

Easter 2019

- Welcome to Easter Sunday on Saturday night!
 - Normally Christians celebrate Jesus' resurrection on the morning His grave was discovered empty, the first day of the week, which is Sunday
 - But did you know that celebrating Easter on Saturday night is actually the more biblical way to celebrate this holiday?
 - Jesus' tomb was discovered empty by two women who returned to attend to His body after the Sabbath had ended

Luke 24:1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.

Luke 24:2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

Luke 24:3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

- Luke says that when the woman arrive at the tomb at dawn the tomb was already empty
 - Which means that Jesus resurrected sometime during the overnight hours on Saturday
 - So as we meet tonight, we're celebrating His resurrection closer to the time it actually happened...which makes us more holy
- Seriously, the importance of Easter is *not* in knowing the specific moment Jesus returned to life
 - But rather, it's the fact that He died and then resurrected at all

Little Bobby was sitting on the porch talking to his Grandpa when he innocently asked, "Grandpa, do you know how to make animal sounds?"

"I sure do" Grandpa replied. "What sort of animal sound would you like to hear?"

"How about a toad? Do you know how to sound like a toad?"

"Sure", said Grandpa, cupping his hand to his mouth, "croaaak croaaak, how did you like that?!"

"Yipee!" screamed Bobby jumping up and down, "We're going to Disneyworld!"

"Huh?" Questioned Grandpa. "Why's that?"

"Because Grandma said that after you croak we'll all go to Disneyworld!"

- Easter is the celebration of a dead man...*coming back to life*
 - And the Bible says that those who believe that testimony will follow in Jesus' footsteps...
 - That is, when we believe He died to pay the price of our sin and rose from the dead to demonstrate the proof of His claims...
 - Then Christ promises He will raise us from the dead also, and we too will never die again...we will have eternal life
 - Easter is so important because had Jesus not risen from the dead, then everything He claimed while He was alive would have been a lie
 - Anyone can claim to speak for God or can claim to know what comes after death or to know the way to Heaven
 - But if that person can't conquer death for his own sake, if he can't find eternal life for himself, why put any faith in his claims?
 - As Paul said to the church in Corinth

1Cor. 15:13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 1Cor. 15:14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

- Many, many men and women have claimed to speak for God and to possess the secret to the afterlife
- And many claimed to have authority to beat death...Buddha, Muhammed, Gandhi, Confucius, David Koresh, Joseph Smith
- But in the end, they all died, and that was the last anyone saw or heard them...death consumed them and they were no more
 - Jesus too went into death, but He came back to life just as He predicted He would
 - And that's a power that can't be ignored or equalled
 - That's why we celebrate His resurrection...it's our proof that our faith in Him isn't misplaced and that death is no longer our enemy
- But there's an aspect of that first Easter I want to explore with you tonight, a question that rarely gets asked, much less answered

- And that question is why did Jesus have to die in the way that He did, scourged, beaten and nailed to wooden cross?
 - We know *why* Jesus had to die...to pay for our sins...but why couldn't Jesus have died in His sleep to pay for our sins?
 - Why couldn't He have been stoned or die by some other method of execution...perhaps one that was quicker or less painful?
 - Why did Jesus' death need to be so terrible? How did that contribute to God's plan?
- We find our answer in two parts tonight, starting with the prophet Isaiah in chapter 53

Is. 53:1 Who has believed our message?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

Is. 53:2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,

And like a root out of parched ground;

He has no stately form or majesty

That we should look upon Him,

Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

Is. 53:3 He was despised and forsaken of men,

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

And like one from whom men hide their face

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

- Isaiah 53 is one of the most remarkable chapters of the Bible
 - The prophet explains in great detail how the Father would pay for Israel's sin – and the world's sin – through the death of His Son
 - In particular, Isaiah reveals the method of Jesus' death, that it would be painful and particularly devastating
- Isaiah opens declaring he has a message about the "arm" of the Lord
 - In the ancient east, a father's "arm" referred euphemistically to an oldest son, who was the Father's strength, the agent of his power
 - Since Jesus is the Son of God, we could say Jesus is the arm of the Father
 - Elsewhere in chapter 51 Isaiah says the "arm" of God will judge the nations, and the world waits for the "arm" of the Lord

- So the Isaiah is giving us a message about the Messiah, Jesus
- And Isaiah asks to whom has the Messiah been revealed and who believed “our” message concerning Him...who is the “our”?
 - Isaiah is referring to himself and other Jews who believed the revelation of a suffering Messiah coming to save Israel
 - But the prophet asks rhetorically who else received this report because few in Israel and in the world would believe it
- Apart from a remnant of Israel, most Jews rejected the notion that Jesus was their Messiah, both in Jesus’ day and in the days since
 - And likewise, most of the Gentile world has rejected the truth of Jesus
 - As Jesus Himself said:

Matt. 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

Matt. 7:14 “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

- So Isaiah opens chapter 53 lamenting that few would believe the prophets’ message concerning our suffering Messiah...and then he explains why
 - Because the Father’s plan of salvation was the most incredible, impossible, bizarre, counter intuitive plot line ever written...who could believe it?
 - If you or I had been in charge of God’s plan of salvation, I assure you we would not have written the script the way God did
 - Beginning with selecting who played the part of the hero of the story
- If it had been up to you or me, we would chosen an impressive megastar to play the part of the Son of God...it’s the greatest role in history
 - We would have selected a tall, chiseled, handsome, man to play the part of Jesus...preferably with blue eyes and a British accent
 - And if you want proof that I’m right, consider who Hollywood casts as biblical heroes...

- Charlton Heston as Moses and Ben Hur, Omar Sharif as the Apostle Peter, Russell Crowe as Noah, Jim Carrey as God...
- Ok, maybe not so much Jim Carey...but you get the point
- And then consider how Jesus is often depicted in paintings...
- That's how we would have cast the part of the Messiah – a Jesus with movie star good looks – but God's ways are not man's ways
 - God's plan was to give us a Messiah Who was ordinary, plain
 - Isaiah says in v.2 that our Messiah would come out of no where, like a tender shoot out of parched ground
 - He didn't come from an important family, He wouldn't be born into wealth or power
 - He entered the world in a humble way, born in a manger to an insignificant, poor family
- Moreover, Jesus' appearance wasn't attractive in the least
 - Isaiah says He had no form or majesty
 - The Hebrew word for form could be translated handsome
 - So Isaiah says Jesus wasn't especially handsome or majestic...He probably looked something closer to this...
- So if we could go back in time and see Jesus as He appeared in His day, this is a lot closer to what we would see
 - Can you embrace a Jesus that doesn't have Hollywood looks? If you feel some struggle right now, you should know that's what God wanted
 - Isaiah says that the Lord intentionally clothed His Son in flesh that wouldn't attract us
 - The Lord purposely made Jesus unattractive, unimpressive and uninspiring
 - Notice in v.2 Isaiah says the Messiah would not be handsome so that we would not look upon Him or be attracted to Him
 - Why? Because God's plan of salvation was to be received by faith in God's word, not by sight in something attractive

- Our eyes are drawn to things that attract our flesh, which is how the first man and woman got into trouble in the Garden of Eden
- So God prepared a salvation that denies the flesh what it wants so it may bring what our spirit desperately needs
- But if Jesus had been handsome, then people would have been drawn to Him for fleshly reasons not for spiritual ones
- So, the Lord eliminated that possibility by making sure there was nothing about Jesus' appearance to attract us to Him
 - And then the Father also made sure that there would be no image, no record of Jesus' appearance for us to fixate upon
 - So naturally, mankind invented its own images of Jesus, all of which portray Him contrary to Scriptures, which just goes to prove that God was right
- And predictably, Israel despised and rejected an ordinary, humble Messiah
 - And as a result of that rejection, Isaiah says in v.3 that Jesus became a Man of sorrows Who was acquainted with grief
 - The Hebrew word translated sorrows is literally the word for pain
 - Isaiah predicts that Israel's Messiah would be a man acquainted with pain and suffering, referring to Jesus' crucifixion
 - And Jesus' suffering was no small thing...it would mar His appearance so badly that men would want to hide their faces from the spectacle
 - Then Isaiah begins explains why Jesus' death was so cruel

**Is. 53:4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.**

**Is. 53:5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.**

**Is. 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.**

- Isaiah says the Messiah, when He came for Israel, would be called upon to bear the griefs and sorrows of the Jewish people
 - And those griefs would be substantial
 - And at this point, Isaiah begins describing the kind of death the Father had planned for His Son
- In v.5 Isaiah says Jesus would die by a piercing through
 - Piercing through is a direct reference to the nails that penetrated Jesus' body holding Him to the wooden cross
 - Isaiah's description is especially remarkable when you consider that it predates the invention of crucifixion by about 200 years
 - And for that same reason, the Father's choice to put His Son to death in this particular way is all the more curious
 - Why did the Father chose a method of execution so cruel, so painful that the evil hearts of man had yet to even invent it?
- Isaiah's answer is the extreme pain of Jesus' death was part of His atoning work
 - Notice in v.4 Isaiah says Jesus was bearing our griefs and sorrows
 - And in v.5 Jesus was pierced for our transgressions, or sins
 - And He was crushed for our iniquities, also sins
 - The word crushed could be translated bruising, referring to the extensive physical damage Jesus' body experienced
 - Jesus likely experienced His shoulders separating on the cross, His face badly bruised and swollen from being beaten
 - To say nothing of Jesus' scourging at the hands of Roman soldiers which Isaiah says was for our spiritual healing
 - So the Father chose for His Son to die for us, to pay the price for our sins, but the the method of that death was important to the plan

- Jesus couldn't die quietly in His sleep or beheaded in some dungeon like John the Baptist
- It was important to the Father's plan that Jesus' death involve an extended, public experience of suffering
- Isaiah says Jesus was made to suffer in our place, but that doesn't completely answer the question...*why* did the Father need Jesus to suffer in this way for us?
 - Why wasn't death enough? What did Jesus' suffering on the cross accomplish for us?
 - Paul gives us part 2 of our answer in Romans...

Rom. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Rom. 3:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Rom. 3:25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

Rom. 3:26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

- In Romans 3:23 Paul begins saying all sinned and fall short of the glory of God
 - The glory of God refers to the perfection of God, and certainly we all fall short of being perfect, don't we?
 - Being as perfect as God is the standard for entry into Heaven
 - Only those who are as righteous as God Himself may enter into His presence
 - So unless we obtain a righteousness equal to God's, well then... as the farmer tells the lost driver...you can't get there from here
 - So in v.24 Paul explains how God's plan of salvation gives sinners like us the righteousness we need for Heaven while ensuring God remains just
 - Paul says we are justified (declared not guilty of sin) by a gift of God's grace through the redemption found in Jesus
 - Paul means Jesus redeems us from the penalty of sin, that is He paid the price for our sin

- In return we are credited with Jesus' perfect sinless life
- You can compare this exchange to two students taking a final exam for a high school class
 - You are one of the students, and in this class, you must get 100% on the final exam to pass the class
 - The final exam is ten questions, and you have to get all ten correct to pass
 - But as you look at the questions, you realize that you don't know the answer for any of them so you are going to fail
- But seated next to you in the class is another student, Jesus, who's taking the same exam
 - He's already finished and He's scored a perfect 100% on His test, so Jesus is going to pass the class
 - That's how it is with getting into Heaven
 - We have to score 100% on the test of life, but if we make even one mistake, just one sin, we can't go to Heaven
 - Jesus came to earth to take the same test as a man, and He made zero mistakes...He aced the test of life and He earned Heaven
- So then the time comes to turn in your test, and you know you've failed
 - But as the professor comes down the aisle to collect your exam paper, Jesus reaches over and takes your exam and hands you His exam
 - So you get credit for Jesus' perfect score and Jesus fails in your place
 - That's what the Bible means when it says that Jesus redeemed us
 - By an act of grace, the Lord assigns us Christ's perfection and puts the wrath for our sins on Jesus
- But then notice in vs.25-26 Paul gives us the reason why Jesus had to die in the terrible manner that the Father chose
 - First, Paul says Jesus had to be displayed publicly as a propitiation

- A propitiation is a fancy word meaning something that appeases wrath
- Sin angers God the Father, and the just and righteous response to sin is wrath
- So as every person goes through this life sinning from day to day, we are storing up wrath with God

Rom. 2:5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

- But the Bible also says Jesus' death was a payment that appeased or satisfied the wrath of God against our sin
- Because God loved us and had mercy toward us, He poured out the wrath we deserved on Jesus instead of us
- But the Father wanted humanity to understand that as Jesus died in our place, He was taking God's wrath for our sin
 - So the Father's plan required that Jesus experience the Father's wrath *publicly*
 - Paul says in v.25 Jesus was displayed publicly in His blood through faith
- As the world saw Jesus bloodied beyond recognition, they would understand that sin invites wrath and that God's wrath is an ugly thing
 - In knowing what Jesus experienced, we get glimpse of how much God detests our sin
 - We come to appreciate how much wrath we have stored up for ourselves
 - And we soon realize we don't want to experience God's wrath... that's what Christ's death accomplished, Paul says
- But more than that, this public display of God's wrath upon Christ was necessary so that we would also understand that God was just in forgiving us
 - Paul reminds us that God in His infinite patience, passed over sins previously committed in v.25
 - Passed over means delayed, so God has delayed judgment for sin

- When sin entered into the world, God could have justly brought judgment immediately, wiping out humanity forever
- But out of love for the world, God did not judge humanity in that moment...He passed over that opportunity for a time
- Nevertheless, God's perfect character requires that He judge sin eventually, and the Bible says that day is coming soon

Rom. 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

- One day the wrath of God will be revealed from heaven
- And in the meantime, the Lord didn't want humanity misunderstanding His patience thinking there wasn't judgment for sin
- Certainly there are those who think that about God
 - Many people go to their graves convinced that God will be nice to them, overlooking their mistakes...so far, so good
 - Or perhaps they tell themselves that since they aren't as bad as other people, they will qualify for Heaven
- Jesus tells us how God actually judges sin:

Matt. 5:21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'

Matt. 5:22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

- If God truly worked the way many assume, then God wouldn't be truly righteous
 - Because true justice means the guilty are punished every time, no exceptions
 - So if you think you're headed for Heaven because you've never murdered, then consider Jesus' words again...
 - Have you ever been angry with someone, have you ever insulted someone, have you ever called someone a fool

- Then you are headed to the same place as a murderer...unless you accept Jesus' death as your payment for those sins
- So Paul says that the Father exhibited His Son to suffering His wrath publicly as a demonstration of His righteousness for the present time
 - The present time refers to our time now, as we await God's judgment on the fallen world
 - Paul is saying the Father didn't want us going through this life blissfully ignorant of how much wrath our sin deserves
 - So He assigned a public suffering for His Son, one involving excruciating pain and disfigurement to make the point to us that sin has a price and Christ paid it
 - So that if we're ever tempted to think that sin is no big deal to God, we need only remember Christ's suffering to understand how God sees it
 - And at the same time, Paul says by this plan we can also see that God is just in allowing us to go free from the penalty of sin
 - Because we can see how His wrath was placed on His Son instead of us
 - We can't say God turned a blind eye to our sin or just ignored it...no, our sin invited God's wrath
 - But we can also see that it fell on Christ instead of us, making God just in forgiving us
 - All the wrath we had stored up, God poured out on His Son instead of us
 - And we gain the benefit of this plan simply by placing our faith in what Christ did for us
 - That's why Jesus had to die the way He did
 - He couldn't die quietly or quickly, out of view of the public eye, for if He did we wouldn't understand what it meant
 - So God publicly displayed Him, pouring out His wrath on Christ so that we could understand the wrath of God against sin
 - And so that we might have cause to accept that payment, having recognized that God was just in making a way to escape judgment

- Jesus took my place to experience the wrath of God, and I shudder now at the thought of being in His place
- But who has believed our report? Can you imagine a plan involving such an incomprehensible act of love and sacrifice?
 - Who could believe that the Son of God would voluntarily receive the wrath of Almighty God on our behalf?
 - It may be an incredible, impossible, bizarre, counter-intuitive plot, but it's the truth
 - So I sincerely hope you've believed in it
 - Because the wrath you're storing up in Heaven by your sin is growing by the day
 - And the Bible says that sooner or later, God's wrath will be poured out because the Lord is just and He will judge your sin
 - But if you've placed your faith in this crazy, astonishing, miraculous plan of salvation, then you have no condemnation before God
 - All the wrath your sin deserved was poured out on Jesus
 - So that by your faith in that payment, you may stand before God innocent because Jesus stood in your place condemned
 - And how do you know this message is true? Because Jesus raised from the dead to prove it to you.
 - Who has believed our message? I pray you will now