**March 31st 2024 Easter Sunday**

**Text: Matthew 28:1-10** 0715

**Theme: Signed, Sealed, and Delivered.**

May the glory of this Easter morning grant comfort and hope to your heart, knowing truly that your sins have been forgiven and your salvation secured through Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear Christians: Hallelujah! Jesus Lives! The victory is won! These are cry of every Christian on this blessed Easter morning. No other day can hold the joy that Easter Day brings, for the penitential season of Lent has set with Good Friday and Black Saturday, and the dawn has risen with the joy of Easter morning. We have been considering the last seven weeks, during our midweek services, the blood of the New Testament, even receiving the body and blood of Jesus in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper this last Friday, and we learned of all the suffering our Savior endured for our sakes, and the shedding of His blood for the remission of sins, which gives answer to the blood of the Old Testament sacrifices in both the Tabernacles and the Temple. It is the sacrifice of Christ upon the altar of the cross that gave those sacrifices their power, but also does away with the need for repeating those sacrifices year after year and day after day.

Now we left off this past Friday with Jesus’ death and burial in a tomb, with a great stone rolled in front of the door. The next day was the Sabbath Day, and the Jews rested while the Roman soldiers guarded Jesus’ tomb, for fear that His disciples would steal His body and claim He had risen from the dead, which act gives witness to His resurrection, for if they had not posted the guard, the claim could be made that His body was moved, but with it, the only plausible explanation, from a worldly standpoint, is the He actually did rise from the dead, as the Scriptures declare. Further, the entire story of Jesus’ life and death would never have been conceived of by man if it were not true, for man’s inclination is that man must save himself, which is the opposite of the true Gospel, and what story would have the hero die in such a shameful way? These discussions are of course simply from reason, but as Christians know the Word of God is more than just mere logic and reason, it is the wisdom and glory of God. Now we want for a moment to think on the importance of the resurrection. What would have happened if Jesus remained in the tomb? In truth it would mean that all we have consider the past seven weeks means nothing, for the sacrifice would not have been complete, our sins remain, and we dead, dying, and would enter damnation. This we hear: *“But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (1 Cor. 15:13-19)* This is how important Jesus’ resurrection is to the Christian, and also the reason why Easter offers such hope and comfort, peace and grace, because with it all is confirmed, but without it we have nothing, and are yet in our sins as Paul said. In other words the blood of the New Testament is signed, sealed, and delivered unto mankind. This will serve as our theme for today, and is drawn from a hymn we sang this past Friday, and quoted in that sermon: “He that drinks shall live forever; ‘Tis a soul renewing flood. God is faithful; God will never break His covenant of blood, signed when our Redeemer died, sealed when He was glorified.” (TLH 149:4) It is in the spirit of joy, peace, and comfort that we look at our text for today, on this Easter morning, which is found in the twenty eighth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew beginning at verse one.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O Lord Jesus Christ, our glorious and risen Savior, we come into Thy house this day, having been comforted and assured of the forgiveness of all our sins, our spiritual and eternal life. Grant unto us a firm faith in Thy resurrection, that we may never lose the hope of eternal life, nor of our own resurrection. Come unto us this day, and speak softly to us, in the voice of the Gospel, to ‘fear not’ for in Thy work we have been reconciled with Thy Father and our Father in heaven. Teach us of the hatred of the world due to the fear of their hearts over their sin and unbelief. Use us, O Lord, to spread the Gospel far and wide, that many may receive the same peace and hope that we have received through faith. Keep us from being afraid of Thee and of Thy Word due to sin, but clinging fervently to Thy promises, the promises of the resurrection morn, honor and respect Thee as our Savior, our Redeemer, our friend, and brother. Grant, O Savior, the Holy Spirit in great measure unto us, that we not lay aside Thy grace, but evermore remain steadfast in the faith which saves us, that when Thou shalt return in Thy glory with all the holy angels and the triumphant saints, we may be among those who ascend with Thee into heaven, there to dwell with Thee in glory forevermore. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn that the blood of the New Testament was signed, sealed, and delivered:

1. **Giving fear to unbelief.** We read verses one through four of our text: **read verses here.** The contrast shown in our text between the soldiers who watched at the tomb, and the women including Mary Magdalene, is quite astounding, and is the focus of our sermon. As the day was dawning on the first day of the, that is, on Sunday, the greatest of miracles took place, the resurrection of Christ from the dead. In a moment of time, the stone rolled away from the door, and the soldiers, were frightened. They became as dead men, which means that they were frozen with fear, they could not speak, they could not move, for fear of the angel that sat upon the rolled away stone, and the great earthquake. How much fear there is in those who have not the forgiveness of their sins through unbelief! When a great tragedy strikes, like an earthquake, those who are not covered by the blood of Christ fear death and what takes place after death, as they rightly should. Coming up in about a week there is a very rare solar eclipse that will pass over the United States, and the fear I have seen and heard concerning this event is incredible. Many saying that it is the sign of the rise of Antichrist, or that it signifies some terrible judgment on our nation. Now it may well be a sign from God about coming judgment, it is certainly nothing to fear for a Christian, but the prospect of death, tragedy, or judgment for the non-Christian will always bring fear, and this because of their impenitent sin. They fear God, they fear His angels, they fear Him because if the Triune God is real then their sin must be dealt with. And if they are in unbelief then they will have to deal with it themselves at the throne of judgment. This very thing we hear in Hebrews: *“For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” (Heb. 10:26-27)* The judgment and even the gracious Savior, hold fear for them because they speak nothing to them in their current state but of condemnation. They see nothing but fear in His resurrection as they are by nature, for if He died for sin and rose again to justify, then sin is real and the threats of the Law are real, and damnation is real. This they cannot abide, and they quake exceedingly for fear of judgment.

There are many self-proclaimed atheists in the world who go so far as to dare God to damn them, and do not seem like they are afraid, but the very moment they are faced with something ;like the tomb guards, they become timid and weak, helpless and hopeless, they quake and tremble, they stammer and stutter, and their great boasts they no longer dare to utter; they become as frightened children who have heard a noise they don’t recognize. The best example of this is when Saul, later the apostle Paul, had Jesus appear to him on the road to Damascus, and though Saul had boasted great things, was nothing as he stood before the Lord. His boasting ceased, for He was face to face with the Holy God who condemned his deeds of wickedness. His fear swelled up within him and he had no defense. So too, the soldiers in our text. They felt the earthquake, they witnessed the rolling away of the stone, and they saw the angel, and they were face to face with their own sin, corruption, and judgment, which in moment became quite apparent. Now this portion of the sermon is not to take pleasure in their fear, but to understand that what things we have escaped they are still facing. Let us then go unto them, and in meekness show unto them their Savior from sin and death, and that He need not be feared, but believed on for the salvation of their soul, for they too have had the blood of the New Testament signed, sealed, and delivered for them, which can be apprehended through faith in Jesus’ blood and resurrection. Thus is the work of redemption signed, sealed, and delivered, giving fear to unbelief:

1. **And, to faith.** We read verses five through ten of our text: **read verses here.** It is interesting to note that the first to the tomb on that happy morning were women. It was not His disciples, or some great man, but the women which followed Him, and which seem to have believed and loved their Savior, not being offended because of Him. Among these women was Mary Magdalene, who is thought to be the woman taken in adultery, who was to be stoned for her adultery, but Jesus saved her earthly life, and spiritual life, whereupon she loved her Lord. It must be that we notice who she was, for when we see the contrast between the fear of the guards and of Mary Magdalene, we must note that the difference in not found in their person or character. She was a great sinner just as the guards, and she deserved the wrath of God and His judgment just as they. Yet she is comforted with the blessed words “fear not ye,’ while the keepers are not. Why is this? Because faith takes hold of God’s grace in Christ, and though our flesh fears as did the guard’s, our faith overcomes the fear of our flesh. We are not afraid of our Savior, of His resurrection; we are not afraid of judgment or of death, for all fear has been removed. Then we see why they do not fear: it is because of the promise of the resurrection morn told to them by the angel: “He is not here: for He is risen.” This truth takes away fear for those who are covered over by the blood of Christ. *“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (2 Tim. 1:7)* Now this does not mean that there is no fear at all in the heart of a Christian, but rather that by faith we receive an answer to the fear of our flesh: I am saved by the blood of Christ, and He has invited me to come and receive His grace, therefore I need not fear.

Howbeit, the title to this section of the sermon says that it does make the Christian fear. Yet this is not the same type of fear. Notice how Mary and her companions departed from the sepulcher: “with fear and great joy.” But it is a different kind of fear. It is not the paralyzing fear of judgment that the keepers had, but one which is rightly humble before the Lord, honors Him, worships Him, but further it is the type of fear that rejoices. It gives joy, for it knows that the righteous God has purchased salvation by His death and resurrection for us, and knowing that He is the infinite God we know that He can and has accomplished it. Our faith knows nothing of being afraid of God, but rather trusts Him, looks to Him for help and hope, and leans on Him for all good things. This is not fear. *“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love Him, because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:17-19)* Love is where the answer is found, and more to the point, grace is where the difference between the fear of unbelief and the fear of faith is found.Love from God to man in the Gospel moves men to faith which loves God and casts out fear: fear of death, fear of judgment, fear of wrath. Love rather looks to God and sees not fear but grace, mercy, and kindness; salvation is given and assured, and our hearts are comforted. May each of us receive and retain this hope and comfort our whole lives through, and may we worship and praise His name today for our justification. Let us pray that Jesus would return soon to bring us home and remove us from the sufferings of this present time to the glory of eternal grace. Amen.