**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)

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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. Today, we will reflect **upon Old Testament prophecy, the truth of Scripture, accessing the power of the Cross, why is Jesus the only way, listening and hearing/seeing the truth, Luke 16 - the Fixed Chasm, and Nicodemus returns.**

 We do note that the mission of God’s Incarnation is directed at the Cross with almost a singular 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.

It is revealing 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; Col. 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 Account and The Truth**

With the aforementioned fulfilled prophecies of the Incarnation. . . it is still a daunting task to witness the Resurrection to a materialistic world that doubts everything. So, 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?**

After reading the Bible, in its entirety, a person should come away with the observation of the narrative details on how to have a successful, peaceful relationship with God and your neighbor. And, also. . . how not to have peaceful successful relationships. Humanity’s quest is to attain peace with God and then they can have peace with their neighbor. In this respect, I see the Bible is the inherent Word of God. When a relationship with God is considered. . . this includes both our temporal and eternal relationship. For our own survival, we must come to grip with this truth. So, when we receive the Bible’s teaching, we receive the truth about our beginning and our continuing life. We all will have a continuing life after this temporal life ends. The complexities and the observation of the fine-tuning of life dictate that all life on earth did not come about by a random, undirected, meaningless, purposeless process. And the Cross event, directed by God, was not a random, undirected, meaningless, purposeless event. The Cross is the pivotal event in history designed to afford peace to all who humble themselves to God their Creator. God is love and He loves the creation and all of us so much that He incarnated Himself as one of us. He did this in order to teach us and demonstrate that by surrendering to His will we can have access to His peace.

The account of God’s Cross detailed in the Bible (New Testament) has not been altered. The Gospels record eyewitnesses’ observations. Concerning the four Gospels. . . there is not any alternative text to the Cross. . . meaning the arrest, trial, crucifixion, entombment, resurrection and ascension. With this said, the sceptic mind needs to know that the biblical text can be mathematically proven to be accurate with less than 1% of the text not considered to be part of the original manuscripts. And this 1% does not have any bearing on the foundational teaching of God’s Word including the Cross. So, the next question, beyond reliability, is. . . do we surrender to what the Bible offers fallen humanity? Illustrating 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. So, regarding the New Testament text, the doubter has only to decide if she/he wants to humble themselves to its truth.

**How do we live in the Truth? How do we access the Truth?**

 **Consider that 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) which humanity does not have any power on their own to accomplish.

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 respond to each of these three questions. However, there is a core understanding that we can investigate that highlights the foundational element of Christianity and to some extent Judaism. Make no mistake. . . John 14:6 is an excluding statement and, at the same time, welcomes all of humanity. No doubt, God has given all an opportunity to be approved by the faith within the light they had (Hebrews 11:1)

Jesus’ declaration is an invitation and calls to questioning minds about the afterlife and the determining factors that direct a person’s placement for eternity. The atheist-secularist dismisses these declarations as irrelevant because they believe God does not exist. Therefore, temporal life extinguishes with a last breath of pitiless indifference. They believe there is not any eternal life. But then the whole creation containing human life in all its grander of complexities speaks to an eternal life.

**Making Biblical Sense of John 14:6 . . .**

**The Way to Eternal Life is through God as Judge-Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment**

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. Jesus is the way because He is the One who suffered and physically died on the Cross and the One who walked out of the Tomb. Thus, the One presiding over the Judgment when the Books of Deeds and the Book of Life are opened. Everyone must pass this judgement point being judged by their names recorded in the Book of Life or not. Is this an arbitrary assignment by God? No. A person’s free-will choice to surrender to God is recorded in the Book of Life, or, if not surrendered. . . their name is in 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). We see from the time of Adam (Genesis 2:17) that 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, which includes surrendering their will. . . shall gain eternal life (John 3:16). Note: The distinction about “believe” needs to be made. The demons believe and shudder (James 2:19), but they do not surrender to God’s plan for the creation.

**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. Many 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 a willful 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).

**Continuing. . . Why is Jesus’ Cross the Way?**

**Because fallen humanity cannot save itself.**

**Human effort to create a forgiveness-path to God always ends with a person or institution being a mediator (Job 33:23; Gal. 3:19; 20; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6, 9:15, 12:24).**

**From the Cross, Jesus declared, “It is finished!”. (Greek τελέω teleo); meaning: to bring to an end, complete, fulfill. Therefore, no other action, merit, or work needs to be done by anyone to access the saving power of the Cross. This is the Truth that gains eternal life.**

In John 3, Nicodemus comes to Jesus secretly at night. Nicodemus wants to be with God. We see this when he asked Jesus. . . "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). Nicodemus desired to access and live in the power of God but he did not know how. Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless he is reborn of Spirit, he cannot “see” the kingdom of God. Through the prophet Ezekiel, Gods makes it clear that people need to ask Him (Ezekiel 36:37) to give them His Spirit and a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26, 27). Therefore, because people have not been reborn of spirit, they cannot access what they cannot see. Jesus often spoke in parables; because while seeing many did not see, and while hearing they did not hear, nor understood.

 **14** "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9 is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; **15** FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.' 16 "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. (Matthew 13:14-16).

This is all in a spiritual context. Unless a person is born again of spirit, they only hear of the power of the Cross. Access to Jesus’ saving work on the Cross is granted to those who surrender/humble themselves to God.

 Hearing about God’s power is different than experiencing God’s power. In fact, even Believers only see and experience a partial of God’s presence in the fallen world.

Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 13:**9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

**10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

**11** When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child;

when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

**12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face;

now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

**13** But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

 **It is the saving grace of God that allows us to hear enough of the truth to make a decision.**

**But. we must listen** through the noise of this fallen world, in order to make the decision to access the truth. Jesus lived and taught the truth for three and one-half years during His Incarnation. Jesus said, in the beginning of His ministry time. . . “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 – Each had an Equal Spiritual Opportunity to hear the Truth in This Life.**

**Which one choice to access the power of the Truth?**

 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 due to the selfishness of his temporal life. He wanted to warn them to change. . . because he was experiencing 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! This is judgement. Our span of time we live in this temporal-life is for surrendering to God’s mercy and seeking forgiveness of sin which empowers us to live the life He has planned. God’s judgement applied to our lives as we live is designed to free us and others from harm. Here the rich man finds that his time has expired when his temporal life ended. God’s judgement is not wanted by the rebellious. This is why the enemies of God do not like Christians because, by our presence, we represent God’s judgment. God’s judgement forces us to examine ourselves. Self-examination is judgement. But is for our own good. A simple illustration includes us monitoring our speed limit as we drive. When we observe ourselves speeding over the posted speed limit . . . we have the opportunity to correct our speed and have just judged ourselves for our own good. When Believers look in our spiritual mirror, we have a decision to make. . . correct our path to what we know God desires for our lives for our own good, or rebel and place our will over God’s will. . . you know. . . like Adam and Eve did when they ate from the forbidden tree. Non-believers have the same opportunity because God’s creation confronts them all the time with spiritual choices. God’s judgement is designed to liberate us from the damages of sin. Here is a passage from the Book of James that accurately describes the correct application of God’s judgement for liberty, as we live our day-to-day lives.

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does (James 1:22-25).

**Back to Luke 16** . . . 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 and assistance?

Abraham further explained the eternal reality of a fixed chasm 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* being comforted. 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 in keeping up the appearance of adhering to all the laws, which gave them an outward reputation of righteousness. However, God sees through appearances and knows all our actions and thoughts. . . God knows our heart. God saw that the rich man ignored his hurting neighbor, Lazarus.

The rich man had performed the religious appearance act well enough to fool many during his life. And he thought 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. . . the choice to surrender their heart 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.

Miracle! Nicodemus, a man who was known as a teacher of Israel, sought Jesus in seeking to understand how He could do the things He did. This doubter, but seeker, eventually wading through all the cultural and intellectual barriers to have the spiritual strength to step across legal religious institutional thresholds of false understanding in order to come and help prepare Jesus’ body for burial. To do this. . . Nicodemus had to surrender to God and then was willing to come join others in making the traditional burial preparations. It was common knowledge that Jesus said He would rise from the grave. No doubt, Nicodemus surrendered to God’s grace and mercy in this life and he anticipated the Resurrection. He then had eyes to see and ears to hear. The power of the Resurrection worked in Nicodemus before Jesus left the tomb. Why? Because the power of the Resurrection overcomes sin and death, fear and doubt, and brings a willingness to be with God. 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).

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

 **AMEN**