

Every Sunday Is "Easter" For Me

Introduction. Many people throughout the world will be attending the "church of their choice" today to remember the resurrection of Jesus. This "special" service of remembering the resurrection of the Lord no doubt will include plays, skits, and dramas.

Besides the absence of instrumental music in worship, offering the Lord's supper every week, and the lack of fundraisers to raise money, most churches of Christ are distinct for their refusal to consider "Easter Sunday" as "special." For us, this day is another Lord's day and special for that reason. So, there will be no "sunrise service," no special sermon or music, no added significance to the Lord's supper, no guest speakers, and no fanfare of any kind. Every Lord's day is equally significant and special; in all of them, we observe the death and resurrection of our Lord.

Many people, honestly believing that they are doing good with this commemoration, celebrate this "holy day" without any biblical authority for the practice. Because of tradition, most people believe that Easter has always been observed from apostolic times and is authorized in the scriptures. But we will see that this is not the case, and we will see what today's focus needs to be for every Christian.

I. ***The History Of Easter***

A. Easter is mentioned in the King James Version in Acts 12:4.

1. Many Bibles contain a footnote conceding that this is a reference in the Greek to the Jewish Passover.
2. About the KJV translation of Acts 12:4, Albert Barnes, a Presbyterian commentator, says, "There never was a more absurd, or unhappy translation than this. The original is simply 'after the Passover.' The word Easter now denotes the festival observed by many Christians in honor of the resurrection of the Savior. But the original has no reference to that, nor is there the slightest evidence that any such festival was observed at the time when this book was written. The translation is not only unhappy, as it does not convey at all the meaning of the original, but because it may contribute to foster an opinion that such a festival was observed in the time of the apostles."
3. Although many decades of church history are recorded in Acts, there is not one legitimate reference to Easter because Easter was not derived from the will of Christ in the New Testament or apostolic tradition.

B. It was learned from paganism, adopted by Catholicism, promoted by Protestantism.

1. One of the most beloved pagan holy days commemorated the goddess Ishtar with a 40-day period of fasting, followed by a feast. Ishtar, or Ashtoreth, was the mother goddess and wife of Baal who was worshiped by the Jews (Judges 2:11-15).
 - a) Paul S. Taylor wrote, "The Mother goddess was frequently worshipped as the goddess of fertility -- and as a sort of Mother Nature and goddess of Spring and sexual love and birth. She was also worshipped as a mediator between god and man. Sexual orgies and temple prostitutes were often used in her worship and in attempting to gain her favor."
 - b) The word "Easter" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word "Eostre," the name of the goddess of Spring. Sacrifices were offered in her honor at the first full moon that came at the time of the vernal equinox.
 - (1) Eastre had as her earthly symbol the prolific hare, or rabbit. Hence, the origin of the Easter Bunny.
 - (2) At the feast to Eastre, an ox was sacrificed and the image of his horns carved into ritual bread. This evolved into the twice-scored Easter biscuits known as hot cross buns. The word "bun" is derived from the word for "sacred ox" (boun).
2. Second-century Christian missionaries, spreading out among Teutonic tribes north of Rome, encountered numerous "heathen" religious observances. Whenever possible, the missionaries tried not to interfere too strongly with entrenched and popular customs. Instead, they quietly -- and often ingeniously -- attempted to transform pagan practices into ceremonies that harmonized with Christian doctrine.
 - a) Converts publicly partaking in a Christian ceremony, and on a day when no one else of their clan was celebrating, stood out like the proverbial sore thumb, easy targets for persecution. But if a Christian rite was staged on the same day as a long-observed pagan celebration, and if the two modes of worship were not very different, then the new converts could avoid persecution.
 - b) The missionaries found that the centuries-old festival to Eastre, commemorated at the start of spring, coincided with the time of year of their own observance of Christ's resurrection.
3. Rather than cast off this paganism entirely, it was sanctified by the church and altered to celebrate Christ. In the 4th century, it was agreed that Easter would be celebrated on the first Sunday following the full moon that comes on or after the vernal equinox. By the 8th century, the resurrection was "overtaken" by Eastre (later spelled Easter), saving the lives of numerous Christians.

4. Israel could never shake her weakness for the idols of Canaan (1 Kings 11:29-33), and the danger of Easter is that people will continue to cling to remnants of paganism, or at the very least, the delusion that they can legislate for God and presumptuously add their own will to His.

II. ***What We Accomplish In The Lord's Supper***

- A. The Lord's supper was instituted by Christ on the night of His betrayal (Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:14-20).
 1. We have an approved example in Acts 20:7 that tells every Christian when one is to partake of the emblems which represent Christ's sacrifice.
 2. The Bible says the first day of the week. It does not say, "The first day of the week, once a year" (cf. Exodus 20:8-10). Every first day of the week is special for Christians.
- B. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, he gave us superb instructions that can really help us understand the meaning of the Lord's supper. The solemn occasion on the night Christ was betrayed is contrasted with the frivolity with which the Corinthians partook of the meal that they mistakenly called the Lord's supper. What they called the Lord's supper did not remotely resemble what Jesus instituted.
 1. A look backward.
 - a) We partake of the supper "in remembrance" of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).
 - b) The phrase "which is broken for you" emphasizes the atoning sacrifice of Jesus' death. Jesus was betrayed, unjustly tried, and died on Calvary's cross so that we might live (Isaiah 53:5-6).
 - c) The Lord's supper is a divinely ordained memorial of the work of Jesus Christ in the same sense as the Passover feast was a divinely ordained memorial of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 12:1-20).
 2. A look inward.
 - a) While we eat, a man should "examine himself" (1 Corinthians 11:28).
 - b) An "unworthy" manner means a careless manner. We can be guilty of partaking of the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner when we fail to give it the respect which it deserves. Being guilty of the body and blood means that we are involved in the same criminality as those who put Him to death (cf. Hebrews 6:6).
 - c) We are to examine ourselves to see if we are in the right frame of mind to partake of the Lord's supper; if we are not, we should correct ourselves and get in the proper frame of mind. Every

person is to conduct their own self-examination; no one is to examine his brother and exclude him from the supper.

- d) Discerning means to "distinguish" or "judge correctly" (cf. Matthew 16:3; 1 Corinthians 2:15). When someone partakes of the supper and does not view it as the proper memorial to the Lord, they are condemned by God.
3. A look forward.
- a) We "shew the Lord's death till he come" during the supper (1 Corinthians 11:26).
 - b) The Lord's supper is a proclamation or announcement of the church's belief in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 1:8; 1 Peter 2:9).
 - c) The supper is to last for a specified period of time -- from the time when Jesus instituted it until His second coming. So we not only testify of His atoning death, but also in His present reign in heaven and His future second coming (Hebrews 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).
- C. So although Easter commemorates the resurrection of Christ, the Lord's supper is a commemoration of His death. The resurrection of Christ allows us to have hope (Acts 24:14-15; 1 Peter 1:3), but it is His death which allows me to be forgiven of my sins. The Lord's supper is special to me for that reason, and it allows me the grand blessing of communing with my brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

Conclusion. The Lord's day is special because it is different from other days of the week. This is not a day for serving ourselves. The activities of this day are to honor the Lord, and we are to treat this day different than the rest of the world. The members of this congregation take seriously their responsibility to serve God and to attend all of the assemblies every Sunday and Wednesday. The Bible warns us not to become lax in our assembling (Hebrews 10:25). But even without the warning, we would be here because this is what we love to do.