

Dearly Beloved of God,

The purpose of this letter is to bless you with the hope of the resurrection. If it blesses you, please feel free to pass it on.

The definition of Easter in one of my dictionaries reads like this: orig., name of pagan vernal festival almost coincident in date with paschalo festival of the church. (*Eastre*, dawn goddess). 1. an annual Christian festival celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, held on the first Sunday after the first full moon that occurs on or after March 21.

This helps to explain: 1) the dual origin of the celebration, and 2) the confusing dating of the celebration. Just the other night at Small Group a young (13) lady asked me why Easter was so early this year, and why it's not the same date every year. I gave an answer that was generally correct, but not as precise as the one included in the dictionary definition. It is interesting to note also that the date for celebrating the resurrection of Jesus can be quite easily determined, because it is tied so closely to Passover, which began on a specific day of a specific Jewish month. Yet, because at some time in church history, the church chose to tie this celebration into a pagan spring celebration, the celebration is now determined by the phases of the moon. On the other hand, the birth of Christ, the date of which is not known other than it was at a time when Jewish shepherds kept watch over their flocks in the fields (probably Autumn), is fixed on our calendar as December 25th, again because of a pagan celebration of the fact that around this time, the days again began to lengthen.

My purpose here is not to slam traditional dates. I say all of this only so that you will focus more on the fact of the resurrection than ANYTHING that has developed by way over the centuries to diminish this most important event in human history. Easter bunnies, easter eggs, spring dresses, ham dinners, etc. along with religious traditions all tend to reduce the power of God's Word.

**Mark 7:9 (NIV)**

*<sup>9</sup> And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"*

**Mark 7:13 (NIV)**

*<sup>13</sup> Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."*

Consequently it seems like many only glance at Christ's death and resurrection, without embracing it in our hearts. It comes down to this, if Jesus was not raised from the dead, then Christianity is a false religion, Jesus was a liar, and Christians are to be pitied among all the world's people. That's blunt and straight-forward, but Jesus gave us no other choice. Jesus predicted His own death and resurrection.

**Matthew 16:21 (NIV)**

*<sup>21</sup> From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem*

*and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*

You can find references to these two events in most of the Old Testament books. And several decades after Jesus' resurrection, a man named Paul, who had been so against Christians and their faith at one point in his life that he was arresting them and consenting to their deaths wrote these words:

**1 Corinthians 15:12-20 (NIV)**

*<sup>12</sup> But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

*<sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.*

*<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*

*<sup>15</sup> More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.*

*<sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.*

*<sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*

*<sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.*

*<sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*

*<sup>20</sup> But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

And because Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, then all who believe this and confess Him as Lord shall also be raised from the dead.

**1 Corinthians 15:21-23 (NIV)**

*<sup>21</sup> For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.*

*<sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

*<sup>23</sup> But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

That's why I prefer to call tomorrow "Resurrection Sunday." Some of you I hope to see you tomorrow to celebrate the resurrection; the rest of you - if I don't see you before hand, I hope to see you at the resurrection.....because He lives!

Yours for His Purposes,

Pastor Les