**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

***One Week After the Resurrection***

***We are Gifted Living Witnesses***

April 7th, In the Year of Our Lord 2024

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(All Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.)

On the previous Lord’s Day, we celebrated the Resurrection. Two thousand years ago, seven days have passed since Jesus left His tomb. At that time, Jesus’ vacancy was being discussed in the highest religious and political offices. They were confronted with the fact that the crucifixion of the Galilean trouble-maker did not take. The Jewish and Roman leadership sought desperately to find the body of Jesus. From their perspective, the worst outcome was unfolding before them. The reality of a resurrected man who had claimed to be the long-anticipated Messiah was coming true. They made-up stories that soldiers had fallen asleep or had been bribed (Matthew 28). This is the classic account that fallen man cannot stop God’s eternal plan by inventing a false narrative and distorting the facts.

To this day, unfounded stories persist that Jesus survived the Cross or that someone else, who looked like Jesus, was substituted for Him. Even suggestions that the followers of Jesus went to the wrong tomb that had not been used, to find it empty. Over 600 years after the Resurrection. . . the Messenger of Islam, Muhammad, revealed that a man who looked like Jesus was substituted in his place (Surah 14:157-159). In addition, stories have been rumored that Jesus escaped or survived the Cross to run-off with a woman named Mary, thus producing several children. All of these are simple attempts to distract the world, by the enemies of God, from the reality of the truth. . . that fallen man cannot control the willful intent of the living God. Every single one of these false stories that were created to discount the Resurrection have been proven to be what they are. . . fabrication created for political or religious purposes.

The truth is, God came in the flesh, lived with us for thirty-three and half years witnessing and teaching about His kingdom. Then He willingly went to the Cross to pay the price for the sins of the world. God then resurrected Himself to continue His ministry of teaching and spiritual empowerment on this earth for forty (40) days. At that time, Jesus commissioned all Believers to evangelize the world (Matthew 28:19). Jesus then ascended into heaven.

 Seven hundred years before the incarnation, God’s prophet **Isaiah** informed the Jews that the suffering Messiah would be resurrected. The reality that many cannot see or accept is that God intended for the Cross to happen in order to fulfill the Law. Jesus said He came to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17). Last Sunday, we read Hebrews 10 which detailed that God’s plan was fulfilled at the Cross. I encourage everyone to read Hebrews 10.

**Isaiah 53**:1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

 2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

 3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

 4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.

 8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?

 9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

 10 But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, **He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.**

 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

 12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

In our witness today, we need to consider the person who has just heard for the first time what happened at the Cross. It is a lot to mentally and spiritually process. The whole Incarnation event is a miracle. At the core of the Incarnation. . . God willfully with grace and love reached out to fallen humanity and become one of us in order to save us from ourselves, from sin and death. Some surrender to God and become Believers. However, to others, this account of God’s great love confounds the world. Despite the fallen world’s resistance to the Cross. . . we persist with our witness. Because we know the truth. We are called by God and have His desire at work in us to witness the Gospel. The Great Commission is a charge to all Believers (Mattthew 28:19).

Several years ago, we were handing-out free bottles of water at the antique show here in Round Top. Along with the free bottled water, we gave a brochure witnessing that Jesus gives us eternal life-water; if we will drink it, then we will never thirst again.

Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

One woman came by and asked why we were giving away free water. I gave her the brochure, and she looked confused. She walked away murmuring that it did not make any sense to give away free water. Unfortunately, people who have not been spiritually reborn do not have eyes to see and ears to hear (John 3).

But for Believers. . . we are set apart and empowered. . . possessing spiritual eyes and ears. God’s great love at work in us directs our hearts and minds to witness His Cross of redemption and the forgiveness of sin. All people are created in God’s image of love. . . with a purpose to have a relationship with Him and to lovingly witness His Cross. Being created in God’s image does not mean that we physically look like God (Genesis 1:26,27). God would be limited if He were stuck in a human body. He created us to have the ability to have His Spirit indwell our hearts and minds. Therefore, we are created to be spiritual beings. When a person humbly surrenders to the Lord, they access God’s attributes that they were intended to use. God’s eternal spiritual power preserves Believers and works in and through us.

**Philippians 1:6** For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

**Philippians 2**:13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing;

It is my experience that Believers are equipped to live victoriously now and be a witness to others while we are in this temporal world. And yes, many Believers need to wake-up and realize all the spiritual gifts with which the Lord has equipped them. Paul writes to the church in Corinth with a goal to wake them up about their spiritual Gifts. (1 Corinthians 12). I encourage you to pray and read this passage of Scripture. God’s Believer’s Church is a spiritual Church.

Love is the greatest spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 13). It is said that we take nothing with us when we die. However, Believers transcend to Heaven with God’s love imbedded in their spiritual hearts. God tells Believers that His love cannot be separated from us. Death cannot separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:37-39).

 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Again, remember that God is love (1 John 4:8), and God’s love stays with us even though we physically die. We are created in God’s image of love. Think about what God has done based upon His divine nature. God is love, so it is reasonable that He created us to be love also. However, God desires for us to freely choose His love.

**What Happened During Jesus’ Resurrection Ministry?**

Jesus accomplished many things after He walked out of the tomb. We read the account of the two men on the road to Emmaus. Jesus appears to the women and the disciples. During Jesus’ “Resurrection Ministry”, He breathed His Spirit into the disciples (John 20:19ff), spiritually empowering them. Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." We, like the disciples, receive God’s peace. This empowers us with the ability to overcome sin and death. This is the second time in history that God demonstrated His power to breathe life into a person both physically and spiritually. The first time was when He breathed into Adam to give him life (Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4). God’s Spirit is life and love. God is love, and when He breathes His Spirit into us, we receive His Spirit of love and life. God created us to walk in life and love, not death. Again, this is why we are created in His image. We must make this very clear to those we witness.

In our witness, we must say that God’s power to create life is the same power to resurrect life. This is God at work in His creation and in our lives. Therefore, life in this creation is a miracle just like the Resurrection. Scientists cannot explain the origins of life or the Resurrection of Jesus.

 God finds a way in His creation to communicate to people the truth about His intent for their lives (Romans 1:18 and following). Referring back to the woman who we gave the water to at the fair; through offering a simple bottle of water, God delivered His Gospel Message.

**Where Are We Going?**

**Is There an Alternative?**

**Three Statements of Love**

 Where are Believers going? The short answer is “Heaven”. God’s sovereign authority determines our final destination. Satan could not stop the Incarnation or the Cross and he cannot stop the Great White Throne Judgement (Revelation 20:11). Satan was given a free-will opportunity to stop God in the flesh as chronicled in Matthew 4 in the “Test in the Wilderness”. What we see in that encounter (Test) is that Satan doesn’t have any power to control the occurrence of events God planned. God also plans for the end-time events. Satan has been allowed a free-will role, presence and a voice (Genesis 3; Job 1; Matthew 4). God’s free-will-love is given to us to choose Him. I have said many times that only those who want to be with God for an eternity will be with Him. . . that is those who have humbly surrendered to Him. Those that do not want to be with God do not have to be. All will have an eternal life.

**What can learn from the Resurrection?**

**1.** God loved us first (1 John 4:19). He has chosen to give us the choice to love Him back. John 3:16 declares this fact. The fact that there is a choice, the decision must be weighed over an alternative. We see this with Adam and Eve. By doing this, He allows Satan to interact with us for now. There will be an eternal separation in the future (Revelation 20). I find it freeing to know that God will not make us love Him. We have alternatives. No one can say that God is the only way to go. There are other choices. The Cross demonstrates the other choices.

**2.** We cannot say enough that God is Love (1 John 4:8), and love is a choice. God created love to be a free-will response. God created us to experience love. For us to experience love, we must choose through and over what is not love. We see Jesus demonstrate this love-choice from the Cross when He said…

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. 35 And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." (Luke. 23:34-35)

 In Jesus’ Cross statement, we see that the love-choice is tied forever to forgiveness. Through the murderous hate. . . God still presents forgiveness for all those who will accept. We can see from the Cross that forgiveness always involves others. Forgiveness is a humble spiritual act empowered by God and then directed at another person. We know that Adam and Eve failed the test. They chose to be consumed with themselves over God’s plan for their lives. They loved themselves more than God. They represent all of humanity is this selfishness. However, God’s Incarnation demonstrated His mastery over love’s opposition. . . which is unforgiveness, pride, bitterness and selfishness to name a few.

**1 Corinthians 15:19-22**

19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. 20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

**1 Corinthians 15:45-47**

45 So, also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.

**3.** We can try, but we are pressed to imagine a world without God’s grace extending the choice for love. Would anyone desire to live in this life and never experience love? The absence of love means there would not be any life. God’s love (John 3:16) provides for us the possibility to have life and life eternal.

The Cross points to the promise of an eternal life with love. At the same time, the Cross draws a sharp distinction between the ugliness of sin and death, in the absence of love, and an eternal world with total unfiltered love, in a place we call Heaven. There is not any love in sin and death. There is no love in a place that is separated from God. In God’s unveiling (Book of Revelation) to John. . . Satan is separated forever from God’s people and His Heaven. God, as Jesus, judges all people at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:7-15). After these events, God’s kingdom is the eternal place established for Believers (Revelation 21). The Cross represents God’s gate to His eternal kingdom.

 **so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. Hebrews 9:28**

**AMEN**