

## Easter 2016

- Welcome to the most joyful day of our Christian calendar, the day we remember our Lord's triumph over the grave
  - Christians mark this day in many ways and many traditions
    - Some families hold egg hunts
    - Others gift Easter gift baskets or other gifts
    - And almost everyone gathers with family for the Easter meal
  - Those meals can be awkward affairs, especially if some members of the family aren't believing Christians
    - If you too live in a blended family (i.e., believers and unbelievers), then know the moment I'm talking about
    - As everyone sits down to eat, the unbelievers are suddenly aware that it's a religious holiday
    - And there are Christians at the table
  - So someone should probably pray before the meal
    - But none of the unbelievers are comfortable doing it
    - And suddenly all eyes turn to the religious ones at the table
    - That reminds me of a time when...

Young Bobby and his Christian family were invited to eat Easter Sunday dinner at the house of Bobby's grandmother, a woman who was not particularly religious. Everyone was seated around the table as the food was being served. When Bobby received his plate he started eating straight away.

'Bobby, wait until we say grace,' demanded his father.

'I don't have to,' the child replied.

'Of course you do, Bobby,' his mother insisted rather forcefully. 'We always say a prayer before eating at our house.'

'That's at our house,' Bobby explained, 'but this is Grandma's house, and she knows how to cook.'

- Bobby's conviction is a good reminder that rituals and habits need to be connected with their underlying meaning or they lose their power
  - Bobby didn't understand the true purpose in thanking the Lord publicly before partaking in a meal
    - He thought it was about food safety
    - In reality, it was about testifying to the goodness of God
  - For that same reason, pastors give Easter sermons because its important to remember the reason why we mark this day
    - To remember why it's necessary that Christ would die
    - And what it means for us living today, those of us who have faith in the Lord's sacrifice on our behalf
- So for this morning let's hear from the Apostle Paul as he summarizes the work of Christ on the cross and what it means for those of us who have believed

**2Cor. 5:14** For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;

**2Cor. 5:15** and He 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.

**2Cor. 5:16** 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.

**2Cor. 5:17** Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

**2Cor. 5:18** Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,

**2Cor. 5:19** namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

**2Cor. 5:20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

**2Cor. 5:21** He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- In this letter to the church in Corinth, Paul has been explaining to the believers why he risks life and limb to serve the Lord in spreading the Gospel
  - Paul has taught that he has made his ambition, both in how he lives and in how he ultimately dies, pleasing Christ

- Doing things that please the Lord drives Paul's thinking
- Just a few verses earlier he explains that all believers will face a judgment moment before Christ
- He speaks of living in a healthy fear of the Lord, resisting sin and working diligently to help others know this truth
- Now in this passage Paul explains why he feels this obligation to serve the Lord
  - And it begins with the love of Christ evidenced in His death on the cross
  - Paul says in v.14 that the love of Christ controls us
  - The word for control is the Greek word *sunecho*, which can also be translated as constrain
- The love that God has for us places constraints on how the believer may live
  - But these are good, healthy, productive constraints
    - Paul goes on to explain that he draws this conclusion from the fact that Christ died for us so that we might live
    - We've all heard those war stories about soldiers who are sitting in a fox hole or in the room of a house during a firefight with the enemy
    - And it looks like everyone is going to die that day
  - But then suddenly, one of the soldiers takes a heroic step to save his comrades
    - Maybe he throws his body on a grenade
    - Or maybe he runs into the teeth of the enemy's position drawing their fire and giving his buddies a chance to escape
  - In a sense, that's what Paul is saying about Christ's death on the cross
    - Jesus Christ placed Himself on that Roman cross by His own decision in obedience to the Father's plan
    - Christ died that cruel death as a payment for our sins
    - And now that He has made that payment, our debt of sin is erased when we place our faith in that payment

- It's as if Christ threw His body on the grenade for us
- So in that sense, Paul says Christ died for all of us, so that we don't die
  - Instead, Paul says in v.15 that we now live
    - Of course, Paul is speaking about our spirits
    - Our earthly body will still return to dust, because it has been ruined by our sin
  - But because of Christ's payment, we are assured to live again
    - Our spirit will not suffer the second death, which is the Bible's name for spending an eternity in Hell away from God
    - Instead, we will live eternally with Christ, given new bodies that will never die again
  - In a nutshell, that's the meaning of Easter
    - Christ died for us so that we might live forever with Him
    - And Christ rose from the dead to show us that He can offer us eternal life too
- But like that soldier who dies to save his comrades, that sacrifice was intended for a purpose
  - The death of one makes possible a new life for the rest
    - If that soldier hadn't made the highest sacrifice, everyone would be dead
    - Instead, only one needed to die so that everyone else could live on
  - But now they live to fulfill the mission
    - Can you imagine a situation where a soldier dies to save his platoon but then the platoon surrenders anyway?
    - They decide to use their new lease on life to turn themselves in and become traitors, fighting for the enemy?
    - Of course not
    - The soldiers who gained their lives will feel all the more committed to succeed in their mission

- And to do so in honor of their fallen comrade
- That's the appeal Paul makes to every believer in connection to Christ's death on the cross
  - Paul says in v.15 that we should no longer go on living for ourselves
  - We don't take Christ's death and squander it by returning to living a life that supports our enemy, Satan
  - Instead, we live to support Christ's mission of reaching the world with a message of salvation
- So then Paul outlines how our perspective in life must change as men and women granted a new eternal life by Christ's sacrifice
  - And it begins in v.16 with how we see the people around us
    - We no longer recognize no one according to the flesh
    - Paul means that we can no longer afford to see people merely in terms of their earthly existence, in the flesh of this body
  - At the end of v.16 Paul draws a comparison to the way believers in the the first century church knew Jesus
    - In Paul's day there were still many who had seen Christ in the flesh when Jesus was walked in the Galilee and taught
    - During those days they knew Jesus merely as a man
    - They had not yet come to understand that Jesus was God incarnate and would rise from the dead
  - But then after Jesus died and was resurrected and then ascended into Heaven, then these same believers came to know Jesus in a spiritual sense
    - His Spirit now indwelled them by faith
    - And He was something much greater in their understanding
    - Now they knew Him in Spirit
- Similarly, Paul is saying you and I have known each other in an earthly, fleshly sense
  - We know each other's faults

- We aren't always kind or forgiving enough
- But regardless, we now must set that kind of relationship aside
- And in its place we must strive to know each other as we know Christ, that is spiritually
  - I know my brothers and sisters in the church are destined to live in eternity with me
  - I know they have sin now like I do, but one day because of our faith in Jesus Christ we will all be free of that sin
  - So in the meantime, I keep that future in mind as I relate to them
- I want to live for Christ, pursuing His mission since He died for me
  - And Christ's mission was one of showing the love of God to fallen men
  - He came to heal, to speak truth, to care for those who have need
  - But within the body of Christ, we'll find it virtually impossible to meet that mission if we're distracted by our biases
  - As long as we view fellow believers according to the flesh, we can't see them as Christ does
- Notice in v.17 Paul summarizes our new perspective of fellow believers by reminding us we have all become "new creatures" by our faith in Jesus
  - If someone is "in" Christ, which means to have placed their faith and trust in Him for salvation, then that person is new creature
    - Paul goes on to explain that the old nature has passed away
    - Before we knew Christ as Lord, we were living in the fallen nature we received from Adam

**[Eph. 2:1](#)** And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, **[Eph. 2:2](#)** in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

**[Eph. 2:3](#)** Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

- That was the old you before you came to know Christ
  - You were alive in an earthly sense
  - But you and I were dead in a spiritual sense
  - We lived out the lusts of our flesh
  - And we were by our nature a child that deserved only God's wrath
- But Paul tells us that those "old things" have passed away
  - The Greek word for old means ancient
  - Paul is referring to things in us that originate in ages past, in the Garden of Eden, when mankind fell into sin
  - That ancient nature we were born with has passed away by our faith in Jesus Christ
  - And the Greek verb in v.17 is the aorist tense, which means an action that occurred in an instant and continues forever on
  - Our old nature was put to death by our faith in Christ's death, and it has forever gone away and will never return
- Therefore, how can we look upon fellow believers according to who they once were since Christ died to put those away?
  - Yes, we all still carry a sin nature in our bodies, at least for now
  - But that's just temporary
  - By faith we have a new spirit which will carry on into eternity
  - So the meaning of Easter that Christ's death made us new, so that we might see one another in the church with spiritual eyes
- Secondly, we must not look upon the unbelieving world according to the flesh either
  - The one who has yet to believe in Christ isn't our enemy
    - Unbelievers may look down upon our beliefs
    - They may mock us, dismiss us, and hate us
    - They may even persecute us at times

- But if we return their hatred with hatred or their judgment with judgment, then we are recognizing them according to the flesh
  - Instead, we must look at them with spiritual eyes once again
  - Knowing that the one who has not believed in Jesus Christ is the very person we are called to serve
- Notice in vs.18-19 Paul says that these truths have been given to us by God as a ministry of reconciliation
  - What is the ministry of reconciliation?
  - Paul is referring to the reality of sin
  - Sin separates us from God, making us His adversary, His enemy
  - Our sin will require judgment, and the wages or payment for sin is eternal death
  - Which is eternal separation from God in immense suffering, according to the Bible
- But God so loved the world that He placed His Son on the cross to die in our place, so that we could be reconciled to God
  - God reconciled believers to Himself by not counting their sins against them
  - He can do this because those sins were counted against Jesus instead, which is why Jesus died
  - He was paying our price in our place
- Make no mistake...the Bible is clear that the one and only way a person may be reconciled to God is through faith in Jesus Christ
  - There is no other way to enter Heaven and avoid Hell
  - That message is our ministry to the world
  - We are to go out explaining this truth to the world so they may be reconciled to God by believing in our message
- But if we allow ourselves to see the world only according to the flesh, then we won't be likely to pursue them for Christ with urgency and persistence
  - We may make token efforts at times, but how motivated will be remain if we continually see the world according to the flesh



- When they resist us, we may give up
- When they persecute us, we may decide they are unsavable
- But Paul says it's our job, our service of worship to Christ
  - In v.20 Paul calls us all ambassadors for Christ
  - When we step out into the world, we share the good news
  - But Paul says it is literally the Lord Himself making an appeal through us
- So not looking at the unsaved world according to the flesh means seeing them all as potential believers
  - Potentially, the entire world may come to know what we have come to know
  - In God's sovereign plan, some will come to faith
  - But from our perspective, the whole world is a possibility
  - And so we look at them according to their spiritual potential, not according to their present fleshly disobedience
- That's why Paul ends v.20 with the rallying cry of the entire church
  - We beg men and women to be reconciled to God
    - Which is to say, we work with urgency and persistence to convince the sinner of their impending jeopardy
    - Of the reality that they are merely a heartbeat away from an eternity spent in hell
  - But the good news is God has made a way available to be reconciled to Himself through faith in Jesus Christ
    - As Paul says in .v21 the Father made Christ to take on our sin in our place
    - Christ had no sin of His own, so He did not deserve to suffer much less to die
    - But He took on our sin and by faith awards us with His righteousness
    - In God's eyes, a believer is as pure as Christ

- So Easter reminds us that sinners need saving, and that Christ died so that we might take a message of reconciliation to the world
  - We are those Christ has preserved so that we might accomplish His mission
    - He fell on the grenade so we could live on
    - He expects us to complete the mission in His absence
    - And we have no choice, because His love for us constrains us
    - It obligates us to service
  - But what if you're still in that foxhole?
    - Christ died to set you free from death, but you haven't accepted that payment yet?
    - You haven't confessed belief in Jesus Christ
    - You know the story, you've heard it before
    - But you've never taken the step to own it, to believe and confess that belief to someone?
  - Paul says you need to stop waiting...you living on borrowed time and time is running out

[2Cor. 6:1](#) And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain –

[2Cor. 6:2](#) for He says,

“At the acceptable time I listened to you,  
And on the day of salvation I helped you.”

Behold, now is “The acceptable time,” behold, now is “The day of salvation” –

- Paul tells you to look upon me and the other Christians in this room as men and women working with God, the Creator of the Universe, your Judge
  - We are His ambassadors
    - He saved us and sent us into the world to find you
    - We are here to declare to your that Jesus is your Lord
    - And one day, every knee will bow and every mouth will confess Jesus as Lord

- But you must make that confession this side of the grave is you are to receive the mercy God is offering you
- Paul writes in v.2, quoting from the book of Isaiah, that there is a day when the Lord reaches down into a person's life and brings the truth of Himself to save that person
  - We may go every day of our life without giving God even a thought
  - We may be the world's worse sinner or a choir boy
  - But in either case, we are not good enough to equal God's standard for entering Heaven
  - So he grants us the opportunity to be reconciled through the death of His Son
- But when that day comes to us, we must act to receive what the Lord is offering
  - As Paul says, now is that time
  - The message of salvation has been presented to you this morning from the word of God
  - For any who have yet to believe in that message, then today is the day of salvation for you
- If only you would confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead
  - That the event we remember every Easter isn't a fairly tale
  - It is isn't myth
  - It's real, it happened, and it happened for you
  - I beg you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God this morning