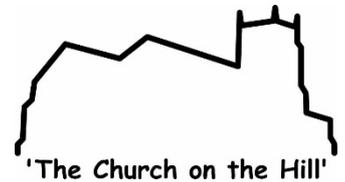


EASTER MESSAGE 2020

In Old testament times God's people were always separated from Him. He spoke to them through visions and prophecies, and even at such times as the transfiguration He still hid in the cloud.



The Ark of the Covenant was kept in the most inner part of the Temple, in the Holy of Holies, separated from the sight of the people by a thick curtain. Only one priest – chosen by lot – was able to enter for one day, once a year to pray for God's forgiveness for the sins of the whole nation.

Such was the reverence and separation, and such was the burden of prayer that there was always a possibility that the priest would be exhausted and faint. To avoid anyone having to go to his aid by going beyond the curtain a rope was attached to him, by which he could be pulled from behind the curtain if necessary.

There was no other direct access to God.

When Jesus cried out His last words on the cross "it is finished", it was not because his earthly life was finished, it was not because God had given up on mankind, it was not because Jesus had given up on the pain and suffering, it was because sin had been defeated, Satan's power was finished, the barrier between God and mankind was finished, destroyed, by Jesus' death and eventual resurrection. At that point the curtain in the temple – which had separated mankind from God - was literally torn in two. The way to God was open to everyone who accepted Jesus as Saviour. The work of redemption was finished, death was no longer the end but a step along the way to eternal life.

Yet, ever since the very first day of the resurrection the truth of the resurrection has been challenged and doubted by so many. Time and again people have denied it. Time and again scholars have tried to prove it never happened.

Frank Morrison did not believe in the resurrection and he set out to prove "once and for all" that it was a myth and began research for his book "Who moved the stone?"**

The more research he carried out, the deeper his enquiries, the more he realized that there was only one explanation for the resurrection – that it was the truth. In his own words "one day I discovered that not only could I no longer write the book as I had conceived it but would not if I could". Morrison became a believer.

The resurrection is the bedrock of our faith. If we do not accept it, then our faith is groundless, we are left lost and wandering, far away from an ever loving, forgiving God, denying the only way to eternal life.

Jesus' death and resurrection was a gift of love from God. We believe in a God who is just and perfect, a God who cannot live beside sin, yet we as sinners can now come to Him and know Him. This is only possible because God placed all our sins – my sin, your sin – on Jesus on the cross. Jesus paid the price for our sins and then rose sinless to give us a way to eternal life, and although that way is a free gift it was not cheap. It was bought for each one of us by the precious blood, sweat and tears of a loving Saviour.

If we accept Jesus as Saviour, if we accept God's free gift of eternal life, one day we will share with Him in the glory of the second coming.

It is important though that we do not sit back and do nothing in our Christian lives. It is a journey we share together and one on which we must always be alert and ready because no one knows when that day will come. We are warned that there will be tough times, difficulties, destruction and persecution and through this we will need the support and prayers of each other and especially at this time with the pandemic sweeping around the world there are many many people serving others in selfless ways that need our prayer and support.

We must never forget that whatever is happening around us, just as God was in control throughout the passion, death and resurrection, so He is in control today. Jesus is Lord and with His Father He is Lord over the financial world and all other sectors of our society. We are where God has put us, to be salt and light in the community, in our homes, our workplace in everything we do, bringing hope and encouragement in dark and difficult times. Even as we observe the strict rules quite rightly placed on our lives we should begin each day asking God what He wants us to do in His name, and then carry it through, rejoicing in the surety of knowing and being known by an ever loving God and Father.

More than ever, in these difficult days, the message of the resurrection is one of hope and joy, a certain promise of eternal life for all who believe. As we journey through these times together let us not forget that our God is a mighty God who is still in control and will not let us fall.

I share with you the words of Paul in his second epistle to the Thessalonians (chapter 3 verse 16):

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you”.

I wish everyone a blessed Easter and peace and good health in the days to come

Allen

*** Who Moved the Stone – Frank Morrison Published 1987 by Zondervan Academic (first published 1930)*