

THREE THINGS YOU CAN KNOW FOR SURE BECAUSE OF EASTER

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It's Easter Sunday. And there's a message in Easter for every person on planet earth. There is wonderful news for the Christian. And there is a powerful, challenging truth for those who don't acknowledge the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, God the Son. First I want to talk to the Christian. I want to talk about the **three certainties of Easter**:

1) **BECAUSE JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD I LIVE LIFE FREE FROM THE CONDEMNATION OF MY SIN**

The presence and power of the Risen Christ does two things at once inside my skin. And, while they seem paradoxical, it is absolutely the nature of His work to do both these things at the very same time. First, by the power of the Holy Spirit I am rendered incapable of being **passive** or **indifferent** to indwelling sin. Sin feels **uglier** and more **discomforting** now than it ever did before. That's because my sin no longer just exists in **my** presence. It dwells far more conspicuously and painfully because it dwells in the presence of the **Holy Spirit** who lives within me.

Yet, second, and at the very same time, while I'm not sinless, I don't live in **condemnation** for sins repented of. Grace is **greater** than any of my sins or all of them piled up together. So I strive for holiness. And I don't tolerate condemnation. These are the beautiful **twins** of the new birth.

Of course, Paul was forced to think a great deal about how the Christian was to deal with the sting - the pain of condemnation - of past sin. He had come from a life with a horrible past - trying to destroy the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul might well have been responding to thoughts of guilt that would race through his newly converted mind and haunt him at night when he wrote these now famous words:

Romans 8:31-34 - "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn?" [Find the source of condemnation. Think about this. It can't be Jesus Christ because He's the One who died to pay for the guilt of those sins!] **Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."**

Notice that first question - "What then shall we say to these things?" What "**things**" is Paul talking about? You have to study the text in two directions for the whole answer. You study back to **verses 18-23** to read of creation's painful fallen sob - all of the things that are broken and seemingly out of control - "**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**"

Cancer. Tsunamis. Earthquakes. Floods. Starvation. The list is endless. This is a tragic world. If you don't see it, where have you been? Those are some of the "**things**" Paul says we have to address - we have to "**say**" something that makes sense and gives hope. We're not going to study that list this morning.

But there's more. You also have to look forward in the passage to see additional details of what these "**things**" are. Look at **8:33-36** - "**Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'**"

Our text says you have to say something. You need something to put up against this reality of condemnation - the vast, clawing evidence of the weight of your guilt - the sting of your own conscience - the unbearable heaviness of regret. You just can't ignore these things.

And here's where this all ties in with the powerful gospel of Easter and the empty tomb. In **verse 34** Paul specifically links the resurrection to the issue of **condemnation** - **Romans 8:34** - "**Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.**"

Underscore those words, "**...more than that...**"(34). Paul says you have to **add** this to Christ's death. We all need to know **more** than the fact that Christ died for our sins on the cross. It takes more than Christ's death to bring freedom. The resurrection of Jesus does more than anything else to bring freedom from the guilt of past sin.

There are always these **three tenses** involved in redemption - Christ's **past** death - my **present sin and guilt**, and Christ's **ongoing, eternal** intercession for my case at the right hand of God Almighty. The resurrection of Jesus means **the benefits of redemption are carried on as long as He lives**. The power of the cross is pushed into the infinite future. God's grace can no more wear out than Christ can die again. The power of the cross resides in the eternally **alive** Savior. A dead savior is no good to anyone. But a **living** Savior carries fresh grace into as many tomorrows as will ever exist.

"**Who is to condemn?**"(34). Well, all sorts of people do. Your own thoughts condemn. Your enemies and critics condemn. Maybe your own family condemns. Certainly all the hosts and demons of hell make it their business to condemn. There's no shortage of condemnation.

Paul's point isn't that condemnation doesn't come. It comes all the time. **Preparedness**, not **denial**, is the answer. Paul's talking about what you and I "**say**" to these things (31). And His point is, because we have a powerful **living** advocate, not a pathetic **dead** one, none of those accusations can be **sustained** before the throne of God. All of those accusation are **overruled - dismissed** - by our Advocate before the throne of God. We now, finally, and eternally, have something to "**say to these things**"(31).

And notice how Paul ties his "answer" to condemnation for my sin, not to **my** improved behavior (though that will, of necessity be the case) but very specifically and exclusively to Jesus Christ and His death and Resurrection. My hope is not tied to His **teaching**. That would only bring me **more** condemnation. It's to His atonement and resurrection from the grave.

- 2) **BECAUSE JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD I LIVE LIFE EMPOWERED BY HIS DAILY PRESENCE**
Ephesians 1:18-21 - "...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and **what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead** and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."

This thought was like blood in Paul's veins. He said he was "**praying that God would open the eyes of their hearts to see the greatness of this truth!**"(18). He says he actually prayed against laziness and apathy and distraction in the church. He was constantly concerned that people, through mental and spiritual laziness, would somehow lessen the force - the explosive impact - that the new life of Jesus would bring into the converted heart. He was worried people would make the power of Christ **smaller** than it was intended to be.

Paul hated religion without power as much as he hated religion without minds. He hated empty forms. He hated dead church. He says to these Ephesian Christians that the power of Jesus in the heart was real enough and strong enough to **make any person brand new**. He couldn't imagine anything remaining untransformed by resurrection power.

He was convinced that just as surely as that huge stone and the legion of roman soldiers couldn't stop Jesus from coming out of that grave, there was nothing in the human soul, that if yielded by a repentant heart, would ever be able to resist what he called the "**greatness of his power toward us who believe**"(Ephesians 1:19).

We shouldn't be surprised that Paul prayed like this for these Christians. He didn't pray for them out of some cold duty. The reason he had this passion for them was he had experienced this same passion for his own heart. This is how he prayed for **himself** - **Philippians 3:10a** - "**...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection....!**"

Look at the words of that simple, passionate prayer. Knowledge of Christ is incomplete as a mental concept. Knowledge of Christ means knowledge of His **power**. Knowing Christ means staring Easter in the face. Easter means we're not dealing with one more brand of religion. This is not man's quest for God with another label. This

answers to the cry of all our hearts.

We need more than just some brand name religion. We need more than words. I want all the people who listen to this sermon this morning to know that because of the proven power of Easter and the empty tomb, no situation is hopeless, no life is permanently wasted, no sin puts them out of God's reach.

The resurrection says there's a Savior who lives, who works in power, who makes people new. Don't put any limits on our resurrected Lord. Don't make conversion smaller than it was meant to be. Look for new life. Expect it. Pray for its increase. The Bible still promises that you can be made brand new. The Resurrection proves it's true.

Paul would say, "I'm praying that you understand the *kind* of power we're dealing with here," He would tell us that before Christ rose from the grave nobody had the right to expect this kind of power to be afoot in this world. People died and stayed dead. It was *impossible* for it to be otherwise. But now we've seen Christ risen. What was impossible before became hopeful after.

"There," Paul would say, "That's the whole point. What is it about your sin, your despair, your lostness, your bondage, that looks hopeless and as unlikely of a future as a dead person pushing his way out of a sealed grave? *That's* the very thing Jesus wants to transform and redeem. That's the whole point of saying the power at work in those who believe is *like* the power demonstrated when Christ rose from the dead!" Paul pleads with all of us, who have heard this truth over and over again, to *think this through*.

3) BECAUSE JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD I FACE EVERY DAY AND EVERY TRIAL FILLED WITH A GLOWING HOPE FOR ETERNITY

This is related to the previous point, only it pushes more into the *future* than the *present*.

1 Peter 1:3-5, 13 - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time....1:13....Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Away forever with the silly notion that Christianity is more mature and responsible if it never thinks about heaven and the renewed world to come. Peter says it is the mark of a mature Christian mind that it orients itself to the coming of Jesus and eternal destiny. The Bible says many things in describing the present condition of those who don't live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They are said to be lost, unsaved, fools, condemned, children of wrath, etc.

Perhaps the saddest and most accurate description comes in two words - "*no hope*" - **Ephesians 2:12** - "**....remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.**"

Let that sink in. Not just wicked, but wicked without hope. Not just lost, but lost without hope. That means that without a conscious turning in repentance to Jesus Christ, God the Son, as Savior and Lord, there is absolutely no chance of their present lost condition ever changing. They have not the slightest chance of ever knowing God, ever having their sins forgiven, ever receiving eternal life. Whatever they may accomplish, whatever temporary distractions and diversions they may fill their lives with in this world, eternally - in the long stretch that counts most - they are totally without hope.

Now the first thing Peter notices about those who acknowledge Jesus as their Risen Lord - right from the first moment of conversion - is they are born into a new realm of hope. They move from the realm of hopelessness to hope. Every Christian has a hope that can only be described as a "*living hope*."

No Christian is trouble free. We don't get all the answers in this life. But in every trial, in every sickness, in the face of every loss, the Christian feels the pains of life, but they're mixed with a hope - a confidence that in the end, he wins. Nothing can separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Maybe I can state the real picture like this: For the Christian, every trial and every setback is temporary. The final destination for every Christian is settled. The trial is temporary. The destination is certain. This world is the shadow. Heaven is the reality.

For the non-Christian, the destination is eternal lostness. Every moment of joy, every achievement, every success, every period of happiness is only a temporary diversion. Everything is constantly **diminishing**. Everything is constantly moving in the direction of the worst possible end. His ultimate condition - even if he never faces or thinks about it in this world - is absolutely hopeless. Death brings God's judgment and eternal condemnation. That's what Jesus consistently taught.

But the Christian knows that because Jesus rose from the dead, he too will rise from the dead. And he will live in the eternal delight of Christ's presence. This is what it means, not merely to **die**, but to **conquer** death. And once you have conquered death, what can stand in your way?

1 Thessalonians 4:14-16 - "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. [15] For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

This living hope marks everything the Christian does. It possesses him. He stewards the rest of his life in light of being reunited with Jesus in heaven. He doesn't live for this world. He doesn't just **use up** his life - he **prepares - invests** - for the long stretch. No, the Christian doesn't **ignore** this fallen world. He lives **in** the world, but not **of** the world, for the **redemption** of the world.

Those are the **three Easter certainties for the Christian**. The condemnation of sin is broken. We are empowered by Christ's daily presence. We are possessed by a living, eternal hope. But I have one more closing point I want to make:

4) **THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS ALSO HAS A MESSAGE FOR THOSE WHO DON'T ACKNOWLEDGE HIM AS THEIR RISEN LORD AND SAVIOR**

Matthew 12:38-41 - "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." [39] But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. [40] For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. [41] *The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*"

It's an interesting picture that's described here. First, notice that this is a **resurrection** centered passage - "**For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**" So, it's the resurrection of Jesus Christ - the Easter message - that is the engine for interpreting these strange words from Jesus.

And we have good reason to take these words very seriously. There's no indication that these words are merely some exaggeration, or some literary device or parable. Jesus rarely, if ever, named specific places and people in His parables. These words come from the lips of Jesus. He seems to outline an event that will take place when He comes again and judges mankind.

People from Nineveh will stand up when we are judged. They're going to have stern words against many people who knew all about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Much in the fashion of a modern day demonstrator or protestor, they're going to push for a hearing. And they're going to say something like this to people who remained unresponsive to the evidence of Easter:

"You know, all your excuses for not living for Jesus don't impress us. We never knew anything about Jesus. We never knew about His life. We knew nothing about His cross. We never heard of the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We didn't have the writings of Peter and Paul explaining the gospel."

"But when Jonah preached to us about our sin and about a holy God, **we repented!** What's with you? How can you possibly have any excuse? You should have come running to Christ as your Risen Savior and Lord!"

Jesus says this will be the greatest sign of God's presence and power that the world has ever seen. We celebrate it every week when roughly 2.7 billion people gather to worship on Sunday. This season called **Easter** holds the Resurrection up before the whole world.

And please don't water down Jesus' point. That event - the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead - that news **obligates people**. You have to come to terms with the living Christ. You have to come to terms with what He said about eternity, about judgement, about life and how to find it. Religion isn't enough. Church isn't enough. Morality isn't enough.

Be born into a living hope. Let Jesus take the darkness out of your heart - **John 3:16** - "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**"