

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

If I had asked my wife, she would have said, don't say something controversial on Easter. People don't want that. They want to hear the Easter story presented in a way that lets them feel good. Just put the frosting on the cake. Everybody feels good after the singing. Don't wreck it.

Part of me wants to take her advice. Just say something nice. For once. Say something easy to listen to, not difficult.

And yet, the model in the Bible is Paul. 1 Cor. 1 22 *Jews demand signs and Greeks search for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God....* 1 Cor. 1 22 - 24

If you're a jew, my job is to make you stumble. If you're a gentile, my job is to speak things that will seem idiotic to you. That was what Paul did. I could only wish I had one billionth of the spiritual power that he wielded.

As usual, stressing over what to say this morning that might be relevant, I listened to commentary on a story that appeared in the Los Angeles Times. The headline was; **Does it Matter if the Passover Story is True?**

The story is written by one Eric Schwitzgebel who is a professor of philosophy at UC Riverside.

He's married to a jewish lady and their son considers himself jewish and their adopted daughter from china says she's half jewish. And they were at synagogue and the woman Rabbi posed that question to the congregation. Does it matter if the passover story is true?

And the congregation was shaking their heads, no. Doesn't matter.

Nobody really cares. It's just a story. A nice old myth from our nice old book. But Mr. Schwitzgebel was shaking his head yes. So the woman rabbi challenged him to speak.

And professor Schwitzgebel said, yes it matters.

"Okay, Eric, why does it matter?" Rabbi Suzanne Singer handed me the microphone.

I hadn't planned to speak. "It matters," I said, "because if the story is literally true, then a god who works miracles really exists. It matters if there is such a god or not. I don't think I would like the moral character of that god, who kills innocent Egyptians. I'm glad there is no such god."

There's a lot there. Mr. Schwitzgebel sits as a higher authority on morality than God himself. When he says I'm glad there is no such god, he uses a small g. Lower case god for a god he doesn't approve of morally.

He doesn't approve of a god who has miraculous powers and who kills innocent egyptian children. An immoral horrible god, lower case g. Then he says;

In belonging to an old religion, we honor values that are no longer entirely ours. We celebrate events that no longer quite make sense.

"It is odd," I added, "that we have this holiday that celebrates the death of children, so contrary to our values now."

At this point I scratch my head and say, really? Because I know he associates within a liberal world view society that has slaughtered millions upon millions of children. But that's beside the point. That's my own struggle I have with people who have these mind boggling double standards.

The questions are interesting ones. But the first road block is; was it immoral for God to kill egyptian children. All of the first born egyptian children in a particular place at a particular time?

We could look at this another way. Is the human race at war with the God who created them? Are we born into a rebellion against the God who created and ultimately owns all things?

And if so, is that God moral to not crush that rebellion of His enemies who hate Him and would, if they could, dethrone Him. The very God who breathed life into them and who upholds all things?

So the question becomes, Can God be righteous if He chooses on that morning to not crush ALL the egyptians, and for that matter, fair being fair, everybody else on earth that is in rebellion.

There is a precedent for that question. Because in fact He did exactly that with Noah's flood. He wiped out mankind except for 8 people. Noah and his wife, and three sons and their wives. He drowned everyone else. Why worry about a few egyptian children? If you are somehow sitting in judgement on the creator of the universes, the flood that wiped out every living human except 8 is far more immoral.

Or, again, is it moral to allow 8 survivors to not be judged? Those 8 are born into the same rebellious race that He judged. Why is it moral to not judge them?

Here's the answer, and you're not going to like it. God, is a righteous, holy, perfect, sovereign King. No one withholds His hand. All of His judgements are righteous altogether. You don't get to question that.

It's OK if you don't completely understand all of His Holy acts. But the baseline is, His judgements are perfect and holy. To put yourself in the place of judging the moral acts of God is like a dog barking at a tornado. He is God and you are not.

He states to Moses in Exodus 34 *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy*. Period. He picks. He's God. But He also says *I will by no means let the guilty go unpunished*. So, then, we have this conundrum.

A righteous God should kill all the egyptians. And everybody else too. Because the indictment is clear in Romans 1 - 3.

Reading the summation of those chapters from chapter 3. The complete indictment of the fallen human race.

9What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

10as it is written,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

11THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

12ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,

THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

13“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,

WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,”

“THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;

14“WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;

15“THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,

16DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,

17AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”

18“THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

That's the indictment of a Holy God against the human race. So the question is; Why did He only kill the firstborn egyptian children. The whole race is guilty. Sin has made us rebels. What a mercy. What a grace that just those few fell that day, instead of the entire rebellious human race.

Now, just about here you're going to ask, is this the God who loves the world? *For God so loved the world . . .* that God. That's the God we came to church to hear about. Not the kill everybody God.

One and the same. He has a fierce conundrum. He says He will by no means let the guilty go unpunished. And the punishment is eternal separation away from Him in a frightening place. But He loves his creation. He loves the world that is in rebellion. He loves you and me.

That story of the passover lamb in Exodus is a picture of the coming permanent solution. A lamb is slaughtered and the blood provides a protection for those who will believe and obey their God. A people who will come out from the rebellion of this planet.

They put the blood on the doorposts and the angel of death passed over those houses. The picture is of God withholding His judgement for a time. But ultimately, punishment has to happen.

Then in the fullness of time, God's time according to His sovereign plan, He sent His Son. Jesus lived the perfect life that none of us could ever do, and He takes our sin to the cross and gives us instead, His righteousness.

Imputation. His righteousness is imputed to me. My burden of sin is imputed to Him. That transaction satisfies all of God's spoken word. Because of the blood of Jesus, the necessary wrath of God falls on Him and eternal life and blessing comes to me.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2Cor 5:21

He takes my sin. He gives His righteousness to me. I can stand before God justified by a righteousness not my own. That's the gospel. That's the good news of Easter.

Why would we believe a 2000 year old story. We started with the question posed by the lady rabbi. **Does it Matter if the Passover Story**

is True?

We would say yes on all kinds of levels. What matters is whether the ancient book and its stories have authority over us, or, like the liberal synagogue folk, it doesn't matter because they have authority over the book.

Which rules. Modern human reason. Or the ancient book full of miracles that describes a God who lives in a sovereignty that our poor little brains can only partly understand. Which is it?

It's Sunday morning. The first day of the Jewish week. Sabbath is over.

Jesus, like the Passover lamb, was murdered on the Friday that their Passover Sabbath began on. He was in the grave part of Friday, and rose up from the grave on the first day of the week which is why we celebrate the resurrection for all of these 2000 years on Sunday.

500 people saw Him, after He was dead, buried, and rose again, alive on the 3rd day. The accounts are written by reliable witnesses.

When you spend time in this book, studying what those authors of the New Testament, who saw Him alive, risen from the dead, wrote down, you get to know their different personalities. Paul is very different from Peter. John and James are unique. Their personalities come through, even though what they wrote is God breathed.

What you discover is that God didn't choose Einstein type people that are hard to identify with. These men that witnessed these things are construction workers. Fishermen. Accountants. Tailors. Ordinary working men, rather like you and me.

They are good solid ordinary working man type people. Reliable witnesses. Not charlatans. They had nothing to gain by making this stuff up. In fact, they became the dregs of society. Poor. Destitute. Offscourings of the world. Rejected. Persecuted. Murdered.

Later on, when Paul finds himself in Athens, one of the ancient world

hubs, he preaches and says this;

Acts 17:30 “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Did you get that last. Jesus rose from the dead. Solid reliable men witnessed that and wrote it down for us, 2000 years later. Paul says the resurrection, which we are celebrating this morning in word and song, is proof to all men, given by God, that Jesus accomplished everything required to satisfy God's judgement for our sin.

What has changed in 2000 years since Paul preached his sermon in Athens? I don't hear anyone saying what Paul says here. Repent, because God has fixed a day when He is going to judge this world in it's rebellion.

Repentance means we leave the rebellion and beg forgiveness of a God we've offended. Men still need to repent. Leave this world and it's rebellion behind. Join forces with the other side. Fight along side God's forces against Satan's world systems.

John 1:12 says; *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,*

When you repent, you come out of the old family that you were born into, the family in rebellion against God, and you become a child in a new family. God's family.

That repentance, leaving the old worldly life behind in order to join a new family, is one of regeneration. Jesus says, Ye must be born again . . . and Peter retains that lesson in his letter to christians scattered all over the place by persecution.

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hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

This morning we sing and we preach to celebrate the victory won for us at the cross where our sins were born for us, and the resurrection that proves to all men that regeneration and new life is available in this same Jesus. Alive from the dead.

Our world is spinning out of control. The judgement on this world that Paul spoke so briefly of to the Athenians, a day reserved for this world of horrific judgement, some of us believe is drawing very near. We don't know the day or the hour. But we do know where there is safety.

Give your life to the risen Christ. Ask Him to forgive your sin and to give you the necessary righteousness that will be required on that day. The God who warns of coming judgement is also the God who says, Whosoever will, may come. He IS Risen! Hallelujah.