

When I Am Lifted Up

John 12:32

(Read Jn 12:12-15). Palm Sunday was a wild celebration. People were excitedly running around waving palm branches, and laying the branches and their coats on the street.

The reason was Jesus. He was riding a donkey into town to the wild, tumultuous praise of thousands. That massive crowd was hailing Jesus, the Son of David, and the King of Israel.

Just as the prophets said--the great anticipated day of the long-awaited Messiah. They had longed for this day all their lives.

The wild, rejoicing crowd had a grasp of who the One was riding the donkey. What they didn't understand was his mission. He was not coming as a king to rule and drive out the Romans.

He was coming as the King who would wear a crown of thorns; who would be nailed to a cross, die, and rise again.

Lurking in the background, behind the words of "Hosanna" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," were other, sinister, dark words—"Crucify him, crucify him."

It was a dichotomy—"Hosanna," "Crucify." On the one hand were those expecting a mighty warrior to lead them out from under the rule of the hated Romans. "Hosanna."

On the other hand were those who thought he was an imposter, a blasphemer, and someone who would cause the wrath of Rome to fall on them. They wanted him dead—"Crucify him."

It's still a dichotomy today. Christians accept the crucified, raised to life, Jesus Christ as their Savior. Many others reject him and leave him in the grave.

Some say Jesus died, but was not raised from the grave. The empty tomb simply meant his disciples stole the body and hid it.

Some others say that it doesn't matter whether or not he was raised; what is important is the example of his life and teaching.

Others say that if you believe he's alive, then he's alive to you. Don't get hung up on whether he really, physically became alive again.

Dead or alive doesn't really matter, for we can all be one with Jesus, and one with all humankind, and one with the universe. Just believe that his spirit is and let that influence how you live.

Still others say, "Christ lives as we build his kingdom on earth right now." The best way to do this is by electing godly men and women into government positions of power.

People can say and believe all sorts of things. But all that really matters is, "What does God say?" The Bible says that the crucifixion and the resurrection were absolutely necessary for our salvation.

The Crucifixion

John 12:31-33(NIV) 31Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." 33He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Jesus could have returned to heaven without going through the cross. But he knew that it was only through his sacrificial death on the cross that our sins could be forgiven.

When Jesus, hanging on the cross, cried, "It is finished," he didn't mean that his life was over, or that God's plan was foiled.

Jesus was saying that the last obstacle had been overcome and the last enemy destroyed, and that he had successfully and triumphantly completed what he came to do.

This is what Jesus meant when he said, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

There are several things that the sacrificial death of Jesus means to Christians:

1. We are justified.

Romans 5:9(NIV) Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

“Justified”—All of us are sinners. But when we accept Jesus as our Savior, before God we are freed from blame; we are acquitted and cleared of all guilt; and we are made righteous before God.

Say the word “justified.” Now, as a Christian you stand before God “just-as-if-I'd” never sinned.

The primary purpose of Christ's coming was to offer himself as the sacrifice to secure the basis for our justification. This is what Jesus did for you and me.

2. We are redeemed.

1 Peter 1:18-19(NIV) 18For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Redeemed means to be bought back or ransomed. It also carries the idea of “substitution.” Jesus was our substitute. He paid for our guilt. In other words, to all who believe, he justified and redeemed us to God. God's justice was satisfied at the cross.

The first man, Adam, fell into Satan's trap. Every person since has also fallen into the trap of sin. You and I had to be bought back with the blood of Christ.

Billy Graham told a story of a mother who once saved her little daughter from a burning house, but suffered terrible, disfiguring scars on her hands and arms.

The young girl, not knowing how her mother had got those scars, was ashamed and insisted her mother wear long sleeves and gloves to cover the ugliness.

One day, when older, she asked her mother how she had gotten those scars. After she was told, she cried tears of gratitude and said, “Oh mother, those are beautiful hands, the most beautiful in the world. Don't ever hide them again.”

In the same way, as horrible as the cross is, those of us who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ realize how very precious it is, and we don't ever want to hide it.

3. Christ broke all barriers.

The cross of Jesus Christ is universal. “When I am lifted up, will draw all men to me.”

It was because of the cross that all barriers between God and humankind were removed. The path to God was now completely open. All people, everywhere, could come to God.

Jesus Christ died for every person. He is for all. The cross of Jesus Christ reaches across all barriers—he reaches into the Arab world, he tears down the caste system in India, he brings light to the pantheist in Africa.

Black and white and brown, Jesus went to the cross for all of us.

On the cross Jesus broke all barriers. Through the cross all people, no matter who or what they are, have access to him. I read a story about President Bush.

He attended the funeral of Soviet leader Brezhnev. He said, “Things were run with military precision; a coldness and hollowness pervaded the ceremony. Marching soldiers, steel helmets, Marxist rhetoric. But no prayers, no comforting hymns, no mention of God.”

He continued, “I happened to be in just the right spot to see Mrs. Brezhnev. She walked up, took one last look at her husband, and there, in the cold, gray center of that totalitarian state, she traced the sign of the cross over her husband’s chest.

“I was stunned. In that simple act, God had broken through the core of the Communist system.” (The Washington Post).

Now, I don’t know what all was going though Mrs. Brezhnev’s simple act—whether she was a secret believer, or whether she had the hope that perhaps there was a God.

I just know that when we contemplate the wondrous cross of Jesus Christ, we discover the truth of a crucified, risen Savior that cannot be excluded even by an atheistic government.

The Resurrection

So if our sins are forgiven by what Jesus did on the cross, why was the resurrection necessary—why do we have to believe in his resurrection?

1. It empowered Christ's followers.

This Friday is Good Friday. We call it "Good" Friday because we know the end of the story—Jesus was alive again on the third day. So we go from Palm Sunday to Good Friday, to Easter.

But Good Friday was Black Friday for the disciples. They had absolutely no hope of resurrection in their minds. Yes, Jesus tried to prepare them, but they simply didn't understand his teachings concerning his death.

For them the crucifixion was the end of the story, the failure of the Messiah, of maybe even God himself. They had given their lives for this man and his purpose. Now, it seemed to be over, and utterly unsuccessful.

They were with Jesus as he performed many miracles. But it was the supernatural, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that changed those disciples forever.

The empty tomb meant life, new life through Jesus. Now they understood his teachings, and now they lived in his resurrected power.

2. It defeated death and Satan

Just as Christ's sacrificial death covered the sins of humanity, only Christ's resurrection defeated death and dealt the crushing blow to Satan's power. When he died on the cross the power of sin over human hearts was forever broken.

1 Corinthians 15:14,17,20 (NIV) 14And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 17And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 20But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

New life comes from the power of the resurrection. Yes, our sins were laid on Jesus as he hung on the cross.

But it is the power of the resurrection that gives all of us the same direct access to unconditional forgiveness from the One who knows everything about us, and yet, insists on loving us anyway.

When Jesus was resurrected, the disciples understood. And that small band of believers literally changed the world. Their message was...

Acts 4:12(NIV) Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

3. It brought greater glory to God

2 Corinthians 5:21(NIV) God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The world has never known a darker day than that first Good Friday when Jesus, the Prince of Glory, died on the cross. But the world's most tragic day was transformed into the gladdest day

Perhaps the only thing that could show God's holiness, power, and love more than by making His one and only Son into sin itself to atone for our sins, was for Jesus to be restored to his Sonship by raising him from the dead.

Application:

The greatest truth of the world is that Jesus Christ is alive. It is our relationship with the living Savior that elevates Christianity above every religion and superstition. When the message of the empty tomb and the risen Christ is told throughout the world, it awakens people everywhere to the fact that Jesus Christ is indeed the Savior.