**EASTER 2014 JCC**

Easter is known as the time of the year that we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, and what it should mean to each of us. The last day of Jesus human life on earth is known as the ‘Passion of Jesus’ - the intense suffering of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane up to His crucifixion on the cross. What incredible passion He had for those of His day right up to today - for you and me – passion is an extreme compelling emotion, an intense emotional drive; a burning desire from within that won’t quit or go away.  **Isaiah** the prophet put it this way, ‘I have set my face as a flint’. (flint is the hardest rock there is) In other words, I will not be deterred, I am resolute, determined; I will not deviate from my course or my work of love. **Luke 9:57** ‘He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.’ It was in this city that He would be falsely accused, tortured and crucified. He knew what lay ahead of Him, but was completely obedient to His Father.

What was the source of this incredible passion Christ had? It was His intense love for His creation called – Mankind. It was this great love that caused Him to walk a very precise and narrow path so He could redeem all mankind from sin and eternal separation from Him. It was His extreme commitment of obedience to His Father and His Father’s will, at any cost, even to the laying down of His life – that was the source of His passion. **Matthew 26:38,39** ‘Then He said to them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry here, and watch with me. And He went a little further and fell on His face, and praying, saying ‘O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’ Then in **verse 42** – ‘He went away again the second time and prayed, saying, ‘O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, your will be done.’ **Verse 44** – He went a third time and prayed the same words. His prayer reveals to us His terrible suffering; His agony of soul thinking of the separation from His Father because of the load of sin He was going to have to bear. The perfect Son of God took on Him our sins to save us from suffering and eternal separation from God. The cross He carried and was nailed to was my own; it was a cross of our sin – yours and mine.

So for the sake of restoring mankind to a right relationship and fellowship with God, He left the splendors of Glory – He made Himself to be nothing – He took on the very nature of a servant b y being made in human likeness. **Philippians 2:5-8** Jesus died this shameful death so we would not have to face eternal punishment. He lived a life of obedient self-sacrifice as required by the holiness of God. It was through this selfless, sinless life that the pure and innocent blood sacrifice was produced that was able to cover all the sins of those who put their faith in Him. **John 3:16 Ephesians 1:17** ‘In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.’ His death and shed blood shows us two truths – redemption and forgiveness. Redemption means He chose to pay the price for our freedom from sin and death. Forgiveness of sin has come and is now available to every human being, because He shed His blood - because He died and was the perfect and final sacrifice for our sins. It only remains for us to make the decision to accept His great sacrifice.

Easter is the day which Christ rose from the grave with power and victory over death, hell and sin. The miracle of the resurrection is the most important miracle of our Christian faith. When Jesus rose from the dead that first Easter morning, He proved to the world – to us today – that the hope He proclaimed in His Gospel message was absolutely true and real. In **1Corinthians 15:17-23** Paul describes why the resurrection miracle is so important and central to Christianity. Why did Paul say that Christians would be the most miserable of all created creatures if being a Christian is only of value in this life? This is an important question, don’t you think? Being a Christian has never really been a step up this society’s social or career ladders – it has never been very popular, glamorous or financially profitable. But even more importantly, if Christ had not been resurrected from the dead, our sins would not have been forgiven and we would have no hope of living eternally in heaven.

Jesus resurrection that first Easter morning is the key to our Belief in Him, or our Christian faith. Why? 1) ‘He is risen, just as He said.’ Matthew 28:1-5 Just as Jesus rose from the dead as He foretold He would, we can have complete confidence that He will perform and accomplish everything else He has promised us. The Word of God is true and infallible – everything will happen just as it is written. Our future is secure and certain, if it is placed in His hands; if we will trust and obey Him. 2) Jesus bodily resurrection shows us that the living Christ, God’s Son, is not a false prophet or imposter, but is the ruler of God’s eternal Kingdom. 3) We can be certain of our own resurrection because He was resurrected. Death is not the end, but the beginning of eternal life – our real life is in Heaven with Jesus and our heavenly Father. There is future life! 4) The divine power of God that brought Jesus back to life is now available to us – to bring our spiritually dead selves back to life. I have often said that this is the greatest miracle – salvation – being spiritually dead and now raised to new life in Christ – for eternity!! 5) The resurrection is the basis for our witness to the world. It is the good news that because Jesus, our fearless leader, has risen from the grave, so we also shall rise from the grave. And those who remain alive will be caught up into the sky to be with Jesus forever!

To live eternally with Jesus, to experience this resurrection life and eternal life, we need to have an encounter with the Risen Jesus. Even as the two thieves who were hung on crosses on each side of Jesus had a choice to make, so must each of us make our choice. It is a choice of eternal proportions. **Luke 23:39-43** Today perhaps you find yourself in the same position as the two thieves – having to make a choice to accept Jesus as your personal Savior or not. One thief chose to ignore Jesus’ salvation, but the other made a choice to accept the gracious offer of sins forgiven and eternal life. There is no need to wait until you are in a horribly difficult situation or circumstance before you receive Jesus as your Savior – today is a good time to make that decision. Or perhaps you feel the need to rededicate your life to Jesus. Now is your opportunity – now is your chance. ‘Jesus, I am sorry for my sins, please forgive me, and make me that new person you have promised in your Word, Amen.’ Jesus has heard your prayer, accepted you and received you – you will be with Him in paradise.