

## **Prayer Transformation Ministries Email Newsletter – Teaching for 4/11/07**

### **Easter Surprises**

Without exception, everyone was surprised on that first Easter morning! The soldiers guarding the tomb were not only surprised, they fell into a dead faint. The women were overcome with great fear at their unexpected discovery. And as John and Peter raced to the tomb, they certainly were not ready to believe that Jesus was gone! No one expected that morning to be such a dramatic turn of events.

All the main players in the Easter story were caught by surprise. The followers of Jesus were undone by His resurrection, even though the Lord had walked with them, taught them, and prepared them specifically for that defining moment. In many ways we respond similarly to the reality of Jesus. We have the documented stories of Jesus' life, the assurance of the truth of Scripture, and the insight of Holy Spirit—yet we are still caught off guard by the marvelous truths of Jesus.

### **Surprise One: Jesus Kept His Word**

It is easy for us to look back on the story and declare that it is no surprise that Jesus kept His word. Surely there was never any question that Jesus would do exactly as He said He would. But put yourself in the place of the disciples. Even though Jesus told them He would die and then rise again (Luke 18:37), they probably did not grasp the reality of Jesus *truly dying*! Even though they saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, losing their Beloved Jesus took things to a whole new level. So imagine their delight when they finally realized (with the helpful reminder of the angel, Luke 24:5-7) that Jesus had already told them what would happen on the third day. Think of the joy at suddenly realizing that Jesus had kept His word to them!

Are there times when you get caught by surprise when God keeps His Word to you? We declare that we believe God will supply all our needs, but then we find ourselves amazed when He actually does (even if not on *our* timetable)! We say that we believe 2 Chronicles 7:14 about God promising to heal the land if we humble ourselves and repent, but then we are astounded when He actually does it in various places around the world! It's hard to believe that God would actually increase crop production in a village in Guatemala simply because people took Him at His word!

### **Surprise Two: Jesus Defied Their Logic**

God never seems to do things the way we think He should. In the logic of the day, Jesus should have raised up a revolt against the tyrannical rule of Rome. And certainly Jesus should have rushed to be with Mary and Martha when Lazarus was sick—and not wait until he was dead! When Jesus was dragged into a contrived and illegal court, how could He just stand there and not defend Himself against all the false accusations? He should have called down the legion of angels to bring immediate justice and free Him from the agony of the cross! It didn't make sense to go through the excruciating death. Yet Jesus stunned His disciples by dying and then showing up again alive. Whatever they expected of Him, Jesus countered by defying their logic.

He still does that today, you know! He doesn't choose the self-proclaimed mighty and powerful people to represent Him. He seeks out the humble and the "nobodies." He does not come with great fanfare and entertaining hoopla, but instead enters by the back door to those whose hearts are hungry and desperate for Him. Just when we think Jesus should show Himself in a certain way, He comes to us unexpectedly. We try to get the Lord to respond to our plans and programs in the Western Church, and then He shows up in the far-off Fijian Islands with the delightful surprise of healing the coral reef and sending fire from heaven! Even today God continues to defy our logic.

### **Surprise Three: Jesus Was Undeniable**

Jesus took great care to make sure that it was clear and undeniable that He had fulfilled His promise of rising

from the dead. Acts 1:3 tells us that Jesus *"also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."* Whether it was appearing to Mary in the garden or astonishing a crowd of 500 with His presence, there was no doubt that Jesus was back! Although we don't know many details about the about the "undeniable proofs," Luke writes very confidently that there was no question in the minds and the hearts of those who saw Jesus.

When God truly shows up in His manifest holiness and glory, His presence is undeniable to believers and unbelievers. Whether in accounts of historical revivals or current-day manifestations of genuine revival and transformation, there is no question that God has come to dwell among the people. At times we want to convince ourselves that "God is in the house" through great worship, preaching, or drama—but then we leave pretty much the same way we came. Being in the true manifest presence of God cannot leave a person unchanged! No one needs to be convinced of a dramatic encounter with the living God.

#### **Surprise Four: Jesus Brought Hope Through Death**

Death is a place of hope! How surprising is that? When Jesus conquered death He brought the greatest surprise of all: the hope of sins forgiven, the hope of eternal life, and the hope of Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus told His disciples to not be afraid, and they took Him to heart. How else could these first-century Christians have turned the world upside-down with their radical faith and outspoken declarations of the risen Lord Jesus? The hope of Jesus through His conquered death motivated the disciples to offer their lives to go to the far-flung corners of the world with passion and courage. That same message of hope challenges us for our generation, if we will just believe with that same abandonment.

Will you allow God to be a God of surprises? Are you willing to let Him do things that defy your logic and religious opinion? If we try to keep God contained within our parameters of comfort and understanding, we will miss the wonder of the God who conquered death and sin. We will not know the God who is able to do exceedingly beyond all we can ask or imagine! Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on that surprising Easter morning, we still have a God who is a God of surprises and hope.