

Rejoicing in Resurrection Hope Psalm 51:18-19

18 As it pleases you, do good for Zion. Build up the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then you will be pleased with righteous sacrifices, burnt offerings and whole offerings. Then bulls will be offered up on your altar.

When you're trying to fix something that isn't working, it's important to go back to the basics. Look for the simplest solution first. For instance, if an appliance isn't working, first check to see if it's plugged in. If it is, you then go to the electrical panel to see if the circuit breaker flipped. Only when you have gone back to the basics should you start working on things within the appliance.

You're having a hard time getting things done at work in a timely way. There's probably some wisdom to going back to the basics of time management. Maybe you take steps to eliminate distractions. Maybe you prioritize the most important thing so that you can make sure it gets done first. These seem so basic that we often speak of them as no-brainers. But basic isn't always so basic. Common sense isn't always so common. Sometimes we need reminders to get back to the basics.

For us Christians, it's no different in our lives of faith. We need to continually go back to the most basic truths of God's Word. What should be a no-brainer is often easy to forget. That's what we've been doing throughout the Lenten season. We've been going back to the basics of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. We've reflected on how we all need to repent. It's not just because of the sins we commit with our hands, hearts, or heads. It's because of our very nature as sinners. We've reflected on how God works repentance in us through the law and gospel. We've walked with Jesus as he's suffered and died for our sins. He endured the punishment we deserve. We've thought about what that means for us. We experience sorrow over sin. That is part of repentance. We turn to our Savior. He lived life to perfection for us. He died our death. Now risen from the grave he lives forever. And so will we. We receive the great news that the Lord has forgiven all our sins.

Sorrow over sin and trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins are at the heart of Christian faith. To say it another way, when we live in repentance, we go back to the most blessed of basics. Today, on this most glorious of day, we gather around an empty tomb. We celebrate what repentance for the forgiveness of sins means for each of us as God's children. We celebrate that because of our Savior and his resurrection from the dead. We poor and miserable sinners can rejoice in the resurrection hope today and every day.

The verses for our reflection today are the concluding verses of King David's section on repentance in Psalm 51. In these verses, we find the reason for our resurrection hope. It's the goodness of our God.

David writes: *As it pleases you, do good for Zion. Build up the walls of Jerusalem.* God is pleased to do good for his people. In the Old Testament, prophets regularly referred to God's people with terms like Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, and Zion. We New Testament

Christians share the same faith that the Israelites had in the promised Savior. Theirs was faith in the Savior to come. Ours is faith in the Savior who has come. But it is the same promise. It's the same incarnation of God's goodness to his people. It's Jesus our Savior. God's goodness to us stems from Jesus' triumphant resurrection from the dead. His rising proves that he died for the sins of all people of all time. God's goodness to us, and to the whole world, flows from Jesus and his empty Easter tomb. From eternity, God knew that the crown of his creation—humankind—would fall into sin and deserve his wrath. From eternity, he planned in his goodness to send Jesus to be our Savior. God's plan of salvation was no plan B. It wasn't a reaction to something unexpected. In his goodness, God planned the salvation of sinners before time began.

That means that in creating the world, while hanging the stars and creating all of life, in making things move in order, God chose to give us his grace. During our time of grace, we are brought to faith in Jesus and our sins are removed. All of creation comes to us from God's goodness in Christ. He graciously gives us our lives as our time to serve him.

In his goodness, God gives us the things we have to use to his glory. He gives us the means to help others. He enables us to be good managers of our possessions. He gives us the opportunity to support the church's ministry. That way more people can know this resurrection hope that we have. He gives us our unique abilities and gifts to use for the glory of his name and the benefit of others.

All these things we realize and rejoice in because of the resurrection hope that we have. Only because of the empty tomb do we know that heaven is ours despite our sins. Because of the empty tomb can we see God's goodness to us and what it all means. The empty tomb puts the things of this world in their proper place and perspective. They are not the end game of our existence. They are not the goal of our lives. They are gracious gifts from our God. We use those gifts in his service. That way we and all people can know him and spend eternity with him.

Our God has been good to Zion. He has saved Jerusalem. He has made his people his own. That includes you and me. We have the sure hope of our resurrection because of God's goodness in Christ.

As we live in the world, it can be very hard to see God's goodness. It can be difficult to rejoice in resurrection hope when there's so much pain and sadness and sorrow. Sometimes, these things can make us feel like God is angry with us or is punishing us in some way. It's easy to think that our sinfulness has angered God so much that he cannot really love us like he says he does. The devil will use difficulties and trials to get us to turn to anything but our risen Lord and to rob us of our resurrection hope.

David gives the answer to these lies of the devil. He reminds us of our hope in the Lord as he writes, *"Then you will be pleased with righteous sacrifices, burnt offerings and whole offerings. Then bulls will be offered up on your altar."*

Through faith in Jesus, we are righteous to serve. In the Old Testament, those who believed in the promised Savior offered sacrifices. That demonstrated their faith in and love for the God who saved them. The sacrifices in and of themselves were not what pleased God. What pleased God were the hearts of faith from which those sacrifices came. God in his goodness made his people righteous in his sight through faith. So they were able to serve and please him.

The same is true for us. With the resurrection hope we have by faith, we're able to please God with the things we do for him, for our church, and for others. God delights in us because of Jesus. He is pleased when we take advantage of the opportunities he gives us to carry out acts of love in the different callings we have in life.

Sometimes it's difficult to see those opportunities, much less take advantage of them. It's frustrating when our best efforts are met with more hardship. When we get to the end of our day, we remember all the ways we messed up or failed to do what we should have done. It's hard to see ourselves as righteous servants whose sacrifices are pleasing to the holy God.

But the empty tomb reminds us of who we really are. We are righteous through faith in Jesus. We have the sure hope of heaven. We are holy in God's eyes. We are able to serve him and others with all that we have and do. We miss opportunities to serve our Lord because we sinfully focus on the things of this world. But the empty tomb reminds us that Jesus died for that sin. His sacrifice on our behalf has been accepted. We look back on our day. We see all the things we should have done better or should have done differently or should not have done at all. We find comfort in knowing that Jesus died for that too. In his empty tomb we have the assurance that our righteousness is sealed, our hope is sure, and our salvation is secure.

This assurance strengthens our faith. It empowers us to serve our Lord as the righteous children of God that we are. Our sacrifices, our offerings, and our acts of service God calls good. He delights in them because he delights in us through faith in Jesus. What a privilege to live for our Lord and please him with lives of faith.

Friends, our look at Psalm 51 over these last several weeks has been a blessing. We've reflected on God's plan of salvation. We've seen how badly we need our Lord and Savior. We remember what sin is and how hopelessly sinful we are. But we've also turned to our source of hope. We turn to the one who is the grace of God incarnate and God's goodness to us. He's the one whose perfect sacrifice makes us righteous in God's sight. He makes all our works good and pleasing to God. He is Jesus our Savior. It seems so basic: Believe in Jesus and you are saved. But the basic is so easy to forget. Never forget to rejoice in resurrection hope today and every day. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!