

Part 4: Easter's Enduring Change

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My son and I just finished reading a book called "The Phantom Tollbooth." In this book we follow Milo and two of his fairy tale friends as they cross a magical land to find two princesses who will bring peace back to the Kingdom. As the three friends climb the mountains to find the princesses they encounter a series of demons who seek to derail their efforts.

One of these is a monster who employs the three in all kinds of meaningless tasks like filling a well with an eyedropper and drilling a tunnel with a needle. After days of zero progress Milo finally realizes this scheme and asks the demon: "Why only do unimportant things?" The demon replies: "Think of all the trouble it saves. If you only do the easy and useless jobs, you'll never have to worry about the important ones which are so difficult. You just won't have the time. For there's always something to do to keep you from what you really should be doing...Now do come and stay with me. We'll have so much fun together. There are things to fill and things to empty, things to take away and things to bring back, things to pick up and things to put down...Why if you stay here, you'll never have to think again--and with a little practice you can become a monster of habit, too."

I'm sure that all of us at some point have been a victim of an unhealthy habit or a thoughtless pattern. Maybe you've been self-aware enough to realize the vanity of these vices and attempted to change them. Or perhaps you even ask yourself, "What am I doing with my life?" This story shows how thoughtlessness and lack of clarity can subtly and dangerously paralyze our minds and our lives.

We try to install new patterns, but we drift back to old ruts. Or we attempt new things only to find them too difficult or not really effective.

The same can be true in our understanding and application of the gospel. Here we are one week after Easter and if you've been with us you have heard a message which Christians claim "changes everything." But what does it actually change? What impact does this have on our day to day lives? Maybe Milo's question follows you to church, to your work, and even into your worship.

The Bible claims the death and resurrection of Jesus transforms everything, and what we want to do today is examine what that means. I want to open by looking at a couple verses we looked at last week. For those of you who weren't with us, we read of the resurrected Jesus appearing to two men on the road to Emmaus.

These men had been in Jerusalem and witnessed the death of Jesus, and thinking this was the end of the story, they began their walk back home to Emmaus. But then Jesus appeared to them. He explained to them how the death and resurrection of Jesus was the center point of all scripture, and then lastly he allowed these two men to realize who they were talking to. But it is their response to this revelation which is amazing, after Jesus leaves them look at what the two men do: **Luke 24:31-35**.

You see these men went home because they thought the death of Jesus was the end of the story. But when they realized Jesus had risen from the dead they went back to Jerusalem because they knew that for them the story was only beginning. When a risen savior lights the kindling of your heart, you cannot go home the same way.

This is true for every one of us in here today. The gospel is wanting and able to rewrite our lives entirely. What we are going to see today is this: **The legacy of Easter is the commission to participate in the work of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

As the two men in our story returned to Jerusalem, so too do we in our text today. We are going to be looking at the first two chapters in the book of Acts. Acts is really the shorthand title for the full title which is: The Acts of the Apostles (apostles meaning sent out ones). And it was written by Luke whose gospel we looked at last week.

I want us to look at the first few verses of **Acts 1:1-3**. Luke is describing the interaction Jesus had with his followers after he was resurrected. We read in other books that Jesus appeared to thousands of people in his resurrected body. But what Luke is pointing out here is that in his appearance Jesus continued to teach. Did you notice what he continued to teach about? Look back at **Acts 1:3**. What's astounding about this passage isn't only what is new, but also what is the same.

For Jesus the proof of his resurrection was important. He wanted to be seen, touched and present with his followers. But Jesus didn't want our understanding of Easter to stop at the resurrection. His resurrection is a big deal! It was Jesus' death which defeated the curse of sin, and Jesus' resurrection which promised the defeat of death for all who believe in him.

As you discussed in your community groups this past week, the resurrection isn't a sideshow to the gospel, it is part of it. And yet Jesus doesn't settle for a group of believers who are content in knowing they have salvation. Instead he continues to proclaim to them repeatedly, and teaches them more clearly about the Kingdom of God.

As we have been going through the book of Matthew we've talked a lot about this Kingdom. When Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God he is speaking of the place where God is worshipped rightly, God's lordship is honored by all who are his, and where the effects of sin and death are removed. It's what Jesus talks about in **Matthew 6:33**.

To set our minds on the Kingdom of God is to see everything through God's eyes. And when Jesus, in his resurrected state continues to teach on it he is making a powerful and important point: salvation is only part of the gospel. The good news is not simply the forgiveness of sins, but also the promise of the Kingdom of God. Life in Christ finds its culmination in a life lived for Christ.

We are saved for a purpose. We are saved for this kingdom. We are saved to live kingdom oriented lives. To only look to Jesus for one moment of justification is to miss the saving weight of the gospel. Yet how many of us take the salvation Easter provides us and turn back to what it was we were already doing? Having the bulldozer of salvation, we turn ourselves back to tapping the mountainside with a needle. We ourselves become monsters of habit taking the salvation which Jesus offers us and confining it into one small area of our lives. But the salvation of Easter calls us to think on everything in a new way.

This is our first point today: **Easter reframes our minds**. Jesus doesn't want us to see his resurrection as a simple proof that he is real. He wants the resurrection to show that everything he spoke about is real. Jesus wants us to see the implications of his resurrection in every area of our lives.

Lesslie Newbigin was a Christian author who shared a conversation he had with a Hindu scholar. Look at what this man says about the Bible: **"I can't understand why you missionaries present the Bible to us in India as a book of religion. It is not a book of religion--and anyway we have plenty of books of religion in India. We don't need any more! I find your Bible a unique interpretation of universal history, the history of the whole of creation and the history of the human race. And therefore a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history. This is unique. There is nothing else in the whole religious literature of the world to put alongside it."**

Even this non-believing Hindu is able to see Christianity as a holistic and unique worldview making sense not only of who we are but what it is we are called to do. And if a Hindu is able to see this, how much more should

God's church believe and act out of the same understanding. Easter is not a nostalgic picture of our salvation, it is the very lens through which we view our future.

Jesus wants his disciples to know the shaping effects of such a truth because look at how Luke continues: **Acts 1:4-11**. Jesus not only wants us to think of our world through the lens of the Kingdom of God, but he also wants us to think of ourselves differently.

You can imagine the identity crisis a follower of Jesus would have had when they heard the news of Jesus' death. As we saw men were returning home because they thought everything was over. But then seeing the resurrected Jesus, they had hope that it wasn't. The disciples came to Jesus asked him when he was going to finish his work, but Jesus turned the tables on them.

He gave these disciples a new task. They are witnesses. They are to bear witness to the gospel. They are to recount and retell the story which they observed. What Jesus began, he looks to his followers to continue. Look at how Paul puts this in **2 Cor. 5:18-20**.

Where the disciples were once followers of Jesus, now they are ambassadors of him. Where they once supported Jesus as he taught, they now are supported by Jesus as they teach. Where they were once identified with Jesus, now they bear his identity. This is a weighty task.

If you believe the resurrection of Easter, do you believe the charge of Easter? When Jesus rose from the dead he made it impossible for us to compartmentalize our faith. What can we face in our trials which Jesus did not die for? And what do we endeavor towards in our lives which Jesus did not rise for?

When we say Easter changes everything we mean it. The book of Acts goes on to tell of full time ministers, fathers, mothers, grandmas, craftsmen, artists and business people doing all sorts of different jobs, but through the lens of this one task: to worship Jesus and make him known to others.

Salvation doesn't change your life because it requires you to quit your job. It changes your life because it reveals to you what your job, your family and your hobbies are actually for: they are venues to bear witness to the gospel. It is the gospel which brings real meaning to us as we understand the identity given to us in Jesus' commission.

We need to have a renewed mind as to what our salvation means to us. But a change in perspective is only half the problem. Returning back to the Phantom Tollbooth, as Milo and his friends realized the slavery they were in they are led away by a loud voice calling them to run. Following the commands of this voice they follow it to what appears to be salvation, but eventually these commands lead them into a pit where they face another monster. Milo asks the monster why he would try to help them only to lead them into a pit. The monster replies, "Oh, I'd do as much for anybody...bad advice is my specialty...I'm the demon on insincerity. I don't mean with I say, I don't mean what I do, and I don't mean what I am. Most people who believe what I tell them go the wrong way, and stay there."

Salvation is only helpful if it enables us to no longer be trapped. If our salvation merely transfers us to another form of death, then it is no salvation at all. If all Jesus did was command us to go and continue his work, we would be trapped in the scope of it. For who is like him!

Modern day freedom workers face this same challenge. In the area of human trafficking and sex slavery, activists are realizing that removing an individual from indentured servanthood or the brothel is only half the problem. The other part is empowering them to no longer return to such things. Even though they realize the harm these ecosystems provide, for many people who are victimized by such evil, that structure of evil provided them with what they needed: food, housing, security.

To combat this freedom workers are attempting to empower these individuals by opening freedom businesses. These are businesses which employ rescued individuals so that they can make a living and begin to have the capacity to live life outside of slavery.

We as a church want to support such efforts in our community and across our globe because this activity models on a physical level what God has done for us on a spiritual level. In the cross God removed us from the slavery of sin by sending Jesus to die for it, but in the resurrection of Jesus, God and Jesus empower us for new life by sending us the Holy Spirit.

Look back at what is said in **Acts 1:6-8**. You see Jesus' charge to his followers is met with the promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus just gave the church a huge task, a task which Matthew records as "Go forth into all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you."

In Jesus' life, death and resurrection a miraculous work was accomplished. And now as Jesus is ascending into heaven he tells this group of rag tag followers to do the work that he had already begun. To take this message to the ends of the earth. This may seem too huge a task for us to even consider.

But everything Jesus called us to do in his resurrection he has equipped the church to do through the Holy Spirit. This is our second point: **Easter empowers our hearts**. The very effort which Jesus demanded from us, he promised to provide for us in the Holy Spirit. It will come with power, and in that power we will be witnesses of Jesus.

Now a good question we should be asking right now is: What is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. It is part of the Godhead (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). And up until this point we have seen the Holy Spirit work in two ways: First in the Old Testament, God would tell one of his leaders to do something, and in specific instances we would read that the Holy Spirit would come upon that individual to empower them to complete that task. But once that task was over, the Spirit left them. So in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was temporarily given to God's people to help them complete a task.

The second way the Holy Spirit worked was modeled in Jesus. After he was baptized, he was filled with the Holy Spirit in a permanent way. After he was baptized Luke says this: **Luke 4:1**. So where in the OT the Holy Spirit was task specific, in the gospel we see Jesus being uniquely Spirit filled.

So these Jews Jesus is talking to in Luke probably knew a little bit about the Holy Spirit, but didn't really understand what to expect. And Jesus tells these guys to wait, because they will not be able to do what Jesus has called them to do unless they have the Holy Spirit. So the disciples about 120 of them camp out in Jerusalem for a few days. And we pick up the story again in **Acts 2:1-13**.

Here we see the Holy Spirit being poured out for the first time on a group of believers. They didn't have to pray a special prayer, they didn't have to wait until they reached a special level of spiritual maturity, they simply had to wait until God decided it was time to pour out his Holy Spirit onto his church. And from this moment on in church history, when someone believed the saving message of Jesus Christ, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

I find this story in Acts fascinating because it begins with a small group of people in a secret room, and it ends with this large multi-ethnic and seemingly public display. And what we see immediately in this text is the beginning of the work Jesus just commissioned his church to do. Jesus says, go to the nations, and in the moment of the Holy Spirit being poured out, God began this work by bringing the nations to the church.

In a miraculous display of the Holy Spirit's power the many ethnic groups who were in Jerusalem for Pentecost were able to hear the message of the gospel in their own tongues.

The Holy Spirit began to use the church to transform a primarily Jewish phenomenon into a global church. But that's not all. Remember Peter? The same Peter who while Jesus was still alive denied him three times and refused to be publicly associated with him?

We'll look at what happens after Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit: **Acts 2:1-21**. There are two things which are important to see in this passage. The first is that the Holy Spirit took Peter the denier and made him into Peter the defender. In boldness he rose up to the crowds and delivered a clear and spirit-filled message. Also worth noting is that the Holy Spirit brought Peter a greater level of understanding via the scriptures. Peter, without being explicitly taught this by Jesus, was able to connect the outpouring of the Spirit to a prophecy from the book of Joel.

While Jesus is no longer with us, he has given his church the Holy Spirit to enliven God's word to us and embolden us to boldly proclaim God's truth from it. This is what Jesus meant when he said this while he was still alive: **John 16:13-14**. It is powerful enough to have the very Spirit of God dwelling inside of us through faith, but it is even more powerful that the Spirit wishes to bring the gospel message to our mind!

Look at what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 2:10-12**. Dear church, the task which God has given us through Jesus is to build his church. To proclaim his gospel and glorify his name. And he has not left us ill-equipped for this, he has given us himself. We can know the Kingdom of God because we have the Spirit of God.

To take this message into our workplaces, friend-groups and families can be scary. But Easter reminds us that even though Jesus is bodily absent, we do not move into these places alone. He is with us through his Holy Spirit laboring through us for his glory. The request of the disciples was for Jesus to change the external culture of their world, but Jesus equipped the church by changing the culture of their hearts by giving us his Spirit.

Peter goes on to proclaim with great clarity the message of the gospel, but look and see how this story ends: **Acts 2:37-41**.

Now remember, the people who were in Jerusalem at the time were not religious seekers. They were resolute Jews and devout men from every nation. They had their minds made up. They were not looking for something new, nor were they any more able to be duped than you yourself are.

So how in span of minutes did the number of believers grow from 120 to 3,000. Why? Because of the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said this in **John 16:7-10**.

The unfortunate reality of our fallen world is that at this very moment there is someone somewhere who is in a life or death situation. They are in a place where danger is near and ominous. But I can tell you this: that there is no person in greater danger in our world today and an unbeliever in a Christian Church. For wherever the gospel is preached the Holy Spirit is doing its work to call lost men to come and die. To die to sin by sharing in Christ's death through faith.

You may think yourself to be as resolute as a stone. You may be a monster of your own habit, but if God so labors on your heart through his Spirit, you will stand no defense. And what a deep joy to be worn down by the grace of Jesus.

If that is you today, I invite you to heed the message of Peter, to repent, believe and be baptized. For everything you so desperately look for in our world has already been provided for you eternally and infinitely in the gospel of our risen and ruling Savior.

To the believers who are in here do you see the power and purpose which Jesus has given you in his Holy Spirit? To encounter Easter and not be moved to do what Easter has called us to do is to have missed the mark! There

is no distinction between being chosen for salvation and chosen for the task of gospel work. Salvation exists to satisfy our hearts, save the lost and glorify God through Kingdom work.

We have the Spirit who took those in isolation and brought them to the nations. We have the Spirit who took weak kneed men and made them into the foundation of the church. We have the Spirit who takes what is small in number and ushers in salvation to the uttermost. The celebration of Easter may have passed, but the power and charge of it now dwells in us.

So let us not return home the same.