

Why Easter?

It's good to be together on this Easter morning and even better to worship. He is risen!

Isaiah 53:6. I want to talk about the *purpose* of Easter. Not so much why we celebrate it, but why it happened in the first place. I think most people in churches this morning connect it with the death and resurrection of Jesus, but very few know why. *Why* he died and rose again. And what it has to do with them.

If that's you, I hope you listen. I hope you hear from the Lord and apply it. Hear and believe. And if you already do, I hope you're encouraged. Built up and spurred on.

Why Easter? It starts with this:

We are lost and need to be found (Isaiah 53:6)

Easter happened, Jesus died and rose again almost 2000 years ago, because we are lost today. Lost! Wandering through life with no purpose, other than the satisfaction of our appetites; our desires. We are lost, in a life, that's all about us. That's the M.O. for most.

Oh sure, we provide for our families and work to make a better life for *them*; but even that is self-serving. Because they're *our* family. Plus, it's short-lived and short-sighted. There's nothing *e*-ternal about it, and nothing *in*-ternal; nothing that changes our soul. So even the *noblest* of earthly living is futile. Even the best of us are lost.

Which is exactly what Isaiah 53:6 says – *All we like sheep have gone astray* [gotten lost]; *we have turned—every one—to his own way.* (ESV)

I've never led a flock of *actual* sheep, but I understand from those who have that they tend to wander. That's why shepherding was a thing. And still is in cultures and areas without fences. Because the sheep go astray and get themselves into trouble. They turn from their shepherd and chart their own path.

And God tells us here through the prophet Isaiah, that's what *we* are like. Every single one of us. *All we like sheep have gone astray.* We're *all* off course. *All* off track. Some 3 degrees and some 30, but in the end, all lost.

But that's not all of it. The second part of Isaiah's statement in this verse indicates it's not just *aimless* wandering; accidental lostness. We're lost because we want to be. Because *every one* of us has turned *to his own way*. Everyone.

Like when people decide that God doesn't exist and Jesus doesn't matter. They're *intentionally* lost. Same for those who don't care; dead set on doing whatever they want. Getting drunk, sleeping around, looking at porn, living for themselves, you name it. They're lost. They've turned to their *own way*, intentionally, and *gone astray*.

That means, it doesn't matter how driven you are, how focused you are, how smart you are, or anything else you are. If your way is any way but God's way, if your path is any different than his path, you're lost.

And you need to be found. Desperately. Quickly. Because dangers abound, wolves lurk, and darkness looms. Or to change the metaphor: your raft is sinking, sharks are circling, and a storm is threatening. Either way, you need to be found. You need to be rescued.

The problem is, the more self-sufficient we are, the less we feel it. The less we *feel* like we're lost. The less we *realize* we're in need.

We make plans and think they're unstoppable. We build fences and think they're insurmountable. We fill bank accounts and think they're untouchable. We build houses and think they're invincible. All the while *lost*, and desperately needing to be rescued.

That's *one* of the reasons for Easter. The death and resurrection of Jesus makes a way for us to come home. When God laid our sins on Christ like v6b says – when he *laid on him the iniquity of us all* – he put up a beacon and laid down a path. A path back to himself. That's why Jesus said, "I'm *the way*, and *no one comes to the Father except through me*." (John 14:6) Except through my death and resurrection."

If you're lost and need to be found, the worst thing you can do is ignore it. The worst thing you can do is pretend you're not. Stop waiting and come home. Stop wandering and start following. And if you already are, keep on.

Second, the second reason for Easter, is that . . .

We are sinful and need to be cleansed (Isaiah 64:6a)

Turn over a few chapters to Isaiah 64:6a. Here Isaiah says – *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.*

There's that word again. *All. We have all become* unclean. We have *all* become dirty. Or as King David said it in Psalm 14 – *There is none who does good, not even one.* (3)

We're sinful. And not just a little, like a drop or two of black paint in a white can; but completely. Every time I watch a paint store mix paint, I marvel at how little it takes to completely change the color. And how quickly it does so.

Same for us. We're sinful through and through.

So sinful, that even *our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment*. That's what it says. And not just some of them, but *all* of them. There's that word again. Even the *good* things we do are tainted by sin. Even our *virtuous* acts are polluted and dirty. How so? Because anything done for any purpose other than to glorify God, is corrupt in his eyes. True.

If you help a little old lady cross the street – just for her sake, or just to be kind, or just to feel good – you rob God of glory *he* deserves. For granting you the opportunity and impulse in the first place. Establishing the moral standard to help the weak in the first place. Apart from God, apart from all credit and glory going to him, even our *righteous* deeds are dirty.

To which you might say, "Come on Pastor, that's just Old Testament authors thinking of *their* situation. That doesn't apply to *us*."

It sure does. Because the New Testament says the same; *quoting* the Old Testament.

Romans 3:10-12 – *As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God. [12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* (1 John 1:8) And *if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* Compounding our sin.

So no matter how you slice it, we're sinful and need to be cleansed. Our garments are dirty and need to be washed. Changed. Replaced, with *garments of salvation* (Is 61:10).

I ran into a short story years ago, that illustrates this as good as any. And I love it to this day. It's called **Ragman**; written by Walter Wangerin.

He tells of a man who went through town exchanging old *dirty* rags, and old *dirty* clothes, for bright, shiny new ones. And as he did, he put the old ones on.

Like, for instance, the handkerchief of a young sobbing mother. Giving her a new one, she *stopped* sobbing; and taking hers, he started. Just like Isaiah said he would do. *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.* (Is 53:4)

Same for the bleeding head bandage of a young girl. Giving her a bright new bonnet, she was healed; while taking the bandage, he bled. *Pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.* (Is 53:5)

The story continues with the Ragman exchanging jackets with an amputee and clothes with a drunkard, until he finally reaches a garbage dump where he climbs a pile of refuse, lays down, and dies.

You can guess the rest of the story. He rose three days later to clothe *anyone* who asks; *anyone* who follows him; anyone who wants to be *clean*. Exchanging our *rags*, with robes; robes of *righteousness*. (Is 61:10)

Jesus died and rose again, because we're sinful and need to be cleansed. And praise God he'll do it if we only confess; *confess* our sins. Admit them and ask forgiveness. Repent of them and turn to him. **(1 John 1:9)** If we do that, *if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

What are you wearing these days? Are you clean, or dirty? That's two reasons for Easter.

A third, is that . . .

We are guilty and need to be forgiven (James 2:10)

We're guilty. As in liable for our sin. At fault and responsible for it. I'm not talking about *feeling* guilty, I'm talking about *being* guilty. Formally so. Like in a courtroom. Guilty of a crime. But instead of a man or a woman being our judge, God is. Instead of being held to man's standard, it's God's standard. We're guilty of violating *his* benchmark. *His* holiness.

And here again, we object. "I'm not that bad. I don't do that many wrong things." And you might be right. **(James 2:10)** But you're still guilty. *For whoever keeps the whole law [God's law; his standard of righteousness] but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.* Even if you were able to keep every single command in the Bible, every single instruction, every single moral standard, but failed just one time on one point, you're guilty of violating all of it in God's eyes. Because once again, sin corrupts completely.

And the worst part, is that it leads to death. *The wages of sin is death* the Bible says. (Romans 6:23) The *consequences* of our sin. The penalty for it. And not just physical

death, but spiritual death. Ongoing death. Separation from God, in the torment of hell, forever and ever.

And the only solution is forgiveness. The only solution is a full pardon. When God, in his mercy, no longer holds our sin against us. No longer holds us responsible for it. No longer punishes us. That's forgiveness. And we need it.

The problem is, God is also just. He's merciful to forgive, but he's also perfectly righteous. Which means he can't and won't forgive unless the *penalty* is paid; the penalty of death. It's like a judge in a courtroom who pronounces a murderer guilty and deserving of death, but in his mercy desires to *relieve* him of the sentence. Except he can't and won't unless someone else pays the price. Like the judge's son.

That's what Jesus did on the cross. He bore our sin, and died; that we might be forgiven, and live. And the fact that he rose again, shows that his death was entirely *sufficient* for our forgiveness. The price was entirely paid; for all of us. Because it wasn't just another *man* who died, but the God-man. God in the flesh.

The only question is, how do we get it? How do we *get* his forgiveness? How do we *apply* his death to our lives?

Believe it. Believe it's true, and believe it was for you. That he died for *your* sin. Took *your* place. Suffered *your* punishment. Believe it, and repent. Ask God to *forgive* you of your sin, and turn from it.

That's where the rubber meets the road. That's where Easter meets you. With all the forgiveness in the world along with it. And every single one of us needs it, because every single one of us is guilty.

And last . . .

We are condemned and need to be saved (John 3:18)

John 3. In v16-18 Jesus is speaking about himself. And after foreshadowing his death on a cross, and that it has to happen, he tells us why.

[16] *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.* The name of Jesus. Representing who he is and what he's done.

Jesus didn't come to condemn us because we're *already* condemned. *Whoever does not believe* [v18] *is condemned already*. Condemned, as in, "tried, convicted, and sentenced." Judged. Doomed. Headed for hell.

Why? Because the Bible says *one trespass* [referring to Adam's sin; Adam and Eve's] *led to condemnation for all men* [all mankind]. (Romans 5:18a) Because God considered it *our* sin. *By the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners.* (Romans 5:19a) Adam's sin was counted as our sin, making us condemned.

Plus, his sin *nature* was passed down; to every man, woman, and child. Confirmed every time we sin. So we're condemned the moment we're conceived, and every moment thereafter.

But thanks be to God, Jesus came to save us. Rescue us. Redeem us. Sparing us from our sin, our guilt, our bondage, our doom, our dirt, our death, our torment, our wandering, everything. We *need* to be saved, and Jesus came to do it in every sense of the word.

And he will, if we believe. If *you* believe. Believe in who Jesus is and what he did. That he's God in the flesh, who died for your sin, rose for your life, and lives as Lord. *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* (Romans 10:9) That's the purpose of Easter.

Summary

So if you're lost and need to be found, sinful and need to be cleansed, guilty and need to be forgiven, condemned and need to be saved; pray with me right now.

Prayer – God, thank you for opening our eyes and opening hearts. Give those who just prayed a Spirit-filled confidence that they are yours, and a Spirit-filled conviction to follow you all their life.

You Are Loved