

THE EASTER CONNECTION

WEEK 1: LIVING HE LOVED ME

You may not realise it, but, very often, my biggest regret about these talks is that we don't get the chance to follow up some of the questions that are asked or issues that are raised about them. Some of them really do need more discussion, and one that was raised last year gave me the approach to these Lenten talks. It was something I had to sort out in my own mind because, at the time, I both agreed and disagreed with the issue that was raised. Now you can see the problem. How can you agree and disagree with something in the Bible at the same time? Sometimes the only way to resolve that kind of dilemma is to look at the big picture, rather than the individual details and that is why I'm starting off with the life of Christ rather than the death of Christ, which is probably uppermost in our minds as Easter approaches.

I'm guessing that already you've probably made the connection between this title and the hymn that it is attached to. We can all make connections between things we find familiar. Unfortunately, we don't always apply that ability to familiar passages in the Bible. As I've said before, there is a very important principle at stake in making connections in the Bible. Easter gives us an opportunity to see just how important this is when we study or talk about people or events or concepts in God's word. I have been constantly amazed at how everything in the Bible is connected to something else. Even in what I have read recently, it seems to be coming through more and more that the Bible is not just a collection of different literary styles divided into two parts with books, chapters and verses. Every single book, chapter and verse is making a contribution to one great big story. John Mark Hicks, in an internet publication stated that the Bible story is a 5-act drama

Creation Israel Ministry of Jesus Church Eschaton

We can see from this scheme that the ministry of Jesus, which he calls 'the Christ event' is central to that story and everything that came before or after that event is all connected to it. In other words, what happened before Easter and what happened afterwards all contributed to what we now call the gospel of salvation. Everything that came before and everything that came after has contributed to the importance and the significance of that one event. That is why we can claim that the whole ministry of Jesus is the centre of history. Those 33 years in comparison to the millennia before His coming and the 2000 years that have passed since His coming have fulfilled the past and have taken salvation into to the present and forward into a future eternity.

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The problem with this from my perspective is that so much has been written during that 2000 years about various aspects of the Bible and so much more is available to people in the 21st century, because of the increasing volume of publication made possible by technology, that it would be impossible to read or listen to it all. And because so much of what is written, regardless of how doctrinally sound it is, focuses only on particular aspects or topics, we don't get an overall picture of that story. This is especially the case with Easter. It takes up just three days of Jesus' 33 year ministry, yet those events play such a major role in Christianity, that there are countless publications about them, most of which only focus on one aspect of those three days, without making the vital connections before and after the events they cover. As an example, I'm starting off by showing what happens if you don't make the connections.

If you were forced to make a choice, what would you say is the more important: the death of Christ or the resurrection of Christ. Could you make a choice between the cross and the empty tomb? Let's take a look at what our answers might be. We could turn to John Stott who states in his book 'The Cross of Christ'

"For the cross is at the centre of evangelical faith. Indeed, as I argue in this book, it lies at the centre of historic, biblical faith....."

I doubt if any of us would disagree with that, and it is probably true to say that the cross is the most prominent element in evangelical preaching and teaching. Again, justifiable because of Paul's declarations.

but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23 NIV)

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 1 Corinthians 2:2

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Galatians 6:14

Paul's emphatic focus to both the Corinthians and the Galatians was the cross. In the 21st century we have lost the impact of Paul's words. A crucified Messiah was a paradox, a contradiction in terms, a scandal to the Jews and a pernicious superstition to Gentiles. It was tantamount to the claim of a madman. It took a over hundred years beyond Paul for the cross to become the symbol of Christianity. Our familiarity with the cross blinds us to the courage

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of Paul in proclaiming this message to orthodox Jews steeped in the Mosaic covenant and the philosophically minded Greeks in Corinth and others influenced by it in the Gentile world.

Today, we understand it as a symbol of our salvation because it became the means of atonement for sin. That is the focus of evangelical preaching and teaching. We are heirs of this tradition and particularly at Easter, we all would feel horrified if the importance of Jesus' death on the cross for our salvation was minimised in any way. My 'gut instinct' and probably yours too tells us that an Easter Bible study should focus on the cross. Maybe like me you would feel guilty or disloyal in some way if you did not choose the death of Christ on the cross, because Jesus did suffer and die there on our behalf. If, on the other hand you say the resurrection, there could equally be a feeling of guilt or disloyalty because in some way this detracts from Christ's sufferings - especially as He volunteered to take the punishment due to us.

Yet, in spite of this prominent aspect of evangelicalism, John Piper another prominent evangelical, in his book 'The Future of Justification' has written *Christianity is in its very essence a resurrection religion. The concept of resurrection lies at its heart. If you remove it, Christianity is destroyed.*

And guess what? He gets support from Paul, who even says that he is suffering imprisonment for the gospel of "Jesus Christ raised from the dead"

And if Christ has not been raised our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. 1 Corinthians 15:14-18

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained 2 Timothy 2:8-9

Look at what Paul says. If Christ is not raised from the dead, preaching Christ crucified is useless and so is Christian faith and he, himself, is a liar for telling them Jesus did rise from the dead. There's no eternal life for us because we are still in our sins. If there is only hope in this life we are to be really pitied.

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That's pretty strong stuff and on this basis alone, it would seem appropriate to concentrate these Lenten talks solely on the resurrection.

This is a prime example of not making Biblical connections. Are we then saying Paul thinks the resurrection is more important than the cross? Is he, in fact, contradicting himself? Is he trying to figure out the answer to the question I asked you earlier? It would seem that Paul's preaching and boasting focuses on the crucifixion of Jesus. Then, to put it bluntly, he says that if the resurrection didn't happen, then all his preaching efforts are worthless and Christianity as they knew it in his time and ever since is a hopeless religion.

The problem is obvious. If we had to make a choice based solely on John Stott's or John Piper's statements, both supported by words from the apostle Paul, we would be facing a dilemma. It also serves as a warning of what can happen if we try to isolate one part of God's word from all the rest. That is why, although so many books can be doctrinally sound, they can lead to confusion, contradictions or distortions, simply through focusing on one aspect of a topic, separating it from the overall message of the whole Bible. So how do we sort out this apparent contradiction in what Paul has written?

First, we have to accept that Paul is not writing a systematic theology of Easter. He is responding to issues that have arisen in different churches. He is addressing an issue a previous communication has brought to his notice. In Galatia the problem was what constituted atonement for sin. Paul said, the blood of Christ shed on the cross. The Judaisers said the blood of Christ shed on the cross plus circumcision. Paul was furious about this and that is why he is so strongly emphasising the death of Jesus on the cross as the sole means of atonement for sin. As far as he is concerned, absolutely nothing suffices to make a person right with God except belief in the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows that Jesus' death on the cross broke down all the barriers that divide human beings. That is the be all and end all of what he can boast about.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile —the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:12-13

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**Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all
Colossians 3:11**

In Corinth, Paul faced a completely different situation. Here, as mentioned, he had to persuade a people with minds steeped in the wisdom of Greek philosophy. Corinth was a cosmopolitan port city. Getting across the message that a Jew, crucified as a common criminal, was the Saviour of the world, was going to be an uphill task. Paul had to use all the power of the Holy Spirit at his disposal to convince the Corinthians of the truth of his message.

**For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:
“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”
1 Corinthians 1:18-19**

I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power. 1 Corinthians 2:3-5

His gospel had to be powerfully and convincingly communicated if he wanted people to be attracted by it enough to rely for their eternal salvation on a Person they would have despised. Why then by chapter 15, after it was obvious a church had emerged in Corinth based on this belief, was Paul so strongly emphasising the absolute necessity of believing in the resurrection? Again, kept in its proper context, the reason is perfectly clear. Having accepted one part of his message, a philosophical dispute arose over whether or not resurrection from the dead was possible. Paul then had to address this particular issue and show the consequences for the Christian faith of not believing that Christ physically rose from the dead.

We can see from the situations that Paul is addressing, that his words were appropriate in those contexts and that it is only by taking them out of those contexts and setting them side by side, that a contradiction appears. Secondly, when we connect these two examples with what Paul says elsewhere we can see that he has made the logical connection between the death and the resurrection of Jesus, since logically, you cannot have a resurrection without a prior death. That is the most basic connection that has to be made about Easter, because without both Jesus’ death and resurrection, salvation is impossible. And, even in Galatia, Paul, makes this connection clear.

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The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead —whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. Acts 5:30

**“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen
Acts 10:39-40**

Paul, an apostle —sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead — Galatians 1:1

He is able to make that connection because of his own experience on the Damascus road.

He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” Acts 9:4-6

In that moment, Paul would have known that the Person who spoke to him was the one who had been crucified in Jerusalem. This cannot be doubted since he was persecuting the people who believed in the message that was being preached and taught by the apostles. In that one episode, Paul had to hold in his mind both the fact of Jesus’ death and the fact of His resurrection from the dead. We know that he did not jump to any immediate conclusions about that because he tells the Galatians,

.....my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days Galatians 1:16-18

Thus by the time Paul began to preach and teach he had already resolved in his own mind the significance of both the cross and the empty tomb. The evidence connecting the two in the New Testament is shown by the fact that neither the apostles nor Paul disassociate the death of Christ from the resurrection of Christ. The sermons in Acts emanate from the apostles’ personal relationship with Jesus during His life on earth and their eye-witness experience of His words and actions during their time with Him. The Upper room discourses and

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Last supper and their Pentecost empowerment to enable Christian communities to emerge and grow were founded on Jesus' birth, life, death, burial resurrection and ascension. And, they would never have dreamed of debating which aspect of those three days of what we now call Easter was the more important. Similarly, as I said earlier, Paul had to hold in his mind both the death and resurrection of Jesus. Given his intellect, those three years in Arabia and Damascus gave him plenty of time to come to a knowledge and understanding of the significance of both the cross and the empty tomb.

But we have to go even further in making an Easter connection. Two sources have helped me to put that in its rightful perspective. The first is Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:2-5 that point us to the Easter events which he regards as "of first importance". Significantly, however, this shows that he views all the stages of Easter as one event.

By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 1 Corinthians 15:2-5

According to this statement, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ was of first importance in the gospel of salvation Paul preached. We often skip over the burial of Jesus, mainly because we do not know exactly what went on while Jesus was in the tomb. However, the very fact that all four gospels specifically mention the burial of Jesus and Paul regards it as of 'first importance', means that we need to take a closer look at it. We also have to take account of the fact that in the New Testament, salvation had other important elements as well. These texts mention some of them. The name and the grace of Jesus, Jesus' life, God's purpose, mercy and His gift, belief in the truth, the sanctifying and renewing work of the Spirit

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12

**.. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
Romans 10:13**

**No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved,
just as they are Acts 15:11**

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For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— Ephesians 2:8

**He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time
2 Timothy 1:9**

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9

**and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.
2 Thessalonians 2:10**

**But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first-fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth
2 Thessalonians 2:13**

he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit Titus 3:5

The conclusion that all of these references lead to is that all three aspects of Easter were of first importance, but that they exist in the context of all the other important features of the whole of Jesus’ ministry, which in itself is also part of a Bible wide connection. Easter, then, is not a stand-alone event. Just as the events of those three days cannot be separated from each other, in the same way they cannot be separated from what came before them and what came after. Because Easter is such a prominent feature of the church calendar, sometimes it seems that once the occasion has passed, to all intents and purposes, so is the focus on the Easter message. These Lenten talks, in a way, may help us to avoid that. Time only permits putting the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in the context of His whole ministry. But making those connections makes it possible to hold Easter as of first importance, while not losing sight of the fact that Easter did not happen in a vacuum.

Everything in Jesus’ ministry contributed to the significance of what happened from that Thursday night to Sunday morning. And the second source that gave

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me the framework for this assertion was the words of the hymn I started with. The chorus explains the connections we need to make in a nutshell.

Living He loved me, dying He saved me, Buried He carried my sins far away.
Rising He justified, freely forever, One day He's coming, Oh glorious day.

As we look at each part of the chorus and the implications of them mentioned in the verses of the hymn, I think we will see that J Wilbur Chapman has made Easter of 'first importance' but has given Jesus' life and subsequent ascension and second coming their proper place in what constitutes the whole Christian gospel of salvation.

WEEK 2: LIFE

Connections in the Bible takes history back to creation and takes us beyond this world into eternity. Proceeding from that revelation have been the writings of the Patristic Fathers, the various records of the Roman church, then the writings of the Reformers and those who follow them in the subsequent centuries. And today, quite literally, no one could keep up with all the books and other media that are produced about Christianity. That is why I am so grateful for the opportunity to prepare these talks because I'm able to concentrate solely on the resources that help the theme to develop along Biblical lines. That in turn has helped me to learn more about what is actually in God's word and see the overall picture of God's dealings with us; and I believe that everything we need to know about that has been revealed in the Bible. We saw at Christmas how the contents of the Old Testament are inextricably linked to the New Testament on which our faith is based. That is because, as I said last week, the Bible is one continuous story and every part of it is connected to all the others in some form or other. Those connections can be illustrated by expanding the 5-part drama I mentioned last week.

Creation to Moses **The beginning of the world** leading to the revelation of the rupture in God-humanity relations because of sin. God and the Patriarchs. Covenants with Noah and Abraham

Israel **From Moses to Malachi.** The story of the chosen people from whom the Messiah would be born. The Law at Sinai laying the foundation of what God expected of His people and what would serve to re-establish God's relationship with humanity. Kings and prophets. Exile & restoration. Prophecy of John the Baptist.

Covenants with Moses and David

John 4:22 ...for salvation is from the Jews.....

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Ministry of Jesus **The Christ event** - birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension

Church **From Pentecost to the end of the world.** The gathering in of Kingdom people based on the gospel of Jesus Christ

Eschaton **From the end of the world into eternity** when the Bible story would reach its fulfilment. A re-creation of heaven and earth and a redeemed people reunited with their God through Christ.

This outline shows how the Christ event is indeed central to God's dealings with us. Everything before Christ's coming was a preparation for that event. Everything after it is a consequence of it. And because Jesus was on earth for only 33 years in comparison to the unknown number of millennia before it and the 2 millennia and counting after it, we cannot separate His existence with us into separate compartments. Every single mention of who Jesus was, what He said and did is connected to what happened on that Easter weekend which I've put into the context of His whole life cycle. Obviously, when the Spirit leads us, our personal devotional times may involve concentrating on one aspect of Easter or another. Hopefully, this will be enhanced for you by also being able to see it within the context of the whole ministry of Jesus.

As I said last week, to concentrate solely on any one aspect of Jesus' experiences at Easter, to some extent, diminishes the importance of one or other of them. For me, the hymn demonstrates that Jesus' life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and praise are interdependent and interlocking segments: You cannot separate one part of the ministry of Jesus from the other. None can exist separately and the hymn expresses this in such a simple, yet profound, way.

One day when heaven was filled with his praises,
One day when sin was as black as could be,
Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin— Dwelt amongst men, my example is he!

Living, he loved me; dying, he saved me; Buried, he carried my sins far away;
Rising, he justified freely, for ever: One day he's coming—O, glorious day!

One day they led him up Calvary's mountain, One day they nailed him to die on the tree;

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Suffering anguish, despised and rejected: Bearing our sins, my Redeemer is he!

One day they left him alone in the garden, One day he rested, from suffering free;
Angels came down o'er his tomb to keep vigil; Hope of the hopeless, my Saviour is he!

One day the grave could conceal him no longer, One day the stone rolled away from the door;
Then he arose, over death he had conquered; Now is ascended, my Lord evermore!

One day the trumpet will sound for his coming, One day the skies with his glories will shine;
Wonderful day, my beloved ones bringing; Glorious Saviour, this Jesus is mine!

Look at the simple logic of that 27 word chorus. You can't have life without birth. You can't have a death without a prior life. Burial, in Jesus' time was the normal consequence of a death. Death has to precede a resurrection. And no-one can come back unless they've already gone elsewhere as a result of being alive. Then each verse gives a point about each aspect of Jesus' ministry. This talk takes the first statement in the chorus with the implication of it mentioned in the first verse. Living He loved me.... Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin. Dwelt among men, my example is He.

I said at Christmas that if Jesus had not been conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, our salvation would have become impossible to achieve. Going on from there, we can state categorically that if Jesus had not maintained His sinless perfection for the whole of His life, our salvation would have been impossible to achieve. But if Jesus is our example for living as God intended us to live, why could we not be saved just by believing that and trying to emulate Him? The simple answer is that God had already given His people a pattern for living a holy life at Sinai and no one had been able to live it. So, the example of Jesus' life had to signify more than just how to live the way God intended us to. What more can be said then about Jesus being an example? Let me give you the negative answer first. If Jesus had not lived, Herbert Lockyer in a Christmas sermon cited these consequences. We would be left with:

- God without honour
- Revelation without climax

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- Prophecy without fulfilment
- Humanity without an ideal
- Men without a Saviour
- Eternity without a hope
- World without a song

Now, that is thinking the unthinkable. I don't know how you would react to this situation, but for me it sums up the emptiness and meaninglessness of human existence. In very general terms, by living Jesus reversed these negatives into giving people a vision of the whole meaning and purpose of life in spite of all its "dangers, toils and snares." Jesus gave us the primary of example of salvation starting with honouring God.

We know the extent to which God is dishonoured in our world today. And, if Jesus had not lived, would we know any different? Our concept of God would be a choice between the monotheism of the Jews and Islam, the worship of the many gods, i.e. the polytheism of other religions and modern gods like self, materialism, wealth, power, fame. On top of these we could add ancestor worship, animism, worship of things in the natural world. Or we could just join the atheists and humanists and deny the existence of any deity. You've got to admit that compared to Christianity, none of these alternatives are very appealing. Even by Jesus' time, the concept of the God of Judaism had been perverted and distorted by man-made laws. We see in Islam an example of what happens when men's views of God go unchecked. Uncertainty and often real fear is always attached to the worship of all other people and objects; and God deniers leave us all the the whims of blind chance, whether it is called fate or karma.

Think too of the barbarity of persecutions and religious wars that have taken place throughout history in the name of God. In some ways it's no wonder people don't want to know God. It is only as you see the horrifying portrayal of God in these alternatives, that you can see the revolutionary difference the life of Jesus has made to our knowledge and image of Him. The fact of the matter is that without the example of Jesus' life, spiritually we would be like those James describes as

But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. Such a person is double- minded and unstable in all they do
James 1:6-8

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The example of Jesus' life swept all these religious variants away by revealing to us the true Person and nature of God. By living Jesus, in essence, announced that people needed to throw out whatever images of God they held and look to Him to see God as He really is. Jesus life and all that it entailed is the climax of that revelation as the writer to the Hebrews tells us.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Hebrews 1:1-3

Because Jesus lived we now have the ability to dismiss any human view of God that is not consistent with what Jesus said about His Person and character. Jesus presented to us a God who knows us and wants to be known by us. He desires this to the extent that He wants us to have a personal relationship with Him. Jesus was the example of a God who, for the first time, could be seen by everyone as accessible. A God who cared about individuals. Would we ever be able to pray "Our Father, who art in heaven" if Jesus had not lived? Revealing God as a divine Father - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, yet only a prayer to a Father away, ultimately leaves humanity without an excuse for misrepresenting God and using His Name to justify their own agendas.

Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? Exodus 15:11

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

Deuteronomy 10:17

Any time God's Name is taken in vain, it is dishonoured. Any concept of God not consistent with how Jesus portrayed Him means that any worship of Him, according to human images of Him, is actually worship of a false god. Why did Jesus have to live to tell us this? We could ask why God didn't just give John the Baptist the job of teaching what we now call 'the Lord's Prayer? Well, in the past the prophets had never been heeded and prophecy up to the time of Jesus was restricted to one nation in one geographical locality. And prophetic words could be deliberately misinterpreted or ignored. As the parable of the vineyard shows, God had given people many opportunities to accept the revelations He had given them. Now, quite categorically, the sending of "His only begotten Son" into the world - the only one qualified to

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demonstrate the Fatherhood of God - was the final attempt to give the world the truest and most definitive revelation we will ever have of Him.

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. John 14:8-9

We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 1 John 5:20

Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.” John 13:20

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. John 17:20-21

Jesus’ life therefore gave us the example of what God is really like and beyond that, what we can be if we choose to follow His example. But it is not just what Jesus said about God, He gave us the example of how God wants to deal with what He revealed. Two verses quoted last week take us to that.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— Ephesians 2:8

He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time 2 Timothy 1:9

Jesus did not just reveal the Person of God: He was the living example of the grace and mercy of the God who wants to save us from a God-forsaken eternity. John tells us:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth..... Out of his fullness we have all received

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grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known

John 1:14-18

Grace and truth were two hallmarks of Jesus' life and were key principles how the example of Jesus' life would illustrate God's true nature. Taking truth first, we have Jesus' own words that He is Truth personified. That means that any revelation of God He gives is absolute truth. Every time Jesus emphasised His statement with the words 'very truly' He was making clear that no one could know God apart from Him. That is why Paul can also assert that truth is integral to our salvation.

and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first-fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth
2 Thessalonians 2:10 & 13

We can now go even further and state that Jesus gave us the example of grace and truth in action. Luke, with the benefit of hindsight, saw that Jesus' own words were the fulfilment of the prophecy given in Isaiah 61:1, for Jesus said that **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing** (Luke 4:21 NIV)

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour.

Isaiah 61:1-3 / Luke 4:15:21

In a very tangible way, Jesus' life was the Messianic promises being seen to be fulfilled. This is just one example, where the miracle of the healing of the blind man led to the removal of spiritual blindness as well. When seeing was, quite literally, believing.

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Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshipped him. John 9:35-38

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:18

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. James 2:17-18

Jesus’ life is the supreme example of how His deeds were the outworking of His absolute faith in the wisdom of His Father’s methods for saving humanity. And when John the Baptist wanted the reassurance that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus pointed to what what was being seen to be done.

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Matthew 11:2-5

It was grace that had given sight to the blind and helped the lame to walk. It was grace that enabled the demon possessed to be freed of their affliction demonstrating the power and might of God over Satan and evil. Feeding the five thousand illustrated the grace of God the Provider of whom Paul was later to say

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 2 Corinthians 9:10

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus Philippians 4:19

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Paul's words also point us to the fact that grace was not just exercised for the physical well-being of people in need. Especially in terms of righteousness, this grace was extended to the outcasts and marginalised in Jesus' society. According to Jewish legalism they were unrighteous, therefore, spiritually excluded from God's grace and favour. Jesus' compassion for the 'sheep without a shepherd' was the example they needed to be assured that they too could be included in the spiritual kingdom Jesus proclaimed. The first tangible example of this was the raising of three people from the dead. Grace was showing that life after death was not just a vague hope or possibility, but could be guaranteed in this life through believing in Him. This was the example of the eschatological hopes of the Jews and now the belief of every Christian.

Beyond even this, we can point to the example of love which motivated Jesus earthly ministry. It is such a pity that the world's concept of love has robbed it of its divine quality which embraces grace and truth. Sadly, today, love often is used as justification for anti-God practices and the love of God is taken to mean that people can do whatever they like and God will forgive them in the end. I find it ironic that the very people who believe this also demand to know why God is letting groups like Islamic State or other evildoers get away with it all the harm they do.

Without Jesus life, however, we would never know the extent and nature of God's love for us. Jesus was the example to those who in the future would be prepared to suffer for His sake because Jesus was prepared to die for God's cause: He was not prepared to kill for it or perpetrate any other form of harm to further His cause. Jesus was the supreme example of love that is prepared to suffer on behalf of those who are loved. Love is self-sacrifice on behalf of those who don't even merit being loved. When Jesus said to love your enemies He was, in a sense, predicting what He Himself was prepared to do. For as Paul tells us, it was while we were enemies of God, Jesus died for us. Jesus was the example of real love which entailed the sacrifice of all self-interest in order to save others from a fate worse than death.

**He left His Father's throne above, so free, so infinite, His grace
Emptied Himself of all but love and bled for Adam's helpless race.**

**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to
give his life as a ransom for many
Matthew 20:28**

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For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.....

1 Timothy 2:5-6

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

John 15:13-14

If the implications of all that Jesus was and what He said and did are not true then the Easter events are pointless. All we would have is the teaching of a Man about God and ethical and moral principles that lead to living a good and upright life. And that is how many people view Jesus today. Because they are true, however, Jesus' life is the illustration of the close relationship to God that is achievable by a human being. That God desires this and has provided the means by which it can be achieved by every man, woman and child in the world, is a picture of divine love. Jesus' life was the example of what we can be and the eternal blessings that can be ours because of the promises He made about the kingdom of God.

But the means by which that was to be achieved required the death of Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate act of the divine grace, truth and love that would enable God to grant salvation with all its blessings to a world that did not deserve it. Why did Jesus have to die? Why was the example of His life not enough to save us? The answer to that takes us straight to the actual Easter events. He knew, as no one else could, that humanity's best efforts could never achieve God's standard of righteousness. Had He remained just an example, humanity would have had an ideal, but no way to achieve it. In other words, if Jesus had not fulfilled all righteousness in His life, we could not be clothed with His righteousness, which is the gift we receive when we are justified. I don't have the time to go into all the ways Paul also has much to say about the meaning of Christ's life, but these texts give us an indication of how important Jesus' life was for the future character and ethos of the Christian faith. And a life worthy of the calling we have received is by taking the life of Jesus as a model of our own.

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Romans 5:10 NIV)

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. (2 Corinthians 4:10 NIV)

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I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 NIV)

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received (Ephesians 4:1 NIV)

so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, (Colossians 1:10 NIV)

As we'll see next week, Jesus' life was what was needed to make His sacrifice at Calvary so effective for our salvation.

WEEK 3: DEATH

DYING HE SAVED ME.....Bearing our sins, my Redeemer is He

Wide, wide as the ocean. High as the heavens above. Deep, deep as the deepest sea is.....The theology of the cross. Since the great analytical mind of the apostle Paul applied itself to this topic, theologians down through the centuries have discussed, debated and often disputed the importance and significance of the meaning of the cross. To a very large extent, evangelical Christians have opted to avoid this theoretical and objective approach to Jesus' death and concentrate on its personal application. The words of this hymn sum up our approach. And this is reflected in many of our other hymns.

"It was for me He hung and suffered there"

"When I survey the wondrous cross"

"I will cling to the old rugged cross"

He lived and died to buy my pardon"

Beneath the cross of Jesus, I fain would take my stand.....I take, O cross thy shadow for my abiding place.

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood

Died He for me who caused His pain.

For me, who Him, to death pursued.

Amazing love, how can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me.

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You could probably add many more examples and, don't get me wrong, it is absolutely essential that this should be our personal testimony. But the Easter event is first and foremost the implementation of a divine plan. Like the birth of Jesus, His death on the cross is a critical milestone in God's overall plan of salvation. Yet, without detracting in any way from it, the cross is still a stage in that process. This is the initial stage of what Paul regards as 'of first importance.'

By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:2-4

Possibly the reason that we would all agree with Paul, is because we are the beneficiaries of it. The element of salvation in "Dying He saved me....Bearing our sins, my Redeemer is He" is now an ingrained part of our faith. What lies behind that statement, however, are theological issues which we need to be reminded of. The basic questions behind it is why did we need to be saved in the first place and what did Jesus' death save us from. And that starts, not with us, but with God. I go back to Martyn Lloyd-Jones statement

"The Bible is God's book, it is a revelation of God, and our thinking must always start with God."

Easter is the outworking of a divine transaction planned before the foundation of the world. Divine foresight prepared for the day when humanity managed to get itself into a tragic crisis it couldn't get out of by itself. Tragic because it put humanity at odds with its Maker. That is why humanity needs to be saved. It needs to be saved from the consequences of its own sinful actions.

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Romans 5:10

We probably never think that our sin was a bigger problem for God than it is for us. We simply have no ability to estimate the intensity of God's

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hatred for sin and the degree to which it makes us enemies of God, for the essence of sin is hostility to God. We get glimpses of God's anger at sin in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of the earth by flood and God's threat to destroy the people He had just chosen as His own and start all over again with Moses. There is a great deal of theological wrangling over what is meant by God's wrath. An American publisher asked Stuart Townsend to change the words of his hymn from "On the cross where Jesus died the wrath of God was satisfied" to "On the cross where Jesus died, the love of God was magnified." He refused to do so and the song was left out of the hymnbook. This compounds the divine dilemma, for while hating the sin, God loves the sinner. Yet hatred of sin and love for humanity are, in human terms, mutually exclusive. How can the two be reconciled in a way that God's wrath against sin is averted through an acceptable atonement for it, thereby allowing God's love to manifest itself for humanity. Without divine intervention this simply would have been impossible.

Just think of the billions in the world today who have no concept of sin or deny it exists. That is why human beings find it virtually impossible to bring about reconciliation even within communities, never mind nations. That situation can be traced back to the fact that every person on earth is an enemy of God and therefore at enmity with each other. To bring about the reconciliation Paul speaks of required a divine solution to that divine dilemma. We needed to be saved: we had incurred the penalty God had ordained for sinners. Therefore, the answer to the second question - What had we to be saved from? - was suffering that penalty. The penalty was death and as Jesus had warned His listeners, this was not just about physical death. Only God knows the true extent of what will befall a sinner after death. All we can say is, that if it took a plan of salvation which involved the death of Jesus to save us from it, then it must be something that God's Person and character would have found intolerable. In the death of His only begotten Son, God went to the extent of His almighty power to save us from that fate. That is because human death is not simply a natural occurrence; a consequence of our physical bodies losing their ability to function. Death in the Bible is penal in nature. Death is punishment for sin and retribution for the

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disobedience which amounted to rebellion against God in the Garden of Eden.

But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Luke 12:5

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned — Romans 5:12

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:22

Death not only affects our physical bodies: it affects our immortal souls. God never wanted humanity to go through death. That's why the Tree of Life was in Eden and will be a prominent feature of the New Jerusalem. Whether we are conscious of it or not, human fear of death probably stems from the legacy of punishment Adam's sin inflicted upon us. That is why from the beginning of time every society has had rituals and beliefs associated with death. All societies also hold a concept of life after death. The various burial rituals in ancient and primitive societies sent their dead into the afterlife with what was thought they would need to sustain them there. Sometimes that even included their nearest and dearest!! Those practices are not part of our culture, but in spite of the unbelief in the Christian view of the afterlife and the view that death is the end, there is a lingering belief that there is something beyond death. Think of seances and interest in the occult, the media programmes like 'The Walking Dead' (which I've never watched, I hasten to add), the ones where people search for ghosts and other programmes or films in the 'zombie' genre. There are also non-Christians, as well as Christians, who refuse to be cremated because they believe they need their body in whatever follows death.

Jesus' death alters our perceptions of what death entails, but as a closer examination of it shows, His death alone does not remove uncertainty about the afterlife. The specific purpose of Jesus' death was to resolve the problem that sin had caused for God's original plans for humanity.

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There are some like Heinrich Heine who thought the problem could be solved simply by God forgiving everyone. He said, "God will forgive me. It's His job." But God could not be true to His holy, righteous and just nature if He turned a blind eye to the inherited evil in human nature. Nor could He ever countenance the admission of any form of sin to have an eternal existence in His dwelling place. The reason why Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden was so that sinful humanity would not eat of the Tree of Life which would give them immortality and so perpetuate evil for all eternity.

If God was to forgive the sin a means had to be conceived that would deal with the problem of sin and, at the same time, maintain the integrity of the Godhead and enable the progress of God's plans for a redeemed humanity. How this was to be achieved involved the death of Jesus on the cross. This was the responsibility Jesus was carrying when He sacrificed His life. It is part of how Jesus was bringing glory to God in His willingness to die. In the first place, God's reputation as Saviour of His people was at stake.

"The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be my God, the Rock, my Saviour! 2 Samuel 22:47 & Psalm 18:46

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long Psalms 25:5

**I, even I, am Jehovah; and besides me there is no saviour
Isaiah 43:11**

and thou shalt know that I, Jehovah, am thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob Isaiah 60:16

How would we know that God was our Saviour? The answer is given in Jeremiah and that hope persisted until the coming of Jesus who was the fulfilment of that prophecy. By this stage, also at stake, was the veracity of the angel's message that Jesus would save people from their sins.

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what

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is just and right in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Saviour. Jeremiah 23:5-6

But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me Micah 7:7

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21

To fulfil those prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments Jesus had to shoulder an enormous responsibility. Sometimes we are so intent in what His death on the cross did for us, that we forget His obligation to God. It is only as we see the cross in the light of this colossal task which is beyond any human ability, that we realise that the words ‘dying He saved me’ is but the tip of a gigantic spiritual iceberg.

So, how did Jesus’ death on the cross save sinners and uphold the integrity of the nature and character of God? Paul’s statement - the wages of sin is death, emphasises the point made earlier that death in the Biblical sense is punishment. For salvation to happen, the price for sin had to be paid. Up to the time of Jesus’ death, the Old Testament Day of Atonement when sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins was made on behalf of both priests and people, was the means by which God overlooked the sins of His people. The key element of those rituals ordained by God was that blood had to be shed. And it had to be the blood of a perfect animal. It is the writer to the Hebrews who explained the significance of this for us.

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! Hebrews 9:13-14

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In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:22

What God had ordained at Sinai for the forgiveness of sins, however, was a temporary solution dealing with the sin of one nation. If God wanted to grant salvation to all humanity then, now and into the future, a more permanent and universal method had to be instituted which would supersede what had previously been practiced. That is where Jesus' sinless conception, birth and life are of crucial importance, and this makes sense of His statement that He had not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it. The sinless perfection of Jesus' humanity meant He fulfilled every part of the law given at Sinai, and thus was able to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice, effective for the cleansing the sin of everyone who would believe He died to save them from the punishment ordained for that sin. In this way Jesus was our substitute. He willingly accepted the punishment of death in our place.

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.
(Hebrews 2:9 NIV)

We may see that substitution only in the physical agonies He suffered from the moment of His arrest to His final breath on the cross. Again, bearing in mind what has already been said about the Biblical view of death, we come to the realisation that Jesus suffered the penalty of spiritual death as well. His cry "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" was the cry of anguish, suffering and pain we would have experienced throughout eternity. God forsaken is probably the best definition of hell that there is, and in substituting Himself in our place, Jesus literally saved us from a fate worse than mere physical death.

But equally, if not more important, was the fact that He had offered a sacrifice acceptable to God. A Man was suffering the penalty of man's sin. Because a Man had fulfilled the law perfectly: because the blood of that Man had been shed in an act of sacrifice for the sins of humanity, God's wrath against sin and His condition for the setting aside of that

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wrath were satisfied. That is what theologians call propitiation. At the same time the integrity of the Godhead was preserved, because the removal of the curse of Adam's sin enabled God, in perfect justice, to forgive our sin. God's mercy, justice and love remained intact and perfect. John Stott puts this so clearly.

“At the cross, in holy love (God) through Christ paid the full penalty of our disobedience himself. He bore the judgement we deserve in order to bring us the forgiveness we do not deserve. On the cross divine mercy and justice were equally expressed and eternally reconciled. God's holy love was ‘satisfied.’”

Stott identifies here, the greatest mystery of the cross in that God the Father, in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ died on that cross. We cannot explain that rationally. We just know that with God all things are possible. That is Paul's assertion when he wrote:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

As David had said before. There are things which we cannot explain, but we believe them. With the writer to the Hebrews, we affirm.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for. Hebrews 11:1-2

We may not be able to see with our physical eyes or the eyes of our understanding, but our faith can accept that God, in Christ, on a cross was our substitute, suffering the penalty of sin in our stead. The tangible and verifiable death of Jesus on the cross, which everyone could witness, was the manifestation of the very same God who had declared Himself the Saviour of humanity in the Old Testament. That is why, our response can only be that “Love amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life my all.”

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Jesus' death on the cross, therefore, had not one, but two very specific objectives i.e. saving us from the penalty of our sin and satisfying the conditions that would enable God to forgive those sins and remove the penalty from us. It is for that reason that the hymn can claim that Jesus is our Redeemer. Our personal testimony to that effect, however, often obscures just how much the death of Jesus - the only begotten Son - cost God - achieved for us. Grace is often expressed as 'God's riches at Christ's expense.' These are just some of the verses that remind us of the price of our redemption.

just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many Matthew 20:28

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. 1 Timothy 2:5-6

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance —now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. Hebrews 9:15

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. Galatians 3:23

In the first place, a ransom had to be paid and Jesus stated He was prepared to be that ransom. Some have suggested Jesus' death was the ransom paid to the devil because as Paul tells Timothy, people need to "escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:26 NIV) But God does not owe anything to the devil. The ransom, according to the writer of the Hebrews freed people from the bondage of sins committed under Old Testament law. Paul expresses the same thought of captivity under the law in Galatians. In light of these statements, the ransom of Himself which Jesus paid was to God so that people could be freed from the old covenant law and be saved through faith in the new covenant bought with His blood.

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But the ransom was not just to free us from the demands of the law. The ransom was paid to free us from the curse of the law for Moses made it clear that disobedience to the law incurred a curse. And it is clear from these other texts that it was the removal of the curse of the law that enabled our redemption.

**See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse — the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known
Deuteronomy 11:26-28**

**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”
Galatians 3:13**

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 1 Peter 1:18-19

**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace
Ephesians 1:7**

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption Hebrews 9:12

From what has been said, it becomes obvious that there is a great deal more to the importance and significance of the cross than the benefits we get personally from Jesus’ death. There is a mystery to it beyond our comprehension. The Persons of God the Father and God the Son and their roles in removing the primary obstacle to humanity’s salvation are so interlocked, that only faith in the truth of God’s substitution for us in the Person of His Son, can give us the assurance that Christ’s sacrifice satisfied a holy God and gained for us forgiveness of sins. Without that, humanity faced after physical death, an eternal spiritual death devoid of every blessing salvation offers us. Jesus’ death on the cross gave the world a Redeemer. The price was paid, but if our

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knowledge of Jesus ended with His death, we would never know if that price was enough.

It is the fact that there is more to salvation than the forgiveness of sins, that Paul says that Jesus' burial and resurrection are also of 'first importance', for we are not just saved from something; we are also saved for something. While we must never underestimate the vital importance and significance of what Christ achieved on the cross, its achievement does not stop there. Like Jesus' life, it was an essential step to take us forward into a fuller revelation of God's plan for our salvation.

WEEK 3: BURIAL

Buried He carried my sins far away.....Hope of the hopeless, my Saviour is He.

This line in the chorus is a puzzlement! I have no idea of what J Wilbur Chapman had in mind when he wrote this line at the end of the 19th century. But it seems reasonable to suggest that as Christ bore our sin on the cross, so He took it with Him to the grave. Chapman was a pastor, evangelist and revivalist and it is obvious as the hymn and chorus progress, that he has the whole concept of salvation in mind. What does give us a clue are the names He ascribes to Jesus in each verse. Jesus' life starts off with being our Example. On the cross He is Redeemer because He paid the price for our forgiveness of sin. Now at burial, He becomes the Saviour because the sins have been removed from us. Normally, little is said about Jesus' burial, more often than not, because we do not know what went on during the time Jesus lay in the tomb. While we still have no details of that and, while we do not know what Chapman had in mind when he wrote about Jesus' burial, Paul listed it as being of 'first importance'. So, a perfectly valid question is why did Paul think this way?

It may come as a surprise to you, but Jesus' burial, in itself, can be regarded as a miracle. Victims of crucifixion sometimes took days to die and it was Roman practice to leave the bodies on the cross until they rotted as a deterrent to others. Carrion birds would peck at the bodies and after a time they would be taken down, dumped on a refuse heap, where dogs or wild animals would leave nothing for burial. That sounds extremely gruesome, but that was how things happened then. That is what would have happened to Jesus' body if the Romans had not had respect for ancient religions and their

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traditions. Because of that, the Jews were given certain concessions and it was a legal requirement for their religion that a dead body could not be left exposed overnight and that burial had to take place. Josephus, the Jewish historian, writing later in the century, described how the Jews regarded this law as so important that even the bodies of crucified criminals would be taken down and disposed of before sunset. The timing of Jesus' death at Passover, rather than any other time of the year, was significant in that Jews requested that the bodies of all those crucified were taken down because the Passover Sabbath was particularly sacred to them. It is also significant that Jesus died very quickly, hence Pilate's surprise.

Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

John 19:31-34

Breaking the legs hastened death but did not kill outright. Usually the victims were speared in the heart to make sure they were dead. After confirmation of death, soldiers would have taken the bodies down and buried them in a communal pit, because the concessions did not extend to allowing the families of victims to bury their dead. So, Joseph of Arimathea becomes an often overlooked, but a very conspicuous figure in what happened to Jesus' body. It is significant that all four evangelists specifically mention Joseph and, once again, we see God's forward planning. He had the right man, in the right place, at the right time.

As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away Matthew 27:57-60

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead.

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Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mark 15:43-46

Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. Luke 23:50-53

After all this, Joseph of Arimathea (he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, because he was intimidated by the Jews) petitioned Pilate to take the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission. So Joseph came and took the body. Nicodemus, who had first come to Jesus at night, came now in broad daylight carrying a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. They took Jesus' body and, following the Jewish burial custom, wrapped it in linen with the spices. There was a garden near the place he was crucified, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been placed. John 19:38-41 The Message

From these accounts, we learn that Joseph, from the Judean town of Arimathea, was a rich man, who was also a member of the Sanhedrin. As such, he would have been fully aware of the uncleanness associated with contact with a dead body, as well as being associated with the curse attached to those who had been crucified. Can you imagine the personal sacrifice Joseph made in order to set aside these deep seated and rigorously observed articles of the law? Can you imagine the courage it must have taken to approach Pilate with this request? Strictly speaking, as he had no connection to the family, he had no right to ask for Jesus' body. He had no idea how Pilate would receive him, especially after the Sanhedrin refused to let him release Jesus and then blackmailed him into crucifying Him. Then, can you imagine how this would have been received by other members of the Sanhedrin when they found out about it? According to 'The Message' version, John tells us that he and Nicodemus carried out their task in "broad daylight." The man who had visited Jesus by night, reversed that by his public identification with the burial of Jesus. While Jews did not embalm

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bodies, the amount of spices etc carried by these men denote the honour they were paying Jesus.

Just from these customs of the times you can see just how many obstacles there were to Jesus being given a respectable burial. Then, contrast the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus with the actions of the disciples, apart from John, who fled. Here were two men, who had nothing to gain and everything to lose, doing something that, because it was not typical, would have attracted much attention. More significantly, by their actions, they gave testimony that Jesus was indeed dead. Pilate was so surprised that Jesus was already dead that he too wanted confirmation. This quick death also gave credence to Jesus own words that He was in control of giving up His life and that Pilate would have had no power over Him unless it had been granted to him by God. So, all things considered, there is no way that two such prominent men would have risked their reputations by pretending to bury a Man who was not dead. And given that two witnesses were all that it took to verify a matter in Jewish law, here we have two of the most highly placed men in Jewish society testifying that Jesus was really dead. When we are also told that the Romans put a seal on the tomb and the Jews asked Pilate to put guards on it as well, the idea that such a seriously injured Man could revive unaided in the tomb, move the stone and overcome the guards is ludicrous.

Jesus' burial can also be considered a miracle because it was the fulfilment of prophecy given centuries before. Again, bearing in mind that their Messiah should die on a cross was inconceivable to the Jews, the prophecies in their own Scriptures were a challenge to all they believed, hence Thomas' scepticism.

My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbours stay far away. Psalm 38:11

All his acquaintance and the women that followed him from Galilee stood afar off. Luke 23:49

He kept all his bones: not one of them is broken Psalm 34:20

The scripture should be fulfilled. A bone of Him shall not be broken. John 19:36

They pierced my hand and my feet Psalm 22:16

They shall look on me whom they have pierced Zechariah 12:10

One of the soldiers pierced his side John 19:34

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Thomas said Except I see the print of the nails in his hands....I will not believe

He made his grave...with the rich in his death Isaiah 53:9

There came a RICH man of Arimathea, named Joseph.....Matthew 27:57

All four evangelists make a point of the fact that Jesus was buried. Theologically this is considered to emphasise the fact that Jesus actually died. While this is a valid interpretation, from what has been mentioned, it can be also be seen that Jesus' burial was unusual given all the circumstances of it. It, therefore must have significance taking salvation a further step towards its ultimate goal. As I said, I do not know what the words 'Buried He carried my sins far away' conveyed to Chapman when he wrote them. All I can do is refer to Biblical texts which might help us to understand why the the four evangelists and Paul make a point of mentioning Jesus' burial.

The one fact that is consistent throughout the whole Bible is that death is not the end. There is an afterlife and people are conscious they are in whatever that place may be. There is also the concept that this location is under the earth. Sheol is the most widely used term for it in the Old Testament. Hades is used more frequently in the New Testament and other words for it include the pit, the abyss, the grave, the tomb and hell. Apart from those certainties, we are given only glimpses of what happens there. Whatever concept of the afterlife we look at, there is a genuine fear of remaining in that location. Old Testament writers, especially David, associate that domain with horror and despair. The graphic descriptions of Revelation show this had not diminished in New Testament times.

You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit. Psalms 30:3

But you, God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of decay; the bloodthirsty and deceitful will not live out half their days. Psalms 55:23

But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit. Isaiah 14:15

When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. Revelation 9:2

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Sheol is the most common term for the afterlife entered after burial and it is regarded as the destiny of every human being. In this respect, like every other human being, Jesus' burial was the prelude to His entry into this unknown and was thus the last vestige of His human existence. Jesus' burial, to those who recorded this for us, gives testimony to Him fully completing the human lifecycle from cradle to grave and enduring the punishment associated with death, burial and experience of the afterlife.

From texts in both the Old and New Testaments, we can discern three things about the nature of this period after death and during burial. To Jews, Sheol was the place of punishment, but they also had the concept of the righteous dead being "gathered to Abraham's bosom." That is is the picture Jesus paints for us in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. But in order to depict those two states of being, some form of judgement had to take place. The writer to the Hebrews, presumably a Jew writing to Jews, states plainly **"Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...." Hebrews 9:27.**

What he is expressing fits in with the New Testament concept of Hades, which is depicted as a place where the dead wait for judgement. Jesus criticised the fact that those in Capernaum who had witnessed the miracles and heard the gospel from His lips, yet had rejected it, would be judged accordingly. The reference to judgement in Revelation is unmistakable,

The rich man also died and was buried. In hell where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus by his side.

And you Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.....But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgement than for you.

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Revelation 20:13

Now think of both of those concepts for a moment. Jesus entered this sphere of being bearing the sins of the whole world, past, present and future. In other words, had He not taken that sin upon Himself, we would be in the position of the rich man, for Paul states we were dead in trespasses and sins.

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**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,
Ephesians 2:1**

**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
(2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV)**

Jesus thus entered the afterlife having been made sin for us and accepting the penalty for it ordained by God; but at the same time, He subjected Himself to judgement on His sinless life. This again is one of those mysteries we simply have to accept by faith. Jesus, at one and the same time was sin and sinless. In this, Jesus suffered our punishment and endured waiting for the judgement of God on His human existence, which had led to His death on the cross.

(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) Ephesians 4:9-10

It was thus God’s verdict which would determine whether or not Christ’s sacrificial death would enable Him to allow our sins to be carried away. With the benefit of hindsight we know what God’s verdict was. But there was also much more at stake for a third concept of Sheol/Hades was that it was the realm of Satan and all the demonic forces of evil. Those who entered the afterlife were thus captives of Satan and unless that hold could be broken, our fate would be the same as that of the rich man in the parable. I have already quoted Jesus’ own testimony that unrepentant sinners faced an eternity of separation from God and under the power of evil without any hope of deliverance.

But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Luke 12:5

It is the parable of the rich man, too, that shows his utter hopelessness because of the great chasm that existed between his location and that of Lazarus. When Jesus descended into the ‘lower earthly regions, He literally was the “hope of the hopeless.” The dejection of the Emmaus Road disciples was the expression of hopes which they believed had come to nothing.

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but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place Luke 24:21

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, 1 Timothy 1:1

When Paul called Jesus “our hope”, he was referring to our hope of eternal life through faith in Him. But if the hopes of redemption that Jesus had proclaimed throughout His earthly ministry had been doomed as the result of God not judging His death an acceptable sacrifice for sin, then all other hopes centred on Jesus would have been without foundation. However, by accepting burial, which was tantamount to experiencing those features of the afterlife we will all pass through, Jesus confronted the ultimate destroyer of the hope of eternal life in the presence of God and Christ.

They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer Revelation 9:11

When we sing “He arose a victor from the dark domain”, we are affirming that while in that domain, Jesus confronted Satan and wrenched from him the power over both kinds of death. This was something He had predicted when He told Peter the gates of hell would not prevail against His church i.e. Christians. There was also an implied prediction in Jesus’ reply to those who accused Him of casting out demons by Beelzebub. The ‘strong man’ refers to Satan and, by His burial, Jesus entered that strong man’s house and carried off his possessions - in other words, us. Scholars see Jesus’ words as stating His intention to drive Satan out of people’s lives and to destroy his sovereignty over them in this life and the next. When His death was imminent, Jesus made it clear that this confrontation with the “prince of this world” was also imminent. Then, Paul, at his trial before King Agrippa testified that Jesus had told him:

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it Matthew 16:18

“Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house Matthew 12:29

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Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out John 12:31

I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. ' Acts 26:17-18

We often see the defeat of Satan only in terms of the cross. But if Jesus' death was the end of His impact on salvation, then we have no confirmation that Satan no longer has power over our eternal destiny. There would be no gospel if the New Testament accounts ended with Jesus being buried. Jesus had already told them, albeit in a different way that death would not hold Him.

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Matthew 16:21

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Acts 2:24

Jesus had also told them in the upper room that He was heading for a meeting with "the prince of this world" and that could only have meant during and after His death.

I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me John 14:30

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.....and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned John 16:11 John 16:13

Significantly He added that Satan had no hold over Him. Church Easter banners, taken from Acts 2:24, proclaim "death could not hold Him." Unless that was true, Jesus could not have been a Saviour from all that death entailed for an unredeemed world. The hopes of His followers rested on His predictions that His death and His burial would not be the end of the story. He had said that these things MUST happen and it can be seen that, given

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the obstacles even to His burial, there was a purpose that had to be fulfilled by this ritual too.

Taking these things into consideration, we can see that Jesus' burial which meant He descended into the "lower earthly regions", was an essential part of the organisation and implementation of the complex concept that we call salvation. Unless God's judgement of Jesus' earthly ministry and death returned a favourable verdict, Jesus had no power to confront and defeat Satan. And unless Jesus succeeded in doing this, any hope we would have had in escaping an eternity spent in the domain of Satan, separated forever from God, would have been baseless.

But the good news - the gospel - is that everything Jesus had said and predicted about what would happen at His death and burial proved to be true. We will never know exactly what transpired during the time Jesus was dead and buried. But from what is written in the New Testament, we do know that a victory was won. Paul exults in this truth. John in Revelation pictures Jesus holding the keys of death and Hades, a statement to the effect that Jesus now had the power and authority over their domain. Jews believed only God had this power and authority and we can only assume that whatever took place during the time in the tomb, Jesus' time there caused an unprecedented and permanent shift in the balance of power between God and Satan as it affected humanity's eternal destiny.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 1 Corinthians 15:54-55

I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Revelation 1:18

Whatever was in Chapman's mind, the words "buried He carried my sins far away" is an important statement because it adds another dimension to an often neglected aspect of the Easter event. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that God's favourable judgement on Christ's redemptive death, enabled our sins to be removed from us. We can understand better the thinking behind 'hope of the hopeless, my Saviour is He' because, without Christ, we are, literally hopeless, as we face death and the afterlife. But because Jesus

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confronted and defeated the author of both physical and spiritual death, when He did emerge from the tomb, He did so as our Saviour.

WEEK 5: RESURRECTION

Rising He justified, freely forever..... over death He has conquered; now is ascended, my Lord evermore.

Example, Redeemer, Saviour, risen victor over death and now, ascended Lord. How this hymn has encapsulated the whole plan of salvation, step by step, with so much profound theology in such simple statements, is truly remarkable. And these lines are no exception. We might ask why Chapman has connected the resurrection back to Jesus' death & burial and then forward to His ascension? Since we don't know his mind when these lines were written, we have to turn again to Scripture for possible answers to those questions the lines raise. What is clear though, is that Chapman saw the resurrection, not as an end in itself, but as contributing to the on-going process of completing the plan of salvation. Chapman had the perception to see that the resurrection was, in one sense, a bridge between what Christ had accomplished by His birth, life, death and burial, and what the consequences of that would be both for Jesus' own status and the establishment of His church.

Over the past weeks, it can be seen that no step in the plan of salvation was 'surplus to requirements'. I mentioned before that we tend to view Easter subjectively, that is, how it affects us. But the whole Christ event from birth to ascension, which the hymn now mentions, is a divine transaction without any input from us - apart from our sin, of course, which necessitated this course of action. Again, we have to begin with God. Peter tells us that, in the final analysis, our faith and our hope are in God. The resurrection points us to God's past words and actions and then forward to His final word on the foundation on which humanity's salvation rests.

Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:21

Turning first to the past, the resurrection established the truth of God's word. To the people of the Old Testament He had promised an immortal Messiah - a Saviour who would live forever. We saw that in Isaiah's prophecy at Christmas. That is why Jews find it so difficult to believe that the Messiah died; especially on a cursed cross. Also, the Messiah was expected to be a

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human being whose person and actions would be seen by all. We have a saying “seeing is believing” and, if Jesus had not come to earth, we too would be querying whether or not the Messiah had actually been born. There had to be literal eyewitnesses to the presence of the Messiah on earth. Equally there had to be reliable witness to His resurrection. There is an apostolic and Pauline emphasis on seeing Jesus, John going even further, mentioning touching Him as well.

....of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne..... from that time on and forever. Isaiah 9:7-8

As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:20

“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen Acts 10:39-40

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? 1 Corinthians 9:1

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched —this we proclaim concerning the Word of life 1 John 1:1

God’s word was further verified by Old Testament prophecy. From, what is believed to be the very first book written in the Old Testament, to one of the last to be written, the thread of resurrection is woven into the texts. Job 19 speaks of a living Redeemer. Psalm 16 is regarded as a messianic prophecy indicating that Jesus would not experience the decomposition of His body through death and burial. Hosea 13 is a prophecy of the Messiah’s power over death and is the background to Paul’s statement of Jesus’ victory over the grave and the removal of the sting of death.

I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. Job 19:25

because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,nor will you let your faithful one see decay. Psalms 16:10

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As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness. Psalms 17:15

After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence Hosea 6:2

“I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? Hosea 13:14

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2

That verification continues into the New Testament. Bearing in mind that Jesus said He only spoke words given to Him by God, if He was not raised from the dead, He would have rendered Himself a liar. The Apostles and Paul would have had serious problems to proclaim a gospel without the resurrection, because people could point to the fact that Jesus, Himself, was lying when He predicted He would rise again on the third day, especially when He told the disciples in the upper room that He had told them these things before they happened so that they would believe He was who He said He was. It is true, Jesus had proved the dead could be raised by restoring Jarius' daughter, the widow of Nain's son and Lazarus. But this would have proved nothing if the One who had such power could not rise from the dead Himself. At the very least, we would have serious disquiet about the rest of the Bible, if God's words had not proved true by the resurrection of Jesus.

I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. John 14:29

So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. John 8:28

God's words were fulfilled in every detail. The apostles and Paul assert that God raised Jesus from the dead and if the end goal of salvation is the eternal life, then this event is the evidence of the hope and expectation which God had revealed from the time of Job. Job believed not only that his Redeemer lived, but that he would one day see Him with his own eyes.

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And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes —I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me Job 19:26-27

And if Job's assertion was to become true of all humanity, then Jesus had to break the power of death. God raising Him from the dead proved He had done so. Jesus' own words indicate that is exactly what His death and burial would achieve. NOW is an important word. It was at this moment in time that Satan's final defeat was effected. Satan has no hold over Christ. He is already condemned to his eternal fate.

NOW is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out John 12:31

I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me John 14:30

and about judgment, because the prince of this world NOW stands condemned John 16:11

That Jesus arose from the dead confirmed that He had conquered death and was a victor over evil. The victory gained while buried in the tomb made Him Lord over the realm dominated and controlled by Satan. As holder of the keys of death and Hades, He now has the power and authority to rescue those who choose to accept His death as the atonement for sin from any hold that domain had over them. Jesus, as the hymn says conquered death, but that had to be accompanied by an unequivocal judgement as to whether or not the price of redemption had been accepted by God. We saw last week that burial indicated a location in Hades where judgement took place. The resurrection was the judgement that validated and authenticated Jesus' death on the cross as the perfect atonement for sin because it met all God's standards of righteousness.

It can therefore be seen, that first and foremost, the resurrection was a product and a fulfilment of the divine prophetic past and then of the words and deeds of Christ when He walked this earth and consented to die such a horrendous death and be buried. Without all these prior conditions, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead would have been just another miracle. It is true that all the prior conditions produced a Messiah who was the Redeemer of His people through the shedding of His blood as the perfect sacrifice for sin; and the Saviour who was the hope of the hopeless who had

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given His people the hope and expectation of a blissful, eternal future spent in the presence of God, because He had defeated death and evil. In other words, through Him, God had done His part to enable people to enter into the salvation He had always intended for His human creation. But if the resurrection of Jesus was the end of God's actions, then the means of passing on that redemption⁴³ still had to be established. Jesus had fulfilled everything God had required of Him. The resurrection was God's pronouncement that He was satisfied this was so. Jesus could save, but how was humanity to avail itself of it? God's exaltation of Jesus was the final provision God made to make this possible. From that moment, salvation depended totally on how humanity reacted to what was offered to them through the merits of the risen and exalted Lord.

I cannot remember which commentator observed that in the gospel of Luke, Jesus arrives on this earth as the most vulnerable and dependent of creatures and leaves it as the exalted Lord of heaven and earth. Peter states this quite clearly in his pentecost sermon. Paul says the same thing in a different way in Philippians 2:9-11 and 1 Corinthians 1:30

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” Acts 2:36

**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father
Philippians 2:9-11**

**It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.
1 Corinthians 1:30**

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1:22-23

The resurrection established Jesus as the Messiah/Christ. His ascension established His Lordship. Because there was an interval between Jesus' resurrection and ascension, sometimes the vital connection between the two is missed. There is a school of thought that states the resurrection and ascension were the means by which God deified Jesus. - In other words, God

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conferred deity upon Jesus at that point in time. I have no hesitation in saying that that is heresy. No one looking back at Isaiah's prophecy and carefully studying all that happened at the birth of Jesus could reach such a conclusion. Jesus' own words make no sense if He was not already a Person of the Godhead. What the resurrection and ascension conferred on Jesus was Messiahship and Lordship. In practical terms this meant that all divine judgement of human existence rested on the acceptance or rejection of Jesus in the matter of their eternal fate and destiny and the way they chose to live their lives as a result of the choice they made. And it is the same choice Moses and Joshua presented to the children of Israel from the time God chose a people to be His witnesses on the earth.

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live 20 and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Deuteronomy 30:19-20

But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

Just as the Israelites were presented with the choice between Yahweh and the pagan gods of the surrounding nations, so today we are presented with the choice between God's only Son and the gods of our world. Only by acknowledgement of the Lordship of Jesus over our lives is salvation possible. Jesus words, when He was alive that no one could come to the Father except through Him, was only made possible through His resurrection and ascension as living Lord. The writer to the Hebrews and Paul confirm this in different ways, but they mean the same thing.

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6

but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. Hebrews 1:2

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For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,
1 Timothy 2:5

Scholars call the study of Jesus, Christology and many theories, like the one I mentioned earlier have emerged from those studies. A study I probably will come back to at some stage is the exploration of what is entailed in how Jesus of Nazareth becomes the Lord Jesus Christ after the resurrection and ascension. From Acts onwards, the frequent use and various combinations of these three designations combine to provide us with every aspect of the ministry of Jesus.

**He is Lord, He is Lord, He is risen from the dead and He is Lord.
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Romans 1:7

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 1 Peter 1:3

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3:15

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Colossians 2:6-7

Lord is a title which points us to the risen and exalted Son of God, now seated at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus takes us back to the name the angel gave Him at birth, indicating He would save people from their sin, and by which He was known throughout His life. Christ is the equivalent of the Hebrew Messiah and encompasses redemption, through the cross, saving through victory over death and the grave and justification through the resurrection. It is also a notable theme in Paul's letters that everything to do with salvation is 'in', 'through' or 'with' Him and always in the context of one or more uses of Jesus' name, title or function.

For Paul, the greatest thing that came "through" the Lord Jesus Christ was justification. In a sermon preached at Pisidian Antioch on one of his

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missionary journeys, Paul rehearsed the history of salvation from God's choice of His Jewish ancestors right to the time He raised Jesus from the dead, Paul made the connection, which he repeated in Romans 8:24 & 28 - an achievement that opened the eyes of Martin Luther and started the Protestant Reformation.

Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that THROUGH Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. THROUGH HIM everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a JUSTIFICATION you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. Acts 13:38-39

and all are JUSTIFIED freely by his grace THROUGH the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.....For we maintain that a person is JUSTIFIED by faith apart from the works of the law. Romans 3:24 & 28

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Romans 4:25

Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification..... Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people Romans 5:16 & 18

Justification comes to us because the resurrection was God's verdict on all that Jesus had accomplished by His earthly ministry, including His death and burial. Justification which is our legal standing before God was only possible through God's acceptance of the price Jesus paid by dying on the cross. We are not guilty of sin in God's eyes because of the redemption through the 'one righteous act' of the sinless Son of God. Since there is no human natural righteousness through adherence to the law, Jesus' sacrifice was accepted because He was the culmination of the law having perfectly fulfilled every condition in it during His lifetime. The resurrection was the judgement on that fact.

Up until this point it can be seen that all that is involved in saving humanity was a divine undertaking. In fact, we really do not come into the picture until after the ascension. The resurrection pointed to both the past and the future

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because it was both God's acceptance of all that Jesus had done to enable us to be saved and the prelude to how that was to develop in the future.

That future which involved an eternal relationship with God was based on justification, reconciliation and righteousness. Redemption leads to justification. Justification leads to reconciliation because forgiveness of sin means we are no longer enemies of God because of it. And reconciliation rests solely on the foundation of Christ's righteousness. Because we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ which was His from the moment of conception and maintained throughout His life, God can grant us an eternal future in His presence.

**But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation —
Colossians 1:22**

**Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.
Romans 5:11**

**It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.
(1 Corinthians 1:30 NIV)**

**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
2 Corinthians 5:21**

**and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.
Philippians 3:9**

How that was to become a reality for those who, by faith, accepted Jesus as Lord of their lives, had to wait until after Jesus had ascended to His former glory, although this time with an enhanced status as Saviour of the world. God had done everything through Christ to enable humanity to inherit eternal life in a recreated heaven and earth. And seeing His glory brings us to the final verse of the hymn, because one day He is coming and it will be a glorious day for those who have accepted all that He stands for in the here and now.

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It is only at this point that God focuses His attention on us? Will we be ready for that day? Oswald Chambers has said.

God is not saving the world. He has already done that. It is up to Christians to help to make men and women realise it.

Acceptance of Jesus as our Example, Redeemer, Saviour and Lord places a responsibility on us both personally and collectively as His church. I said, I think it was the first week, that we are not just saved from something, but saved for something. We are saved to “glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” And we do that by following the example of Jesus’ life through discipleship, acknowledging Him as our Redeemer through His atoning death, being grateful He has saved us from eternal damnation through His victory over Satan and evil, believing in His physical resurrection from the dead which enabled a relationship to be established with God; and finally by committing our lives to Him in acknowledgement of His Lordship through His elevation to the highest position of honour in heaven. In short, knowing Jesus as Saviour and submitting to Him as Lord, takes us into God’s plans for our world. It is in this way, too, that we prepare for His coming and become the answer to Jesus’ last prayer before His death.

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one — I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

John 17:22-24

WEEK 6: PAROUSIA

One day He’s coming, Oh glorious day.....glorious Saviour, this Jesus is mine.

This final line of the chorus and the verse of our hymn reminds us that because of what God has done in Christ to save humanity, the process of salvation is not yet complete. There is a tense of Greek verb called the perfect tense. It means that something has happened and has been completed once and for all in the past, but has continuing effect into the present and the future. That is a

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perfect (excuse the pun) explanation of why Easter is not just an occasion that comes round once a year. It is part of the continuing process of salvation that has to be worked out all year round. God, through Jesus, did not just take Him back to heaven and leave us just to believe what His earthly ministry signified for our spiritual journey through life and into the beyond. What followed resurrection and ascension was still a work of God, albeit based on the merits of the Christ event. To see how this is so, we can turn to two statements from Paul. The first is in Ephesians.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do Ephesians 2:10

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved Romans 10:9-10

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11

Even after Jesus left this earth, salvation is an ongoing work of God. Christians are God's handiwork and the way He created us in Christ Jesus was by providing the means by which we could play our part in His final phase of the plan of salvation. Our participation in God's plans only enter the picture when we avail ourselves of these means through publicly acknowledging and truly believing that Jesus is Lord. That includes believing everything that we are told in God's word about Him and what He has done for us.

It is that verbal commitment and heartfelt belief that brings us into the orbit of God's plans for this world. But, Paul's words also make make very clear that we enter that orbit through Christ, for a purpose that God had prepared in advance. Jesus' whole earthly ministry was the penultimate phase of God's plans for humanity. Christ's return mentioned in the hymn will be the ultimate consummation of all that God planned and prepared for throughout human history. Because we are living now in that penultimate

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phase, every aspect of Jesus' earthly ministry is of crucial importance because it is the foundation upon which we can become the children of God and citizens of His kingdom. These concepts are expressed in various ways in the New Testament but its writers are in complete agreement that Jesus is the chief cornerstone of the edifice God is building through Him. How we participate is included in the reference to 'good works for the goal towards which our participation in 'good works' is to be directed is to co-operate with God to become a "dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.'

**Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes'?
Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17**

**Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. ' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."
Acts 4:11-12**

**Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.
Ephesians 2:19-22**

**For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."
1 Peter 2:6**

Now becoming a building fit for God to live in is a pretty tall order. In fact, it would not only be an impossible task, but also a very stressful enterprise when we read Paul's second statement in

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Philippians that we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

.....continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose. Philippians 2:12-13

In spite of the negative connotation of these words, this is a tremendously encouraging verse. Paul is on solid Scriptural ground when he gives this command to the Philippians. In the first place, this imperative is given in the context of Christ's obedience, even when it meant death on a cross in verse 8 of this chapter. Just as Jesus was obedient to the will of the Father, so Paul is expecting us to follow His example. The background to Paul's statement about fear and trembling takes us back to the Old Testament and the context there shows how important obedience was at the very beginning when God chose a people for Himself. 'Fear' and 'trembling' is a reference to the Old Testament where fear of the Lord was not in the sense of dread or being afraid, but of the awe, wonder, respect and honour with which God was to be viewed. We can infer this first from Exodus 20:18-20. In the manifestation of God's mighty power at Sinai the people's fear and trembling was the natural human reaction to the phenomena they were witnessing. The fact that Moses tells them not to be afraid shows this is the case. What he then says seems to be a contradiction in terms. He tells them not to be afraid, then tells them the fear of the Lord will be with them. Significantly, this was to keep them from sinning. In other words, awe, wonder, respect and honour directed God-ward was the key to resisting and yielding to sin. All these were also a reminder of the Person and power of the God who had rescued them from slavery in Egypt and what was required of them as His witnesses to their world.

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God

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has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.” Exodus 20:18-20

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, Deuteronomy 10:12

Obedience to the law was to be the means whereby the children of Israel could have their sins overlooked by God. But, in the main, it was obedience to an external set of rules and regulations. The history of Israel showed that while there was some outward conformity to the rituals, in the vast majority of circumstances, the people's hearts were not in it. It had not penetrated the inner being. As we've seen before, you cannot work out what has not been first worked in.

Something had to be done to put something into us that would enable us to put God and His ways first in our lives because of what we have learned of His Person, His power and His overwhelming desire for our eternal well-being. This knowledge was not enough for the Hebrews and, until it is internalised, we are in the same position as they were. Our hearts are far from God and having no fear of God, we remain outside His sanctuary. We are excluded from His dwelling place.

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it “I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.” Jeremiah 17:9-10

I will make an everlasting covenant with them:I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul. Jeremiah 32:40-41

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I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Ezekiel 37:26-27

What radically changes our position from that of the Israelites, however, is that the everlasting covenant became a reality in the Person of Christ - God Incarnate. The offer of the covenant of peace arrived with His birth. It was a covenant that rested not on the cornerstone of the Mosaic Law, but on the New Covenant in Christ's blood. Of this sacrifice the writer to the Hebrews says:

But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as THE COVENANT OF WHICH HE IS MEDIATOR IS SUPERIOR TO THE OLD ONE, since the NEW COVENANT is established on better promises Hebrews 8:6

The resurrection and ascension were the ratification of that covenant which enabled several spiritual benefits to be put into us upon our acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Christ.

Again we will see that it is only because of what God has worked into us through Christ, that we can then play our part in how salvation is to progress towards the day when Christ will come again. We mentioned three of them last week. Justification, reconciliation and righteousness. Justification put guiltlessness into us, because God no longer sees us as guilty sinners deserving the penalty of death. Reconciliation put peace with God into us. We are no longer considered as enemies. Righteousness has been (put into) imputed to us. Adam imputed sin into humanity by his disobedience, Christ imputed righteousness into our being by His obedience.

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous Romans 5:19

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Those are the foundational things that have to be worked out in our lives. Sometimes its hard for us to see or understand the magnitude of what these gifts mean. I suspect, although we get flashes of their significance at times, it is only when we get to that glorious day of Christ's return, that their full impact will hit us. Yet it is when we do get a flash of inspiration about them, that our 'fear and trembling' comes into play for it inspires our awe and gratitude and wonder and praise for what God has done for us through Christ. We have the assurance that the relationship we have because of justification, reconciliation and righteousness is firmly established in the here and now. Although we are not perfect and will never be in our earthly existence, there is the belief and hope and expectation that at the Parousia, that is the condition we will stand in for the whole of eternity.

And that brings us to the grounds for that assurance. As is my bad habit of stating the obvious, there could have been no ascension without a resurrection and there could be no coming back unless there had been a going away. I'm sure the disciples wondered why the resurrected Jesus could not remain on earth with them throughout their lives and beyond. There is a mystery to the nature of Jesus' resurrected body because He could walk through walls and appear and disappear at will. Apart from the fact that Easter was for the benefit of the whole world, not just one geographical location or one nation, it appears that Jesus, even in His glorified body, could not remain on earth. Even in His glorified body, He could not be everywhere at once. He had to return to the realm of His former glory suited to the nature of His Being. He mentions this to the woman at the well. Since Jesus is God, He too is a spiritual Being who for 33 years consented to be present in a human body.

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth
John 4:24

Jesus as Spirit in a human body could not indwell His followers and, according to the gospels and Paul, Jesus only remained on earth to

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reveal Himself to enough witnesses to verify His resurrection and also to instruct His disciples about the direction His life had taken, what it was leading to, and what part they were to play in those developments.

After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:6-8

**And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.....He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures
Luke 24:27 & 44-45**

You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high Luke 24:48-49

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command:"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit." Acts 1:4-5

While we acknowledge the ascension, sometimes we miss some of its implications. One of those is the record of Jesus' enthronement at the right hand of the Father as Lord and Messiah and our High Priest. This event is the finale, as it were, of the system inaugurated by God when He instructed the Israelites to make the tabernacle in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. We know what was in the tabernacle and, significantly, the inventory didn't include chairs. The priest could not sit down because their work was never finished. Animal sacrifices could not eradicate sin or cleanse a guilty conscience. Only Jesus, the slain Lamb, could take away the

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sins of the world. Jesus, seated in heaven, is the evidence of His cry on the cross - "It is finished." His work on earth was finished in every detail. He could now sit down in His rightful place in heaven, from where henceforth, He would reign on earth through His Spirit.

And, it is because we are already citizens of His kingdom, Paul can assert, we are already reigning with Him. He can also assert that this is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit who, as we are told in Acts, would be sent by Jesus according to what the Father had promised.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus
Ephesians 2:6-7

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.
Ephesians 1:13-14

Today, the Holy Spirit is the reason that Christians are able to work out the gifts that God has worked in us through all the stages of Jesus life on earth, and now as a result of His exalted status in heaven. That is why even the working out of our salvation is still a work of God.

for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose. **Philippians 2:13**

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. **1 John 4:13**

The gift of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is what distinguishes Christians from the morally upright and generous spirited people, who can justifiably claim they never did anyone any

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harm and helped all they could. There is no doubt there are many good people in this world, but unless they are working out all that Jesus' ministry has given to us, their underlying motivation is not of God. It is only the Holy Spirit who knows the mind of God and thus can lead us in the right direction. First and foremost that is through belief in His only begotten Son.

It is because of him (God) that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

John 17:17-19

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth..... He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you John 16:13-14

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ

Our righteousness, holiness and redemption are the result of Jesus sanctifying Himself through the example of His life to enable His death, burial, resurrection and ascension to be the effective means of our salvation, which leads to eternal life. Once we become Christians our lives are committed to preparing for how we will spend eternity. The working out of our salvation is preparing us to fit in with the Christlike ethos of the new heaven and new earth. Theologians call this sanctification and it is the Spirit of truth who will guide us in the way we should go. We have to 'boast in the

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Lord' because without the indwelling presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, sanctification is impossible.

How then do we live Easter all year round? It is easy to say by following the example of Christ in the way we live and in our dealings with others. It is also easy to say, by remembering what happened at Easter. But Paul tells us that God is willing us to do certain things and to act in certain ways. Unfortunately, different interpretations of those things by different denominations can become confusing for the ordinary Christian who just wants to live to please God. This is what Paul advised the Colossians and it seems to be a good summary of how God is working in us. These five verses bring together what Jesus' life, cross, burial, resurrection and ascension means in practical terms. The kingdom of God was preached during Jesus' ministry; the cross brought us redemption for the forgiveness of sins; His burial rescued us from the dominion of darkness and His resurrection and ascension enabled the life and glory of His inheritance to be shared with us.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to (1) fill you with the knowledge of his will (2) through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, (3) so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: (4) bearing fruit in every good work, (5) growing in the knowledge of God, (6) being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might (7) so that you may have great endurance and patience, and (8) giving joyful thanks to the Father, (9) who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. (10) For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and (11) brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, (12) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:9-14

On the basis of all that God has given us the wisdom and knowledge of the Spirit to discern His will which should manifest

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itself in wanting to learn more about Him, in Godly living and Christ-like attitudes towards, and concern for, our neighbours. In character He will strengthen us and give us endurance and patience to go through whatever life brings to our doors. And we will be able to do that by joyfully remembering with gratitude all that God has done and is still doing for us through Christ, which the chorus of the hymn sums up for us.

Living He loved me, dying He saved me, Buried He carried my sins far away.
Rising He justified, freely forever. One day He's coming, Oh glorious day.

That is the day when we will see our glorious Saviour and know the wonder of what His 33 years on earth achieved for us. Until that time however, we can pay no greater respect and gratitude for all that He did, than to follow Paul's advice, also to the Colossians.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him Colossians 3:16-17