

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES EASTER MAKE?

The two most important events in human history are the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4(NIV). Show connection between v.2 and v.3).

Just a few verses later Paul wrote, If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (v. 14). If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile; you are still in your sins (v. 17).

This was the central theme of the early Christian's witness to the world: the fact that Jesus Christ was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead.

The cross and the resurrection are linked; they were supposed to be. Without the resurrection the cross is meaningless. Apart from the resurrection the cross is a tragedy and defeat.

What does it mean to you and me personally? That's up to each of us. Is it just another holiday? Is it a day to dress up to be seen, and to go see? Is it just the traditional day to go to church?

Is it simply a holiday of colored eggs, bunnies, new clothes, and, perhaps, a break from school and work?

A Sunday school teacher once asked her class of children about the meaning of Easter. One student said Easter is when the family all get together, have a big turkey and sing about the pilgrims.

She said, "That's not it." Another student piped up and said, "Easter is when we get a tree and decorate it and get presents."

"No, that's not it, either," said the teacher. A third student said, "I think Easter is when Jesus was killed, put in a tomb, and left there for three days."

The teacher thought to herself, “He knows it. He knows what Easter is about.” But then the boy continued, “Then everybody gathers at the tomb and waits to see if Jesus comes out. And if he sees his shadow he has to go back in for seven weeks.”

We laugh at the children’s ignorance, but the sad thing is they learn from their families and our culture. What about you? What is Easter?

Easter is about Jesus who died for our sins, and who rose again, and is alive today. Don’t listen to the world. This is what Easter is all about, just as the Scriptures say.

But what difference does it make—in your life? Millions believe, but what about you?

Consider the Disciples. I keep coming back to the disciples. What difference did it make to them? The day we call Good Friday, the day of Christ’s crucifixion, was not good for the disciples.

They were crushed and devastated. Like their fellow Jews they expected the Messiah to be a political force and a military leader.

The last thing they expected was to see Jesus arrested and crucified. For three years they had followed Jesus. They’d walked many miles with him, sat around innumerable campfires listening as he shared about the Kingdom of God.

Each of them had left promising jobs, careers and professions because they believed he was the promised Messiah, and that he was going to usher in a new kingdom.

But their expectant dreams died along with him on that Friday. Their lives once so filled with hope and meaning, were now empty.

As they watched the nails being pounded into his hardworking, calloused hands and the blood flowing down his face because of the crown of thorns pressing down on his head, it seemed that their hopes were all in vain.

Here they were, pinning all their hope on this lowly carpenter. So what difference had all their love and devotion made? What difference had all his promises made?

For them the resurrection made all the difference, just as it does for each of us. Their despair was turned into joy and anticipation, and the desire to live up to his expectations.

Now let’s turn our attention from the disciples to us today. Many of you experience your own dark days when your life seems to be crashing and collapsing on you.

Perhaps even today it seems out of your control. Maybe your marriage is struggling. Where do you go, what do you do to fix it? Who can you turn to for help? Jesus is alive!

Young person, maybe you are not getting along with your teacher, or your grades aren't what they should be, or it seems that nothing you can do will ever please mom and dad. Jesus is alive!

Elderly person, maybe you are feeling your age—your mind is young but your body betrays you. You don't bounce back like you used to.

You look in the mirror and wonder, "Who is that staring back at me." And every day you are amazed at the number of pills you are taking. Jesus is alive!

Some of you are struggling with your job. You don't know how you can take it another day. The boss is impossible; your co-workers drive you crazy.

Another person just wishes they had a job because they don't know how the rent is going to get paid or the family fed. Jesus is alive!

Parents, you wonder and worry about your children. They're getting older and more independent. You don't know whether or not you are being a good parent. Jesus is alive!

As I look out over this auditorium I see men and women, young and old, business men and women, blue collar and white, students and teachers.

And every one of you knows what I'm talking about. Learn what the disciples of Jesus did. That dark, desperate Friday—the day Jesus died for our sins, turned into the most glorious day ever.

The resurrection followed the crucifixion—making life, real life possible for all who believe. The resurrected, living Christ changed the disciples lives, changed their hopelessness to confidence, certainty and power.

That's what the living Christ can do for you—when you let him. He can bring peace in the storms of your life—when you allow him.

He is the living Savior—the King of kings and the Lord of lords, but he will not ever force himself on you. You must allow him to be your Savior and Lord.

He will not interfere with your decision, and he will let you live with the consequences of your decision concerning him. Because Jesus is alive here are three things to consider.

1. Life is brief.

The Bible describes the brevity of life like this in Psa. 103:15-16 (NIV), As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

Whatever difficulties are in your life, give them to Jesus. You have only this one, brief life. How much better and easier it is when you let Jesus be the center of your life.

As puffed up as we can sometimes be over ourselves and our importance, someday we all are going to die. All that will be left will be memories of our lives; memories that will fade with time.

Job said that life is like a shadow that flees and is not. And Jesus' brother, James said that we "are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

2. Use this life wisely.

Now is the time to prepare for eternity. Jesus one time said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Thank God for the resurrection. We can live a victorious life even in our troubles because Jesus is alive. It seemed that the cross was the defeat of Jesus. The disciples lost all hope.

Satan seemed to have won. It seemed that evil had conquered righteousness; that wrong had demolished right, and hate had smothered love.

That's exactly what it would have been if Jesus had remained in the grave. But he didn't stay in the tomb. Matthew 28:6 (NIV), "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."

That's what we celebrate today. The risen Christ conquered death, evil, wrong and hate. The risen Christ guarantees every believer's resurrection and eternal life.

Unfortunately, many, in essence, leave Jesus in the tomb by not letting him be their Savior and Lord. Too late they are going to discover that they didn't use this life wisely to prepare for the hereafter.

Just be sure you understand the ramifications of your decisions. Jesus said in John 11:25-26 (NIV), "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

3. Life continues for true followers of Jesus.

Jesus has prepared eternity for believers. He said, “Because I live you shall live also” (Jn. 14:19). And in John 14:2-3...

“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

These are some of the greatest words of promise believers can ever receive. “Because I live you shall live also.” “I am preparing a place for you.

I feel sorry for those who have no hope. How I would hate to live as if this life was all there was.

Believers have placed their trust in Jesus. Remember, the resurrection followed the crucifixion. Jesus is alive. The living Savior makes all the difference even in our trials.

Application:

Your destiny, my destiny is decided in this life. Once you die it is too late. It is the here and now that you decide where you are going to spend your eternity. Jesus Christ is alive, and every believer is alive with him for all eternity.