

Luke 24:44-47

“Anyone who is **hung** on a **tree** is under God’s **curse**.” These were the haunting words that echoed again and again in the minds of Jesus’ followers on the Sabbath which is sometimes called Holy Saturday - the day before Easter. The man they had thought was their Lord and Messiah, 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.” But how could a man who died under the **curse** of God redeem Israel?

This is the **same** man who asked His Father to **forgive** us, but if He died under a **curse**, how could God truly have been His **Father**? This is also the man on whom we put all our **hopes**. On Him we have pinned all anticipation of **forgiveness**. But if the last view we have of Him is a man dying under a divine **curse**, what **good** is that anticipation?

This is what **Easter** is all about - not rabbits and eggs - not spring and blossoms and green grass. Easter is about the question that the **followers** of Christ were asking and that **we** must ask now. Jesus prayed from the accursed **cross** that we might be **forgiven**. What **answer** did He **receive**? The answer is, **The Father Has Forgiven Us**.

“Anyone who is **hung** on a **tree** is under God’s **curse**.” This verse, taken from the book of Deuteronomy, was the very **foundation** of Jewish **law** for centuries. Christ Himself said everything in the law had to be **fulfilled**. So there was no doubt in anyone’s mind that on the day Jesus died, He was **cursed** by God Almighty. How did it happen? The Sanhedrin provided the accusation of **blasphemy**, and the Roman governor condemned Christ to be **crucified** - to hang upon a manmade **tree**. It was clear to all of God’s people that Jesus of Nazareth had died under a divine **curse**.

But **why** should such a good man as Jesus **die** like that? What great **crime** had He really committed? Had He ever raised His hand to **harm** anyone - hadn’t it always been to **heal**? Had He led some kind of blood-soaked revolution through the streets of Jerusalem? Not at all. Even Pilate, the man who signed the death warrant, openly admitted, “I find **no basis** for a charge against Him.”

History has recorded the crucifixion of Christ as one of the greatest **miscarriages** of justice of all time. But what was an **injustice** on the **human** level was actually the **fulfillment** of **divine** justice. Why did Jesus Christ have to **die** under a **curse**? The answer is found in **you** and **me**.

Christ was the **Sin-bearer** for all people, and His **death** was the condemnation reserved for **all** the members of the human race. Jesus had taken **our** guilt and **our** curse upon Himself. And so it was only **right** that His death should **conform** to the terrible verdict of the book of Deuteronomy. **Our** sins and **our** guilt, were the **cause** of the **curse** Christ received, as He suffered and died on the tree of the cross.

But on Easter Sunday, the Almighty Father **set aside** all verdicts against Christ. The condemnation of the law was **overturned** as God in heaven **reversed** the sentence of death. Jesus had been sentenced and executed for **blasphemy**. But every word He had spoken had been **true**. He truly **was** and **is** the long-awaited Messiah and the Son of God. The court system of the Jews had been **wrong**, and the courtroom of the Almighty found Jesus of Nazareth **innocent** of the accusation which had been made against Him.

But this was more than a victory for **Jesus** against His accusers. It is a victory for every member of the **human race**. The curse against all people was fully and finally played out to its **conclusion**. And once that conclusion was **reached** - once Jesus declared, "*It is finished*" - the **curse** no longer hung over us. The penalty was paid in full by His death on a tree, and the **curse** has been **removed**.

It is Jesus' **resurrection** that **assures** us of all these truths. Jesus Christ "*was declared with power to be the **Son of God** by His resurrection from the dead.*" Once or twice, when Jesus' enemies demanded that He give them some kind of **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**. That's 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 for **2,000** years - a

mission to spread the account of Jesus' **resurrection** to all people. You see, it wasn't only Jesus' **disciples** who were supposed to know what the resurrection meant. This news was for **all people**. 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 - and they **went**. Men like Peter, Paul and Thomas traveled to the very edges of the map to proclaim the **Good News** to those who had not yet heard it. **Missionaries** have crossed oceans and mountain ranges to find souls who have not yet learned that their sins are **forgiven**. Great **hardships** have been suffered, lives and fortunes have been **sacrificed** so that the news of the resurrection might indeed spread from **Jerusalem** to **all** nations - even nations **undreamed** of by Jesus **disciples** as this mission **began**.

And now that mission has become **ours**. We are the ones who are to **follow** in the footsteps of the prophets and apostles. **We** are to call sinners to **repentance**, and to assure them of the **forgiveness** of all their sins. Whether they are **frightened**, or **burdened**, or **confused** - whether they are in search of the **truth** - whether they are not taking Jesus **seriously**, or are refusing to **acknowledge** their sins - tell them that **Jesus has risen** from the dead to bring us **forgiveness** and **eternal life**. Take that comfort for **yourselves** when the sins you have **committed** threaten to **haunt** you. And take that same comfort to **others** whose sins still stand **between** them and the peace of forgiveness that **Christ** has **won** for us all.

This year the season of Lent lasted for 40 days, as it does **every** year. It was a **dark** time - a time for **contemplation** - a time focusing our attention on our **sin** and the **curse** it brings. But everything is **different** on Easter morning, with the light of **life** streaming from the empty tomb, and with the risen Savior's **greeting**, "*Peace be with you!*" Jesus' resurrection has **destroyed** the curse of death for us. Pass it on to **everybody**. Through Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead, we are eternally **assured** that **The Father Has Forgiven Us**. Amen.