

“Raised for Our Justification”

My niece Carol and her husband Michael sent me a YouTube video earlier this week about Easter – sort of. It was a clip of a well-known pastor talking about how he used to hate Easter because of all the pressure to make Easter special so people, who don't always come to church, would be impressed and want a better relationship with Jesus.

He told how there was a friend of the family, a young woman in his church that he and his wife had taken under their wing. He said she had become like a daughter to them. She had been dating a guy for a while, and it seemed like things were moving pretty fast and getting serious, and maybe marriage was in their future, but then suddenly he started acting a little distant. So, she said, *“What’s going on, you seem to be treating me differently?”* He said, *“I’m having a hard time because all my life I’ve imagined myself with some hot blond surfer girl who, you know really fit and really into fashion. So in my mind, I’m trying to decide whether I wait for my dream girl or settle for you?”* He said, *“I’m not saying I don’t want this relationship; I just need some time.”* If that was your friend, or better, your daughter what would you tell her? Would you say, *“Just give him some time? But use that time to get to the gym, take up surfing, dye your hair...?”* *“No! You don’t want someone settling for you. You want someone crazy about you. Someone who wants you so badly they will gladly give things up for you.”* Then the pastor telling the story said this, I relate to this, which is why I wanted to share it, he said, *“The defensiveness you feel for her, ‘Don’t let someone treat you like that, you are better than that,’ This is how I feel about God. That’s what I feel about Easter and people trying to beg you to consider Jesus at Easter.”*¹

I haven't seen this in our community, but I've heard of churches who so want to maximize the opportunity to bring in new people for Easter that they offer all kinds of special incentives. If you come we will give you this also – we will have a drawing for an iPad or give you a set of steak knives. Or it becomes part of the message: *Invite Jesus into your heart, and God might make you rich, and answer your prayers and fulfill your dreams, help you get ahead and give you the life you’ve always wanted.* All of this misses a huge point. If you are going to come to church, or come to Jesus, come *for* Jesus, come *for* God. He is enough. He is more than enough. He is more than we deserve, or even know to want.

Jesus made wonderful offers and invitations for life at it's fullest in relationship to him but if you say to him, *"I don't know, I think I might find more satisfaction or more fulfillment somewhere else. I don't know if I want to hold out for my dream life or settle for you.* He's not going to say, "Well, I'll give you myself and an iPad also! He will not offer you something more or different because there isn't anything more he could offer. He deserves your faith, and love. Why? **Verse 25** puts it very concisely. *He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

We're going to focus on this one phrase in one verse this weekend. It comes at the end of a chapter about a man named Abraham from Genesis, the first book in the Bible. If you don't know the story let me briefly catch you up. Abraham was chosen by God promised that he would be the father of many nations, the Savior would come through him and the whole world would be blessed. However, his wife, Sarah had never been able to conceive. When the promise was made, they were past childbearing age. The Scripture makes a big deal about Abraham because he did what humanity was supposed to do but did not do. He believed God. And **verse 22** says, *his faith was counted to him as righteousness.* God loves it when people have faith in him! Then **verses 23-24** say, *But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord.* To be righteous is to be right with God and the important thing here is that you get that not by your own record of good deeds but by believing in Jesus as Lord. It's is at this point that scholars point out that **verse 25** introduces a summary statement, a single phrase that is almost certainly a very ancient and traditional summary statement of the Christian faith – what it is we must believe about Jesus to be right with God. Here it is, *who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.* That's the heart of the gospel for Easter and every day! *Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

Two things stand out here. First,

I. GOD RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD.

A. The death *and* resurrection of Jesus was *an act of God.*

What happened to him was being guided by an unseen hand. There are many verses where Jesus speaks of willingly giving himself up for us. But, God wants you to know as **John 3:16** famously says,

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” God gave Jesus up for us, and God also raised Jesus up for us. The resurrection of Jesus is an act of God. Christians aren't naive about the laws of nature, as if it is no big deal to claim that Jesus rose from the dead.

We can believe in the resurrection because we believe in God. Christopher Hitchens was an outspoken atheist. He understandably denied the resurrection because he didn't believe in God. In an interview, once the lady interviewing him said, *“In your books, you take on a kind of religion that takes the stories in the Bible literally. I'm a liberal Christian. I don't take any of this stuff literally. I think it is all a metaphor.”* His response was fascinating. He said, *“I would say that if you don't believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and Messiah and that he rose again from the dead, and by his sacrifice, our sins are forgiven, you're really not in any meaningful sense a Christian.”*

Illustration: In recent years I've loved to reference Dr. John Lennox on this point. He is a philosopher of science and a professor of mathematics at Oxford University, in England. He writes about the relationship between science and faith. He wrote an article on the question: *“Can a Scientist Believe the Resurrection?”* At the end of the article, he affirms his own faith in the resurrection of Jesus. He uses this illustration: If I put \$1,000 tonight in a drawer in my office. Then I put another \$1,000 in tomorrow night. That's \$ 2,000. On the third day, I open the drawer, and I find \$500. Obviously, the laws of arithmetic have not been broken. \$1,000 plus \$1,000 still equals \$2,000. What those laws tell you is that someone has put his hand into the drawer and removed some money. The laws of nature can't keep that from happening. Lennox concludes: In the same way, the Resurrection of Christ doesn't negate the laws of nature. The resurrection shows us that God has reached into history and done something powerful.²

If God exists he is able to intervene in our world at crucial moments to do above and beyond anything we can imagine. And....

B. What the Bible teaches about the resurrection of Jesus is confirmed by the evidence of history.

I reviewed two scholarly articles about the state of present-day *international* scholarship on the resurrection of Jesus. What was fascinating was to see that a very strong *majority* (3 to 1) of modern scholars, even the skeptical and unbelieving, conclude that *the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is compelling on the*

face of it. In other words, in the last twenty-five years, the majority of scholars believe that the historical evidence relating to the resurrection of Jesus is strong. They believe, based on historical evidence that at least five things are historically reliable: 1.) Jesus really existed and lived an amazing life. 2.) He was crucified and really died. 3.) On the third day the tomb was empty. No body expected NO BODY. The enemies of Jesus could never produce a body - it was gone. 4.) Hundreds of independent believable witness gave convincing testimony that they had experiences, encounters with the resurrected Jesus after his death. 5.) These experiences with the risen Christ radically changed the lives of the witnesses and launched the world-changing movement of the Christian faith and church.³

What Scripture tells us, and what history confirms is that God raised Jesus from the dead. and...

II. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS HAS LIFE-CHANGING SIGNIFICANCE.

Let's just look at four things: the resurrection as a seal of salvation, a sign of hope, a secret to belonging, and a source of confidence. First,

A. The resurrection seals the gift of salvation for every believer.

The Bible says both the death and resurrection of Jesus were *for us*. **Romans 4:25** says Jesus was *delivered up for our trespasses*.

Illustration: In the ancient world nations or armies would sometimes send out one champion to fight for them all. They would fight and whichever champion won - the whole army won. A modern example might be a lawyer. If you have to go to court and maybe you're not that bright, but your lawyer is a genius. So, if he wins the case you win - right! His victory becomes yours too. Another example might be the lottery - your wife wins the lottery! What do you say? *"We won! Here's how that idea relates to Jesus. First, of when you say, I trust in him as my Savior, God says then His sufferings will be the payment for your trespasses. Your trespasses are every place where you have stepped across the lines God has drawn for the way we are called to live. Everything we've done that's wrong – what the Bible calls sin. Our sin receives the judgment it deserves in the suffering of Christ. But the gospel doesn't end on the cross! It also says and (he was) raised for our justification! The final verdict of righteousness for Jesus and for us was powerfully demonstrated when God raised Jesus. So our assurance is not only in the words "it is finished" but also in the words "He is risen!" "It is finished" means the payment for sin has been made. "He is*

risen” means the verdict of righteousness has been given. Jesus receives and claims that verdict for you – when you trust in him.

This is the first thing; the resurrection of Jesus seals the gift of salvation for every believer in Jesus. Second,

B. The resurrection is the *sign* that points to our future hope.

1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection of Jesus is called *the first fruits* of a larger resurrection and promise to come. The first fruits would be the first grapes that show up on the vine that promise a larger harvest. The resurrection images what God will do with everyone who turns to Him for salvation *and* with the world itself in the end of history. The crucifixion wrecked the body of Jesus, but God raised him up in a renewed body that was filled with life, power, and glory. In the same way, God will one day renew all creation and everyone who believes.

The resurrection is a sign that pictures that future promise. Third,

C. The resurrection is the *secret* to belonging in God’s family.

Remember how **Roman 4** began by talking about Abraham. One of the reasons he is so important is that God said the family of Abraham would be the people, indeed the family of God. If you go back and read **Romans 1-4** you will see the critical question in **Romans 4** is “*who are the true people of God?*” The answer Scripture gives is that it is not those who share Abraham’s blood but those who share his belief who belong to his family and to God’s people. If you believe in the risen Christ you belong to the family of God. That’s your true spiritual family. Faith tells me who my true brothers and sisters are, and what it is that brings us together.

Sociologists have said that in recent years the rates of people claiming to believe has remained relatively stable but the rates of people belong to a church has dropped. If you think of God as your on-call therapist there to meet your individual, personal needs you might be satisfied with believing in Jesus but never really belonging to a church. On the other hand if you see that part of the purpose of the gospel is for God to create a worldwide family for himself and then use that family, with all it’s flaws, as a means of advancing his causes in the world, you will see that belonging to his church is part of fully believing the gospel.⁴

The resurrection is the seal of the believer's salvation, the sign of our hope, the secret to belonging and there is a fourth thing...

D. The resurrection is a *source* of confident commitment to Jesus.

Illustration: Four hundred years ago there was a Christian philosopher named Tommaso Campanella. He was one of the most influential philosophers of the late Renaissance. I noticed this week that he offered the following criticism of what he saw as a weakness in Christian art. He said:

Why do you keep filling gallery after gallery with endless pictures of the one ever-reiterated theme of Christ in weakness? ...Why do you concentrate upon that passing episode, as if that were the last word and the final scene, as if the curtain dropped upon that horror of disaster and defeat? Paint Christ not dead but risen, with his foot set in scorn on the split rock with which they sought to hold him down! Paint him the conqueror of death! Paint him the Lord of Life! Paint him as what he is, the irresistible Victor who, tested to the uttermost, has proved Himself in very deed mighty to save!⁵

How do you think of, or even picture, Jesus? Jesus is often portrayed as weak, and tender, he's got soft hair and a little pet lamb. What kind of Christ do we look to and from what kind of Christ do we draw strength - and what sort of Christ lives in us? It is the Christ who suffered for us but passed through suffering and came with power out of the grave?

Listen to what Jesus himself says in **Revelation 1:17b-18**. *"Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. If you are not sure you want to worship him or follow him – others will. He's not losing out if you say "no" to him. Other people will believe in him and be saved by him and love him and live for him.*

Listen to what Jesus said in **Matthew 10:37-39** *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

CONCLUSION

He was delivered for our trespasses: no one loves you like that or ever will! No one can do for you what he did in dying for you on the cross! But that's not all. He was raised for our justification! No one is as great or powerful or able to do or promise so much as Him! What is your response? Is it half-hearted and hedging your bets or holding out for other options? Jesus is telling you loud and clear, "I'm worth it! I'm worth your love and devotion. I and I alone can love you and renew you pour my eternal resurrection life into you.

His saving grace, the eternal life he offers is a gift; it isn't earned. It is not a reward for the good people. He clearly offers himself to you if you simply, sincerely believe in him. In **John 11:25-26** Jesus says, "*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?*" Do You? Believe it! Believe in Him. Entrust your salvation to Him and then, because of who he is, live for him. He's so great he is worth your entire life's total devotion. Don't hold back. Give your self to him who gave himself for you.

Amen

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=MbYsfKDw8NI

² Adapted from John Lennox, *Miracles, The Veritas Forum, 2013, p. 24* - John Lennox's own website can be found at: <http://johnlennox.org/>

³ <https://www.bethinking.org/did-jesus-rise-from-the-dead/contemporary-scholarship-and-the-resurrection-of-jesus>

⁴ In the *Story of God Bible Commentary on Romans*, Michael F. Bird develops this aspect of the gospel and the resurrection on pages 158-160

⁵ Tommaso Campanella quoted in *The Cross is Not Enough*, Clifford and Johnson p. 19