

Easter Love
2 Corinthians 5:14-21
Easter Sunday
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Introduction

Christ is risen! That is what Easter is about. But, we know, it is simply a nice long spring weekend for many people. I did some checking on what Easter means to people. Here are some things people say Easter means to them.

- The first, “When I think of Easter, the picture inside my head has children dying eggs and going on an Easter hunt. I can see this big bunny all dressed up. I can see a little basket filled with decorated eggs. I can see pure bliss and happiness. I can see the smiles of children. I love EASTER!”
- The next person said, “It’s always on the weekend, so I never seem to notice it.”
- Then, an eleven year-old boy said, “It’s not about the Easter Bunny or getting candy and presents. God is the greatest person in the universe. He died for our sins and for us so we could be saved.” (*An eleven year-old boy!*)
- Then a quite different view, “Easter means having to go to my in-laws, eat ham and scalloped potatoes, pretending to enjoy watching my nephew find eggs, and getting home way too late to do anything but go to bed and go to work.”
- And, finally, “What does Easter mean to me? Quite honestly? Absolutely nothing.”

Now, what does Easter mean to you?

Think with me about Easter and also the motivation and power behind Easter. One of the most familiar verses in the Bible tells us,

“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that
whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

(John 3:16)

We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ today and the God’s great, unmatched, incomprehensible love behind it. God’s “Easter Love.” Our text in 2 Corinthians 5 tells us that *Because of Easter love,*

Christ Died And Rose Again For Us.

This truth is central to the Christian faith. Without it there is no true Christian faith. Without it there is no real relationship with God. There are, tragically, some within the organized church who don’t see this.

A pastor in Toronto states she does not believe in the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the miracles of Christ or the creeds of the church. She loves the Bible’s stories of things like the resurrection and miracles, but sees them as metaphors, not real events.

There is a fog creeping across the land obscuring a clear view of Christ. Let's clear away some of the fog.

Because of God's great *Easter Love* there is the fact that Christ died and rose again. Note Paul's statements in the opening verses of this section.

- Verse 14, speaking of Christ, "that one died for all."
- Verse 15, "He died for all," and again,
- "who died and rose again on their [and, *our*] behalf."

Earlier this morning we read the resurrection account in chapter 28 of Matthew's gospel. Each of the four gospels records Jesus' death and resurrection as facts. There are repeated references to the death and resurrection of Christ and the importance of these truths in the New Testament. One key statement is in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul writes,

"... I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." (3-8)

The Bible is clear: Jesus Christ really died. He really rose from the dead. He really appeared to the disciples and many others after His resurrection. The Jews and Romans of that day could not refute this, and neither has anyone since then. Christ died. His is risen!

Then the second fact here: Jesus died and rose again for us. Christ's death and resurrection had a specific purpose. He did not die because of any failure, weakness or sin in Himself. In His nature as God the Son and in His complete life on earth He never sinned. He never was touched or contaminated by it. Christ died and was raised *for us*.

Go back to those phrases in verses 14 and 15 again.

- Verse 14, speaking of Christ, "that one died *for all*."
- Verse 15, "He died *for all*," and
- "who died and rose again on *their* behalf."

Then drop down to the last verse, verse 21, "[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin *on our behalf*." Yes, Jesus Christ died and rose again *for us*.

That leads us to a question: "Why?" "Why did Christ die and rise again for us?" We start with the truth that God is holy. He is totally pure, totally separated from, not contaminated by anything that is even questionable, let alone wrong or sinful. He is pure. He does not,

cannot sin. So, sin and anything sinful cannot be in relationship with Him and enjoy His perfect life. To maintain His holiness, God must and does judge all sin.

God created us in His image to know Him. Our first parents disobeyed Him and that sinful action changed their nature, their children's, and every generation's nature down to us. The result, as Romans 3:23 tells us, is that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We are spiritually dead in our sinfulness and sin and cannot change that no matter how sincere or strenuous or efforts may be. We cannot change ourselves from being imperfect to being perfect.

Only one who is perfect can do that. Only God can do that. "But, *why* would He? *Why* would God the Son become one of us, live and minister to people who by and large rejected Him, and die that terrible death on the cross, taking our sins, our punishment on Himself? *Why*?" Listen to John 3:16 again,

"God so *loved* the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Ephesians 2,

"God, being rich in mercy, *because of His great love* with which He *loved* us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ..." (4-5a)

Then 1 John 4,

"By this the *love* of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, *but that He loved us* and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (9-10)

In *love* Christ gave His life to save us from everlasting separation from God, everlasting, rightful punishment for our sin.

Next, Because of Easter Love ...

Christ Changes Us.

The first fact here is that Christ makes us new creatures. Verse 17, "...if anyone is in Christ He is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." In Galatians 6:15 Paul says we are "a new creation." This is not a touch up, renovation or makeover, as you might see on television.

- We were dead spiritually, now in Christ we are alive.
- We were enemies of God (Romans 5:10), now in Christ we are reconciled to Him and are His children.

- We were condemned before God in our sins, now in Christ we are righteous before God.

Christ changes us! He makes us new creatures!

Then, another fact is that Christ gives us a new way of living. This is where most people, philosophies and all man-made religions start. There are goals to pursue, hoops to jump through, disciplines to follow. “Just keep working at it until you have the new life, the *new you*, or whatever else you are seeking.” That is a backward approach which is hopeless and useless when it comes to our relationship to God. We cannot make ourselves acceptable to God. We cannot work hard and long and change our basic nature any more than a leopard can change its spots.

Because of His great love, by His grace God changes everyone who comes to Him through Christ, and *then* He gives us a new way of living. Paul doesn’t give us a lengthy list of details about our new way of living here. Rather, he gives us two practical principles. The first one is in verse 15.

“... [Christ] died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

As nice, considerate and thoughtful as you are, your natural view of life is just like mine, in that all of us naturally live for ourselves. Yes, we sacrifice for our families and others, but naturally each of us sits on the throne of our own lives and ultimately we live for ourselves.

Because Christ died and rose again for us, when we are His and receive His new life, He gives us a new purpose, which is to live for Him. That includes trusting Him with every small and large detail, every decision and direction. We are His. He has rescued us, given us new life. So, by His presence and strength, it is fitting and possible for us now to live as He created us to live, to live for Him.

The second principle is in verse 16.

“Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.”

What is Paul talking about here? The New Living Translation of the first part of the verse helps clarify Paul’s point, “So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view” (NLT).

Ever since Paul met Christ on that road to Damascus, he looked at everyone and everything differently, and so should we. The human point of view scans and evaluates people on the basis of temporary things and accomplishments ... how people look, dress and speak; what kind of jobs or positions they have; what they have achieved and accumulated.

The spiritual point of view scans and evaluates people on the basis of spiritual and everlasting truth. The most basic view is if a person is spiritually dead or alive, if a person

is a new creature in Christ or not, a child of God or not. Because Paul looked at every person from this point of view, he tirelessly witnessed, preached and taught the gospel, the good news of the resurrected and living Christ.

What about us? It's wonderful to celebrate Jesus' resurrection here today, but how do we view all the people in our lives? Do we really see them from a spiritual perspective? One of the simplest, most clear tests is if we are actually telling them about Christ.

Yes, Christ makes us new creatures and gives us a new way of living, but that leads us to another question, "How?" At the end of verse 20 Paul writes, "...we beg you on behalf of Christ, *be reconciled to God.*" This is the starting point, the key and eternally significant condition of each and every one of us—are we or are we not reconciled to God.

Some say, "I don't have anything against God. So why would I need to be reconciled to Him?" That's a fair question. Earlier I noted Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sinfulness and sin, living for ourselves rather than for God makes us enemies of Him whether we recognize it or not. In Romans 5 Paul writes about us being *reconciled to God through Jesus Christ while we were enemies* (10).

How do we become changed people, new creatures who are God's children with a new way of life? By coming to God through the risen and living Savior, Jesus Christ. John's gospel tells us,

"...as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (1:12-13).

Then in Romans 10 we read,

"...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." (9-10)

This means coming to God on His terms, through Christ, asking God to forgive our sins and give us life because Jesus died and was raised from the dead for us. As Jesus said, the way is narrow. There is only one way— through Him. He told us, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

If you are not reconciled to God, I "beg you on behalf of Christ, *be reconciled to God*" (20). Don't let this Easter Sunday pass without knowing you are reconciled to God. Talk with me, or someone who can help and encourage you in this.

Because of Easter Love Christ died and rose again, Christ changes us and,

Christ Commissions Us.

The first fact here is that Christ has entrusted this good news of reconciliation to us. Paul makes this clear in verse 18 as he tells us that God “gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” This is just one of many times the Bible makes the point that those who have been changed by the gospel are commissioned to share it with others. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 28

“Therefore, as you go on your way make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

(19-20, personal translation)

And again Jesus tells us in Acts 1,

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” (8)

God’s plan for people coming to Him is based on those who already know Him telling others. Paul dwells on this a bit in Romans 10,

“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?”

(14-15a)

Building on this is another fact: Christ has made us His ambassadors. Paul said in verse 18 “we are ambassadors for Christ.” An ambassador then and now is one who formally or officially represents someone else. We most often think of this in terms of governments. For example, Canada’s ambassador to the United States is Michael Wilson. The new U.S. administration has yet to name its new ambassador to Canada. Robert Wright is Canada’s ambassador to China and Lan Lijun is China’s ambassador to Canada.

Now in some ways it is different in spiritual terms. Every believer has the privilege and responsibility of being an official ambassador of Jesus Christ to everyone he or she meets. We are to represent His concerns and present His message. We are to answer and respond to people’s questions about His kingdom.

In light of this we can ask “So...How does this work? What is expected of us?” Sometimes ambassadors are part time representatives. We may think that applies to the church, but it does not. While only a few people are salaried workers, every Christian is appointed as a full time ambassador of Christ. That is, we are to represent Him in every moment, every place, every relationship, every situation. 2 Timothy 4 tells us to “be ready in season and out of season” (2). In 1 Peter 3 we read that we are always to be ready to give “a defense,” or to speak for Christ (15).

And then there is the matter of performance. Yes, God is concerned about our performance as His ambassadors. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4,

“Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is *required* of stewards that one be found *trustworthy*” (1-2).

He gives us another side of this responsibility in chapter 9 of that same letter when he writes

“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.”

God has commissioned us as His ambassadors and He is concerned about and evaluates our performance. How are we doing, really? In the parts of the world where the church is really growing today, one of the common threads is that individual believers recognize they have the privilege and responsibility of being Christ’s ambassadors. They do not wait for people to come to them, but go, representing Christ to everyone they can.

Conclusion.

Yes, today we celebrate God’s great *Easter Love* which led Christ to die and be raised from the dead for us, which changed us, and commissioned us to be His ambassadors.

We are going to bow our heads now and spend a few moments reflecting on this truth of God to us. First, to you who have not yet been reconciled to God. God is reaching out to you today, giving you the opportunity to be made right and whole before Him. Come to Him in these moments. Talk with me or someone else before you leave.

Then, for those who have been reconciled, thank God for His great love for you. Thank Him that in His great love Christ humbled Himself, endured all the pain and suffering, and that He raised Christ from the dead so you could be reconciled and have a relationship with Him forever. Thank God that He has given you the privilege and responsibility of representing Him. Determine to be faithful, to be more faithful, to always be faithful in this, starting right now, this Easter Day.

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