

Easter Message

[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Hello, today's talk is the Easter Message but I want to start by linking this straight away with the Christmas message. I was thinking about this Easter message around the time the whole of the world of Christendom was celebrating the Christmas story. It is vital that we never lose sight of the Easter story at Christmas time because, unlike when we celebrate any other child's birth, the Baby in the manger was to facilitate a Man destined to die!

So, with this in mind I want to start by reading a verse from the Prophet Isaiah and, as with all our readings unless otherwise stated, it will be from the New King James version of the Bible. Before I read however, I just want to mention that it is not one of the wonderful verses we are very used to hearing read at Christmas time from Isaiah, perhaps the most well-known of which is chapter 9 verse 6, telling us about a Child being born and a Son given. The Prophet wrote these verses about some event yet to happen, but the verse I want to read is one that takes us back to something that had already taken place a long time before Isaiah lived, or even before the worlds were created!

Let me read from Isaiah chapter 6 verse 8:

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.””

In the same way as King David in Psalm 22 in particular used, as directed by the Holy Spirit, words to describe his own state of soul that the Lord would use from the cross centuries later, we can perhaps see here Isaiah using the words that the Son of God had used before the worlds were created. These were to express His willingness to come into this world in order to fulfil the desire of the Godhead (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) that mankind should have an eternal relationship with them. So, it is with these two prophetic words, “Send Me”, that the Christmas and Easter messages both begin. They were obviously Isaiah's own words in response to the vision of the seraphim and the challenge it had given him, but I like to think of that scene in heaven long past where the desire of God was met by the willingness of the Son to come into manhood and die on the cross of Calvary.

After saying a little more on these words spoken in eternity, I then want to think about things that Jesus said when He was here in this world that are of a similar pithy nature, which I trust will then help us all to remember and meditate upon them.

Firstly in John chapter 14 verse 1,	-	“Believe... in Me.”
Then in many various verses we read,	-	“Follow Me.”
In Matthew chapter 11 verse 28 we will look at,	-	“Come to Me.”
Then again in John chapter 14 verse 9 we read,	-	“Known Me”, “Seen Me”,
and in verse 11,	-	“Believe Me”.

Then finally in Luke chapter 22 verse 19, when the Lord effectively said,

- "Remember Me."

All of these things could perhaps be summarised by the old chorus, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face" (Helen Howarth Lemmel 1863 -1961).

There can be no doubt that if any other person had said these things then we would be dealing with some sort of narcissistic megalomaniac. Sadly there appears to be plenty of them around in the world today so it is vital that we understand the Person behind Isaiah's prophetic words. We can then go on to appreciate and embrace the invitations we are considering; to believe, follow, come, see, know, and remember the only One who is worthy of such honour, Jesus Christ the Son of God. "Send Me." I like to think was spoken by the Son of God in the counsel chambers of eternity as the great plan of salvation was worked out. We love to sing so often, "Oh the love that drew salvation's plan, oh the grace that brought it down to man" (William R. Newell 1895). There are 3 New Testament verses that I love to muse over whenever I consider this incredible concept. First, in Paul's epistle to the Ephesian Christians chapter 1 and verse 4, he tells them that they were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Dear Christian friends what a glorious thing to keep in our minds that we were the object of God the Father's and God the Son's love, as well as the subject of their conversation before the worlds had even been created! We are not just here by chance as many greatly desire that we should believe!

Second, I want to mention Paul's epistle to the Colossians chapter 1 verse 17, where having told them in verse 16 that God the Son was both responsible for creation and that it was created for Him, Paul clearly explains that the Son is before all things and that through Him all things consist. A good dictionary gives the meaning of consist as exist, subsist or holds together. So, the vast universe has been brought into existence by and for the Son of God, and is held together, or subsists, by Him. He who ever was chose you and me to be believers, who are blessed eternally in Him.

Thirdly, another verse that takes us back to before anything existed. I almost said "a time" before anything existed but even then, time didn't exist! Eternity is not bound by time; time is for this life only. We will now look at Peter's writings, where in chapter 1 of his first epistle and verse 20 he says:

"(Christ) indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."

So when Abraham told Isaac in Genesis chapter 22 verse 8 that God would provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, little did he know that this had already taken place and that God the Son had already been chosen to be that Lamb. Peter's explanation then goes on to say that this choice, from as far back as anyone could care to imagine, had now been brought to fruition in these last times in the birth, life, and death, of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, the One who ever is the Son.

So we have seen these three things that go back to before even time existed: that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were there; that God the Son was already chosen to be the Lamb of God; and that all Christian believers were earmarked for eternal blessing. I trust then you can enjoy with me that prophetic voice of God the Son, "Send Me!" What grace!

Then the time did come! Paul writes to the Galatians in chapter 4 verse 4:

"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman."

Christ was foreordained and accepted as worthy before anything existed, then sent in time, when the time was right. Then after those 30 years of relative obscurity, the One who ever is the Son came forth into His public ministry; and after being identified by the Father on the banks of the Jordan, He almost immediately started putting out the next wonderful request: "Follow Me." We read the details of the responses to this request in all four Gospels: Matthew chapters 4, 8, 9 and 19; Mark chapter 2; Luke chapters 5 and 9; and John chapters 1 and 21. All are worthy of your further private enjoyment, and you may even find more. Let us just think about a few.

Before we do, however, I want to mention the very first request of Jesus that I mentioned earlier, that being, "Believe in ... Me". It is very difficult even in the very basic things of life to follow someone or something that we do not fully believe in. This is not just to believe in the historical existence of a man named Jesus but to be fully convinced and trust in all that He claimed to be. I will go into this in more depth a little later as we think about John's Gospel chapter 14, but I wanted to keep the continuity of the points mentioned earlier.

In John chapter 1 the invitation to "Follow Me" goes to Philip and he recognises Jesus as the One who Moses and all the Prophets had spoken of. Not only does he follow, he goes to find others and brings them to Jesus. It is interesting that the next reference to following Jesus in John's Gospel is in chapter 21 when the resurrected Christ, in order to restore Peter, uses the same term more than once, "Follow Me." It would seem that He was instructing Peter that to follow Him was both the answer to Peter's own failings and that it would also prevent him being overly concerned with what others are doing or are not doing.

In Luke chapter 5 we read of Levi, or Matthew as he was also known, sitting at work as a tax collector. Jesus comes and the invitation to follow Him is accepted by Matthew. Verse 28 gives us the real sense of immediacy, Matthew left everything, stood up, and followed Jesus. What an impact his decision made! For example, we are still reading his Gospel account of Jesus's life all these years later. I wonder if we would have ever read his account of tax collecting?

One more example of the response to this request, "Follow Me" is found in Matthew's Gospel chapter 4. Here four hard working, uneducated, and no doubt rough fishermen are by the Sea of Galilee trying to catch fish to make a living. The invitation to "Follow Me" goes out to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, as well as to brothers James and John. All responded by leaving everything and to become fishers of men not fish. Their response helped change the world for Christ. As we listen to this invitation to follow Jesus today, is there anyone who has never responded as those men did? Perhaps we are ignoring the Master's voice and our life is facing the consequences of those decisions! As we continue my prayer is that you will consider this.

Let's stay with Matthew's Gospel for our next invitation and I want to read Matthew chapter 11 verse 28:

"Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Is there anybody listening today who feels heavy laden with, and burdened by, the stresses of life? It feels like we are living at the moment in days of unprecedented problems: the financial effect of lockdowns, political uncertainties, and wars, etc. Yet were things any better when Matthew was quoting these words of Jesus? I think not! So we can have confidence that whatever is going on in our personal, family, or business lives, or in the world in general, we can have rest by accepting Jesus' invitation to come to Him. The Lord then explains what he means by using the example of the yoke that was used for oxen ploughing in the field. If two oxen are ploughing together, they must be in unison or else their labour will be very uncomfortable and ineffective. The Lord's yoke is light and He invites us to stay close to Him, to be in unison with what He wants, and by so doing, our lives will be fruitful and blessed. If one of the oxen tries to go in its own direction, or at

its own speed, just imagine how uncomfortable that yoke will feel. Perhaps, when we Christians feel life is not going as it should, it is because we are trying to plough our own furrow and are not following the Lord's instruction!

Let's now move to John's Gospel chapter 14 and read the words of the Lord Himself, firstly verse 1:

“Let not your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.”

Many people today may say they believe in God but are uncertain as to what it is they are actually placing their faith in. Is it just a higher power or an invisible force for good, or indeed an image carved from stone or wood? The Apostle Paul experienced all these ideas as he reasoned with the philosophers in Athens. No doubt many of them were very intelligent people and Paul told them in verse 22 of Acts chapter 17 that he had perceived they were very religious. He had observed their many objects of worship, gods, and had even seen an altar with the inscription: “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” However, as he went on to preach the Gospel to them it was evident that their religious observances, irrespective of how sincere they were, were not able to bring them into the eternal blessing of sins forgiven and all the other blessings of Christianity.

It is here in John chapter 14 perhaps more than anywhere else in the Bible that the Lord Himself explains the very essence of Christianity; that it's only through faith in Him that we can be brought into relationship with God the Father. It's worth noting that it's not just being saved and having our sins forgiven, however wonderful that is, but it's to be brought close and to know our Heavenly Father. So, as the Lord explains in verse 1, His disciples who were already very happy to have the God of the Old Testament, Jehovah, as the object of their faith were now to believe in Jesus in exactly the same way. It appeals to me that He is almost saying: ‘Why would you not?’ Then He tells them that He is going to prepare a place for them in the Father's house.

Verse 6 then records the wonderful words of the Lord when He said:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

This cannot be more emphatic, but the disciples still needed some points clarified. Perhaps we like them have things we don't quite understand and may be afraid to ask. If Thomas and then Philip had not asked the questions, perhaps they would have all been left wondering about this most amazing area of truth! In verse 9 the Lord goes on to explain that they had not fully known who He is otherwise, if they had, they would have realised that by seeing Him in person they had in fact seen the Father. Furthermore, because the Son is in the Father and the Father in Him, we believe in Him and all that He brings us into in respect to the Father. So, by faith, we believe in Him, see Him, and get to know all that He is. What a contrast to the philosophers of Athens!

Finally then, our last point of this message, “Remember Me.” Surely if we believe that Jesus was sent from God, if we believe in Him for our salvation, if we have responded to His invitation to follow Him, and have come to Him in order to dispose of all our cares and woes, then we should remember Him often and sincerely. We will find it difficult to see, know, and believe Him by faith, if we go through our lives forgetting all about Him and His work upon the cross for us. We read a heart-rending example of this in Genesis chapters 40 and 41.

Joseph had been placed in prison because of terrible lies told against him. After some time, Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker were also placed in the same prison as they had done something to offend the king of Egypt. On the very same night both of these men had dreams that troubled them greatly as they had no idea what they meant. The following morning it was very

evident to Joseph that something was troubling them so when he enquired, they explained about the dreams they'd had. Joseph had been given a special gift from God to interpret dreams, and so he offered to do that for these two men.

They explained their dreams to Joseph, and he was able to give them the meaning of them. The interpretations were very different however, the butler was to be released from prison and restored to his position of serving the king but the baker, in the same time frame, was to be executed by the king. When Joseph had given the butler such good news, he asked the butler to remember him after he had been restored and to bring his case before Pharaoh. However, chapter 40 verse 23 tells us that the butler completely forgot all about Joseph. In chapter 41 we are then told that two years past before Pharaoh himself had a troubling dream. It was only then that the butler remembered the man who had been such a blessing to him while he was in prison. Even then it would appear that it was only because there was something in it for him, that he spoke to Pharaoh about Joseph. How sad, but how often do we forget what the Lord has done for us?

It is because the Lord knew His disciples and, by extension us, better than we know ourselves and that, like Pharaoh's butler, we might so easily get caught up with the busyness of life that we forget Him, that He took His own into that upper room on the night before He was crucified and instituted the Lord's Supper. The timing of when this took place is very significant, it was the Passover night. This brings us to the very time we are celebrating this weekend, Easter. The word "Easter" is translated from the Greek word meaning "Passover." Easter is used only once in the King James, or Authorised, version of the Bible, in Acts chapter 12 verse 4. This same Greek word is properly translated as "Passover" in the New King James version. It is for this reason that the Easter weekend is not the same date each year, whereas Christmas has been set as 25th of December. We have no exact details from Scripture as to when the Lord was born. But we do have the time of His crucifixion, it was the Passover. How remarkable then, and certainly not coincidental, that in his first epistle to the Corinthians chapter 5 verse 7 the apostle Paul writes:

"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."

So here as the Jews were remembering that great night in Egypt when they broke out of captivity and the avenging angel passed over them on the strength of the blood of the sacrificial lamb that was put on their door posts and lintel, which was a type of God's Lamb, the very time had come when that ultimate sacrifice was made. Another example surely of the accuracy of what I mentioned earlier from Galatians in respect of the fullness of the time.

I would now like to read the account of that wonderful occasion from Luke chapter 22 and verses 19 and 20:

"And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.""

The preceding verses, vv.14-18, describe the actual Passover meal. So it was fitting that for those Jewish believers that, the things pertaining to the old ways of animal sacrifices as a way to approach God, were replaced with the Lamb of God foreordained before the foundation of the world, and who was about to be sacrificed. It is Him that we should now be remembering until He comes again, as Paul explains in 1st Corinthians chapter 11: 23-25. Paul then further adds to this in verse 26 that, as often as we celebrate this feast of remembrance, we proclaim the Lord's death till He comes again. It is interesting to note that we are instructed to remember Him and to show forth, that is, announce or proclaim His death till He comes. At the Lord's Supper, we should always be moved in thanksgiving and then led to worship the Lord Jesus and through Him to the

Father. We should consider it a privilege and responsibility to be able to do this in a world that still rejects, in the main, the Person and work of the Lamb of God.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on the Easter Message, talk number T1297 and I trust the message has been a real encouragement and a challenge to us all.

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