

The Good News of Easter - Reflection

Last weekend, we focused on the death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. On Good Friday, we focused on the incredible reality that Jesus voluntarily gave His life- suffering the unimaginable physical, emotional, and psychological pain of Roman crucifixion, being shamed, humiliated, and taking on Himself the righteous wrath of God for all our sin- so that all who put their faith in Jesus would never have to experience the death and punishment that their rebellion against God deserves.

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44-46)

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

On Resurrection Sunday, we focused on the reality that Jesus was physically raised from the dead by the power of God, showing God's power over sin and the death. We celebrate because as Jesus died and rose to life, He promises that His death was a sacrifice for our sin, and that although we will all die someday, those who put their trust in the finished work of Jesus will be raised to everlasting life as He was. That because of what Jesus accomplished through the cross and the empty tomb, by faith we are forgiven, saved, and set free, made a new creation and given new life to walk in- now and for all eternity. Jesus the perfect Lord of all, came to us in compassion and love, died for us, and rose so that we can live with Him forever. This is grace. This is the realest love we could ever know. Hallelujah!

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." (Luke 24:1-7)

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:24)

"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:54b-57)

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, (1 Peter 1:3)

On Sunday, we witnessed the testimonies and baptism of some awesome people who have received this incredible grace and love of Jesus and are committed to walking in it all the days of their lives.

This week, reflect on your own story of how you came to faith in Jesus. As you do, try to think deeply about and answer these questions:

1. What was your life like before you became a Christian? How did you think, feel, speak, act? What was important to you, and what kind of person were you? (If you became a Christian at a very young age or don't remember a time when you weren't one- what was life like before you took following Jesus, growing, and living out your faith *seriously*?)
2. How did you become a Christian? How did you hear the gospel and respond to it? What means did God use to get your attention, humble you, and bring you to the point of turning from your sin and turning to Jesus in faith? If you've always called yourself a Christian, how did God awaken in you a serious desire and commitment to follow Jesus in discipleship with your whole life?
3. How did your life change once you started following Jesus? How did your inner life- your heart, your sense of peace, contentment, fulfillment, your thoughts, affections, cares- and your outward life- your relationships, priorities, mission, words, actions- change?
4. What has your journey been like since turning to Jesus? Have there been seasons of being hot, cold, lukewarm? What brought these different seasons on? How have your life-circumstances affected your walk with God? What has caused distraction, doubt, fear, encouragement, growth?
5. How is your relationship with God right now? What are you encouraged about? Where are you struggling? If you could identify one area where you feel you need and want to grow in your discipleship, what would it be?

Be ready to share a *short version* of your testimony in your Community Group time. Go around and hear each person share anywhere from a 2-5 minute version of their story, depending on group size.

Listen to and be encouraged by the many different ways that God in His perfect wisdom chooses to use highs and lows, successes and hardships, happiness and brokenness for good. The different ways He pursues us, reaches us, speaks to us, and shows His amazing love and grace to us. As you share and celebrate your stories of God's power, goodness, and grace together- watch how the Holy Spirit shows up, how He strengthens your faith, encourages your hearts, and brings you together as a group. Spend time praying for one another and praising God for the living examples of His goodness on display in each of your lives. Be honest about where you might be struggling in your faith, where you need help, and how your group members can support and pray for you. What a gift that God has not left us alone in this – He has graciously poured out His Holy Spirit into our hearts to empower us, He guides us by His living word, and He surrounds us with brothers and sisters to walk with us and sharpen us.

*and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. **(Romans 5:5)***

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. **(John 14:26)***

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. **(Psalm 119:105)***

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. **(2 Timothy 3:16-17)***

*And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. **(1 Thessalonians 5:14)***

*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. **(Galatians 6:2)***