



Easter Is...
Text: Selected Scriptures
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Introduction.

For many people Easter is a time for chocolate, Easter eggs, bunnies, special meals and times with family, as well as a long weekend. There are those who have their own unique view of Easter. One self-styled thinker writing about “What Easter means to me,” tells us,

“I adore Jesus, but as a man, like you and me, with just a lot more knowledge of the Truth. A man that lived and preached what he understood to be true, telling us that the kingdom of heaven was within us—not in a far away place ... on this Easter weekend I will remember that life is eternal. That we do not die and that through finding God and becoming ‘like him’ we will find eternal bliss. We, like Jesus, are able to make this transition to the next plane consciously. ... We are all his children and so I rest assured that I am made of the same substance, perfect inelegance, goodness and wisdom as this great Universal power that we call God. Have a wonderful and uplifting Easter Holiday!”¹

This may be what Easter means to that person, but it has nothing to do with what Easter really is or who Jesus really is.

We know that Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Good Friday commemorates Jesus Christ dying on the cross as the substitute for us to pay the debt of our sin, to satisfy God’s righteousness and holiness. As the apostle Paul wrote,

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demon-

strates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.”²

He was raised on what we call Easter Sunday in victory over both death and sin. As Paul continues in that same place he tells us “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”³ Yes, because He lives, we are saved. Yes, because He lives we too can live if we place our faith in Him. Live freed from the penalty and control of sin. Live with God here, now and forever.

Think with me about some of what *Easter Is*.

A time of hope.

First, Easter is a time of hope. Hope is a wonderful and vital quality. But there is a problem with hope. You *hope* for a good grade on a test, but fail it. You *hope* someone will like you, but that doesn't happen. You *hope* to get that great job, but don't even get an interview. You *hope*, but are disappointed.

You are discouraged because you can't understand let alone solve a problem. Then someone tells you, “You can do it! You can make it through this! Just have hope!” You think, “Thanks a lot! Now I feel even worse, because I can't even hope to get through this.”

We know hope has to do with things we don't have, things we can't see now. A dictionary defines it as “a feeling of expectation and a desire for something to happen.”⁴ As well, the Bible tells us “we hope for what we do not see” and, “hope that is seen is not hope.”⁵ Because of that, our view of hope can be murky and disappointing. One writer tells us,

“I have a problem with the word hope because it is usually associated with unrealistic aspirations, and because the goals are so often unattainable the routes to those goals must also be liable to lead the hope-filled person to failure. Thus the setting of unrealistic goals soon brings the hope filled believer to a life filled with despair. Probably most people realize their otherworldly aspirations are unrealistic, but

they grasp after them anyway, because their current life is already overloaded with things that are not working very well. For example, betting on the lottery in the hope of winning a great reward almost always ends up with losing some amount of money, and if the person is already desperately lacking in money, that money gambled away comes from essentials like food and a [small amount] of economic security.”⁶

So we see that naturally the word hope is something that is not certain—uncertainty is at the root of what it is for most people. It then can be like *wish*—I *wish* I will get the job, I *hope* I will get the job. Hope that is merely wishing can be a fantasy, may have nothing to do with what will happen, or even with what probably will happen.

Biblical hope, hope for the Christian is different from wishing in that there is certainty. As it is often said, the Christian’s true hope is a certain, a confident expectation for the future. That is so because it is based in God Himself, on His truth, on His promises in the Bible. So then, as the apostle Paul wrote, “hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”⁷

But certainty can be both subjective and misplaced. For example, I could have rock solid certainty in joining those who hope that God’s love wins out in the end for everyone and so it is not vital that people accept Christ as their Savior in order to be with God forever. That would be misplaced certainty and would result in all those with that hope alone bearing the punishment of their sins forever.

You see, from a number of viewpoints there is a problem with *hope*.

Easter solves the problem of hope! It solves the problem because it is built on facts. The gospels under God’s direction record the death and resurrection of Christ as well as that being the basis for our hope to be accepted by God. Then Paul wrote, as we read earlier,

“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas [that is, Peter], then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep [or, have died]. After that He was seen by James, then by all the

apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”⁸

And so, as the apostle Peter wrote, God

“according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a *living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (NASB).⁹

Scripture tells us we who were separated from, excluded and strangers to God and His blessings had “*no hope* and [were] without God,”¹⁰ that we who were darkness and living in the domain of darkness,¹¹ now have been called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light,¹² now are justified by God’s grace and made heirs of God according to *the hope* of eternal life.¹³

Easter solves the problem and brings us into a life-long time of hope, into a life of certain, confident expectation based on God, what He has done, His promises, His word. Yes, for believers we now are in a time of hope for our days of mourning as well as celebration, for our failures as well as our faithfulness, for our times of confusion as well as our times of clarity.

This certainty that God loves us, forgives us, is with us because of Jesus comes not from ourselves, but from God Himself who, the Bible tells us, is “the God of hope.”¹⁴ Easter made it possible for Paul to pray, “*may the God of hope* fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will *abound in hope* by the power of the Holy Spirit” (NASB).¹⁵

Yes, may the God of hope fill you with a certain and confident expectation for today and for forever so that you will be filled with joy and peace rather than despair and distress, that you may overflow with this certain hope from God. Yes, Easter is a time of hope.

Easter is a season of renewal.

Easter is also a season of renewal. We have a thirst for renewal. It’s easy to think about renewal in the spring. Trees budding, and then beginning to leaf, plants emerging and then

blooming, the drab brown grass turning to bright green. I was thinking about that as I drove to Slave Lake two weeks ago. Everything was brown. There were a fair number of deer along the side of the road that blended into that sea of brown. I thought it would be nice if everything had already greened up so it would be easier to see the deer. From drab brown to bright green. *Renewal*. It has started and we might even see that here before too long!

Because of its great appeal, renewal is used in promotions for health products and programs, environmentally friendly products, gardening supplies, educational courses, air fresheners and even sidewalk and street repairs.

Deep within we have a longing to sweep away the old, dry and drab and welcome something fresh into our hearts. The Sisters of St. Benedict in Winnipeg once advertised a *Spring Renewal Retreat*. They described it, “Give yourself the gift of time ... to stop, rest and be still. A spiritual spring tune up! Deepen your relationship with the Divine and re-discover meaning in your daily life. Daily meetings with a spiritual director are provided.”¹⁶ They were providing an opportunity for spiritual renewal.

Regardless of the season of the year, we thirst for renewal. It may be that our spiritual life is a bit drab, not as it should be, not that meaningful. So we can long for a *spiritual spring tune up*. We might identify with the Psalm writer who cried out to God, “My soul clings to the dust; *revive* me according to Your word.”¹⁷

Then too, after neglect and failure, we call out to God as King David did. He tells us when he kept silent about his sin his “body wasted away through [his] groaning all day long.”¹⁸ And so he cried out to God, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”¹⁹ Yes, we can have a thirst for renewal and cry out “God, renew, revive me.”

Easter answers this longing by ushering in a season of renewal. A season not limited to a certain part of the year, but a life-long season. It begins when we place our faith in the Risen Savior, Jesus Christ. God tells us through Paul, “anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (NLT).²⁰ It continues throughout all of life. As Paul testified, “Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day.” (NLT).²¹ No matter how long you have been a Christian, never take this for granted, never lose the wonder, never lose sight of the amazing reality and opportunity of your new life in Christ, of God with you to renew you every day.

We have a part to play in this season of ongoing renewal. Isaiah tells us that God dwells “with the contrite and lowly of spirit, *to revive* the spirit of the lowly, and *to revive* the heart of the contrite” (ESV).²² God is close to those who allow Him to crush their pride, self-reliance and complacency. When we are careless, drift, are self-focused, self-reliant rather than God-reliant, when we are focused on our problems and limitations or are at ease with our sin, our hearts become dry and drab. We can forget the goodness and blessing of God and so drift away from Him with the result again being spiritual dryness and drabness.

God spoke through Jeremiah to call the people of Judah to face their actions and those of their fathers before them. He said they “have followed idols” and

“neither did they say, ‘Where is the Lord, Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought and the shadow of death, through a land that no one crossed and where no one dwelt?’ I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. but when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord?’ And those who handle the law did not know Me; the rulers also transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.”²³

Whatever the specific causes, we must turn back to God and seek His renewing, His reviving of us. The Psalm writer prayed to God, “Revive me *according to Your word*.”²⁴ “revive me *in Your way*.”²⁵ “Revive me *in Your righteousness*.”²⁶ “Revive me, O LORD, *according to Your lovingkindness*.”²⁷ God had shown the Psalm writer and he understood, he learned that renewal requires staying close to God, depending on His character, following His word. And so we too will be renewed, blossom and flourish as we stay close to God, His word, His ways, His righteousness and lovingkindness — all because of Jesus who was raised from the dead for us.

Easter is a season of renewal.

A reason to rejoice.

And, finally, Easter is a reason to rejoice. We sang hymns of rejoicing this morning. There are many reasons to rejoice in some things for a period of time. The Edmonton Oilers won the Stanley cup five times, the last time was in 1990. People celebrated, but that joy is long, long gone for most people. This year, as we know, was another year when they didn't make the playoffs. The Oilers last playoff appearance was in 2017 where they won the first round before being eliminated. In 2006 they came close to winning it all, losing in the seventh and final game. But you don't see people celebrating either of those accomplishments today. Being in the finals or even close to winning doesn't lead people to celebrate for any length of time.

The Bible tells us that, among many other things, wine, oil and perfume can make the heart glad.²⁸ That a good word makes the heart glad.²⁹ That children being wise and doing well make their parents glad.³⁰ That good friends bring joy.³¹ These and many more things are a reason to be glad, but the gladness they bring can evaporate quickly.

In sharp contrast, Easter is the reason for complete and everlasting joy. Question: What is the reason for your greatest joy? Think about it carefully. *What is the reason for your greatest joy?*

Knowing God, being right with God, experiencing His presence and blessings have always brought the greatest joy, lasting joy to people. The prophet Habakkuk served God as Judah, the Southern Kingdom, was plunging toward collapse due to their turning away from God and so being spiritually bankrupt. It was an extremely difficult time for all of the people, but especially painful for those who stayed true to God. In the midst of this Habakkuk testified,

“Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!” (NLT).³²

Do you and I know this for ourselves? Can we truly testify this in the devastating experiences of our lives? We can and will if we “rejoice in the Lord” and are “joyful in the God of [our] salvation.” And then King David sang to God, “My heart shall *rejoice in Your*

salvation” and, “my soul shall *rejoice in the LORD*; it shall *exult in His salvation*” (NASB).³³ Recall that Jesus told the seventy disciples returning from a tour of ministry, “do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, *but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*”³⁴

You have been saved by God’s grace through faith in the risen Christ. Never stop thinking about how amazing that is. Always remember your privileges as a child of God. Ground your identity and joy in who you are in Christ.

This complete and everlasting joy is not something from ourselves, not something we work up. It is, the Bible tells us, God’s own joy in us. As Jesus told us, He gives us His truth so that His joy may remain in us and that our joy will be full or complete.³⁵ He also told us it is God’s own joy which no one can steal from us.³⁶ It is God’s own joy which gives us strength, as Nehemiah told the people who had returned to Jerusalem from exile.³⁷ It is God’s own joy which the Holy Spirit keeps developing, keeps growing within us.³⁸ It is God’s own joy which we will experience to the fullest when we stand faultless, blameless in His presence in heaven.³⁹

Yes, Easter is a reason to rejoice!

Conclusion.

Easter is a time of hope, a season of renewal and a reason to rejoice.

Do you know the reality of Easter? Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you have His hope, renewal and joy? Many of those who do not can list some reasons for why not. The late historian and television personality Lord Kenneth Clark lived and died without faith in Jesus Christ. He once stated that while visiting a beautiful church he had what he believed to be an overwhelming religious experience. He wrote, “My whole being was irradiated by a kind of heavenly joy far more intense than anything I had known before.” But the “gloom of grace,” as he described it, created a problem. If he allowed himself to be influenced by it, he knew he would have to change, his family might think he had lost his mind, and maybe that intense joy would prove to be an illusion. What did he decide? He concluded, “I was too deeply embedded in the world to change course.”⁴⁰

Whatever your friends' and acquaintances' reasons, however deeply embedded they are in their way of life, in the way and stuff of this world, the Risen Christ is reaching out to them today and wants to use you to do that. Regardless of who we are or are not, of what we have done or have not done, He says "I am here knocking on the door of your heart. Open the door and I will come in."⁴¹ He will come in. He will wash away our sin and guilt, be with us forever giving us hope, renewal and joy. There is no better time to reach out to those you know who do not have faith in Christ than now, today, this Easter.

If you are one of God's new creations in Christ, in these next quiet moments thank and praise Him for what Jesus did for you. Commit yourself anew to live in, to live out each day what Christ has made you and given to you.

¹ ULRIKE. *Forever ... and 365 days*. Los Angeles: Troll River Publications, 2014. Chapter 4: Applications and Choices, April 7. No page numbering.

² Romans 5:6-9.

³ Romans 5:10.

⁴ *Hope*. Oxford Dictionary of Current English, Third Edition. Catherine Soanes, editor. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, page 435.

⁵ Romans 8:24-25.

⁶ *My problem with hope*. Probaway – Life Hacks ~ Many helpful hints on living your life more successfully. <<https://probaway.wordpress.com/2016/05/23/my-problem-with-hope/>>. 23 May 2016. Accessed 4 April 2019.

⁷ Romans 5:5.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

⁹ 1 Peter 3b-5, NASB.

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:12.

¹¹ Ephesians 5:8; Colossians 1:13.

¹² 1 Peter 2:9.

¹³ Titus 3:7.

¹⁴ Romans 15:13.

¹⁵ Romans 15:13, NASB.

¹⁶ *Spring Renewal Retreat*. Originally posted on www.stbens.ca, but no longer accessible.

- ¹⁷ Psalm 119:25.
- ¹⁸ Psalm 32:3, NASB.
- ¹⁹ Psalm 51:10.
- ²⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:17, NLT.
- ²¹ 2 Corinthians 4:16, NLT.
- ²² Isaiah 57:15.
- ²³ Jeremiah 2:5-8.
- ²⁴ Psalm 119:25, 107, 149, 154, 156.
- ²⁵ Psalm 119:37.
- ²⁶ Psalm 119:40.
- ²⁷ Psalm 119:159.
- ²⁸ Psalm 104:15; Proverbs 27:9.
- ²⁹ Proverbs 12:25.
- ³⁰ Proverbs 23:15, 25.
- ³¹ 1 Corinthians 16:17; Philippians 4:10.
- ³² Habakkuk 3:17-18.
- ³³ Psalm 13:5; 35:9.
- ³⁴ Luke 10:20.
- ³⁵ John 15:11.
- ³⁶ John 16:22.
- ³⁷ Nehemiah 8:10.
- ³⁸ Galatians 5:22.
- ³⁹ Jude 1:24.
- ⁴⁰ Cited in *Our Daily Bread*. Grand Rapids: RBC Ministries, February 15, 1994.
- ⁴¹ See Revelation 3:20.

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