

November 19, 2006
Saints Triumphant

"Saints You Have the Joy of Two Resurrections"

JOHN 5:25-29

*T*ell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out-- those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

"Where's the beef?" Some of you may remember that television commercial showing a small, elderly lady opening a hamburger and asking the question, "Where's the beef?" It was Burger King's attempt to get some of the business away from MacDonald's with a burger called "The Whopper."

"Where's the joy?" Open up the lives of Christians the way you might open a hamburger. Look into their daily grind, week after week. "Where's the joy?" Have you ever looked at your life and asked, "Where's the joy?" "What's missing?" The world laughs and scoffs at us. "Where's the joy? You Christians aren't any better off than we are. In fact I think that we have more joy in our lives than you do?" Satan loves to get us so focused on our current problems and troubles that we fail to see the blessings that surround us.

Today, on this Saints Triumphant Sunday we want to listen to our Lord Jesus talk to us about two resurrections that take place in our lives that totally change every day on this earth. The first resurrection is the resurrection that takes place when you come to faith. The second resurrection is the one that will take place when you are raised to life again on the last day. If these two resurrections bookend your life then everything in between, even your worst days are good days. With your life sandwiched between these two resurrections you can wake up every morning saying with other saints, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."

The word for resurrection is a very beautiful sounding word in the original Greek. It is the word "anastasis." It is a word that you can say softly to yourself this morning "Anastasis." It is a word that you can say loudly to greet each new day. Literally the word means to stand up again and be alive. As saints of God we gather together to remind each other that there is a resurrection that has taken place in our lives when we came to faith and a resurrection that will take place after we die. With Paul we can say that the sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing to the glory that will be ours in the future and the glory that is ours right now because of these two resurrections that form a beginning and end point in our lives. If you know where you came from and know where you are going when you die, then everything in this life has meaning and purpose and value. Now let's look at these words of Jesus that speak about the two resurrections that are such a vital part of your life and mine.

Look back at your resurrection to faith

Our Lord Jesus speaks to us about a time in which dead people are going to come to life through the power of God's Word. "I tell you the truth, a time is coming, and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." Jesus spoke about a time that was coming and time that had already come. We know that Jesus is speaking about spiritually dead people coming to life and believing because of what was said in the verse previous to this. "I tell you the truth whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." Jesus said of the words that he spoke to people, "My words are spirit and they are life."

If you speak to something that has died whether it is a flower, an animal, or a human being, your words do not have the power to bring what is dead back to life again. The words of Jesus did have that power. He once spoke to a man who had been dead for four days. He told the people to roll the stone away from the tomb. He then shouted to a dead man named Lazarus who was wrapped up in grave clothes in the tomb. You know the words, "Lazarus come forth." He came out of tomb alive wrapped with linen clothes around his body and over his face. What the words of Jesus did for a dead body, they are also able to do for someone who is dead inside and wants nothing to do with Jesus. You, dear Christian, are living proof that people who are born into this world dead and without life are able by God's Word to come to life again.

If you ever feel like something is missing in your life, or that your joy is not as full as it should be, then go back and look at the change that has taken place when you were brought back to life after being born into this dead. Listen to how Ephesians 2 describes how dead we were before we were made alive in Christ. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." You were born not wanting God's Word in your life. You were born thinking all the blessings you have in Christ were worthless. Listen more to how dead we once were. "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, and following its desires and thoughts." Did you see the people living up in the stores this past week to have an opportunity to buy a new Play Station 3? There was a time when you lined up with a crowd with an even greater passion and desire to follow the ways of this world, to live without Christ, to be your own person.

But now you are alive in Christ. Jesus said, "You have crossed over from death to life." Your ears have been opened to hear and your heart has been made alive to believe in Christ as your hope of salvation and peace with God. "Where's the joy?" If it is ever missing in your life and mine, go back to look again at the change that has taken place in your life. Ephesians 2 says, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, has made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in trespasses and sin." In John 15 Jesus says, "I am the vine you are the branches." He took dead branches, grafted them into himself the true vine, and made us alive in him.

To be alive in Christ is such a beautiful thing because it is a life that comes from Christ and not from anything inside of us. As Jesus tells us, "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge

because he is the Son of Man." The Father has life in himself. He creates the world in which we live, he gives life to human beings in the wombs of mothers, he provides us with food to eat and the meal we eat this Thanksgiving Day. Jesus also provides us with life, life as saints of God, washed by his blood. He has authority to judge us because he is the Son of Man who humbled himself and became obedient to death on the cross. He has the authority to determine if we are worthy to be saints not on the basis of anything in us, but purely on the basis of what he has done to pardon and cleanse us.

In the Revelation John sees a vision of the saints of God gathering around the throne of the Lamb. He saw a great multitude of people from every nation, tribe, people and language. They were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb." Then John was told, "These are they who have come out of great tribulation, they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Revelation 20 says that the souls of those who were beheaded for Christ, and those who came to life in Christ during their lives on this earth will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. You reign with Christ right now, 24/7 because you are a saint, washed in the blood of the Lamb. "Whether we live we live unto the Lord, whether we die, we die unto the Lord, whether we live therefore or die we are the Lords."

In John 15 Jesus said, "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full." "Where's the joy?" The joy comes in knowing you have been brought to life when you were dead. Whatever the future brings, nothing changes this status you have as saints. Nothing changes the goodness and mercy that follows you all the days of your life.

Look ahead to your resurrection after death

Jesus speaks of another resurrection in the future that transforms and changes every day of your life right now. It is the resurrection of your body that will take place on the last day. "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out- those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." Just think of it. The day is coming in the future when Jesus will return in glory and raise all the dead bodies in the world back to life again. It will not take years or months to do this. It will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet. The skeptics laugh at our hope of bodies being raised to life again. "How can a body eaten by worms or reduced to ashes possibly be restored to life again?" For the skeptic the day of resurrection will be a day of horror and shame as we heard in the words read from the prophet Daniel. "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."

There will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust, those who have done good and those who have done evil. The ones who do good are those whose works are accepted because everything they have done in life has been made worthy and acceptable to God through Jesus. Jesus will say to them, "Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Those who are without Christ will find that even their best deeds of love and kindness will not be good enough to judge them worthy on the last day.

We look forward to this resurrection of our bodies on the last day. We look forward to being raised to life and being caught to be with the Lord as he takes us to a new heaven and new earth he has prepared for us. In Philippians 1 Paul writes, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." When Christians buried their dead in the catacombs of Rome they buried them with palm branches, symbols of the victory that comes with the hope of being raised to life again at the last day.

"Where's the joy?" Today we share something more real to us than our friends, our family, our world around us. We share together as saints of God a resurrection, an anastasis that takes place when we came alive in Christ and a resurrection that will happen in our future when Jesus returns in glory. These two events, these two resurrections make every day in this life a holy day.