

Easter Sunday 2010

Title: “Easter Made Simple”

April 4, 2010

Selected passages

OBJECTIVE: That the simple message of the Gospel will be clear to all. That the complex issues of faith will not be a barrier to faith.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards.
- Check bulletin for ministry details
- 9:00 hour – Continental Breakfast in courtyard after service
- Youth Night Service May 2nd – 6 p.m.
- Baptism – next Sunday!!! April 11th
- Membership – April 25th
- Chipotle – next Sunday – free burrito or kids meal

Opening prayer

Video

Perhaps more than any other time in recent history, there is great confusion regarding Easter – regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ. The statements you just witnessed are evidence of that – and I believe those statements are a sampling of what people in our culture think about Jesus, the cross, and His resurrection.

Why has the message of Christ become so confusing for so many?

By putting behavior before belief

Many have loaded up the message of Christ with other things – they have added to it – they have expanded it – they have diluted it – they have watered it down – they have complicated it – they have

taken what God intended to be understandable by a child – and have added fancy and confusing terms and language unnecessarily. Is our behavior important to God? Does He desire us to live moral and ethical lives? Does God want us to be faithful in our marriages, honest in our business, loving toward others, trustworthy with our friends? YES!!!! However, before a person can begin obeying God and living as Christians are called to live, they must first start at the beginning. God calls you to believe first – then begin the life-long process of allowing His truth to transform your life!

It has been said: *“It is a simple task to make things complex, but a complex task to make them simple again.”*

Illus. I love to golf – and about three years ago, my wife decided to take up golf so that we could spend some time together. I’ve been golfing since around 6th grade. I’m not a great golfer, but I’m not a beginner either. It would be ridiculous for me to tell Kim that she must hit 250 – 300 yard drives, be competent out of the bunkers, to be able to hit a 200 yard 4 iron – before allowing her to golf with me.

Yet, that’s what some churches have done to those who visit the church or who are investigating the claims of Christ.

It would be foolish for me, if I truly wanted to spend time with Kim golfing – to demand of her a certain skill level before teeing it up with her.

It is just as foolish – may I say even heretical – for me or any other Christian to demand someone to transform their life and develop some aspect of Christian character or morality before even becoming a Christian!

This is one of the things that has complicated the simple message of Christ.

You could say that many times, churches and pastors have become distracted by things that are not supposed to be the focus of the church. Issues of politics and culture are not supposed to be the focus of the church. The church does have a responsibility to address some of these issues from the pages of Scripture. The church should be the ‘Voice of God’, the ‘Conscience of the culture’. But we are not called to lead the charge in the public arena. Our mission – our job is clear – “...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”
Matt. 28:19-20

One of the ways that churches have complicated the message of Christ is that certain expectations and standards were added to church and it’s message. Wearing certain types of clothing, looking a certain way, the pressure to conform to what was “acceptable” may have had some good motives, but they did damage to the cause of Christ. What was intended to help people begin changing their life became an obstacle that kept them away from Christ. Instead of positive peer pressure, many of these things became a den of hypocrisy – where people acted one way at church, and another way at home, at work, and at play.

This was nothing new actually. We read in the New Testament of similar things. In the first century – when the church began, they didn’t wear suits and ties, but the early Christians added spiritual baggage to the simple message of Christ. Some early churches taught that in addition to belief / faith in Jesus, you had to do other things also. They taught that you had to conform to *more* than the Gospel.

In fact, when this started happening, the Apostle Paul went to the Apostles in Jerusalem who were the early authorities for this new group called “Christians” – and he told them what was happening,

and how concerned he was that this would keep people away from the message of Christ. Some of that group said that all the new believers in Jesus needed to be circumcised and follow all the rules in Mosaic Law! (Acts 15:5) Wow! Nothing would dampen someone's desire to follow Jesus than requiring circumcision on their second visit to church! Maybe this is why men seem to be more hesitant to attend church!

Well, after much discussion, the Apostles – James, Jesus' brother, was the primary leader in Jerusalem at this time – and he gave the following verdict:

Acts 15:19

“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

This was indeed a victory for God – the message the Lord gave was preserved in its true form.

By putting style over substance

Flashy preachers. Worship services that are more entertaining and amusing than reverent and worshipful.

Worship that is more a performance and a concert feel where the focus seems to be on the people not the God they claim to worship.

On the other extreme, there are dull and boring preachers who don't seem to be passionate about the things of God.

Worship services that are torturous due to their poor quality and lack of creativity.

It has been too easy for churches to get distracted by style...style of the preacher...style of the worship music...style of the sanctuary – instead of focusing on the substance of these things. A preacher is often critiqued on

his presentation – not on the truth of his message. The music is critiqued on the basis of personal preferences, not on the veracity of the lyrics and the spirit of the leader. Don't misunderstand me...I – and Pastor Joseph – none of the leadership of the church is above scrutiny – none of us are beyond correction. However, the correction must be grounded in the substance of Scripture – not preferences of personal style. The Corinthian church struggled in many areas – and this issue of style over substance was one of them.

1 Cor. 1:10-12

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

¹¹ My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹² What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

My guess is that all of these men communicated the same *substance* – but the divisions were created by an over-emphasis on style.

Paul even cautions against an overly clever and overly dynamic preacher when he wrote:

1 Cor. 1:17

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”

This is not a refutation of baptism – but simply an emphasis on Paul's humility in preaching and his emphasis that the substance of his preaching was what was important – not the outward style. The cross of Christ doesn't need any more power from a theatrical preacher.

By diluting the truth instead of being discerning

2 Cor. 11:3-4

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

What was Paul saying here? The people in the church at Corinth were not taking the truth of Christ seriously enough. They were more interested in being nice and agreeable with a traveling speaker / pastor that came and taught them with false ideas and a false gospel, instead of standing up for the truth they had already accepted.

What a parallel with our culture today! We are very uncomfortable with saying something is 'right' and the other thing is 'wrong'. That kind of dogmatism and confidence is taboo in our society. However, all throughout Scripture, God calls His children to be discerning – to make judgments of what is right and wrong – to distinguish between truth and error – and not to put up with error but cling to the truth! When we don't follow God's Word in this regard, the message of Christ becomes complicated and various 'nuances' attach themselves to the core message. Instead of being simple, the Gospel becomes complicated with various philosophical, scientific, sociological, anthropological and ecumenical additions that we can't even spell, let alone articulate and keep track of!!!

Easter made simple

First, let's clear up some possible confusion about the word simple.

Simple does not equal simplistic

Simple = easy, straightforward, uncomplicated

Simplistic = naïve, unsophisticated, one-dimensional

Towards the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul spells out the essence of the Gospel – the message of Jesus. He also says that if this isn't true, then we are all just wasting our time.

1 Cor. 15:3-8

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that *Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that *he was buried*, that *he was raised* on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that *he appeared* to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

That is what Easter is about – that Jesus died, was buried, rose from the grave, and he appeared

After Jesus rose from the dead, look who He appeared to...

⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.”

He appeared to more than five hundred people! There were over five hundred eye-witnesses to the resurrected Jesus! That was hugely important at the time Paul wrote these words, because (as he states in vs. 6b) some of those multiple eye-witnesses were still living about twenty years after Jesus' resurrection! Eye-witness testimony is the most reliable, but

the eye-witness testimony of two or three people can be refuted by clever attorneys. However, eye-witness testimony of over five hundred people is overwhelming evidence to the event!

This Easter, I want you all to understand that there are many worthwhile intellectual pursuits related to Christ, His teaching and His Church. As I said a few minutes ago, simple doesn't mean simplistic.

But the message of Jesus – the message of Easter is simple – not complicated. Jesus died to pay the price for our sins. Every person who ever lived, aside from Jesus, were and are sinners.

(Put verses on screen while talking about humanity's sin)

Romans 3:10 (Psalm 14:3b)

“There is no one righteous, not even one”

Rom. 3:23

“All have sinned”

Jesus died and was buried in a grave – He was dead...not simply unconscious.

He rose from the dead – the grave was empty – He conquered death and sin. The resurrection of Jesus makes Him unique to all other ‘religious leaders’. Only God can conquer death and Jesus’ resurrection validates His claims of deity.

The fact that He appeared to over five hundred different people – in addition to His disciples, proves that the disciples didn't make this whole thing up.

The simplicity of Easter is not only in the message – the truth of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, but also in your response to it.

God's request to you – His call to you is simple – to believe. To believe that Jesus did this for you. He never asks you to put your intellect aside – to not think about these things. After all, He created your intellect! He is not threatened by our intellect!

But His appeal to you is to believe that He loves you – and because of His great love for you, He died to redeem you and me from our sin.

Admit your sins to God – confess your sins to Him. Come clean before Him! He will not reject you – no matter what sins you have committed – His love and forgiveness is greater than any kind and any amount of sins in your life.

Believe in Jesus and His death, burial, and resurrection. By His death He paid the price for our sins – He redeems us or “buys” us back from Satan. Believe in Jesus – put your faith in Him and what He has done.

Choose to follow Him. God loves you. His love for you is so great that He died for you and atoned for your sins. But His love doesn't end at the cross – it doesn't end at the empty grave – He has a plan for you – a plan for your life. So, He calls you and says, “Follow Me” (Matt. 9:9).

Close in prayer – salvation prayer