

THREE THINGS

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We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)

Every man has a past, a present, and a future.

Every man has a problem in his past, a problem in his present, and a problem in his future.

Our Past

The problem in our past is sin. Sin is the brokenness in our relationship with God who made us. Sin manifests in every way that people attempt to lead and live their lives apart from God. It begins as mere self-centeredness, but swells and contorts to all manner of contemptuous and contentious evil. It is accompanied by guilt, shame, pain, and blame.

The problem in our past is sin, but God has an answer to that problem. The answer is faith—faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

By His self-sacrificing death, Jesus, who had no sin of His own, atoned for our sin. His bloodshed was the ransom payment for our sin and estrangement from God. He bought our forgiveness.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the evidence that the atonement was sufficient, that God's judgment was satisfied, that our freedom was granted. He brought us eternal life.

When you put your faith in these two events — not merely that they happened historically, but they happened *for you* (with you in mind) — you receive their divine benefits.

Put another way, when you express your confidence in God's redeeming love and power through Jesus Christ, your salvation begins to take shape (by grace you have been saved).

Our Future

The problem in our future is death. *"The wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23). From the moment we are born, death begins its nefarious work in us, challenging every system of health, growth, and life. Eventually, every earthly system will succumb and our conscious life on earth will cease. *"All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return"* (Ecclesiastes 3:20).

The problem in our future is death, but God has an answer to that problem also. The answer to that problem is hope—hope in Christ's return based on the fact of His historical resurrection and His promises.

The resurrection of Jesus is no fanciful tale of religious dreamers. It is the astonishing fact that was witnessed by the Roman soldiers guarding His tomb. His disciples found the tomb empty, another fact that has never been denied, for someone could have produced the body to dispel the reports of His resurrection. He appeared at various times after this to His disciples in a physical body, which they handled and examined. He was no ghost. He ate with them. On one occasion, He appeared to more

than 500 of them at once. It was no hallucination. As He stood, arms outstretched to bless them, He rose into the air until He disappeared from their sight in the clouds.

And the blessing continues. Jesus' words — His teachings and His promises — were validated by His amazing resurrection. Others have made similar predictions, but no one else could pull it off, no one else has risen from the dead.

¹ Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. ² There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? ³ When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. (John 14:1-3)

Jesus predicted the turmoil and pain of both natural and social disasters that would precede His return ("signs of the end"). We are experiencing many of these already. Yet, we who trust in Him have hope. This is not hope in political machinery or the evolution of mankind. It is hope in the faithfulness of Almighty God. He keeps His word.

*So is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty (fruitless),
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
(Isaiah 55:11; NIV)*

Our Present

The problem in our present is hate. People hate one another. You hate those whose skin is darker or lighter than yours. You hate people who don't speak your language. You hate people who are attracted to those of the same sex. You hate people who espouse different values or follow a different religious tradition. You hate people who belong to another political party or a different Christian denomination. You hate people who are lazy; you hate people who are hyper. You hate people who are dripping with money; you hate people who have none. You hate people who are glamorous; you hate people who are ugly. You hate people who are more intelligent than you; you hate people who are dumb. You hate people who are stronger than you; you hate people who are weak. You hate people who are faster than you; you hate people who are slow.

"I don't hate them!" you will argue. Ah, but do you love them? Do you treat them with respect and compassion?

The problem in our present is hate, and God's answer to that problem is love. It is the love of Christ lived out in the lives of those who trust Him.

Love is a verb, not a feeling, not an imagination. Love is action taken on behalf of someone else. Love binds up the wounds caused by hate. Love overcomes emotional paralysis. Love drives out fear.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

Doing good to others is an expression of love.

Love reveals God's heart for people. Love liberates.

³⁴ *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* ³⁵ *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* (John 13:34-35)

¹² *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* (John 15:12-13)

Do Something!

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

So, do something about your past! Recognize that God has loved *you* and receive His forgiveness as you put your trust in Jesus Christ.

Do something about your future! Realize that Jesus has conquered death, the grave, and Hell *for you* and put your hope in His words. Shake off your fear of really living your life for Him.

And, for Christ's sake, do something about your present! Nothing will satisfy your soul like deeds of kindness, especially when done for people who cannot serve you back. If you want joy in your life, love someone who needs you today. If you want peace that surpasses understanding, love someone who needs help today. You'll sleep like a baby.

And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. (1 John 3:23)

Little children, love one another!