

The Resurrected Gospel – Bringing the Message and our Passion for the Good News Back to Life (Part 4 of 4)

Celebrating the Gospel

Romans 6:1-11

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“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:1–11, ESV)

I was talking recently with a man who is a “new Christian.” I use that terms in quotes because it took him some time to come to terms with the fact that something unique happened to him. You see, he was religious for most of his life, and he would have even called himself a Christian. But the reality was that his religion didn’t really work. In other words, there was no real relationship with Christ, and there was not the kind of life change that would fit with being a Christian.

As he sat in my office, he told me that he came to church one Sunday a broken man. The circumstances of life had caught up to him, and he knew that something needed to change. Eventually he met with one of our pastors who shared what the Bible says about us and what Jesus offers us through His death and resurrection.

He barely had words to describe what happened next. He said, “I’m not sure what exactly happened in that moment, but I finally understood my need to have a personal relationship with Jesus. I opened my heart to Christ and something changed. . . something happened in that moment.” As the man told me the story of what happened in “the moment,” he kept lifting up his hands toward the ceiling as if he were pulling something down. With a face filled with joy and with insufficient words, he tried to describe what happened.

Blaise Pascal, the French mathematical genius, ran from God until he was 31 years old. His “moment” came on November 23, 1654. It was so dramatic that Pascal wrote down the exact time and created a written record of his thoughts which he sewed into his coat. Apparently he never wanted to forget. Here’s what he said:

Year of grace 1654, Monday 23 November, feast of St. Clement . . . from about half past ten at night to about half an hour after midnight, FIRE. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of philosophers and scholars. Certitude, heartfelt joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ. God of Jesus Christ. "My God and your God." . . . Joy, Joy, Joy, tears of joy. . . Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ.

Do you know what the man in my office was trying to explain? Do you know what would lead Pascal to sew a document in his coat? They were both experiencing "the moment" when resurrected power of Jesus becomes very personal.

What my friend and Blaise Pascal were talking about is what the Apostle Paul talks about in Romans 6:9-11. Here is what he says:

"We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:9-11, ESV).

This passage gives us a beautiful summary of the power of the resurrection and how it could connect to each of us personally. And this text helps all of us to understand why Easter Sunday is such a huge celebration for Christians. What's more, this text explains something that could be life-changing. Easter celebrates the power of life change.

Three Realities in the Resurrection

So let's use Romans 6 as our guide to understand why Easter Sunday is so important. I would like to show you three spiritual realities which relate to why Paul would write Romans 6 and how that connects to "the moment" we are talking about this morning.

1. A Broken World

We need to start with the reason why Paul wrote Romans 6 in the first place. And our best clue is found in verses 1-2 where he asks a rhetorical question:

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2, ESV)

Paul is addressing the problem of sin and the charge that his teaching could lead to an excessive lifestyle where a Christian might have no regard for his or her actions. In other words, if someone is convinced that they are completely forgiven, they might simply do whatever they wanted. Now Romans 6 is written to address that issue.

But what I would like for you to see is something embedded in that question: the problem of sin. You see, Paul would never need to address this issue unless there was something fundamentally wrong with the world. And the Bible tells us that the ultimate problem in the world is humanity's rebellion against a holy God. In other words, the presence of sin in the world is the reason why the world is broken, why we do things that are wrong, and why we celebrate Easter.

I'm sure you know at some level that we live in a broken world. While there is great beauty and incredible joys in our experience in the world, there are constant reminders that something just isn't right. Here are a few examples: snow in March (just kidding), personal conflict, marriages fall apart, promises are broken, tragic accidents happen, we hurt one another, and the ultimate expression: people die.

The Bible is very clear about the problem of sin and its consequences. It tells us the following:

- Sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam (Rom. 5:12)
- Death was introduced as a consequence of sin (Rom. 6:23)
- Every single person is guilty because we have all sinned (Rom. 3:23)
- God's law serves to show us our sin more clearly (Rom. 7:7)
- The presence of sin in the world demands God's judgment (Rom. 2:16)

When you look around at the world, there is a real sense that something is just not right. I'm sure that you have felt that before. At one level I understood this in a new way when I was in jr. high. I don't know about you, but those were not great years for me. Beside the fact that I wore head-gear to school, was one of the shorter guys in my class, and had knobby knees, kids were often cruel to each other. And I was part of the mix. I remember learning that kids could talk behind your back, cheat at four square, and say really cruel things. I longed to grow up and leave those days behind.

But do you know what I've found? The problem was not a jr. high problem; it is a human problem. The same issues showed up in high school, in college, and in adult life. And what's worse is when you begin bearing children, you see it repeated in them. It isn't long until you realize that that cute little bundle of joy is a potential monster. You do not have to teach your children how to do things that are wrong. It comes naturally.

We are natural born sinners, and we live in a world that is broken. Conflict, pain, relationship issues, messy break-ups, natural disasters, poverty, injustice, wars, and hundreds of other issues show us that something is wrong with the world.

But probably the greatest statement that something is wrong with the world is death. The Bible tells us that death is our enemy. And as hard as we try to appropriate make a funeral upbeat or hopeful, there is just something wrong and, frankly, scary about death. It is the ultimate statement that our world is broken. That is the problem.

2. Union with Christ

The second reality helps us to understand why Easter is such a significant day on the Christian calendar. The problem of sin and what is wrong with the world is solved ultimately by the work of Jesus Christ, and the culminating event of His earthly ministry is the resurrection.

The event we celebrate this weekend is a powerful statement about Jesus' ability to change what is wrong with the world. Or to make it more personal: it's a statement of Jesus' ability to change what is broken within us. This brokenness, which is caused by our sin, is solved by a spiritual union or a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The message of the Bible is that Jesus, as the Son of God, came to the earth (think Christmas). He lived a sinless life. He perfectly obeyed the Law, and therefore didn't deserve the punishment of the cross. Yet, Jesus willingly suffered on the cross in order to provide a sacrifice that could be applied to sinful human beings. In other words, Jesus took your place. Here is how Paul describes this in 2 Corinthians 5:21 –

"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, ESV)

Becoming a Christian means that a person comes to a point in their life where he or she realizes what Jesus has done, believes in Jesus, and receives Christ as Savior and Lord. Another passage, John 1:12, captures this reality like this:

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God," (John 1:12, ESV)

And Easter relates to all of this in that Jesus' death was the sacrifice, but His resurrection proved He had truly conquered death. The empty tomb declares that sin has been defeated because death is no longer ultimate.

"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 15:54–57, ESV)

So Jesus' death provided the payment for our sin, but the resurrection proved that death had been defeated.

Those who put their faith in Jesus enter into a spiritual union with Christ in which they share in what Jesus did. Romans 6:5 makes a very important and life-changing statement:

"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:5, ESV)

This spiritual union is absolutely amazing. It means that God spiritually unites us to Christ in that He considers Jesus' sacrifice as our sacrifice. God applies the work of Jesus to the account of those who put their faith in His Son. From a spiritual and legal standpoint, God declares us to be His children and welcomes us into a new relationship with Him. And in that moment, everything changes.

We are still human. We still live on the earth. But this moment changes everything. You might think of it like what happens at a wedding. When a bride and groom pledge their vows to each other, there is something really powerful and life-changing about that moment. The bride and groom are still the same people, but a new union has been created which will fundamentally change everything about them.

God instituted marriage between a man and woman to be a picture of the spiritual union between Christ and his church. The bride and groom leave that ceremony the same people; yet everything has changed. They are spiritually united together.

When it comes to a relationship with your Creator, it is the same thing. Putting your faith in Christ unites you to Jesus. And while you are still the same person – everything about who you are fundamentally changes.

Easter is connected to all of this because this day celebrates Christ's victory over death which makes our union with Him possible. We are celebrating the resurrection today. But the reason for this celebration is because of what it means for us personally. This day is not just a date on the Christian calendar; it is a triumphant celebration of our spiritual union with Jesus.

Our world is broken, and God's remedy is a spiritual union with Jesus Christ.

3. Joyful Freedom

The third and final reality is found throughout the remaining passages in Romans 6, and it is connected to the video we've shown you this morning.

Easter is a day of great joy because it is a day that is all about freedom. You see, the death of Jesus did not just create a theoretical and spiritual union. The moment a person receives Christ, they are fundamentally changed, and the effects are sweeping and life-changing. So we sing today not only because of what Jesus did, but also because of what it means for our lives practically.

In other words, Jesus defeated death in the future; He also gives us victory now! This is the great hope of the Christian faith. Sure, it gives a person certainty and hope when they are facing their own death or the death of a person that they love. But it also gives a person power over sin – our personal brokenness – now! Don't get me wrong. Christians are still imperfect people. But because of their new-found relationship with Christ, there is a new power to follow after God, to defeat temptations, to have new desires, and to experience freedom. It is a foretaste of what is to come in heaven when sin has been completely removed from the equation.

The beauty of Christianity and the amazing thing we celebrate today is that those who receive Christ, who are united with Christ, are able to experience the transforming power of God now. Let me show you this from Romans 6.

"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." (Romans 6:6, ESV)

Do you see the connection between being united with Christ and freedom? Those who have received Christ no longer have to be enslaved to sin. This is the power of the moment when a person receives Jesus. You are not going to be perfect; but you have a new power for God to fix what is broken in you.

Here's another amazing statement: *"For one who has died has been set free from sin."* (Romans 6:7, ESV) Again, personal union with Christ equals a new freedom. What's your moment?

The next three verses summarize what we have been talking about this morning in terms of the death and life of Jesus:

"Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God." (Romans 6:8–10, ESV)

But it is verse 11 that is just incredible! It connects this day to the lives of those who have placed their faith in Jesus:

"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:11, ESV)

The word "consider" means to keep a record in a legal or financial sense, and the implication is that those who are followers of Jesus must live in light of the spiritual reality of who they are in Christ. For example, they are to live in light of these realities:

- God has forgiven all of their sin and declared them to be righteous
- God has given them a new heart with new desires, affections, and passions
- The Holy Spirit now resides within a person
- Temptations are now able to be defeated in ways not possible before
- There is a new desire for obedience

This is what it means to "consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God." It means that in the moment when you receive Christ, everything changes. It means that the brokenness in you is finally fixed. It means that you are brought back to God. And it means that you have power in your life like you've never had before.

Again, it is not that you are perfect. But "the moment" of receiving Christ changes the trajectory of your life and your ability to live in a broken world. That is why I'm asking you about your moment.

The reason this day is so important and the reason why this church exists is to point you to Jesus. He is the one who can fix the brokenness in our lives and in the world. Receiving Christ – entering into a spiritual union with Him – changes everything. And with that fundamental change comes a freedom that fills your heart with joy.

Easter is a great day for celebration. And frankly, I long for every person to understand and embrace the liberating truths of this day. I've seen personally and pastorally the effects of a personal relationship with Jesus. I've seen the effects of "the moment."

And I long for you to have a story similar to my friend who tried to describe to me the supernatural change that happened in his heart. He barely had words. I long for your journal to say something like: *March 31, 2013. Easter Sunday. FIRE. POWER. FREEDOM. Met Jesus. Became a Christian.*

I long for you to be able to say: "Today was the moment."

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