



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 20 Issue 14

April 4, 2021

The Message of Easter

Romans 1:3-4

Easter, throughout the world, millions upon millions of people celebrate Easter. For some it will include:

- An easter bunny or an easter bilby (if you're Australian)
- Throwing clay pots in the street (if you're Greek).
- Oranges (if you're Norwegian).
- Kite flying (if you're from Bermuda).

- Dressing up like witches (if you're from Finland).
- Throwing water on each other (if you're from Poland).
- An exploding cart (if you're from Florence).

And while these may be fun traditions, amazingly for so many, that is all that Easter will mean for them today! They will miss the true meaning of Easter!

We are looking at a passage which details for us the message of Easter. When we think of Easter, one word usually comes to mind: Resurrection. Yet, as our passage reflects, the message is bigger than that! For the message revolves around the person of Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:1-3a, "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God [which is the focus of The Message of Easter], which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son..."

This is the essence of the message of Easter: Jesus Christ! We see it throughout Scripture.

1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

That is what Paul preached — which no doubt is why Christ was the focus of his life.

Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Galatians 6:14, "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

This is a profound truth which is so important for us to understand. The message of Easter does NOT revolve around bunnies or bilbies, oranges, clay pots, or exploding carts. RATHER, it revolves around the person and work of Jesus Christ — identified in v. 4 as, "Jesus Christ our Lord." Here Paul uses Christ's full title:

- Jesus: which comes from **יֵשׁוּעַ** (*yeshuah*) which means, "salvation" refers to Christ's historical identity, the one who came to "save His people from their sins," Matthew 1:21.
- Christ: comes from **Χριστός** (*christos*) which means "Messiah." In the Old Testament it was used of the one anointed by God as King in fulfillment of the OT prophecies which spoke of a godly ruler whom God would send to govern His people in righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5-6).
- Our Lord: a title indicating "Sovereign Ruler." Indeed, Christ has been exalted to the Father's right hand and there exercises "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:19).

Truly, the message of Easter — that which makes it GOOD NEWS — has everything to do with

God the Son! Now what is it about Christ that makes Him the message of Easter? Paul answers this in the text before us by describing two facets of Christ's identity. Notice the two parallel statements in vv. 3 & 4.

Romans 1:3-4a, "Concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh [the expression has reference to Christ's humanity], 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness [this does NOT reference the Holy Spirit¹, BUT Christ's Divine Nature... what He is as the Son of God]..."

Accordingly, the message of Easter revolves around Christ's humanity and His deity. With that, let's consider Christ's humanity.

Romans 1:3, "[He was] born of a descendant of David according to the flesh."

This has reference to the incarnation and therefore to that which Christ became in respect to His human nature — He is a man. And yet, with the mentioning of Christ's lineage we note that the emphasis here is on the fact that He is of the Davidic line² which is incredibly significant. Why is Paul stressing Christ's lineage? Because according to the Bible, the promised Savior would be born of the household of David! To appreciate this, consider the Scriptural background.

When God created this world, He entered into a covenant relationship in which the Lord walked with man, dialogued with man, and so fellowshiped with man. This ultimately is what we were made for! It began with this command:

Genesis 2:16-17, "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.'"

We call this the covenant of works! Now we know that Adam — our representative — rebelled — that is what the Fall was all about. In his rebellion, mankind became enemies of God. Paul describes what all men are as a result of the Fall.

Colossians 1:21b, "...you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds."

Though thousands of years and so much history separate us from the Garden, nevertheless on account of this original Covenant of Works. Every individual relates to God on a legal basis. Every person stands before God as either covenant keeper or covenant breaker. And thus, every person who goes to hell ultimately goes there because they are guilty of violating this covenant with God!

Romans 5:18, "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all

men...”

1 Corinthians 15:22, “...in Adam all die...”

Now on account of His great love for us, God promised to send a Savior who would deliver us from the punishment due us on account of our violation of this Covenant of Works. God made this promise as He met out the curse upon Satan.

Genesis 3:15, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

****and thus we read****

Romans 5:19, “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”

That is why the coming of Christ was heralded with these words:

Luke 2:11, “For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Now the question we ask is: How are we to know who this “Savior” is? What is it that would identify this “Savior” for us? While there are many answers we could provide, one of the most fundamental qualifications of the Messiah/Savior is that He would be a descendent of David...

Psalms 89:3-4, “I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant, I will establish your seed forever, and build up your throne to all generations.”

This is a major theme referenced throughout Redemptive History. As it references one of his heirs who would reign “forever,” we know this ultimately is in reference to Christ! (cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-13, 15-16; Psalms 89; Amos 9:11; Ezekiel 37:21-25; Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Accordingly, when we come to the New Testament, we are NOT surprised to read of this exchange between Christ and the Religious leaders of His day...

Matthew 22:41-42, “Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘The son of David.’”

And so, when Paul relates to us the message of Easter beginning with the lineage of Christ — that he was “born a descendent of David” —he NOT ONLY is making a strong case for Jesus being a man (which is massively important), BUT he also is telling us that He is the promised, Davidic King who would rule over a Kingdom which will last forever!

Now implicit in this first description of Christ is a glorious message of comfort and hope! For as Christ is a man, he is able to deliver us from the death we owe God on account of our violation of the Covenant of Works.

Hebrews 2:14-16, "Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

If the reason mankind stands condemned before God is because they are guilty of violating the Covenant of Works, then the only way to get out of this death is IF *Another* perfect man- a "second Adam"³

1. Somehow placed himself under the Covenant of Works — through being born of a woman,
2. Fulfilled the Covenant of Works.
3. And then gave us His standing while He took upon Himself ours!

Yet this could never happen since every man represented by Adam would be born guilty of violating the Covenant.

1 Corinthians 15:22, "...in Adam all die..."

That brings us to a very important second element to the message of Easter, the message revolves around Christ's deity.

Romans 1:4, "Who was declared⁴ the Son of God..."

Literally translated, this would be, "who was marked off by bounds to be the Son of God." The focus of this statement is on the Deity of Jesus Christ. Notice:

John 5:18, "For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

Now notice that Christ did this in a "powerful" way, Paul says that He was "...declared the Son of God with power..." I love this! Throughout His earthly ministry, Christ purposely concealed His identity. In fact, He chose as His favorite Messianic reference a title which was unknown to the established religion of His day, "Son of Man." When He cleansed the leper, He said this:

Matthew 8:4, "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest..."

When His brothers mocked Him and told Him to show who He really was, we read this:

John 7:8, "Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come."

The reason Christ in His first advent concealed His true identity is because He didn't want to start an insurrection on the part of the Jews against the Romans! For example:

John 6:14-15, "When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone."

And so, throughout His time on the earth, Christ purposely hid His true identity. And yet, when it came time to reveal His true nature to the world, it was done "WITH POWER"- with much force and conclusiveness- for it was demonstrated.

Romans 1:4b, "...by the resurrection from the dead..."

The resurrection is used in the New Testament as proof of Christ's deity (Acts 17:30-31)! How does the resurrection prove that Christ is God? Because, among other things, Scripture tells us that Christ raised HIMSELF from the dead. When Jesus was asked to give a sign as to His authority, we read this:

John 2:19, "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'"

John 10:18, "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

Think about it. At the time of Christ's resurrection, many throughout Redemptive history had been raised from the dead. Yet when we come to Christ, we discover that HE HIMSELF broke the power that Satan held over death (Hebrews 2:14).⁵ That is why after Thomas saw Christ resurrected, we read this:

John 20:28, "Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

- No one said this of the widow's son of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24),
- The Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:18-37)
- The widow's son of Nain (Luke 7:11-17)
- Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:49-56)
- Lazarus (John 11:1-44)

- Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42)
- Eutychus (Acts 20:7-12)

It is only with Jesus that the Bible links His resurrection with His deity! Why? Again, because while in the grave He Himself broke the power of death!

And so, through His resurrection, Christ is declared to be God! Now, what does this have to do with the message of Easter? To answer this, once again we need to be aware of the context. When Adam and Eve fell from the Garden of Eden, there were many lessons to be learned. And yet, of the many lessons which emerged from the Fall, this certainly is one of them: The Fall is NOT recorded to show us how foolish man is; RATHER, it is recorded to show that man at his best falls short of God's standards! In the words of Isaiah:

Isaiah 64:6b, "...all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment..."

What is God's standard when it comes to Salvation? What was/is required by the Covenant of Works? Perfection!

Could any man attain that standard? The answer from the Fall is, "NO!" For God's standards are as infinitely high as He is. Christ explained the "bar" to which all are held accountable.

Matthew 5:48, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

And thus, the ONLY One who could ever affect the salvation of any man is God Himself and so God alone!

And thus, we see the beauty and magnificence of the message of Easter. Because Christ is man, He was born under the Law — the Covenant of Works. And as such, He was able to

- Give His life in the place of man, the sinner!
- Be our sympathetic High priest (Hebrews 4:15).
- Fulfill the Old Testament promise of the Redeemer who would suffer to save His people from their sin.

Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman [this speaks of His humanity which means that He was...], born under the Law [that is, the Covenant of Works], in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

****and yet****

Because Christ is God, He — and He alone — was able to fulfill the Covenant of Works by living a perfect life!

Romans 8:3-4, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

How should we respond to so great a salvation? We must be careful so as not to neglect it!

Hebrews 2:3a, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

That we might NOT be guilty of neglecting so great a salvation, what must we do? First, we must ask with the Philippian jailor:

Acts 16:30, "...what must I do to be saved?"

The answer simply is that we must rely upon Jesus Christ alone — His work in our behalf — and we will be saved. This means that we:

- Turn from any form of self-reliance...
- And go to God in prayer and confess our sin, ask Him to forgive us, and so receive Christ's act of righteousness as our own.

Acts 16:30-31, "And after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.'"

As He is THE Lamb of God; let us lay our hands upon His head, confess our sins, and be healed! Secondly, as ones who have trusted Christ we must rejoice! Do a study sometime of what happens when men come to a fuller understanding of Christ. They worship like Christ's disciples in the boat!

Matthew 14:33, "And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'"

And when Peter got a greater glimpse of Christ's majesty, the disciple fell down and worshipped the Lord.

Luke 5:8, "But when Simon Peter saw *that*, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!'"

Philippians 2:9-11, "Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

And then later, when he considered THE response which must be given on the part of God's

people when once they understand who Christ really is, Paul exhorted thus:

Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!”

Such must be our response this day. Joy... Rejoicing... and Worship!

Finally, let us share the glory of this message near and far! That is the standard set for us by the Gadarene Demoniac. After being delivered from the host of demons which possessed him, this child of God longed to follow Christ to the remotest regions of the earth. And what was Christ’s response?

Mark 5:18-20, “And as He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was entreating Him that he might accompany Him. And He did not let him, but He said to him, ‘Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and *how* He had mercy on you.’ And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone marveled.”

Such is the calling to every one of us this day. Let us not necessarily “Go!” But “as we go,” let us share the glorious news of our Lord right where we live!

End Note(s)

¹ To establish the contrast between Christ’s humanity (“according to the flesh”) and Christ’s Divinity (“according to the spirit”), and yet to avoid any reference to the Holy Spirit and human spirit, Paul qualifies “Spirit” with “holy” which means “perfect”, “complete”, “set apart”. Now the word “holy” is never used in the Bible in reference to the Spirit of God, and yet it is unable to be applied to man.

² Both Mary (Luke 3:23, 31), Jesus’ natural mother, and Joseph (Matthew 1:6, 16; Luke 1:27), Jesus’ legal father, were descendants of David.

³ Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:45, 47; Romans 5:14.

⁴ τοῦ ὀρισθέντος; to mark off by bounds. From this term we get our English word *horizon*, which refers to the demarcation line between the earth and the sky. Thus, Christ was “marked off by bounds,” or better yet, “shown to be...”

⁵ This is reflected in such credal statements as the Apostle’s Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the WSC #28.