

Does Jesus hold significance for your life?

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This morning we once again celebrate Easter Sunday around the world after having celebrated Good Friday two days ago.

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The one event was the death and burial of Jesus who was the Christ the anointed one the Jewish messiah promised from ages ago, while the other event the resurrection of Jesus from the dead with undeniable proofs, such as the empty tomb, the willingness of the disciples to die for this belief, and the countless millions of lives that have been changed down through the ages.

For the believer the crucifixion guaranteed the complete forgiveness of our sins and the removal of all guilt associated with them. At the crucifixion Jesus absorbed not only our sin but also his Father's anger against those sins, so that we can live completely free.

While the resurrection guarantees our own resurrection to eternal life to be forever with Jesus.

Or to put it another way as the famous Chinese Christian Watchman Nee once said "our old history ends with the cross and our new history begins with the resurrection"

In 1982 when I was 19 and in my first year as a Christian, I would take my bible to work and read it during lunch times and I can remember clearly one of the older guys saying to one of the other workers that I was more interested in the news that happened two thousand years ago than I was in today's news.

And that is true of all genuine believers. The good news that took place 2000 years ago still holds such significance for today.

This morning I want to ask you "Does Jesus hold significance for your life?"

For me Jesus holds significance in my life in the following ways:

First

As I said before it was 1982 and I can honestly say that I was not looking for God, in fact I was openly against the God of the bible. But that did not stop him from looking for me. Shortly after I was converted, I can clearly remember one day when I was reading in my bible where it says that whoever believes in him has eternal life.

The feeling of assurance that came over me was quite incredible. I had a real sense that heaven with Jesus was my not only a future reality but also a current possession.

Unless you are a committed Atheist, one who does not believe in God, then many people believe in a heaven and often spend the whole of their lives trying to find it here on earth.

Mark Driscoll was recently asked to write an article for the Washington Post on this very subject.

Looking for paradise

Everyone believes in a heaven.

The next time you are standing in line at a store, take a moment to look at the covers of the magazines on the rack. Each cover presents a picture of some sort of heavenly life. There is vacation heaven, fishing heaven, hunting heaven, pet heaven, entertainment heaven, sex heaven, bridal heaven, nicely organized home heaven, baby heaven, and so on. The articles in the magazines speak of life in hellish terms but offer functional saviors to take us from our hellish life to our heavenly one if we just obey the steps and buy the products.

The question persists, however, why? Why do we live for the endless pursuit of heavenly perfection on earth, and spend our hard-earned money relentlessly pursuing that perfect place, perfect thing, perfect person, or that perfect day? Perhaps all of our toys, hobbies, home improvement projects, festivals, parties, toys, joys, and vacations are simply our way of looking for paradise and practicing for heaven.

In the Bible we are told that God made creation as a paradise with sunshine, fresh air, clean water, feasting, song, and friendship. God then made our first parents and gave them paradise as a gift to enjoy and share with the generations to follow them.

Tragically, however, our first parents sinned against God; they wrongly thought that they could live life on their own, in effect functioning as their own gods. Because of our separation from the living God, death entered paradise, and with it arrived such things as murder, war, oppression, and telemarketing.

According to the Bible, God kicked us out of paradise because of our rebellion, much like we would do to a roommate who declared war on us in our own home. Subsequently, ever since then we have all been booking airline flights, gassing up our cars, hiking in the woods, buying junk, logging on, and walking on the beach searching for paradise. Deep down we all feel homeless and restless.

Our pernicious problem is that paradise is lost. No matter how close we get to that perfect day in that perfect place, we are continually disappointed because sin is there too and things are not as perfect as we had hoped. Subsequently, we get sunburned, food poisoning, seasick, or bumped off our flight home from the search for paradise and are left to wander through the airport, which is perhaps the best illustration of hell that earth has to offer.

Curiously, this passionate pursuit of heaven does not often lead to interest in the Christian version of heaven. This is likely because whoever is in charge of the Christian marketing department for heaven has done a very bad job. The thought of being a chubby baby who sits on a cloud in a diaper strumming a harp with wings far too small to transport one's girth to anywhere interesting is anything but a compelling marketing campaign.

However, the Bible offers a very different and rarely understood picture of heaven. To be fair, heaven is not really the aim of the Bible. Heaven is a place between this fallen and broken world, and the new one that will come with Jesus at the end of time when God makes all things new. Heaven is the time between the times when our bodies lie in the ground and our souls go to be with God for a season. On the day of our resurrection, our bodies and souls will reunite and God's people will live forever in God's kingdom with the resurrected, ruling, and reigning Jesus as their King.

Perhaps most shocking, the new kingdom will not be the idyllic rural lifestyle that has dominated so much American vision of faithful Christianity. Rather, at the center of the new creation will be a grand metropolis from which Jesus will rule over the earth (Revelation 21:1-2). The entire storyline of the Bible is not from garden to garden, but rather from garden to city. The Bible opens in its first few pages with a beautiful garden paradise. But the Bible closes in its final few pages with the vision of heaven as a dense city filled with people--the ultimate goal of creation is an urban kingdom paradise.

The practical question remains, how should we live until Jesus returns? President Jimmy Carter once said, "We should live our lives as though Christ was coming this afternoon." Paul wrestled with this same question in Philippians 1:20-25; he was torn between his desire to exchange this sinful, cursed, fallen world for the kingdom, and the work that God had given him to do on the earth. Paul's solution was to live as a kingdom citizen while on the earth, bringing some of the joy and healing of the kingdom to the earth (Philippians 3:20). In this way, Paul was not just awaiting his eternal life, but rather celebrating that eternal life is both a quality and a duration of life that begins the moment Jesus saves us here on earth and continues forever in his kingdom.

http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/mark_driscoll/2010/03/looking_for_paradise.html

This vision of being eternally with Jesus in heaven holds great significance for my life, particularly as I get older and the closer I get to being there.

Second

The providence of God holds incredible significance for my life.

Romans 8:28-32

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Not one thing is wasted in our lives in God's plans for us. Everything has meaning and significance even if we don't fully understand why at the time. It is a great comfort in life to know that we don't live lives of meaningless existence.

Third

The love of God hold significance to me and it has to be experienced to be believed. Mere head knowledge want do it.

I can tell you that God loves you and it may not mean much to you, but if you allow yourselves to seek that love and experience that love then it will mean the world to you.

It has significance for me in that no matter what I have done in my life, the mistakes, the failures, the hurts I've caused, I can come to him and he is the only one who can fully forgive even when I find it hard to forgive myself or others find it hard to forgive me. It's his love that does this.

Romans 8:33-39

33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-more than that, who was raised-who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,

39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let's pray.