

## **The Good News of Easter**

Romans 1:1-6

When we read about the life and ministry of Jesus in the gospels it is easy to understand why He piqued the interest of so many people.

Take the miracles that are written about for example.

One of the things that stands out to me about the miracles that Jesus performs is that He does them in a way that is impossible to fake.

Take the time He and disciples are in a synagogue and there was a man there who had what the bible calls a 'withered hand' which means there was something seriously wrong that was noticeably visible.

Luke tells us that the 'scribes and Pharisees watched Him to see whether or not He would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse Him.'

The LORD knowing their thoughts confronts the evil in their hearts by telling the man to stand up in front of everyone and tells him to stretch out his hand and as he did so his hand was 'restored'.

Or think about when He raised Lazarus from the dead.

He had done that miracle before, but with Lazarus He did it in a way that would be impossible to argue with.

Remember when He gets word that His friend is sick? Instead of going right away John tells us that because "Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus" he waited two more days before starting the journey to see His friend.

When He tells the disciples it is time to go, He tells them that Lazarus has died and that "[He is] glad that [He] was not there, so that [they] may believe."

He could have healed Lazarus' sickness from a distance, He could have kept him from becoming ill in the first place, but He lets Him die to show His disciples who He is.

By the time He gets to Bethany Lazarus has been dead and in a tomb four days.

With a sizeable group of mourners at the tomb He says, "Take the stone away!"

Martha, being quite sensible says to Jesus, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor."

Her point being that her brother is way past the point of helping.

Nevertheless, the stone is rolled away Jesus commands Lazarus to come out and the dead man lives.

Everyone saw it and there was no disputing that Jesus had performed a miracle.

Those are just a couple examples in a long list of miracles performed in a way that could not be denied.

Even the religious leaders who hated Jesus had to admit that the miracles happened.

Try for a moment to put yourself in a crowd that witnessed even just one of His miracles happen.

What would your reaction be? It would certainly be the same as the people who were there.

They were amazed and their amazement leads to a question.

Who is this guy?

Some commentators outline the gospel of Mark around the question, “Who is Jesus?”

We read in the gospels that people in Jesus’ day came to different answers.

Some people thought He was a prophet, some thought He was crazy, some thought He was a good teacher, others thought He was a servant of the devil, and still others believed that He was the Christ (that is the One appointed by God to save His people).

It is a question that is as relevant today as it was the first time it came out of someone’s mouth.

It is a question that people answer today as they did back then.

It is the most important question that you could ever ask in your whole, because your eternity depends on how you answer it.

[While people may answer it in different ways, not all answers are correct. Hopefully, that leads us to ask, “How do we know which answer is correct?” And the answer to that question is the Good News of Easter. Our text this morning **Romans 1:1-6** answers the question “Who Is Jesus?” in a very clear and powerful way. Turn there in your bibles if you would so that we can see together at least three important lessons about the “Good News of Easter!” Lesson one is this...]

**Point #1 – God promised the good news of Easter long before it happened. (Verses 1-2)**

On the very first day that humanity became in need of redemption God spoke of a Redeemer and He spoke of it again and again through His servants.

It is impossible for me to imagine verse 1 being written if Easter doesn’t happen the way it is recorded for us in the Bible.

Paul calls himself, “a servant of Christ Jesus” here.

The word translated “servant” is a servant in the sense of being a slave.

Commentators suggest Paul uses this word to convey the fullness of His belonging to Jesus and it may also be intended to point the reader to his conversion story.

Paul did not come to Christ easily. I am fully convinced Paul witnessed at least some of Jesus’ earthly ministry, he was likely there

when Jesus was condemned, and he was probably pleased at His death believing Him to be a false messiah/saviour.

When the disciples began preaching the Good News of Easter, Paul rejected it and worked hard to put an end to it.

But then, Jesus Himself came and met with Paul and everything changed.

Not only was Paul converted He was also ‘called to be an apostle’ that is a messenger sent under authority.

He is a messenger ‘set apart for the gospel of God.’

The word gospel literally means “good news”. It is the good news of Easter.

How is it possible for someone to experience such a 180?

It seems to me it is only possible because Easter really happened.

Why does it happen? We are told in verse 2.

Sometimes we say something like, “God didn’t have to send Jesus to save us!”

I know I’ve said that a number of times over the years.

When we say that, most of us are looking at it from a perspective of justice.

From a justice perspective God would have been totally right to leave us in our sins and condemn everyone to an eternity in hell.

God would have been just fine to have heaven without us.

There is nothing outside of Himself that demands that He save us.

But there is another side to that coin which Paul raises here and that is the promise which God makes.

As soon as God makes a promise, He obligates Himself to fulfill the promise.

Because God knows everything and He has always known everything He must make this promise within Himself in all eternity past.

If we look at it from that side of the coin then God absolutely had to send Jesus into the world to save us because He promised it.

We see that promise time and again throughout the Old Testament.

Just think of how many things the Scriptures foretold about Jesus.

How He would be born, Where He would be born, where He would grow up, what He would do, and how He would die.

The OT prophecies fulfilled by Jesus number in the range of about three hundred.

The odds of that happening at random chance are impossible.

It happens because God bound Himself by a promise and exercised His unequalled authority to bring into being all that He had planned throughout all of history and He is still doing it.

[I have thought from time to time that it would be really cool to know the future. Even if I could know the future one day in advance it would have a dramatic effect on the decisions I would make. Even if I had that ability though it would only mean that I had the ability to react to events and perhaps on a very small scale alter the course of somethings to a very small degree.]

If we think of God's promise in Scripture like that, then we are missing the significance of what the Bible is saying here.

God has more than knowledge, He also has the power to do all that He pleases throughout all of history in all of the universe.

His promise is more than simply knowing how things are going to go, it is His ability to cause the future that is on display in His promise of the gospel.

How many times does Jesus say something like, "This has to happen so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled?"

He says that more than once to His disciples about Easter before it happens.

[Who is Jesus? One of the things that points us to the right answer is His fulfillment of the promises of God made in the Old Testament and Easter is like a giant exclamation point on everything He had done up until that point. That brings us to a second lesson about the good news of Easter.]

**Point #2 – Easter is only good news because of God's power. (Verses 3-4)**

It is only because the LORD is able to do far beyond what we can understand that we have a Saviour.

Verse 3 opens by telling us who the good news promised by God in the Old Testament is about.

It says the "gospel of God" concerns "His [that is God's] Son."

That is a bold claim to make.

It is a claim many people have made throughout history.

Greek and Roman mythology is filled with their gods having children.

Various kings and emperors have believed themselves to have divine heritage.

What makes Jesus any different? What is such good news about Who He is?

**Verse 3** tells us something very important about Him.

This is connected with what we saw in point number one concerning the promises of God.

God promised that the Messiah would be a descendant of David who God had chosen to be king over all of Israel.

You can read about God's promise to David in 2Samuel 7 where God promises to establish David's throne forever through one of his descendants.

I believe that both Mary and Joseph (Jesus' earthly parents) descended from David.

Joseph's connection is made clear in the fact that he had to go the Bethlehem to be counted in the census of Caesar Augustus because he belonged to the 'house and line of David.'

Because Jesus' earthly parents descend from David, Paul can say that Jesus is a 'descendant of David according to the flesh'.

That is important in terms of Jesus having a claim to the throne of Israel as God had promised but it is also important in terms of what Jesus came to do.

As Pastor Jason reminded us on Friday, Jesus came to die on our behalf as an offering for sin.

In order for that to happen Jesus needed to be genuinely human.

He needed to have real humanity which Paul affirms here with the word 'flesh.'

He had bones, muscles, organs, and skin. He needed to eat, sleep, breathe, and have real blood circulate through His body.

In order for Jesus to die for us, He had to be like us in every respect except one.

He was different from us in that He lived in perfect obedience to God.

Where we have failed miserably Jesus has been completely faithful.

There is more though to the good news of Easter than Jesus' perfect humanity and His dying in our place.

We are told about it in **verse 4**.

When it says here that Jesus "was declared to be the Son of God" it is in the sense of making what is already true plain to people.

Commentators Everett Harrison and Donald Hagner point out that this likely has to do with how Jesus was viewed in light of His incarnation.

When Jesus took on humanity His divinity was veiled or hidden from people.

That is not to say that God the Son changed or that He was diminished in His attributes in any way, it is simply to say that when people looked at Jesus they could only see His humanity.

More than once He claimed to be the Son of God, that is one of the big reasons the religious leaders had for wanting to crucify Him, they thought He was a mere man claiming to be equal with God.

What the resurrection announces is that everything Jesus claimed about Himself is true.

It pulls back the veil of His humanity and makes it plain that He is the infinite, almighty, glorious, and powerful Son of God.

*The good news of Easter is what sets Jesus Christ our Lord apart from everyone else who has made claims to divinity or authority.*

If Jesus had died and stayed dead Easter wouldn't be good news at all.

Jesus would just be an ordinary guy who can't do anything for us in a lasting sense.

Rising from the dead though shows that God is real, that Jesus is God the Son, and the Holy Spirit is confirming this is the hearts of everyone who believes in the truth of it.

The good news of Easter is good news because the each Person of the Trinity is at work doing the impossible to the glory of God forever.

*Paul knew this to be true as well as anyone who has ever lived.*

It is impossible to make sense of his life if the resurrection didn't happen, in fact it is impossible to make any sense out of the early church without the good news of Easter.

The gospel accounts only leave us with two possible options regarding the eye witnesses who claim that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Either they are liars or it is true.

Now, who walks away from everything they hold dear and suffers greatly, many to the point of death, for something they know is a lie?

Nobody lies so they can suffer loss.

Because that is true the only reasonable explanation that remains is that after Jesus had really died, He really rose again and is living and reigning at the right hand of God until He comes again to raise His people from the dead and make all thing new.

[Easter is good news because God exercised His incomprehensible power and therefore Jesus is alive. That brings us to one more lesson about the good news of Easter. The good news of Easter was promised by God long before it happened, it is good news because of the power of God, and finally we see that...]

### **Point #3 – The good news of Easter is for all the nations. (Verses 5-6)**

What is announced in the gospel is the means by which people from every tribe, tongue, and nation are invited to come to God to the glory of Jesus' Name.

*Look with me at what is said in the first part of verse 5.*

Because Jesus is truly human and stood in our place and because He is truly God as is clearly shown in His resurrection from the dead, through Him, Paul writes "we have received grace and apostleship."

I believe the ‘we’ here refers to all the apostles personally set apart by the risen Lord Jesus.

He says through Christ they have received “grace”.

How many of you are thankful for the grace of God this morning?

The way the New Testament is written shows us that the apostles were men keenly aware of their need of grace.

Think of it, how tempting would it have been to write the gospels in a way that painted themselves in a better light.

Why doesn't Peter have Mark edit out his denial of Jesus?

Why not make some of their questions to Jesus sound a bit more intelligent?

Why not skip over the part where Paul was happy that Christians were dying and going around putting them in jail?

Because they wanted to tell the truth and in so doing call attention to the fact that being right with God is something no one deserves, it is a gift God gives to people who trust Jesus because of what He did for His people on that first Easter.

Paul and the others did not become apostles because they deserved it, they became apostles because God's grace came to them through Christ.

We are told why God does this in the **second half of verse 5.**

It is possible that what is intended here by the phrase “obedience of faith” is simply belief in the gospel message.

It is also possible that he means the turning of people away from doing things God disapproves of and towards what the LORD says is right.

If we look ahead to the rest of the book of Romans he probably has both things in mind here because faith in Christ creates a desire for what is right in the eyes of God.

So the announcement of the gospel, concerning God Son and His resurrection from the dead (in other words the good news of Easter), is for the purpose of turning people to the LORD.

This it says is, “for the sake of his name [that is the name of Jesus] among all the nations.

Every country and people group on the face of the Earth ought to know that Jesus has risen from the dead.

He says in **verse 6** that the believers in Rome are included in this goal of bringing about the “obedience of faith.”

That verse also extends to us this morning.

The fact that we are sitting in this place half way around the world from where the first Easter happened is a testimony to the grace of God at work in the world declaring the power of Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus conquered the grave brothers and sisters and is seated upon His throne which is over all other kingdoms and therefore every nation ought to know that Jesus is alive and that He reigns.

That is the good news of Easter. Promised long before it happened, brought about by the power of God, and for all people to hear that "He is Risen."