

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Easter is Never Over

Monday, April 17, 2017

He is risen.

On Easter Sunday, we saw those three words all over social media, and we heard the phrase frequently in conversation. Not only did these words permeate our world, but also these:

You Matter.

It's such a simple phrase, but also one we neglect to use. Those two words, whether seen on a billboard or a yard sign, spoken to someone directly, heard in church, or shown through action, are two very powerful words.

Why do we say them? Why, as a church, have we made this a focal point of our ministry?

Because we believe it.

We believe that roughly 2,000 years ago, an event took place that essentially screamed, "You Matter!" There has not been an event like it since. We're clearly talking about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Two thousand years ago, the Son of God came to our world as a human, lived a perfect life, and then died.

We've heard the story. The vast majority of people in Western civilization know at least a little bit about the Christian story, but many don't know why it applies to them. Why should an event 2,000 years ago matter to us? What relevance does it have for us? Why does it matter?

It matters because God - the sovereign creator of the universe - came as a man to die, to tell us that we matter, even when we think he doesn't matter to us.

That's what sin is, isn't it - living and acting like God doesn't matter. Of course, sin is something that is deep-seated and a part of us on this side of heaven. It is like a cancer that has infected us and then manifests itself in symptoms of sinful action. When we commit an act of sin, we are living like God doesn't matter. When we sin, we pretend that we can do it - whatever *it* is - without God.

The majesty of the gospel is that even when God didn't matter to us, we mattered to him (Romans 5:8). Jesus resurrected from the dead and conquered our sin once and for all. In this incredibly miraculous event in history, God told us:

You Matter.

This is the message of the gospel - that Jesus died for our sins and then rose from the dead to give us freedom from them. In fact, the first thing the disciples of Jesus were preaching was this simple message. Today's passage is from 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. Virtually all New Testament scholars (skeptic and Christian alike) date the creed written in verses 3-7 to within 1-5 years of the death of Jesus! This is what the followers of Jesus first preached.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

¹ Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. ² It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

*³ **I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. ⁵ He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him.***

You'll notice the creed, here is in bold. This is what they preached:

That Jesus died for our sins and was buried.

That he was raised from the dead on the third day.

That he appeared to the disciples and 500 other people.

This was the original "You Matter" message. Christ died for your sins and then rose from the dead to free you from them. This is the message we have been charged to carry to other people. We show people they matter by telling them, doing nice things for them, and treating them kindly. However, we show people they matter when we tell them that Jesus showed them they matter by dying on the cross for them. When we tell people this simple message, we introduce them to the God who wants to show them...

You Matter

When was the first time you understood that Jesus died for you and you accepted him as your savior? Explain.

How does the resurrection of Jesus show you that you matter?

How can you tell people about Jesus' love for them today?

Prayer

Father, thank you for loving me. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to die for me. I know that he stood in my place. I know that I was guilty and that even when I lived like you didn't matter, you loved me like I did. Thank you for all of this. Help me to share this message with others. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

This post was written by Andy Rectenwald, the Director of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

I Am Not a Sheep

Tuesday, April 18, 2017

*⁵But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.
He was beaten so we could be whole.
He was whipped so we could be healed.
⁶All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
We have left God's paths to follow our own.
Yet the Lord laid on him
the sins of us all.*

Who is this passage about?

Of course, most would say that it is about Jesus. It always amazes me, however, when I think that this passage is from the Old Testament book of Isaiah and was written 700 years before Jesus' birth! Although there are more than 300 Old Testament prophecies about Jesus, this is probably the most well-known. There are five very specific pieces of prophecy in these verses that came true, as we later learn from Peter, Matthew, and Mark in the New Testament, centuries later. This is often referred to as the "Suffering Servant" prophecy, and it helps to prove that Jesus' death was always part of God's plan.

Look at each line and try to picture the scene. I will never forget the first time I watched "The Passion of the Christ"; I was literally ill. I am not a very visual person, so that movie brought it home for me. Looking at these verses now, I have the visual firmly in mind. It makes me think about the ways in which we take his sacrifice for granted. How we stray every day despite knowing that God's path is the better way. He has already taken steps to bring us back to health and wholeness; and yet, how often do we turn away?

Before I became a Christian, I used to say, "Who allows himself to be called a sheep?? I'm not a sheep!" Ironically, as it turns out, I am. If you have ever read anything about the behavior of sheep, you will see the similarities between them and us immediately. They are stubborn, they stray, and they get themselves into all kinds of trouble. We are so like them it is crazy. For a great little read about this topic, I highly recommend [A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23](#), by Phillip Keller.

At this time of year, we usually stop and reflect on what that sacrifice means for us, but I wonder, why do I only really think about it now? What would my life be like if I considered it every day and lived my life in absolute gratitude because of it? Of course, we are not perfect, and that is the whole point! God knew this far in advance and tried to tell us that he loves us anyway, and he has provided a

way for us to come back to him. That is good news!! All those years of striving and fighting...

Even though he knew that we would remain rebellious, just as we have for thousands of years, God made a way for us to return to him. Jesus was our sacrificial lamb, and because of his death, we *can* be healed. We just have to accept the message of his resurrection. Hallelujah!

Isaiah 53:5-6

*⁵But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.*

He was beaten so we could be whole.

He was whipped so we could be healed.

⁶All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.

We have left God's paths to follow our own.

Yet the Lord laid on him

the sins of us all.

What can you do to keep Jesus' sacrifice as your daily focus?

How would your life be different if you lived in constant gratitude for the healing and wholeness that God has already provided?

Prayer

Dear Father, thank you for giving your Son, the Suffering Servant, to take my sin and make me whole again. Help me live in absolute gratitude for the healing that was made possible by Jesus' resurrection. Thank you for being my Good Shepherd! Amen.

Predicted Betrayal?

Wednesday, April 19, 2017

While David wrote Psalm 22 about 1,000 years before Jesus was crucified, it sure seemed as though he was there. "My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; an evil gang closes in on me." Judas directed possibly hundreds, maybe even a thousand Roman soldiers to Jesus and his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night Jesus was betrayed. Not only were the Roman soldiers there to arrest him, but some Jewish officials, chief priests, and Pharisees went along carrying torches, lanterns, and weapons. These Jewish officials had conspired to kill Jesus before. They reasoned that "If we let him go on like this (performing many signs including raising Lazarus from the dead), everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation" (John 11:48). The high priest, Caiaphas, even prophesied the importance of Jesus' death (albeit for selfish reasons and without comprehending exactly how true those words were). John records him as saying, "You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (John 11:50). The Jews were ganging up on Jesus at this point and continued to plot his arrest and death until it was accomplished. They didn't want to lose control of the people, the temple, or the nation. Their hearts were hardened to the truth that Jesus was the one that they had been waiting for.

Psalm 22 continues, "They have pierced my hands and feet." This description causes the reader to immediately think of the crucifixion and how Jesus' hands and feet were nailed to the cross. "I can count all my bones." Not being much of a science geek, I had to look up how many bones are in a human. The answer is 206. Unlike the other criminals who were crucified on each side of Jesus, Jesus' bones in his legs were not broken to speed up his demise. Jesus gave up his spirit willingly for you and me. "My enemies stare at me and gloat." Matthew says, "The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery" (27:29). In the Gospel of Mark, the people yelled "Ha! Look at you now! You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!" (15:29).

These verses in Psalm 22 conclude with "They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing." In John 19, "When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes among the four of them. They also took his robe, but it was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. So they said, 'Rather than tearing it apart, let's throw dice for it.'" These soldiers who didn't even know about Jesus or his message were used to fulfill this Scripture. Luke 23 describes this fulfillment of Scripture also, "And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice." I'm pretty sure my clothes are not worth gambling

for because I don't have any designer items, but in Jesus' time, a garment that was woven in one piece was valuable. Every piece of clothing we wear tends to make a statement about us. My jeans and t-shirt usually say I'm casual and comfortable. A wedding dress, on the other hand, makes the statement that this woman is making a commitment and is celebrating a new life built together with her husband. Jesus' seamless garment gives us another glimpse at Jesus' perfect, sinless life. A garment like this that was made with such special care was worth not tearing apart. It was worth taking a risk and rolling the dice to gain possession of this unique piece of fabric. His other garments, which may have been his sandals, belt, and headpiece, were worth something to the soldiers also. They were a perk of the job that the Roman soldiers had to do. As we see how these verses from Psalm 22 are fulfilled during Jesus' crucifixion, we are reminded that God's plan all along was to send his son to suffer and die so that we could be in a relationship with him. He did this so that you would remember "you matter" to him. But it didn't end with the crucifixion; Jesus rose from the dead!

Psalm 22:16-18

*¹⁶My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;
an evil gang closes in on me.*

They have pierced my hands and feet.

¹⁷I can count all my bones.

My enemies stare at me and gloat.

*¹⁸They divide my garments among themselves
and throw dice for my clothing.*

What emotions do you think Jesus felt, knowing that he would have to suffer all these things from Psalm 22? What emotions do you feel when you think about Jesus' sufferings? Have you suffered in similar ways? Have you been surrounded by enemies? Have they stared at you and mocked you?

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for suffering at the hands of your enemies. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. Please help me to remember that you did this so that I could be in a relationship with you. Help me to come to you daily in prayer and Bible study so I can grow closer to you. Thank you for telling me "you matter." Amen.

God's Plan

Thursday, April 20, 2017

While Tuesday's verse from Isaiah and Wednesday's verse from the Psalms are ancient prophecies indeed, this one is the oldest by far! In this, the account of the fall, the first glimmer of the coming Messiah is given. Now, I have read this before, and quite honestly, I thought they got the reference wrong! Where does it say anything about the Messiah in this passage? I didn't get it.

That is what is so fascinating about digging deeper into the Scriptures. Often, we need to look at the original text to get the whole picture. I love that we have resources like YouVersion where we can go to look at lots of different translations to get a fuller, richer understanding of the texts, but sometimes we might have to go a bit deeper still. The Hebrew or Greek words used in the original texts are far more complex than many of our English words can exactly relay. Therefore, we need to delve a little further to see what is going on here, particularly in Genesis 3:15b.

This is where God is punishing the snake for talking Eve into eating the apple. In the first part of the verse, God says that the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring will be hostile toward each other. Then God says, "**He** will strike your head and **you** will strike his heel." This is what theologians call the "protevangelium." That is a big fancy word for the very first gospel. The interpretation of the Hebrew pronouns for "He" refers to one particular man, Jesus, and the "you" of the serpent to Satan. So here God is saying that Satan will strike Jesus' heel, meaning the crucifixion, but Jesus will strike Satan's head, having the ultimate victory.

Whew! Ok, so what does that mean for us? It's just another reminder of how God has had this plan in place from the very beginning. It's the very first reminder! The first of many, as we have seen throughout this week. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, which we can now see was God's plan all along, he has made a way for us to return to him, even from the moments directly after the fall. All through history, through the prophets, God has been telling us that Jesus will come to save us! Even though we turned away from him time and time again, he has always been right there saying "come back to me." That is incredible, extravagant love. We can look at these passages and be reassured over and over that our God loves us and wants to have a relationship with us. All we have to do is believe in his most precious gift that he foretold to us so many years ago.

Genesis 3:14-15

¹⁴Then the Lord God said to the serpent,

*“Because you have done this, you are cursed
more than all animals, domestic and wild.
You will crawl on your belly,
groveling in the dust as long as you live.
¹⁵And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.”*

Take some time to look at a different translation in tandem with the one you usually use or read some commentary about the passage you're reading. Download [YouVersion](#) for translations and look at several commentaries [Here](#).

How does doing so make the meaning of the passage clearer?

How can having clarification and a deeper understanding of this passage bolster your faith?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for giving me so many ways in which to get to know you and your Word. Thank you for the various and incessant ways in which you have shown your love to me throughout time. Help me to always thirst for a deeper understanding and a richer relationship with you through your Son. Amen.

People Don't Come Back to Life

Friday, April 21, 2017

Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is essential to being saved from your sins. Theologian and Philosopher William Lane Craig [writes](#),

Most people are happy to agree that God exists; but in our pluralistic society it has become politically incorrect to claim that God has revealed himself decisively in Jesus. What justification can Christians offer, in contrast to Hindus, Jews, and Muslims, for thinking that the Christian God is real? The answer of the New Testament is the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus' radical personal claims to divine authority.

As Christians, the only thing we have to believe in is the resurrection of Christ, not the entire Bible or any of its stories, for salvation. Therefore, the only thing we have to communicate to the world is that Jesus died for our sins and was brought back to life three days later. Easy, right??

Actually... it's not as hard as it may seem if we are properly prepared with indisputable historical facts about the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Here is some ammo to help you, broken down into four points.

#1 - Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea. The grave site is known to everyone, Jew and Christian. Joseph was also an enemy of Jesus, one of the Jewish high court members who had condemned him to death but later honored Jesus with a proper burial instead of a common criminal's disposal. Given the strong resentment against the Jews who played a role in the death of Jesus, it is highly unlikely that it would be a fabricated part of the burial story. If it were, in fact, a false claim, there would be many conflicting stories about what happened to Jesus' body, where he'd been buried, and in what fashion. There is no competing legend!

#2 - Jesus' tomb was found empty on the Sunday following his death. If the tomb weren't empty, wouldn't Jesus' opponents have pointed it out! They could've very easily gone to Joseph of Arimathea's tomb and pointed out the body, but they didn't. They claimed the body was stolen.

#3 - There is a long list of eyewitnesses who interacted with Jesus after his death. More importantly is who he visited after death - his younger brother (among several other individuals and groups), someone who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah during his lifetime, but rather after he died. James, Jesus' brother, was eventually martyred for his faith 60 years after Jesus died. William Lane Craig points out, "what would it take to make your siblings believe you are God?"

#4 - The disciples believed Jesus rose from the dead when they had every reason not to. Jewish religion regarding death and the afterlife have nothing to do with rising again to walk the earth. They would have done their best to preserve the tomb and Jesus' bones until they died, but this group of followers was so passionate about interacting with Jesus after his death that they were willing to be tortured and killed for it. There was no body to protect or tomb to preserve. A historian could not explain their drastic behavior unless Jesus had risen and left an empty tomb.

The people referenced above and throughout the life of Jesus were real, documented by Jews and Christians alike. The geographical landmarks can be identified on a map. Every war and personal altercation in history has conflicting opinions for blame and triumph except for the story of Jesus Christ. How remarkable is that?!

Romans 10:9-10

⁹If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.

This is the message that the early church preached. With all the darkness and sin in the world, we need to bring the hope of the resurrection. We don't need to convince people to believe that the entire Bible is completely true (though it is). We don't have to try to convince people to believe in any specific part of the Bible to be true, other than the resurrection. That's what the early disciples preached and that is how the church started. That's the message of the Gospel.

How might you engage with a non-believer after today's message?

Is your belief more solid?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for allowing us to receive the Living God that is Jesus! Thank you for making it so clear, so certain, that he not only died for our sins but rose again from the dead to prove the prophecies and covenants he preached in his lifetime, which sets Christianity apart from all other belief systems. Amen.

This post was written by Aviva Hufford, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.