



GRACE – GOD’S RICHES AT CHRIST’S EXPENSE.

Easter is the churches greatest reason to celebrate, the resurrection is the world’s most history changing event, it is Christianity’s greatest proof and the world’s only hope.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

As we are approaching the most important time in the Christian calendar, for the next 3 weeks I wish to focus on Easter for without Easter and the resurrection of Jesus – we would not be here.

I wonder what you can recall of Easter as a child – was it an exciting time; waiting around for easter eggs; just another day out of school or a special time in the Christian faith? For me, all this changed when I committed my life to Christ and was baptised on the 12th December 1966.

A story is told of the time when Alexander the Great invaded Persia. During the fight, one soldier found an attractive leather bag – he looked inside and there were the Crown Jewels of Persia. However, he did not realise what he held in his hands, so he threw away the shiny rocks so he could keep the bag – that seemed more valuable to him.

EASTER IS THE CROWN JEWELS. It is what really matters. Many people strut around boasting about jobs, houses, cars, position, possession, popularity while the only true and lasting treasure, a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ, is cast aside.

Easter is defined by the word **GRACE - God's Riches At Christ's Expense.**

It is God's unmerited, undeserved move towards man's need. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. While we deserved judgment, He acted in love. Not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be a sacrifice to take away our sins and satisfied the demands of God's holiness in His death. 1 John 4:10

In Luke's Gospel of Jesus' death on the cross he uses an unexpected verb tense. When he writes of Jesus saying: "Father, forgive them." it expresses a continuous repeated action. This was something that He repeatedly said. As He was beaten with cat-o-nine-tails; as a thorned crown was put on His head; as a purple robe was draped across His bloody back; as people mocked Him with false worship; as He carried the cross in an exhausted state; when they drove nails through His body; when He hung there with His blood dripping out of His body and when their angry voices shouted at Him:

**AT WHAT POINT DID WE DESERVE HIS FORGIVENESS OR EVEN
ASK FOR IT? EASTER IS GOD'S MOVE**

1. THE MANNER OF GRACE: Grace is defined in the work of Christ for us expressed by the Gospel. The gospel – preached, received and lived out. This is the how we are saved.

You may ask - how do I know that I am saved? 'If you hold fast to the word. The Word finds root in your life and is proven by the actions of your life.

A true story was told of an outdoor lecture given by Dr. Paul Tillich at a Baptist Divinity school. He spent nearly 2.5 hours trying to prove that the resurrection of Jesus was a lie. He quoted books and scholars to try to prove his point. He then asked for questions.

An older man near the back of the auditorium spoke as he progressively munched into his apple. "Dr. Tillich I have a simple question. I haven't read any of those books you talk about; I can't recite the Scriptures in Greek; I don't know anything about those scholars you mention. He then held up the core of his eaten apple and said: All I want to know is, 'This apple I just ate, was it bitter or sweet?'

Dr. Tillich paused and then responded, 'I cannot possibly answer that question, I haven't tasted your apple sir'. The old man dropped the apple core into his sack and said, 'Neither have you tasted my Jesus'. The audience of over 1,000 erupted into applause and cheers to which Dr. Tillech left the platform.

2. THE MESSAGE OF GRACE: Jesus died; He was buried and on the third day He was raised and note the most important words after that - 'according to the Scriptures'

Ps 22 describes the events of the cross before the cross was ever invented as a form of capital punishment:

"My God, My God why have you abandoned ME? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? My life is poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint; my strength has dried up like; my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; my enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; they have pierced my hands and feet; they divide my garments amongst themselves throwing dice for my clothing.

What reason did Christ die for?

Isaiah 53 He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. It was our weaknesses He carried, it was our sorrows that weighed Him down. And we thought His troubles were a punishment from God, but He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. Like a lamb to the slaughter, He did not open His mouth and by His death we are healed.

Have you ever watched the behaviour of elephants who have been chained up all their lives? They could easily pull the stake from the ground with their strength, but they don't. Why don't they free themselves? Because when they were young they were chained to very secure objects and it repeatedly reinforced that they could not escape the chain no matter how hard they tried. So they don't attempt it now.

GRACE SETS US FREE IN SPITE OF THE CHAINS OF SIN.

Some remain in their bondage because they have become convinced by past failures that escape is impossible. Paul's life is a demonstration of the power of grace to set us free.

The Gospel changed Paul from a persecutor to a preacher. Grace can take whatever is holding you back – addiction; pride; selfishness; anger; violence; depression; anxiety – whatever and put God's love and salvation into your hands.

INSCRIPTION ON THE GRAVE OF JOHN NEWTON (a cleric, captain of slave ships) "John Newton, Clerk Once an infidel and libertine; a servant of slaves in Africa; was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy."

Grace becomes the explanation of our lives - by His grace I am what I am. There is no other explanation except that God did it? Every time you witness; every time you see somebody struggling with the same sin that almost destroyed your life; every time you give without questioning; when you can recognize how God has blessed your life – that is grace.

The reason why the life of Paul is so unbelievable is because he allowed grace to flow through his veins. God's power replaced his meagre abilities and his life became a pure vessel in God's hand. Grace leads to action. Try grace in any area of your life, put it to the test and I guarantee it will not prove empty, without effect.

I am sometimes asked - 'Can someone be saved if they never hear about Jesus? But Paul would ask, 'Can you be saved if you never tell anybody?'

Our reading today provides us with the central theme of the gospel:

Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. Without the truth of this message, Christ's death was worthless and those who believe in Him are still in their sins, without hope. Christ as the sinless Son of God took the punishment of sin so that those who believe can have their sins removed. Christ's death on the cross was not accident or afterthought. It had been part of God's plan from all eternity in order to bring about the salvation of all who believe.

He was buried. The fact of Christ's death is revealed in the fact of His burial. Many have tried to discount the actual death of Christ, but Jesus did in fact die and was buried in a tomb.

He was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said.

Christ was raised permanently forever, Three days – as prophesied in Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110 which foretell the resurrection of the Messiah.

We have a wonderful message to offer the world: A hastily transcribed, simple message sent from the Titanic, 'We have struck an iceberg' recently was auctioned off by Christies and was valued at between \$6,700 and \$9,300.

What is our message worth? IT is lifechanging! HE DIED....HE WAS BURIED....HE AROSE! IT was all done for you and me and because of it all God can offer us forgiveness of our sins and a life by which we stand in His grace.