

“Joy In Believing”

What gives people joy?

For the disciples that first Sunday of the resurrection, it was the appearance of Jesus, crucified on Friday, alive today. I don't think I need to go into all the ramifications of what it would be like to have someone come back to life after they had been dead a couple of days. It would be, of course, unbelievable. But it happened!

The veracity that it happened is documented in this account, it is documented in other post-resurrection appearances, and it is attested to by the billions of people who follow the Risen Lord. This morning we want to talk about the effect that the Risen Savior has in the lives of those who follow Him.

The first bunch – the disciples were overjoyed. They had just spent three years of their lives getting to know this wonderful man, each of them discovering his own sense of worth and identity through Him. Friday was a horrible day, and His efforts to prepare them in advance notwithstanding, Friday left them dismal.

Then the angels. Then the rumors. Then the wondering. And now . . . the reality. "Peace be with you." Amidst all the mystery and speculation and turbulence of spirit, here Jesus offers peace. It's at this point that a person can begin to see that the resurrection isn't the end, it's a new beginning. Jesus offers them peace so that they can see beyond the spectacular and be at ease for what comes next. And what is that?

Jesus immediately talks about forgiveness! His entire suffering and death – His excruciating crucifixion – was about restoring a broken relationship with God, and this takes forgiveness. Forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian message, at the heart of Jesus' resurrection message, and so He tells them to announce forgiveness to people.

And it's about life. This is very near the end of John's gospel, and so after he writes of the two resurrection appearances, he states the reason that he writes at all – "But these [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." And there-in is eternal life, new life right now, and joy in believing, which changes everything at any time."

The first lessons during these 7 Sundays of Easter are from the book of Revelation. This is revelation to John, the same person who wrote the words of the gospel lesson this morning. The Revelation was given some years later during a time when Christians were persecuted. It is a book of encouragement.

Jesus, in this first chapter, is called "the firstborn from the dead," and declared to be the One who loves us, who has freed us from our sins by his blood, linking His resurrection once again to forgiveness. John says that to Him is given glory and power for ever and ever.

And then, in His own words, Jesus says, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." Would you have eternity opened to you, and death locked away forever? Then accept Jesus as your personal Savior, having a relationship with Him that goes on forever. There *is* joy in believing!

This joy then, expressed in the disciples' reaction to the Risen Christ, and encouraged in the book of Revelation, serves as a basis for Christian living on a daily basis.

We've been going through the book of Ephesians in a series called, "Gifted." This morning we are going to check in with the last chapter of the book and discover God's gifts as they relate to keeping us safe and on track. But before we get there, chapter six opens with additional instructions for relationships in life. We've already talked about Ephesians 5:21 – "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." We've talked about husbands and wives using their love and energy to "prefer the other." Now it's parents and children, and it's employers and employees.

Children have it easy – except they don't think so! "Children, obey your parents in the Lord . . . 'Honor your father and mother . . . that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'" I believe the emphasis is on "enjoy," rather than on "long." This is linked to joy in believing, because when things are done God's way, there is joy. Children – honor and obey your parents. You can do this!

Then, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Come on dads – don't be unreasonable, don't be harsh, don't be abusive, but do demonstrate God's love and discipline in how treat your kids. They can't just run wild; they need guidance. Set the rules and enforce them. And all the time let them know how much you love them.

Mothers aren't specifically mentioned here, but do know that parental instructions are for both parents. Be consistent. Talk things over behind the scenes. Family first.

Then . . . work life. Wow! Here is instruction that goes beyond what is expected. In fact, our work performance is to be beyond what is expected. Summed up, obey your employer as you would obey the Lord. For . . . in a very real way, you *are* working for the Lord. Be a great employee, and let God be in charge of your future employment. There's no room for exceptions here, except for not being required to do that which is wrong. Serve wholeheartedly.

And then . . . not to be outdone, the emphasis turns to the employer. "And masters, treat your slaves in the same way." Every human being has worth. Every Christian is to treat others as they would treat Jesus. Now I know this sounds ethereal, but for the Christian it is a very real thing. Jesus' death and resurrection were very real, and so is the way that we are to treat others with love and respect.

As Paul closes out his letter, he gives encouragement, reminding people of two things: 1) they need to step up to the plate, and 2) God provides that which is needed for them to do so – he couches it in terms of a soldier's armor.

"Put on the full armor of God . . . stand firm . . ." Don't be a wimp. Get out there and do what's required, and do it with the help of God.

Put on the belt of truth. The belt holds everything together. One can't operate in Christian action, without knowing and applying the truth. One of the reasons for ongoing, ever-advancing contemplation of God's Word, is that therein lies the Truth, and the further one goes through life the more meaningful and useful it becomes.

Put on the breastplate of righteousness – the breastplate protects the heart; it protects other essential life-sustaining organs. Righteousness is what you need in your heart to be right with God. That is the forgiveness Jesus is talking about. This relationship with God first saves, then protects.

Run with the gospel of peace – make being at peace with people a goal of what direction you are going. And use the shield of faith. Whatever negative is coming at you, deal with it from the point of view of faith, your trusting relationship with God.

The helmet of salvation protects your head, protects your thinking. If you are going to have joy in believing, you need to think of things from the eternal point of view of being forgiven in Christ. Your relationship with God does not mean you leave your brains behind, rather use them in every situation, knowing you have salvation protecting all that you do.

And finally, take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. This is the offensive weapon. Use it in every situation, whether it is against the enemy's harassment, or simply to light up your path. Enjoy believing.