

Jesus our Savior

Rich Nathan
March 31 & April 1, 2018
Easter
Acts 3:11-21

A poll was done recently asking Americans what Easter was all about. It was an open-ended question. What do you think Easter is about? 67% of Americans correctly describe Easter as a religious holiday [yay for how informed we Americans are!]. Among the 33% - one-third of Americans – who did not identify Easter as a religious holiday, many didn't know anything about Easter. Other people said that Easter means Spring Break or getting together with friends. A large number of people said that Easter is all about Easter bunnies and Easter eggs.

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Easter bunny and eggs picture

But when the pollsters dug in and asked the 67% of Americans who said Easter was a religious holiday what religious event does Easter celebrate, people weren't so sure. Some people said that Easter celebrates the birth of Jesus, of course. Others said that Easter celebrates the second coming of Jesus. Still others said that Easter celebrates the rebirth of Jesus or the reincarnation of Jesus. Only 42% of Americans – less than half of the people living in the United States – correctly said that Easter was a holiday

celebrating the resurrection of Jesus; that it signified Jesus' return to life after being dead.

To be a Christian is to believe and confess that Jesus is alive. This is one of the major dividing lines between being a Christian and being a non-Christian. Christians believe that Jesus is alive today. For everyone else, however much Jesus may be admired and his teachings respected, Jesus is still a dead man. For Christians, Jesus is the Living One. We can't fudge this point. As a famous New Testament scholar put it,

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"There is no middle ground between dead and alive. If Jesus is dead, then his story is completed. If he is alive, then his story continues." – Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson

I want to show you a video clip from the famous children's story by C.S. Lewis titled *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the story, the Lion is named Aslan and he is a Christ figure. Aslan, the lion, gave his life as a substitute for a little boy named Edmond who had betrayed his family. So Aslan is killed by the White Witch in substitution for Edmond who goes free. As the scene opens, Aslan lies dead on a stone table on which he was killed.

Video

In the book, when the two girls, Susan and Lucy, see Aslan alive, Lewis tells the story this way:

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There shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself.

“Oh Aslan!” cried both the children, staring up at him, almost as much frightened as they were glad.

“Aren’t you dead then, dear Aslan?” said Lucy.

“Not now,” said Aslan.

“You’re not – not a - ?” asked Susan in a shaky voice. She couldn’t bring herself to say the word *ghost*. Aslan stooped his golden head and licked her forehead. The warmth of his breath and a rich sort of smell that seemed to hang about his hair came all over her.

“Do I look it?” he said.

“Oh, you’re real, you’re real! Oh, Aslan!” cried Lucy, and both girls flung themselves upon him and covered him with kisses.

“But what does it all mean?” asked Susan.

What does the resurrection of Jesus mean? You know it must matter because otherwise we wouldn’t celebrate Easter. More importantly, it makes a great deal of difference whether someone is dead or alive. What does the resurrection of Jesus mean for us individually, for our families, for our world?

Here at Vineyard Columbus we just got through a Lenten discipleship series that we titled “The Real Jesus”. Over the course of the last six weeks we tried to dig under 2,000 years of religious tradition and discover who the Real Jesus was in the first century and who he is for us today. We looked at Jesus in his various roles – as our teacher, as our healer, as a social revolutionary, as suffering servant, as our king, and today we’re going to look at Jesus as our Savior.

Next week, I’m going to be starting a new series here titled “Love is More than a Feeling”.

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Graphic for new series

Every one of us wants to be loved; and more than that, all of us need to learn how to love people that we don’t necessarily like – difficult family members and annoying neighbors and irritating co-workers and people who have hurt us and people who have hurt those we love. How do we love people that we don’t necessarily like? I want to extend a warm invitation to those of you who live in Central Ohio who don’t regularly attend Vineyard Columbus to return next week as I start this new series, “Love is More than a Feeling”. We’d love to have you come back.

But today as we consider the resurrection of Jesus and what it all means, I've called my message "Jesus our Savior". Let's pray.

In the story that I'm going to read in a moment from the book of Acts, the Apostle Peter just healed a man crippled from birth. This man used to lie by the gates of the Jewish Temple begging for money. As a result of Peter's prayer for healing, the crippled man was instantly healed. Here's what we read:

Slide Acts 3:11-21

¹¹While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

¹⁷"Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his

Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

The first thing we learn from this text is that

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The resurrected Jesus saves us from our sin

In the New Testament, Jesus is called our Savior 16 times. And many, many more times, Jesus is said to save or be the author of salvation. Some of you may know that the name Jesus is the English version of his given name, which was Yeshua.

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Yeshua = YHWH [The Lord] saves

Jesus' name literally means "The Lord saves". In the New Testament, Jesus is always associated with salvation, but what does salvation mean? When you see the words "Jesus saves" on a highway overpass or building

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Picture of building

What does that mean? Here's what we read:

Slide Acts 3:18-19

¹⁸But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

If we repent, Peter tells us, if we turn away from our sins and ask God's forgiveness, verse 19 tells us

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Your sins will be wiped out

But what is sin? Just like a lot of Americans don't know what Easter is about or that it's associated with the resurrection of Jesus, a lot of people today don't know what sin is.

Folks say, “Well, I’m not a sinner,” because they associate sin with really terrible things like murder or bank robbery or adultery. I always think it’s helpful to remember that sin is primarily self-centeredness.

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Sin = self-centeredness

What I often ask people to do to define the word sin is write the word sin down on a sheet of paper and circle the middle letter of the word sin. Sin is an “I” problem. It’s life curved in on itself. You see, God gave us two great commandments. The first is to love God with all of our being. The second is to love our neighbor as ourselves. But sin reverses the order. Because of sin we always put ourselves first, our neighbor next when it suits our convenience, and God is somewhere in the background. We hardly pay God a passing thought.

The good news that the Apostle Peter preached is that we can be saved from our sinful self-centeredness. Salvation really involves two things. First, as verse 19 says, that your sins might be wiped out.

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Your sins will be wiped out

The idea of being wiped out meant to wash off, to replace, to obliterate. One commentator put it this way:

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“Ancient writing was upon papyrus, and the ink used had no acid in it. It therefore did not bind into the papyrus as modern ink does; it simply lay upon the top of it. To erase the writing a man might take a wet sponge and simply wipe it away.”

In the same way, if you or I turn to the Lord and asks his forgiveness, the Lord wipes away or erases the punishment we deserve because of our self-centeredness and the impact of our self-centeredness on everyone else – all the ways we’ve hurt other people that we should have loved and all the ways we’ve neglected God whom we should love and honor. When God forgives he even wipes away the dark stain that sin leaves on our souls.

But there’s a second thing that happens when a person gets saved. We don’t only have our sins wiped away, but in addition, because Jesus is raised from the dead and is alive today, he can free us from our self-centered sinfulness. We can know the power of the resurrection in our own lives. Peter, in verse 19, speaks about times of refreshing.

Slide Acts 3:19

¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

To put the same truth in different words, when we turn to the Lord and ask God to save us, the Lord first of all, wipes away our sin. But second, and just as important, the living Jesus enters our personalities by his Spirit and begins to undo our self-centeredness. He turns us inside out. Apart from Jesus we are totally focused on ourselves. But when the risen Jesus enters our lives, he begins to bend us outward away from ourselves and our own needs and our own cravings toward others and toward God. We don't become perfect until Jesus returns, but over time we can become much less self-centered because of the power of the risen Jesus. At the end of this message I'm going to give each of you an opportunity to stand – to ask Jesus to wipe away your sins and to come into your life to bend your personality towards others and towards God.

But Peter tells us that salvation goes way beyond having our sins washed away and being set free from our self-centeredness. Here's what we read:

Slide Acts 3:19-21

¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

In the New Testament, the restoration of everything in creation is tied to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Here's what the Apostle Paul says:

Slide 1 Corinthians 15:20-24

²⁰But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²²For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

The restoration of the whole universe, which was hopelessly damaged by sin, has begun through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The Bible describes this restoration as a two-step process. First, Jesus rose from the dead offering a foretaste, a kind of firstfruits of the new creation to come. Then when Jesus returns, he will complete his victory over sin and death that began with his resurrection. With his resurrection he began to restore everything and when Jesus returns he will complete the restoration of everything.

What does Jesus' resurrection restore?

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The resurrected Jesus restores love without parting

How many of you remember reading Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Raven" in school? In "The Raven", Poe writes about a man's sorrow over the death of his lover, a woman named Lenore. A raven, a symbol of death, speaks to him one word over and over again.

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The Raven picture

That one word is "Nevermore". In this fallen, broken world, we will eventually lose everything. There is a "nevermore" over everything in our lives – our youth, our health, our pleasures. We'll see places on earth and enjoy vacations and memories with family and friends and then never again revisit those places. There's a "nevermore" over experiencing our children as babies. There's a "nevermore" over raising kids. There's a "nevermore" over wonderful experiences in school or with friends. But the worst "nevermore" is the loss of love we experience when someone dies.

You see, the resurrection of Jesus is not just comfort – "Oh, don't worry. You don't need to be afraid of death because if you trust in Jesus you will live forever." – the resurrection is that, but it's way more than that. The resurrection of Jesus promises the

restoration of all things. We'll get it all back – the youth, the wonderful places, the memories, but most of all, the loved ones. Everything that we have ever enjoyed, we get it all back in an unimaginably better way when Jesus returns and completes what he started with his death and resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is the great Christian response to the raven's "nevermore".

Even better, we get the relationship back with a loved one who has died and is now with the Lord. We know that love was meant to last forever. That's why when we're separated from a loved one by death, we know that's just not the way the world should be. We not only grieve sometimes, we rage at the injustice of it all. Why should I ever be parted from my child or my spouse or my parents or my dear friend or my sister or brother? We know in our heart of hearts that love was meant to last forever. The resurrection of Jesus says that our deepest intuitions are right. We'll get our beloved back and our love will last forever.

Peter says that Jesus' death and resurrection began the restoration of everything which will be completed when Jesus returns. What's included in that everything? The resurrected Jesus restores love without parting. And

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The resurrected Jesus restores a world without evil

In this broken and sinful world, we suffer all kinds of injustices and sin. And we pray along with the psalmist:

Slide Psalm 35:17

How long, Lord, will you look on?

Rescue me from their ravages,
my precious life from these lions.

We ask, as they did in the book of Malachi:

Slide Malachi 2:17b

“Where is the God of justice?”

Many people around the world cry out for justice. Some have been sexually abused. Some have been physically or emotionally or verbally abused. Some have been abandoned. Some slandered. Some betrayed. Some ripped off financially or relationally or vocationally. Sometimes, the person who is responsible for the hurt or the evil gets caught and he or she is punished. But while we can punish people in this world, we can't undo the evil. Evil still carries with it all of its dreadful consequences. So the murderer who killed the two Westerville police officers

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Photo of officers

Less than two months ago is facing aggravated murder charges and may be punished for his crimes. But the punishment is not going to bring back the two officers. It won't undo the loss experienced by the officers' wives or children or parents or friends or siblings or the Westerville community. The extraordinary thing about the resurrection of Jesus that started this process of restoration is that not only when Jesus returns will he bring judgment, but when he returns Jesus will undo evil so that all the impact of sin and wickedness in this world will be removed.

As one writer put it:

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At some point, for all eternity, there will be no more unmerited suffering: this present darkness, "the age of evil", will eventually be remembered as a brief flicker at the beginning of human history. Every evil done by the wicked to the innocent will be avenged, and every tear will have been wiped away.

But not only will every evil be avenged and every tear wiped away, but everything that we have lost will be restored. We not only get back the body and the life that we had, but the bodies and the lives that we wished for and never had. When the Lord returns, he's going to give us back something unimaginably better than even those precious

things and precious people who we have lost. Jesus' resurrection started the undoing of evil. His return will finish evil's undoing.

The resurrected Jesus restores love without parting. The resurrected Jesus restores a world without evil. And, finally,

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The resurrected Jesus restores Jesus to his rightful place as Lord

- Some of you may be wondering if there is a God, and whether or not Christianity is true.
- Many others of you are new or returning to God and would like to gain a better understanding of Christianity.

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Alpha

- I'd like you to consider checking out Alpha, Alpha is a judgment free zone where you can ask any question and explore Christian faith for yourself.
- Alpha is starting here at Cooper Road on Thursday April 12

The early Christians staked their belief in the Lordship of Jesus on his resurrection. The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead was the surest proof to them that Jesus was exalted as Lord of all. Here's what the Apostle Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost:

Slide Acts 2:32, 33, 36

³²God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

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

The connection between the resurrection of Jesus and the restoration to his position as Lord is everywhere in the New Testament. Here's what Paul writes:

Slide Romans 1:4

⁴and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here's what Paul says in:

Slide Romans 10:9

°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.

How many of you are familiar with that simple chorus that’s sung in many languages around the world? “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.”

Let me ask you who are listening to me a personal question as I close this Easter message. Is the resurrected Jesus your Lord? This Easter, as the chorus says, “He is Lord. He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and he is Lord.” But is he your Lord? What would it mean for Jesus to become your Lord this Easter?

One thing that the Lordship of Jesus means is that he becomes Lord over our opinions. We like to think that we have a right to our own opinions and our own views of everything. If you’re like me, you like to share your opinions with anyone who can hear. When Jesus becomes Lord of your life, you’re saying, “You, Jesus, have authority over my mind and my opinions. I submit my views of other people, of God, of myself, of politics, of religion, of the way to be saved, I submit my mind to you, Jesus. You are my Lord and I choose to conform my opinions to yours.”

What would it mean for Jesus to be your Lord? He is Lord. But to be your Lord, it means that you submit your bodies to Jesus as Lord. Not just your opinions, but also your

body. What you choose to consume by way of food and drink, what you take in your body, what you do sexually with your body, what you choose to look at and listen to and do with your hands, places you choose to go. Friend, is Jesus Lord over your body?

The resurrection restores Jesus to his rightful place as Lord of all. Is Jesus Lord over your relationships? Do you submit your dating, your marriage, your parenting, your relationship with your siblings, your parents, your friends, your neighbors to him? How you look at other people of a different race or different ethnicity or social status? Is Jesus the Lord over your relationships? He is Lord. He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and he is Lord. But is Jesus your Lord this Easter? Is he Lord over your money – how you spend your money, what you buy, how much you save, how generous you are. Jesus is Lord over your career choices. Over your service and volunteerism. Over your time. Over your future, over your past and present.

When we speak about the resurrection of Jesus as restoring everything, his resurrection not only restores the love that we have lost and a world without evil, but most importantly the resurrection restores Jesus to his rightful position as Lord of our lives.

Jesus our Savior

Rich Nathan

March 31 & April 1, 2018

Easter

Acts 3:11-21

- I. The resurrected Jesus saves us from our sin
- II. The resurrected Jesus restores love without parting
- III. The resurrected Jesus restores a world without evil
- IV. The resurrected Jesus restores Jesus to his rightful place as Lord