

EASTER SERMON – March 27, 2005

I Corinthians 5:17 - “*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins*”

Everywhere you look – there are children going on Easter egg hunts. And the Easter Bunny that “lays” those eggs. Now, that’s funny...isn’t it? Ever thought about that? **A bunny laying eggs?**

How did all of this come about?

It’s been a long time since I was in school, probably a long time for most of you too. So, let’s put on our student caps and learn some history, shall we?

We’ve all heard of Noah’s flood, haven’t we? Some “preachers” teach that this was just a myth, a fable, a made-up story...but the flood is a **historical fact**. Just read Genesis chapters 6 – 9. The Bible says that “*the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*” Noah built himself a boat didn’t he? And he saved his family and the animals on that ark while the rest of the earth was flooded. **Noah** had 3 sons, Shem, **Ham**, & Japheth.

Ham had four sons. The descendants of one of his sons, Canaan, were some of the most wicked people to ever live on the earth—the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. But we’re going to learn a little bit about another of Ham’s sons, **Cush**, who married a woman named Semiramis. Cush and Semiramis had a son named him **Nimrod** (*Noah’s great grandson*).

After Cush died, Nimrod married his own mother (*Semiramis*) and became King. See Genesis 10: 8-10. Nimrod became god to the people and Semiramis (*his wife and mother*) became a powerful Queen. Nimrod was eventually killed by an enemy, and his body was cut in pieces. The queen told the people of Babylon that Nimrod had ascended to the sun and was now to be called “**Baal**” (*the sun god*). She also proclaimed that Baal would be present on earth in the form of a candle flame when used in worship.

Semiramis claimed that she was **immaculately conceived** (*this is one of the origins of the Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception & Mary worship*). She taught that she had come down from the moon in a giant moon egg that fell into the Euphrates River. She became known as “Ishtar” (*Easter*), the goddess of fertility, and her moon egg became known as “Ishtar’s” egg” (*the Easter egg*). Ishtar soon became pregnant and claimed that it was the rays of the sun-god Baal that caused her to conceive. Her son was named Tammuz, and he was especially **fond of rabbits**, which became sacred in their religion.

Ishtar proclaimed herself to be the “*Mother of God and Queen of Heaven*” Eventually, Tammuz was killed by a wild pig, and Ishtar told the people that Tammuz had ascended to his father, Baal. She declared that the 3 of them were **father (Nimrod), son (Tammuz), and spirit (Ishtar)**. The queen told the worshippers that through the power of her tears, Tammuz was “*resurrected*” in the form of flowers and vegetation. She also proclaimed a forty day period of time of sorrow each year prior to the anniversary of the death of Tammuz, called the “*Feast of Tammuz.*”

Ezekiel 8:14,16 “*Then he brought me to the entrance to the north gate of the house of the LORD , and I saw women sitting there, mourning for Tammuz...He then brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD , and there at the entrance to the temple, between the portico and the altar, were about twenty-five men. With their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, they were bowing down to the sun in the east.” During this time, **no meat** was to be eaten.*

Does this sound familiar?

This is where Catholics get the 40 days of “Lent.” Baal worshippers were to meditate upon the sacred mysteries of Baal and Tammuz, bown down to worship, and to make the sign of the “T” (for Tammuz) in front of their hearts as they worshipped (*the sign of the cross*). They also ate sacred cakes with the marking of a “T” or cross on the top. (*Jeremiah 7:18*). This is where we get the Catholic tradition of hot-cross buns at Easter time.

Every year, on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox (*which is about at end of March or first of April*), they had a celebration celebrated with **rabbits** and **eggs**. Ishtar also proclaimed that because Tammuz was killed by a pig, that a pig must be eaten on that Sunday. This is where we get the **Easter Ham!**

Within time, however, the father and son were practically overlooked and Ishtar became the grand object of worship. Numerous Babylonian monuments show Ishtar with her son in arms. The image of mother with child in her arms was so firmly entrenched in the pagan mind that by the time Christianity appeared on the scene in 30 A.D., these statues and paintings were merely **renamed** and **worshipped** as the virgin Mary with her son Jesus. Thus, the pagan mother (*Ishtar*) and child entered Christianity as the Roman Catholic worship of Mary with the infant Jesus.

The truth is that Lent ... eggs ... rabbits ... hot-cross buns ... Mary worship ... the sign of the cross ... and the Easter ham all came from the ancient pagan religion of Baal & Ishtar.

But what does all that have to do with our text of Scripture?

Let’s read it again: I Corinthians 5:17 - “*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*”

So, we’re talking about the first part of this verse – “*if Christ has not been raised*” – the resurrection. For Christians, Easter is “**Resurrection Day**.” For Christians, the origin of Easter is simply the **crucifixion** and **resurrection** of Jesus Christ about 2,000 years ago. Jesus Christ, the true Messiah promised in the Old Testament, was crucified and resurrected at the time of the **Jewish Passover**. Since then, Christians have honored that day and often celebrated it with the traditional Passover.

My uncle, who died of cancer about 7 years ago, was named Joel **Paschal** Bollinger. I have never met another person with the name Paschal. It’s an odd name, isn’t it?

Here's where the word "**Paschal**" comes from: In the Old Testament, the Israelites/Hebrews were enslaved to the Egyptians. In order to get the Pharaoh (*leader*) of Egypt to set them free from being slaves, Moses (*at God's command*) brought down upon Egypt ten plagues. The water in the rivers, lakes and wells was turned into blood; hail and locusts destroyed all the plants; a three-day darkness covered the whole of Egypt; frogs, gnats, and flies covered the land. In spite of all these events, Pharaoh still did not let the Hebrews go.

Then the final plague **the 10th plague** the Lord commanded the Hebrews to choose for each Hebrew family a spotless lamb that was one year old, slaughter it, cook it and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, without breaking any of its bones. They were then to smear the blood of the lamb onto the doorposts of their houses. The Hebrews did as God commanded them.

On that night the angel of the Lord killed all the first born males in Egypt, from men to the cattle. He **passed over** only those houses with blood on the doorpost. Even Pharaoh's own son was killed, and he told Moses to leave Egypt with the Hebrew people as soon as possible. 600,000 men left with Moses, not counting women and children. They were freed from their slavery.

In order to commemorate the day of the Hebrews' deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the Lord established the main feast of the Old Testament, which He called Pascha. The word Pascha means "passover" or "deliverance from misfortune." Since the angel of the Lord had "passed over" the Hebrew dwellings, every year on the evening of this day the Hebrews slaughtered and prepared the Paschal lamb and ate it with unleavened bread.

The Paschal lamb, by whose blood the first born of the Hebrews were delivered from death, foreshadowed the Savior Himself Jesus Christ the **Lamb of God** which takes away the sins of the world.

Like the **Hebrews** who were **freed from slavery** through the **blood** of the Paschal Lamb on their doorpost, so are **Christians** set free from our slavery to sin through the **blood** of our Passover Lamb (*Christ*).

In the Old Testament, death passed over the dwellings of the Hebrews. They were freed from slavery in Egypt and given the Promised Land. Now, through the death and resurrection of Christ, eternal death has passed over us. The risen Christ, having freed us from the slavery of sin, has given us eternal life.

In the Old Testament, the lamb was customarily slain at 3 p.m. on Passover. When He died, Jesus uttered the words "**it is finished**" and died on the cross at 3 p.m. on Passover. And like the Paschal Lamb in the Old Testament, not one of Christ's bones was broken on the cross when He died.

The Resurrection of Christ is the event upon which the entire Christian faith hinges. Paul, once a Jewish leader who killed Christians, became a convert when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. As an eyewitness of Christ, Paul made it abundantly clear that without the

resurrection, there is no basis for faith in Christ. He writes in our text *“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.”*

The resurrection is what separates Christianity from **EVERY OTHER RELIGION**.

- Mohammed died...and he never rose from the dead....
- Confucius died...and he never rose from the dead....
- Mary died...and she never rose from the dead....

Suppose that Jesus, after He died on the cross, had stayed dead. **Would it matter?** Paul says that our faith is futile if Christ did not raise from the dead.

Do you know what the most feared event is? An event that most people don't want to talk about? **DEATH**. On TV, we see commercials about everything...except DEATH. Do you know what we all have in common? Everyone, that's right, everyone sitting here tonight is **terminal**. Mom & Dad both are dead of cancer. Dad was 52 and mom was 62. Both were too young to die. But Romans 8:28 states *“and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.”* This is the verse that has become our refuge in times of trial.

If you look in the newspaper, you'll see the **Obituary page** full every day. I'm a CPA, and do you know what some of my wealthiest clients are? That's right – FUNERAL HOMES – they don't have to advertise. Their business just comes to them. Why does Paul say that our faith is futile if Christ didn't raise? Because if Christ didn't raise from the dead, then neither will we.

Our hope of the forgiveness of sins hinges on the fact that Jesus died on the cross for us, and rose again. **Without the Resurrection, there is no forgiveness of sins**, and we are all responsible to pay our own penalty, which is death. Romans 6:23 tells us that *“the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Because Jesus conquered death, we, too, have a chance to live again — and so do our friends and relatives who have already died. I look forward to seeing mom and dad again. I'm sure that there are people that you are looking forward to seeing in heaven as well. I'm the most excited to see Jesus, my Savior. Since Christ's resurrection was real, ours will be real as well.

If there was no Resurrection, there is no good news for the Christian at Easter. But the truth is, **Christ has been raised!** And what were Jesus' first words when He saw Mary after He had been raised? **“FEAR NOT...”** Praise God, Christians don't have to fear death any more!

So how can we be sure that the resurrection happened?

Some skeptics and “intellectuals” say that this was just hallucinations. That the disciples just missed Jesus and really wanted Him to be alive, so they “imagined” that He had risen. That theory can be easily disproved. Here is why: **There were too many eyewitnesses.**

Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the 12 disciples, to the two disciples at Emmaus, to the fisherman on the shore, and even to **500 people at once!**

Let's read I Corinthians 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, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 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. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also.”*

Notice that Paul says that most of the 500 are still alive, inviting any skeptic to check the truth of the story by questioning the eyewitnesses. **He could never have done this and gotten away with it if it were not true.** As many enemies at Paul had, I'm sure that they were swarming on the 500 eyewitnesses to see if what Paul had said was true. And we don't have one recorded report from any of the 500 saying that Paul was lying. **The 500 saw Christ together, at the same time and at the same place.** This is **amazing** if you think about it.

We hear all the time that Elvis is alive...that he was seen eating fried chicken at some obscure restaurant in Amarillo or was seen buying gas at Exxon. As a matter of fact, we probably have had 500 separate Elvis sightings over the past decade. Now...500 separate Elvis sightings may be dismissed as “hallucinations,” *but if 500 farmers in East Texas saw, touched, and talked to Elvis at the same time, in the same town, on the same day, then we might just have to believe that Elvis really is alive.*

The evidence is solid. Jesus ROSE FROM THE DEAD. The tomb was **empty**, and **nobody could produce the body.**

Can a man who claims to be God and then rises from the dead **actually be God in human form?** Is He someone you should follow? C.S. Lewis asked those same questions and came to the conclusion that there are only 3 possibilities. Jesus Christ claimed to be God. Therefore, to say He is just a “good man” or “great teacher” is to call him **a liar**. Any sane person who would claim to be God, but who in fact, is not, must then be crazy - **a lunatic!** But...if Christ is neither a liar nor a lunatic, then there is only one other possible conclusion – **He must be the Lord!**

Sin has a hold on all of us.

Without God, we are **slaves to sin**. Sin is not a popular concept today. It is considered old-fashioned and out-of-date to say that someone is a sinner.

We would rather call sin by different names:

- honest mistakes
- psychological disorders
- pathological diseases
- victims of circumstances
- or anything but the sins they actually are

I've even heard some preachers say that there is a **demon named gluttony** which possesses people and causes them to eat too much. Now while eating too much is a serious problem, there's no Biblical evidence to support the opinion that it is caused by an actual demon. It seems like everybody is trying to **make an excuse** for what they do rather than just admitting that it's wrong.

I John 1:8 says "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*" In other words, **EVERYONE** is a sinner. That means you and that means me, too.

Let's look at what the Bible says about sin: Did you know that we **ALL are born** sinners?

Again, **this is not a popular concept**, but it is what the Bible teaches. Let's read Psalm 51:5 "*For I was born a sinner-- yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.*"

What else does the Bible say about Sin?

The Bible describes sin as very much like an addiction . . . in John 8:34 Jesus says "*I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin*" . . . in other words, sin is something that possesses us and controls us. It has often been said that "*if you own something that you can't live without, then you don't really own it...it owns you.*" This quote is normally applied to material "**stuff**", like homes, cars, boats, jewelry, etc.

BUT it also applies to addictions and bad habits which we "own" - such as stealing, alcoholism, drug addiction, pornography - these are addictions that get our attention. But there are other addictions that we don't often deal with but are just as dangerous such as lying, gossiping, slandering, and pride. *We all have addictions of some sort that need to be dealt with.*

This includes me. I stand here tonight **NOT** as an accuser - I'm not thumping you on the head with my Bible - I stand before you as someone who struggles too.

But thanks be to God, on March 25, 1994, I saw my sin, my need for Jesus to save me, and I knew that I was helpless to change myself. I asked Jesus to wipe away my sins, come into my heart, and be my personal Savior. **That was the day I became a Christian.**

That was 11 years ago, and since then God has blessed me with the most wonderful woman in the world as my wife. Charlene loves God with all her heart and I call her my "*second salvation.*" Without her by my side, as my encourager and my best friend, I couldn't make it. But God new this, and so he blessed me with "*my Princess,*" as I call her.

Romans 6:17-18 tells us "*Thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin ... You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*"

That's why Jesus came - to make us new and give us a new master - He wants us to be His slaves - **FREE slaves**, if that makes any sense. He came to set us free from the addictions that controlled

our lives. The Bible tells us that we are either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. There is no “in between” area – it’s either one or the other.

I Cor 5:17 “Any man who is **IN CHRIST** is a new creation, the old has passed away and the new has come.” In Romans 8 Paul writes, “*So now there is no condemnation for those who are IN CHRIST.*” So, what does it mean to be **IN CHRIST**? That’s the Bible’s way of saying that someone is a Christian.

What exactly is a Christian?

If I were to go to different churches around Dallas tonight and take a survey of 100 people and I were to ask them if they were a Christian, I would most likely get a wide variety of answers.

One popular answer would be - “Of course, I’m a Christian...my mother and father are very religious. I even have an uncle who is a minister.”

The **problem** with this is that physical heritage and family connections have **nothing** to do with whether or not a person is a Christian. John 1:12-13 tells us “*But as many as received him, to them God gave the authority to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*” God doesn’t have any grandchildren. Look at me...I had 2 parents who were both solid Christians and I was living like the Devil bound for Hell...having Christian parents doesn’t make someone a Christian.

Another common response would be - “Sure, I’m a Christian. Isn’t everybody? Isn’t God the Father of all men? We may be going by different roads, but all of these roads lead to the same place. It doesn’t really matter what you believe, just so you are **sincere**—everyone who is **sincere** in his own religion is bound for heaven.”

The problem with this is that you can be sincere about your beliefs and be **sincerely WRONG**. “Jesus saith unto him, I am **the** way, **the** truth, and **the** life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6) All roads **DO NOT** lead to heaven. Only the road which goes through Jesus Christ will lead to heaven.

And I’m sure many people would say - “Yes, I’m a Christian...I’m doing the best I can. I try to live by the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, I go to church every Sunday and I was baptized when I was only 12.”

The **problem** with this is that sitting in church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than sitting in a chicken house makes you a chicken. Going to church, helping the needy, praying prayers, and giving to charities will not get you to heaven. All these things are just a bunch of good works and good works don’t make you a Christian.

I’m not saying that we shouldn’t go to church and shouldn’t do good works. What I am saying is that good works are not enough to save you. Eph 2:8,9 makes this clear - “*For by grace are you*

saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **Not of works**, lest any man should boast.”

I want you to picture 2 men

One of the men is a grandfather, he’s lived a good long life, he served his country in WW II, Korea, and Vietnam. He is a Scout Leader for the local boy scouts, he doesn’t drink or smoke, he gives money to all the local charities, and he even loves animals so much that he volunteers once a week at the local animal shelter.

The other man is a drug-dealer, a pimp, and a thief. He has spent over half of his young life in jail, he’s a heroin addict and an alcoholic, and his crew sells drugs to hundreds of kids at the local schools.

I want you to imagine that both of these men are sitting here tonight and they each hear the gospel preached clearly. They hear the **good news** that the Bible says we are free from God’s wrath because Jesus has satisfied the requirements of God’s justice by dying in our place as our Passover Lamb, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day.

The first man is glad that Jesus came to help the bad people, **but** he really doesn’t think that he needs Jesus since he’s lived such a good life and is really a good person. **The second man** hears the same message, but he is **truly sorry** for his sinful life, he **repents** of his sins and **believes** that Jesus died in his place and he prays to Christ to come into his heart and to be his Savior.

The Bible tells us that the grandfather’s good works are **not enough** to save him. As a matter of fact, we read in Isaiah 64:6 that “**All our good works are as filthy rags.**” This passage isn’t saying that we shouldn’t do good works, but what it is saying is that when we take our good works and compare them to God’s righteousness...**THEY STINK!**

The Bible also tells us that the drug-dealer is now a child of God and will spend eternity in heaven with Him. And if the grandfather doesn’t repent of his sins, then he will spend eternity in hell.

Let’s look at some of the people in the Bible who Jesus forgave

The prostitute in Luke 7:37-38 “*And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume.*”

King David, who committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband to cover it up – he was referred to as a “*Man after God’s own Heart*”

The apostle Paul, formerly Saul, who killed Christians. He had been struck down while persecuting God’s people. One day with a sword in his hand, hatred in his heart, and a letter of

authority in his pocket to beat and imprison Christians, Paul was on his way to Damascus. He was blinded by a great light and heard a voice saying, "*Saul why are you persecuting me?*" He became a Christian and proceeded to write more books in the Bible than any other author.

Mary Magdalene, who was possessed with 7 demons (Luke 8:2) - She was the first to see the risen Lord and to announce His resurrection to the apostles.

What do they have in common? They were all **BAD** people who **repented** of their sins and **believed** the Gospel and trusted in Christ for their salvation.

Are you still a Slave to Sin?

The Bible says, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*" (Acts 16:31).

I could not finish this message without asking you, "*Are you still a slave to sin, or have you been freed from slavery and saved into Christ's family?*" One thing that is certain is that we will all die. **ALL OF US**. Rich, poor, black, white, male, female...all of us will one day face God...are you ready?

You must go into judgment – are your sins forgiven? Jesus, our Passover Lamb, died and was resurrected on the 3rd day. He is called "*the Savior.*" The Apostle Peter once preached, "*there is none other name under heaven whereby we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12).

So, on this Easter Sunday, I hope you've learned a little bit about the history of Easter, the bunnies, the eggs, the Passover, the resurrection, and how you can be set free from slavery to sin and become one of God's children by **repenting** of your sins and **believing** on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear Father in Heaven, I thank you that you sent your son Jesus to be our Passover Lamb, to die in our place, and to be resurrected on the 3rd day, to free us from slavery to sin, and to give us an eternal home in heaven. I pray that if there is anyone here who truly desires to be free from sin's power that you will enable him to trust Christ for salvation...right here...right now.

In Christ's name we pray,
AMEN