



Christ, Cross and Resurrection

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E-Book

Preface

Christ, Cross and Resurrection are important aspects of Christian faith. The Lent season that begins from Ash Wednesday and ends with the celebration of Resurrection Sunday is a time of Reflection, Repentance, Commitment and Celebration.

Over the years, I had shared or written few articles about this season. I thought of collecting all of them and make it as an e-book available to for all. As pastors, preachers, and writers, finding new thoughts, ideas for sharing afresh is a never-ending search. All of us collect like a honeybee, from different flowers and make our own sweet honey. Yes, these writings are thoughts inspired by personal bible readings, listening to others, reading from other authors.

All events recorded in the gospels are important. However, this time is devoted to focus on the Lord's purpose of incarnation, revealing his glory to disciples, his love, triumphal entry, demonstration of servanthood, inauguration of New Covenant, Last Supper, intercession in Garden of Gethsemane, vicarious sacrifice, death, burial and glorious resurrection.

Christian faith is based on Love of God, that was expressed as Gracious incarnation which resulted in Sacrificial death of the 'Lamb of God,' burial and glorious resurrection on the third day. The essence of the Gospel is: Historical Christ is Eternal Christ is alive today! This glorious hope in Christ gives us strength, stamina, and wisdom to face all situations with extraordinary courage in the world.

This E-book could be used for personal study, group study or for preparing to teach to others.

I am grateful to brother Rahul Mitra who graciously edited the book to make it more reader friendly.

In the future, I will add new chapters that would be updated.

May God richly bless you as you read. Thank you!

J. N. Manokaran

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Lent: Beyond Ritual to Renewal

Lent: A tradition or a discipline?

There is an interesting Indian story. A guru used to teach his disciples sitting under a tree. One cat used to come and disturb his discourse by jumping around and distracting his disciples. One day, the guru ordered the disciples to catch the black cat and tie it against a tree. Then it became a daily practice that the black cat be tied while the guru gave lecture. After several months the guru died, later the cat also died. New guru took charge and was ready to start the discourse, the cat was missing. He became angry and asked the disciples about the cat. They said the cat had died. He got very angry and shouted: “Fools, do you not know the tradition; that I cannot speak unless the black cat is tied there.” The disciples ran around and found a black cat and got it tied. Yes, the cat had to be tied as it was disturbing the discourse. After the cat died, it became a continuous meaningless tradition.

Purposeful traditions?

There are many traditions and customs that become part of human life in different cultures. Many of the traditions are followed as unconscious decisions. Traditions are passed from generation to generation, mostly as oral communication. There are some good traditions that are healthy, purposeful; also, there are some that are superstitious and meaningless traditions. For example, people in South India eat with their right hand

and eating with left hand is considered taboo. Christians follow this tradition without any hesitance.

Is it a Christian belief or a cultural practice?

So, traditions are not harmful, could be matter of discipline or healthy practice or best practices. It will be good to evaluate traditions from time to time and bring in changes necessary or discard them if there is no reason to continue.

Season of Fasting

Lent days are considered as a season of fasting before Easter. It begins with Ash Wednesday. 'Forty days' is the time period of fasting that does not include six Sundays as Sundays are considered as mini-Easter. Forty days fasting is seen in the Scripture as practiced by Moses and Lord Jesus Christ. Fasting is a spiritual discipline followed by many saints of God in the Bible. Pharisees even made fasting a traditional ritual. They fasted twice a week and considered that as righteous act and claimed acceptance from God. (Luke 18:12)

Pagan ritual?

Some people make an allegation that a pagan festival of spring or weeping for Tammuz was incorporated as Christian festival, so it should be rejected. It is also said that Ezekiel also condemned this. (Ezekiel 8:13-14) Some interpret that Lent as tradition need not be followed by Christians. There are others who consider Lent as a 'dynamic equivalent' to a pagan festival.

Self-Discipline of spiritual audit

Of the 365 days, setting apart 40 days for spiritual growth and focus on self-analysis is a good thing. Can anyone fix 40 days by himself and do it. If so, what could be those dates, that should be chosen? Can that be

done regularly year after year? The choice is almost impossible, and a person may postpone the decision and ultimately may never allot a slot of 40 days for a spiritual audit.

Church discipline

There are certain disciplines imposed by institutions. School uniform is a discipline for all students. To help Church members to have a regular spiritual audit of fasting and renunciation, church fathers have designed a Church Calendar. When Lent days are marked in the church calendar; it provides all an opportunity to fix those dates for spiritual enhancement exercises. Generally, personally, I skip breakfast during Lent days and read more the gospels, with special emphasis on the Passion of Lord Jesus Christ. It has certainly helped me to meditate and understand the meaning of the Cross, Christ's Suffering and have learned to appreciate Christ's sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary.

Good spiritual exercise

Fasting is a good spiritual exercise. We humble ourselves before God, to learn from His Holy Scripture and fulfill His Will in our lives. Fasting is not 'hunger strike' that politicians use as tool to express their protests. It helps us to become spiritually meek and seek His Face.

Celebration of Discipline

Richard Foster wrote a book: Celebration of Discipline. Fasting during a period of Lent days is a good spiritual discipline. When Lent is considered as a discipline, it is a blessing. If it is just seen as a tradition and make that an institution, it serves no purpose. Instead of just rejecting Lent, it is possible to redeem it with positive spiritual attitude and make it beneficial for our spiritual life.

Challenge

Fasting is a missing element today in most churches. It is neither a corporate discipline of the church or individual discipline of members. To get closer to the Lord, discerning His Will, cleansing of all dross and pollution, consecrating ourselves for His service as a 'Living Sacrifice' could be done during Lent days.

Cross and Culture

In Christendom, cross is important symbol and sign. For the Romans it was a cruel punishment to those who raise against them. However, for Christians around the world it is a Sacred symbol. There are some practices that are traditions and not essentially biblical.

After saying prayers, Catholic Christians draw the symbol of cross. This is to symbolize and state that they are crucified with Christ. However, protestant Christians do not do that. Cross is a symbol that signifies significant things including the redemption sacrifice Lord Jesus paid at the cross of Calvary. The bread and wine as we partake in Holy Communion symbolizes the body and blood of Lord Jesus Christ; Unlike Roman Catholic tradition where the priest claim magical powers to convert the bread and wine as actual body and blood of Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Communion inspires awe and we partake with preparation, prayer and fear of the Lord. That does not mean that we worship the symbols.

Symbols convey deeper meanings always. The symbol of cross has intrigued Christians and others in several ways. When I was a small boy (6-7 years) I had to cross a portion of the road which was pitch dark and had a well on one side. Children used to say that a demon lived in the well. Whenever I had to cross that portion alone, I used to put a symbol of cross and run that distance. Sometimes, I have held my younger brothers' hand, and we have run those places. At that age, I did not know the Bible as I know today. However, I knew that cross is a powerful

symbol against evil forces. I used that as my protection. That was my ‘weak faith’ and certainly God did not mock at my weak faith as some Christians would like to do. “A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.” (Isaiah 42:3)

As small kids, when our parents were not present, we were afraid to sleep alone. That time, we used to mark the symbol of cross around our mat and go to sleep. Certainly, we had a good, deep sleep. The idea was that the symbol of cross which was even not invisible for us, could ward off the invisible Satan and his armies. It is childlike faith and it was a spiritual resource in the world.

When cross symbolizes the greatest meaning and purpose of God for humanity; no wonder Satan shudders. Those who are children and are at the beginning stage of faith use cross as their spiritual resource to face hardships in life. It is like shuttering used when concrete roofs are built. These shuttering has to stay for about 21 days until the concrete solidifies. After that the shuttering would be removed and concrete would remain. In the same way, such childlike steps in faith are like shuttering which could be removed as the person grows more in faith. But, to live with shuttering is unnecessary and unwarranted.

Such outer acts have to be accompanied by inner faith. As a child, I believed that a symbol of cross on my chest while I run a short distance infested by demons protects me had both inner belief and outer act. If there is no faith, then the outer acts are used like magic power.

A person symbolically blessed other by placing hands on the head. The hand is considered as if God placed the hand of that person. God has given the authority to servants of God to do certain symbolic acts. When we start worshipping the hand of the servant of God, then we start idol worship or pagan worship. God put a sign on the forehead of Cain to

protect him. Putting a symbol of cross on the forehead of those a person blesses is not a pagan rite.

Symbolic acts are always there in Christian faith. Moses had to stretch his rod over Red Sea and miracle happened. It was a symbolic act of faith. That does not mean, whenever he stretches his rod over any water body there would be a way in the midst. Partaking communion is an act of faith. If not accompanied by faith and holiness, people could die while partaking communion.

Faith grows as we grow in knowledge. “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” (I Cor 13:11)

Palm Sunday

Lessons learnt from the First Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday is celebrated the Sunday before Easter, marking the Triumphal Entry of the Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. It has been recorded in the gospels of Matthew (Chapter 21), Mark (11), Luke (19) and John (12). It was a panoramic sight, Jesus riding on the donkey; children shouting ‘Hosanna, in the highest’; people spreading their cloaks; cutting branches and waving the palm leaves. It was a popular celebration among the disciples and common people while the religious leaders were upset, envious and even complained to the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Lord Jesus uses the Meek: It is interesting to note that the Lord Jesus chose a donkey as his vehicle for a triumphal procession. The meek and humble animal was chosen by our Lord instead of highly rated horse that was the vehicle of kings and nobles. It is a myth that God uses only those who are extroverted, highly talented, educated, skilled, trained, equipped, and capable people. God can use anyone who is available. In His paradigm, one’s availability ranks higher than the ability. The mule was readily available.

2. Lord Jesus as our Model: Lord Jesus Christ is our model. The world worships pomp and show, while the Lord chose a humble procession. It was not planned as a mega show with media persons clamoring for bytes. Humility was one of the greatest virtues of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even

when he had opportunities to choose a better place for his birth, he chose an unhygienic setting for the Incarnation episode. He always chose the level where the least, the marginalized, the ostracized, and the poor could be comfortable with Him.

3. Lord Jesus teaches a Moral: The Palm Sunday cannot be disconnected from the cleansing of the temple. The Temple in Jerusalem looked like a Bazaar (historically dubbed as Ananias Bazaar, named after the corrupt Chief Priest) where the noise of animals, the money being changed (temple tax coin was to be purchased with other currencies brought by Jewish Diaspora), the vendors shouting and advertising their products, wooing potential customers. And the poor worshippers—appalled as they were—tried to strike the best bargain for buying worship materials including a sacrificial animal or a bird. Instead of praises in the temple there was a lot of noise; while the streets were filled with praises instead of noise. What an irony? Jesus cleansed the temple and restored the worship with quietness and a calm atmosphere. Immediately the blind and lame came to be healed and were healed (Matthew 21:14). Lord Jesus was indigent towards those who commercialized worship but blessed those who came to worship. A place of worship cannot become a ‘den of thieves.’ Our body is the ‘temple of Holy Spirit’ it cannot become den of thieves with commercial and distracting interests.

4. Lord Jesus reveals a Mystery: The Pharisees and Sadducees as usual were not happy with the praises and worship that the Lord Jesus received from the people. They wanted silence, not praises. (They could tolerate noises in the temple- that became a bazaar but not praises in the streets). Lord Jesus simply said that the ‘stones’ would cry out if the worshippers keep silence. (Luke 19:40) He was talking about the present Information Era. In fact, ‘micro-chips’ would cry out, if people quit praising and worshipping Him.

5. Lord Jesus was not swayed by the Masses: The Lord Jesus was not swayed by the praises and the mass hysteria. He was living with purpose, fulfilling the Will of the God. He at least did three important things. First, he cleansed the temple. He restored the worship in the proper place. Second, he healed the blind and the lame who came to him after the cleansing (Matthew 21:14). Third, he wept for Jerusalem. (Luke 19:41) The city failed to discern and accept the Messiah.

Challenge

The Palm Sunday reminds us that God can use us if we are ‘available’. It also challenges us to be meek and humble as modelled by The Lord Jesus Christ. Our priorities should be right. Worshipping the Lord is paramount in our lives. We are not only called to be disciples, but to be true worshippers. Let not the noises of the world marginalize our life of praises as we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Technologies, including micro-chips are for glorifying God. Christians should redeem technology and science for the purpose of glorifying the Creator. Lord Jesus was focused on God’s purpose and was not swayed by the people around Him. He was not a “men pleaser” nor played for the gallery, nor was he directed by his critics. May God help us to lead focused lives? Let us join the procession shouting ‘Hosanna in the Highest’. Amen.

Significance of Triumphal Entry

Palm Sunday is the Sunday before Easter. It is the day that Lord Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem through East Gate in a jubilant procession. Before coming to Jerusalem, Lord Jesus was in Jericho. Lord Jesus met Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10) in Jericho and he helped Zacchaeus to his sinfulness, repent and become generous towards others. The distance between Jericho and Jerusalem is about 25 km.

On the way to Jerusalem he reaches Bethany. Lord Jesus stayed with Mary, Martha and Lazarus, whom he raised from dead. Hence, the popularity of Lord Jesus Christ had risen, so was their expectation to have freedom from oppressive Romans.

There are seven important things to learn from the sequence of the events.

I. Preparation:

Lord Jesus Christ is the ‘lamb of God’ who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29) God in his mercy was showing the Nation of Israel that Lord Jesus was His Only Son. There were at least two aspects of preparation that revealed a discerning Jew that He was the Messiah.

First, Mary anoints Lord Jesus Christ with an expensive perfume. (Matthew 26:6-13) While there were others who were criticizing that act as ‘waste’, Lord approved it. Lord Jesus knew of his sacrifice and death and hence told: “In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.” (Matthew 26:12) Disciples who were again and again hearing His words about his suffering and sacrifice should have discerned it.

Second, Lord sent two people to bring a colt/donkey. “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” (Luke 19: 30,31) There was a clear message that the Lord is not walking to the city but will be riding on a donkey.

II. Prophecy:

Jerusalem witnessed two contradictory processions. One was political power march by Pontius Pilate to intimidate people, another was spiritual peace march by the Messiah.

There was a clear prophecy that Messiah would come to Jerusalem riding on a colt, not a horse. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9) The Nation of Israel were given several prophecies to identify the Messiah. This was one of them. The Son of God chose a Peace March to invite people to be reconciled with their Father.

Messiah would come for ‘Peace’ not for war unlike other worldly leaders or kings or emperors. In fact, on the very same day or before, Pontius Pilate would have marched into the city on his chariot and horses. Governors who ruled from Caesarea reach Jerusalem during Passover and other festivals to root out and rule out any riot or resistance or rebellion. That march was to show the strength and power of Roman Empire to intimidate the people in Jerusalem.

III. Procession

What was destination of the procession of Lord Jesus Christ: Temple? Or Throne? The people must have thought it was a Political procession? Since, there were a huge crowd of people thronging Jerusalem from all directions, the procession mingled with the Passover celebrities coming into the city. Certainly, some people were eagerly expecting Lord to storm Antonia Fortress and take the ‘throne of David’. However, Lord Jesus knew it was a Spiritual procession towards Temple and not toward Antonia Fortress to defeat Romans.

IV. Praises:

In fact, Jewish people gathered around him sent a non-verbal message. They were carrying palm branches which was a reminder of Maccabean revolt about 150 plus years ago, that cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem from pollution of Greek idols.

The Praises also was declaration that Lord Jesus was the King and were expecting ‘salvation now’. The praises were to receive an earthly kingdom which was a misconception about the Messiah. “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38) “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” (Mark 11:9)

Pharisees protested praise of people, wanted to end the praising. Lord said that when the people keep quiet, “the stones will cry out.” (Luke 19:40) Today, micro-chips are made from silicon a kind of processed sand. Gospel and worship of God reaches many people in closed countries. Yes, stones and sands are crying out.

V. Pain and Agony:

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. People who were praising must have wondered, why he wept. Instead of rejoicing with the people, Lord Jesus wept. Sadly and strangely, they did not understand his heart concern, agony and burden. Though there was a crowd that was singing praises, the Nation of Israel, especially the city of Jerusalem did not have discernment to identify Lord Jesus as the Messiah. There was Lack of understanding about the Messiah. The Israelite were looking for an earthly kingdom, without understanding the eternal kingdom. Hence, they lacked faith and obviously lacked repentance too. (Luke 19:41-44) They were religious, but not spiritual.

VI. Prayer or Robbery?

The crowd expected their Messiah to march to the Fortress Antonia and snatch the seat of power ‘throne of David’ from Romans. However, the procession took the direction of the temple. The people in the crowd were disappointed, disheartened and disillusioned. Surely, many would have stopped following the procession.

Then the Lord entered the Temple. He cleansed the temple of all unspiritual, illegal and unreasonable commercial activities: “He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.’” (Matthew 21:13) ‘Ananias bazaar’ run by the family of High Priest was notorious that it looted pious Jews who came to worship there by indulging in corrupt practices and commercializing all ceremonial rituals.

Was it a defeat? Did the common people chose the wrong person as Messiah?

VII. Peace and Healing!

The disillusioned crowd deserted him. Instead of ransacking the Roman military headquarters in Antonia Fortress; “drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons, he overturned.” (Matthew 21: 12) There was no violence. The people involving in business in the Temple premises ran in all directions.

Then there was a surprise. Then came the needy people to Lord Jesus Christ. “And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.” (Matthew 21:14)

Interestingly, when all grown up disappeared; there were children in the Temple: “the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!”” (Matthew 21:15)

Return to Bethany

Lord took a final look at the temple and decided to return. “And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.” (Mark 11:11) Yes, Lord had to return the borrowed animal and go and rest before his suffering and sacrifice.

Challenging questions!

1. Preparation – Are we prepared to face death and eternity?
2. Prophecy – Do we understand meaning of the Word of God?
3. Procession – Where is our life procession leading us to? Spirituality or Worldly power and possessions?
4. Praises – Do we worship and proclaim our saviour? Or Micro-chips have taken over?
5. Pain and agony – Do I understand god's burden for lost?
6. Prayer or robbery? – How is my prayer? Pure or prosperity seeking?
7. Peace and healing – Do I enjoy intimate fellowship, peace and healing like children?

Maundy Thursday

New Covenant and Holy Communion

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world. So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions. (I Cor 11: 23-34)

Two sacraments

The New Testament Church has two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. Baptism is taken by a believer to express his obedience of faith once in life time. However, Holy Communion has to be taken as often as possible. Some churches like Roman Catholic Church celebrates Eucharist every day; Brethren Assemblies every Sunday; other churches practice this once or twice a month or once in three months.

New Covenant

The term covenant used in the Bible has a unique meaning. Covenant in the Bible means an agreement between two unequal partners. While contract and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is done generally between equal partners, the biblical covenant is between God the creator and human being who are just His creation. Hence, God himself takes initiative for the introduction and implementation of the covenant. Bible scholars consider there are several covenants like: Garden of Eden, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. Generally, the elements of covenant are: agreement, oath or promise, sacrifice, and feast

Holy Communion is the symbol of New Covenant which could be termed as the Everlasting covenant. The everlasting covenant comprises of Law of righteousness, Law of grace, Law of Spirit, Law of Liberty and faith. The Old Testament Covenant had circumcision and Passover as important components, while the New Covenant has Baptism and Holy Communion.

I. Obedience

The disciples of Lord Jesus Christ are called to celebrate this sacrament. This is an ordinance or commandment given by God. Christian life is based of faith and which is demonstrated by obedience. A Christian who ignores or neglects the participation in the Holy Communion is disobedient. Obedience is the demonstration of our humility. If we love Him we obey his commandments (John 14:15)

II. Remember

Lord has commanded to observe Holy Communion in remembrance of Him (I Cor 11:24). The wages of Sin is death (Romans 6:23). Lord Jesus Christ gave himself as sacrifice, died, buried and rose again from death. By His death Jesus fulfilled the Law. He did not destroy or break or violate the Law. Through His fulfilment we find salvation from our sins in Him alone. Jesus Christ fulfilled the old covenant and its laws when: 'He lived a sinless life; became the sacrifice for our sins and was raised from the dead defeating sin and death'. Also, Jesus Christ became our: 'High Priest, Sacrifice and Temple'. Jesus' death and resurrections means: 'Reconciliation with God; Redemption, Forgiveness, Eternal life, Citizenship of Kingdom of God, Royal Priesthood and many other blessings.' We rejoice and celebrate all these spiritual blessings he earned for us by His sacrifice.

III. Examine

It is wise to observe the Holy Communion after examining ourselves (I Cor 11:28).

In the Upper Room Judas participated in the Holy Communion without truthfulness and integrity. As soon as he received bread, Satan entered him and he went out to betray Lord Jesus (John 13:27). Paul warned the believers in Corinth that some became weak and sick as they participated in the Holy Communion without proper self-examination. First, we have to examine with our conscience. If our heart condemns us, then we have to seek forgiveness from God (I John 3:20). Second, we have to look into the Word of God that is mirror to see our shortcomings, mistakes, deviations, waywardness, lethargy, negligence, and disobedience (James 1:23). Third, we should allow the Holy Spirit to convict us, rebuke us, and teach us.

IV. Proclaim

Holy Communion is the act of proclamation of His death (I Cor 11:26). It is a visual demonstration of the New Covenant. In the Old Testament, Moses commanded the children of Israel to observe Passover. While they observe Passover, parents were expected to teach the children the Mighty deeds of God Jehovah, who redeemed them from Egyptian slavery. Similarly, partaking Holy Communion is the proclamation of the deliverance of disciples of Lord Jesus Christ from slavery of Sin, Satan, World and Death. This is also an invitation for those who do not believe in Lord Jesus Christ to come into the Fold of the Good Shepherd.

V. Participate

Holy Communion is not a private meal; it is participation in the body of Christ. The Church is the covenant community that has been cleansed by the blood of Lord Jesus Christ. The Church is also termed as Family of God. All believers are equal irrespective of any human hierarchy. All are equal in the presence of God as we partake in the Lord's table. Christian disciples are numerous but they are one body – the body of Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor 10:16-17). Christians consider themselves as heirs of Abraham by faith and inheritors of promises given to Abraham (Gen 12:2). However, Christians are also inheritors of the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1). The call is to forget the ethnic/racial identity (nation); cultural and linguistic identity (people) and caste and clan identity (family) that includes family background. For these three identities people sacrifice themselves and even kill others. However, as disciples of Lord Jesus Christ, we are beyond all these human temporal identities and have a superior identity in Lord Jesus Christ.

VI. Anticipate the Second Coming

The phrase "I shall not eat it until" (Luke 22:16) implies that Christ expected the eating of the Passover (Holy Communion) to continue during His absence until He would partake of it again at the eschatological marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9). As in the days of Noah and Lot (Matt 24:37; Luke 17:28) people will be obsessed with

themselves and in their personal projects and lose focus of the purpose of life and His imminent coming.

Challenge

The celebration of Holy Communion has Past, Present and Future in focus. We remember the Cross and Empty Tomb; obey, examine, proclaim, and participate in the Present; and look forward into future with Hope for His Second Coming. What a privilege to be celebrating the feast at His Table.

Washing feet

Today, washing of feet seems to be a political stunt. Lord Jesus Christ modelled washing of feet as a spiritual exercise.

Ritual washing: Foot washing was known in the ancient world. Foot washing was practised by several religions, made it mandatory before devotees and priests enter a sacred place. In the Old Testament, Foot washing was mandatory for priests to go into the temple for service. (Exodus 30: 17-21) In some religions, disciples have to wash guru's feet, to show reverence, loyalty and servitude.

Culture of Hospitality: Guests were always treated with respect. Abraham washed the feet of divine visitors. (Genesis 18:4) He becomes a model for hospitality.

Hygiene: Servants were expected to wash feet of Masters. Slaves wash feet of not only masters but also guests. Wife in Jewish culture was also supposed to wash feet of her husband.

Spiritual Principles: Lord Jesus Christ went beyond all these to demonstrate spiritual lessons for His disciples.

1) Identification:

Lord Jesus Christ identified Himself with humanity that too as the least of all humans – a slave; in this context. It is not just ‘tokenism’ or ‘symbolic’ but real identification with fallen human beings.

2) Attitude of service:

Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated ‘service’ as the purpose of human existence. Serving God and serving fellow humans is the ‘job description’ of all disciples. ‘Serve, not to be served’ was motto of Lord Jesus Christ. (Matthew 20:28) Hence, each and every follower of Lord Jesus Christ should have that attitude in all aspects of life.

3) Paradigm of servant hood:

Lord Jesus expected his disciples ‘ought to wash one another’s feet’(John 13:14) Dominating, Dictating and Directing is the leadership style of the world. Serving, Saving and Sharing is the lifestyle of leaders who live according to Bible.

4) Practice of love and humility:

Lord expected all human relationships to be rooted in love and humility. If love and humility are the basis for human relationships; all relationships – husband and wife, parents and children; employees and employed; doctors and patients; seller and consumers; teachers and students; government officials and governed people; etc would be transformed. Hierarchical hatred, envy and exploitation will be replaced by equality and love.

Jesus' Death – who is responsible?

As Jesus hung on the cross, the world almost stood still. Darkness filled the earth at noon, for the sun stopped shining. The curtain of the temple was torn in two. And then Jesus died.

Every Christian is familiar with this event, which occurred centuries ago. But, who really was responsible for Jesus' death? Mel Gibson's film: The Passion of The Christ has triggered a debate in United States and around in the global village.

This question may bring out various answers, depending on the person who gives the answer. Some may point to Judas as any child would. A political science student may pin point Pilate. A rationalist may point to Jewish fundamentalists. But the answer is not so simple. Let us try to analyze each of these characters.

Judas

He must have been the most honest person in the band of disciples. Otherwise, he would not have become the treasurer. It is long process for a wise steward to become a traitor and it could not have happened overnight.

When Mary anointed Jesus with perfume, Judas revealed his attitude towards money. He valued money more than Christ. Usually, those who give less for God's work criticize more about God's work. Generally, the problem is not lack of money, but our attitude towards money. So, St. Paul warned against love for money. Money is a faithful slave, but a cruel taskmaster.

Judas was a wise person who calculated and planned things. He might have thought if Christ is caught, He can easily escape. Ultimately, it is win-win situation where Jesus also escapes and he gains a hefty amount.

Satan seeks instruments for his purposes. Judas was obsessed and disappointed as he estimated Jesus as a powerful Messiah, the king – a descendant of David, who would throw out the Roman government. Judas would have become the finance minister of the new free state of Israel. Satan offered the alternative or a short cut on a platter. Judas became an instrument by consent. He sold Christ for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave.

Jesus talked with him. He brought his folly to his notice. He even appealed to him in love. The last supper shows how Christ wanted to win him back. He showed him His perfect love. But he was unmoved. He was a manipulator and hypocrite.

But within a few hours, Judas hated the money he loved. Wealth obtained by selling Christ will be a curse (Matt 27:3-10). Judas shipwrecked his faith and future. And those who gave the money did not take it back. A potter's field was purchased to bury strangers.

Judas regretted his blunder. He confessed, but to the wrong persons. He went to confess to those who lead him astray. He should have returned to Christ, but sadly did not. Even today there are many who repent and confess, but do not come to Christ. They are sadly lost, like Judas.

We cannot serve two masters. We have to love one and hate the other. Jer 6:13 declares that all are covetous. And it includes each one of us. The only antidote for this is to learn to give to the Lord. It must become our habit. We must store up in heaven.

High Priest

Jesus was very popular with the masses. His love, compassion, teachings, and miracles attracted many people towards Him. This caused a sense of insecurity in the minds of Jewish leaders. This insecurity and envy were revealed in their words and actions.

Caiphas was the high priest when Jesus was crucified. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Pilate could sense that the high priest had accused Jesus out of envy. (Matthew 27:18) Envy was the root cause for the other sins, which caused the violent death of Jesus.

The bazaar of Annas had a notorious history. The priest officiating in the temple used to turn away all offerings brought from outside the bazaar of Annas. And in that bazaar, a dove could have cost 20 times more than the market price.

Annas and Caiphas hated Jesus because Jesus cleansed the temple. They were looking for an appropriate opportunity to take revenge.

Jesus used to condemn the hypocrisy of priests and Pharisees. This truth pricked them. They were losing their reputation among common people. They also hardened their hearts. They were bitter against Jesus.

Envy, insecurity, hatred, bitterness and an attitude for revenge made them conspire against Jesus. They prepared Judas for that purpose. And they gathered their cronies who would give false witness against Jesus. They arrested Jesus in the night with the help of Judas. The children of darkness perform their dark deeds in the cover of darkness. And the high priests were no exception. They arrested Jesus and interrogated him in the night. The Sanhedrin never met at night. They broke the law and framed charges against Jesus. In the Sanhedrin, the charges were religious: blasphemy and allegation about destroying the temple and building it again.

Since they did not have the authority to give capital punishment, they took Jesus to Pilate. In John 18:28 we read an intriguing note. The high priests did not want to go inside the judgment hall fearing defilement. But they were ready to murder the Son of God with false charges. Do we not see the same situation today?

Before Pilate, they changed the charges against Jesus. All charges were political. He was portrayed as a revolutionary (Luke 23:5), who forbade people from paying tax, and who claimed Himself as king. They even declared Caesar as their king (John 19:12). It was life according to convenience and not according to Scriptures.

Envy rots the bones (Proverbs 14:30) and is condemned by the apostles (Galatians 5:26 and James 3:16). Love dispels jealousy. Christ still loved them and prayed for their forgiveness.

Pilate

Pilate was the Roman governor at that time. He was a shrewd and strict administrator. This case exposed all his weak points.

He tried to avoid the responsibility given by God. Power and responsibility could either be used for His glory or abused. It is the same with the talents, gifts and skills provided by God. He asked the Jewish high priests to judge the high profile case by themselves.

Later, he sent Jesus to Herod. He expected someone else to take decisions on his behalf. Christendom is full of such personalities. They need someone else to pray or to preach or go as missionaries. Pilate opted for the easy means.

Secondly, he tried to compromise. He had Jesus flogged, which was unlawful, to pacify the crying crowd. But it did not please the unruly mob. So he offered to release for them one of the prisoners. He tried to

do the right thing in a wrong way. “End justifies the means” is the world’s philosophy. Noah could have easily arranged a dinner party in the ark. All would have flooded in. He need not have preached at all. Will the end justify the means? Never.

At last, he washed his hands, according to the Jewish custom (Deut 21). He failed to do what was right and had power to do good but did not so he sinned against God (James 4:17). Pilate gradually lost control of the situation. If he had taken his responsibility seriously and applied his mind, it could have been different. He was behaving in an irresponsible manner.

We must not forget that he was not ignorant. His conscience and insight declared that Jesus was innocent. Also, as a senior administration, he could see through the minds of the high priests. He understood that Jesus was arrested out of envy. He had a keen sense of justice. Apart from that, his wife warned him.

Now the question arises, why did he do so? It could be because of fear. They threatened that they shall complain to Caesar. He feared losing his position, power, wealth, etc. One who fears God, need not fear man. God has not given us the spirit of fear.

He was aspiring for promotions. That was his ambition. Pilate was a selfish person. He could allow justice to suffer for the sake of personal gain. Also, he wanted to please all. One who wants to please all, can please none. Man must seek to please God alone.

He had no value for human life. If one more person was executed, will it make any difference? For Pilate, it would not.

How must we decide in such circumstances? Conscience, Scriptures and Holy Spirit can help us to decide such matters. Any decision that violates the principles of Scripture is wrong.

Mob

The law of Moses clearly warns about mob violence (Exo 23:2). Group dynamics and mass hysteria operate in a mob. Usually, damage is done before the truth is ascertained. And clever persons manipulate such groups for their own benefits.

Man has been gifted with free will. This will does not guarantee right choice nor does it give us freedom to make wrong choices. It is like a driving license. The license is to permit a person to drive lawfully and not for running over people. Similarly, free will is provided to take lawful decisions and not to exploit fellow human beings.

William Barclay comments about the mob's action clearly. They chose lawlessness, instead of law. One who takes the sword shall fall by the same. Taking law into our own hands is a sin.

Secondly, he says that they chose war, hatred, violence and bitterness. Instead of peace and love. Barabbas symbolized evil and Christ symbolized holiness. Men in darkness prefer darkness to light.

The reason for their choice could be ignorance and ungratefulness. Ignorance, because they could have been manipulated by the high priests. Christ's ministry must have blessed many including some of their relatives. But they were ungrateful. This mob brought down the curse on themselves and their children.

Herod

Herod had heard about Jesus. His guilty conscience thought that John the Baptist has come alive.

He expected Jesus to show some sign or miracle. It was out of curiosity and not out of love for truth. He had no intention of following Jesus. He wanted it as sensation. Even today, many attend healing crusades to enjoy miracles, not to follow Christ.

The gift is always inferior to the giver. When Christ Himself was present, Herod sought a gift. While Christ wants to dwell in our hearts, we expect only miracles from Him.

Herod hoped that Jesus would perform a miracle. But Jesus was different. This annoyed Herod. It offended his inflated ego. So, he commanded his soldiers to beat and mock him. He also joined them in mocking the Son of God.

Do we come to Jesus only for miracles? Do we view Him as a magician and trouble shooter? Or, do we regard Him as Lord and Saviour?

The Official

This man slapped Jesus for no reason. He must have been expecting a favour from his boss. It could have been a promotion or some materialist benefit.

I know one teacher who got a job in a Christian school as she professed Christianity as her religion. When she needed a house on rent she understood that the house owner was interested to give only to a non-Christian. She then declared that she was not a Christian and got the house for rent. She pretended to be a Christian for the job's sake. Many slap Christ's face with words, deeds, and thoughts. Using Jesus just for materialistic benefit is sin.

Though he was not directly involved, he acted as a catalyst. He rubbed salt to Jesus' wounds.

Conclusion

Love for money, materialism, hypocrisy, envy, sense of insecurity, hatred, bitterness, falsehood, violence, avoiding responsibility, compromise, fear, wrong ambition, wrong motives, ungratefulness, pride, seeking signs for sensation, etc., are self evident in these characters. As we stand before the mirror of the Scriptures, do we not see ourselves? Yes, you and I are responsible for the death of Jesus. God's wrath was upon Him because of us. Must we not repent? Let us repent. Today is the day of salvation.

Good Friday

Gethsemane to Golgotha

The intense suffering of our Lord began in the Garden of Gethsemane when his sweat was blood. The disciples representing the church were sleeping while saviour was praying.

Choice 1: Prayer over sleep:

Lord Jesus Christ did know that the time for his final part of suffering i.e. death for the salvation of humanity. Lord asked his disciples to pray. (Matthew 26:40) While disciples slept, Lord chose to pray. (Matthew 26:45) The path of cross is to make a voluntary choice to pray rather than sleep. There are a huge number of Christians who say that they do not have time to pray. It means, like the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, did not make any attempt to sacrifice sleep and chose prayer.

In the history of the church there are many stalwarts who accomplished great things through prayer. John Hyde, who was called as Praying Hyde of India was a prayer warrior. The church in Punjab (both India and Pakistan) owes its root to the prayers of John Hyde while he served in Moga and Sialkot. The sweat of the Lord became blood because of the intensity of prayer. (Luke 22:44) The heart of Hyde moved from normal left to right because of intensive prayer. He died when he was 46 years old.

Choice 2: God's will over my will:

Lord pleased with Father to remove the cup, but committed to do the Will of the Father (Luke 22:42). The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) For the salvation of humanity, Lord Jesus Christ had to bear the punishment of sin i.e. death. Sin invites the wrath of God. Lord Jesus Christ had to taste death and rise again. Lord desired that the cup could be removed, however, accepted the Plan of the Father.

Sam Higginbottom came to India in the year 1903. After understanding the situation in India he realized he needed to study Agriculture. Though, he could have continued to work as missionary, he chose to go back to study Agriculture. He went to US and completed B.Sc. Agriculture Ohio State University in 1911 and came back to India. He chose a land that was poor, infested by pests in Allahabad that was not being cultivated and started to work out modern farms. Today there exists state recognized university in Allahabad.

Choice 3: Spiritual methods over worldly methods:

Peter chose a worldly method, violence and cut the ear of a servant of High Priest, Lord admonished Peter and healed the man. (John 18:10 and Matthew 26:51) Lord Jesus could have appealed to Father for twelve legions of angel, but refused to do so. (Matthew 26:53) The path of cross is to refuse easy, worldly and earthly methods and chose spiritual methods.

Paul writes: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12) The persecution the church faces is executed by people in power or ordinary people. The reality is, these people unknowingly become instruments of unrighteousness in the hands of Satan. (Romans 6:13)

Choice 4: Sovereign God over man's favour:

When Pilate boasted that he had authority to crucify him or set him free, he refused to plead for mercy. Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin." (John 19:11) God is Sovereign, He rules over all people and whole universe. Nothing can harm or touch a disciple without the permission of God.

Choice 5: Self-worth over sympathy:

Lord exhorted the daughters of Jerusalem to weep for themselves and not to show sympathy for him. (Luke 23:28) While doing the Will of God, we do not need sympathy of others instead confidence in God. There are people who think suffering while doing God's will is shame. "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." (I Peter 4:14) Lord Jesus was not drowned in self-pity, instead exhorted the women to repent by weeping for themselves.

Choice 6: Forgiveness over vengeance:

There was a surcharged atmosphere, where there were several people shouting, cursing, and even rejoicing. Instead of cursing his distractors, enemies, conspirators, executors, traitors and deserters, Lord chose to forgive them. (Luke 23:34) When vengeance, revenge and violence is the norm, forgiveness becomes God's gift and grace.

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:19, 20)

Stephen the first martyr also forgave his killers. (Acts 7:60) Egyptian Coptic church chose to forgive the terrorists who killed their people.

Gladys Staines who lost her husband and two sons in gruesome burning of them in a jeep, forgave the killers.

Choice 7: Discerned prayer over several noises

In the midst of cursing, mocking, and various noises, Lord chose to listen to the feeble voice of penitent thief granting him Paradise. (Luke 23:42) There were laments by women sympathizing for him. Critics demanded that Lord Jesus come down from the cross. (Luke 23: 37) Certainly, there was groaning from pain by the thieves. The thief on his left mocked him and asked him to save himself and them. (Luke 23:39) In the midst of all these voices and noises, Lord chose to listen to a prayer of a genuine repentant thief.

Discerning and listening are spiritual disciplines. Are we listening to the voice of the Lord in the midst of so many voices and noises in this world? Are we discerning the voices and laments of people who are in need to help them?

Challenges of choices

The path of the cross is basically choices we ought to make as we follow Lord Jesus Christ. These are voluntary choices. Lord Jesus said: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24) Our spiritual life is a journey from Gethsemane to Golgotha.

Seven Words

Words of Glory from the Pulpit of the Cross

Lord Jesus Christ endured the suffering and pain to provide salvation for all who could trust in him. The process was not easy. The Seven Words he spoke in spite of his agony provides us inspiration, priorities and a new attitude towards life. In many cultures, the last words of a person are

considered sacred. Yes, these seven words are sacred and every Christian should meditate to gain wisdom and spiritual maturity.

Before Pilate (the Roman Governor) The Lord Jesus did not open his mouth to defend himself. Hanging on the cross he was physically exhausted and dehydrated to speak. Emotionally, it is not possible to speak in such turmoil of soul. Spiritually, he underwent the wrath of God on behalf of humanity that could have made him dumb folded. However, he chose to make Cross as his pulpit to speak seven phrase sermons.

Lord Jesus Christ gave all for the sake of redeeming the humanity. When he spoke, he gave: Paradise for sinner thief, son for Mary and gave humanity the salvation. In the condition of humiliation, pain, suffering, turmoil he gives unselfishly, sacrificially and generously.

In the seven statements; four were addressed to the Father: "Father, forgive them"(Luke 23: 34); "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke. 23: 46); "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46) and though a general statement it was addressed to Father: "It is finished " (John 19:30) It has to be read with reference to the following verse: "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4) That means a majority of the statements were addressed to the Heavenly Father.

He established his divinity by addressing God as Father and his humanity by addressing him as God. Without doubt He was Son of God and Son of Man.

Lord Jesus' messages were relevant to his persecutors, sinner thief representing sinful humanity and to Mary (family)

The First Word

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". (Luke 23:34). Even when he went through agony and turmoil, he thought about the

welfare of the others. His focus was not his pain, grief, wounds, loss of strength or thirst, but interest and well-being of others. His first mission was to save his adversaries and persecutors.

Only Son of God could think of tormentors in the peak of his suffering and pray for their forgiveness. No bitterness, no malice, no revenge, no anger but love demonstrated and personified in its highest degree.

He also practised what he preached. He modelled his teaching in the most impossible situation or circumstances. "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you," (Matt. 5:44)

This calls his followers to be benevolent in forgiving others, showing grace as recipients of His grace and transform the world by new way of life.

Second Word

“Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”” (Luke 23:43)

The second person whom Lord Jesus Christ addressed is the thief. The penitent thief was a person with rare spiritual insight to see Lord Jesus Christ who could grant him a place in heaven. The hard-hearted man saw Lord Jesus Christ who could forgive his persecutors from the cross. That could have changed him and his attitude towards Lord Jesus. When Lord Jesus healed many and fed thousands, they did not receive belief or faith, but this thief looking at Jesus on the cross bearing the immense suffering transformed him.

The thief could see Lord Jesus as Messiah, a spiritual perspective that was missing in the religious leaders like Pharisees and Sadducees. His prayers were quickly answered. Lord refused to speak on many occasions

and even to the other thief who challenged by saying: "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Matt. 27.:40) However, He responded quickly to the prayer of repentance. The thief stood alone by defending Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of persecuting, mocking and skeptic crowd. His perception of seeing Lord Jesus as King with Kingdom is amazing. The thief was with Jesus in his suffering moment and would be in glory in his glorious moment.

Third Word

“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.” (John 19: 26, 27)

This verse reminds us how important family is. He entrusts his mother in care of one of his close disciples John. And most probably the only disciple who was near the Cross in Calvary. Others were missing from the vicinity, betraying or cursing or simply running away for life. Caring for the family members is an awesome responsibility.

When in pain and suffering, generally the family members come to care for us. However, Jesus was in pain but was consoling and comforting his mother who had emotional and social pain of humiliation. During the dedication of Lord Jesus as a child, Mary received prophesy: “And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Luke 2:35)

Lord Jesus Christ took initiative to speak to Mary. He did not wait for her to ask this favour. In case of penitent thief, he waited for him to initiate the conversation.

Fourth Word

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). (Mathew 27:46)

Lord Jesus identified with sinful humanity to the core. His physical pain, emotional detachment as he endured the wrath and justice of God on behalf of humanity and spiritual pain that he had to go through made the Son of God to appeal to the Father. “Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:10-12)

A woman giving birth to a child has to endure pain and suffering. Her husband could be near, doctors could be attending her, nurses could be encouraging her; however, she would have to bear the pain herself. She could shout to her husband or other helpers: “Why did you forsake me?” No one had forsaken her, but she had to go through this process of pain to bring a new life into the world. In a similar fashion, Lord Jesus had to go through the suffering.

Some scholars think that Lord Jesus repeated the verses of Psalm learnt in childhood. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?” (Psalm 22:1)

This is the cry of all humanity. Many of us have experienced abandonment, rejection, and total disillusionment in our lives. Lord Jesus

represented us on the cross. He fasted even from edibles (refused to be tempted by Satan, while Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit). Lord Jesus fulfilled the Law on behalf of us, so that we are freed from death sentence ordained by the Law.

The Fifth Word

"I thirst " (John 19:28).

He was dehydrated as he had not taken any food or water for long hours. The sweat, blood loss and torturing heat would have drained all his energy and strength.

The Messiah who offered living waters to the Samaritan woman that she would never thirst (John 4) was thirsty. It was not just the physical thirst but a spiritual thirst that desires the salvation of all humanity. His thirst could be quenched when humanity repents and comes back to him. The Church has the task cut out to invite people who are thirsty to drink the living waters.

The Sixth Word

"It is finished " (John 19:30).

This is a grand statement. It was personal fulfilment of the task Lord Jesus had undertaken to complete in the world. The 'wages of sin' which is death has been paid finally. His humiliation, disgrace and sufferings were complete. So, the redemption of humanity is complete.

It also means that all requirement of Law has been fulfilled. All aspirations of humanity for forgiveness of sins have been fulfilled. The prophecies foretold have been fulfilled. The highest form of sacrifice that demonstrates ultimate love has been complete and displayed for humanity to see and consider.

The veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom signifying the Way has been open through His body for our salvation.

The Seventh Word

Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46)

When poor Lazarus died, his spirit was carried by the angels (Luke 16:22). Some scholars believe that when Lord Jesus died his Spirit was carried by the Father. He enters heaven as the eternal high priest with his own blood as atonement for humanity.

“Truly this man was the Son of God!”

Roman soldiers are known for their Discipline, Duty, Dignity, Loyalty, Obedience to authority when Roman Empire was a Superpower. The Centurion who oversaw execution of Lord Jesus Christ and two other thieves had life-changing experience that Good Friday. He would have closely witnessed several deaths sentences he had executed; however, this was totally different.

Context

The scenario was surcharged with several dramatic incidents including, women wailing their misery. They could not bear to witness a benefactor, teacher, miracle-worker, lover of children being ruthlessly tormented and executed on the cross. The Jewish religious leaders were hailing their victory. The Nation’s Number One Enemy according to their imagination and prophetic insight has been eliminated for ‘good’ of the Nation of Israel. Roman soldiers were jeering as they felt doing their routine heartless job. The unruly mob was cheering as their chosen ‘Barabbas’ was released and Lord Jesus was crucified. The thief mocking, on the left side while another was thief praying for a place in the Kingdom.

Strangely, the disciples disappeared from the scene, except for John. Others were afraid, confused and could not comprehend.

Centurion is different

The centurion seems to be a loner or even an outsider. He was not comfortable with gambling; he could have taken the garment of Lord Jesus as his right. Probably he detested the hatred that was spewed. According to Mark, he stood in front of Lord Jesus not with his soldiers. He could not identify with the mob. Professionally, he cannot be with the grieving family and friends too.

Christ is different

Centurion observed: Lord Jesus Christ was not ‘guilt ridden’ as many criminals who have committed crime in a moment of anger or frustration. Instead, Lord willing to forgive his detractors. Many hardened criminals would curse and seek vengeance, but Lord Jesus did not. Some, go in to shells of stoic silence, but Lord Jesus spoke in spite of his pain and suffering. Centurion must have seen convicts in anger against government, soldiers, parents, friends, colleagues or family members, but Lord Jesus was sensitive, loving and compassionate. Blaming someone for the misery was common among the dying convicts, Lord Jesus did not blame, instead he faced death with dignity and confidence.

Forgiveness and not vengeance

He had never seen a person praying to God addressed as ‘Father’ for enemies and forgiving his tormentors. (Luke 23:34) For centurion, God was a distant power. It was unthinkable, as criminals curse one and all for their misery; while Lord Jesus did not. Gentleness of Lord Jesus was exhibited by his tender care for mother. (John 19:26-27) Confidence, dignity, authenticity and authority of Lord Jesus Christ as King of Kings was evident from the assurance for Kingdom of God to thief. (Luke 23:42-43) The Centurion had never witnessed such Darkness for three

hours with earthquake in his life time. (Matthew 26:45, Mark 15:43) Lord's sense of accomplishment and victory cry was unique: "It is Finished" (John 19:30) The serenity and peace with which Lord Jesus gave up his spirit touched the heart of the centurion.

Public censure to Pilate

"Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39) This statement was public censure of Pontius Pilate, as he did injustice by condemning Lord Jesus to death, though Pilate concluded him to be 'innocent'. Centurion must have witnessed the whole proceedings of the court in which an innocent person was given death sentence, just to please few 'blood-thirsty' wicked people.

Representative of Gentiles

When the whole world was speechless and silent, or mute, he publicly gave testimony about Lord Jesus Christ; as representative and spokesperson of Gentiles. Jewish religious leadership was shamed by this bold testimony. The religious elite tried to brand Lord as scoundrel and thief, but he declared him as 'a righteous man'. Jewish leaders with rebellious heart and stubborn spirit could not discern the Messiah. Hardened soldier, was able to discern the truth.

He shamed religious leaders

Witnessing the misery and agony of Lord Jesus, he was able to come to a conclusion the Lord Jesus was innocent, righteous and 'Son of God'. The religious leadership and pious Jews in Jerusalem were put to shame by a Roman soldier. They had said of their Messiah that he was a scoundrel, but he said, "a righteous man!" Though he has seen nothing but Christ's sheer misery for 24 hours, he testified and gave highest honour that he could have had for his Caesar.

Spiritual Revelation

Initially, by his observation, the Centurion concluded: “Certainly this man was innocent!” (Luke 23:47) However, he did not stop there. In his research, he got revelation from the Father. He declared: “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39 KJV) Lord Jesus said to Peter that it was not his own achievement or intellect to discern Him as Messiah, only Father in heaven could have revealed it to him. (Matthew 16:17) His keen sense of observation could have helped, but only revelation from God helped him to understand the truth, Lord Jesus as ‘Son of God’. This revelation is significant because, this Centurion does not have a religious background to await the advent of Messiah or expectation of Son of God to reveal as Messiah.

Courage

It was not a professional ethic for the Centurion to declare in such manner. There was risk for his profession and career. He could be suspended or dismissed from his position. He must have concluded that ‘truth’ is more important than his life or future.

Challenge

Observation is engagement with faculties of senses. The centurion keenly observed all the factors. Analysis is application of mind. The centurion analyses, interprets and concludes using his intellectual capacity. There he gets a revelation that all his observation and interpretation points to Lord Jesus Christ as ‘Son of God’. When this light dawns on him, he was able to take a life transforming decision. He voices that decision as his declaration to all those who were willing to listen. Certainly, his statement was well-received, discussed and debated by all. Hence, recorded in the gospels.

Wisdom of God manifest in the CROSS

“For the message of cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (I Corinthians 1:18)

All human wisdom cannot find god. The search for God by humanity seems endless tunnel. But God by His grace has manifested Himself through His Son Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross and his subsequent resurrection defies human logic and explanation. Apparently cross signifies punishment, suffering, depravation, defeat and death but forgiveness, glory, kingdom, victory and life are latent or mystery.

Human mind fails to see beyond the physical cross. But Paul states that his duty is to proclaim the mystery of the cross. So convincing human mind of the mystery of the gospel is primary duty of Christians.

1. Symbol of Punishment or Forgiveness:

Death penalty by nailing to the cross was the Roman system of capital punishment. And Jesus tried under Roman law was awarded death penalty through cross. The physical cross can signify only punishment meted out a deserving criminal. But Bible emphatically teaches us that the death of Jesus Christ was vicarious. He died on behalf of sinners. It was punishment due to human being borne by Him. So cross which is a symbol of punishment is transformed in the symbol of forgiveness and reconciliation. “He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us, he took it away, nailing it to the cross.” (Col 3:13,14)

2. Symbol of Suffering or Glory

The cross was a place where a person had to endure immense physical pain and mental agony. Jesus was losing blood and was tortured by his own creation. Dehydration made him to cry for water. The weight of the body was tearing his flesh apart. The taunts of the Pharisees and Sadducees were giving him mental and spiritual agony. Above all the burden of sin of the whole world was upon him.

The suffering in the physical realm was transformed to the glory that was bestowed upon him later. “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:9-11) So then Christ rose from the dead declared that all authority in heaven and earth was with Him. (Matt 28:18)

3. Symbol of depravation or hope of kingdom

Jesus Christ on the cross was deprived of everything. Even his clothes were divided among the soldiers. But strangely a robber who was undergoing punishment on the cross along with Him recognized Christ as King. So he pleaded, “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.” (Luke 23:42) Christ the king deprived Himself of all to make us Kings and Priests in His Kingdom.

4. Symbol of Defeat or Victory

The coming of Messiah was the time for celebration. Many who were anticipating the Messiah expected him to come with power and pomp. But when Jesus Christ came, he took a stable as his abode. His death was defeat to the ideals of Messiah and defeat to all who followed him. But the Bible says, “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

(Col 2:15). It was not defeat of Jesus Christ, but the defeat of the Satan and his army.

5. Symbol of Death or Life

The death on the cross was not the end. It was not a history of another personality who's life ended with the tomb. It was with death he defeated death and made a new living way for His followers. "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body." (Hebrews 10: 19,20)

Challenge to Communicate

The challenge to Christians is to explain the truth about the cross, which is divine wisdom to seekers of truth.

Cross to Glory

The Cross of Calvary symbolizes the complete identification of Son of Man in human suffering. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." (Hebrews 4:15) He was tempted, tried, tested in every way like any other human being. The Old Rugged Cross is an inspiration for those who go through pain, suffering, hardships, and rejection. At least there are five areas in which our Lord Jesus Christ endured the suffering that is common to us.

Physical Pain:

As an adolescent I used to think that Lord Jesus Christ as Son of God was exempt from pain. Even though he had to endure whippings by cruel Roman soldiers and nailing and public hanging, he did not realize the pain was my assumption. Not only adolescents, many adults also think that his sufferings were painless as he was privileged. However, the

Scripture clearly teaches that he experienced physical pain. The pain of pricking from the crown of thorns, the nail pierced hands and feet, the whipped and ploughed back, the bruised arms that carried the heavy wooden beams, the dehydration and thirst, and the piercing of the spear all contributed to the immense pain he suffered. Rarely people suffer such a combination of pains. He was a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. (Isaiah 53:3) He was so battered, bruised that “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” (Isaiah 53:2) So, when we go through physical pain, the Lord Jesus understands it and can truly empathize with us.

Mental Agony:

Mental tension and stress are part of modern day vocabulary. The purpose of His mission to carry the burden of the sin of the whole universe meant that his whole being was under stress. The task was so great that he needed inner resources harnessed for the purpose. He had to carry out the task all alone and he could not seek assistance from his Father or angels or men. Even if he sought them, they were not in a position to help him. He was despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3). He was publicly humiliated, rejected by the masses that chose Barabbas, ignored by religious leaders, and disowned by his own people. And, it is possible for us to inflict mental pain on the Lord. When we are rebellious or disobedient or choose to sin, we cause him mental pain.

Emotional turmoil:

The Lord Jesus spent most of his time with the twelve designated Apostles. He loved them (John 13:1), however his love was not reciprocated in fullest measure. Judas descended to the meanest level that he sold his master for just thirty pieces of silver. He sold his master for the price of a slave. Peter, a dynamic and vibrant personality denied the Lord three times. The temptation was from a weak source – a slave girl. Except for John others disappeared from the scene – went into hiding.

Being separated and forsaken by those whom he loved, was emotional turmoil indeed. When our First love becomes cold, we can cause emotional pain to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible for us to deny him, doubt him or even betray him by our words or deeds.

Social rejection:

“He was despised and rejected by mankind.” (Isaiah 53:3) “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” (Acts 10:38) However people did not respond to the good he did but responded with evil. Religious leaders were envious and so handed him over to political authorities. They also instigated the mob to choose Barabbas and reject Jesus. The religious bosses, political leaders and common people socially rejected him. Ostracism by a community is a painful experience. Lord Jesus was rejected by the Jewish Nation, Culture and Religious system of Judaism.

Spiritual alienation:

“My God, My God Why you have forsaken me,” (Matthew 27:46) was a heart rending cry, or lament from the Cross. Lord Jesus, who was so closely associated and in constant fellowship with the Father, was separated because of the burden of the sin of the world placed on him. This disconnect had immense implication for the Son who always watched His Father active and did what the Father did (John 10:37). The God of Justice had to hide his face as the Son of God had to take the Penalty and Punishment of the sin of the whole world. The prophet Isaiah wrote: “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:4-5)

Challenge:

Lord Jesus went through all aspects of human suffering in the most cruel and violent form. So, he is able to sympathize, emphasize and understand our sufferings. As the tragedy of Good Friday was followed by the Darkness of Saturday and resulted in Victory on Easter Sunday; those who trust in Him will see the final victory without fail. As Easter was a miracle delayed, so are our miracles delayed, but not denied. “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.” (Philippians 1:29). Sufferings in the Christian life are reminders of the Cross and assurance about the Resurrection and final Victory.

Chapter -v

Easter

I am the Resurrection and life

Reproach and Death

The Death of Son of God was not a normal death but a violent death. The term ‘Good Friday’ does not just bring to memory about the historic event that happened that particular day in the city of Jerusalem. The historic event was also a spiritual event with eternal consequences and continuous impact. Lord Jesus Christ did not die for his own sins as he was sinless and holy. He died for the sake of sinful humanity. In place of each and every person born in the world, Lord Jesus took position or was the substitute. When he died, he defeated sin, death and satan, which was established, declared and proclaimed by His Resurrection on the third day. Death is considered curse by many. The death on the cross is considered a curse. (Deuteronomy 21:23 & Galatians 3:13) Death is also declared as last enemy. (I Corinthians 15:26) In a limited sense Good Friday is mournful day, but in eternal sense it is the Glorious Friday.

Reincarnation

There are even Christians who confuse resurrection with reincarnation. The idea of reincarnation is mainly found in Hinduism and Buddhism. Both the religions believe in the doctrine of Karma. The doctrine of Karma teaches that each person who commits sin has to pay for his sins, i.e. bear punishment. Suffering, sickness, disability, being born in low

caste...etc are considered to be punishment due to karma. One life time may not be enough to pay for sins. Hence, each person has to come back to the world in different form of life and pay for the past sins. This is termed as reincarnation. A person (soul) may have to go through several births (In South India it is seven while in North India it is calculated as 8.4 million births) to get rid of all karma against the soul and be immersed in the one eternal reality. The new form of life need not be human, it could be any animal, bird, reptile or fish. Whatever form a person may take, may not really know for what sins s/he is being punished. Natural justice process provides charge-sheet to the accused. Also, the accused is provided an opportunity to defend himself. God cannot handout irrational and illogical judgement without informing the accused. If so, How can the government of God punish a person without issuing charge-sheet detailing his/her sin?

Resurrection

The resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ is different. On the third day, which is celebrated as Easter, Lord Jesus rose from the dead that the tomb was empty. His body was transformed into a glorious body. “So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” (I Corinthians 15: 42-44) The people could recognize the resurrected Lord. He could speak with them, Of course, shut doors and shut tombs cannot lock him in. (John 20:19) On one occasion he cooked breakfast and served his disciples. (John 21:13) The Risen Saviour challenged Thomas to come touch and feel the wounds. It is not migration of soul or life from one form to another form even human form.

Funny theories

There are funny theories floated that Lord Jesus did not die at all. He went into a coma, hence he recovered in the cool cave where he was placed. However, this theory cannot stand scrutiny. The Roman soldier pierced his side that blood and water flowed. (John 19:34) This indicates the death of Lord Jesus Christ. Under the Roman rule, the centurion had to certify that the criminal is dead. Only after getting death certificate Pontius Pilate ordered the body to be handed over to Joseph of Arimathea. (John 19:38) His tomb was buried and sealed, yet Lord Jesus rose again.

Another fake news was spread by the High Priests through the soldiers who were guarding the tomb of Lord Jesus Christ. They were bribed so that they went out and said that the disciples stole the body in night and claimed resurrection. (Matthew 28: 11-15) However, the body was never recovered.

Regeneration

The response to resurrection can result in regeneration of a person. When Jewish religious leader Nicodemus met Lord Jesus Christ (John 3): Lord said: You must be born again. The learned religious leader was confused and asked: “How can you enter mother’s womb to be born again?” Lord explained that he has to be born of Spirit and Water to enter the Kingdom of God. It happens alike the flow of wind. The breeze is not seen but the effect is felt. Similarly, this spiritual experience is not seen, but certainly experienced. To all human beings, the message is the same. Be born again – or experience regeneration. Nicodemus had to realize irrespective of social, religious, economic, gender status all are sinners. They have realize this fact, receive forgiveness by faith on Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross on their behalf. His resurrection is attestation of his deity and authority to forgive sins. The water symbolizes the Word of God that convicts a person of sin and the Spirit of God convicts a person

helping him to see Lord Jesus as the Saviour. When that person responds in faith, he or she is regenerated or born-again.

Response: Repentance and Life

This Easter reminds us once again that we are all sinners. We all need regeneration. That is possible only because of Lord Jesus Death and Resurrection. Repentance, Forsaking of sin and Forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ is a needed spiritual transformation. Let Easter bring this transformation in the lives of each person in the world.

Challenge:

Reincarnation can only enslave a person into perpetual slavery. God did not allow humanity to wallow in futility, stupidity, ignorance, sin and death. Instead, he sent His Son Lord Jesus Christ who took the punishment of sin of all humanity in other words karma of all humanity and died. “For the wages of sin is death, for the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” By His resurrection he demonstrated his deity and divinity and offered forgiveness and eternal life to all those who believe in Him. This is a glorious invitation to all humanity by the Risen Saviour Lord Jesus Christ.

No Shut Tomb: No Closed Door

The resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ and His appearance have implications for missions. The political power, religious power and power of nationalism tried to keep Lord Jesus shut in the tomb. The external forces failed miserably. The disciples were overwhelmed by mixed emotions like fear, doubt and depression which drove them behind closed door. But the closed doors could not keep Lord Jesus Christ outside. There is no closed door for missions.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words. (Luke 24:1-8)

Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead is the greatest historical event celebrated in the world. For every Christian it is a glorious, precious, marvelous event that transformed their personal lives. The resurrection power of God is amazing and awful. Two things that happened in and after resurrection are: no shut tomb and no closed door.

I. No Shut Tomb

Women who loved Jesus carried spices to do some after burial ritual that was half done as the Sabbath day did not allow them to complete the process. They were surprised to find the stone rolled away and the body of Lord Jesus Christ missing. They heard men (angel) saying, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" The resurrection power of God broke open the shut tomb in which all forces of darkness tried to keep the Son of God under captivity.

1) Political power

Roman Empire, one of the worlds mightiest political power in the history of humanity wanted the tomb be shut. They had zero toleration for any kind of dissident or rebel activity. Lord Jesus Christ was seen as a political threat, potential claimant for throne, mass leader and had loyal

band of disciples. For the peace in the empire, social harmony among its citizens and highest good of the governance Jesus should be in the shut tomb. So, there were soldiers who were assigned to guard the tomb.

2) Religious power

The religious power axis of Judaism consisting of Chief Priest, Former Chief Priest, Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducee's and Sanhedrin were also wanted Jesus to be in the shut tomb. The religious lifestyle, domination and influence over the Jews were challenged by Lord Jesus Christ. The teachings of Lord Jesus Christ was with authority, his miracles were credible, his love was transformational, his power brought healings, deliverance from demon possession, fed the hungry and subdued the nature. For the religious scholars an unschooled rabbi from a non-descript town of Nazareth was an enigma. He undermined all of them by his excellence, compassion and grace that put their arrogant attitude to shame.

3) Power of Nationalism

Jewish nationalism also wanted Jesus Christ to be in the shut tomb. Barabbas represented Jewish nationalism in the crudest form. When the opportunity to choose between Lord Jesus Christ and Barabbas was given by Pilate, instigated by the high priest and his coterie, the crowd chose Barabbas.

II. No closed door

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" (John 20:19)

1) Fear

The disciples were afraid by the sudden turn of events. Their Master was arrested unceremoniously, ill-treated and a violent death sentence was

awarded by a foreign political power but instigated by Jewish religious leaders. The same forces that had murdered the Son of God could continue their bloody trail against them also. Closed doors were a solace and gave them a sense of security. Here the risen Lord Jesus Christ appears to declare peace to them. No fear could close any door for the risen Lord.

2) Misunderstanding

The disciples did not understand God's purpose and Lord Jesus redemption mission to the planet earth. Several times during the three year long earthly ministry Lord Jesus taught about his impending death and resurrection, but the disciples failed to understand. The disciples misunderstanding will not create a closed door that could stop the pervasive power of risen Lord Jesus Christ.

3) Doubt

Thomas, who was one of the twelve, was not present when Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples. May be he was away to collect food ration for the besieged ten. Now also the doors were locked and Lord appeared to His disciples and Thomas was present. (John 20: 24-29) Doubt of Thomas will not stop the invading presence of the Risen Lord.

No Shut Tomb or No Closed Door for missions

The redemption mission of sovereign Lord could never be shut inside a tomb. All the political powers that attempted to stop missions have failed in the history of humanity. Religious power structure have devised all possible means and methods to stop the glorious gospel and have miserably failed. There were always appeal in the name of nationalism to keep the name of Jesus out of several culture which have also failed. There is no external force that could stop the progress of missions as the Risen Lord has all power in heaven and on the earth. The internal turmoil of the disciples or doctrinal divide or denominational divide or any other problem in the Church cannot stop the invading power of Lord Jesus

Christ among all people. Let us move forward with the power of resurrection to bring nations to His Kingdom.

Open Tomb! Open Eyes!! Open Scriptures!!!

St. Luke provides panoramic view of the Resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ in chapter twenty-four. The Open Tomb provides the evidence of Resurrection. The disciples on the Emmaus road experienced revelation of God's presence or Opening of their eyes; then Lord Opened the Scriptures to them. The essence of Easter is: Open Tomb! Open Eyes!! And Open Scriptures!!!

Open Tomb (Luke 24:2)

I have visited over 350 cities around the world. The places of attraction in these cities are generally a tomb or a memorial. One of the Wonders of the World, Taj Mahal is essentially a tomb. The Capital of India, Delhi could be renamed as 'city of tombs'. And many times, great personalities visit these tombs to get inspiration. Though the men who died were great in human standards, their ideals generally died with them.

The Open Tomb is entirely different. The people who conspired the Lord's death wanted that tomb to be sealed; the mob that cried for death of Lord Jesus wanted the tomb be shut forever; the Roman Empire wanted no more trouble and wanted the tomb be sealed and secure; satan and his army wanted the Messiah to perish. The religious forces, so called nationalistic forces, political forces, and dark spiritual forces wanted the tomb be shut.

Demonstration of God's power

Open tomb declares God's power. The whole creation, put to death the Messiah for humanity to death and buried him. But, God was not

defeated; he raised Lord Jesus from death. Through death Lord Jesus defeated death the last enemy of humanity.

Demonstration of divinity of Lord Jesus Christ

The Open Tomb also demonstrates the ‘divinity’ of Lord Jesus Christ. He was truly Son of God. He is God Himself in human form, creator, savior, redeemer and one who is Coming Soon. The Wounded Savior also is the Risen Savior. The Historical Lord Jesus Christ is also the Contemporary Jesus Christ, who is relevant to us in our day to day life.

Demonstration of hope for humanity

The resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ gives new hope for humanity. If Lord Jesus was raised, then the life after death was demonstrated. If God could raise Lord Jesus Christ from the death, He could bring New Life to fallen human beings that are eternal in quality and quantity. New creation in Lord Jesus Christ is the hope of humanity.

Open eyes (Luke 24: 31)

Blinded by Satan

All human beings are blinded by Satan (II Cor 4:4), that they lack divine perspective. So, they could not understand the Truth, the True God, His love or Way of Salvation. The disciples on the Emmaus Road may not have been totally blind, but were for sure partially blind spiritually. They were like the blind man who saw ‘men walking like trees’(Mark 8:24) and needed a second touch.

Blind spots

Even those who are disciples of Lord Jesus Christ have blind spots. These blind spots could vary from person to person. Some have racial or caste prejudice and could not overcome that in their everyday life. So, only there are segregated congregations on the basis of caste, class, race, colour etc. The Risen Lord has to touch and open their eyes.

There are blind spots of ‘traditions’, ‘dogma’ and ‘rituals’. Do not Christians love these more than Lord Himself? Many times these traditions or rituals were created as tools to understand or worship God better. Unfortunately, the facilitating tools became the focus and replaced the Object of Worship, Lord Jesus.

Blinded by misconception

Most probably the disciples on the Emmaus road were blinded by ‘misconception’. Living in the predominantly Jewish Culture that was challenged by Roman Culture, they believed the Messiah should be a Political hero like David. And the Messiah should overthrow the Roman rule and bring in a reign of peace. So, they were not sure whether Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah. Lord graciously opened their eyes to see Him, the Risen Saviour.

Open Scriptures (Luke 24:32)

Approach with Open Mind

Scriptures are not understood by ‘intellectual mind’ or ‘scientific mind’ but with ‘open mind’. When the disciples’ minds were open, the Scriptures are opened up by the Holy Spirit, the author.

Understand Scriptures

The Risen Saviour longs to help us to understand the Scriptures. In the ever-changing world, the only unchanging authority and guide for our life is the Bible. To understand the Scriptures, the Risen Lord is willing to reveal or open the truth to us. The relevant application of the truth in our lives would set us free. The Disciples on Emmaus Road, not only walked in truth, but also in Freedom.

Truth leads to Freedom

When the Scripture is Open to us, we have Freedom. Freedom from fear, hatred, jealousy, envy, bitterness, confusion, worry, sadness, depression,

short-temper, wickedness, sin, sinful habits, vices, greediness, stubbornness, pessimistic thoughts, narrow-mindedness, inferiority complex, arrogance, pride, strife, divisions, suspicions, ...etc.

Challenge

Have you been to the Open Tomb to receive the Power of Resurrection? Did you experience the touch of the Lord, that your Eyes (spiritual inner eyes) are Open to discern God's wonderful deeds, see His marvelous works, and understand His ways? Is God's Word alive in your day-to-day life? Do you hear His Voice, understand His Will and lean for His guidance when you read and meditate the Word of God? Live with the Power of Resurrection.

Personal Cross

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Matthew 16:24) Cross is not an option but an essential kit in the pilgrimage of faith. Lord Jesus invited people into the kingdom by stating: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30) The invitation promises rest and also a yoke that would help the disciples to learn. Cross-assigned for each disciple would help that person to learn.

Paul writes of his experience: "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (I Corinthians 12:8-10)

Cross-could be distinct and different to each person. Sovereign God has designed the cross-that would help us mature in faith, grown in knowledge and mature spiritually. Some of the general classifications are given below:

1. Physical:

Some disciples are affected in their physical life. Frequently some are taken ill. And some endure chronic sickness or disability. For some certain tasks are not possible for health reasons. For example, a leader could not eat in other cities, as his digestive system was weak. So travelling ministry was out of question.

2. Social:

Some Godly couple do not have blessing of children. Among them some adopt children others prefer to be spiritual parents of number of young people. The national leader and his wife of a student movement was a blessing to thousands of students as they were without children. There are some who are ostracized and boycotted by family and relatives for their faith.

3. Psychological:

Some have to bear loneliness. Due to ministry, my wife had to stay alone when I travel. That too in places, where we did not have friends or relatives who do not speak our language. There are a few who experience bouts of depression.

4. Financial:

There is always financial pressure, especially for those who ‘live by faith’ without receiving regular support.

5. Political:

When adverse government is in power, some anti-social elements call the shots, rogues try to intimidate; disciples bear the painful cross.

6. Family:

Unwilling and uncooperative spouse could be a cross. Disobedient and rebellious children could bring sorrow. Family members may not regard disciples for their faith.

Resurrection for spiritual life

The idea of resurrection from dead and life after death is found in Old Testament. The resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ was affirmation of the faith of saints in Old Testament who anticipated and hoped for such glorious resurrection. Also resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ seals the truth of his deity and divinity. Resurrection offers hope for all humanity, while the believers have the privilege of Eternal Life with the Lord for ever and ever in His presence in Heaven. Others have eternal life in misery, gnashing of teeth, pain and suffering in hell.

Confession of Job

Satan accused God that Job trusts in him just because he was favourable and blessed Job abundantly. God gave satan authority to afflict Job except to take away his life. After losing possession, children, Job lost his health. Friends who came to comfort him, were unable to help him in anyway: spiritually, morally, emotionally or physically. In that series of Job’s conversation with his friends, he makes this great statement: “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see

God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!” (Job 19:25-27)

Job was confident of his understanding of a great spiritual truth that God is his redeemer, who is eternally alive. It was not a speculation or blind faith or a theory or good wish or desire. For Job, it was a fact, a truth he knew very well.

Job also understood God as Judge. God is the redeemer of those who believe and ultimate Judge of all humans. Job would rise from dead to stand in the Judgement.

Job was sure that his physical body that is sick, infirm and stinking would be transformed to glorified body that he would stand in God’s presence and see him. It will not be some other form, but in glorified body he will see the saviour.

Not God of dead

The experts in the Law of Moses miss out an important truth. “Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.” (Luke 20:38) Lord Jesus Christ pointed out to the Sadducees that Eternal God is not God of dead but ‘God of living’. The Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who were dead physically are alive, affirming life after death.

Elisha’s bones

Elisha was a great prophet used mightily by God. He was dead and buried. A funeral procession, seeing a threat from a marauding army band, just threw the corpse into the grave of Elisha and escaped. “And as a man was being buried, behold, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha, and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet.” (II Kings 13:21) A dead man became alive when he touched the bones of Elisha, but certainly died later. The miracles of physical resurrection were to prove

God's power and sovereign authority as author of all life. However, resurrection of Lord Jesus was beyond the physical realm.

Messianic prophecy

David also had the vision of resurrection of Messiah. The Son of God would die, but will not be in Sheol forever. His bodily resurrection and Eternal resurrection of seen by David. "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption." (Psalms 16:10)

Resurrection of Lord Jesus

The resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ has been discussed in an earlier chapter (Resurrection, Regeneration and Reincarnation) which clearly shows the resurrection of Lord Jesus as much different to the one normally discussed in other religions. It had been discussed that it is not migration of soul or life from one form to another form even human form.

Are you regenerated?

Easter is a great festival of celebrating the Resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ. This celebration is really meaningful only when a person repents and experiences regeneration by Lord Jesus Christ.

Resurrection: New Paradigm for Life

But for the resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ, human history could be scripted in three words: Deception, Defeat and Death. The resurrection was the declaration and proclamation of truth, victory and life to humanity. There is no equal or similar event in the whole of the history of mankind that could change the paradigm of whole humanity forever.

Deception:

Satan used the weapon of deception to take humanity into bondage. In disguise as serpent, satan sowed the seeds of doubt in the mind and heart of Eve. "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gen 3:1) Deception begins with doubt. Satan led Eve to doubt the goodness of God and also trust in his lie. It was a direct assault on God's character. He made her to doubt the intentions of God. Did God mean business or was He just kidding? Then Satan gave an assurance or promise: "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4) and sadly Eve accepted that and forgot God's commandment.

The deceived humanity bears the mark of sin in its very nature. There are no exceptions, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". (Romans 3:23) The ingrained sin corrupts the whole mankind in totality. The whole creation bears the brunt of the curse caused by the great human deception in history.

The anti-dote for deception is the truth. Lord Jesus Christ declared that He was The Way, The Truth and The Life. (John 14:6) He was the embodiment of the Truth and personification of the Truth. Satan brought sin through deception while Christ brought salvation through Truth. "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) The poison of deception was defeated in the Cross of Calvary and was vindicated by God on the first Easter Sunday.

Defeat:

The deception or fall was not a one-time event without consequences. The deception enslaved all people of all times to sin. There is no exception for any person from this enslavement. Sin became the master and the sinner became a hapless, helpless and hopeless slave. And sin was the strategic instrument used by villain satan to achieve his purpose of enslaving humanity and raising rebellion against God. "Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin"". (John 8:34) The enslaved humanity lived in perpetual defeat and hopelessness.

Paul describes this graphically. “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” (Romans 7:15) (Recently Tiger Woods made a similar statement with regards to adultery and cheating of his wife.) He was defeated in his intentions, efforts and results. Having noble thoughts and ideas did not ensure victory. Best and sincere endeavors were vain. The result was always “defeat”. A life devoid of meaning and purpose was the lot for whole humanity. All attempts to rise up morally, worked counter productive as it pulled a person deeper into quagmire.

There is assurance of victory in the resurrection. Not life of being hapless victim but victorious life could be humanity’s lot by choice. Deliverance knocks at the door of humanity. Human dignity is restored as free will is used for right purposes and for higher purposes. No more a slave or prisoner but free person in Christ Jesus.

Death

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (I Cor 15:26) Death was darkness, torment, mystery and enemy until resurrection. The life after death was simply aspiration and imagination. Death was a terror agent. Was death end of human life?

But, a door of hope was opened in resurrection. The windows of eternity were thrown open to humanity to peep out and praise God. The last enemy of humanity, the death was at last defeated decisively.

Resurrection offers hope for eternal life with God and in His presence forever. Death becomes a gateway to heavenly eternal life and not a misery.

Resurrection not only defeats the fear of death in the minds of the disciples of Lord Jesus Christ but also guarantees quality eternal life. The

after life shall be everlasting of higher quality. And immortality is the gift of resurrection. And heaven is open for us to enter the presence of God, His angels and His saints. A glorious future, fellowship and joy forever are assured, promised and guaranteed.

Praise God

Resurrection is not just a great event or significant event. Resurrection in fact, is the transformation of millions of those who believe in Lord Jesus Christ from Deception, Defeat and Death to Truth, Victory and Eternal Life. Has resurrection become your Truth, Victory and Eternal Life in your personal life? If not, invite Lord Jesus Christ into your life today.

Resurrection – An Unparalleled Marvel in History

Is there any event in history that can be compared with resurrection? The historians will search in vain to find even a faint echo or shadow akin to resurrection. The biblical account of resurrection is unique and shall remain so far ever.

1. Fact

Jesus is neither a mythological figure nor resurrection a mythological event. Jesus Christ is historical personality. Of course, He divided history into two as BC and AD. The event is an indisputable fact attested by several men throughout history. Also, there are sufficient evidences through archaeological findings, literature...etc.

The empty tomb, only one of that kind in the whole history and in the whole world, proves that resurrection is a fact. The conspirators of the murder of Jesus Christ could not furnish the body of Jesus as evidence to disprove resurrection.

The presence of the church, the largest enduring, caring and loving community, proves resurrection as authentic. No institution built on myth and false story can survive such persecution. Even today, there are millions who love, serve and share Jesus Christ. They continue to proclaim and preach about Him.

2. Foundation

Church stands on the foundation of resurrection. Without resurrection, there could be no Church. How can there be a bride without a bridegroom? The purpose of the Church is based on the person of Jesus Christ. The world has been reconciled to God in Jesus Christ. And hence forgiveness as free gift is offered to all humanity. And this offer is provided through the Church.

Can there be an alternate foundation? Buildings on sand shall be washed away without trace. Christ is the Rock of Salvation and Rock of all ages. So the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

3. Basis of our Faith

Christian faith is in vain, if Christ is not risen, declares Paul (I Cor 15). Faith cannot survive on misplaced, illogical and irrelevant fantasy. Faith placed on empty philosophy, genealogies, fairy tales and myth shall fail in the test of time.

Faith on human personalities shall be shaky, unstable and vulnerable. Jesus Christ is not an avatara or guru or mahatma or rishi or sage, but Son of God. And there are no equals to Him in the annals of history.

The divinity of Christ was attested by His resurrection. The gift of salvation was sealed by His death and resurrection. His claim for authority over all creation and power to forgive sins and authenticated by

His resurrection. And this is logical, relevant, authentic and strong basis for our faith was laid.

4. Hope for the Future

Death was darkness, torment, mystery and enemy until resurrection. The life after death was simply aspiration and imagination. But, a door of hope was opened in resurrection. The windows of eternity were thrown open to humanity to peep and praise God. The last enemy of humanity, the death was at last defeated decisively.

The afterlife shall be everlasting of higher quality. And immortality is the gift of resurrection. And heaven is open for us to enter the presence of God, His angels and His saints. A glorious future, fellowship and joy is assured.

Power of Resurrection: Paul's aspiration

Peter, James and John were chosen by the Lord to be with him on special occasions. Why?

The three occasions taught the three about three significant truths: 1) Lord of Life: Lord raised daughter of Jairus, who was twelve years old. (Luke 8:43-48) The three witnessed the 'power of resurrection'. Lord Jesus was also Lord of life and has power over death. 2) Lord of Glory: The transfiguration was witnessed by the three. The Law represented by Moses, The Prophets represented by Elijah recedes to bring the Messiah, the Saviour to focus with affirming voice from heaven. (Matthew 17: 1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36) To know Lord Jesus as a person, Son of God, Messiah, Sovereign Lord is a significant spiritual blessing for the three and for all of us. 3) Lord of suffering: Lord Jesus was portrayed as 'man of sorrows.' (Isaiah 53:3) In the Garden of Gethsemane, Lord surrendered to will of Father, to be afflicted, bear the judgement of God on behalf of sin of humanity to taste death. (Matthew 26:36-46)

Paul echoes these three aspirations: “I may know him (Transfiguration) and the power of his resurrection, (raising of Jairus daughter) and may share his sufferings (agony in the Garden of Gethsemane), becoming like him in his death.” (Philippians 3:10)

This was also Lord’s leadership strategy. These three were with who he confided, trained the twelve, mobilized the seventy and taught the multitudes. These three: Peter, James and John are the leaders about whom we read in the Acts of Apostles. Others work are not recorded in the inspired Scripture.

Do I know him, power of resurrection and sufferings like Paul?

Love Lord more than these?

Simon Peter was a dynamic disciple of Lord Jesus Christ. He got revelation that Lord Jesus was the Son of God, while other disciples were unable to grasp this truth. (Matthew 16:16) When many disciples stopped following Lord Jesus, Peter said: Where will we go, you have the Word of Life. (John 6:68) Peter was one of the three disciples to be present in healing of Jairus daughter, (Luke 8:49-56) Transfiguration (Mark 9:2,3) in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:36-38)

Denial of Peter

Lord Jesus warned Peter that he would be tested, and deny the Lord three times, before the cock crows twice. (Matthew 26:34) Peter made bold assertions that he will not deny yet denied the Lord. (Luke 22:59-62) Peter faced a mild source of temptation from a servant maid. He was not denying because a Commander demanded or High Priest demanded.

Resurrection and special message

After resurrection, the women see angels in the Lord’s tomb. Angels instructed woman to tell disciples the good news of resurrection, especially to Peter. (Mark 16:7) The message was ‘personal’ to Peter. Of all the disciples Peter was sorrowful, for he had betrayed His Master.

Lord triggers old memories

Peter goes to Galilee back to his home, probably disillusioned, discouraged and depressed. Then he with other six disciples went for fishing, including James, John, Thomas, Nathaniel and other two unnamed disciples. (John 21:1-2) Lord standing ashore addressed them as ‘children’ and asked if they had any fish? (John 21:5) When they replied ‘No’ Lord commanded them to put the net on the right side. John immediately understood and recognized the Lord and told Peter. (John 21:6,7)

Path of resurrection: Overcomers

Paul writes about the life in Christ as ‘Law of life.’ “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:1-2) The reading of gospels provide how the ‘Law of life’ transformed believers to become overcomers.

1. Overcoming Earthly Perspective

Mary was a devout disciple of Lord Jesus Christ. She was early in the morning at Empty Tomb. (John 20:1-18) She was weeping as she could not see the body of Lord Jesus Christ. Grief, worry, and fear overwhelmed her. In her distress he saw the resurrected Christ as a gardener. Lord called her by name, then she recognized His voice and responded; ‘Rabbi’. Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (John 20:17) The risen Lord cannot be just viewed from the earthly understanding of ‘Rabbi.’ Mary Magdalene got the understanding, Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.” (John 20:18) “I have seen the Lord,” became the creed used later by Paul also.

2. Overcoming Misunderstanding

The disciples on the Emmaus Road did not grasp the Resurrection of the Lord, even while walking along with the Lord. Their understanding of Messiah was incorrect, incomplete and immature. Even during the whole conversation, their hearts were warmed, indicating the work of the Holy Spirit, yet they could not recognize the Risen Lord. Their eyes were opened when the Lord gave thanks and break the bread. (Luke 24: 25, 31)

3. Overcoming failure

Peter denied Lord Jesus Christ. He was ashamed and overwhelmed by failure. He decided to go back to Galilee his familiar home terrain. There were seven of them who went for fishing. Lord prepared breakfast for them and waited for them. John could recognize only when the Lord asked them to cast the net on the right side. Lord spoke tenderly with Peter and restored him. A person who failed, was restored the leadership position. (John 21) Were not the other disciples who did not deny were better than Peter? In God's observation and understanding in spite of flaw, Peter was fit to be a leader.

4. Overcoming Fear

The arrest of Lord Jesus Christ sent shock waves among his disciples. Nine of them fled the scene. Judas betrayed, Peter denied, while John followed the Lord in that night which must have been nightmare. Some scholars think that these nine ran away to Bethany to the home of Lazar, Mary and Martha, which was safe haven away from Jerusalem. They hid in a closed room, afraid to come out. Lord Jesus appeared to them twice, once with Thomas being out and in another Thomas was also present. (Luke 24:36) Lord delivered them fear and gave them peace.

5. Overcoming Doubt

Thomas was not present when Lord appeared to the disciples. He must have been greatly upset that he missed a golden opportunity. He wanted to touch the wounds to believe. The Risen Lord was gracious to appear again. “Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:27-28) Lord helped Thomas to overcome doubt and have belief.

6. Overcoming Purposelessness

After resurrection the disciples were wondering what their purpose was. They knew their lives have drastically changed. How can they face the future without their Master? Risen Lord is not just their earthly Master but Sovereign Lord, who had authority over heaven and earth. Lord gave them Great Commission. “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Challenge

Following the Risen Saviour is to be overcomers. Immediately after resurrection the disciple’s experiences victory in six areas: imperfect perspective, misunderstanding, failure, fear, doubt, purposelessness. These six areas could miss God’s highest purposes in our lives. Let us follow the Risen Lord to become channels of His Holy Sovereign Power.

Restoration of Peter

When the disciples reached the shore, Lord served breakfast and had a moving conversation with Peter. Lord Jesus asked: “Simon, son of

John, do you love me more than these?” (John 21:15) We can examine this question from several perspectives.

1. Place: peace and serenity

Peter was called to global ministry of taking the gospel to the whole world. He was in Jerusalem few days ago, now came back to his own home town of Capernaum and returned to his home, relatives and friends. Abraham had to leave his country to be a global blessing. (Genesis 12:1-3) Peter, sadly chose to go back to his home town. Did Capernaum take prominence in Peter’s life that love of His Master.

2. Profession:

Lord called Peter from catching ‘live’ fish and killing them to catch spiritually dead people and give them eternal life. Lord said: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19) Peter forgot his Calling and chose his old profession instead. Did fishing/profession took priority over his calling to be ‘fishers of men’? Elisha when he was called, made a decision not to return to his farming work. “And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.” (I Kings 19:21)

3. Possession:

Lord standing and probably showing the boat, fishing net and 153 fish; asked Peter if he loved these more or Him? Boat, fishing net and the catch were worth a huge fortune. Peter could continue to be good fisherman-businessman for rest of his life. He had investment, aptitude, abilities, skills while there was abundant fish in the Sea of Galilee.

4. Peers: Do you love me more than other disciples?

There were six others along with Peter that time fishing together. They were all disciples. Lord could have pointed to them and asked, if Peter

loved Him more than those six disciples? Saying yes was a very difficult task for Peter, as none of them had denied the Lord as Peter did.

5. Place of self-confidence to Christ-dependence?

Earlier Peter was too confident that he will never deny him. He depended on his will power, commitment, strength and spiritual insights to overcome temptation and Satan. Peter assured the Lord that he will 'die' rather than deny Him. (Mark 14:31) But was sadly defeated. Lord was asking if he would love his own self-confidence or exercise his faith and confidence on him?

6. Philo or Agape Love to give your life

Greek has many words for love. Lord Jesus was using the word 'Agape' which is self-giving or self-sacrificing love. Will Peter love the Lord with Agape love? Peter twice replied that he will love him with 'Philo' love that means 'brotherly love'. Peter was honest, and was not sure if he could really love the Lord with 'Agape' love. He had failed once and did not want to fail again. So, he safely used a term that did not show higher commitment.

However, third time, Lord asked if he would love him with 'Philo' love, Peter was shattered. Lord was asking if he would love Him, with Philo love as he loved others? Peter responded: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." (John 21:17)

Spiritual and Emotional healing

Peter was tormented in his spirit, mind and emotions. He needed inner healing. The conversation with the Lord brought Him the healing. Lord commanded Peter: "Feed my sheep." (John 21:17) Lord also predicted his death, that would Peter's fulfilment that he would die and deny the Lord. Peter will no more deny the Lord, but will 'die' for Him. Lord trusted Peter to fulfil the call and commission.

Hard week for Thomas

Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. All the eleven disciples were hiding in a closed room. Thomas was bold enough to go out to probably collect food for all. Or was he getting bored and wanted to know how the world outside is? In doing so Thomas must have felt, it was foolish thing for him to go out.

1) Missed opportunity: For Thomas it was missed ‘golden opportunity,’ he may never get again. He must have been very remorseful for leaving home at the very appropriate moment.

2) Will he see Risen Lord? Another question that would have rattled his mind would have been about a second opportunity. Until the Lord appeared second time in the ‘closed room’ he would have never known, about a future opportunity.

3) Angry with himself: Thomas could have endured emotions of anger and frustration. There are possibilities for belittling himself or consider himself ‘inferior’ or ‘less fortunate’ than other ten Apostles.

4) Rejected? Lord Jesus who is omniscient should have known that Thomas would not be there, yet he appeared to other disciples. Thomas would have wrestled, if Lord Jesus had rejected him? Thomas would have tormented his soul trying to understand why he was rejected.

5) Not loved: Another nagging question that would have bothered Thomas would have been about Lord’s love. Did Lord Jesus love him less than other disciples?

For Thomas that week (eight days later John 20:26) would have been like a painful era of many years. He must have wept, cried and groaned. Doubt, pessimism, desperation, depression, confusion, fear, rejection, anger could have been his emotions all through that time. Other Apostles could have tried to comfort him, but would have failed.

Gracious Lord appears again to the eleven disciples including Thomas. Loving Lord invited Thomas to come near, touch, feel, experience and believe. (John 20:27) Then he exclaimed: “My Lord and My God.” (John

20:28) These words of worship are remembered, repeated again and again for 2000 years.

Do I understand that dark paths lead to glorious lights?

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About the Author



Rev. Dr. J.N. Manokaran is a renowned Bible teacher, trainer, mentor, author, conference speaker, innovative thinker, strategic planner, and contemporary missiologist. With over four decades of ministry experience, he has travelled extensively to nearly 40 countries and more than 450 cities worldwide, equipping leaders and strengthening the Church through teaching and training.

He has authored over 25 books and written thousands of articles addressing biblical, theological, and missiological themes. His daily blog, *Igniting Insights*, is published in eight languages and reaches readers across the globe. Several of his teachings and sermons are also available online, benefiting a wider audience.

Dr. Manokaran is married to Rosia Selvi, and they reside in Chennai. Their daughter, Hosanna, went to be with the Lord; in her loving memory, the book *Beyond Boundaries* was published. Their son, Tambos, pioneers an urban church-planting movement in major cities. He is married to Sayali, and they are blessed with a son and a daughter.

Currently, Rev. Dr. Manokaran serves as the Regional Director for South Asia with Community Bible Study, continuing his passion to equip believers and leaders for effective ministry.

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