

When Christ Died, Nothing Was Lost

One night during the Easter season in March of 1989, our children couldn't sleep; two were frightened about those things that go "bump in the night," one didn't want to go to sleep and the oldest had just returned from the Astro-World youth activity. It was Spring break, no school the next day, so I decided to read to them. I made two stipulations; first, they had to be lying down (they were multi-leveled from the top bunk to the floor) and secondly, I was going to read the Bible. May the Lord forgive my underestimating the kids' readiness for the Word! There were no arguments to hear from Suess, Disney, Ingalls Wilder or E.B. White. I thought to myself, "I'll test their resilience and put them to sleep reading four chapters from Ezekiel." Can you believe it? They were still awake after those four chapters! Then I explained to the kids it was Passion week and this was Maundy Thursday, the night when Jesus had His last supper with His disciples. I went on, "We are now approaching the trial and crucifixion of Friday, looking forward to His glorious resurrection on Sunday morning." I continued, "Kids, what do you say I read the story from the Gospels?" I saw heads lean forward over the bunk rails, an ascended head resurrect from the pillow on the carpet and they listened as though they had never heard it before. I tried to read it from the old King James as though it were the first time I had poured over this dramatic account. The room was quiet, except for the classical music playing softly in the background. The room was enchantingly lit with a raised blind that allowed us to see the "purpled" night outside. Broadway could not have given us a better atmosphere.

I began to read, "When the morning was come, all the chief and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death: And when they had bound Him they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the Governor." I read slowly, reverently, deliberately, trying to be obedient to the grammatical punctuations. I was aware that the kids knew the story almost as well as myself, yet I didn't hear a peep. As I read, everything we saw became a visual aid and every thought in our minds provided full-colored illustrations. Our white cat came prowling in, reminding us that because of Christ's blood shed for us, our sins have been washed as white as snow. The darkness of the outside reminded us of that dark night Jesus prayed in Gethsemane while men plotted His death. The previous fears in our children's hearts had peacefully subsided in the presence of our main character in this drama, the Prince of Peace, who came to release us from the bondage of our fears.

As I came to the crucifixion, a lump began to rise in my throat and moisture spontaneously came to the corners of my eyes. I wanted to look and see how the children were responding, but I felt a restraint at this sacred moment. It was as though the Lord was saying this is not just a time for kids and Daddy – this is a time

for God and His children. I was reminded of what we had previously read in Ezekiel, "I am their inheritance...I am their possession" (Ezekiel 44:28).

Before we could finish the last days in all four Gospels, the kids were asleep "in the arms of Jesus." It was during this week that MD Anderson had given my dad the information that there was nothing else they could do for him. Soon we would be laying Dad's body in the grave that had been long prepared for him. We were moving him and Mom into our home for the final three weeks of his life in this earth. And so at the same time we were contemplating the loss of our Lord's life on Calvary, we were also thinking much about the fast approaching end of my father's life during the Easter season of 1989. And now in this 2018 year of approaching Easter, we are again thinking about my mother and my wife's father who are on the other side. We are also thinking about the young people reared in Christchurch that have recently gone to heaven and the grieving parents left behind. Along with the younger ones passing, I am reminded that the first funeral was when the original parents had to bury their youngest son. I am referring to Adam and Eve having to say goodbye to Abel. Among statements heard when a loved one or a friend passes is most often, "we lost him or her."

As we approach Easter, I ask you to consider: what was lost when Christ died?

I. THE LIFE OF OUR LORD WAS NOT LOST

In Acts 13:35, Paul was quoting from Psalm 16 when he said, "Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption" (Acts 13:35-37). Romans 8:34, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

II. THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WILL NEVER BE LOST

After Christ willingly laid down His life for us, He took it back again and in turn gives us the assurance that we too will never truly lose our life if we believe in Him. Jesus said in John 11:26, "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die...." I Corinthians 15:51-53 promises, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

In the great intercessory prayer of Christ in John 17:12a, He declared, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost...."

III. THE CAUSE WAS NOT LOST

Just before our Lord ascended to Heaven the Bible records these words in Luke 24:44-48, "And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."

Please notice the wording, "...beginning at Jerusalem...." You see, this was not the end; it was only the beginning! Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." And so in every part of the world our missionaries are proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Easter, 1989 our children were going to become acquainted with the first death of a loved one. Soon they were going to have to say good-bye to their Uncle Kenny. Our children have said good-bye to loved ones from their grandparent's generation, their parent's generation and now they have begun to say good-bye to peers in their own generation. It is a wake-up call when people our own age begin to pass. It reminds us of the brevity of life and the need for all of us to be prepared. Proverbs 27:1 warns us, "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

No one can cope with life when it comes to an end like God's people. Perhaps I should use a different terminology, and say no one can celebrate life at the time of death except God's people. I Thessalonians 4:13 says that we "...sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." And why is that? Because Jesus said in John 14:1-3, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.