

THE SORROW AND THE JOY OF EASTER

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Lesson: Luke 24:36-49

We cannot really think of the joy of Easter without also thinking of the terrible things that the Lord suffered two days earlier when He was crucified. When we read those powerful stories of the Lord's betrayal, trial and crucifixion, we cannot help but be moved with grief. We read of how the merciful Lord, who from His love healed the sick and restored life to the dead, was cruelly treated.

The Lord, whom we try to love and respect, was betrayed by one of His own disciples. He was mocked, beaten, and a crown of thorns was placed upon His head. When we read and hear of these terrible things that were done to the Lord, we feel deep sorrow within ourselves. It is right that we should feel this way, for we are taught by the Lord that we should love Him above all else, and when someone we love is mistreated we always feel sad. But the Lord gives life to all people, and He came on earth to teach people how to use that gift of life, so that eventually He might lead them to become angels of heaven.

We know that the Lord really wants every person to come into heaven because He told us this many times in His Word. But let us try to put ourselves in the place of the disciples who were with the Lord around the time of His trial and crucifixion. We might not have understood His teachings quite so easily.

The disciples had been following the Lord for about three years before He was crucified. They had listened to His teachings and learned much from Him. He had taught them that above all they should first learn to love Him, that is, to learn about Him from His Word and try to follow His commandments. He taught them that they were to love the neighbor as much as they loved themselves. They were to follow His example, always trying to do good to one another and fighting against evil as a terrible enemy. He had told parables so that they could slowly begin to understand something about the kingdom of heaven. And He taught them what to do in order to come into that kingdom.

The disciples had learned much from Jesus, and they had come to look to Him as their Lord, the true King of heaven and earth. They had come to believe in Him as their God, and they felt this especially when He was with them. But when the Lord was crucified their faith and trust were most severely tested.

They saw the Lord betrayed by Judas, who had been a disciple with them. Then He was taken by an angry multitude to the high priest's house, where He was accused of being the Son of God. The Lord did not deny this charge, because it was the truth. Then He was taken before Pilate to be tried, but Pilate found no fault in Him worthy of death. In mockery, a crown of thorns was

placed upon His head, instead of the golden crown a king would normally wear, and a purple robe was draped about Him. Then He was led away to Calvary to be crucified, to suffer the cruelest act that people could inflict upon a prisoner.

The disciples saw all of these terrible things happen to the Master whom they had come to love dearly, and in whom they had placed their faith and trust. They had previously seen the Lord perform many miracles, yet they saw that He made no effort to save Himself.

The disciples and all those who loved the Lord must have secretly wished that the Lord would perform some final miracle which would openly show forth His power over evil people. Because the Lord did not do this, His followers were left not knowing what to think or believe. Could they believe in One who had so meekly suffered at the hands of evil people, and in One who was no longer with them? Doubt, sorrow and confusion filled their minds.

But the Lord did not allow those who loved Him to remain doubtful for too long. The Lord performed a great miracle for some of those who loved Him. He opened their spiritual sight so that they were able to see into the spiritual world. And there they saw the risen Lord as He appeared in the heavens. This happened several times, and it is because of these wonderful miracles that the sorrow associated with the Lord's death is turned into gladness and rejoicing.

Those who were shown the risen Lord in heaven were filled with happiness, and slowly they began to see the meaning of some of the things that He had previously told them, such as, that He was to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day. This indeed had now come true. Slowly, as the Lord further taught His disciples, they realized that although He was no longer present with them in a physical body, He would be with them always as to His spirit.

And this was not only true for the disciples at that particular time, but it is also true for all people since that time who, like the disciples, love the Lord's teachings and try to live by them. The Lord has left us His Word, and the Word may be likened to the body of the Lord. We can learn from it all of those things that the Lord said to His disciples when He was with them in a physical body.

When we approach the Word we are really approaching the Lord. When we read it in a humble and reverent spirit, we are inviting the Lord to be present with us as to His Spirit. It is this presence of the Lord which leads us in our daily lives. It is this presence that brings all happiness and peace among people.

At Easter time we turn to the Lord once again with thankful hearts for having spoken all of the truths contained in His Word, for it is by means of them that we can discover how the Lord can be with each one of us, to lead us in the way of peace and into His kingdom of heaven.

Amen.