

'Jesus is Everything'

by Rev. Robert Griffith

As the memory of another Easter fades behind us, sadly so does the power, the reality and the confronting truth of Easter. Easter is certainly a time to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus in a more focussed way and that's a good thing. But for most people it is just another holiday and a time to re-connect with family and friends. But the underlying truth of Easter is, or at least should be, incredibly confronting.

Easter reminds us of that time when God came to earth in human form to rescue us and we missed Him completely. Not only did we miss Him, we miss-understood Him; we made a mockery of Him; we masqueraded Him through the streets like a criminal and then we murdered Him. It was the greatest injustice ever perpetrated on this planet.

Our Creator came to redeem us, to reconcile us, to overwhelm us by His love and to remove the stain of sin from us forever and we said, *"No thanks, You're not what we need,"* then we killed Him. But like some incredulous, unexpected twist in a movie plot, God actually used that reprehensible sin on our part to save us from *all* sin – past, present and future! This is the outrageous gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the good news. This is why we are still here!

"God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

"When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross." (Colossians 2:13-14)

"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:6-7)

It was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which brought forgiveness, grace, salvation, freedom and eternal, abundant life to the very people who ignored Him, misunderstood Him, denied Him, betrayed Him and killed Him. Such was the incomprehensible love which God lavished upon us and we did absolutely nothing to secure our salvation. In fact we did everything we could to push God, His love and His free gift of salvation away. We didn't deserve the freedom and forgiveness which God gave us in Christ. Jesus did it all for us. Jesus fulfilled all that God required to redeem us and reconcile us to Him for eternity and then He gave that to us as a free gift. Jesus did everything and that's why Jesus *is* everything to us, or at least He should be.

Our redemption was all the work of Jesus. This is the gospel of God's amazing grace and we are invited to believe it, receive it, step into its reality and then watch our lives change before our very eyes. It's all about Jesus. It's ALL about Jesus. But is that what we hear today from all our pulpits? Is that the message the world hears from the Church and observes in the life of Jesus' disciples today?

On that first Palm Sunday all those years ago when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey there were hundreds of thousands of people lining the streets waving palm branches and worshipping Him as their king and the long-awaited Messiah. But their expectations of this Messiah were very different to God's intentions. On Sunday the adoring crowds were shouting *"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."* By Friday the same people were shouting, *"Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"*

What changed in those five days? The Messiah they expected and praised at the beginning of that week was a mighty leader who would rescue them from the Romans and rule like King David. The *real* Messiah actually came to die on a cross and rescue them from God's holiness, purity and judgement - reconciling them to their Creator forever. In spite of the Old Testament prophecies which spoke of this suffering servant Whom God would send - they despised and rejected their own Saviour and didn't even know it. You and I do the same today whenever anything fills our mind more than God.

I believe the problem today in our world and in our Churches is not really a lack of zeal for missions. The problem is a lack of zeal for God and for the glory of God. If you truly understand what has been done for you; the purchase that has been made for you in order to save you from sin and the holy judgement of God; if you realise the greatness of the One Who sits upon the throne, Who created the earth and one day will bring it to an end; when you accept that absolutely everything in this temporal, earthly reality is dust and rot . . . *then* you will *begin* to have a zeal for God . . . *then* you will *begin* to know that Jesus is everything . . . *then* you will know that it's all about Him and His mission, not you or your mission or your Church's mission. It's all about the mission of the One Who promised to build His Church. It's all about Jesus. Jesus is everything!

Now I don't need to be a prophet to know who or what your God is - I only have to watch your life. When Jesus Christ is just something you do at the beginning of the week, yet throughout your life you are a practical atheist, I know who your God is. When you have just enough religion to make you moral so you fit in with the Church crowd, I know who your God is. If I could look into your mind and see what dominates your thoughts and desires every day of every week, I would know who or what your God is.

Listen to me . . . in Jesus' name, listen. Even if you are the vilest and most wicked, God-hating man or woman on the planet – if there is any good whatsoever in your life it comes from the very One you hate! Now you might never say that the Lord is not number one; you may never say that anything else is more important than God, but you say it with your life – and we already know that our life will always speak so much clearer and louder than our mouth. People are impacted far more by how we live than what we say.

There are many lessons we can learn as we come through these difficult times when the whole world is being held captive by an invisible virus with the innocuous name of *Covid-19*. We must have missed the first 18 but we certainly haven't missed No.19. The whole world has been brought to its knees and in the midst of the sickness, death, economic decline and hardship we are seeing people's hearts revealed. In our nation of Australia where it could be argued that sport is the dominant religion, we are being told how devastating this lockdown has been for our football codes and how hundreds of thousands of worshipping fans have been left with this incredible hole in their lives and their weekends no longer have purpose. Now if you want to see true zeal, just watch 80,000 of those fans pack a stadium and scream their love and support for a team of guys tossing around a piece of pig hide on a paddock. Those fans are not cheering anymore. Their beloved game has been shut down, like most of our society. Those fans now need to see if there is anything else in their lives which matters or means anything now their primary passion has gone.

Even the Church is being tested in these times as we are forced to face the possibility that it was our buildings, our worship teams, our programs and our events which were at the centre of our Christian faith, not Jesus. Now they have all been taken away many people are struggling to know what Church is supposed to be. But Jesus, Who is everything, is not tied to a building. Jesus is not in lockdown and there have been no restrictions placed on Jesus at all. So His mission and the ministry of His Church should be thriving in these difficult times - if Jesus truly is everything to us.

Listen to what God is saying to us at this time friends. What does God want from us? The same thing God has always wanted from us: EVERYTHING. I know we still have evangelists who say, *"Give me your hand and give Jesus your heart."* I know about the many preachers who say, *"Come forward and say this prayer, it only takes a few minutes ..."* They are lying to you. Jesus is everything and to be His disciple it will cost you everything – He wants your whole life. He wants your heart. He wants your greatest affection, your deepest passion, your highest commitment and your absolute surrender.

Jesus promises you two main things: a cross to die on and eternal life. He's everything or He's nothing. The greatest curse in this world today friends is not greed, power, poverty, war or even evil. The greatest curse today is *religion*. That's right – religion is that place where we can have just enough Christianity to soothe our conscience but we despise the Lord by the way we live. We can be religious and so full of idols in our life that Jesus is not No.1 or No.2 or even No.3. Our lives are filled with so many other things which demand our true worship, our love, our interest, our attention and our time. If Jesus is not everything, then Jesus is nothing.

When Jesus *is* everything then our first waking moment of every day begins in surrender to the Lord of all creation as we ask, *"What are You doing today Lord . . . in my life, in my family, in my community, in my workplace ... and how can I be part of Your mission today? Teach me Your ways, O Lord. Who do I have in heaven but You, Lord? Who do I have on earth but You, Lord? What am I but a speck of dust breathing holy breath because You are my source of life."* Is that how you greet each day?

So difficult is our salvation that only God could make it possible. So many believers treat God like He's a flu shot. I have spoken to many people about God over the years who say something like, *"Oh, I sorted that out when I was a teenager. I prayed the prayer. I did my confirmation class. I took care of that a long time ago."* Friend if you are not taking care of it now, if Jesus is not part of your life every day – the most important part of your life - then you didn't take care of anything all those years ago. The only real evidence we have that you truly accepted the gift of salvation and repentance all those years ago is that you are still repenting every day now and living out that salvation which was given to you as a gift by God's grace and for God's glory. The evidence that you truly believed in Christ that first time is that you are still believing today *and* it has changed your whole life. If God is not still changing your life today then I question whether He ever did at the start.

Brothers and sisters, I want you to hear the truth here. It is a fact that Satan and the angels fell and God didn't send them a saviour. Our human father Adam fell and I want you to know today that if God hadn't sent a saviour and we all ended up spending eternity separated from His presence, His love and His blessing – then God would still be just, He would still be glorious and He would still be loving. We would simply be getting what we deserved. We rightly sing of God's amazing grace because in Christ we are given what we don't deserve: eternal, abundant life.

If you are hearing the true gospel then you are being confronted with a truth that demands everything from you. You are being confronted with Who God is. For you to be at your very best, the way God created you and always intended for you, then God must have your everything. And if your heart has truly been regenerated by the Holy Spirit – if you have been born again and God has transformed your whole being and you are not just a pretend Christian going through the motions, then you will be saying, 'amen' right now because in your heart of hearts - where deep calls unto deep – you truly want God to have all of you, not just some of you! It is God who placed that desire in you. A truly saved, redeemed, regenerate disciple of Jesus Christ has no problem with anything I am saying now because they know that unless Jesus is everything to them and everything in them, they will not achieve God's best in their lives; they will not fully embrace Christ's mission on earth. They will not know what it means to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

When we no longer have the power of the Holy Spirit in our ministries, in our Churches and in our missionary activities then we are forced to do all sorts of 'professional' things to keep a dead corpse moving! We would have more integrity if we were an atheist than to claim we know Christ as our Saviour but then embrace that reality half-heartedly or for just a day or two each week. There is a very confronting verse in the book of Revelation about being neither cold nor hot but lukewarm in our relationship with God in Christ. That verse is basically saying, *"Jesus is everything or Jesus is nothing."*

Most people are alive only because air is free. They have done nothing with their lives. You might protest and say you've done a lot with your life and I would ask one question of you, *"How much of what you have done with your life is eternal?"* By that I mean how much of your life's activities will vaporise when this world ends? You see, when I talk about advancing God's kingdom, which is the primary calling of every disciple of Christ and the purpose of the Church, I am talking about sowing seeds which are reaped in glory. I am talking about investing our lives in that which transcends this life and impacts people's eternal reality.

That, my friends, is why Jesus came – *not* to establish a temporal, earthly kingdom – but a heavenly, eternal kingdom. We wanted an earthly king and when it became obvious Jesus refused to be that kind of king, we turned on Him and killed Him. Before He left us, Jesus told us to advance the eternal Kingdom of God by preaching what He preached, praying how He prayed, and making disciples of all nations. That was Christ's mission and that is still Christ's mission. It's the only mission we have. The Church does not have a mission. I don't care what it says on your newsletter or your website – the Church does not have a mission. Jesus Christ has a mission and His mission has a Church. We are not called to advance the mission of the Church – we are called to partner with Jesus in fulfilling His mission. There is a huge difference between those two.

There is so much about this earthly life that we can enjoy and should enjoy, but if our underlying reason for being here; if our dominate focus, our deepest passion and our highest commitment is not connecting people with Jesus and making disciples, then we have missed the main purpose of our life. It's all about Him. It's all about Him.

Friends there are only two jobs in Christ's mission. Either you are called to go down into the pit to rescue God's lost children or you are called to hold the rope for those who go down. Either way there will be scars on your hands. Either way there will be a cost to you. Either way the mission of Christ will be the most important reality in your life and it will define who you are; it will define how you live; it will impact every other decision in your life because this mission is birthed in *Whose* you are. You belong to Jesus ... and when you belong to Jesus, He is everything.

So let me ask you, where are your scars? What has it cost you to be Jesus' disciple? What has it cost you to be a member of His Church? What has the global mission of Jesus Christ cost you? How many of the world's opportunities have you lost or laid aside because you identify with that man on the cross? What sacrifices have you made in this material world so that Jesus can be everything to you and everything in you? How much time, energy and resources have you invested in being a member of the Church Jesus promised to build?

I say none of this in judgement. I don't want you to feel guilty or ashamed or inadequate. That is the ministry of Satan. All your guilt, shame and inadequacy fell on Christ when God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin so that you might become the righteousness of God in Him. I am pleading with you to make Jesus everything in your life because that is the life God planned for you. That is the best version of yourself. Most of us are reluctant to surrender all to Jesus because this world has programmed us to think that when we surrender we have lost something and we have less on the other side of that surrender. The exact opposite is true when we surrender to God.

Why are we here? Why do we breathe? Why does our heart beat if not for the advancement of His kingdom? When we surrender all and Jesus is everything to us, we finally become who we truly are in Christ. We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ – the most perfect version of a human being that ever walked this earth. When we make Jesus everything, we don't lose anything – we gain everything God has planned for us.

Hear the word of the Lord again today through the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:1-2 *“All who are thirsty, come and drink. All who are hungry, come and eat. Why do you spend your money on that which will not satisfy? Come and drink my living water so you will never thirst again!”*

Come to him today . . maybe for the first time ... maybe for the thousandth time ... it matters not. God is waiting for those who want Jesus to be everything. He just needs you to trust Him with what your life will be on the other side of that choice. So choose this day whom you will serve and have the courage to accept the truth: **Jesus is everything, or He is nothing.** Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness . . . and everything else will flow into your life and through your life . . to the glory of God.

Come, Holy Spirit of God, speak to us now, embolden us now, empower our choices from this moment on. In Jesus' name and for Jesus' glory we pray. Amen.