

The “Much More” of our Salvation

Easter Message

April 1, 2018

We left off in the Sunrise service with the Gospel of John and the story of Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene just outside the empty tomb. Mary was distraught. Not only had her Lord, the one she had thought was going to save the world, been crucified on the cross on Friday afternoon, now she discovered that someone had come and stolen his body. The body of the one whom she came to love and the one whom she came to give the proper burial to. Boy was Mary surprised!!!

Mary ran and told the other disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” You wonder what they all were thinking. Even though Jesus had been with them for three years and he had told them many times that he would have to die on the cross and be raised again on the third day, they seemed to be clueless. Some of you may be familiar with the movie several years ago entitled “Sleepless in Seattle.” Jesus’ disciples were clueless in Jerusalem. Many of them were probably sleepless as well, out of fear. It’s kind of ironic that today, Easter Sunday, would fall this year on April 1st, the day many of us refer to as “April Fool’s Day!” Think about it, this was the ultimate “April Fool’s Day,” for both those who had been for Jesus and those who had been against Jesus.

It took quite a while for Jesus’ closest disciples to even begin to realize what was going on here. Jesus started appearing to many of them, in different ways and at different times. Over the course of weeks. It would be some 50 days between when Jesus rose from the dead on the third day and when he ascended back into heaven and God finally sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Then the disciples finally got it! Literally, they got it!!! Without the Holy Spirit coming upon them and working in their lives they would have never gotten it. None of us can get it today without the Holy Spirit coming to us and working in our lives. And just like those early disciples, more often than not it takes time. But when Jesus’ original disciples finally did get it, they began to preach. They couldn’t help but preach!

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.³⁹ “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross,⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Acts 10:34-43 (NIV)

The apostle Paul who Jesus appeared to on the road to Damascus began to preach:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (NIV)

Paul wrote in Romans 5 (that which we looked at several weeks ago):

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Romans 5:9-11 (NIV)

The title of the Easter message this morning is from that passage in Romans, "The much more of our salvation." Just like Jesus' first disciples immediately following His resurrection, we often fail to grasp the magnitude, the immensity, of His resurrection on our lives today.

I asked the question in the SonRise service, "if someone were to come up to you and ask you what Easter is all about, what would you say?" Or maybe a question, from a little bit of a different angle, "what has Jesus done for you?"

Most would probably say something like Jesus died for me on the cross so God could forgive my sins. Which is indeed true! As we just learned in our series on Romans the apostle Paul tells us that "if you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Because of Jesus dying on the cross, He has taken upon himself the punishment for the sins of all who put their faith in Him.

The beginning of that passage in Romans 5:10 says, "Through the death of Jesus we were reconciled to God." That is the ultimate meaning of "reconciliation" in the New Testament. The death of Jesus saves believers from the punishment of sin and restores us, reconciles us, back into a true and proper relationship with God. Because of that reconciliation we are assured of eternal life – "For God so loved that world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever shall believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

But there is more to our salvation than reconciliation with God through Jesus' death on the cross. In fact Paul tells us in the Romans 5 passage that there is "much more!" Not only are we saved by Jesus' death, we are also saved by Jesus' life. That is the "much more of our salvation."

Having been reconciled to God by Jesus' death, is that day in when we are convicted by the Holy Spirit that I am a sinner and that the only thing that can cleanse me from my sin is Jesus' precious blood which He shed on the cross. By acknowledging my own sinfulness, confessing Jesus as my Savior and Lord, I am cleansed from all my sins – past, present and future, as long as I continue to recognize that I am still a sinner and confess those sins as I work out my salvation in Christ, as Paul says, with fear and trembling.

But God didn't give up his own Son's life, and Jesus give up His own life, in one of the most horrific ways possible, just so we could be forgiven for our sins and have eternal life to come. The "much more of our salvation" means that we are being saved through His life for our life today! If we're not living our life today through Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit whom God gives believers, than we are robbing Jesus of that for which His blood was shed.

It is also what causes many people today to look in on the church from the outside and say, "there seems to be very little difference between the lives of believers and non-believers. Believers seem to be just as critical and judgmental as non- believers. Believers seem to be engaged in all the different kinds of sexual immorality today as non-believers, and they seem to be just as angry, just as prideful and just as violent.

Why? Because we focus so much on the death of Jesus on the cross that brings us eternal life in the life to come, when Jesus returns and fully establishes His kingdom on earth just as in heaven, that we forget that He calls us to live the life that He lived today.

As Paul wrote in his letter to the early Christians in Colossae:

¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

If you are a Christian then you have already been raised with Christ. You already have new life in Christ right here and right now. Paul goes on:

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.... You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

The life you lived before your Easter and the resurrection of Jesus in your life.

You must also rid yourselves of such things as: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.... Colossians 3:1-10 (NIV)

If you have been “born again,” meaning you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, you have died to your old life. Jesus is no longer on the cross! For many Christians, they wear the crucifix, the cross with Jesus still on it. But think about it, for Christians the crucifix represents bad theology. For Christians Jesus is no longer on the cross. The crucifix represents our dying to our old life. The empty cross, the empty tomb, represents our new life, our new life in Christ. The crucifix – representing Jesus’ dying on the cross is symbolic of our salvation. The empty cross is symbolic of the much more of our salvation.

¹² Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds all the virtues together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:12-14

I am told there is a board game called “Othello.” Is there anybody here familiar with it? I know nothing about “Othello” as with most other board games. I am not a game person. But I do like the slogan of the Othello board game! Does anybody know it?

“A minute to learn, a lifetime to master!”

That slogan speaks just as much to our Christian spiritual journey here on earth. “A minute to learn” represents our salvation, our conversion experience, the time when we are born again, the moment we truly accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord over our lives. “The lifetime to master” is the “much more of our salvation.”

I have never had much patience with board games. I have even less today.

I have no patience with board games.
I have no patience with jigsaw puzzles.
I even losing patience with sports!

Why? Because I realize that I have only so many years left to live my life in Christ here on earth and to master the life that Jesus has called me to live – “the much more of my salvation.”

Easter is about both “our salvation” and the “much more of our salvation.”

The Gospel is the Good News of Jesus –

I am currently reading a good book entitled *(Re)union: The Good News of Jesus for Seekers, Saints and Sinner*, by Bruxy Cavey, the Pastor of The Meeting House, a large Anabaptist congregation outside of Toronto Canada and he says that the Gospel can be condensed into one, three and thirty words:

One – “Jesus”

Three – “Jesus is Lord”

Thirty – “Jesus is God with us, come to show us God’s love, save us from sin, set up God’s Kingdom, and shut down religion, so we can share in God’s life.”

Or as John, the other disciple, who also referred to himself as the beloved disciple says in the Book of Revelation (1:5-6 NIV):

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,
And made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father –
To him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen*