

## Sermon: A Death that brought New Life

Scripture: Matt 28:1-10, 2 Cor 4:8-10

Sunday, March 27, 2016

These are the facts as recorded in the Bible. Jesus of Nazareth who proclaimed himself as the Messiah, the IAM, which is Jewish culture would be understood to be God himself and the only way to God, who had thousands of followers, who entered Jerusalem like a triumphant king, then through a series of events saw a remarkable set of reversals. First his followers began to drop and not just go all the way down to zero but the vast majority turned against him, his closest 12 denied him and one of the 12 sold him. So from a social standing of a king he was reduced to someone who everyone wanted to disassociate themselves from. You see Jesus had tremendous power but he refused to use it at that moment. But because he did not use it even those who wanted to believe in Jesus were perplexed and thought maybe Jesus is not the Savior they thought he would be. And Jesus had to simply watch his closest friends leave in fear and anguish. Now at the cross Jesus not only had to deal with his closest friends not believing who he said he was, which by the way included even his family and the beloved disciple who was standing around physically but Jesus had to deal with an even greater blow. As the sins of the world piled on top of Him, even God had to look away from Jesus. And he felt no comfort from God's love and towards him. With that level of abandonment, there was one last thing that Jesus still had. He was able to breath. Yes his physical body was close to collapse under the extreme torture of the Roman crucifixion. But the way the Roman crucifixion is designed, it is meant to break down your body systematically till your lungs literally collapsing so that when Jesus said "it is finished", he had given up even his capacity to breath. From the worlds perspective he had given up his achievements, his social standing and respect people had for him, he had given up his family and he had shed all his blood, his body was broken and finally he was unable even to breath. Why do I talk about Christ's death on Easter Sunday. Well, because you cannot understand the magnitude of Resurrection if we do not reflect deeply on Good Friday. So walk with me through the valley of the shadow of death and I assure you that you will have see the joy of the Resurrection in a new way.

Coming back to Good Friday, we also know this. So we know that Christ willingly gave himself to the process of crucifixion. John 10 verses 17 and 18 say, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18" No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to

lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. Now friends when you have hear the Jesus story year after year, it somehow becomes too easy for us to mouth that Jesus gave up his life. But do we really understand what that means. To understand Christ's sacrifice we have to understand human nature a little better and to understand human nature better, I am going to take a little help from a very famous psychologist called Abraham Maslow. And Abraham Maslow's most well-known contribution was this diagram in which he describes what he calls the Hierarchy of human needs from the most basic to the most sublime. And Maslow says that these needs are hierarchical because humans look for satisfaction of these needs in this order. The most basic level of need is the physical, so our needs like air, food, water, sleep, etc. Now once our physical needs are satisfied, we look for the next level which is the need for a safe and stable environment with law and order. Once we have our safety needs met, and we are not constantly worried about people attacking us in some way, then we look for relationships and the need to belong and to love and be loved. Once we have our need for love met then we have a greater need, the need for achievements that are recognized outside our family and friends. Achievements that will be recognized by the larger society. That is the fourth level. Maslow says that once you have recognition beyond your own family and friends, then the next and final level is what he calls "self-actualization" which is a phrase psychologists came up with to describe the deepest level of self-satisfaction that even level 4 cannot give you because it is external. Now Maslow intended spiritual fulfillment to come at level 5. Now when you are someone who already has a strong spiritual component of life, you begin to have questions about this hierarchy or the sequence of satisfaction of these needs, but the 5 categories of the needs itself are valid to all people and that is where Maslow's model is I believe very helpful. So if these are the human needs, then the normal human instinct is to do everything to make sure that we can have these needs satisfied and keep going higher on this pyramid.

Now given that we have a world full of people all jostling to have their needs met, it is no wonder that we have a world full of materialism and power struggles and promises of self-fulfillment. But you have to remember that such a world is a world that completely bypasses God and is not concerned with what God really wants. When you bring Jesus into such a world, what exactly do you get? What you get is that Jesus himself is tempted to the extreme to fall into the "self-centered" Maslow like model of the world. And in fact the three temptations, stone to bread had to do with meeting his physical needs, the jumping of the roof of the temple had to do with testing the depth of his relationship with God the Father, and finally bowing to the devil to receive all the earthly kingdoms had to do with the temptation for human achievement. Bow down to

the temptations of this world and you have instant reward and instant gratification. But here is the other side of the coin. If you do not bow down to this world your human needs might face all kinds of deprivation that is only limited by God Himself whom you have no control over. And in Jesus case God intended the deprivations to go all the way to removing all 5 levels of his needs till all that remained was a dead body. But for Jesus if the price of going against Satan was death, then the reward of going against Satan was the triumph over Satan which brought triumph over sin and triumph even over death! Glory be to our Lord!

Now we turn our attention from our risen Lord to the followers of the Risen Lord. And to help us get there I want you to contemplate for a moment the life of Apostle Paul and he describes it in his second letter to the Corinthians.

Let me first go to this section from chapter 4, reading from verse 8-10. Paul writes,

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. <sup>9</sup>We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. <sup>10</sup>Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

So what you are observing here is a most fascinating phenomenon that would have blown Abraham Maslow's mind if he had dared to study it. Here Apostle Paul is describing his situation and the situation of other persecuted Christians. He says, "we are pressed on every side by troubles", "we are suffering in our bodies", "we are hunted down", "we get knocked down", "we are perplexed" and he even says, "we continue to share in the death of Jesus". And all this willingly. When you look at this list it contains deprivation from the first four levels of Maslow's pyramid.

So now the question is, what happened to Maslow's pyramid and what happened to Paul? How is Paul able to go against everything that Maslow defined as the hierarchy of human needs and still be OK. And the thing is, not just the Apostle Paul but every single Apostle and not just the Apostles, but the faithful in every generation have acted against the way Maslow would have predicted. In the year that Ahia was born, which was also our last year in India, 1999 an incredible Australian missionary family in India, a father and two of his little boys were burnt to death while they slept in their jeep. The missionary was Graham Steins and while most people in the US may not recognize that name, that name would be widely recognized in Hindu India. Their family had left the comforts of Australia to go to relocate to a remote village in India to care for leprosy patients a work they started in 1965. Now these patients were abandoned even by their

own parents in India. What is really remarkable about this story is that even after this horrific killing for her husband and two little sons, Graham's widow Gladys with her daughter returned back to India saying that this is the only home they know and that they are going to continue Graham's work as long as God has called them to it. Where is Abraham Maslow when you need him to explain how anyone can do this?

So what is going on here? Apostle Paul puts it like this, "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. <sup>9</sup>We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. It is almost as if the effect these deprivations have on a normal person does nothing for the believer of the Resurrected Christ. So what does Paul have that gives him this super power? This is what Verse 10 is talking about so let me read this out to you again. Verse 10 says, Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. This really is the key so let me focus on this for a minute. So Paul's explanation for his Maslow immunity is the "resurrected life of Christ Himself" that is now taken over his being. In other words the Resurrection of Christ Jesus actually has two impacts on those who have Christ in them. The first is that when Christ's life is in you and you are engaged in a very challenging situation that includes physical, mental and even spiritual challenges they will not have the same effect on you as someone who does not have Christ's life in them. It is not that you will not feel the pain or the hunger or be perplexed or even sad. Yes you will feel all those things just like everybody else, but all those deprivations will not stop you from fulfilling your God given mission on earth. The second impact of Christ's Resurrection life in you is that one day when this world has finally taken your life, then that death will not be final like it was not final for Christ, but that God himself will raise you to eternal life. This my friends is the promise of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ we celebrate today.

Let me tell you the salvation story one more time. God is an eternal being and he made us men and woman to be eternal beings in eternal fellowship with him. But sin my friends which is human self centeredness disconnected us from God and with that disconnect our eternal nature was lost as well and death become the eternal reminder of the presence of self-centeredness in God's creation. God was not going to let sin and death continue to have power over his creation so he sent his Son to take on the full consequence of sin upon himself including death. But because Jesus Christ took on this sin without giving in to Satan, he never lost his own eternity and so on the third day he took his life back. And not only did he take his life back but he promised to all those who

are willing to take their sin to Jesus Christ and receive Christ's life into them that he would give them power over the pulls of this world and power even over death. So you too can say like Paul, I am pressed on every side by troubles, but not being crushed. I am perplexed, but not driven to despair. <sup>9</sup>I am hunted down, but never abandoned by God. I am knocked down, but not destroyed. You may kill me but I will still be brimming with eternal life!

If you are then asking this question, how to I get this Christ life to be in me? Let me address this. To answer this question, I say it like this. To receive the eternal life of Christ, we have to first clearly understand the choice placed in front of us. And the choice is between the message of the world advertising to us that it can satisfy our physical needs our emotional needs, ours accomplishment needs and our deepest self-satisfaction needs, for the price of going along with the world, or completely suspending control of the satisfaction of all these needs of ours and allowing Christ's life to take control and drive us where he might. The choice is one of control, do you want to be in control or are you willing to let Christ have the control of the satisfaction of your needs. The promise is that he will satisfy you and satisfy you beyond what you can ask or imagine but it will be according to his plan and not yours. Are you willing to surrender your instinct for self preservation and give your life to Christ. Here my friends is the greatest irony in the world. Those who are unwilling to let go of their instinct to self-preservation will actually loose their lives for all eternity and those who are willing to let go and let Christ's life take over will unlimitedly preserve their lives. May each of us become masters of letting go of us fallen instinct to self-preserve and allow Christ to possess us. And may each of one day walk out of our own graves to a live beyond our imagination. Let us pray.