

RISE TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

‡ **Substitute suffering (vv.7-9)**

‡ **Satisfied serving (vv.10-12)**

In the name of Jesus, our victorious Savior, dear children of the resurrection:

In the weeks and months of this coming summer we will again hear reports of Santa Anna winds whipping off the Sierra Mountains of California, forcing the moist sea air to stay away from the arid inlands. Someone will light a match, or a piece of glass lying in a field will magnify a beam of smoldering light before anyone notices. Firefighters will rush in to battle flames that seem to have a life of their own as they tear through people's dreams and burn up their lives. And some senseless reporter or insensitive environmentalist will tell the rest of us that man had no right to be there in the first place, so mother earth was just responding to human existence.

We look with dismay at what is coming on God's green earth. We listen to worries about "global warming" and wonder why so few are concerned about global burning. God's explanation is the only one that really clears this mess – where we've been and where we're headed. God who created this beautiful planet also made man to be holy like Himself. But our rebellion brought the curse that plays out in the natural disasters. These constantly remind us of Christ's promise to return to judge the living and the dead. We're entering that blessed season of Easter so much like the forest floor after a fire. At first you only see dirt and destruction, but soon the tiny greens begin to shoot from the earth. Just as the Creator brings life from death in nature, so much the more He calls us to **Rise to New Life in Christ**.

‡ **Substitute suffering (vv.7-9)**

It's safe to say that there has never been a time in history when we humans had more opportunities to talk. A telephone in every home was not enough. We had to get rid of the cord so people could drive their cars, put on makeup and eat breakfast while telling someone somewhere something that just can't wait. Talk radio wasn't enough. We needed blogs so we could talk in cyber space to more people than just a few email recipients. And what do we accomplish with all our talking? Against the backdrop of eternity we're like a very busy crew choosing colors and spraying paint on the decks of the *Titanic*. Still today the voice of the prophet rings true: ***"Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?"*** (Habakkuk 2:13 NIV)

God knows that man's sin would finally so pollute the planet that the only way to make things right again would be to burn it up and start over. But He wanted to save His own from this destruction. He had to provide a way. We could no more save ourselves than someone could climb down the sides of a skyscraper to escape a top floor blaze. From eternity God's own Son stepped forward to do for us what no one else could do. But that's what so amazes me when I think how people talk and talk and say so little. So often in meetings especially about difficult decisions everything is said in the first few minutes before we have to go on and on because not everybody got to say it yet. And then you look at the LORD's Christ – amazing even to the Roman governor Pilate that in spite of all the false accusations from envious Jews screaming for His blood, this Jesus said nothing. Unbeknownst to Pilate, Jesus was fulfilling these God-inspired words of Isaiah: ***"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."*** Jesus was looking forward to this Easter season when we could **Rise to New Life in Christ**.

We like to say that God works in a mysterious way, but who can ever exhaust the wonder of this? We see so much oppression in the world around us, but Jesus was ***taken away*** by ***oppression***. How confusing this must have been for the disciples to see the object of their greatest hopes and dreams

suffering even to the point of such a shameful death. How strange to be give a grave with the rich and the wicked at the same time. How awful to suffer so much when nothing but meekness, humility, kindness and goodness had ever come from Him. Put yourself in the place of the disciples and it's easy to understand how Peter and the rest would think the women's witness of seeing Christ alive would sound like nonsense. I can relate to Thomas demanding physical proof of Christ's physical resurrection. Don't we have to admit that given the same circumstances we would keep asking foolish, earthbound questions right up to the time of His ascension too? Jesus in unbounded love was **Substitute suffering** in the place of us clueless sinners. God had plans for us to **Rise to New Life in Christ** and thrill with Him in...

† Satisfied serving (vv.10-12)

Satisfaction comes hard. And self-sacrifice doesn't always help. When the Hinckley fire raged in the early 1900's, the last transmission of the telegraph operator was, "Stayed too long." He did not realize it, but the one train he did manage to call to take some citizens north got across the Brule River bridge just in time before it collapsed. In spite of his heroic efforts he died feeling like a failure.

Some of you may remember the giant in the movie *Prince's Bride*. A recent biography chronicled the real life of this Frenchman named Andre whose goal in life was to become a championship wrestler. He did, but at 7' plus and growing far past three hundred pounds, there were many places where he literally didn't fit. On the other end of the yardstick are the little people who need to block the pedals just to drive. We always seem to be reaching for satisfaction, but something gets in the way.

The ancient Israelites had a lesson in the Mva. When it comes to God's holiness, even we Christians are like choir members trying to sing, but never getting the notes just right. Christian husbands want to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her. Christian wives want to be as beautiful as Sarah the Old Testament princess of God-pleasing submission to her husband. Children want to honor their parents from youth to old age. But about the time you may think you're doing well, you find you just don't fit the pattern of perfection God gives us in His holy law. These are *unintentional sins* of omission and commission when one is attempting to live a good life. Under the law, ignorance is not innocence. James speaks of this in the New Testament too: "**For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles (ptaisei) at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.**" (James 2:10) We are condemned as *guilty* for driving over the speed limit even if we did not see the sign. God's law condemns us all even when we try our best. But what God for us was to make Jesus an Mva in our place to remove all the *guilt* we incur in spite of our best efforts as Christians wanting to be good according to the New Man. This is very comforting for our feelings of inadequacy living in the holy light of God's Word, yet failing miserably like the self confessed "**wretched man,**" Saint Paul in Romans 7.

Our Baptism not only connects us to Christ's death but binds us forever to His holy life and all the true satisfaction He achieved. "**After the suffering of his soul, 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.**" This is a whole new way of living and whole new way of looking at life. It means God is pleased with our praises even if sometimes the notes come out more as noise than song. It means when we fall short in our best efforts to love as we've been loved and forgive as we've been forgiven, we have a Savior-God who picks us up and carries us to the goal in Christ. In this cosmic struggle for souls it truly is "winner takes all." The "**spoils**" here are the eternal souls of sinners like us that God wants home forever with Him in heaven. To bring us whole and healthy to that lush green paradise of the new heaven and new earth which He has promised to create, Jesus was willing to take our place in death to give us His life even now. When you and I feel dissatisfied in our serving, let's remember who served us first and that all our life from here on out is a huge "Thank-you!" for what He has already done. Then we can talk with more meaning than a world of cell phones and blogs because we're here to talk about Christ even as He talks to God for us. It's a great day to **Rise to New Life in Christ**. Praise His Name! Amen.