

Watchers on the Hill: The Gift April 1, 2020

Mark 15:40-41, John 19:28, 30-31, 38-42

One again we look back to Jesus' cross. We know that Mary Magdalene stood by the cross when Jesus died and that Nicodemus was there when His body was taken down from the cross and placed in new tomb. Both people lives had been changed by Jesus. Jesus had given Mary Magdalene a new life when He ordered the evil spirits to leave her. From that point forward Mary was a faithful follower of Jesus.

Jesus gave the promise of a new life when Nicodemus came to see Him one night. Jesus told Nicodemus, **“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16) Jesus gave His life for us on the cross.

But how can Jesus' death be a gift? Is death ever a gift? Darkness covered the land while Jesus was on the cross, as if nature itself was in mourning. Jesus' life so full of promise was cut short. Three years of miracles, healings, teaching and preaching came to a screeching halt. It didn't look like much of a gift.

I'm not sure that Nicodemus understood what Jesus said to him that night. Jesus told Nicodemus, **“The Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.”** (John 3:14-15) He may not have even understood it while Jesus hung from on the cross. Jesus was lifted up on the cross to give us the gift of Eternal life.

Just before He died, Jesus cried out **“It is finished.”** What was finished? Obviously Jesus suffering was just about over. We might be tempted to think of death as a gift for a loved one who has suffered a lot. But Jesus didn't become a man just to experience human suffering. So what was finished? The work of Redemption was finished. We are all sinful people who have broken God's laws and turned away from others. Jesus paid for the sins of the world in full. He finished that work on the cross. He did this to reunite us with God and with one another in God's family.

This is good news for you and me and all who believe in Jesus. It means that we don't have to pay the price for our sins, which we can't do anyway. Jesus paid the full price for us. While there may still be some natural consequences for our sins

on earth, we don't have to pay any part of an eternal debt for our sins. Jesus didn't just die to pay for the big stuff and leaves us to deal with the rest. He paid it all in full. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

When Jesus said "It is finished," He was proclaiming that the debt for our sins has been paid in full. He was announcing the fact that the gift of forgiveness and life was available to all of us, to all who believe in Him and receive the gift through faith in Jesus. If you have ever made a gift for someone else, you know the gift isn't ready to give until it is finished. God's gift of love and forgiveness were given to us only after Jesus finished His work on the cross. We are the recipients of His finished gift.

Appearances can be deceiving. Although it was Friday when Jesus died on the cross and His body placed in a tomb, the last word had not been spoken. Jesus had predicted His death and resurrection at least three or four times. Jesus had the power to raise His friend Lazarus from the dead. The tomb would not be able to hold Jesus' body either. God's gift of salvation, of forgiveness and new life, was paid for on the cross. The world received that gift on Easter Sunday morning when the grave broken open to reveal that Jesus was not inside. He is alive. Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus' death is a gift. Jesus said, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13) That is what Jesus did on the cross. The Gift is for you and for me. The gift is for all who will receive it in faith. "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God." (Ephesians 2:8)

God has a gift for you today. It is finished, waiting for you. Receive the gift in faith. And don't forget to tell others about it because God has the same Gift ready for them.