

God Declares the Ultimate End of Ends

Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015 – Brad Bailey

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Daniel 12:2 (NLT)

Isaiah 53:5-6, 9, 11; 52:13

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ...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.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

...After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied...See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

1. The entry of Christ as the Servant King declares God's ultimate power over this _____.

2. The death of Christ declares God's ultimate power over the _____.

Colossians 2:13-14 (GW)

1 Corinthians 1:30 (NLT)

God has united you with Christ Jesus. ... Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.

3. The resurrection of Christ declares God's ultimate power over _____

1 Corinthians 15:26

Romans 6:4-5

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In this special Easter day service the following two texts were read earlier...and this provide that which is referred to in a general way.

Isaiah 53:4-7 & 52:13, 15 (NIV)

Luke 24:1-9, 33-36, 44-53 (NLT)

Idea: Build on Easter as culmination of all that the final week represented as a confrontation in which God's power is declared over the world's power...over sin ...and over death.

Intro:

Today we are gathering around **the event which has changed more lives... across more cultures** than any other in human history. **As our planet moves across it's time zones...**in every country lives are waking to celebrate and honor the One who changed the world...whose life, death, and resurrection has changed their life.

They are events which **began early one morning**... when some women made their way to the tomb where the one they had known as the savior had been laid...and found the 1 to 2 ton rock which sealed it closed was rolled away... and they were encountered by an angelic form declaring that he was risen...just as he said he would... and they ran to tell the others ...who then ran back to see...and the risen Christ came amidst groups...over time at least 500 ...then ever more powerfully....Christ continues to engage and here we are.

But it all began in the dark morning... with no expectations. They were devastated at his death...disappointed that there hopes were sealed up by the Roman Empire.

Some of us here today may have a hard time believing. Some may find it difficult to believe...in God altogether...or that Christ was indeed one sent by God...who actually rose from the dead. My hope for you today...is simply to ponder afresh. I can't do justice to all the reasons to believe...but...

Let me offer a few things worth thinking about. [1]

1. God told of one He would raise up long before these events...the Scriptures speak of how God would send a Savior...of how he would be born...where he would be born...how he would live...die ...and be raised up. All prophesied long before the birth of Christ.

Something worth thinking about.

2. That figure, on this week we celebrate, entered the one city. The city of Jerusalem, which joined the forces of the religious leaders...with the most powerful empire of all human history...the Roman Empire. [2]

That should grab any of us. Whose seal sealed the tomb of Christ? It was the seal of the Roman Empire. That's a profound confrontation of powers.

Something worth thinking about.

3. Roman guards who fled or failed their post would face execution. Dr. George Currie, a student of Roman military discipline, wrote that fear of punishment "produced flawless attention to duty, especially in the night watches." It makes it hard to assume there was some simple mistake.

Something worth thinking about.

4. If the empty tomb was not a fact...if it was simply something created by the disciples...they would have gone off to declare such news in Athens or Rome ...but they went right back to the city of Jerusalem, where it would be obvious and crazy if not true.

Something worth thinking about.

5. There is an open reference to over 500 witnesses...of whom most were alive.

One of the earliest records of Christ's appearing after the resurrection is by Paul. The apostle appealed to his audience's knowledge of the fact that Christ had been seen by more than 500 people at one time. Paul reminded them that the majority of those people were still alive and could be questioned. [1b]

6. The most passionate witness...was the most antagonistic... Saul of Tarsus was a religious leader who despised Christ and persecuted Christ's followers. Only after Christ appeared to him did he become one of the greatest witnesses for the truth of the resurrection..

Any thought that those who first believed were just followers isn't the case at all...it would appear that those who first witnessed the risen Christ became followers.

Something worth thinking about.

Add to this that...

7. All who shared this news....didn't gain any material wealth or social prestige...but rather faced losing everything...including their lives. Those early Christians were beaten, stoned to death, thrown to the lions, tortured and crucified. Every conceivable method was used to stop them from talking. Yet, they laid down their lives as the ultimate proof of their complete confidence in the truth of their message.

Something worth thinking about.

The truth is,

“The Resurrection of Christ is not a belief that grew up within the church; it is the event around which the church itself grew up.”

One point I would encourage us to grasp...and that is that...

The events of Easter did not really begin that morning. They began long ago in the eternal realm.

The resurrection of Christ is the culmination of what God had promised and predicted... in human history.

In the account we heard this morning... The angels declare that this happened AS IT HAD BEEN PREDICATED... and Jesus emphasized the same point...that this was according to the Scriptures...to what God has declared.

Consider the very words declared in Genesis (c. 1440 BC)... to what God said upon the fall of Adam and Eve...

Genesis 3:14-15 (CEV)

God said to the snake: "...you will...suffer this curse—One of hers will strike you on the head, and you will strike him on the heel."

Whose offspring? God only refers to the women's. Pointing to one who would be born of a virgin... one who would bear a child through God's power.

And what would be the exchange between this one born and the enemy who represents evil? The enemy would strike his heel... but the one born would crush his head. **The enemy who represents evil will strike the heel... something that would not prove fatal....** While the one from God sends will bring the mortal end of evil. **A poetic description of how the enemy struck down Jesus... but who then rose up in a final crushing of evil.**

Most agree these words from Genesis...were revealed and written by Moses...**between 1440 and 1400 B.C.**

God had a plan.

Then he began by calling a people to Himself... to begin to make his ways known...and his plans. He would raise up prophets...through whom he would reveal the mystery of what would arise in human history... such as Hosea...

Hosea 13:14 (NIV)

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.

Or the prophet Daniel...

Daniel 12:2 (NLT)

Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace.

But it would be through the prophet Isaiah that God spoke most of the One who would come as the Messiah...the saviors...and come as a suffering servant who would be raised up...

Isaiah 53:5-6, 9, 11; 52:13 (NIV)

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ...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.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. ...After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied...See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

Most agree these prophecies were recorded between 740 and 700 BC...before Christ.

In fact....you may have heard of the Dead Sea scrolls...they were discovered in 1947...the most extensive early copies of the Scriptures... and there ...is Isaiah 53 for all to read. [3]

The point: That what we celebrate today.... God had purposes and pointed to...revelation in real history.

We are not gathered to celebrate simply that someone rose from the dead...some mythical story that arose in a single quaint piece of human imagination.

This is not make believe comic book super-hero story telling...this is what all those fictional stories may echo in some way...but this is reality....rooted in actual history.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a random act...it was revealed by God and rooted in history.

The good news of the resurrection is that it is ‘**according to plan**’...it is part of God having a plan to rescue and redeem us.

> **We can’t recue ourselves because our identity as the ‘beloved’** image bearers of God cannot be given by anyone but the **source of that love**. Only the source of love can overcome our rejection.

We are like POWs... who willfully accepted the enticements of an enemy... and have found ourselves enslaved ever since... by an enemy who claims to own us... who convinces us that nobody is coming for us...nobody remembers us...and THEN... **discovering that the enemy is doomed... and that a rescue plan is underway. That is what the resurrection of Christ declares. God has a plan to both defeat the enemy and rescue us.**

The resurrection is the culmination of the grand clash between evil and good... hate and love... eternal and temporal.

We can see it beginning in the very birth of Christ...which we celebrated just over 3 months ago... and even then we may recall... the very birth of Christ was marked by hope and threat...a long awaited hope...and a threat to the powers that be...whether religious or the state of Rome. His whole life...and ministry... defied that powers of this world. And it culminates in the final week....

On the last Sunday of his life....what we celebrated last Sunday...and refer to as Palm Sunday...there are two powers heading towards an ultimate confrontation.

1. The entry of Christ as the Servant King declares God’s ultimate power over this world’s oppression.

It is the ultimate drama...that was being aligned...as we have **the conspiring of human authorities** at their worst....the religious leaders claiming that they are aligned with God...yet lording themselves over the people...and the Roman Empire believing they are ruled by one who is a god of types...and were meant to rule the world.

They were demanding allegiance and offering all who would bow to them pride in their citizenship....for he price of fear. And they held the world in fear and force.

But Christ comes declaring God’s reign...not with force or fear... but of love

The powers of this world rule by oppression.... Sacrificing people to serve them...while the power of God comes in that which is willing to sacrifice FOR others.

Such sacrifice...was stunning... and as the religious leaders denounced him...and Rome discounted him....it looked like weakness.

I believe that **Jesus had a clear sense of this ... he knew that the people would turn...** that people trusted force ...and **saw love as weakness.**

On Thursday of that week...he gathered his disciples...and what did he do? He **washed their feet.** Jesus washed the disciples' feet during what is known as the Last Supper on the night He was betrayed.

On that night **Peter would raise his sword** to defend Jesus from the Roman guards...but Jesus told him... to **put away the sword...**for the kingdom is not won that way.

As they watched him taken away...beaten...mocked...and finally sentenced to be crucified...they watched as the powers of this world...the powers of the religious leaders who had oppressed them for so long...had done away with Jesus...and Roman Empire's might was going to prove fatal.

BUT then it happened...when God broke the Roman seal...it was a declaration of **God's ultimate power over this world's oppression.**

DO you wonder if the world is really a safe place? Do you fear that it is just crazy and out of control? The resurrection reveals something you and I need to know... that God is over human history...and He is more powerful than all the forces of this world.

The entry of Christ as the Servant King declares **the ultimate end of the powers of this world's oppression.**

But we have to face the challenge of what we trust in.

It is often noted how striking...that shouts of "hosanna" which initially welcomed Christ entry into the city as the new king...within days... would change to shouts to crucify him by so many.

We may want to cast such lives as shallow... ,,but we can all be shallow fans.

We can all be so enamored by human force.

We do well to pause...and consider what we trust in.

I know that some resonate with the harsh reality that evil must be fought with force...something many resonate with when forces such as ISIS rise up. God certainly affirms that **there is a legitimate role of human force** to provide boundaries upon evil.

But human force can only constrain and contain the expediency of evil...it cannot defeat it.

It is the power of love that will overcome evil...for "perfect love will cast out fear"

Jesus said to his followers...you will face the forces of this world. But fear not...he has overcome them.

On that Sunday...they began in fear...but as they realized that Christ had risen...a liberation began.
> They saw the power of Rome for what it was...it could not contain God.

They realized that what God was doing in Christ...was more powerful than the powers of this world. They realized that love was not 'weakness'...it was actually a divine force that would ultimately prevail...even when it appeared to be defeated.

I would challenge us today... to consider what we trust in.

Then came Friday...in which we can see that...

2. The death of Christ declares God's ultimate power over the debt of life we owe.

I recall the last time I served on jury duty....and when they go through the process of selecting jurors... the defense attorney kept challenging the prospective jurors to look at his client and presume he was innocent. I kept thinking... if you'd qualify that you are referring to this particular accused crime... it would be a lot easier for me. I can't see any human life... including my own... and see a fully innocent person. **Even the best of us** know something of **selfish orientation**...that we have **not fully given ourselves to God and our fellow beings.**

We all face the bent in our lives...that which is bent towards ourselves...and not God.

If we understood that we have turned from God...left the source of life...we face separation...eternal separation. In essence we are like those living on death row....living only to die....to pay our debt of life.

We can all feel locked inside with something not all that we should be. Jesus entered that locked room with the disciples hiding in fear. Imagine the power of hearing Jesus declare 'PEACE.'

And **he showed them his hands and feet**... for his new body would forever bear the scars of his sacrificial love.

The Scriptures declare that **he has born our shame**...which is what **defined crucifixion** ...it was not simply execution...it was public humiliation in it's highest form. The whole point was to lift one up before the public to be cursed ...and mocked...and disgraced. That is what he bore for us...all that we fear inside when we are honest.

And he took upon himself **the separation from God we deserve**. When he cried out: "Father why have you forsaken me?"...it was the one who had never known separation....being subjected to the very separation we took upon ourselves.

I believe that at some level, we live between denial and despair. But now there is no more denial... no more despair... Jesus declares that he has defeated the power of our guilt and shame and brings PEACE.

The crucified Christ... now risen... has **posted a message for us all.**

Colossians 2:13-14 (GW)

"You were once dead because of your failures and your ...corrupt nature. But God made you alive with Christ when he forgave all our failures. "He took the charges away by nailing them to the cross."

According to an ancient Oriental tradition, whenever a debt was settled, either by payment or forgiveness, the creditor would take the canceled bond and nail it over the door of the one who had owed it. Anyone passing by could then see that it had been fully paid.

In this we transcend a life bound in the fear of our failure... the fear of what we deserve.

1 Corinthians 1:30 (NLT)

God has united you with Christ Jesus. ... Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.

The death of Christ crucified declares an ultimate end to the debt of life we owe.

But the week was not over... for after he was crucified...again...the powers conspire.

The Jews were not allowed to use their own military. They had been under Roman rule for a number of decades at this point. So they had to go ask for permission. The religious leaders go to Pilate and they say, "Listen. Can you secure the tomb?"

Both needed the people to stay in line...not to be stirred up by this figure who claimed such authority...authority that transcended them.

And so the tomb is sealed with a stone likely 1 to 2 tons...and the seal of Rome would have been placed upon it...along with set of guards. For the disciples...it was the death of their hope. Make no mistake....they didn't expect anything. It was over. Dead is dead.

But then...**just as God predicted....just as Jesus said...on that third day...Jesus was raised to life.**

3. The resurrection of Christ declares God's ultimate power over death

The Apostle Paul is speaking at length about the resurrection of Christ, and declares...

"The last enemy to be destroyed is death." - 1 Corinthians 15:26 (NIV)

Death is deemed an "enemy" not a part of God's original plan and desire for us. We were never meant to know death.

We can try to deny it... we can recognize that in our current condition aging is natural....but the Scriptures declare... this isn't the original nor destined condition.

Hebrews 2:14-15

'Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.'

Jesus comes... "he showed them his hands and side"...making clear that he really dies and it was not the end. One life now before us.. a life which was prophesied would rise... said he would rise for us ... and then rose up and proved loose in the world.

> The resurrection of Christ declares that what God had always purposed...to have image bearers in relationship forever... it is possible...that he has the power to defeat death.

It transforms them.

I recently discovered that **possums actually have some smart instincts.**

You wouldn't think so because you hardly ever see one except when it's dead on the road.

There's a joke that goes, "Why did the chicken cross the road? To prove to the possum that it could be done!"

But possums, it turns out, are smart.

They won't enter a hole if there's just one set of tracks going into it.

They know there's something in there.

But if there are two sets of tracks.

The possum will enter and not be afraid.

> The message of Easter is that we can enter the grave - we don't have to fear death because there are tracks leading out of the tomb.

We can have life beyond death as well.

Romans 6:4-5 [NLT]

And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised as he was.

Did you notice...it says we will be raised "**As he was...**" that is... a bodily resurrection... new and eternal life.

Notice the better life is not just an addition to your old life, something you just tack on. It's a whole new deal. It's brand new. God wants to give you a brand new life.

Have you noticed how many packages say "**New and Improved**"? What that means is "Same old junk with a new title." There's very little new in this world. It's all just **repackaged, repositioned, relabeled, retitled.** There's very little that's actually new in the world. But God says I want to give you a brand new life.

I remember being on a **caterpillar expedition with my son Travis** when he was just four years old during which at one point **he reminded me, "We can't keep butterflies, they were meant to fly."**

> **Easter proclaims the reality that your very life was meant to fly.**

He alone offers the transformation of life.

He came from the eternal realm...to provide a way....a way for all who will repent and receive it.

Jesus said he is the way, the truth, and the life...that he is the resurrection. **Life is found in him...**in relationship...when we make him our Savior and Lord.

A lot of people try different ways to get to heaven. [5]

Eternal life is not found in **accepting a religion.**

Some people try **Salvation by Sincerity.** "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." Just think that one through. You can be sincerely wrong.

Some people try **Salvation by Subtraction.** You give up a bunch of things and then you get to heaven. "I don't drink, smoke, cuss, chew, run around with girls that do." I don't do nothing'. If being a Christian was a matter of not doing things then anybody who's dead qualifies as a Christian. They don't do anything.

Then there are people who think they'll get to **heaven by ritual.** Neither going to church services...nor meditation...nor any form in itself can substitute for your relationship with Christ.

How about **Salvation by Heritage**. Your mother was a Christian. Your grandmother was a Christian. Their decisions were their own. You have yours to make.

And of course there is **Salvation by Comparison**. "I'm better than ... so and so." But that doesn't make you right with God.

Only Christ has **paid the debt of life** we owe...and **defeated the power of death**.

PRAYER: Invitation to receive his death as or forgiveness. And to receive him as the one who reigns in the world...and in us.

Closing Service thought:

As I go back through the Gospels, trying to envision how Jesus himself viewed his time on earth, it seems obvious **he planned this departure from the beginning**.

Nothing pleased Jesus more than the successes of his disciples; nothing disturbed him more than their failures. He had come to earth with the goal of leaving again, after transferring his mission to others.

At the Last Supper, Jesus disclosed plans for his departure in terms no one could mistake, he said, "**but I tell you the truth: it is for your good that I am going away.**" All along he had planned to depart in order to carry on his work in other bodies. Our bodies. The new body of Christ. Let us now go into the world knowing he lives in us and through us.

Notes:

1. Drawn and adapted in part from Evidence for the Resurrection by Josh McDowell at <http://www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/josh2.html>
Might also add...

While not admitted to by many of the religious and Roman rulers of that day... **both Jewish and Roman sources, do admit to the empty tomb**... even though it was not a favorable fact for them.

1b. Regarding the 500 witnesses, Dr. Edwin M. Yamauchi, associate professor of history at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, emphasizes: "What gives a special authority to the list (of witnesses) as historical evidence is the reference to most of the five hundred brethren being still alive. St. Paul says in effect, 'If you do not believe me, you can ask them.' Such a statement in an admittedly genuine letter written within thirty years of the event is almost as strong evidence as one could hope to get for something that happened nearly two thousand years ago."

1c. Professor Thomas Arnold, for 14 years a headmaster of Rugby, author of the famous, *History of Rome*, and appointed to the chair of modern history at Oxford, was well acquainted with the value of evidence in determining historical facts. This great scholar said: "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

2. The Roman Empire was among the most powerful economic, cultural, political and military forces in the world of its time. It was the largest empire of the [classical antiquity](#) period, and one of

the largest empires in world history. At its height under [Trajan](#), it covered 5 million square kilometers¹ and held sway over some 70 million people, at that time, 21% of the world's entire population. – From Wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire

This assessment of Empires laces the Roman Empire as the greatest - <http://listverse.com/2010/06/22/top-10-greatest-empires-in-history/>

3. The Dead Sea Scrolls - From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Dead Sea Scrolls, in the narrow sense of Qumran Caves Scrolls,[notes 1] are a collection of some 981 different texts discovered between 1946 and 1956 in eleven caves from the immediate vicinity of the ancient settlement at Khirbet Qumran in the West Bank. The caves are located about 2 kilometres inland from the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, from which they derive their name.

The texts are of great historical, religious, and linguistic significance because they include the second oldest known surviving manuscripts of works later included in the Hebrew Bible canon, along with deuterocanonical and extra-biblical manuscripts which preserve evidence of the diversity of religious thought in late Second Temple Judaism. There are only two silver scrolls which contain biblical text and are older than the Dead Sea Scrolls; they were excavated in Jerusalem at Ketef Hinnom and date from around 600 BCE.

Most of the texts are written in Hebrew, with some in Aramaic (in different regional dialects, including Nabataean), and a few in Greek.

The larger consensus is that the Qumran Caves Scrolls date from the last three centuries BCE and the first century.

At time of writing message – was on display at Calif. Science Center -

<http://californiasciencecenter.org/exhibits/dead-sea-scrolls-the-exhibition>

4. Possum illustration drawn from Joel Pankow

5. The statements about the ways we try but cannot gain salvation are adapted from statements by Rick Warren