

Easter

by Tony Melton

The belief in the resurrection of Christ is a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. In the New Testament, we read of the first century preachers who constantly spoke concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Throughout the book of Acts, the principle theme of their sermons consisted of their testimony concerning the resurrection. It was a significant part of the thinking of Christians in the first century, and it should be for us today.

At this time of year, many people celebrate the resurrection of Christ or what is commonly known as Easter Sunday. While many conflicting views exist pertaining to the date that Jesus was raised from the dead it is generally believe by scholars that it was around this time of year. According to the Grolier Encyclopedia, "The name *Easter* is derived from the pagan spring festival of the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre, and many folk customs associated with Easter (for example, Easter eggs) are of pagan origin." The word "Easter" is found only in Acts 12:4 in the King James Version which is commonly recognized as a mis-translation of the Greek word *pascha* which literally means "Passover."

Although the New Testament gives no example of a congregation celebrating the resurrection of Christ as a special day, every child of God should daily meditate and think upon His resurrection. Let us briefly consider this extremely important event.

When we look back to that dark, dreary day when Jesus' friends forsook and denied Him and His own people falsely accused Him, it should produce inward grief. When we think how the Roman soldiers cruelly spit in Jesus' face, mocked him and beat the flesh from His back, we should keep in mind that Jesus could have stopped it at anytime; but He bore the humiliating experience for our sake. Then as we ponder how the soldier hammered the nails into His hands and feet fastening Him to the wooden Roman cross, it should create within us a renewed appreciation for His love toward us. Even though Jesus had committed no crime or sin, He was mercilessly pinned to that cross for six long hours. Why did He make such a sacrifice? He did it to give everyone on earth the opportunity to escape the eternal wrath of God against sin and to have eternal life.

After Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took Jesus down from the cross and wrapped his body in linen cloth. In the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden where Joseph had built a new tomb; the two men placed Jesus' body there. Then Joseph rolled a very large stone over the mouth of the tomb. Pilate placed guards around the tomb, and they placed a seal upon the stone that was over the entrance.

On Sunday, three days later, Mary Magdalene and other women went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. These ladies were concerned about who would remove the stone for them. When they arrived, the earth quaked and an angel descended from heaven and moved the rock from the entrance and sat upon it. The guards shook with fear

and became as dead men. Then the angel told the ladies not to be afraid, and he explained to them that Jesus was no longer in the tomb but he had risen from the dead.

The first one to see Jesus after his resurrection was Mary Magdalene. The apostle Paul later informs us that Peter, James and all the apostles saw Jesus after His resurrection; and then on another occasion, over 500 hundred brethren saw Him at the same time.

Today, we can be truly thankful that Jesus was willing to suffer such a cruel, agonizing death on our behalf; and for the fact that He came forth from the grave. Jesus broke the binding chains of death. The Bible speaks of many who were raised from the dead, but Jesus was the first to be raised *to die no more*. Because of what Jesus did, we, as children of God, can confidently say with the apostle Paul, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).