**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***The Choice for The Resurrection***

***Matthew 27:57-66 & 28:1-15, Luke 16:19-31***

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

Read and/or print sermon notes from our website – roundtopchurch.org

Today, we will worship our Resurrected Lord and take into account two passages of Scripture from the Gospel of Matthew and one from Luke 16.

To begin, I will read **Matthew 27:57-66; Matthew 28:1-15**

**The Cross. . . Just a Nice Story?**

 I understand that we can do historical-textual parallel comparisons of the Gospels in reference to the Passion of Jesus Christ taking in the entirety of the Passover week leading to Jesus’ arrest, trial, crucifixion, the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension. It is tempting to preach an apologetic sermon. However, today, we will worship God reflecting upon His great act of love. . . the Cross and Resurrection.

 We do note that the mission of Incarnation is directed at the Cross with almost a singularity purpose. Meaning that without the Cross event, everything that God accomplished in the flesh, as Jesus, would have been just a nice story about a good man who enlightened the world. Let us look at the many astounding facts that took place in the life of Jesus before the Cross. And, also, Psalm 22 which points directly at the Cross and the Resurrection.

We need to cite a few of the hundreds of prophesies in the Old Testament that were fulfilled with the Incarnation. I have preached previously, and it is of value to remember. . . that scholars have mathematically calculated the odds of Old Testament prophesies about Jesus coming true. One scholar calculated the odds for eight (8) of the prophecies to come true in one person which produced the odds of 1 in 1017. This study summed-up the odds with a story.

The odds of Jesus fulfilling just eight (8) prophecies is like the geographic surface of Texas being covered two feet deep with silver dollars and marking one specific coin to be found by a blind man.

 See <https://www.jesusfilm.org/blog-and-stories/old-testament-prophecies.html>

Another study considered forty-eight (48) Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. These mathematicians calculated 1 in 10157 odds. For comparison, there are 1080 particles in the universe.

See https://empower.global/the-mathematical-probability-that-jesus-is-the-christ/

**Consider These 10**

**1.** The Messiah would be introduced – Isaiah 30:3-4. . .

. . . fulfilled in John 1:23 by John the Baptist

**2.** Virgin birth – Isaiah 7:14 . . . fulfilled in Luke 1:35

**3.** The Messiah will be the Prince of Peace – Isaiah 9:6 . . .

. . . fulfilled Luke 2:14; John 14:27; Colossians 3:15

**4.** King David’s House established forever – 2 Samuel 7:12-13. . .

. . . fulfilled in Matthew 1:1

**5.** The Messiah born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2. . .

. . . fulfilled in Matthew 2:4-6

**6.** The Messiah shows victory over Satan – Genesis 3:15. . .

. . .fulfilled in Matthew 4, 28; 1 John 3:8

**7.** The Messiah fulfilled the perfect offering, whereas the animal sacrifice system was never intended to

 do - Psalm 40:6-8 . . . . . . fulfilled in Hebrews 10:5-10

**8.** The Messiah will set the captives free – Isaiah 61:1. . .

 . . . fulfilled in Luke 4:16-21

**9.** The Messiah would be a stone rejected – Isaiah 8:14. . .

 . . . fulfilled in 1 Peter 2:7-8

**10.** The Messiah would preach righteousness and the glory of God to Israel and the world before and after crucifixion - Psalm 40:9, Psalm 22:19-31. . .

. . . fulfilled in Matthew 4:17, 27:46, 28:19,20;

John 20,21; Luke 24:13-53; Acts 1:1-11.

**The Resurrection and The Truth**

In our world today, there persists the same challenges for people that have been here from the beginning of our creation.

**Biggest Challenge in Life - What is the truth and how do we live in the truth?**

The Bible is the inherent Word of God revealing to us how to have a relationship with God and our neighbor. So, when we receive the Bible’s teaching, we receive the truth. For the sceptic, we now know that the biblical text can be mathematically proven to be accurate with less than 1% of the text being in question. This small percentage does not have any bearing on the foundations of God’s Word. So, the next question, beyond reliability, is. . . do we surrender to what the Bible offers fallen humanity? Rephrasing the question. . . Russian leadership will most likely acknowledge the accuracy of the text of the U.S. Constitution. However, they refuse to live under its law.

**The Truth is Spiritual**

**Jesus said. . . "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one**

 **comes to the Father, but through Me. (John 14:6)**

Simply worded. . . Jesus is the way who taught that the true path to right-standing with God is through a faithful heart surrendered to God that accesses Jesus’ atoning propitiating sacrifice on the Cross. Propitiating means paying a debt owed for our sin. (Ephesians 2:8; Hebrews 2:17; Romans 4, 3:25; 1 John 2:2, 4:10)

The Good News is that God, as Jesus, paid the sin-debt for everyone regardless if they accepted it or know about His work. The question for everyone is. . . how is this free gift accessed?

Jesus’ statement in John 14:6 opens more questions. Why is Jesus the way, the truth and the life? It would take more time than we have this morning to fully respond to each of these three questions. However, there is a core understanding that we can investigate.

These questions call-out to questioning minds about the afterlife and the determining factors that direct a person’s placement for eternity. The atheist-secularist dismisses these questions as irrelevant because they believe God does not exist. Therefore, life extinguishes with a last breath with pettily indifference.

**Making Biblical Sense of:**

 **The Cross, John 14:6 and the Great White Throne Judgement**

The Bible, the Word of God, relates to us that the Resurrected Jesus is The Judge at the Great White Throne Judgement in Revelation 20:11. Everyone must pass this judgement point being judged by their names recorded in the Book of Life or not. A person’s free-will choice is recorded in either the Book of Life or the Books of Deeds. God does not predetermine anyone’s eternal destination. God’s foreknowledge is perfect, and He knows in advance of our choice (Romans 8:29) since the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8, 17:8). God so loved the world that He allows every person to freely choose to be with Him or not. . . to choose to surrender their will to His or not . . . to choose to have His Spirit indwell their heart or not (John 3). Therefore, who so freely chooses to believe shall gain eternal life (John 3:16).

**Why Does a Loving God Send People to Hell?**

**Answer – God Doesn’t**

God, as Jesus, at the Great White Throne Judgement simply reads the lists of names and gives people what they have chosen. Some did not want to be with God for an eternity. God gives them what they chose. Revelation 20:15 describes this place without God’s presence. . . without God’s love, as “the lake of fire.” It stands to reason that since God is love (I John 4:8) that a place without God’s presence. . .is a place without love. I see this place, where there is an absence of love, that there persists eternal regret. . . where a person burns with remorse for their evil choices. Evil is simply a choice, a force that denies and opposes God.

**Evil and Hell is the absence of love. . . the absence of God.**

**God’s Heaven. . . is a Place for People Who Want to Be with Him**

Whose names are recorded in the Book of Life? Those that chose to surrender their hearts to God. . . He gives them what they chose.

**People Who Love God. . . Follow His Commands**

**"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).**

For these, God opens the gates of heaven where they will live with Him forever. Heaven is a place that is pure love with the absence of sin and death. Unfortunately, many people claim they love God but then choose to live in darkness. The Bible calls these people liars (1 John 1:5,6). These people never experience God’s salvation and Heaven. Heaven is a place where God “…shall wipe away every tear from our eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

**Jesus’ Cross is the Way that accesses the Truth gaining eternal life.**

Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3:3 that unless he is reborn of Spirit, he cannot “see” the kingdom of God. Therefore, people cannot access what they cannot see. “Seeing” in this context is *spiritual* sight. Unless a person is born again of spirit, they cannot see the power of the Cross or access the truth.Jesus lived and taught the truth for three and one-half years during His Incarnation. Jesus said that “the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19)

**Rich & Poor – Equal Spiritual Opportunity in This Life**

 Jesus tells the story of the rich man and a poor man, named Lazarus, in Luke 16:19-31.

19 "Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. 20 "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

 Many of us are familiar with this account. What is most revelatory in the story. . .is that after the rich man and Lazarus died (v.22), they are separated by a *non-traversable chasm*. What both men had done in life and their respective positions in the afterlife was irrevocably fixed. Once in the afterlife, the rich man wanted to go back and tell his brothers what he was experiencing. . . which was a tormenting unquenchable thirst due to the agonizing flames.

23 "And in Hades he [Rich Man] lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.'

 So, how did Abraham respond to this request for mercy?

25 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.

 Whoa. The time for mercy is over. Remember that it was Lazarus who laid at the rich man’s gate being highly visible. How could the rich man not see Lazarus needed mercy? Abraham further explained the eternal reality for all of us.

 26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'

Jesus relates that there is a “fixed” divide in the afterlife. On one side of the *chasm* (v.26) is called *Abraham’s bosom,* whereLazarus resides. The other side of the *chasm* is described as a *place of torment,* from where the rich man could see Lazarus, across the *chasm*, in *Abraham’s bosom*. The Jews considered Abraham to be the most righteous of men, and he was most assuredly with God in the afterlife.

In this account, Jesus depicts the rich man to have worn purple fine linen denoting he was of the religious elite during his lifetime. These religious leaders believed by keeping all the laws, which gave him an outward appearance of righteousness. . . that he would be with God in the afterlife. In addition, the Jewish religious overlords did not show any mercy in their governance of the law over people. However, the sad reality is that the rich man was wrong. The rich man made a showy spectacle of keeping the law but did not reach-out to the poor, begging man, Lazarus, who laid at his gate with weeping sores that the dogs licked. In the afterlife, the rich man begged for Lazarus to come across the *chasm* and give him one drop of water to satisfy his thirst while being in the torment of regret. This was denied because the *chasm* is permanent and cannot be traversed in the afterlife (v.26).

 **Jesus tells us here that there is not any reincarnation for a second chance, and there is not any purgatory to traverse to get to heaven. Once we die, we arrive at our eternal destination. There is a fixed chasm.**

Receiving Abraham’s response, the rich man wanted to warn his brothers in order for them to change their hearts.

27 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father's house-- 28 for I have five brothers-- that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

So, in response, the rich man’s second request . . . Abraham told him. . . ‘Your brothers have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But, knowing the hardness of his brothers’ hearts, the rich man pleaded, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' However, Abraham replied. . .'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'

This is where Jesus’ account is most revealing about people having the truth right in front of them, but they refuse to listen. And so, everyone who has ever lived. . . has this eternal *life-choice* right in front of them. . . to heart-surrender to God?

**Nicodemus Returns**

In the beginning years of Jesus’ ministry, we see one of the leading teachers of Israel (Nicodemus) come to Jesus, saying to Him, . . ."Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2).

Sensing this is more of a question, Jesus responds to Nicodemus that he had to be reborn of Spirit in order to “see” and “enter” the kingdom of God. Jesus challenged Nicodemus with the truth. Nicodemus goes away and obviously thinks about Jesus’ teaching. A few years later, Jesus is crucified, and we see Nicodemus come forward to assist in preparing Jesus’ body for entombment.

**John 19:39** And Nicodemus came also, who had first come to Him by night; bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight.

A miracle. A man who was known as a teacher of Israel surrendered to God and was willing to come join others in making the traditional burial preparations. No doubt, Nicodemus knew that the Resurrection was going to happen and he surrendered to God’s mercy in this life. It was common knowledge that Jesus said He would rise from the grave. The Resurrection was of much concern to the Jewish religious leaders. . . to the extent, they asked Pilate to assign soldiers to guard Jesus’ tomb (Matthew 27:62-64). Nicodemus surrendered to the Resurrection.

 The Cross is intended with purpose and meaning to reach across cultural and religious *chasms* in order to change lives forever.

 **AMEN**