gospel is that lost sinners, when they repent and believe, become brothers of, and joint heirs with, the Lord of Glory.
- Lastly the authorities put their cover-up into operation, but the truth will always come out - if not in this life, then definitely on the Last Day.

Kevin