

Easter in 3D

Various Texts

© April 5th, 2026 by Rev. Rick Goettsche EASTER

As you may know, I've been trying to sell my house, and it has caused me to think a bit about the process of buying and selling, and I realized there are some principles that apply to buying just about anything. For example, when you buy a house, it's important to look not just at the front of the house, but to walk around it to get a sense of scale. Sometimes you can see a house that looks small from the front, but when you walk around it, you realize it's a lot larger than you think. The reverse can also be true—a house that looks huge from the front, but then you discover the rooms are all in a row!

The same is true with buying a car. It's not enough to just look at one side of the car, you need to look at all sides of it. And you need to drive it so you can get a real sense of what it's like. Looking at a single piece of data on a spec sheet doesn't give you the whole picture. And if you only pay attention to a single data point, you run the risk of drawing the wrong conclusions.

I mention this because I think the same is true when it comes to Easter. Most people are familiar with the story of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, and they may even know that Jesus did this to pay for our sin, but that's all they know. When we only know one aspect of who God is, it can lead to some really skewed conclusions about Him.

For example, many who only know the Easter story will tell you only that God is loving. They say God would never punish people by sending them to hell, or that Jesus made it so everyone would go to Heaven. Others look at the Easter story and tell you that the Old Testament depicts a completely different God from what we see in Jesus. These people conclude that the Bible is a piece of fiction rather than the inspired word of God.

This morning I want to look at who God is from several different angles. I want us to see several facets of God's character, because when we do, we can appreciate who He is and why the Easter celebration is such a big deal. It is only when we look at Easter from many angles that we can really understand its fullness.

God is Creator

The first characteristic of God we need to see is that He is the Creator of all things. The first words of the Bible introduce us to this fact,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1, NLT)

Admittedly, there are many today who deny this fact about God. They have concluded that natural processes are the cause of our existence today. But the existence of a Creator is a logical necessity. Everything we see around us was caused by something else. But at the beginning, something must have always been there. Something must be the ultimate cause of everything else. The best explanation for that logically is exactly

what the Bible says—that God created the universe, the earth, and everything on it, including us.

This is an important truth because it leads to a couple of important conclusions. First, it shows that God values us as human beings. God did not have to create us, but He chose to do so anyway. He did not create us merely as objects for His amusement, but as creatures He loved and cared for.

The second conclusion that follows from God being our Creator is that He sets the rules. When you design something, you know how it should function and what will be damaging for it. God created us to function in a certain way. He knows how we will best live up to what He has designed us to be. He also knows what will be destructive to us. God has the right to enforce whatever boundaries He sees fit on His creation. This is foundational to our understanding of who He is.

God is Righteous

The second facet of God's character we must grasp is that He is righteous. This is a churchy word that doesn't get defined very often. But it's not a complicated word; all it really means is that God always does what is right and good.

Now, it's important for us to understand what that means. If God is the One who created the world, He also is the One who gets to define what is right and good. God's definition of what is right is the only one that counts. We may not like how God functions, but we really have no right to argue against Him. God determines what is right and wrong.

Practically, this means God is consistent. He doesn't change according to the trends of society. His character is consistent and so are His laws. This is wonderfully refreshing.

I have worked with students for more than 25 years at this point, and I discovered long ago that I cannot keep up with the trends. My daughters, however, are at an age where they know about each trend as it happens. For example, a few years ago, it was important that every teenage girl had a Hydroflask. A short time later, everyone had to have a Stanley (and not the Stanley thermos that we grew up with...but pretty ones). Now they have moved onto other brands. My girls now have to have Owala water bottles. It's dizzying to keep up with these trends because they are constantly changing.

But God doesn't change! He is perfectly consistent in His character. What He says is right is always right and what He says is wrong is always wrong.

We see this throughout the Old Testament. God gave His people laws to abide by. Some of these laws were given to accomplish a certain purpose for a certain period of time while others were given because they guide us to living in the way He intends for us to live. But in all these things, God shows that He is consistent in His righteousness. He always does what is right, and He expects the same from you and me.

God is Just

The third facet we need to see is that God is just. This is closely tied to the fact that God is righteous. God being just means He always ensures that justice is served. Another way of thinking of this is that God must punish those who break His laws.

Admittedly, this is not something we tend to like, at least not when it's directed at us. Most of us, if we found ourselves in court, would hope that the judge chooses to let us off, even if we're guilty. We like that idea, so sometimes people imagine that this must be what God is like—that He simply overlooks our crimes (sin) and lets us go free.

But while that's what we want when we're the guilty party, we have a completely different view when we're the party that was offended. If you were harmed by someone else's criminal actions, you would be irate if the judge simply told the person there were no consequences. If they simply pardoned everyone, we would say that judge was derelict in their duties and demand they be recalled from the bench! A good judge must punish crimes, regardless of who commits them.

This is what God does. When we break God's laws, it is called sin. And God, because He is just, cannot simply overlook those things. There must be a punishment that fits the crime.

Throughout the Old Testament, God laid out all the laws He expected the people to keep and then laid out a system of sacrifices they should offer when they broke those laws. The point of this system was to drive home an essential point: sin carries with it dire consequences. Sin will always lead to death.

The sacrifices God commanded were a vivid reminder that God must punish sin because He is just. Everyone is subject to that justice. The writer of the book of Hebrews summed up the Old Testament law like this,

²² In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. (Hebrews 9:22, NLT)

This was why God commanded the Israelites to wipe out entire nations. Many look at these commands and conclude the God of the Bible is a tyrant. Or they conclude that the God of the Old Testament was different from the God of the New Testament.

But there's a better way to look at these events. God was putting His justice on display when He ordered the destruction of these nations. They were nations that had lived in open rebellion to God and to the way He had told them to live. They had chosen to defy Him so repeatedly that there was no hope of them ever turning back. So, God commanded them to be killed. His command was not evil nor trivial. It was just.

Some object that this wasn't fair, and that God should have permitted them to live despite their sin. But is that really fair? Is refusing to punish sin really justice? Of course

not. God must punish sin because He is just, and He will punish sin because He is righteous.

God is Loving

This creates a problem. Every person on the planet has broken God's laws. Admittedly some have broken fewer than others, but we all stand guilty before God. And if our sin demands death, why does God not wipe out every one of us?

The answer is because He is also loving. God's love and His justice are not in conflict with each other. Sometimes, because of God's love, He delays administering justice. He does so not because He is a bad judge, but because He has a bigger plan.

This is something people often get wrong about God's love. They imagine that a loving God would never punish those He loves. But we understand that love and justice are not contradictory at all, and in fact, they go hand-in-hand.

Parents understand that it is not loving to simply let their children do whatever they want. As parents, we can see further down the road than our children can. They do not see where these behaviors that seem harmless now will lead them. But as parents, we do see those things. So we punish our children as a way of restraining their bad behaviors and hopefully leading them to a better place. We don't do this because we desire to hurt our children, but quite on the contrary, because we know that if we do not restrain the evil desires in our children's hearts, they will become terrors that will bring harm to themselves and to others.

God has the same view of you and me. He does not desire to punish us and destroy us as we deserve, though He will do so if necessary. But God has chosen to delay justice for a very simple reason—He had a plan to fix what we had broken.

⁹ The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. (1 Peter 3:9, NLT)

This passage is talking about how God will ultimately bring the punishment upon us that we deserve. But God also has a plan to save us. He has not brought about that punishment yet because He does not desire to destroy anyone—but instead wants us to repent of our sin and turn to Him for forgiveness. God's love is not permissive, it is patient. God's love does not negate His justice, but it works hand in hand with it.

God is Gracious

God has delayed His punishment for a time because He desired repentance. But how does repentance change anything? Does simply being sorry for what you have done somehow erase it? Of course not. Does trying to do better in the future mitigate what we've done in the past? Also no. But there is a thread that runs through the Bible that shows us that God is gracious, even while being righteous and just.

The Bible is consistent in explaining that sin leads to death and that the only way our sin can be dealt with is through a perfect and unblemished sacrifice. For years, the Jewish people came back year after year to sacrifice animals for their sins because they kept committing new sins. All of this was intended to illustrate some essential truths—our sin is greater than we imagine, it is a far bigger deal than we think, it never seems to end, and we cannot fix it on our own.

Fortunately, God had promised from the very beginning that He would provide a way for us to be forgiven once and for all. He promised He would provide a perfect sacrifice who would make clean once and for all. Listen to what the Apostle Paul said about this,

⁶ When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹ And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. (Romans 5:6-9, NLT)

Our sin made us enemies of God. We stood in direct opposition to Him, and we deserved His condemnation. We imagine ourselves to be basically good people, but we do not measure up to God's standards of righteousness. Because of that, we stand condemned before God. Left to our own devices, we are in deep trouble.

Jesus came to earth to be the perfect sacrifice we needed. Jesus had no sin of His own but willingly took the punishment we deserved upon Himself. Sin was not merely overlooked, it was punished, as justice demands. The cross shows us the intersection of God's justice, righteousness, love, and grace. He makes forgiveness possible to those He loves—and at great personal cost to Himself.

Paul shows why the cross and the empty tomb are such a big deal. It means that we can be made right in God's sight, even though we don't deserve it. That's the great news of Easter. For those who trust in and follow Jesus, forgiveness is ours through Jesus' sacrifice. It's not something we deserve, nor is it something we can earn. But if we trust in Jesus, it's something we will receive.

God is Generous

Not being destroyed even though we deserve it is a pretty wonderful gift in and of itself. But there's another facet of God's character we must see. He is generous. He has promised not only to be spared the Hell we deserve but has promised us new life for all of eternity! Again, see what Paul says as he reflects on this wonderful gift.

And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. ²⁰ But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. ²¹ So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. ²² Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. (1 Corinthians 15:19-22, NLT)

After His crucifixion, Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose again. And He promises that for all who believe in Him, they too will live even though they have died. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we can have the assurance that there is not only forgiveness of our sins in this life, but we will experience eternal life through Him! In other words, the story continues, even after our lives on this earth end. Jesus is the source of our hope, and He is also the proof of it! That's the difference Easter makes.

Conclusion

It's not enough to understand that Easter is a way God shows us His love. That's true, but it's only one side of a story that can only be fully understood when we look at it from all the different sides. My hope is that today you can see that the God of the Bible is multi-faceted. A single trait cannot adequately describe Him. But when we put several of His traits together, we discover the wonder of Easter. We discover that the Old and New Testaments are not contradictory, but different sides of the same story. And we see that our God is wonderfully complex and worthy of our praise and worship. And all of these truths taken together demand a response from us.

With that, let me draw some lessons I hope you'll take away today. **First, we are all subject to God.** He is the One who created us, and we are subject to what He says. He has designed us and knows what is best for us. Our society likes to believe that we are more enlightened now and no longer need to follow the commands of the Bible because they are old and outdated. The notion that we know better than Him is foolish and dangerous. When we choose to ignore His instructions and go our own way, we do so at our peril. We should recognize that His way is best and do what He says.

Second, God will punish sin. Many imagine that because God is loving He will overlook our sin and excuse our failures. But God punishes all sin. He doesn't overlook or excuse it, because He can't. He is righteous and just and will ensure justice is served. He has provided a means of forgiveness for us, and that is to trust in Jesus and follow Him. If we choose to ignore that means of forgiveness, we will bear the penalty we deserve. We will remain God's enemies. This is not God being mean or a tyrant. He is wonderfully loving and gracious. He has provided a means of salvation even though we don't deserve it; if we choose to ignore it, we will rightly bear the penalty for it.

Third, if we embrace Christ it should give peace, hope, and joy. The wonder of Easter comes when we recognize what we deserve, and then that Christ has made it possible for us to be spared that punishment! It reminds us that our hope is not only for this life, but that there is life beyond the grave. It reminds us that God is in control, that He loves us, and that He sees and cares for us in a way we can barely even fathom. It shows us that God can be trusted in all things. That should lead us to trust Him and follow Him in all things. And it should change our outlook completely. It should give us confidence, it should give us direction, and it should give us joy—a joy that affects us not just on Easter Sunday, but every day of the year.

© April 5th, 2026 by Rev. Rick Goettsche EASTER