“What Difference Does Easter Make?” – Easter April 20, 2014 at SBC

 John 11:25

In *U.S. News & World Report,* there's a section, called . . . "News, You Can Use", which, implies that, there is a lot of news, . . . you can't use. That's true. We live in a very, information society. But, a lot of it . . . we really, . . . don't, need to know. Well, we don't want to waste your time, today, . . . so, we're going to talk about, . . . News, That You Can Use.

Today, I want to get, right to the point. Two questions: About Easter, . . . and, the resurrection. **What does it mean, . . . and, why does it matter?** Today, billions of people, will celebrate Easter, . . . all around the world. How is it, that something happened, over 2000 years ago, and still, matters today? What does, it mean?

A lot of people say, "I believe in, . . the resurrection. I just, . . . don't understand it." A George Gallup poll said, that, even 84% of the people, who never go to church, . . . believe, that Jesus, . . . rose, from the dead.

If CNN had been around, . . they would have had it, live. There are at least, 15 historical references, . . to Jesus meeting people, touching people, talking with people. One time, He talked to about 500 people, . . after, . . . He had risen, . . . from the dead. A lot of people, . . . saw Him.

**\*\*\* What does it, mean?** **Three things**: 1. Jesus is, who He, . . . claimed to be. 2. Jesus has the power, He . . . claimed to have. 3. Jesus does, what He, . . . promised, to do. That's, what it means.

**1. Jesus is, . . . Who He Claimed, To Be**. John 11:25 – *"I am the resurrection, and the life. He who believes in me, will live, even though, He dies."* Jesus made some, outrageous claims, . . . when He was here, on earth. He said things like, "I'm God, . . I'm perfect, . . . I'm the only way, to heaven, . . . I'm the Savior, of the world."

A lot of people, try to make Jesus, . . a good teacher. A good teacher, . . would never, say that. A person, could go out, and teach people, all kinds of good moral truths, . . . and, they'd say, . . . "He’s a good teacher." But, if he started, calling himself God, . . . you wouldn't think, he was a good teacher, . . . any more.

Jesus was either, who He said He was, . . . or, He was the biggest liar, who ever lived. He said, . . . "I am God." He made some claims, and He said, “What I'm going to do, . . . is going to validate, . . . who I am.”

One day, Jesus cleared, the money changers, out of the temple. They had turned the temple, into a kind of flea market. He went in, . . and, drove them, all out. They said, "What right, do you have, . . . to do this?" He said, "Because, . . . I'm God." They said, "Prove it!" He said, "I will. After you kill me, . . . I'm going to, . . . come back to life, three days later." He claimed to be God, and His resurrection, backs up . . . what He claimed, to be.

John 14:6 – *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one, can get to God the Father, except by means of me."* That's, a pretty strong, claim. He said, I'm **the** way. He didn't say, I'm one way, I'm a good way, . . . I'm one of the ways. Saying, "All roads, get to heaven", . . . is stupid. That's like saying, I can dial any phone number, . . . and, get my home. There's one number, . . . that, will get my home.

He says, . . I'm **the** truth. That means, any other way, . . is not the truth, . . if He's right. He claimed, to be God. He says, *"No one, can get to God the Father, . . . except by me."*

Even if you don't believe, . . . Jesus Christ is, who He said He was, . . . you still use Him, . . as a reference point. Every time, you write a check, every time you date a contract, every time you put down an appointment, . . . what's the reference point? 2014 years, . . . from what?

Jesus came, to earth. God came to earth, in the form of a man, so we could know, what God is like. His name, was Jesus Christ. He split all of history, into A.D. and B.C. He said, He was, . . . who He claimed to be.

**2. Jesus Shows, . . . He Had The Power, He Claimed, To Have**. He said, in Matthew 28:18 – *"All power on earth, and in heaven, . . . is given to me."* Because, He was God, . . . He could do everything, . . . God could do. In John 10:18 He says, *"Nobody, takes my life, from me. I have the power, to lay it down, and I have the power, to take it up again."* No force, . . . could keep Him, . . . in the tomb.

The Romans killed Him, they put Him in a tomb, they put the big stone, in front of the tomb, and, then sealed it, and, they posted, a 24-hour guard. They were only, trying to prevent, . . . the inevitable. He had all the power, in the world. He said, “They can't stop me. I can give My life away, and I can take it up, again.”

**3. Jesus Does, . . . What He Promises, To Do**. Mark 10:34 – *"They will mock, and flog, and kill me, but after three days, I will come back to life."* The cross, was no surprise, . . . to Jesus. It was all, . . part, of God's plan.

How would you feel, if you'd been one of the guys, . . who put Jesus to death? You publicly, executed this man, . . . in front of hundreds of witnesses, . . who had seen Him die. Then, you bury Him, put a stone over it, seal it, and guard it. Three days later, . . . this guy's up, and walking around, the city, again.

Matthew 28:5-6 – *"The angel said, `Don't be frightened. I know, you're looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He's come back to life again, . . just as He said He would.'"* He did, . . . what He promised. When God, makes a promise, . . . you can, count on it.

That's, what it means. Because, Jesus did rise, . . . He is, who He said He was, . . He has the power, He said He had, . . . and, He kept the promises, . . . that, He made.

Let’s look at, this other question. **Why does, the resurrection, matter?** What difference, does it make? We're talking about, News You Can Use. So what, if Jesus is, who He said He was? What does it mean, to me, today?

**\*\*\* It means, . . . three things**. Because, Jesus is, who He claimed to be, . . . and, because, He has the power, He claimed to have, . . . and, because, Jesus does, what He promises to do:

**1. My Past, . . . Can Be Forgiven**. And, that's, . . good news. Have you ever been, half way through a project, . . . and wish, you could start over? Like painting the house, . . or, whatever? A lot of times, . . . people feel that way, . . . about life. They get half way, through life, . . and, just wish, . . . they could start over.

We all have things, we wish we hadn't done, . . . and, said things, we wish we hadn't said, . . . thought things, we wish we hadn't thought. We all, . . . have regrets. We all feel bad, about things. We all, . . . have guilt.

Some folks, . . . just can't get on, . . with the present, and the future, . . . because, they're stuck, . . . in the past. Some guilt, or regret, or something, . . . has tied, them down. Sometimes, it's a former relationship, . . . and, they're letting it mess up, . . . their current relationships. That's not, . . . too smart.

They say, "I guess, I'll just have to live with this, . . . the rest of my life." And, they're running around, with this baggage -- emotional garbage -- trying to live life, and they're wondering, . . . why, they're not happy.

Colossians 3:14, is the good news. *"He has forgiven, all our sins, and canceled every record, of the debt, we owed. Christ has done away with it, by nailing it to the cross."* This is God's, pardon program. He says, He nailed it all, to the cross. Jesus paid, for my guilt. That means, . . I don't have to, pay for it. Jesus Christ, was nailed to the cross, . . . so, I can quit, nailing myself, to the cross. He wants to, . . . forgive, your past.

He says, He wants to cancel, . . . every record, . . of all debts, you owe -- emotional debts, relational debts, sins. Canceled. How long, do you remember a bill, . . . that's, been paid? Not, at all. Once it's paid, . . . we forget it. What He's saying, is this: Once God's forgiven it, . . . I can forget it. That's, good news!

Even if, there were no such thing, as a heaven, or hell, . . and there is – but, if there weren't, it would be worth it, to become a Christian, just to have a clear conscious, . . . just knowing, that I am free, . . . from all those things, I've done wrong. That's, the good news. Because, Jesus is, who He said He was, . . . my past, . . can be forgiven. I don't have to, go around, . . . carrying a load of guilt.

Romans 8:1 – *"There is no condemnation, awaiting those, who belong to Christ."* Remember . . when you were growing up, and, you had a Etch-A-Sketch? If you messed up the picture, you just flip it, shake it, turn it over. There would be, a clean slate. This is God's etch-a-sketch verse, in the bible. He says, I want to, wipe it, clean.

You can walk out of here, today, . . . knowing, that every single thing, you've ever done wrong, . . . up until this point, . . . is completely forgiven. That's, good news. That's news, . . we can use. No, . . condemnation!

 He said, *"I didn't come, to condemn the world, I came to save it."* He wants to change you, to help you, give you a new beginning, a clear conscious. That's news, . . . I can use.

**2. My Present Problems, . . . Can Be Managed**. Much of life, . . . is unmanageable. Especially, if you're a parent! Charlie Shedd, an author, . . . tells this story, on himself, "Before, we had kids, I use to travel across the country, teaching a lecture, I called `The Ten Commandments, for Raising Perfect Kids', . . . before, I had kids."

After he and Martha, had their first child, he changed it to "Ten Hints, . . for Parents". After, their second child, he relabeled the lecture, . . "A Few Tentative Suggestions, . . . For Fellow Strugglers." He said after the arrival, of the third child, . . . he gave up speaking, on the topic, . . . altogether.

Maturity, is when you figure out, . . . that, you don't have it all, figured out. Maturity, is when you realize, that you can't manage, all that life, is going to send you. But, . . . God can. And, that's, . . good news. I can't control, everything in my life, . . . but, God can. So, I want to hook up with Him, . . . and, let Him control it, . . . and, ask Him, . . . for help.

If you talk to, very many people, you’ll find that, the number one complaint, you hear from people, today, . . . is "My life, is out of control." You hear it, over and over. "I feel powerless, to change the situation . . . I feel powerless, to break a bad habit . . . I feel powerless, to save a relationship . . . I feel powerless, to get out of debt . . . I feel powerless, to manage my time, and my schedule."

What you need, . . . is a power, . . . greater, than yourself. You were never, . . . meant, to live this life, . . . just, . . . on your own power. God wants to have, . . . a relationship, with you.

Ephesians 1:20 – *"How incredibly great, is His power, to help those, who believe Him, the same mighty power, that raised Christ, from the dead."* The same power, that enabled Jesus, to rise from death, . . . will help you, . . rise above, your problems. The same power, that God used, at resurrection time, 2000 years ago, can be used, . . . in your life, . . . right now.

You don't know, . . . what the future holds. I don't either. We don't know, . . what's going to happen, next year, next month, next week. We don't know, what's going to happen, tomorrow. But, . . . it doesn't matter. Because, even though, it's out of our control, . . . it's not, out of God's. He will give us, . . . the power, to face it.

Philippians 4:13 – *"I'm ready for anything, through the strength of Christ, who lives in me."* I want to help out, God says. No matter, how hopeless, your situation is -- some of you, . . may have had, . . a tough week!

God wants, to say to you, . . . "Don't give up." No problem, . . . is too big, for God. No situation, is hopeless, . . if you'll turn it, over to Him. "I am ready, for anything, . . . through the power, . . . of positive thinking"? No, it doesn't say that. "I am ready for anything, . . . because, I psyched myself up." No, *"I'm ready, for anything, . . . through the strength of Christ, who lives in me."*

**Why does, the resurrection matter?** Because, my past can be forgiven, my present can be managed, and, . . .

**3. My Future, . . . Can Be Secure**. One of the universal problems, we've all got, . . . is death. Everybody, dies. I'm going to die, someday, and, so are you. Only a fool, would go all through life, . . . unprepared, for something, . . . he knows, is inevitable. That doesn't, make sense. Sometimes, we get so busy, in the here and now, we don't stop to think, about what's, . . . going to come.

People don't like, to talk about death. Invite your friends, over sometime, serve them some coffee and pie, . . . and say, "Let's talk about, . . . death." See, what happens. But, it's inevitable, . . . so, let's talk about it:

\*\*\*\* They asked some children, to write sentences, about what they believed, about death. Gilda, age 8, said, "When you die, they put you in a box, and bury you in the ground, . . because, you don't look too good." Stephanie, aged 9, said, "Doctors help you, so you won't die, until, you pay their bill." Marsha, aged 9, said, "When you die, you don't have to do homework in heaven, . . . unless, your teacher, is there too." Raymond, aged 10, said, "A good doctor, can help you, so you won't die. A bad doctor, sends you to heaven."

The fact is, everybody has a deep, internal longing, to know, "What's going to happen? What's going to happen, after, I die?" It's obvious, we're going to spend more time, . . . on that side of eternity, than on this side.

Here, we only spend 70, 80, maybe 90 years. This is just, the first inch, of the yardstick. This is preschool, for what's going to happen, in eternity. It is interesting to me, that as 70 million baby boomers, approach middle age, all of a sudden, they're interested, . . . in the Hereafter. More people, believe in heaven and hell, than ever before, in American history. Why? Because, people are wondering, . . . "What's going, . . . to happen?"

\*\* The fact is, there are a lot of misconceptions, . . about heaven. Most of them, come from, bad movies. (The movies, can be good, . . but, the theology is bad, in them.) Heaven Can Wait, Oh, God, All Dogs Go To Heaven, Defending Your Life -- they are cute little ideas, of what they think, heaven is going to be like.

**\*\*\*\* What is it really, going to be like**? When you go to the Bible, what does God say, it's really going to be like, . . in heaven, and in hell? One day, . . . you're going to stand before God, . . . and, you're going to need to know, . . . the right answers. **Here's what the Bible says, about the future -- about heaven, and hell:**

1) Heaven, . . is a perfect place. Total love, total peace, total joy, total perfection. No sin, no mistakes, no evil, no bad, no errors. It's perfect, in every area. It's a, . . . perfect place.

2) In order, for you to go there, **you** have to be perfect, because, only perfect, can get into heaven. That would leave us all out -- we'd never make it, if we had to be perfect. None of us, are perfect, . . . we've all messed up.

There are **two ways**, the Bible says, you can get to heaven. Plan A, . . . is to earn it. That's the, . . performance plan. To earn it, you only have, to never sin, . . . and, always do what's right, . . . for your entire lifetime. Always, make the right decision, always say the right thing, . . . never the wrong thing, . . . be perfect.

Since none of us, qualify for Plan A, God came up with Plan B. Plan B is, you trust Jesus Christ, you establish a relationship with Him. He said, . . *"I am the way, the truth and the life."* He was the only, perfect person, who ever lived, . . . because, He was God. He came, so we could know, . . . what God, is like.

By trusting, in Him, . . . by repenting of your sins, and asking for forgiveness, . . . and establishing a relationship with Him, you get in, . . . on His goodness. When you get to heaven, you'll say, "God, I couldn't get here, on my own effort.” The only way, we can get into heaven, . . . is we’re a friend, . . . of Jesus Christ.

John 17:3 – *"This is the way, to have eternal life. By knowing, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the One, He sent to earth."*  The Bible says, that Jesus, has already paid, for your way, to heaven. This is news, you can use.

The Christian, is not somebody, who accepts, a religion. A Christian, is somebody, who has a relationship, with God. A lot of people, try different ways, to get to heaven. Some people, try Salvation, by Sincerity. "It doesn't matter, what you believe, as long as you're sincere." Just think, that one through. You can be, sincerely wrong.

Some people, try Salvation, by Subtraction. You give up, a bunch of things, . . . and, then, . . you get to heaven. "I don't drink, smoke, cuss, chew, . . . or, run around with girls that do." I don't, . . . do nothing wrong.

Then there are people, who think they'll get to heaven, . . . by ritual. I'll get, baptized. You can get baptized, in the ocean, . . . until, every fish, knows you, . . . by your first name. Maybe, you'll join a church, . . . and, think that, will make you, a Christian. Sitting in a church, will make you a Christian, . . . about as much as, sitting in a chicken house, . . . will make you a chicken.

How about, . . . Salvation by Heritage. Your mother, was a Christian. Your grandmother, was a Christian. So, what? You have to make, a personal decision, . . yourself. That's like saying, . . . I know you're married, . . . because, your mother was married, and your grandmother, and your great grandmother. No, . . . you've got to make, . . . a personal decision.

My favorite of all, is Salvation by Comparison. "I'm better than, . . . so and so." You're probably better, than me. I don't, doubt that. But, God isn't judging you, . . . according to me, or anybody else. Saying "I'm better, than Hitler", is like saying, "I can bench press, more than my grandmother!" God doesn't grade, on a curve. It's either perfection, . . . or, zip! It's either 100%, . . . or, Plan B – trust Christ.

Christ said, This, is the way, to eternal life. 1 Peter 1:3 – *"We have been born again, into a life, full of* ***hope****, through Christ, rising from the dead."* Hope means, you don't have anything, . . to fear. You don't, fear death, any more. You're not ready to live, . . . until, you're ready to die. You can't really live, . . . unless, you're, . . . not afraid, to die. How can you, not be afraid, to die? By making peace, . . . with God, now.

\*\*\* What is your, . . . source of hope? Hope means, . . . confidence, . . . in the Bible.

1) Would you like to, . . . have every sin, . . . everything you've ever done wrong, . . . completely forgiven? Would you like, . . . to have, a clear conscious?

2) Would you like to, . . . acquire a new power, that would help you, manage the problems, . . . in your present?

3) Would you like to, . . . have your future, . . . secured?

That's the difference, that Easter, can make. How? **Just understanding**, why Easter happened, . . . why Christ rose from the dead, and what a difference it made, . . . is not enough. **You've got to, . . . do something**, about it. You've got to take, some action steps. Understanding, what I've just talked about, . . . is not enough, to get you, . . . into heaven. You've got to, accept it, . . . and, act on it.

You pray, and say to God, "God, I'm scrapping Plan A. I know, that I'll never, . . . earn my way, to Heaven. I know, I'll never be, good enough. I've already blown it, enough times to know, I'm not going to make the 100% thing. So, I'm asking You, to work Plan B, in my life. Jesus Christ, I want to trust You, follow You, get to know You, and have a relationship." That's, how Easter, . . . makes a difference, in your life.

All of us came, today, for many different reasons. Some of you came, because, it's the thing, to do. It's Easter. Tradition. Find a church, . . . and, go. So, you came, . . . out of habit. Others of you came, . . . maybe, because, . . . somebody invited you, . . . somebody, who really cares, . . . about you.

It doesn't matter, why you think, you came here. You're not here, . . . by accident. God, . . . brought you here. He brought you here, . . . so, He could communicate to you, . . . so, He could get you to sit still, for a few minutes, . . . so, He could say something to you. We get too busy, . . . to hear God, . . . talk to us.

This is what, God wants to say to you, today, . . . "You matter, to Me. I understand everything, about your life. I know you. I made you, remember? You matter, to Me. I want to have, . . . a relationship, with you.

 I sent, My only Son, . . . to die for you. I want you, . . . to get to know Me."

I don't care, what your background is. I'm not, talking about, . . religion. I'm talking about, a relationship, with Jesus Christ. That's what Easter, . . . is all about. God knows you. He wants you, . . . to know Him.

 So, you come, . . . with an open heart, . . . and, you say, . . . "God, here I am."

Some of you, have been close to God, in the past. You've kind of, drifted away. God wants to say, come back. What does God say, to somebody, who has drifted away? Isaiah 54:7 – *"With deep love, I will welcome you, back."* Nobody, will ever love you, . . . as much as, Jesus Christ does. You matter to God, and He brought you here, today, to tell you that. Jesus Christ, died for you, to prove, how much, He loves you.

We're all, at different levels, in our spiritual journey. Some of you, aren't even sure, that you're going to heaven, when you die. You need to, make sure. Some of you, need to, . . . recommit, your life, to the Lord.

**“What Difference Does Easter Make?”**

**\*\*\* What Does The Resurrection Mean? It Means:**

1. Jesus is who He \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

John 11:25 – *"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."*

John 14:6 – *"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can get to God the Father except by means of me."*

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John 10:18 – *"No one takes my life from me. I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it up again."*

3. Jesus does what He \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

Mark 10:34 – *"They will mock . . . and flog . . . and kill me; but after three days I will come back to life again."*

Matthew 28:5-6 – *The angel said, `Don't be frightened! I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified, but He isn't here! He has come back to life again, just as He said He would."*

**\*\*\* Why Does the Resurrection Matter? Because Now:**

1. My past can be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

Colossians 3:14 – *"He has forgiven all our sins . . . and canceled every record of the debt we owed; Christ has done away with it by nailing it to the cross."*

Romans 8:1 – *"There is no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ."*

2. My present problems can be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

Ephesians 1:20 – *"How incredibly great is His power to help those who believe Him . . . the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead!"*

Philippians 4:13 – *"I am ready for anything through the strength of Christ who lives is me."*

3. My future can be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

John 17:3 – *"This is the way to have eternal life - by knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ, the One He sent to earth!"*

1 Peter 1:3 – *"We have been born again into a life full of hope through Christ's rising from the dead."*