

Easter Sunday, 2007

We have been looking at the 3 resurrection miracles that Jesus performed during his public ministry during these past Sunday mornings. We have already seen Christ's raising the 12 year old daughter of Jairus, the only son of a widow in Nain and his close friend Lazarus from the dead. Now on this Easter Sunday morning, we want to look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ himself. And to help us, we are going to interview one of the 3 people who witnessed the other 3 resurrection miracles who also was an eye-witnesses to the resurrected Christ. His name was Simon Peter. He was one of Jesus' disciples. We know that Peter believed that Jesus rose from the dead because of the dramatic change that that event had on his life. Before Christ's resurrection, Peter was more interested in what he could see physically. He was convinced that Jesus had come to set up an earthly kingdom, and he wanted a prominent place in it. Power, authority, riches, certainly these would bring inner peace and joy. And that was one of the reasons why Peter along with the other disciples deserted Jesus as Christ went to the cross of Calvary. Their expectations were shattered, hopes were dashed- there would be no kingdom, no power, no honor for them. They had wasted the last 3 years of their lives.

But then, one event turned Peter's thoughts and life around. That was the event that we celebrate this morning- the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the tomb. No, Peter did not actually see him rise from the dead- nobody did. But Peter had seen him go to the cross. Now Peter saw him alive again. And Peter believed that Jesus had risen from the tomb with his whole heart. He believed to the point where it affected his life and changed him forever.

Listen to Peter's commentary on what the resurrection of Jesus Christ meant to him from chapter 1 verses 3-9 of the first epistle that he wrote:

1PE 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you . . . In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.⁷ These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Peter, why is the resurrection so important to you? Why has it changed your life so much? Why are you so different now?

Well, quite frankly, Christ's resurrection was the guarantee to me that I had truly been born again into the

family of God. "In his great mercy he has given me new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".

You see, when Jesus taught us while he was here with us on the earth, he told us many wonderful and marvelous truths. But among the most incredible was the fact that he was the embodiment of life itself. "I am the way, the truth and the life", he once said. Jesus told us that he had always lived, and that he would never die. "Before Abraham was born, I am" he once said to a group of people. These people didn't believe him, because those statements frankly seemed to be too incredible. They even tried to kill him for blaspheming against God and the great prophets of the past. But we, his disciples, had believed those words- that somehow, he had existed throughout the eternities past as the son of God. And the way that Jesus escaped the clutches of those who were trying to kill him time and time again just seemed to confirm to us what he was proclaiming concerning himself.

Jesus promised to give this everlasting life to us. He told us that the one who believed on him would have eternal life, that he would be born again into the family of God. We believed him, and even left our jobs to follow him. We were convinced that he had given to us eternal life, that we would never die.

But then when Jesus was finally arrested, and when he was sentenced to death, and when he was finally crucified on the cross, all of his words seemed to become so empty. How could he die if he had lived throughout all eternity past with his father in heaven? How could he be the embodiment of life as we witnessed it oozing out of him on that Roman cross? And what about this eternal life that he had given to us? If he, the one who claimed to be the way, the truth and the life, had died, what hope did we have of obtaining everlasting life? All of us disciples had become very discouraged and depressed following that crucifixion. We had hoped against hope right up until the time of his execution that he would somehow save himself. I had even tried to help him escape the Roman soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane. But it seemed to be of no use. The one who had claimed to be life had now died, and with his death, his claims now had a hollow ring.

Then when we heard that Jesus had risen from the tomb, at first, we couldn't believe it. But as we saw his resurrected body ourselves, and as we reflected upon his former teachings to us, all of the pieces of the puzzle began to fit together. He had to go to the cross as the perfect sacrifice to pay for our sins so that we could stand righteous before God. And his death was actually beneficial because it gave an opportunity for him to prove that he really was the life. Death could not hold him in its grip. No, Jesus Christ as the life rose from that tomb and in his resurrection conquered sin and death. Ever since that day, I have never again questioned whether he has given to me a new birth and the eternal life that goes with it. I know that I have been born again into eternal life because Jesus has conquered death in his resurrection. Nobody ever rose from the dead by his own power before. If Jesus could do that, certainly he will be able to raise me from the dead after I die so that I might be able to have eternal life in heaven with him.

2. Well, that's wonderful Peter. We can see how the resurrection of Jesus was important to you to confirm

Christ's teachings concerning the new birth. But is that all that the resurrection means to you? Why has your life changed so dramatically and why are you now working so hard to tell others about Jesus?

Well, you see, so many other truths that Christ had taught became clear to my mind after Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus had taught us that the kingdom of heaven had come, and that he was the promised Messiah from God. Well, we were so excited when we heard that because we had been taught about this great deliverer whom God had promised and we were anxiously awaiting his arrival to free our nation from the Roman oppression. And when Jesus performed all of his miracles, especially the miracles that had been promised by the O.T. prophets that the Messiah himself would perform, we became convinced that He really was the Messiah sent from God. After all, I saw with my own eyes him healing those who were blind, strengthening the legs of those who were lame so that they could walk again, unstopping the ears of the deaf, even raising Jairus' daughter, the widow's son and Lazarus back to life.

Well, when he promised to make us rulers with him in his kingdom, we just got more and more excited. To gain an inheritance in the Messianic kingdom was more than we could have ever hoped for in life. I remember the many times when we disciples would just be sitting around together imagining the positions that we would have in Christ's kingdom. Sometimes we even argued a little bit about jobs that we wanted or thought that we deserved. But we all were excited about the prospects, for we were convinced that he was the Messiah sent from God and we had left everything to follow him. We knew that our inheritance was going to be really something, and we were looking forward to that time when we would begin to rule over the Romans. And Jesus was gaining in popularity every day- certainly, it wouldn't be long before the revolution would take place.

But then when he was arrested and executed, all of our hopes seemed to crumble and fall. We felt so foolish. We had actually believed that our little band following the Messiah could overthrow the mighty Roman government. But now reality struck us, we realized that the situation was hopeless. We had left everything for what? For nothing, that's what. So some of us decided to go back and try to pick up the pieces of our former fishing occupation. There would be no revolution, there would be no kingdom, there would be no inheritance.

But after the resurrection, we realized that we had misunderstood the nature of the inheritance that Jesus had promised to us. It was through the resurrection that I realized that the inheritance that Jesus had promised was one that would never perish, one that would never spoil or fade- one that was kept in heaven for me. It was not a mere earthly inheritance that Jesus was promising to us, one that would last for a while and then just fade away like any earthly empire. No, Christ's invitation was to become part of God's heavenly family. As a child of the King of the Universe I would become an heir to his eternal, heavenly kingdom. You ask why my life has changed so dramatically and why I am working so hard telling others about the good news of the Messiah's coming? I have been given a new birth into the family of God and a glorious inheritance that comes with being a child of the King, and I am working to build up an even greater inheritance, one that will never perish, one kept in heaven for me.

3. Well, Peter, we can certainly see how important the resurrection was in your life. We can see how it

assured you of your new birth into the family of God and how it confirmed that inheritance that Jesus the Messiah had promised to you. As you reflect back upon that resurrection, it certainly must bring great joy to your heart.

You can't even imagine the joy that it brings to my heart. I remember one time in particular, just after Jesus rose from the tomb. We were still somewhat confused, and hadn't put all of the pieces of the puzzle back together in our minds. We didn't know exactly what we were going to do in the future, so had gone back to our former occupation- fishing. But we were out of practice. We had labored all night, but had caught nothing at all. And now, as dawn was just beginning to lift the cloak of darkness from off of the Sea of Galilee, we were preparing to go back to shore in defeat. The time for good fishing had passed; we would just have to try again another night.

But then we heard a voice calling from the shore. "Friends, have you caught any fish?" "No", we answered somewhat irritably. What business what it of his anyway. "Well, throw your net down on the right side of the boat and you will find some."

I don't know why we did it; the time for good fishing was past. But there was something about the way he said those words; an authority in his voice. When we threw the net into the water, we immediately knew that we had hit a school of fish. Later we would actually count the fish- 153 of them.

John said- "it's the Lord". We still couldn't see him clearly because there wasn't enough light, but I agreed that it had to be him, for he was the only one that I knew who could perform this kind of miracle.

I couldn't help myself. I was so filled with joy that I jumped right into the water and began to swim to shore. I just couldn't wait for the boat to make its way in slowly dragging all those fish in the net. What a thrill it was to see the resurrected Savior! What joy it brought to my heart! I'll never forget the thrill of that morning. And the most amazing thing is that the joy of the resurrected Lord has never left me. It is as great today as it was that morning.

Now I know that there are going to be some difficult days ahead for me. Jesus told me that morning that I was going to die a martyr's death. And I anticipate persecution and suffering to come my way in life even before that time. But the joy is still there. Because I saw Jesus suffer and die, and I know that he will give me the strength I need when my time comes. And I also know that the sufferings of this life can make me a better person, like gold refined in the fire. So my heart has been filled with joy- ever since I realized that Jesus really did rise again from the dead.

Like Peter, we can also have assurance of our new birth into the family of God because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We can also have the confidence of an inheritance in heaven, an inheritance worthy of those who have been born again into the family of God. These truths can bring a great and lasting joy into our hearts, a joy that is able to endure the temporary sufferings of our earthly existence. Listen to Peter's own words again in conclusion.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil

or fade- kept in heaven for you. . . In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." I Peter 1:3-9