

LOOK UP EASTER DEVOTIONAL WEEK TWO

And for every fear, there's an empty grave, for the risen one has overcome



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EASTER SUNDAY

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God... (Hebrews 10v12)

When this verse is speaking about 'this priest', it means Jesus. And the writer is contrasting what He does, with the activity of the Old Testament priests (we talked about this last Wednesday). Unlike the Old Testament priests, Jesus made His sacrifice once – but its effects would last forever. Because he didn't bring an animal, He brought Himself. The perfect, sinless Son of God offered up for our sins. And now nothing else is required.

This verse also says that Jesus sat down at God's right hand.

The right hand of God is an expression used a number of times in the Bible – it speaks of God's power and authority. We sometimes talk about someone's right-hand man or woman, meaning someone who exercise the power or authority of the person being represented. If the US President's right hand man asks you to do something, you know that really it is the president asking you. The right hand man wields the power and authority of the office. Similarly, the right hand of God is the place of honour and authority. And that is where Jesus sits.

One of the interesting details here is that sometimes Jesus is described as standing at God's right hand (e.g. Acts 7v55-56). Most often, He is described as being seated. When Stephen sees Him standing in Acts – it tells us that He is ready to act. The fact the writer of Hebrews describes Him as being seated tells us something important – the work is finished. He is seated because He has accomplished His mission on earth. He has paid the price, made the ultimate sacrifice – the one for which all those animal sacrifices made over so many years

were just like movie trailers. And that has been accepted by God the Father in Heaven. Because, as we mark Easter Sunday, it reminds us that He didn't remain in the grave – He rose and is alive today. He is ALIVE! At God's right hand.

In his amazing hymn called 'Tis Finished, Charles Wesley wrote this: 'Tis finished! The Messiah dies, Cut off for sins, but not His own; Accomplished is the sacrifice, The great redeeming work is done. 'Tis finished! all the debt is paid; Justice divine is satisfied; The grand and full atonement made; God for a guilty world hath died.

To respond...

Jesus, our Saviour, is at God's right hand in heaven. What do you want to say to Him? What do you want to ask Him? The one who loves you passionately and who been victorious over sin and death is wanting to hear from you today. Let's thank Him that "it is finished".

You're still rolling stones





MONDAY 10TH APRIL

For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Hebrews 10v14)

Now here is a puzzling verse. It says that Jesus has made us perfect. But that we are still being made holy (and therefore surely not perfect?) How can this be? We can perhaps understand that we are being made holy – but made perfect? Well, it reflects what we said last week about the in-between times – Jesus has started something that will only come to fruition when He returns again.

Yesterday, we read that Jesus is at God's right hand in Heaven. Ephesians 1 tells us that God, by His mighty

strength, raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the Heavenly realms “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion” (Eph1v20-21). But Ephesians 2 goes on to say something quite remarkable – we are seated with Him (Eph2v6). We are in the place of power and authority?

Take a look around you. Does it look like heaven? Probably not. But, in terms of our spiritual life – our life with God, our relationship with Him – we are there. We can fellowship with God. We can talk to Him, He can talk to us, we can experience heavenly power in us and through us. We see God at work. We are alive when we were dead. We have been made perfect.

However, in terms of our physical life, our flesh and blood daily experience, we are still on the journey.

Have you ever moved house? It is so exciting when everything is agreed and you become the owner of a fabulous new house. Just one problem – all your ‘stuff’ is in a different house. What is more, you’re not sure it’s all going to fit in this new house.

And so begins the process of de-cluttering and moving (hoyin' oot and gannin) – of not just owning your new house, but living in it.

This is the Christian life. We have been made perfect, but we are being made holy. We are learning, changing, maturing – to grow into the perfect life that has been given to us.

To respond

Let's thank God that He accepted what Jesus did on the cross and raised Him to Heaven – but that He has also accepted our faith response and raised us up with Him. Let's pray for the ongoing process of holiness in our lives to enable us to grow into the perfect life that has been won for us.

And for every fear, there's an empty grave, for the risen one has overcome





TUESDAY 11TH APRIL

*“This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”
(Hebrews 10v16)*

Today’s verse from Hebrews is actually a quote from the Old Testament – from Jeremiah 31v33. Much of the book of Jeremiah is concerned with the prophet highlighting that the nation of Judah had sinned, and judgment was coming which would cause the nation to fall.

And yet, there is hope. Because God does not give up. And after the judgment, after the exile, after the demonstration that for all the regulations and sacrifices, sinners still

sin and foolishly remove themselves from the blessing and protection of God – God reveals something new He will do. Something that will make a difference.

God's law won't be written on stone like the 10 commandments revealed to Moses. They won't be external. They will be inside of people. People won't just be told what they need to do, they will change so that they want to do it.

Have you ever driven along the motorway and seen the signs that say "tiredness kills – take a break". A really important message. But have you ever actually stopped because you saw the sign? Not many people do. There is a scheme in Australia where they take a different approach; they offer free coffee at motorway service stations. Rather than just telling people what they should do, they try to help them to do it.

The Old Covenant was a bit like that sign. It told but it didn't help. And it certainly couldn't change us so that we wanted to do the right thing. It didn't come with the power to live differently. That is the power promised here in this

verse and in Jeremiah. Because God made us to live from the inside-out. For how we live to start with our spiritual connection with God, our real relationship with Him. Which changes how we think, how we respond emotionally, our attitudes and ambitions. Which is then reflected in what we do, how we live, the actions we take.

So, the idea of covenant that we discussed last week continues. But it is different. Not because God failed with the Old one, but the people did. And it was only ever a temporary arrangement until Jesus came and made possible and new and different kind of covenant. One that enabled and empowered.

To respond...

Let's thank God for the kind of life He promises, and that He enables us to live. Let's be grateful that the Christian life comes with power and pray that our hearts and minds would go on being changed.

You're still rolling stones





WEDNESDAY 12TH APRIL

And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. (Hebrews 10v18)

Where this verse speaks about 'these', it is referring to sins and lawless acts (from v17). Where our sins have been forgiven, no sacrifice is needed. It makes sense doesn't it? When you go to the shop and pay for something, you don't then need to pay for it again.

When someone serves their sentence for committing a crime, they only have to do it once. Jesus sacrificed himself so that we can be forgiven. That's it. Price paid. Sentence served.

And yet, I have spoken to countless people who struggle to accept it. They might not necessarily say it with their words. But in their attitude and action.

For example, there are some church groups who feel that they need to punish themselves for their sin. I have heard countless people say that they are not good enough to be a Christian. I have spoken to too many people who are weighed down with guilt and shame.

And in one way or another, all of these attitudes are saying – it wasn't enough. What Jesus did wasn't enough. It someone didn't do what the Bible says it did. That somehow Jesus only paid some of the price. THIS IS A LIE! We need to recognise that there is an enemy who wants to make us feel guilty. Who doesn't want us to embrace the freedom that comes from everything Easter represents. The enemy can't change the power of the cross; he cannot undermine its effectiveness for forgiving and cleansing from sin. So all he can do is tell lies to us. It is a bit like someone conducting an armed robbery but rather than taking an actual gun, uses a banana in a paper bag. Because, as long as the bank clerk thinks he has a gun, it will be just as effective. The enemy can't rob the cross and the

empty grave of their power. But if he can make you think they aren't powerful, it will be just as effective. This is why the truth we are exploring over these two weeks is so important. To help us understand that Easter represents God's perfectly perfect, completely complete solution to the problem of sin. Once for all time. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1John 1v9)

To respond...

Thank you Lord that I am forgiven. The cross has said it all. I don't have to feel guilty, I don't have to earn my forgiveness. I am confident in you.

And for every fear, there's an empty grave, for the risen one has overcome



THURSDAY 13TH APRIL

...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10v22)

We spoke yesterday about not needing to feel guilty. Today, we have the positive counterpoint – assurance or confidence! We have been cleansed, the writer says, so we can be confident. And that confidence comes by faith. Do you have a food that you really don't like? Where the thought of a plate full of this food would make you gag? Peanut butter? Bananas? Mushrooms? Liver? Just the idea of it makes you feel

unpleasant. You really don't want that food near to you and certainly nowhere near your dinner plate!

Well the thing we have to understand is – that is how God feels about sin. It is so unpleasant to Him. In fact, He is committed to wiping it from the face of the earth. How do you think God would feel about us appearing in front of Him 'covered' in sin? And how do you think we would feel coming before God knowing that He is committed to wiping out the sin that we cling to? Awkward doesn't come close.

But such is the divide between sinners and God. They are polar opposites. And yet God chooses to have mercy and compassion and 'so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3v16).

To be able to draw near to God we need some serious cleaning. And that is what Jesus did for us. And this verse tells us that this was such a deep clean, so complete, not only can we approach God at all (which is a

miracle) but that we can do so with confidence, with assurance. And we can do this by faith – by believing that Jesus has paid the price. That our cleansing is as real as the sin that required it. Faith means we believe God and we trust Him. We take Him at His Word.

Our assurance is not based on our feelings on any given day. It is not based on whether we have lived perfectly today or that we will be super-holy tomorrow. It's not based on whether I have done enough or on making sure that I haven't somehow made myself unclean? It is based on what Jesus did in His death and resurrection. And what the Bible says about that.

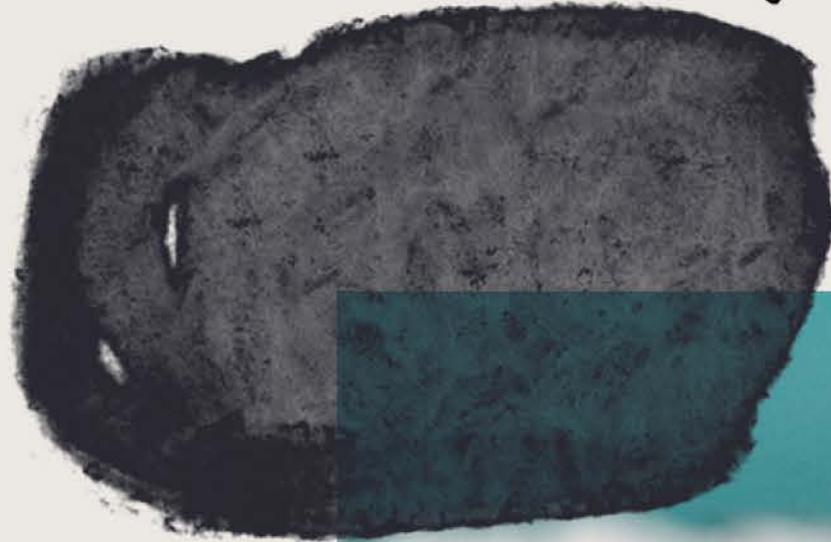
And what it says, and what this verse says, is that it isn't just about getting us off the hook for our sin. But about drawing near to God and having a relationship with Him. Not based on fear. But love and faith. Now that we have been cleansed, now that the offence against God has been removed – we can take it to the next level – relate to Him, draw close to Him, walk

closely with Him. With confidence.

To respond...

We are so privileged to have the ear and the heart of Almighty God, our Heavenly Father. Why don't you just take some time to talk to Him. And ask Him to speak to you. Because you can.

You're still rolling stones





And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds... (Hebrews 10v24)

Yesterday we saw how Easter sets us free to have a relationship with God. Today's verse, just a little further on in Hebrews 10, shows us that embracing the message of the cross and the empty tomb – what Jesus did in his death and resurrection – impacts on our relationships with one another.

We are encouraged to draw near to God but also to help others to do likewise. The writer goes on in the next verse to say – don't give up meeting together, keep encouraging one another.

There is certainly an action and a responsibility for each one of us in this. But this is not a change of direction from what the writer has been saying to this point. This isn't a shift in tone to say – now you have to do something to earn your salvation.

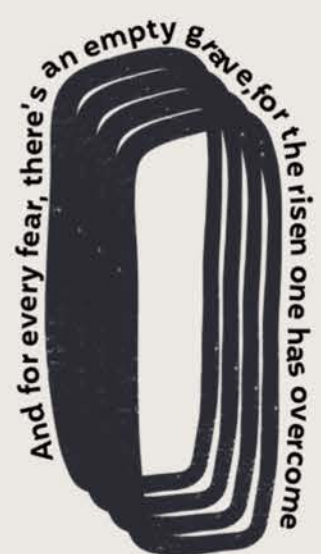
This is not separate to what has gone before. Because God's heart is and always has been to have a people who relate to and glorify Him. Not just lots of individuals but a family, together.

And the ability to do this is absolutely a miracle that is only possible because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Us being able to relate to each other is part of God's incredible grace and heart revealed through Easter. It requires so many of the things we have talked about over the past two weeks. The heart of sin is selfishness, wanting what I want, getting my way; only when we are freed from its power can we properly relate to one another. Being transformed from the inside-out so we treat each other as God treats us. Being in covenant – being people who are committed to people. Being confident about who we are and meant

to be, not insecure. Having a common purpose and a common identity. So we help each other, support one another, provide encouragement. Our relationship with God changes our relationships with everyone. And when the writer talks about good deeds, I don't think he means just helping little old ladies across the road. In fact, you see his train of thought as he goes on to develop his argument in the next chapter recounting the great heroes of faith. Men and women who acted in faith – who trusted God in how they lived. With dangerous, determined faith. And whose lives were and are an example. Who show the credibility of living by faith.

To respond...

Lord, thank you that you have made me to connect to other people, just as you have made me to connect to you. Lord, help me to be a blessing to others, and to receive that blessing from those you have put around me. Help us be a church who don't give up meeting together, but who spur one another on.





SATURDAY 15TH APRIL

*But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.
(Hebrews 10v39)*

We said at the beginning of week one, the heart of this devotional was to help us realise the importance of Easter and respond to it. Hopefully, it has been helpful in keeping your gaze on the real reason we stop and celebrate at this time of year.

But our response doesn't stop here. As we have said in previous days, the writer of Hebrews is addressing a group of people who are struggling. Who are being told to get back in their box. And the writer says NO – keep going. And explains and encourages them about why they need to keep going and how

they can keep going.

We have emphasised how much better the way of Christ is than anything they could possibly go back to. But that doesn't mean the challenges aren't real. For them and for us.

There can be challenges, temptations, difficulties which try to knock us off course. And there is an enemy who is against God and against us. And we live in a world which is against God and not for Him. And we even have a relic of our old life within us (the sinful nature) which keeps trying to take us back there.

We are living in that gap we have talked about before, the gap between holiness in heaven and holiness on earth. The gap between Jesus' first coming and His return. Which is why today's verse is so important. We are those who have faith and are saved.

It is not in the manner of the Old Covenant - do this, don't do this. Don't shrink back, keep the faith. It is from the 'batteries are included' new Covenant. Which says - this is who you

are now. You are different. You are changed. What is your identity? What is your nature? It is not someone who runs away. Who gets battered into submission. Who chooses the quiet life instead of the victorious life. You aren't someone who just talks about the Christian life being victorious.

What Easter has done for you is to make you someone who lives every day for God. Who can live on earth like they are living in heaven. Who start well and finish well. Who have faith. And are saved.

To respond...

If you are facing difficulties right now, ask God to help you see His perspective. That you aren't defeated and won't be overcome. And for all of us, let's ask God to continue to help us base our identity on who we are in Him – a person of faith, saved, victorious.



