

Last time I preached was at the Bush Disciples Monthly Muster. And if you haven't heard that message, I really want you to get a hold of it and listen to it. You can get it off the internet, or ask me and I'll get you a copy. It's about "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few". And Jesus said, "So pray that the Lord of the harvest will send workers out into His harvest field". And then He said, "I'm sending you."

All disciples are sent, with a message, out into the world.

And something that struck me, is that when Jesus sends disciples out, most of us have no idea what message it is that we take with us.... But, the message is actually quite simple: Jesus said, "Tell them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near." That's it: "The Kingdom of Heaven is near." It's a message that's filled with hope. It's a message that points to something better. It's a message that draws us to peace... It sounds good...

But what does it actually mean? When we share with somebody, "the Kingdom of Heaven is near", what are we actually saying???

Well, this Easter Sunday, as we worship the **risen**, crucified one, we find the answer in the **resurrection**....

Let's Pray,

Lord, Today, as we contemplate the resurrection, we ask that you would reveal yourself to us. Lord, reveal to us, more of Your Kingdom. Help us to understand what it means, that Your Kingdom is near, and bring us into that Kingdom of hope, peace, comfort and salvation... Amen.

In 1936, Arthur Guiterman wrote this poem:

*First dentistry was painless;  
Then bicycles were chainless  
And carriages were horseless  
And many laws, enforceless.  
Next, cookery was fireless,  
Telegraphy was wireless,  
Cigars were nicotineless  
And coffee, caffeinless.  
Soon oranges were seedless,  
The putting green was weedless,  
The college boy hatless,  
The proper diet, fatless,  
Now motor roads are dustless,  
The latest steel is rustless,  
Our tennis courts are sodless,  
Our new religions, godless<sup>†</sup>.*

Complete atheists, I actually find to be quite rare. It actually takes a pretty big commitment to hold the faith of an atheist (that all this just happened). Most people believe there is “something out there” - something beyond what we see and know. Something beyond – “ourselves”. But unless belief is

based on the **risen** Christ, essentially our religion, our belief, our faith... is Godless. It's empty, and it's useless....

Romans 10 shows us the difference between a real, saving faith and false hopes that fail.

The one real, saving faith, is faith in the **risen** Lord Jesus Christ. But there are many, many false hopes that people prefer to hang their hat on:

1.

It's a very modern notion to believe that all paths lead to the same God, and that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere about it, you'll be right with God.

*That's like saying with traffic lights, that as long as I sincerely believe that red means "turn the stereo up" and green means "spin your wheels in reverse", as long as I do that, do it consistently and sincerely, then my travels will be rewarding.... I don't think so... And I don't think the copper's going to be too happy with me, no matter how sincere I am., because I'm wrong.*

And when Paul spoke about his own Jewish people and how they had rejected Jesus, he said this: <sup>2</sup> ..... **they are zealous**

**for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.**

Alright, they're really keen, but they've got it wrong.

And you can be sincere about something, but be sincerely wrong. Jesus said, **John 14:6** ...**"I am the way and the truth and the life.** (it doesn't matter which way you go, you'll get to heaven. Did He say that?) **No-one comes to the Father except through me.**

Now that sounds like a very exclusive claim, doesn't it? Well, that's because it is. It **is** an exclusive claim, and Jesus made it. Jesus wanted to be very clear with us, that He **is** the only way to God. And He's very clear with us because He loves us, and doesn't want us to get distracted by false hopes, pinned on false Gods.

So, to be religiously wrong, is a false hope, that no matter how sincere we are, fails when we really need it.

2.

A second false hope, is to trust in our own goodness.

*Nearly every funeral that I've done, when I meet with the family before the funeral, almost without exception, they feel a need to talk about how nice the person was and how they never hurt anybody and always did the right thing.... It's almost like they're trying to convince themselves that their*

*loved one achieved a pass mark. Yes, he had no time for religion, he was a drunk and a fighter and had a foul mouth, but he was a good fella.....*

This is the great prevailing hope of most Australians, “Yeah, I don’t have any time for God, but as long as I do the right thing and don’t hurt anybody (unless they deserve it), He’ll let me into heaven....”

That’s their hope, but it’s a false hope.

*You see, if we try to live by the law, it’s like having a balance scale, where if we do something good, we put a helium molecule, and if we do something bad, we actually screw the pan on this side of the balance to the floor. And it doesn’t matter how much good stuff we do, it’s never going to tip the balance in our favour.*

Because the bad (sin) is actually a rejection of God. And trying to do good to balance the scale, is also a rejection of God. To it our own way, by self-righteousness, is a rejection of God’s way, and a rejection of God.

On this attitude of trying to live by legalism (keeping the rules & doing the right thing), Paul says, “<sup>3</sup> Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.”

God's righteousness is not gained by doing good. God's righteousness, is the righteousness that comes through faith in the risen Christ.

No good deed can make up for the bad. If you break one law, it's like you've broken the whole of the law.

In my daily Bible readings, I'm currently reading Leviticus, which is a tough read. It seems like a great list of ceremonial rules and regulations. But the picture it paints, is this: "God is Holy and we are not. God is unapproachable when we are in a sinful state. It's all about trying to get pure before a Holy God.

God's standards are so high and so unachievable, the only way to live by the law, is to lower the bar, and make our own standard. But if you try to live by rules and regulations, you'll tie yourself up in knots, and you'll live with this false hope. "By my standards, I'm a pretty good guy. I'll get to heaven". ... It's a hope, but it's a false hope.... It'll let you down.

3.

And so people try to make their own image of God.

Some people feel that God is unapproachable. Who can go up to heaven to see Him – if only God could come down to us.... Well, guess what... He did. He came and lived as one of us. God is not unapproachable any longer (He might have been in Leviticus), because Jesus Christ came to us.... But we couldn't handle it, and we crucified Him.

And some say Jesus is still dead. But He's not. And that's why we're here together, on Easter Sunday.

So, what does a real, saving faith look like?

Well, it starts out with the true God, and submits to Him and to His righteousness.

It's no good trying to produce our own righteousness. It's no good trying to produce our own image of a God that suits us – that's all just a lie. Forget it.

What does a real, saving faith look like? Where can true hope be found? The Kingdom of Heaven is near – that's the message. Well, how near is it?.... Here's the true hope.

<sup>9</sup>... if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and **believe** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

A real, saving faith, is something that you believe, and something that you say.

You can say it, and not believe it. You can go to church every Sunday, from the time you're in nappies, to the time you're in incontinence pads, and say it and sing it, and you can recite it.... But unless you believe it, it's just empty words.

What do you believe? What do Christians believe? We believe that God raised Jesus Christ, our Lord, from the dead. That's why we're here on this Easter Sunday. That's why we worship together on a Sunday, instead of the Sabbath. It became known as 'The Lord's Day', because it's the day He rose from the dead. The power of God is greater than the power of death.

Our Heavenly Father demonstrated His power over death by raising His Son from death to life. And you might ask me, "Michael, how can you be so sure that you as a Christian will be raised from the dead?" . And I will say to you, "He's already done it." He started with Jesus, and He'll finish with you and I.

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, is what we believe. And if you ever hear someone who professes to be a Christian, suggest that Jesus didn't rise from the dead, or say that it's not important if He did or not, well they're not a Christian – I know that sounds blunt and judgmental, but it's true. And I



tell you the truth, because I love you. Christians believe in a **live** Christ.

if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and **believe** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is **not** an optional extra. The resurrection goes to the very **core** of the Christian faith. It is a lack of faith that denies the resurrection.

*In 1984, David Jenkins, an Anglican priest, who preached that neither the virgin birth or the resurrection was necessary to be taken literally, was consecrated as the new 'Bishop of Durham'. Less than 3 days later, his cathedral was struck by lightning, and was greatly damaged by fire.*<sup>ii</sup>

Coincidence? Well, you can decide that for yourself.

Verse 10 says, .... **it is with your heart that you believe and are justified**, (what do we believe? That God raised Christ from the dead) Alright, to believe in our heart, in the resurrection of Christ, brings justification. That's the taking away of our sin, so that we can approach God.

and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

What do we confess about Jesus? What are we saying with our mouth? We confess with our mouth, that Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord over everything. He is Lord over creation. He is Lord over my life. He is Lord over every spirit and power. Jesus is Lord.

And you cannot confess that Jesus is Lord over the grave, unless you believe in your Heart that God raised Him from the dead.

Friends, this is dangerous stuff. It got all but one of the disciples killed. To preach that Jesus is Lord, and to proclaim that He has been raised from the dead, is subversive to our culture. It challenges our self-centred ways. It challenges our worldly living. It challenges my sense of self sufficiency. It points to the truth, and uncovers the lie. It is an exclusive claim, which will earn the ire of every person who worships the idol of tolerance.

Jesus is alive. The resurrection is real. The cornerstone of our faith is not a carcass in the dirt, but a living God who calls you to faith. A Saviour who demands a response. And the Lord who commands our acknowledgment.

The resurrection is dangerous stuff. Believe it. Proclaim it.

Happy Easter Everyone.

Jesus is alive. Jesus is Lord. Christ is Risen.

Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> Galaxie Software. 2002. *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*. Biblical Studies Press

<sup>ii</sup> *It was an unholy coincidence that many took to be divine retribution. Two weeks ago, canon David Jenkins, 59, who had publicly asserted that neither the Virgin birth nor the Resurrection need be taken too literally, was formally consecrated as Bishop of Durham in York Minster amid cries of protest. Less than three days later, in the early hours of the morning, lightning forked down on the wooden roof of the minster's 13th century south transept. By 2:30 A.M., flames were leaping from the medieval masterpiece that is the largest Gothic cathedral in Northern Europe.... Jenkins' detractors lost no time in claiming that their views had been vindicated.... a vicar who had been evicted from the minster for voicing protests in the midst of the new bishop's consecration ceremony suggested that "divine intervention" might have caused the fire. Others ... cit[ed] the prophet Elijah, who brought down a fire from heaven, which destroyed an altar he had built in the presence of the prophets of Baal.*

**Time**, July 23, 1984