

What Church is All About – Easter

Jon Benzinger

Romans 10:9

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People come to church for many reasons on Easter. For some it's what they've always done, so it's what their parents and their grandparents, their great-grandparents always did. So it's a yearly tradition. For others, it's a connection to their past. They get dressed up and go to church like when they were kids, and so Easter takes them back to the good old days. For some, it's time with family. Others, it's feeling like they did a good deed. For some they are here today against their wills. If that's you, thanks for being here. I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand, but church on Easter then is about expectations, making someone happy, keeping the peace, being a good sport.

For others, they believe in God. They know there's a higher power and they know they're not Muslim or Jewish. So Christian is more what they are, so that's why they're here. And for many, they're here most weekends and so of course they're going to be here today. Regardless of the reason you're here today, my question is what do you think this Christian thing is now that you're here? What's this whole church thing all about? Why do Christians have church on Easter and all the other Sundays too? I mean, why give up primetime on the weekend? What is Christianity all about?

Two weeks ago, I went to pick up my father-in-law's car at the house where it was being stored. And the lady is a proper English woman. She was very kind and helpful, especially when the car didn't start and wouldn't start and wouldn't start. We tried everything. We got neighbors involved. We were trying everything we could to get this car started and nothing worked. So I called AAA and then I sat down for a nice 45-minute conversation with Judy. And as it's polite to do, she asked the fateful question, "What do you do for a living?" And I used to be afraid of that question because I know my job can be kind of intimidating for people. I mean, after I tell them I'm a pastor, they immediately stop cussing. They apologize when using God's name in vain. "Oh, sorry." It's like you didn't use my name in vain. You got to take it up with Him.

Others ask, "I mean, is it okay with you if I have a drink?" Like I care about that. Because things just kind of get awkward for them. And so if I want to be nice, I don't always want to be, but if I want to be nice, I will diffuse the awkwardness with something like, "I know, weird, huh? A pastor. Probably don't run into people like me very often. I promise I'm not judging you right now." And then like I did with Judy, I will ask them something like, "So has anyone ever told you what church is all about? Why people go to church? Why there are people like me, pastors?" And most people say, just like Judy did, "No. No one has ever told me what church is about." She told me, "I'm 75 years old and I've never even been to church."

Listen, if that's you today, thank you. Thank you for being here today. In a very real way, what I'm going to say today is meant to help you. I know you probably have opinions about Christians mostly from entertainment or media, which might just be a tad biased. So today I'm going to bottom line this whole Christian thing for you. I'm going to let you in on what this whole church thing is all about and why we do this not just a couple times a year, but why we do this every single week. To do this, I'm going to turn us in the Bible to the book of Romans, the book of Romans. If you have a Bible with you, turn to Romans chapter 10. Romans chapter 10. If you got a Bible from us today, Romans 10 is on page 1047, 1047. And if you don't have a Bible with you today, that's okay because it's going to be on the screen behind me.

Now as you're turning there, some of you, Romans was a letter written by a guy named Paul. Paul was one of the earliest leaders among the first Christians, and he wrote the letter that we call Romans to a group of Christians, guess where? In Rome. Group of Christians in Rome about 2,000 years ago. And he wrote this letter to explain the heart of Christianity. It tells us what church, this whole church thing is all about. Here is the core of Christianity in just one verse, Romans 10:9, which says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

So to start us out, this leader among the first Christians says Christianity is about a person, a person, and his name is Jesus. Notice near the middle of the verse, it says, "Jesus is" what? Jesus is Lord. Thank you those two people. Awesome. Christianity is all about Jesus. Church is all about Jesus. This whole thing is about Jesus, that He is a real person, as real as you and me. This Jesus, the verse says, is Lord. This is the very first separator between Christians and those who weren't Christians. Christians claim that Jesus alone is Lord. Well, Lord is a fascinating word and we don't use it very much. So its meaning has kind of been lost for us. So I want to tell you a quick story about this word, Lord.

The Bible has two parts. You've got the Old Testament written in Hebrew. You've got the New Testament written in Greek. The Old Testament is before Jesus came. The New Testament is after Jesus came. In the Old Testament, the name of God is written 6,000 times. Now, the Jewish people, about 200 years before Jesus was born, wanted to translate the Old Testament Hebrew into Greek. So they wanted to do this translation work, but then they got to these names of God and there's no word that can match what this name means. And so what are we going to do? Well, they went back and forth and decided to translate his name with a Greek word that is the equivalent of our English word Lord.

So Jesus is Lord means that he is the most special person that has ever lived because in the Bible, to be Lord means that you are God. So Christianity starts with a particular person, Jesus, that He is Lord. And being Lord in the way the Bible uses the word Lord means that Jesus is God, which means that Jesus isn't whoever we want Him to be. Just like you're not whoever I want you to be. We can't make Jesus into what we want Him to be, to fit what we think or to fit how we want to live.

I mean, if someone's asked me if I knew you, and I said, "Oh, sure, that's that seven-foot Chinese guy that works at Target, right?" I mean, looking at the crowd right now, I'm pretty sure I didn't get you right. We don't have any seven-foot Chinese people in here. And that's my point, that that's the point here. Like you, Jesus is a particular person, and the only answer to the question, who is Jesus? The only answer to that question that matches who Jesus really is is this, He is Lord. He is God. And anything else describes a completely different person. So this is what Christianity is all about. One very unique person, Jesus the Lord.

Now, why do we think this about Jesus? That He is Lord and God? Well, Romans 10:9 tells us why. Second Christianity has always been about an event, an event, namely the resurrection. Notice towards the end of the verse, it says, "God raised Him. God raised Jesus from the dead." The resurrection refers to Jesus truly, physically, powerfully, historically rising from the dead. He's no zombie. It's not resuscitation, it's not reincarnation. It is a true victorious over death, resurrection, alive today. This is why we have church on Sundays because Sunday is the day of the week that He rose from the dead. This is why we celebrate Easter. We go all out on Easter. Why? Because that's the day Jesus came back to life, never to die again.

Now to speak of resurrection is to assume that Jesus died. So we've got Jesus' death and His resurrection. Good Friday, great Sunday. These are the events that summarize what Christianity, church is all about. You see, in His death we have substitution, and in His resurrection we have success. Christians have always taught that Jesus died as a substitute, as a stand-in. He died for rebels against God. He died in their place for their sin, and that's because God loves rebels and He loved rebels in a very specific way.

On the cross, which is what we remembered on Friday. On the cross, Jesus was punished for sin as if He was a rebel, when He never sinned, not even one time. God treated him as if He lived a life of rebellion, even though He didn't. And then when He rose from the dead, Jesus showed that His work as a stand-in for rebels was successful. His punishment for rebels was accepted. By rising from the dead, Jesus proved that everything He said, everything He did is true, especially His work as a substitute for sinners. So Christianity points up and says, "Jesus is Lord." It points out to an empty tomb and says, "Jesus, the substitute, really actually rose from the grave. The tomb is empty."

Now all that's great, but what can that mean for you? Does that have any at all meaning? Does that matter for you personally? Romans 10:9 says it does. Third, Christianity has always been about a destiny. A destiny, namely salvation. The Christian message has always been end of the verse, what does it say? "You can be saved." That word saved means to be rescued from danger, delivered from destruction. Well, what is the danger that you can be saved from? Answer, punishment for your rebellion. You see, Lord means God and God means He's in charge. In our job is to conform our lives, to conform our thoughts, to conform everything to what He thinks and what He wants.

However, if we're honest though, we don't like authority. We don't want authority. We don't want anybody telling us what to do, but that's what God is. He gave us rules. Every one of those rules

is for our good. They weren't given to harm us. They weren't given to hold us back. Just the opposite. Every one of his rules is an expression of His love for us. Just like the rules you gave your kids, if you have kids, were what? They were expressions of your love for them. Well, instead of believing the best about God, we believe the worst about God, that He's a tyrant, that He wants to make us miserable. We flip the whole thing on Him, in fact. We treat God like we're gods. We do what we want to do.

And if God, the one who gives us life and breath and everything else, if this God doesn't conform to what I think He should be, if He doesn't do what I want Him to do, then He gets my wrath. He gets my disdain. He gets my rejection. We've given Him the middle finger countless times. And because the penalty for that is an immediate, we assume that His rules are optional. His ways are just opinions. But really it's rebellion. Really, it's treason. And God not only created you and owns you, but He's also holy meaning that He hates our sin. And not only is He holy, but He's just and good, which means that He must punish our sin. And if you've heard of hell, that's what it's about. Punishment for all of our crimes against God.

So Christianity points up to Christ, points out to an empty tomb, and points forward to a destiny that you can be saved from, meaning that because of Jesus' death as a substitute for sinners like us and because of His resurrection, you can be rescued from facing God as your judge with a case against you that you cannot possibly win. And instead, face Him as a father who loves you and will give you a never-ending life of infinite love, maximum happiness, and the purest of joy. Listen to me. What I just said to you is fact not fiction. It is not fake news. It is good news. You can be saved. You, me, anybody, everybody can be saved from their sin. But how? I mean, we did commit the crimes. Our fingerprints are on the murder weapon. The video evidence is conclusive. How can we be saved from crimes that we committed? Romans 10:9 answers that question too.

Finally, Christianity has always been about a response, and that response is faith. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Now, that does not mean ask someone, "Is Jesus Lord? Did he rise from the dead? Check, check. Yes, yes. Okay, everybody. Okay, we're good now. We're saved." No, confessing that Jesus is Lord is not just saying the words or saying, "I agree with those words." No, that's because Lord means God, and God means master, authority, king. We don't belong to ourselves whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, we belong to Him. We all have a Lord though. And the question is, who is that Lord? Your Lord is who you're living to please. Your Lord is the one whose desires you're achieving, that your Lord is the one whose words you are following, which means usually our Lord is who? It's us. Yeah, absolutely.

Which means confessing Jesus as Lord means abandoning us as Lord and replacing us from the throne, removing us from the throne, and replacing us with Jesus as Lord. Confessing Jesus as Lord must be done, notice, with your mouth. Meaning to be saved, Jesus must be more than "the good Lord." He must be your Lord. That's identifying yourself with Him as His follower. This is

a pledge of allegiance to Jesus. It's a lifelong commitment to Him as your Savior, your Lord, your God.

This is what it means to believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead. Your heart in the Bible is not your emotions. It's not even an intellectual thing either. Your heart is your core. It's the real you, your true self. This means that at the center of your being, you trust in Jesus. You're committed to Him. You trust Him that He lived and died and rose again. And notice the verse does not end. "If you confess and believe, then you will save yourself." It says, "You will be saved," meaning you don't save yourself. You can't save yourself. You're in danger and someone has to rescue you. And that someone is Jesus when you trust in Him.

He never sinned. We always sin. And when you believe in Him, He trades all of His perfection, His perfect life, His perfect relationship with God. He trades all of His perfection for all of your sin. He's punished for your life on the cross, and you're rewarded for His life when you die and you're allowed into Heaven, not based on your resume, but based on His. How can that trade happen for you? How is that even possible? End all trust in yourself, all trust in anything else and anyone else, and put all your trust and life and death in Jesus alone. Refuse to try to save yourself with your good works and instead, trust that Jesus is willing to save you. He is able to save you. And how do we know that He's able to save us? Because of what we're here to celebrate today. Because Jesus actually rose from the dead. He conquered sin, death, and hell for all who would believe in Him and Him alone.

So what is Christianity all about? Four things. It's about a person, the Lord Jesus, an event, his death and resurrection, a destiny, salvation from punishment for all of your rebellion because of faith in Jesus to rescue you from all of your sin. So what is this church thing all about then? It's a celebration, really. That's why you see people smiling and friendly and singing and raising their hands; church is a gathering of people committed to Jesus, convinced of His death and resurrection, whose sins are forgiven, whose destinies are secure, who get together regularly to say, "Thank you, Jesus, for saving my soul, for forgiving all of my sin. Thank you for all that You did." And then it's learning from His word how He wants us to live in light of all of this incredible kindness and mercy that He has shown those who believe.

And really, if you think about it, why wouldn't we celebrate? In a world of fake, we want something real, something tangible, something true. And Jesus rose from the dead. We long to be rid of our guilt, and our guilt can be removed forever because Jesus rose from the dead. We long for something that's truly amazing. We chase after experience after experience to find something that is just really remarkable and awe-inspiring. And what could be more than that? Jesus rose from the dead. We long for something that is really worth living for, that captures our passions and say, "This is what I'm going to devote my life to." We have all that and more. And the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

So Christianity points up to Jesus, points out to an empty tomb, points forward to a destiny, and then it points right here and says, "What about you? What about you?" If you're not committed to Jesus as your Lord, if you're not convinced about His death and resurrection, if your destiny is

not secure because you haven't believed in Him, then there is no better day than today. There is no better moment than right now. Please do not harden your heart. You will be tempted right now to look at your watch, to look at your phone, to think about what you're going to have for lunch, to think, "Did I put that ham in there? I don't remember if I did. Uh-oh." You will be tempted right now to think whatever with that stuff.

But in this moment, if I could come to you and put my hand on your shoulder, look you in the eye. I would say, "Notice the text says you. You can be saved." It speaks to you, whoever you are, whatever you've done, regardless of why you came here today, God brought you here today to hear this. Jesus is Lord. He died as a substitute for sinners like you and me. He rose from the dead. He has done everything to save you from your destiny. So trust in Him. Ask Him to forgive you of all of your sins. Give your life to Him. Pledge your allegiance to Him, and the blackness of your rebellion can be washed as white as snow. Trust in Jesus today and you will be saved.

The team's going to come back up right now. Join me in prayer.

Jesus, it really is a celebration. Once we come to truly understand what it is that You've done, taking the punishment that we deserve for our sins on Yourself, so that all who trust in You can be forgiven of all of their sins, adopted into God's family, receiving eternal life. Once we realize what You've done, it makes sense to celebrate today. It makes sense to celebrate every weekend. It makes sense to celebrate every day because there really is nothing greater, nothing better than You. Every one of us is here and watching, we're in a different place with You. So my prayer today is that these truths will draw every single one of us closer to You. That nobody would stand in the same place, nobody would walk backwards, but all of us would be drawn closer to You as we have seen You for all of Your kindness, all of Your mercy, all of Your forgiveness. May this truly be a great Easter because we recognize You, the one who died and rose again for our sins. And pray these things in your beautiful name. Amen.