



EASTER 2012

"That's Not How You Were Raised!"

Colossians 3:1

A man was driving along the highway when out of nowhere he saw a large animal jump in the road. It was the Easter Bunny. He swerved to avoid hitting the bunny, but it was too late. The bunny went down and the basket of eggs went flying all over the place.

The driver pulled over to the side of the road and got out to offer aid. Much to his dismay, the colorful bunny was dead. The driver felt guilty and began to cry.

A woman driving down the same highway saw the man crying on the side of the road and pulled over. She stepped out of her car and asked the man what was wrong.

"I feel terrible," he explained. "I accidentally hit the Easter Bunny and killed him. There may not be an Easter because of me. What should I do?"

The woman told the man not to worry. She knew exactly what to do. She went to her car and returned with a spray can. She walked over to the limp, dead bunny and sprayed the entire contents of the can onto him. Miraculously the Easter Bunny came back to life, jumped up, picked up the spilled eggs, waved its paw at them and hopped on down the road.

Fifty yards away the Easter Bunny stopped, turned around, waved, and hopped on down the road another fifty yards, turned around, waved, hopped another fifty yards, turned around, and waved again!!!

The man was astonished. He asked the woman, "What was it that you sprayed on the Easter Bunny?"

The woman said, "Here, read for yourself!"

The man took the can and read the label. It said, "**Hair Spray. Restores life to dead hair. Adds a permanent wave.**"

While we are on the subject of the Easter Bunny:

What do you call a rabbit with fleas? (Bugs Bunny).

What does the Easter Bunny get for making a basket? (Two points just like everybody else).

What's the best way to catch a unique rabbit? (You 'nique up on him).

How do you catch a tame rabbit? (Tame way - you 'nique up on him).

It's Easter Sunday. It's the day to talk about resurrection. Usually when believers think of their resurrection, they think that it is an event which will take place exclusively in the future, when Jesus returns in the clouds to resurrect the dead in Christ and to rapture the living believers.

If this is the only way we understand our resurrection, then we do not fully understand the dynamic of Jesus Christ's resurrection which took place two thousand years ago.

The Bible teaches that your resurrection also took place two thousand years ago!

Colossians 3:1 (NIV) Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Your resurrection is discussed in the past tense. It doesn't say "you will be raised," it says "you have been raised." It is presented as something that has already occurred.

Don't misunderstand. There will be, in the future, a literal, physical resurrection from the dead. Your "mortal" will "put on immortality." Or, if you are alive at the coming of Jesus, you will be "changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."

Nevertheless, the resurrection of Jesus impacts you right now. You are raised from the dead in the sense that the resurrection of Jesus two thousand years ago has practical consequences for you today. Those practical consequences, the effect it has, is that you are dead to sin and alive to obedience to God and have the power to walk in a manner pleasing to your Lord.

Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead insures you of your future physical resurrection and it also assures you that the power of His resurrection is available to you today in order to live-out the Christian life.

You ought, therefore, to "set your hearts on things above." You are asked to live in the here and now as if you were already seated there and then.

Let me illustrate. At my age I hear a lot of talk about retirement. Some people have a definite goal and a solid plan for getting there. A good plan usually involves sacrificing now to benefit you later. If you know where you want to retire you likely buy some property there - maybe even start building on it in your spare time. The closer you get to retirement the more you pour into your goal and the more you think about and anticipate what it will be like.

In other words, someone planning for retirement begins to live now, even sacrificing, as if they are seated there already.

Are you “seek[ing] those things which are above”? In the Greek language it reads, keep on seeking. It implies a continuous, daily activity.

Pam and I like to frequent local antique and second-hand shops. We always overhear folks saying that something they’ve found would be perfect for their cabin in the mountains or their place at the coast. They are always ‘seeking’ things to furnish the house they’d rather be living in and that they plan to retire in. They “seek” everything in light of their future home.

Heaven should permeate our thoughts. “What does this have to do with Heaven?” is a question that should be a kind of litmus test of attitudes and activities.

Paul said there were “things above,” in Heaven. What are some of them?

1. First of all, you've been promised a sweet retirement home. It's a mansion being custom built for you by the Lord (John 14). No matter where you would like to retire on earth it cannot begin to compare to what is awaiting you in Heaven. (Sorry - it won't be at the coast, since in Eternity "there is no more sea.")
2. Your home is part of a great heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. It's described for you in the closing chapters of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It's made mostly of precious jewels, gems, and minerals. No water shortage there as a great spring flows through it. It's a "pure river of water of life" that nourishes "the tree of life" that yields incredible fruit.
3. In Heaven and for eternity you will have a glorified and perfect body that is free from any possibility of sin or sorrow or death. "There's no crying in Heaven."
4. Next you've been promised an inheritance "incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in Heaven for you" (First Peter 1:4). Anything that God has deposited for me in Heaven is safe and secure. Anything I might add to my heavenly inheritance by serving the Lord is just as safe and secure.
5. Then there are the people who have preceded you to Heaven - loved ones who loved the Lord and are awaiting a reunion with you. You'll know them fully, as they were intended to be by God, and they will know you.
6. The last thing I'll mention is the most precious of all. It's Jesus Himself. You'll get to see Him, know Him, be with Him forever.

Those are just six of the things that are guaranteed for you. They are real - more real than anything on the earth.

How can you be certain of these "things above"? You can be certain because "Christ is [there], sitting at the right hand of God."

The literal, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ in the first century is your guarantee.

The “right hand of God” is the seat of authority and power. Read through the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ and you’ll see just how much authority and just how much power your Lord has and wields.

We have been raised with Jesus. Have you ever said to someone, or have someone say to you, “that’s not how you were raised”? Parents or other adults say it to children or young adults when they are not living-up to the things they were raised into.

Why do we not always live the way we were “raised” from the dead? The world, the flesh, and the devil tend to divert my attention off of Heaven and on to the things of earth. I forget I am seated in Heaven and instead of investing my time, treasure, and talent where it is safe and secure I waste it on earthly pursuits.

In his first letter the apostle Peter said, “for the time has come for judgment to begin in the house of God.” Before we can share with nonbelievers the resurrection of Jesus, we ought to examine ourselves to be certain we are walking in His resurrection the way we’ve just discussed.

In a moment we’ll return to this and have an opportunity to examine ourselves. Before we do, we need to acknowledge that there may be nonbelievers here today, and that’s a serious concern that we must address.

A couple verses later, in Colossians chapter three, you read,

Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Colossians 3:6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,

These words give believers in Jesus Christ hope that, in the power of the resurrection, they can defeat things in their lives that once dominated them. The particular things listed are not meant to be exhaustive. They are representative of what the Bible calls “sin.”

The thing I want to focus on is that because of sin, “the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience.” “Wrath” isn’t uncontrolled anger. It is God’s measured response in dealing with sin. Because He is holy, God must judge sin.

Who are “the sons of disobedience”? It’s a phrase that occurs three times in the Bible as a general description of nonbelievers.

You are a son (or a daughter) of disobedience if you have not received the Lord and the forgiveness of your sin.

(By the way. We know sin has been overcome, defeated, because of Jesus Christ’s resurrection. Sin is what brings death, but when Jesus died, taking upon Himself the sins of the world, He didn’t remain dead, did He? No, He conquered death by defeating sin).

So there you have it. Among us are believers, mostly, and a few nonbelievers. Both have a decision to make.

If you are a believer, Easter is a good day to check to see if your heart is really set on things above. I have to believe, since the Lord both indwells you and is here in our gathering, that if you ask Him, He will lovingly show you places in the heart where your affections may not be fully set upon Him, upon Heaven. It could be a behavior, a habit; it could be an attitude, or what motivates you.

Let's therefore take a moment to seek the Lord and, as He shows you something or some things, ask yourself, "is this how I was raised?" "Is this what I was raised for?"

To the church at Ephesus, which had some problems in setting their hearts on things above, the Lord said "remember from where you are fallen... repent... and do the first works."

If you are not yet a believer, we have Good News! But first you have to understand there is very, very bad news. It's communicated by the three letter word, sin.

"Sin," the word itself, means *missing the mark*. If you shot an arrow from a bow and it missed the target you'd say that you sinned.

The 'mark' you must hit with God is a standard of absolute spiritual and moral perfection - both in your external behavior and in your internal thoughts. Jesus once said, "Be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Are you perfect? Be honest! Have you ever lied (even once - fibs, white lies, etc.)? Ever stolen (anything - the value is irrelevant)?

Jesus said, "Whoever looks upon a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery already with her in his heart." Have you ever looked with lust?

If you said "Yes" to these three questions then by your own admission you are a lying, thieving, adulterer at heart. You've missed the mark. You've sinned. You are a sinner.

The penalty for sin is death. *Really big death!* In the Bible it's called the "second death." First you die physically; second you 'die' eternally in that you will be separated from God forever.

'Separated' doesn't sound so bad until you understand that the place designated for those separated is the Lake of Fire - what we call Hell.

The Good News is that you don't have to go to Hell. You, too, can have a home in Heaven. All you need to do is "believe" on Jesus Christ.

When Jesus said to "believe" on Him, He was saying we should have faith in Him in the same way you would trust a parachute to save you when you jump from a plane. You don't merely believe in the parachute - you actually put it on.

Don't jump into eternity without Jesus! If you die in your sins there is no second chance. You will end up in Hell forever. His wrath abides upon you (John 3:36).

God doesn't want you to go to Hell. Neither do you want to go there, so confess your sins to God right now, put your trust in Jesus to save you, and you will pass from death to life.

We're going to give the nonbelievers here - you whom God has lovingly brought here today - an opportunity to express belief in Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin, death, and Hell.

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To make clear what an incredible thing He has done for you in the Gospel, let's look to civil law. You are standing in front of a judge, guilty of very serious crimes. All the evidence has been presented and there is no doubt about your guilt. The fine for your crime is \$250,000 or imprisonment, but you haven't two pennies to rub together. The judge is about to pass sentence. He lifts his gavel, when suddenly someone you don't even know steps in and pays the fine for you.

The moment you accept that payment, you are free to go. Justice has been served, the law has been satisfied, and what's more, the stranger who paid your fine showed how much he cares for you. His payment was evidence of his love.

That's what God did for you, in the person of Jesus Christ. You are guilty, He paid the fine two thousand years ago. It is that simple. The Bible puts it this way: "He was bruised for our iniquities... Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law being made a curse for us... God commended His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

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How do you start a relationship with God?

- Realize that you are a sinner. No matter how good a life you try to live, you still fall miserably short of being a 'perfect' person. That is because we are all sinners. We all fall short of God's desire for us to be holy. The Bible says, "No one is good - not even one" (Romans 3:10 NLT).
- Recognize that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you. The Bible tells us, "But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8 NLT). This is the Good News, that God loves us so much that He sent His only Son to die in our place when we least deserved it.
- Repent of your sin. The Bible tells us, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away" (Acts 3:19 NLT). The word "repent" means to change our direction in life. Instead of running from God, we can run toward Him.
- Receive Jesus Christ into your life. Becoming a Christian is not merely believing some creed or going to church on Sunday. It is having Christ Himself take residence in your life and heart. Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door [of your life] and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in. . ." (Revelation 3:20 NKJV).

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Dear Lord Jesus... I know I am a sinner... I believe You died for my sins... I believe that you rose from the dead... Right now, I turn from my sins... I open the door of my heart and life.... I confess You as my personal Lord and Savior.... Thank You for saving me... In Jesus name, Amen.