

A Message Of Hope For Good Friday, Resurrection Day And Beyond

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Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5, John 17:24, Matthew 16:13-22, Matthew 16:18-19, Hebrews 9:16-17, John 14:1-2, 1 Peter 1:3-4, Colossians 3:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

Denomination: Evangelical/Non-Denominational

Summary: The celebrations of this week makes us reflect on the importance of two past events and one future event. Dr. Madana Kumar brings out the hope that we have as Christians

A message of Hope | Good Friday | Resurrection Day

During the next week, we will celebrate two of the key founding events of Christianity. The Good Friday and the Easter / Resurrection Sunday. What makes these two events special?

Paul established several churches during his three missionary journeys. Out of all of them, one Church really stood out. This is the Thessalonian Church. The Thessalonian church flourished and stood as a model despite organised persecution. They thrived despite the physical absence of the founding leaders. Paul was there only for a few weeks. He was persecuted and chased away soon after the church was established. They thrived among idol worshippers. The culture of Thessalonica was seeped in the Greco-Roman culture of Polytheism, Idol worship, immorality social injustice etc. Despite all that, they became an evangelistic church. "The Word of the Lord sounded forth" from this congregation.

My studies reveal that the main reason why this church became a model church is because they exemplified the pillars of Christian faith, namely Faith, Hope and Love. Today we are going to look into the aspect of Hope that the Thessalonian Church had, and hope that we have. Our hope is based on the two events celebrated next week and the third event that is yet to come.

Let us look at the first event that gives us hope.

When our God created the universe, He did an amazing Job. He created it as a perfect place where sin was non-existent. When God created Adam and Eve, there was no sin, but they had the freewill. Adam had the ability not to sin. So they were a situation what we could call as not-able-to-sin. But they chose otherwise, even though they had the ability not to sin. They chose to disobey God, sinned, and thereby corrupted the whole mankind. Because of their disobedience, humanity went into the second stage of the continuum that we could call as Total depravity, or to use the terminology in the language of sin, not-able-not-to-sin. Human beings lost the ability not to sin. That was the condition of humanity till Jesus's work of salvation on the cross. When Jesus took all our sins and died on the cross, God's grace became available to us, and we gained the ability to not sin. We came to the third stage of the continuum we can call as able-not-to-sin. God's grace working through faith in Jesus Christ enables believers to resist sin and live according to God's will. Paul reminds us through this letter about who we are. 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5 says "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness". That is the first hope and assurance that we have. That our sins, past present and future are

all nailed to the cross.

But what if the history had stopped at the cross? If we had only Good Friday, if we had only the death and burial of Jesus Christ, if the story had ended there? I have done a study on John 17 comparing that chapter to a will of a dying man. He left some exciting inheritance to those who believe in Him. But, would we have been as excited about His will that He wrote in John 17, if the story ended with His death on the cross? Would we have been excited about the inheritance described in John 17:24 (NKJV) Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. Would that inheritance meant anything to us, if all that Jesus did was to stay put in the tomb? Would we have been excited about the will then?

Let us take the example of Peter and his response to the declaration by Jesus about his own imminent suffering and death. This is described in Matthew 16: 13-22. Jesus asks His disciples a question. Who do you think I am? I can imagine Peter probably putting up his hand in excitement just like a school student who knew the answer to the question that the teacher asked. Peter gives the right answer, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter gets praised for the correct answer. And then Peter gets a huge reward. A reward in the form of a really big promise. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:18-19, NKJV). It is natural to assume that Peter felt good about the promise. Wow what a promise, what a reward. I am going to be the gate keeper of heaven. Who wouldn't be excited at that promise. But then things take a very different turn. Jesus starts telling them that He is going to die. Just imagine Peter's condition. He has just been promised a great position, and then the person who promised is saying He is going to die. Peter was all willing to accept the glory that came with the promise, but was not really ready for the suffering and death that came packaged with that promise. Jesus was promising him Great things like building the Church on him, and giving him the keys to heaven, and giving him authority to bind or let loose people for heaven while on earth. Peter could not fathom a dead person being able to do this. Peter wanted the promise to be fulfilled, but not the suffering and death part that was associated with the same.

So the fact is if there is a will, the will becomes effective only when the author of the will dies. There was a very rich old man who could not hear anything. During one of his visits to the hospital, the doctor decided to try a new procedure on him. He was asked to observe the effects for a month and then report back. When he reported back for check up after a month, the doctor asked him if there is any change in his situation. The family members who accompanied him said that they could not observe any change. The doctor then asked the family members to step outside and decided to communicate to the old man alone. When the family members were all at safe distance outside, the old man burst into a big smile and told the doctor. "Doctor. I can hear very well. I have been quietly listening to what my family members were saying about me during the last month and I have changed my Will four times already." You get the message right? A Will written before the death of a person is only worth the value of the paper till the person dies. This is the earthly law. The Bible confirms this in Hebrews 9:16-17 (NLT2) Now when someone leaves a will, it is necessary to prove that the person who made it is dead. The will goes into effect only after the person's death. While the person who made it is still alive, the will cannot be put into effect. I have always been amazed about the significance of Good Friday. This

one stands out for me. Jesus chose to die on the cross on Good Friday, so that the Will he wrote for you and I becomes legally effective. So that the inheritance He promised will surely reach us.

And the inheritance He promised us is that we will be where He is. Let us face the facts. The answer to the question I raised earlier, about our reaction to the story ending with the cross. The answer is no.. None of us are looking forward to spending eternity inside a tomb, even if it is a "rich man's " tomb, isn't it? We need a better place? We don't expect our God to take us to such a place.

The truth is that Jesus did not just stay in the tomb. He meant business when he said John 14:1-2 (NKJV) 1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 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. He sure was not talking about a place in a tomb. He was talking about a place in heaven. For that to happen He had to get out of that tomb and ascend to heaven, and that is the resurrection day that we celebrate. For the will to take effect, the author of the will had to die, and for the inheritance to be complete, the author had to rise from the dead and sit at the right hand of God the Father. 1 Peter 1:3-4 (NKJV) 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,. You see , our inheritance is reserved for us in heaven, and to make that fully available to us, Jesus had to be raised and He had to ascend to heaven, so that we have hope that we can claim the inheritance that he promised us.

Incorruptible, means imperishable. Our inheritance is not something that will perish. It will not deteriorate. All of have experiences with our refrigerators right? Fridges are getting bigger and bigger. The problem with bigger Fridges is this. More stale food stored for more time. We keep a perishable fruit at the back of the refrigerator and then forget about it. But soon, the fruit will perish, and then we will be forcibly be reminded of it when the smell hits our nostrils when we open the fridge.

Peter tells us that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our inheritance is imperishable. It is not going to go bad over any period of time. It is an eternal inheritance.

My wife Leslie used to tell me of an instance when she was in boarding. Leslie loves raisins, and when some visitors come, she asks them to bring raisins. Leslie's sister Diane is also in the same boarding, and naturally the visitor who brings raisins would like Leslie to share the same with her sister. So Leslie used to play the "virtual defilement" card with Diane. Leslie will tell Diane that the raisins looked like "ticks". That was enough to put Diane off her inheritance and she would disgustingly let Leslie have her share of the inheritance also. Leslie could virtually and verbally defile the inheritance of Diane of the raisins.

Fortunately for us, what Peter is telling us is that because of Jesus's resurrection, our inheritance is undefiled. It cannot be touched by sin or our own inefficiencies, because it has been sealed with the perfect blood and the victory over sin has been completed through Christ's resurrection.

A 60 year old lady went to a Dentist. While sitting in the waiting room the lady saw the full name of the Dentist. The name sounded a bit familiar and suddenly it reminded her about the tall, handsome, dark haired boy with the same name in her high school class. She wondered whether the dentist could be that same boy on whom she had a secret crush. However upon seeing the dentist, she discarded any such thoughts. This balding, gray haired man with a deeply lined face and a bulging stomach could not

have been my class mate, she thought. But after the teeth examination was over, she decided to ask him if he studied in St Xavier's school. Yes, Yes.. he gleamed with pride. When did you graduate?, she asked. 1982 , He said. Why do you ask? Then she couldn't contain her excitement anymore. We were in the same class , she said excitedly. The dentist thought for a moment and asked innocently. Oh really? Which subject did you teach? "... You see, time can do a lot of damage to how we look. Many of the possessions fade away with time.

Fortunately for us, Peter tells us that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our inheritance in heaven is time proof, it does not fade away. It is eternal, it is permanent.

That is the resurrection that we celebrate. Verse 3 is key here. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the hope of every Christian. It is through this resurrection that the Father has begotten us again. It is through this resurrection that we have been regenerated. It is through this resurrection that we are reborn. To claim the position that we inherited to sit at the right hand of God, we need to be raised with Christ. Colossians 3:1 (NKJV) 1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

So that is the second reason for the hope we have. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead, and is sitting at the right hand of God interceding on behalf of us.

That brings to be the provocative question. If Jesus, nailed our sins to the cross, then why is sin still around? Why do we still need His intercession?

Many of us have questions. We all know that the word became flesh and lived among us. We all know that Jesus took our sins and nailed them to the cross once for all and paid for our sins, past, present and future on the cross. We all know that Jesus defeated Satan when he gloriously rose on the third day and then ascended to heaven.

So it is right when questions arise on the prevalence of sin all around us today. Questions like, why does sin still exist all around us, not just exist but abound? Why is there pain and suffering if the price has already been paid? Why do the wicked go unpunished? Why do Christians get afflicted with terrible diseases like Cancer or Corona etc.? Many of us have questions.

The answer to many of those questions lies in the fact that we are living in an overlap phase of God's redemptive plan for humanity. The theological term for that is the mediatorial kingdom. But I won't burden you with the theological explanations. Let us look at it this way. Jesus nailed our sins to the cross, but Sin did not go away from the world. The Kingdom of God has come, but the kingdom of sin exists as well. That is why we need Jesus to mediate or intercede between us and the Father. It is by his mediation that we receive grace now. So when will sin completely go away from our world? That is where the second coming of Jesus is important. When Jesus comes again, sin will be completely eradicated, and a perfect kingdom will be established. Revelation 21:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 speak about the end of the overlap, the end of death, the end of suffering and pain and the final union of humans with God. That is something we all look forward to, isn't it? A world without sin, a world without pain, suffering and death. The establishment of God's true kingdom. Back to the Garden of Eden. That is the third hope that we have. That the day will come when sin will be completely eradicated from the world.

That is the hope that Paul had given to the Thessalonian church. Paul affirms that the Lord indeed

come. He says in this letter in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night." Then Paul goes on to explain that this hope is not just for the living, but for all . 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words. Paul is assuring the people that those who are dead have priority over those who are living when Jesus comes. They will rise again and be united with Jesus before the living get a chance. But in either case, dead or alive, we will always be with the Lord. Paul affirms this in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. That is the hope we have, that is the reassurance we have.

It is interesting to note that Paul uses the term "sleeping" when he refers to the dead. Paul's use of the term sleeping is consistent with the belief that for those who believe, death is not permanent. There is an awakening and a resurrection. We sleep in Christ, we don't die. We sleep in Christ, so that when He comes again, we will wake up and be united with Him for ever. This is the hope for Christians. This is why death is not a fearful thing for Christians.

Let us summarise what we learned today.

1. Jesus took our sins and nailed it to the cross, and that gave us the ability not to sin, because of His grace.
2. This was according to the will that He wrote for us. He had to die for the will to become effective.
3. Jesus promised us an inheritance, unperishable, incorruptible, reserved in heaven for us, a place next to Him in heaven.
4. To make that inheritance come true, He had to rise from the dead, and that is the resurrection day we celebrate.
5. But the kingdom of sin still exists. We are living in the overlap period of God's redemption plan for us.
6. Sin will finally go away when Jesus comes again, and that is a promise He made. He will come again and we will all be with Him forever.
7. Death does not rob anyone of the blessings of the second coming.
8. That whether we are living or dead, when the second coming happens, we will be reunited with Him.

This should fill us with hope and anticipation. It fills me with hope and anticipation. Let us look at the celebrations of the week in this context and give thanks to our Lord.

Let us pray.