

# St. Paul: On The Same page

04.20.14 for Easter 2a

## Day One: Acts 5:29-42

*"We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree... We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."*

Are these the same men that we were reading about only last week? Are these the same disciples who ran away in the Garden? Are these the same guys who hid while Jesus was crucified? Are these the men who locked themselves in a room and waited for Jesus to come get them?

What could change people so dramatically that ordinary fishermen would stand so calmly against all the powers and authorities? Peter answers, "We are witnesses of these things..." They were changed because they knew that Jesus had risen from the dead.

What could change you so dramatically? Right now, if you had to stand up in public and defend your faith, I suspect

that would be a pretty daunting prospect. If you had to speak up at work, perhaps risking your job, your career, even some of your friendships, that might be even worse. What could make it easier for you to take such a chance?

Let's imagine. What if you weren't afraid of losing your income because someone had recently promised to give you everything you needed every day? What if you had received a calling that was even more important and more lifelong than your career? And what if you knew that you had a large family of brothers and sisters that no one could take away, and who would love you no matter what?

In other words, what if you had seen Jesus rise from the dead, and knew that all his promises were true, and you were called to follow him? How are you changed by that knowledge?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, fill me with your Spirit, your witness to the new life you have won for me. Give me courage that comes from knowing that I share your victory. Amen.*

## Day Two: 1 Peter 1:3-9

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trial.*

“For a little while you may have had to suffer grief...”

For a little while?! Does that sound to you like Peter is making your griefs and troubles seem small? They don't seem small to us, do they? They don't seem to be just “a little while” either! They seem like one after another, and all stacked up!

But when judging the size of something we always have to ask this... “compared to what?”

Now that people in every country of the world are linked by social media, we see our lives side by side with others. While our friends in the north were posting pictures of 2 foot snowfalls, our friends in Florida were posting pictures of sunshine on the beach. More pointedly, while we post about our little aches and pains, others are asking for our prayers because

of their cancer or their upcoming surgery. Or worse, while we are posting our complaints about traffic or weather or other trivia, our friends in other nations are often posting their gratitude for opportunities to speak about Jesus.

Our griefs seem large and heavy, and sometimes they truly are a burden that we struggle to carry – but compared to the living hope we have in Jesus' resurrection, how do they appear? In view of Jesus' victory over death, in view of his gift of eternal life, in comparison to the price that Jesus paid for us how do our griefs appear?

Our troubles will last for a moment – but our life with Jesus will last forever! “In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Therefore we “greatly rejoice.”

**Prayer:** *Dearest Savior, when I look down at my sorrows they seem so deep. Lift up my face to see your life, your resurrection, the hope you have given me that towers above my troubles. Amen.*

### **Day Three: John 20:19-31**

*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!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

I looked up the Greek word (εχάρησαν) that is translated "overjoyed." We don't really have a word like it in English. The basic word is usually translated "rejoice," but it's passive here so you'd say that the disciples 'were rejoiced' to see Jesus. Interestingly, the same word was used as a form of greeting, like "welcome" or "hello." But we don't have any greeting that says, all in one word, "It rejoices me to see you."

Maybe this seems too much like a grammar lesson, but there's a funny shade of meaning here that I hope you will find encouraging.

We can say we're happy. That's a description of how we feel. But we cannot "happy" someone else.

We can say we feel wonderful, but we don't ever wonderful someone else.

Instead, our feelings of joy or happiness belong to us. They come from inside of us. Or, too often, they don't happen inside of us.

But John says that the disciples "were rejoiced." Because the word is passive, that means that someone "rejoiced them." They didn't just experience joy out of the blue. They didn't just feel happiness in their hearts.

First, Jesus came, and he rejoiced them. He gave them the gift of joy. And as a result of the overflowing of joy, they jumped to their feet – they shouted – perhaps they clapped their hands. They rejoiced because they had been rejoiced. They were filled with rejoicing by Jesus.

"The disciples were rejoiced when they saw the Lord." Each time you meet your Savior today – each time you recall his presence beside you – I pray that you will be rejoiced, and filled with the joy of his salvation.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, you fill me with joy. Who am I that you should visit me, and walk with me, and dwell with me? Lord, let me introduce you to my friends that they too may rejoice in you. Amen.*

## Day Four: Why do Christians worship on Sundays?

Maybe you don't experience this, but I feel really funny if I'm not in church on a Sunday morning.

Several years ago I missed all of the Holy Week services because I had surgery on Maundy Thursday for a kidney stone. My vicar conducted all the services in my place.

I missed the special services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. But worst of all was lying in bed on Easter Sunday, hearing the church bells ring, and not being in worship. I felt terrible, not just because it was Easter, but because it was Sunday. I \*always\* want to be in church on Sunday.

Do you suppose that's how the disciples and the early Christians (who were mostly Jewish believers in Jesus) felt about worshiping on Sunday instead of on the Sabbath – which is Saturday?

Maybe you already realize that all true believers in God, for thousands of years, always worshiped on Saturday. That was the last day of the week – the day on which God

“rested” after his week of creation. And God commanded people to rest that day also.

So what changed? It had to have been a powerful thing to cause so many people to change such a deeply ingrained habit. It rearranged their entire life, the order of their week!

It was the resurrection, of course. After Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, his disciples would always look at that day of the week differently. They might (for a time) attend the synagogue on Saturday, but they could not arise the next morning without remembering that this was the day that God RE-created his world as Jesus conquered death. And believers in Jesus gathered on Sunday to celebrate the new life they now had in him.

Jesus' resurrection changed our very concept of rest. We are not just resting from a week of labor, but we are finally at rest and at peace in our battle against Death. The victory is ours!

***Prayer:** Dear Jesus, let this day be my Easter, and tomorrow, and the next day. Let me rise every day to new life with you. Amen.*