

“Then We Shall Know Fully”

April 1, 2018

It was morning and several women were heading to Jesus' tomb, carrying spices for His body. But when they reached the tomb, they found the large stone that sealed the tomb rolled away and Jesus' body was not there. While the women were perplexed by this, two angels in bright shining clothes appeared to them and said, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” (Luke 24:5-6).

On that day, everything changed. Our lives today have been changed by that event. This Easter morning, I would like to talk about what has been given to us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If I was the author of the Bible, and my goal was to tell readers of how wonderful life could be if you believe in God and walk with Him, there are some passages that I probably would leave out.

These passages may confuse readers, cause them to stumble, and give proof to naysayers that the Bible is only a fairy tale. Even if I had to write them down, I would make them as brief as possible.

But when we read the actual Bible, it is apparent that the Bible makes no concessions of this kind to its readers. In other words, we find passages all over the Bible that may cause people to feel even more distant to God.

In the Bible, we find the story of a leader named Moses. He was a man greatly used by God, and no other leader before or after him served God so faithfully or contributed more to the well-being of the people of Israel as Moses. He was a hero who freed his people from slavery in Egypt and was a faithful servant til the very end.

We would assume that a great hero like Moses must have been richly rewarded, but instead it says that he was not allowed to enter into Canaan, the promised land that he longed to see with his people, and he took his last breath just outside of Canaan. From a human perspective, this does not make sense. He was always on the front line leading his people, so we naturally think that he had every right to enter the land he dreamed about.

John the Baptist was a prophet who appeared before Jesus began His earthly ministry. No one had a better understanding of their purpose in life as he did. He lived a life completely separated from worldly pleasures, and dedicated his entire life to preparing the way for Jesus Christ's appearance. Jesus commended John by saying, “Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11).

But John's life ended in a tragic way. Herod, the ruler of Judea, had a birthday banquet, during which his daughter danced for the guests, and this pleased Herod so much that he promised to give her whatever she asked. She replied to this offer by saying “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist”. This was a disturbing request, but Herod had to comply to save his face in the presence of his guests, and as a result John was beheaded and his head put on a platter.

We wonder, why did this man who received the highest praise from Jesus, why did he have to be beheaded, all because of a foolish request during a drunken feast, and to save the face of an impulsive king?

It is clear that Moses and John lived their lives for God, and I think all of us would agree that they deserved the utmost reward from God. Yet they never received their reward from God while they were alive, and both of their lives ended in a way that leaves us asking, “Why?”

And these things that make us wonder “why” are not only found in the Bible, but these are things we hear about today that happen to people we know.

There is an American missionary I know named John Trosen. To be more precise, I have to say there “was” a missionary named John Trosen. He was a missionary pilot who delivered Bibles and other supplies on a small plane to other missionaries working in remote jungles and he himself served as a missionary in South America.

As a licensed pilot, he could have chosen a career path that would allow him to live a relatively comfortable life. But his heart for missions led him to South America. On September 28, 1998, John Trosen's plane flew out of a small village in Bolivia, carrying seven people which included a local pastor, a young seminary couple, and the pilot's own family. Shortly after they took off, the plane disappeared and they were never heard from again.

Despite search and rescue efforts, not a trace was found of these missionaries and it has been twenty years since they went missing. At the time John was 28 and his wife Masako 35, and their two young children Tsubasa (Isaiah) and Hikari (Sophia) were also on the plane. Needless to say, everyone would have thought that this family's best days were still ahead of them. They were sent to the mission field after a long period of preparation, but only after 9 months their work was abruptly ended.

Twelve years ago, on March 21 in Sagami-hara, Kanagawa, a memorial service was held for a man named Lee Chung-hee. Still in his forties, he went to be with the Lord and left behind his wife and three children. Why was he in Japan? Originally from Korea, Mr. Lee had a burden for Japan and came as a missionary. He and I studied together in seminary. He was a quiet person, but always had a smile on his face and was passionate about reaching Japan with the gospel.

These missionaries left their home land for the mission field and devoted their lives to God, but they never got to see the life they envisioned for themselves. If they were still alive, they must have been able to do so much more for God and for their families and friends. They remind us of Moses and John the Baptist. Why does the Bible not shy away from telling us about these kinds of people? Why did the lives of the Trozen family or Pastor Lee have to end that way?

Anyone would agree that a person who devoted their life to God should be rewarded for their sacrifice. But why did they have to die so soon without ever seeing their reward?

There is something I want to make clear. I have been speaking on the topic of reward, but what exactly do we mean when we use the word reward? Is it long life? Financial compensation? Praise from others? Our idea of a reward is mostly along these lines.

But the Bible does not consider these kinds of rewards as truly valuable. This is addressed in Hebrews 11. This chapter of Hebrews is called the Hall of Faith, and lists the names of people who walked with God and had the same outlook on the reward they shall receive:

"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth" (Hebrew 11:13).

The words "things promised" are referring to the reward that I have been speaking about. It says here that they did not receive their reward on earth. We can draw from this passage that the things we on earth consider to be rewards are not valuable in the eyes of God. This means that our true reward will be received outside of this earth. But what could all of that mean? It sounds too out of the ordinary to have any relevance to us in real life.

Does the Bible have an answer to our "why's" about the lives of Moses, John the Baptist, the Trozen family, and Pastor Lee? If the Bible cannot give us an answer, our faith would be vain and hopeless.

But the Bible does have an answer. Where could this answer be found? The answer is found in a single event. The answer is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus' resurrection we too are promised eternal life, and in that life, everything we experience here on earth will be set straight, and the books will be balanced.

What do I mean by balance the books? What is the meaning of this phrase? It refers to a practice in accounting when the difference between earnings and expenditures on a ledger is balanced out. During our life here on earth, our ledger is still not finalized. In this life, there are moments when the numbers just don't add up, no matter how many times we try to calculate the balance. This is the reality of life on earth and we sometimes call this the "absurdity of life".

I don't know how it is today but as far as I remember, all the banks in Japan closed at 3PM. I have heard before that after they close the shutters, the clerks inside have to count all the cash that have been exchanged during that day. Back in the days when there was no internet or credit cards, these bank clerks had to count all the cash that were deposited and record the transactions of the day on their ledger. But if they were 370 yen short at the end of the day, they won't be able to go home until they found that 370 yen. Someone once told me that when this happens, the bank clerks will pay out of their own pocket, but I don't believe this is often the case. The clerks would look all over until they find that missing 370 yen and only after they settle the balance for the day can they

go home in peace.

In life, there are times when the balance on our own ledger does not add up the way we think it should. Everyone experiences this at least once or twice in their lifetime. And when this happens, we doubt the goodness of God or even become defiant towards Him. But when we do this, we are forgetting something. We forget that it is not up to us to balance the books, but after our life on earth is over and the shutters are closed, God is the one who will settle the balance. And the Bible promises us that the day will come when we will praise God for settling the balance and making everything right.

Paul tells us about this in 1 Corinthians 13:12 where he says, "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known". Right now, we only see life's ledger in part. But a time will come when the One who knows us fully will let us see the whole picture.

At times we are reminded of how fleeting life on earth is. In our complacency we believe that there will always be another day, without any guarantee. But when an unexpected death occurs, all of a sudden we become overwhelmed with grief and cry out, "how could this happen?" This is because we falsely believe that death is the ultimate end of a person's life.

But the Bible tells us that no matter how long a person lives, or how much they achieved in this life, or how painful or sad their last days were, these things do not have the final word on that person's life. The passage we read from Hebrews tells us that in this life, we are "foreigners and strangers on earth". There are things we don't yet understand in the middle of our journey but when we reach our eternal home the truth will be revealed to us.

That day when we finally reach that place, all of our questions and doubts in this life will be answered and we will know the purpose behind each event in our lives. And to guarantee us that we will indeed see that day, Jesus Christ died and rose again.

The resurrection of Jesus promises us of our own resurrection and eternal life, and on that day we will clearly see God's purpose behind all of the things we experience here on earth.

Jesus' resurrection proves to us that God does not ignore the sorrows and frustrations we experience in the midst of circumstances we don't yet understand, and because of His great love, God will not leave our questions regarding these things unanswered.

And the great news is that we do not have to wait until the end of our lives, but if we trust that one day God will answer all of our questions, we can claim this promise today and be confident that no matter what we are facing, we can find hope through Christ.

Pastor Lee whom I mentioned earlier was survived by his wife Che (崔). A mutual friend once told me in an email about a conversation between Che and Pastor Lee at the hospital. Seeing how much her husband was suffering, she asked him, "When you are suffering like this, do you still love Jesus?" To this Pastor Lee smiled and said, "Yes, I love Jesus". She asked him again, "You are in so much pain! Do you really still love Jesus?". Again, he smiled and replied, "Yes, I love Jesus". After saying this, Pastor Lee's blood pressure rose and his body started to shake violently in a seizure, and the pain was so severe that he passed out. As she saw her husband laying unconscious, Che thought to herself, "This man really does love Jesus, and wants the people of Japan to know about Jesus' love".

At that moment, Pastor Lee was nearing the end of his ministry on earth. Soon, he had to say goodbye to the family he loved. But in his heart was his unwavering trust in the love of Jesus Christ. Why was Pastor Lee able trust Jesus amidst his suffering? It is because he knew that Jesus Himself suffered. They scourged Jesus until His bones were exposed; as His hands and feet were pierced, His blood pressure swung and His body shook in excruciating pain, as He fell in and out of consciousness; but Jesus knew that He must endure the cross and die once in order to give us eternal life. It was this love of Jesus that Pastor Lee trusted in as he laid on his sickbed.

His faith and hope was in this Jesus who died on the cross for him, he trusted in the One who conquered death and rose again for him. Even as his illness forced him to leave everything behind, he trusted in God, the One who works all things for our good and settles the balance on our behalf.

If there is anyone here today who is struggling with questions about the pain and suffering in your own life or the lives of people you know, please know this one thing: The answer is found in Easter. The answer is found in the empty tomb witnessed by those women. Jesus Christ's resurrection is the answer to all of our questions. As long as this truth stands, we cannot and must not draw any conclusions about our lives. God loves us so much that He gave His only Son to us, and He will settle the balance of our lives to make everything right in the end. Blessed are we when we trust in this promise and walk with God as we journey through this life, until the day He calls our name and we go home where our loving Father is waiting. Let's pray.