

Easter Sunday 2019 – Paid In Full

A sermon by Pr. David Johnson

How many here have ever had a debt to pay; a car loan, a mortgage on a home, or maybe a credit card balance or 2 (or 3, 4, or 5) to pay off? Each obligation or debt we incur brings an additional burden to our lives.

Some have said that the more things we own, the more things own us. The same can be said of our financial obligations; the more debt we carry, the more liberty we compromise and even forfeit.

So, rather than face the painful truth, the easiest thing to do is pretend it's not there. We do our best to rationalize it away. We convince ourselves that since we're making our minimum payments, we're actually fiscally sound. Or maybe, we compare ourselves to others, which will usually result in finding someone in a bigger hole.

In short, we ignore the bondage of our own condition, choosing instead to focus on whatever benefit we might be able to identify from our condition. We surround ourselves with toys, friends (who usually share our condition), and other distracting or numbing influences to take our minds off our condition. But sadly, down deep inside we can't ignore the drain and stress of the truth.

Truth be told, it isn't until the bill is paid that we can truly experience freedom and some kind of relief. It's the *Paid In Full* receipt, or an incinerated mortgage that brings a lasting liberation from our financial burdens. Oh, what freedom we feel when the last payment is made on a debt which has hung unforgivingly over our heads.

But this isn't really a sermon about debt. It is a sermon about life. No, actually life and death. You see, there are those who would, and will, spend this Easter talking about things like bunnies, spring, new beginnings, and chocolate, while others focus on works like hope, new life, and restoration. The first group will have a pleasant day of fun and candy, while the second will attach a much deeper significance to the holiday.

But I'm convinced that even those in the second group will miss the true significance of those terms unless we are first willing to admit the presence of things like bondage, fear, depravity, and eternal damnation; something few wish to discuss today, and which some actually deny.

But that's where our Old and New Testament lessons lead us today. They force us to face our need for Easter:

Isaiah 53:8-9 "By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? ⁹ His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth..."

1 Corinthians 5:7-8 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of

malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

On the surface, these passages may seem antithetical to a day like Easter. But when you really ponder them, they are actually quite fitting, and filled with hope, especially when you consider the topic of our own Lenten series this year. You see, we've been studying the 7 penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) in our Thursday evening Bible Studies. We've seen how desperate the Psalmists felt; the absolute agony they endured, until they shifted their focus from their problems, to their provision.

These Psalms are filled with expressions of darkness, hopelessness, depression, and an intense sense of being overwhelmed. However, when the writers are reminded of the power, forgiveness, and righteous character of their loving heavenly Father, those feelings of hopelessness faded away. They overcame, and were overcome, by the truth; a transformation which comes by shining the light of the Good News into their own personal hell.

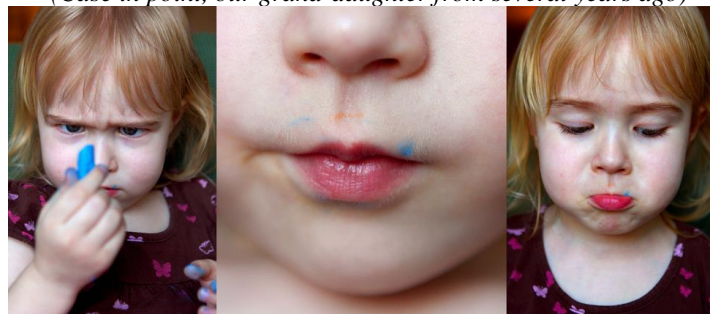
But what good is a promise of freedom to a person who has no real understanding of their own personal imprisonment? Or the hope of debt forgiveness for a person unwilling to consider the indentured reality of his condition? What meaning does eternal salvation have for a person who won't recognize real eternal judgment, and the claim it has on his or her soul.

That's why I'd like to take a few minutes this morning to address the realities of Easter, and the benefits of that empty tomb from the angle of what no longer binds us.

We're told in the Scriptures that we have three distinct enemies: Sin, Death, and the Devil. We experience the attacks of these enemies through the fallen world around us, through direct assaults of Satan himself, and through our own fleshly natures and human bodies. To deny this fact is like denying that a financial debt has any real negative impact on our general lives. Can we really celebrate and appreciate financial health or freedom, without fearing the reality of financial debt and bondage.

Sin is sin, and no matter how we rationalize or deny it; the evidence remains. There is no hiding; not from ourselves, from others, and least of all, from God.

(Case in point, our grand-daughter from several years ago)



"Cadence, did you eat a Crayon?"

"Um, no."

"Really?"

"I ate one."

This is frequently reinforced throughout Scripture.

John 8:23 And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.

24 "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am {He,} you will die in your sins."

1 Cor 15:16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; **17** and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

That's why passages like Isaiah 53 are so critical in understanding the liberty brought through Easter.

Is 53:8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living *For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke [was due?]* (He became a Scape-goat)

9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, *Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.*

(The innocent for the guilty)

10 But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting {Him} to grief; *If He would render Himself {as} a guilt offering...*

(Voluntary Sacrifice)

11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see {it and} be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, *My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.*

(Universal Atonement)

12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; *Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.* (Our Vicarious Intermediary)

In those few verses from Isaiah 53, we read no fewer than 5 references to Jesus' motivation for going to Calvary. It was because of our sin, our transgressions, and our debts that he endured the agony of the cross. Jesus had no debts of His own. In fact, Jesus had never incurred a debt in His life, financial, moral, or spiritual. He had never known the stress and destructive bondage brought on by any kind of obligation. But in the agony of Jesus' torture and death, our debts became His.

In addition to this, along with our debt of sin, comes a truckload of consequences: sickness, depression, bondage, fear, depravity, hopelessness, and eternal damnation.

Heb 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

Col 1:21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, {engaged} in evil deeds, **22** yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

All of those things that burden and drain us daily are a result of our overwhelming sin; as well as the burden of eternal damnation after death. And in that horrible death on Calvary's cross, Jesus took all of our corporate and individual debts on Himself. Jesus cleared every spiritual debt we ever owed to our heavenly Father, and all of their consequences.

But if all that happened in Jesus' death, what is the significance of the empty tomb, of His resurrection? To

answer this we must remember what I said about the relief that comes when that "Paid in Full" receipt comes in the mail. That is precisely what Jesus' resurrection declared.

It was in Jesus' resurrection that our accounts were certified "*Paid in Full.*" It was by this bold statement of life from death that our heavenly Father declared all accounts cleared, every prophecy fulfilled, all sacrifices honored, and every sinful debt cancelled. It was through the empty tomb that hope replaced fear, liberty replaced bondage, wholeness replaced sickness, and eternal reward replaced eternal damnation.

1 Cor 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. **21** For since by a man {came} death, by a man also {came} the resurrection of the dead. **22** For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. **23** But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, **24** then {comes} the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. **25** For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. **26** The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

So now, in Christ Jesus, we can understand and appreciate what we have, because we have faced the truth of what we deserve. Our sin has brought us a verdict of death and despair. Jesus Christ has brought us life and that abundantly. And the empty tomb was the Father's way of saying, "I accept My Son's death as '*Payment in Full.*'"

Many years ago, a Christian recording group named *Point of Grace* sang a song called *No More Pain*. The chorus of the songs made this bold statement which speaks directly to the wonderful promise of Easter:

Where there will be no more pain, No more sorrow

No more waiting, For illusive tomorrows

There will be no more pain, No more dying

No more striving or strain, No more pain

The only sad catch in this promise is that it only applies to those who submit themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That's right, all the old can be gone, and all the promises of liberty, hope and eternal blessing can be yours. But you have to come by faith in the Risen Savior Jesus Christ. It was only because of His sacrifice that the Father cancelled your debt.

The two options are clear; eternal life and liberty, or an eternity of the debt-filled life you've always struggled against?