

“IF YOU BELIEVE IN THE BIRTH OF CHRIST, THEN....”

Sunday, March 23, 2008 “Resurrection Sunday”

Text: Matthew 28:1-10 (Complete English Version)

Mat 28:1 The Sabbath was over, and it was almost daybreak on Sunday when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

Mat 28:2 Suddenly a strong earthquake struck, and the Lord's angel came down from heaven. He rolled away the stone and sat on it.

Mat 28:3 The angel looked as bright as lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

Mat 28:4 The guards shook from fear and fell down, as though they were dead.

Mat 28:5 The angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was nailed to a cross.

Mat 28:6 He isn't here! God has raised him to life, just as Jesus said he would. Come, see the place where his body was lying.

Mat 28:7 Now hurry! Tell his disciples that he has been raised to life and is on his way to Galilee. Go there, and you will see him. That is what I came to tell you."

Mat 28:8 The women were frightened and yet very happy, as they hurried from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples.

Mat 28:9 Suddenly Jesus met them and greeted them. They went near him, held on to his feet, and worshiped him.

Mat 28:10 Then Jesus said, "Don't be afraid! Tell my followers to go to Galilee. They will see me there."

IT IS THAT TIME OF THE YEAR WHEN THE QUESTION ALWAYS SURFACES IN A VARIETY OF NATIONAL SURVEYS, AND FROM A VARIETY OF THEOLOGICALLY SLANTED PERSPECTIVES.....

“DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST?”

SO, MY QUESTION TO THOSE WHO COME TO ME WITH SIMILAR QUESTIONS IS THIS.....

“DO YOU BELIEVE THAT CHRIST WAS BORN OF A VIRGIN?”

AND THE ANSWER MOST OFTEN IS “YES”.....ALTHOUGH SOMETIMES WITH A HINT OF SKEPTICISM....

BUT THE ANSWER ALIGNS ITSELF WITH 87% OF PEOPLE WHO ARE ASKED THE QUESTION.....PEOPLE FROM ALL THEOLOGICAL POSITIONS....

SO.....MY THOUGHT IS THIS.....IF YOU BELIEVE IN THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST....WHY WOULDN'T YOU BELIEVE IN THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

YET LESS THAN 62% OF THOSE NATIONALLY SURVEYED RESPONDED IN A POSITIVE MANNER.

SO...WHAT POSITION DO YOU TAKE THIS MORNING?

AS I WAS SURFING THROUGH INTERNET ARTICLES ON THE SUBJECT.....THE THOUGHT CAME TO ME....

I WONDER WHAT THE APOSTLE THOMAS THOUGHT?

DO YOU REMEMBER THOMAS'S REACTION TO THE NEWS THAT PEOPLE HAD SEEN THE RESURRECTED JESUS....

THE STORY IS FOUND IN JOHNS GOSPEL, THE 20TH CHAPTER, BEGINNING WITH THE 19TH VERSE;

FOR FEAR OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN TO THEM AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS, THE DISCIPLES WENT AND LOCKED THEMSELVES IN A ROOM.....

SUDDENLY JESUS APPEARED TO THEM....AND TO DISPLACE THEIR UNBELIEF, HE SHOWED THEM HIS NAIL PIERCED HANDS, AND SPEAR PIERCED SIDE....

THOMAS WAS NOT WITH THEM WHEN THIS HAPPENED, SO WHEN THE DISCIPLES TRIED TO CONVINCHE HIM....

HE WAS AN "UNBELIEVER"....HE WANTED PROOF....

THOMAS SOUNDS SO MUCH LIKE THE CURRENT VERSION OF A MODERN HUMANIST.....BELIEF IS EQUAL TO FACT.....

THOMAS SAID, "I MUST SEE...AND I MUST TOUCH...OR I WON'T BELIEVE!"

A WEEK LATER WHILE ALL, INCLUDING THOMAS, WERE GATHERED TOGETHER....JESUS APPEARED AGAIN....

HE WENT IMMEDIATELY TO THOMAS AND TOLD HIM, "PUT YOUR FINGER HERE, IN MY SIDE, AND LOOK AT MY HANDS".

AND THOMAS REPLIED.... "YOU ARE MY LORD, AND MY GOD!"

LISTEN TO WHAT JESUS SAID, HE IS SPEAKING NOT ONLY TO THOMAS, BUT TO ALL WHO PROFESS A BELIEF IN HIM AS LORD AND SAVIOR.....

HE ASKS, "DO YOU HAVE FAITH/BELIEVE BECAUSE YOU HAVE SEEN ME?"

AND THEN HE CONTINUES BY SAYING, “BLESSED ARE THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE FAITH IN ME WITHOUT SEEING!”

KNOWING WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THOMAS, I WONDERED;

- WHY DOES IT APPEAR HE BELIEVED/ACCEPTED THE MESSAGE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST.....BUT YET HE HAD DOUBTS ON THE MESSAGE OF HIS BODILY RESURRECTION?
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THERE WAS AN INTERESTING ARTICLE ON THE INTERNET WRITTEN BY DAVE BENNETT, A GRADUATE STUDENT AT OHIO UNIVERSITY....

THE ARTICLE IS ABOUT A CONVERSATION THAT HE HAD WITH ONE OF THE PROFESSORS....STEVE HAYS.

DAVE TALKS ABOUT HOW IN THE ACADEMIC ARENA IT IS PERFECTLY OK TO TALK ABOUT FAITH/RELIGION AS LONG AS YOU CAN SUBSTANTIATE WHAT YOU SAY YOU BELIEVE IN.

HE WRITES, “IF ONE OF MY FRIENDS CAME TO ME SAYING THAT A MUTUAL FRIEND HAD DIED AND WAS NOW RESURRECTED FROM THE DEAD.....I WOULD DEMAND PROOF”.

HE GOES ON TO SAY, THAT EVEN IF HE WITNESSED SUCH A PHENOMENON, HE WOULD STILL HAVE DOUBTS....DOUBTING HIS OWN MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL STABILITY, AND THE ABILITY TO SEE AND THINK CLEARLY.

BUT THEN THE PROFESSOR WHO WAS LISTENING TO DAVE RAMBLE ON OFFERED THIS;

HE RECOUNTED A RATHER STRANGE MEMORY HE HAD AS A CHILD. HE LIVED IN RENO, NEVADA.

HE REMEMBERED SEEING AN AFRICAN LION SITTING IN A STATION WAGON WITH ITS WINDOW ROLLED ALL THE WAY DOWN OUTSIDE HIS HOUSE.

HE TELLS HOW HE WENT UP TO THE CAR, AND BEGAN TO PET THE LION.....THE LION DIDN'T GROWL, OR ATTEMPT TO BITE HIM.

AS THE YEARS PASSED HE BEGAN TO DOUBT SUCH AN EVENT EVER TOOK PLACE....

HE REMEMBERED ASKING HIS MOTHER IF THE STORY WAS TRUE....

AND SHE CONFIRMED THAT THE STORY WAS TRUE....AND THAT A LOCAL LADY IN RENO ACTUALLY OWNED THE LION.....

STEVE SAYS THAT IF HE WAS BEGINNING TO DOUBT HIS OWN STORY....HE WAS WONDERING WHAT OTHERS THOUGHT WHEN HE TOLD THE STORY.....

HE KNEW EVEN AS THE STORY WAS BEING PASSED DOWN THROUGH HIS FAMILY, SOME BEGAN TO THINK IT FANTASY....AN IMAGINARY.....

BUT THE ACCOUNT IS TRUE, IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED IT, OR IF YOU HAVE FAITH AND BELIEVE IN THE PREDESSORS WHO HAVE TOLD THE STORY.

WHICH BRINGS THE POINT OF THAT ILLUSTRATION BACK TO THE POINT OF THE SERMON THIS MORNING.....

IF WE **DON'T** HAVE FAITH, AND **DON'T** TAKE THE WORD OF THOSE WHO HISTORICALLY HAVE GONE BEFORE US....THEN WHAT DO WE HAVE?

THEN OF WHAT VALUE IS THIS (HOLDING UP THE BIBLE)?

DR. MYRON AUGSBURGER, DISTINGUISHED N.T. SCHOLAR, AND FORMER PRESIDENT OF EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY WRITES ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATING SCRIPTURE TO FIND TRUTH...

HE SAYS CONSIDER THE INCIDENCES OF ACCOUNTS OF THE APPEARANCES OF CHRIST FOLLOWING HIS CRUCIFIXION, WHICH HE BELIEVES ADDS AUTHENTICITY TO HIS RESURRECTION;

- JESUS'S APPEARANCE TO MARY AT THE TOMB (MARK 16, JOHN 20).
- JESUS'S APPEARANCE TO THE OTHER WOMEN AS THEY LEFT THE GARDEN (MATTHEW 28).
- JESUS'S APPEARANCE TO PETER (LUKE 24...AND ANOTHER ACCOUNT BY PAUL IN 1ST COR. 15).
- JESUS' APPEARANCE TO THE TWO ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS (LUKE 24, MARK 16).
- JESUS' APPEARANCE TO THE TEN IN JERUSALEM (LUKE 24, JOHN 20).
- JESUS' APPEARANCE TO THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES (JOHN 20, MARK 16,AND PAULS ACCOUNT IN 1ST COR.15).
- JESUS' APPEARANCE TO SEVEN DISCIPLES AT THE SEA OF GALILEE IN TIBERIUS (JOHN 21).
- JESUS' LATER APPEARANCE AGAIN TO THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES AT THE GALILEE (MARK 16, MATTHEW 28).
- JESUS' APPEARANCE TO FIVE HUNDRED (PAUL'S ACCOUNT IN 1ST COR.15).

- JESUS' APPEARANCE TO JAMES (PAULS ACCOUNT IN 1ST COR.15).
 - JESUS' APPEARANCE TO PAUL (1 CORINTHIANS 15).
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ANOTHER NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR, NICHOLAS WRIGHT, BISHOP FOR THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND, IN DURHAM, ENGLAND, WRITES;

“I DO THINK HOWEVER THAT CHURCHES THAT LOSE THEIR GRIP ON THE BODILY RESURRECTION ARE IN DEEP, DEEP TROUBLE, AND THAT FOR HEALTHY CHRISTIAN LIFE INDIVIDUALLY AND CORPORATELY, BELIEF IN THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL.”

HE CONTINUES BY QUOTING THE APOSTLE PAUL, “IF YOU CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD YOU WILL BE SAVED.....BUT IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED THEN WE ARE STILL IN OUR SINS.”

AND CONCLUDES BY SAYING....WE ARE THEN WITHOUT HOPE!

IN CONCLUSION.....

THERE IS PROBABLY A LITTLE BIT OF THOMAS IN ALL OF US....IT SEEMS TO BE EVEN MORE SO TODAY GIVEN THE CULTURE THAT WE LIVE IN...

WE THINK WE NEED PROOF TO BELIEVE.....

HOWEVER REMEMBER AGAIN WHAT JESUS SAID TO THOMAS.....

“WE ARE BLESSED IF WE BELIEVE DESPITE NOT HAVING THE EVIDENCE.”

HAVE A GREAT RESURRECTION SUNDAY THE REST OF THE DAY.....

LET'S PRAY.