

Living the Sacrificial Life III

Love, Stronger than Stone

Romans 5:6-10

Paul is addressing a number of items posed by the Roman believers, with a central theme throughout the book being the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. One of the things that we have to come to grips with is the “real reality” of what this life is, and how we are to live in Christ. The celebration of Easter is important to this, because it is the pivotal point in the believer’s life: the point at which we truly go from death to life.

The Challenge of Easter

Although we “know the story”, there is something to the way it is told. Much like a book report, we pull the most important, most relevant ideas, the things that stick in our minds, and that make an impression on us. When the movie *the Passion* came out, people flooded theatres, and subsequently flooded churches, because of what struck them as the central theme of the movie:

The suffering that Jesus went through

While not making light of His suffering, what happened to the droves of Passion-converts? Within a few short weeks, their lives were back to what they were as if *the Passion* had never been made. For these very sincere, well intentioned individuals, they were truly touched and inspired to change, but were stuck in the first part of the story, so true change never really happened.

“...and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only in this life we have hope in Christ we are to be pitied more than all men” (I Corinthians 15:12-19, 17-19 quoted)

So, we are here now, celebrating the most pivotal point in the life of the Christian, but if we are not careful, we too can find ourselves in a few weeks in the same state we were before Easter, as if Easter never happened.

Rejoicing in Good and Bad

Paul starts out doing what we love to do: rejoice in good stuff

“Therefore since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2)

The rejoicing is easy when we are sitting in that grace and peace. Paul, however throws a curve ball our way, and challenges us in what we rejoice in...

“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings...” (Romans 5:3a)

Where does this come from? Is this an attempt to match suffering for suffering – since Jesus suffered, we should live a life of suffering too? Is the life we are supposed to have on this earth one of denial and pain, of “dying daily” for the sake of dying daily, and only receiving reward in heaven? Is that what Jesus died for? And there it is... the key phrase *what Jesus died for...*

The reason the Passion converts did not continue is because they were stuck in one part of the redemption story. They experienced the inspiration to change because of the sacrifice of Jesus, but not power to live through His life.

Paul did not rejoice in sufferings for sufferings’ sake.

“... we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us” (Romans 5:3-5)

Paul’s perspective was that regardless of the things we experienced, good or bad, peace and grace or suffering, nothing could stop the gift and promise of God. Not because Jesus died, but *because He rose!*

Easter’s One-Two Punch

“The words “it was credited to him” were not written for him alone, for but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was **delivered over to death** for our sins and was **raised to life** for our justification.” (Romans 4:23-25)

The story of Easter is powerful not only because Jesus died, but because he was raised. Interesting to see how Paul breaks it down:

- Delivered to death: for our sins
- Raised to life: for our justification

GK, righteousness (δικαιοσύνην) and justification (δικαίωσις) are from the same root;

Righteousness, “the state of him who is as he ought to be”;

Justification, legal term “to acquit” or declare righteous

Jesus’ death delivered the “smoking gun”, and dealt with sin (the cause of our state), but we were still not “as we ought to be”. We needed to be acquitted, and set free, so we could be how we should be. It took the resurrection for this to be accomplished.

The Seed Springs Life: Regardless

“But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, *because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him*” (Acts 2:24)

The amazing thing about seeds is that when they are planted, they will find a way to press through the toughest of circumstances. The sprout that emerges from the seed does not stop until it has found sun; until it has emerged from its earthly grave. Even in the harshest of conditions, such as lava flows, given time you will see plants sprout through the cooled molten rock. The seed planted emerges stronger than stone that would hold it back. **Why? Because the sprout is not fulfilled until it can be positioned to create new life.** Similarly, Jesus' purpose for His sacrifice was not simply to show that He loved us, but **to produce new life in us**

"For if, when 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" (Romans 5:10)

Reconciled means to "pay full price". This means that God paid full price for us while we were not trying to be in any kind of relationship with Him. Now that the reconciliation is taken care of, God can focus fully on "saving" us: keeping us from danger, and restoring us to health

Inspiration vs. Incarnation

The story of the Cross *without* the Resurrection is a very inspirational story. Some of you know the story of Dick Hoyt, whose son has Cerebral Palsy. Dick has been doing road races, marathons Triathalons and Ironman races, simply because his son wanted to. Their story is inspirational, but *how long will that inspiration last in us?*

Incarnation is different, because it doesn't rely on our own strength to fulfill the purpose. Jesus didn't go through what He did simply to inspire us, but went *through* it all and came out on the other side to put the power of His resurrected life inside of us.

"He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

Not the End, but the Beginning

Last week during a pause in worship, one of the children questioned "Is it over?" Dave rightly answered "It's only beginning". Easter for many marks the finality of a story, the end of sin. However, the best part of the story is just beginning – the real life of God inside of us. The life we were meant to live. We get to be how we are supposed to be, because Jesus would not and will not stop until He accomplishes His purpose in us. The stone couldn't keep him in the grave, and nothing can stop His love from being fulfilled in us.