Why Easter Matters

Read Psalm 110 and Acts 2:21-39

Key verses: “This man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power” (Acts 2:23-24).

In just a few weeks now, most of the world will know that it’s Easter and that, in some way, this holiday is about Jesus Christ. But for all who know and love Jesus, Easter is far more than a holiday that looks back to an historical figure. For us, Easter means that because Christ lives, we live also—now and forever. Easter means that our lives have meaning, purpose, and endless hope. And Easter means that we want all the world to know the resurrection hope that we have found in Christ.

Peter’s passionate sermon on the day of Pentecost demonstrates why Easter matters so much. Notice these emphases of Peter’s message:

1. The Christian faith is based squarely on the truth of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. “This man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power....This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses” (Acts 2:23-24,32).

Weak, cowardly, Peter, a short time earlier—denying he ever knew Christ and hiding out in fear—but look at him now. Boldly, Peter shares Jesus and calls the people to repentance. He is a different Peter, for two main reasons: First, he and the other disciples have seen the risen Christ—“all of us are witnesses.” Second, Peter and the other disciples have been filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Peter’s passionate message centers on the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is the heartbeat of the Christian faith. Our faith is based squarely on the truth of Jesus’ bodily resurrection.

2. Christ lives now through the Spirit-filled lives of Jesus’ followers. One cannot read Peter’s passionate message at Pentecost without seeing the
difference the Holy Spirit makes. At Pentecost, a Spirit-filled Peter is a
different person—bold, powerful, full of faith. And, Peter tells the crowd, the
miracle of Pentecost, which enabled the disciples to speak in languages they
had never learned, is further evidence of Jesus’ resurrection:

“This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being
therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the
Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see
and hear” (Acts 2:32-33).

If Easter is to matter to a lost and dying world in 2014, the world must see
Jesus, by his Spirit, living powerfully through his followers. This can only
happen as believers today are filled and empowered by the same Holy Spirit
that transformed Peter and the disciples at Pentecost.

3. The resurrection of Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy
and the promise of a Messiah. In his sermon, Peter draws from Psalm 16 and
Psalm 110 to demonstrate this truth. From these psalms, Peter argues that
he and all of Jesus’ disciples were eyewitnesses that Jesus had risen from the
dead. And Peter maintains that Jesus rose in fulfillment of David’s promise
that the Messiah would die, his soul would not be abandoned to death, and he
would rise from the dead in a human body that would not decay and reign at
the right hand of God:

“For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is
at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad,
and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. For you will not
abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You
have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness
with your presence.’

“Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that
he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he
was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he
would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke
of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, ‘He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience corruption.’

“This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being
therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the
Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see
and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The
Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your
footstool.’ Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that
God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified”
4. The risen Christ can change lives today! In response to Peter’s passionate message, his listeners “were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’

“Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him’” (Acts 2:37-39).

In response to Peter’s message, according to Acts 2:41, 3000 people came to faith in Christ!

The Christian faith is based squarely on the truth of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. Christ lives now through the Spirit-filled lives of Jesus’ followers. The resurrection of Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and the promise of a Messiah. The risen Christ can change lives today!

That is why, in 2014, Easter still matters.

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