

Psalm 30:1-12 and Luke 24:1-12 “Because He Lives”

IN THE CLOSING WORDS OF PSALM 30, WE CAN HEAR WORDS THAT PROCLAIM THEME OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION: “YOU HAVE TURNED MY MOURNING INTO DANCING; YOU HAVE TAKEN OFF MY SACKCLOTH AND CLOTHED ME WITH JOY, SO THAT MY SOUL MAY PRAISE YOU AND NOT BE SILENT. O LORD MY GOD, I WILL GIVE THANKS TO YOU FOREVER.”

THE SONG: BECAUSE HE LIVES- BY THE GAITHERS, EXPRESSES THIS THEME IN ITS OWN BEAUTIFUL WAY:

GOD SENT HIS SON, THEY CALLED HIM JESUS.
HE CAME TO LOVE, HEAL, AND FORGIVE.
HE LIVED AND DIED TO BUY MY PARDON
AN EMPTY GRAVE IS THERE TO PROVE MY SAVIOR LIVES.

BECAUSE HE LIVES, I CAN FACE TOMORROW
BECAUSE HE LIVES, ALL FEAR IS GONE
BECAUSE I KNOW HE HOLDS THE FUTURE
AND LIFE IS WORTH THE LIVING, JUST BECAUSE HE LIVES

AND THEN ONE DAY I’LL CROSS THE RIVER, I’LL FIGHT LIFE’S FINAL WAR WITH PAIN.
AND THEN, AS DEATH GIVES WAY TO VICTORY I’LL SEE THE LIGHTS OF GLORY AND I’LL KNOW HE REIGNS.

BECAUSE HE LIVES, I CAN FACE TOMORROW. BECAUSE HE LIVES ALL FEAR IS GONE.
BECAUSE I KNOW HE HOLDS THE FUTURE,
AND LIFE IS WORTH THE LIVING JUST BECAUSE HE LIVES.

OF COURSE, MOST PEOPLE WOULD SAY THAT LIFE IS WORTH LIVING ANYWAY. AND ACTUALLY THE REAL POINT OF THE SONG’S MESSAGE ABOUT CHRIST’S RESURRECTION IS TO TELL US BECAUSE HE LIVES –WE DO NOT HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL WE GET TO HEAVEN TO BE BLESSED, BUT WE HAVE THE CHANCE FOR ABUNDANT LIFE NOW.

JESUS’ LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION SHOW THOSE WITH THE WILLINGNESS TO SEE HOW MUCH GOD LOVES THE WORLD, AND ESPECIALLY MAN AND WOMAN WHO ARE MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE. THE RESURRECTION ALSO GIVES US THE ASSURANCE THAT WHEN WE FAIL TO LIVE AS GOD COMMANDS, WHEN WE FAIL MISERABLY TO BE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS-THERE IS HOPE.

JESUS REDEEMS US FROM SIN AND THUS ENABLES US TO TRY AGAIN WITHOUT FEAR THAT OUR EFFORTS WILL BE IN VAIN. JUST AS IMPORTANTLY THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS MAKES OUR FAITH POSSIBLE, BECAUSE IF HE IS NOT RISEN THERE IS NO BASIS FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

A FORMER SEMINARY PROFESSOR OF MINE SAID THIS CONCERNING THE IMPACT OF EASTER MORNING AND THE MESSAGE THE WOMEN DELIVERED TO PETER AND THE OTHERS. “... WHEN THE WOMAN CAME BACK FROM THE CEMETERY ON EASTER MORNING, THEY BROUGHT BACK ASTONISHING NEWS: ‘HE IS RISEN’. ALL CHRISTIAN PREACHING BEGINS HERE, AND ALL CHRISTIAN SERMONS ARE REVERBERATIONS OF THIS EASTER NEWS, FIRST ANNOUNCED BY THE WOMEN TO THE APOSTLES.”

THE APOSTLE PAUL PUT IT MORE FORCEFULLY, WRITING TO THE CORINTHIANS: “IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD, OUR PREACHING IS IN VAIN AND SO IS YOUR FAITH.”

THESE WORDS EMPHASIZE THAT IT IS NOT ONLY BECAUSE THE TOMB WAS EMPTY THAT OUR FAITH HAS MEANING, BUT THE **REASON** WHY JESUS’ BODY WAS NOT IN THE TOMB. THE ANGELS INFORMED THE WOMEN OF THAT REASON SAYING: “WHY DO YOU SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? HE IS NOT HERE, HE HAS RISEN.”

THEN THEY REMINDED THE WOMEN ABOUT WHAT JESUS SAID BEFORE HIS DEATH; THAT HE WOULD DIE AND BE RAISED TO LIFE AGAIN. YES INDEED, JESUS TOLD HIS FOLLOWERS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN, BUT THEY NEITHER EXPECTED HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS, NOR LOOKED FOR HIS IMMEDIATE RESURRECTION. CONSEQUENTLY NO ONE EXPECTED TO FIND THE TOMB EMPTY, AND THEY ESPECIALLY DID NOT EXPECT TO SEE JESUS ALIVE AGAIN.

THIS IS WHY THE WOMEN WERE VIEWED AS BEING DELUSIONAL. YOU SEE, THE GREEK WORD, TRANSLATED AS "IDLE", MEANS DELIRIOUS, THUS INDICATING THEY THOUGHT THE WOMEN WERE IMAGING THINGS.

IT WAS ONLY AFTER THEY HAD SEEN JESUS PHYSICALLY APPEAR TO THEM THAT THE DISCIPLES BELIEVED. BUT IT WAS BECAUSE THEY SAW JESUS ALIVE THAT THEY WERE ABLE TO FACE THE FUTURE. REMEMBER THEIR HOPES AND DREAMS HAD BEEN SHATTERED AT HIS DEATH. AND JESUS' RESURRECTION DID NOT BRING BACK WHAT HIS DEATH DESTROYED.

INSTEAD THE DISCIPLES AND OTHER FOLLOWERS WERE GIVEN A NEW A FUTURE AND A LIVING HOPE BY CHRIST'S RESURRECTION. PETER WROTE THOSE WORDS YEARS LATER, BUT BEFORE WRITING HE DELIVERED THE FIRST SERMON ON PENTECOST TO HIS FELLOW JEWS WHO WERE NOT FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

PETER PROCLAIMED TO THEM THE MEANING OF JESUS' DEATH AND THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION. AND AT THE HEART OF HIS WORDS TO THE CROWD WAS THE EASTER PROCLAMATION: "THE LORD IS RISEN, HE IS RISEN INDEED."

AND BECAUSE HE LIVES- LIFE HAS NEW MEANING FOR ALL WHO COME TO FAITH IN HIM. TRULY OUR FAITH IS NOTHING WITHOUT THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD.

THE BASIS FOR OUR FAITH WOULD BE LIKE THE EARTH WITHOUT THE S-U-N, IT WOULD NOT EXIST. THE EPISTLE OF 1 PETER DESCRIBES THE POWER OF THE S-O-N RISE, SAYING: "BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. BY HIS GREAT MERCY HE HAS GIVEN US A NEW BIRTH INTO A LIVING HOPE THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS FROM THE DEAD."

THE LETTER GOES ON TO DESCRIBE THAT BECAUSE JESUS LIVES THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM HAVE AN INHERITANCE THAT IS IMPERISHABLE, UNDEFILED, UNFADING, AND KEPT IN HEAVEN. THE MEANING OF THOSE WORDS IS THAT THERE IS NO POWER ANYWHERE THAT CAN DESTROY THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

INDEED THE LIGHT OF THE S-U-N CAN BE ECLIPSED, BUT NOT THE LIGHT OF JESUS OUR RISEN SAVIOR. TRULY THIS IS REASON TO REJOICE AND GIVE THANKS, ON THIS SPECIAL DAY. HOWEVER, WHILE WE CELEBRATE EASTER ON ONE PARTICULAR SUNDAY EACH YEAR, LET US REMEMBER THIS IS NOT JUST AN ANNUAL HOLY DAY.

INSTEAD LET US NEVER FORGET THAT WE WHO ARE CHRISTIAN ACTUALLY **LIVE** IN THE LIGHT OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION EVERYDAY. YES BECAUSE HE LIVES, WE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN JESUS PHYSICALLY LIVE IN A HOPE BASED ON FAITH.

THIS FAITH CAN AT TIMES BE SHAKEN, IT MIGHT EVEN SEEM FOR SOME TO BE LOST, BUT IT IS AN IMPERISHABLE HOPE. A HOPE THAT REMINDS US TO PRAISE THE LORD AND GIVE HIM THANKS EVERYDAY.

THERE IS A STORY THAT MAY HELP TO ILLUSTRATE THIS POINT: AN ELDERLY WOMAN HAD THE DAILY HABIT OF BEGINNING EACH DAY BY GOING OUT ON HER FRONT PORCH AND LOUDLY PRAYING: "PRAISE THE LORD," SHE HAD ONLY ONE NEIGHBOR WITH A HOUSE CLOSE TO HERS, AND HER MORNING RITUAL WAS NEVER A PROBLEM FOR THEM. BUT WHEN THEY MOVED AND A NEW NEIGHBOR MOVED IN, HE WAS NOT HAPPY WITH THE WOMAN.

HOWEVER IT WAS NOT THE NOISE THAT DISTURBED HIM, BUT WHAT SHE SAID. HE WAS AN ATHEIST AND THE WOMAN'S WORDS REALLY ANNOYED HIM. WHEN SHE WOULD NOT CEASE BEING SO VOCAL THE MAN TOOK ACTION. EVERY MORNING ABOUT THE SAME TIME AS THE WOMAN PRAYED, HE SHOUTED A REPLY- "THERE IS NO LORD, NO GOD."

THIS WENT ON FOR A LONG TIME, UNTIL ONE DAY THE WOMAN ADDED A REQUEST ALONG WITH HER PRAISE- SHE TOLD GOD THAT SHE HAD NO FOOD AND PRAYED HE WOULD PROVIDE HER WITH SOME. THIS GAVE THE ATHEIST AN IDEA. HE WENT TO THE STORE AND BOUGHT HER SEVERAL BAGS OF GROCERIES.

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, BEFORE THE WOMAN CAME OUTSIDE, HE PLACED THEM ON HER PORCH. SHE PRAISED AS GOD AS USUAL, AND THEN ADDED THANKS FOR PROVIDING HER WITH FOOD. AFTER SHE SPOKE THE ATHEIST CALLED OUT TO HER- "THERE IS NO GOD, I PROVIDED THE FOOD." THE WOMAN RESPONDED WITH ANOTHER PRAYER: "PRAISE THE LORD, HE HAS PROVIDED ME WITH GROCERIES AND MADE THE DEVIL PAY FOR THEM."

NOW WHILE IMPLYING HER NEIGHBOR WAS ACTING FOR THE DEVIL MAY NOT HAVE BEEN APPROPRIATE, THE POINT IS HER FAITH WAS NOT SHAKEN. SHE UNDERSTOOD GOD'S PROVISION MOST OFTEN COMES THROUGH WORLDLY RESOURCES- THAT IS OTHER PEOPLE. AND WHILE NOT INTENDING TO, AND IN SPITE OF HIS MOTIVES, THE ATHEIST WAS DOING GOD'S WORK BY HELPING THE WOMAN. THE PRAYER OF THANKS SHOWED SHE RECOGNIZED THIS AND WAS GRATEFUL TO THE LORD.

HERE WE ARE REMINDED THAT OUR FAITH IN CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND ITS MEANING IS NOT SOMETHING WE CAN PROVE TO AN UNBELIEVING WORLD. OUR ROLE IS NOT TO CONVINCe ANYONE, BUT RATHER TO LIVE OUT AND PROCLAIM OUR FAITH, AND TO PLACE THE RESULTS IN GOD'S HANDS. WE HAVE HOPE THAT OUR PROCLAMATION WILL BEAR FRUIT BECAUSE GOD HAS SHOWN BY RAISING JESUS TO LIFE AGAIN THAT GOD HAS THE FINAL WORD ABOUT EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE.

LISTEN NOW TO PART OF THE LYRICS OF AN INSPIRATIONAL EASTER HYMN, BY CHARLES WESLEY, WHICH REMINDS US OF THIS VERY THING.

"CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY, ALLELUIA.
ALL CREATION JOIN TO SAY, ALLELUIA.

RAISE YOUR JOYS AND TRIUMPHS HIGH, ALLELUIA.
SING O HEAVENS AND EARTH REPLY, ALLELUIA.

LOVE'S REDEEMING WORK IS DONE, ALLELUIA.
FOUGHT THE FIGHT, THE BATTLE'S WON, ALLELUIA.

DEATH IN VAIN FORBIDS HIM RISE, ALLELUIA.
CHRIST HAS OPENED PARADISE, ALLELUIA."

LET US PRAY: ETERNAL AND MERCIFUL GOD, WE REJOICE THAT THE GRAVE COULD NOT HOLD YOUR SON, AND THAT HE HAS CONQUERED SIN AND DEATH, AND RISEN TO RULE OVER ALL POWERS OF THIS EARTH. WE PRAISE YOU THAT JESUS SUMMONS US INTO NEW LIFE IN HIM, TO FOLLOW WHERE HE LEADS US. BY YOUR SPIRIT, LIFT US FROM DOUBTS AND FEARS, DESPAIR AND SORROW, AND SET US IN CHRIST'S HOLY WAY, THAT OUR LIVES MAY BE SIGNS OF HIS LIFE. BECAUSE HE LIVES, WE GIVE THANKS WE LIVE EACH DAY IN THE LIGHT OF HIS RESURRECTION. HELP US, WE PRAY, TO REMEMBER THIS AND TO SHOW FORTH HIS LOVE. ALL PRAISE AND GLORY AND HONOR BE TO YOU O GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER, WHO WITH THE RISEN CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT LIVE AND REIGN NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN