

April 2011

Dear neighbours,

To live for ever and to be free from guilt are two of the most exciting and fundamental reassurances we can long for. If only!

To live for ever, not as some mysterious ghost, but more living and vibrant bodily than we are now. With our present bodies changed and transformed. Without aches, pains, sicknesses, learning difficulties, tears, fears and failures, and yet in such a way as to be always satisfied and occupied without boredom in a new and renewed life.

To be free from guilt. The regrets reversed; the wrongs righted; recriminations banished, a new start now and a new beginning in glory. A free pardon for all sin, as Jesus said about Himself, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8.36).

This is what Easter is all about.

First, Good Friday. A commemoration of the day Jesus Christ died.

But why did He die?

The background is this. When the first man and woman disobeyed God, God could not allow that ultimate threat to His authority – and, with it, to all that He had made. He condemned them and all their descendants (being just like them in their turn, in one way or another) to a life which would culminate in death, to labour for daily living and in childbirth, and to a cursing of the earth which could only be mastered with difficulty and in which everything must decay, and to a spiritual death (a continual dark existence without the blessing or presence of God). (Genesis 3. 16-24)

Jesus Himself confirmed the historical truth of the Bible, of its first book Genesis and all it describes, including the real existence of Adam and Eve (Matthew 19.5); and acknowledged Himself to be the Son of God, backing up that claim with miracles.

He was born in such a special way as to ensure that no taint of inherited sin affected Him personally, so that He had no sins of His own for which to atone. He lived without sinning. His death was contrived by men who disbelieved Him (showing the same rebellion as Adam) but planned by God the Father, "yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him" (Isaiah 53.10). It was with the full agreement of His Son who willingly agreed to leave heaven and take upon Himself full manhood, yet without sin. The whole purpose being that, by His death, He made atonement for the sins of every believer who repents of sin. So there it is – a full and free pardon!

The Apostle Peter writes, "Christ...hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit..." (1 Peter 3.18).

The Apostle Paul writes, "Forasmuch... as the children (that is, ourselves) are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2. 14-15).

Second, Easter Sunday. A commemoration of the day Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

He had already shown on two previous occasions His power over death in raising Lazarus and the widow of Nain's son from the dead (John 11. 1-48; Luke 7. 11-16). By this, He showed that resurrection is possible and that it is vested in Him.

When Jesus was raised from the dead it was the Father's vindication of His atoning death. Accordingly, all that believe in Him are seen by the Father as no longer belonging to Adam but now belonging to Christ. All in Christ have everlasting life; "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15.22).

When a believer dies, for each individual must fulfil the ancient curse, the soul goes straight to be with the Lord. Life continues unabated. In consequence, there shall be no condemnation. "There is...now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8.1). Afterwards, at the end of this world's time, each will receive a new resurrection body.

Eternal life in fact begins upon repentance - in this life - for there will be no interval at death. But we usually mean by eternal life that renewed life which begins straight after death. Death ushers us all into the immediate presence of God. To the believer King Jesus says, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..." (Matthew 25.34)

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3. 16-17).

There is a third exhilarating "by-product" of the Easter events. It is that believers may walk with God for the remainder of the time which remains to them on earth. We may have the Saviour for company. He may abide in our hearts. He will reign over us, to guide us. We may resort to Him continually for every matter and seek His guidance, help, comfort and companionship and much else beside. The King of Kings, the Creator by His Spirit dwells in such individuals as ourselves when we believe in Christ. This is glorious beyond words! Though unseen, it is incomparably real.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psalm 91. 1-2).

"Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress" (Psalm 71.3).

"Thy lovingkindness is better than life" (Psalm 63.3). "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16.11).

We would encourage you to come to our Good Friday service at 10.45am (22nd April) which lasts for just over the hour and to our Easter Sunday services at 10.45am and 2pm where these things will be further explained. We will think of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ Easter Sunday morning, and the believer's resurrection at the afternoon service.