

Easter 2015 / COB / 04.05.15

- † How many of you have a television in the house? Anyone not have a television? When LeeAnn and I got married, neither one of us owned a television. We had a friend who was astonished by this, first that there were two people without access to ESPN, and then that we were fortunate enough to meet, since obviously we were perfect for each other.

- † Those of you with access to a television, any of you watch “Killing Jesus” on National Geographic last weekend? I was hopeful it would be good, since it was based on a book written by Roman Catholic men, instead of the skeptical experts to whom Hollywood usually turns.
 - I think, since this was National Geographic, they should have given us some aerial shots of the actual biblical sites before zooming in on the scene in action; at least, they might have been more realistic in the sets they developed. Those were missed opportunities for distinctiveness.
 - It was distinctive, and maybe this is from the book, that they focused more on speculative background and side-stories, rather than teaching the biblical text.

- † Somewhat typically, they portrayed a very human Jesus. There was little to suggest that Jesus was the eternal and divine Son of God come as a man.
 - The Bible tells us Jesus was fully human, that he hungered and thirsted, grew tired and slept, even faced temptation and grief, just like the rest of us.
 - But I don’t believe Jesus was ignorant of his Messianic identity until told at age thirty by his cousin John the Baptist. The gospel of Luke, tells us Jesus was correcting the religious leaders when he was twelve years old, and referring to the Temple as his Father’s house.
 - And while it is correct to show Jesus showing emotion, should we believe that he was surprised by Judas’ betrayal through a kiss? As we have studied the gospel of John, we have seen that Jesus knew all along exactly what was going to happen. He sent Judas on his way to betray him, then prophesied about his arrest and crucifixion to the other apostles.

- † I know the Bible can be a difficult text, believe me, I wrestle with it every day. Even when we can understand what it says, we might not understand why or we might find it hard to accept. What we have to do is take the text as it is and try to make sense of it. What often happens instead, on TV and in some pulpits, is to change the text to make sense to us. When we do this with the text, we do it with Jesus.
 - Skeptics struggle with Jesus being divine, doing miracles, accomplishing anything real with his sacrifice, and rising from the dead. Believers struggle with Jesus asking us to experience transformation, live sacrificially, love our enemies; and we struggle with a God who asks for perfection, condemns people to Hell, and allows believers to suffer greatly for his own glory.
 - So our tendency is to change God, change Jesus, to suit our view of what is right. Instead of allowing God use the text to change us, to believe, think, do, to be what is right, we alter the text, we alter the teaching about God, Jesus, and the Bible itself, to fit our flawed human perceptions.

- † This is wrong and self-deceiving, but my concern today is that it leads to a bigger problem.

- If Jesus was just a man, just a created being, then he could not have been able to bear God's punishment for our sin; if Jesus did not reconcile us with God through paying our penalty, indeed through taking our guilt, then we can have no real hope, just self-delusion. If Jesus did not prove his identity and accomplishment on the cross by rising from the dead on the third day, then our faith is useless, we are still in our sins.
 - At Easter, we celebrate the crucifixion and resurrection, because this complex event is the basis for our hope, hope that God will grow us to be better people, hope that we can be intimate with God despite being imperfect people, hope that we can have purpose and empowerment in this life, hope that the suffering and struggle of this life will yield, first to conscious bliss in Heaven and later to our own resurrection onto the renewed earth.
- † I was thinking this week about how we celebrate Christmas and Easter in the church. These are the two weeks when we have the most visitors, yet these are the weeks we change, so our guests never get to see a typical service.
- This is most true about the sermon. For most of the past year, we have been studying the gospel of John, verse by verse. Each week, we take one scene from the life of Jesus, and we try to really understand it within its historical and literary contexts, so we can see how it is relevant to our lives today. It is analysis that leads to application, a teaching that leads to exhortation. That's not what we usually plan for holidays.
 - Last year, I shared the historical evidence that Jesus really lived, really died on the cross, and really was believed to have risen from the dead; even secular and Jewish sources say this. Then we talked about why this evidence mattered. I'm not claiming it was the best Easter sermon ever, but I am not sure I can do any better. Rather than try, let me tell you what is on my heart.
- † It's about the children. Did you enjoy the children's choir? I love seeing the children taking part in worship. Last week we had them marching around, waving palms. The children were constantly on my mind this week.
- The statistics are staggering, so I am not going to recite them on Easter Sunday; but quite a few of our children will suffer through sexual abuse; and then there is bullying and other forms of physical abuse, peer pressure, neglect, intimidation, self-doubts and fears. Through their families they will be exposed to addiction, divorce, adultery, death, and abandonment. And they will make some bad choices: experimenting with drugs, perversions, the occult. What hope can they have if this is the life they know?
 - Not many people anymore argue about our need for deliverance. The corruption and suffering and evil is plain to see in the world, in life, even in you and me. The question is whether there is a deliverer, and thus a reason for hope.
 - Again statistically speaking, do you know that the biggest deterrent to our children and youth coming to faith might be you and me. Because if we don't have a passion for worship, if we don't experience transformation in character and lifestyle, if we don't learn to love and serve unconditionally and sacrificially, then what evidence is there for the relevance of Jesus or the promises of the text?
- † Yet our hope and their hope must be sourced in Jesus as he is revealed in scripture.
- The apostle Peter wrote to believers who had been torn out of their lives and exiled into rural Turkey, where they continued to suffer further. Here is what he wrote to them: [1 Peter 1.3b-6

NET] **“By his [God’s] great mercy he gave us new birth [!] into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [and what is that hope?] that is, into an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you, who by God’s power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time [i.e. at your resurrection]. This [truth] brings you great joy, although you may have to suffer for a short time [your lifetime] in various trials.”**

- The person living the good life might not find encouragement in a text that says you will suffer in this life, but most of us have suffered, and still suffer on and off. This is not news to us, but it is encouraging to learn that our suffering is anticipated, it is part of life no matter what, and so it does not signal that God is fake or that God has stopped loving us.
- In fact, God so much loves us that he is willing to forgive us, he is willing to wipe out our guilt and sin, he is willing to give us a new spiritual birth, all by grace, a gift, through faith in who Jesus is and what he accomplished in his crucifixion and resurrection.
- Our children need to know this is real. That there is hope; that even if life never gets better, there is hope of an inheritance reserved for them by a loving God. And that there is hope even in this life, that they can experience true joy and peace inside, that they can experience true love and acceptance in the body of Christ, and that they can experience true empowerment and transformation by the Holy Spirit if they believe. Our children need to know this is real, so they need to see the reality in us.

† Let’s pause for a moment and watch a short video by Pastor Kit Bogan...
[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53nAMkIJlE> (5 Rs)].

† I mentioned earlier, we have been studying the gospel of John. This book has two intertwining thematic questions: “Do you know who Jesus really is?” and “Do you really believe?”

- If you really know Jesus and if you really believe in who he is and thus in what he has done for you in the crucifixion and resurrection, then others – particularly our children and youth – will see the reality of Jesus in you, because you will be experiencing tremendous blessing which will drive tremendous growth in you and thus bring radical change into your life.
- If you have not found faith and salvation in Jesus, I encourage you to seek the truth through prayer and scripture, and allow God the Father to bring you to faith by grace. If you have put your faith in Jesus, let’s make it our daily priority to be in right relationship with God. If we do that together, our children will come to know Jesus and then they will have hope in this life.
- Let’s take a few minutes to pray...

Benediction:

resources on web and resource table;

access to me and church [9am / Pilate];

time of fellowship in back room; bathrooms for elderly and others

celebrate: as the angel said to the women at the tomb, He has risen!