

Pako Evening Service: 10/07/2016

Scripture Readings. John 11:17-44; John 19:31-42. Message: "A Saviour, dead and buried, so what?"

Congregation, I once spoke to a lady who tried to convince me that death, the loss of a loved one or dear friend who dies in the Lord, should never be a reason for tears, but only for praise. While this lady was telling me her thoughts, I was thinking, "What planet is this lady on?" I have never thought about death in this way. God has made us emotional beings who become deeply attached to those we love. We don't need to feel guilty about grieving at death. In fact, ordinary Christians can readily understand the pain and sorrow of Mary and Martha when their brother Lazarus died. And even the Lord Jesus was affected, for he wept (v35). Jesus probably wept for many reasons. No doubt he was saddened by his friend's death and the grief he saw all around them and hence the consequences and result of sin.

But I have a suspicion his grief was also a result of the impending suffering that awaited him as the cross began to loom on the horizon. And whether we like it or not, death remains our constant companion. The last time I looked, the ratio was still one out of one. And even those who live to be a hundred will not escape this constant companion. Furthermore, unlike the friends of Lazarus, Jesus is not literally standing next to us raising our loved ones from the dead instantly when they die. By all accounts, humanly speaking, they stay dead!

And perhaps, humanly speaking, who of us would want our loved ones returned to this sinned filled world especially if it means more disease or serious illness. And that is also why at many Christian funeral services we usually recite the Apostles' Creed and especially the line that we believe in the resurrection of the body. It is of great comfort to know that just as Jesus defeated death and rose physically from the grave, so shall we. Indeed, as Paul mentions in 1 Cor 15 death has been swallowed up in victory!

However, before we reach that particular line in the Apostles' Creed, we also confess that our Saviour died and was buried. And that truth is also reason for comfort. For if it was not recorded in Scripture that Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners, died and was buried, then we would never really have that our debt for sin has been paid. I mention this for in the early church, not everyone believed what we read in John 19:33 that Jesus as the Son of God died for our sins.

As there are today and also were then, there were a number of heretics that couldn't understand how a loving God could send his own Son to die for sinful man. One such person who thought Jesus wasn't the son of God or that he died for our sins was a heretic named Marcion. He taught that Jesus didn't really die, nor that He was the Word became flesh as John records in his first chapter. Marcion said that Jesus had only the appearance of a man, but was not actually a physical man.

In other words, He was like a phantom, a bit like Casper the ghost and hence Marcion taught that all Jesus' pain and suffering was imaginary. Another heretic, named Nestorius, separated the divine and human natures of Christ. He said that the divine nature came upon the plain man Jesus at his baptism and left before He went to the cross. In other words, Jesus was only a plain man when he died.

But we also have modern day heretics. There are leaders of the church who claim that Jesus died to pay for the more 'serious' sins like murder and rape and stealing, but not for them or for the person who tries to do good. I have read articles on the so called understanding of Bishop John Shelby Spong. Wow, too weird and ridiculous to even mention.

He basically suggests that for anyone to believe in the virgin birth, the death and physical resurrection of Jesus for our sins, has failed to move on into the 21st century. Rev Tim Costello, once the president of the Australian Baptists and spokes person for world Vision, wrote a book called "Tips From A Travelling Soul-Searcher". In it he states, "I certainly feel that I have sinned also, but not enough to warrant the death of the man I love. ... Christ's death is not solely to do with individual sin, but that it was to defeat all powers that cripple and deform human life" (p137)

But what all these people are actually doing is undermining the work of Christ. What they are saying is that God's demand for a perfect sacrifice was unnecessary. In fact, some people would even accuse God the Father of child abuse for allowing that to happen. They suggest that the infinite wise and loving God made a big mistake!

Now we as saved Christians are the first to admit that God sending His one and only Son to die for us and to be buried is a remarkable show of love, incomprehensible in many ways. But that doesn't mean it is not true. John 19:33ff states it clearly, Jesus died and was buried! The reason Christians today can speak of death in a theoretical manner is because Christ never did! In fact, to even think about his death was tremendously painful for the Saviour. When Lazarus died, Jesus wept!

Not just because he missed his friend but because he knew that for this terrible thing to be reversed, he would need to suffer the full wrath of God to pay for sin with his own body! A day before his own death, Jesus prayed that his Father in heaven would remove the cup of wrath from him with such intensity in the garden of Gethsemane that His sweat turned to blood. In fact, he says in Mark 14:34 that his "soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, to the point of death!" God determined that the wages of man's disobedience was death, even in the Garden of Eden.

He warned man in Gen 2:16-17, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." That was the just punishment of a most holy God. And if God's Son was to be our Saviour and really take our place, he had to be perfect man and He had to die. For man sinned hence man has to pay and death was the payment!

He also had to be buried to show that he actually died! You don't bury live people. At the start I mentioned the story of this lady who said we shouldn't cry at death and the burial of loved one. I disagreed with her. We have the right to hate death and weep with those who weep for Jesus did. However, let us not forget that Jesus' death was not a punishment for His sin, but a punishment for our sin.

He, who knew no sin, became sin for us. Jesus' death for our sins was the only way to satisfy God's justice. If we were to accept Marcion or Nestorius' or Bishop Spong's teaching, then we would still have to bear the punishment for our sin. That would mean eternal punishment rather than eternal life in glory with our Saviour!

We also read that Jesus was buried. He was laid in a tomb. Now we may ask, "Was that really necessary? Why didn't God just end it with Jesus' death? Jesus had already said "it was finished" (John 19:30). The Roman soldier had pierced his side with a spear showing that He was truly dead, and he didn't have to break his legs. So, what is comfort to know that Jesus was buried? A number of things.

First, it is a great comfort at Christian funerals to be reminded that they buried the Lord Jesus and the grave could not hold Him, nor will it hold us. Second, Scripture tells us that to be buried is an honourable thing. For instance, when Jehu ordered that Jezebel's body be thrown out the window, Jezebel's body was trampled on by horses and devoured by dogs. No one buried her (2 Kg 9:10,35-36). Third, even though Jesus is the Son of God, he is put into a hole in the ground (Psa 8). In fact, this was part of his complete humiliation!

Jesus being buried identifies with our pain. Jesus must give into an enemy, and by all appearances suffer defeat. The same with us. Our lifeless bodies are surrendered to decay, which of course remains painful to friends and family. When a person dies and is buried, we see the dethronement of the image of God. We were created to rule and have the earth under our feet, yet in the end we lose all polish. The shine has gone, we return to dust. And so, the Son of God submits to our final humiliation; He was buried, surrendered to the earth. Spices were placed around him to ward off the odours of decay.

And then God the Father intervenes. The humiliation had gone to the very end. No more humiliation for his dear Son. Satisfactory payment has been made for man's sin. Therefore, as Psalm 16 reminds us, God the Father would not let his Holy One see decay.

Now the question may be asked, "If Jesus died as a payment for our sin, why do we still have to die? Wouldn't it be wonderful to be plucked up by God's chariot and taken to heaven like Enoch or like Elijah?" I sometimes ask the trivia question, "Why do people still die?" And many people will say, because of their sin. And it is true we do sin, and this side of the grave we will continue to be sinners, although, hopefully less as the Holy Spirit sanctifies us.

However, this is not the answer to why we must still die. We believe Scripture to teach that Jesus made full satisfaction for our sin. Therefore, our death is not a payment for our sin but is the doorway to heaven. I put it to you that Scripture doesn't refer to our death as dying, but as passing on. John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

Philippians 1:23-24; "I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account". Perhaps the best known verses come from Jn 11:25-26, "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'"

We merely move from a life of sin, through a door into eternity. That's why Paul could say to the Corinthians, in 1 Cor 15:55; "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" It is gone because of our blessed Saviour died and

was buried – and rose again! Of course the struggle to not sin but to obey continues until God pulls us through that door of death. Thankfully, death puts an end to our sinning and is our entrance into perfection. Of course it is not the only entrance, for those who are still living when Jesus returns will have an ascension (1 Thess 4:17). They will be changed without going through death's dark door. In one blinking moment they will put on immortality (1 Cor 15:52).

Yet, even knowing all this, doesn't make death a friendly thing. It is still an enemy of God and of us. Sure, the sting has gone because of our Saviour. Our Saviour has conquered death. It has been disarmed, but as yet not destroyed. It still remains the door through which we are called home.

So, what advantage is there for the living in Christ's death and burial? We are inclined to say that Jesus takes the fear out of dying, rather than saying Jesus' death and resurrection puts us to death while we are still living. (Repeat.) We don't mind dying in the Lord at the end of our days, but dying is only gain for those who are living in Christ now (Phi 1:21).

Because Jesus died for me, dying is easy, but once I have said this, I should add, and this is the difficult part, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). This is where the rubber hits the road! Our lives are to show that Jesus lives in us and that we are dying for him every day. In that sense, you and I as believers are included in Christ's death, his crucifixion and his burial and when he rose victoriously!

All Jesus did he did for those who believe. Jesus' death and resurrection was a representative act. He was the second Adam. What He did, we did! The death He died He died for us, and for all those who believe in Him! Through Him, we overcame death, and by his Holy Spirit, we now live a different life! We are now in Christ! We don't just say we died when Christ died on Golgotha. That is true, but if that is all you say then it is an incomplete gospel. For surely we die every day to sin.

Nor do we just say we died when we were baptised into Christ. Yes, we died to sin by being baptized into the death of Jesus (Rom 6:6ff), however, if that is all you say then you may be accused of being a "sacramentalist." Nor do we just say we died when we were converted and born again. That is only the beginning. If you seek the certainty of your death and life in your conversion only, then you are a not standing on solid ground.

We need to be able to say that you died with Christ, and you die daily to sin, otherwise you cannot live with Christ who is now Lord and King forever. To sum up - Jesus died – our sins are paid for in full. Was buried – identifying fully with our pain, rose again – comforting us to know that just as he rose from the dead so shall we with glorified bodies. This Jesus invites all sinners to repent and believe and be saved unto eternal life, all for the glory of God the Father. Amen.