

Throughout the ages Christians have greeted each other on Easter with the good news, “Christ is risen!” May we continue to respond, “Yes, he is risen indeed.”

Luke 24:44-47

<sup>44</sup>He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

<sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup>He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

**“Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse”** (Deuteronomy 21:23). Those haunting words echoed in the minds of Jesus’ followers after Good Friday. The man they thought to be their Messiah, the Son of God, had died on a tree, a sure sign from the Scriptures that he had died under the curse of the Almighty. All their hopes were ruined. As one of them said later on, **“We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel”** (Luke 24:21). But how could a man who died under the curse of God do that?

This is the man who asked his Father to forgive us, but if he died under a curse, how could God truly have been his Father? We pinned all our hope of forgiveness on him. But if he died under a divine curse, what good is that hope?

This is what Easter is all about. Not rabbits and eggs. Not spring and blossoms and green grass. It is about the question that the followers of Christ were asking and that we must ask now. Jesus prayed from the cross that we might be forgiven. What answer did he receive? What answer have we, who have echoed his cry for pardon for our sins, received? Here it is: **The Father Has Forgiven Us!**

### 1.

**“Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse”** (Deuteronomy 21:23). This verse is taken from the book of Deuteronomy. This book was the constitution of Old Testament Israel, and, unlike our own constitution, it was authored by God himself. Not the dot over an “i” or the crossing of a “t” would fall away from that law, as Christ himself said, until everything was fulfilled. So there was no doubt in anyone’s mind that on the day Jesus died, he was cursed by the Almighty.

The Sanhedrin provided the curse, and the Romans provided the tree. The Jewish ruling council condemned Jesus to death for the sin of blasphemy. He had claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God. When he had said the words, the entire Sanhedrin condemned him to die.

But it was not for the Jews to carry out that sentence. They were occupied by the legions of Rome, and the Roman government had reserved all death penalty cases to its own jurisdiction. After a chaotic trial, the Roman governor condemned Christ to be crucified, to hang upon a manmade tree. And thus it was clear to all of God’s people that Jesus of Nazareth would die under a divine curse.

But why should so good a man as that Nazarene die like that? What great crime had he really committed? Even Pilate, the man who signed the death order, protested to the last, **“I find no basis for a charge against him”** (John 18:38). History has recorded the crucifixion of Christ as one of the greatest miscarriages of justice of all time. Then why did Jesus Christ have to die under a curse? All humanity provided the reason.

Christ was the sin-bearer for all people, and his death was the condemnation reserved for all the members of his human race. He had taken our guilt and our curse upon him. All our sins were there. All our guilt was there. And so the death that the whole human race deserved, under the curse of our Creator whose laws we had broken, was the death Christ suffered on the tree of the cross.

But on Easter Sunday, the Almighty set aside all verdicts against Christ. The Sanhedrin’s condemnation was overturned as the higher court in heaven reversed the sentence of death that had been reached by Jerusalem and carried out by Rome. He had been sentenced and executed upon the charge of blasphemy. But every word he had spoken had been true. The court of the Jews had been wrong; the courtroom of the Almighty found Jesus of Nazareth innocent of the crime.

But this was more than a victory for Jesus against his accusers. It is a victory for every member of the race that he represents. The curse against all people was fully and finally played out to its conclusion. And once that conclusion was reached—once the Crucified declared, **“It is finished”**—the curse no longer hung over us. Nor does it any longer hang over him who died. The penalty was paid in full by his death on a tree. No further

payment of death remains.

And it is the resurrection that assures us of all these truths. Jesus Christ, in the words of the New Testament, **“was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead”** (Romans 1:4). Once or twice, when his enemies demanded that he give them some sign that he really had been sent from God, he told them the sign would be that three days after his death, he would rise again. And he did. What further proof do we want that all he promised is true? This is what makes Easter a holiday worthy of great celebration.

But celebration is only part of what this day is about. Without a doubt, when Jesus came and stood among them again, the disciples felt like celebrating. But Jesus had more in mind than just a welcome back party. Very soon he would be sending them on a mission, a mission that has lasted the past two millennia and has now become our mission: Spread the story to all who have sinned against the Father!

## 2.

Unless people are told, the empty tomb is just a curiosity. It has become a footnote in history texts, with some words like, **“Three days later, the followers of Jesus claimed that he had risen from the dead,”** and then the author goes on with the “important” matters about the Roman Empire and barbarian invasions and such stuff. There are many today who would like the empty tomb to be nothing more than an empty tomb.

But Christ would not allow his resurrection merely to be some mystery for the ages to try to solve. **“Then he opened [his disciples’] minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”**

It was not only his disciples who were to know what the resurrection meant. This news was for all people. And so Jesus sent his disciples out to the ends of the earth to proclaim the news of the resurrection and its meaning for the whole human race. Men like Paul and Peter and Thomas and others roamed to the very edges of the map to proclaim the news to those who had not yet heard it. Missionaries have crossed great oceans and mountain ranges to find those souls who have not yet learned that their sins are forgiven. Great hardships have been suffered, and lives have been sacrificed so that the news of the resurrection might indeed spread from Jerusalem to all nations.

And now we are the disciples to whom this great commission has fallen. We are the ones who are to follow in the work of the prophets and apostles and diligent men and women of all the ages. We are to call sinners to repentance, and we are to assure them of the forgiveness of all their transgressions.

Tell those whose sins fill them with fear—the Lord has risen from the dead and has come back to say, **“Peace be with you”** (John 20:21). Tell those who once felt Christ’s kingship as a burden that he has returned from the dead and has established a kingdom of pardon and peace. Tell the ones who once desired only the blessings of this life that freedom from death is now theirs through the resurrection of Christ. Tell those who once asked, **“What is truth?”** that the truth is Christ has risen from the dead to bring us forgiveness and immortality. Tell those who once did not take his claims seriously that every one of them has been proven true by the resurrection of Christ.

Take this comfort for yourselves when the sins you have committed threaten to haunt you. Take this comfort to others whose sins still stand between them and the peace of forgiveness that Christ has won for us all.

Lent has lasted 40 days and 40 nights, a dark time. But it always ends on an Easter morning, with the light of life streaming from the empty tomb and with the risen Savior’s greeting: **“Peace be with you!”** His resurrection has destroyed the curse of death for us. Let us tell all our fellow people who were under the same curse that through Jesus Christ and through his rising from the dead, we are eternally assured that the Father has indeed forgiven us. Let repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached in Christ’s name to all nations. Let his resurrection be the Father’s loud and mighty message to all people: **“Your sins are forgiven.”** Amen.

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