

Today is Easter Sunday, and I'm reminded of an occasion some years ago at Easter. [Staff story - do you know what Easter is about? Do you know who Jesus Christ is?]

This prompts me to ask you these questions -

1. What is Easter about?
2. Who is Jesus Christ?
3. Are you in relationship with Him?

Now I know that for most of you, you do have a good understanding of the answers to these questions, but it does no harm to be reminded of the most basic, and precious, principles of our faith from time to time.

Before going any further, however, I want to urge you not to take what I say at face value - please go and meditate on it all, and discern it according to the Scriptures. That is your responsibility!

Let's look at the first two questions:

What is Easter about?

It is an occasion, or time, where we commemorate the victorious life, crucifixion to death, burial as a dead man, and resurrection to life, of Jesus Christ that took place nearly 2000 years ago.

Who is Jesus Christ?

He is the Son of God, through Whom all things were made.

The context of this passage - John was laying a foundation for his readers of Who Jesus is.

John 1:3 ³God created everything through Him, and nothing was created except through Him. (NLT 2nd ed.)

Now the question arises: Why did the One through Whom all things were created come to this earth that He made, and allow Himself to be murdered by the people that He made? To answer that, we need to go back to the beginning of human history. I think that all of us know the account recorded in Genesis of the creation of the world and all that is in it. We don't have time to study it now, but in summary God created a place for us to live, then He created mankind.

Genesis 1:15 ¹⁵The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. ¹⁶But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— ¹⁷except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die." (NLT 2nd ed.)

Isn't it interesting that it was only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that Adam was not allowed to eat from? At that point, in other words, he could eat from the tree of life. That is why after the fall Adam and Eve were banished from the garden. They had brought death to mankind through their disobedience.

So we see that it was when Adam and Eve listened to Satan that they disobeyed God, and fell into sin. Sin is sometimes defined as "loving less". Isn't it so clear from the original sin that Adam and Eve loved God less than their own appetite or curiosity? So it is today with most of humanity - we choose separation from God. Satan happily facilitates and encourages this - he hates both God and us. Because of his rebellion and an attempt to usurp God's authority, he has been sentenced to eternal separation from God in a place we call Hell. But in the time before he is actually consigned to Hell, he is trying to take as many people as possible with him. That's a tragedy for those he succeeds in misleading, Hell was not created for us...

A simple statement is: "Sin separates, love reconciles".

Sin separates, repentance opens the way for forgiveness. Forgiveness restores the relationship. Forgiveness is an act of love. To continue in sin is to be in disobedience and rebellion.

The love for humanity of the Son and the Father never grew less, but because of constant disobedience on the part of humanity, few people managed to stay in relationship with God. There are very few recorded examples of people who got it right - one is Enoch, another Elijah.

Genesis 5:22 ²² After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch lived in close fellowship with God for another 300 years, and he had other sons and daughters. ²³ Enoch lived 365 years, ²⁴ walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.

2 Kings 2:11 ¹¹ As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven.

So we see that they never tasted death.

The original intention of the creation of mankind was that we would be a Bride for Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Now there was the problem that most of humanity chose sin over relationship with God. The penalty of sin, separation from God, is death. What could be done to restore the relationship between humanity and God?

Hebrews 2:9b ^{9b} Yes, by God's grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone. (NLT 2nd ed.)

Acts 2:32-33 ^{32a} God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. ³³ Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. (NLT 2nd ed.)

The answer is that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came to the earth as a man, lived a life of perfect obedience to His Father, and allowed Himself to be sacrificed for us, all of us! He was then raised from the dead and ascended to be at the Father's right hand where He intercedes for us. In other words, He pleads our case with the Father if we submit to Him. What love is this?! Just think about the love of both the Father and the Son.

The result?

Romans 8:1-2 ¹ So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. (NLT 2nd ed.)

Hallelujah! How can we but celebrate, and worship the One Who has freed us!

How do I get into relationship with God?

The question people were asking Peter was "Brothers, what can we do?" as a response to their revelation of their sinful state of separation from God.

Acts 2:38-39 ³⁸ Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God."

It's so simple, isn't it? Remember that Peter was speaking to people of a whole lot of different nations, Jewish and Gentile.

Now, why is it that so many people are not there?

Over the years, I've heard a multitude of reasons for not committing to the Christian life. So far, I haven't heard even one that was valid. That does not mean that the person expressing the reservation was not honest in their viewpoint - it means that they did not yet have a revelation of Jesus the Christ. What does this Name "Jesus Christ" mean? Anointed Saviour. Jesus saves. His work is done - complete, nothing can or need ever be done to add to or complement it. So why isn't everyone saved? Because not everyone has appropriated, or taken ownership of, the salvation offered by Him.

I want to discuss a handful of the excuses that people use for not being Christian:

Predestination;

So much error has been propagated around this topic, but if we look at the Scriptures, it becomes clear that the Father wants all of mankind to be saved.

1 Timothy 2:3-4, in the context of praying for people who are in authority, reads This is good and pleases God our Saviour, Who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.

Joel 2:32 ³²But everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved.

So what does Paul mean by Romans 8:29? ²⁹For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like his Son, so that His Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

So often, we have seen such terrible sins being committed by people misrepresenting this Scripture and the heart of God - this has been at the root of much racism and genocide. However, if we look at the beginning, in Genesis, we'll see that the destiny of mankind was always supposed to be intimate fellowship with God. That's why He created us in the first place - so we were all created for fellowship with Him. He created the earth and all that is on it as our environment, then He created us to live and have dominion on the earth - in submission to Him. So all of mankind has been predestined to become "like His Son".

Trials;

Romans 8:35-37 ³⁵Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ³⁶As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") ³⁷No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

In the "School of Faith" we must have occasional tests, or we will never know where we are spiritually.

The silversmith purifying silver, which tarnishes.

Look at what will happen to us. Don't give up! Sure it's too hard, but that's what grace is for... What caused Christ's suffering? Was it something that He did? No, it was the behaviour of evil and misguided men.

How can God, Who is Holy, possibly love someone like me?

I don't know, but He does. He says that He does, and I've seen it demonstrated over and over again.

Romans 8:31-35a: ³¹What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³²Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? ³³Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. ³⁴Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. ³⁵Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love?

How can it be possible that God would have time to listen to little me and my puny problems?

Surely He is far too busy attending to much more important and pressing issues? Have you ever used the internet? Don't you think that the Creator of everything that is could work out a way of connecting with everyone? Of course He has and does! I know it, I converse with Him...

I've "tried Jesus" and it didn't work for me.

When the Israelites were called out of Egypt, it was to worship God. Not to escape Egypt, or even primarily to enter the promised land. It was to become the chosen race that God had destined them to be, to show the world at that time Who He is. The fact that almost none of them understood this simple truth meant that as soon as the going became a little tough, they wanted to rush back to "safe" slavery. Had they understood and embraced the truth, they would have focused on the Lord and the trials would have faded into insignificant little blips on their path. It's the same with us - if we were to understand that our destiny is to reign with Christ in eternity, this little portion of time here on earth would fall into its true perspective.

Mark 8:34-37 quotes Jesus as saying: ³⁴Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. ³⁵If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. ³⁶And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? ³⁷Is anything worth more than your soul?

Communion:

The communion meal has a special significance at this time, it was the only thing that Jesus gave His disciples to do as a symbolic act - He didn't institute any festivals or rituals at all - only asked us to remember Him whenever we eat together. Both He and His Father must have experienced extremes of emotion at the time of this last supper with His disciples - I'll try to illustrate it using something that I've shared before [the sacrificial Lamb].

Don't take my word for everything that has been said tonight - investigate it for yourself. Be like the little boy who dismantles the clock radio or his bicycle to see how it works... But be honest and open to see what God wants you to see - see the changed lives, the effect of our salvation upon the creation, the love that we have for one another - it's not perfect yet, but see it anyway.

Finally, I want to remind you of the steps to salvation...

What must I do to be saved?

- Repent of your sins and turn to God.
- Be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.
- Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.