

## **TJW, HT, 12.4.09 (Easter), 10am, Romans 6.1-10**

---

Some people live in the past.

Most families have an uncle or a grandfather who can manage to turn every conversation round to what he did in the war.

There are even whole societies devoted to the past - like those organisations who go around re-enacting ancient battles - only without the blood and the gore. I discovered this week that the “National Association of Re-enactment Societies” has a website which can tell you more. (I promise you, I’m not making this up. The Viking society looked to me like the most entertaining one.)

Now we’re here on this Easter Day to remember events that happened in the city of Jerusalem longer ago than even any of that - when a the man Jesus of Nazareth was executed by being nailed to a wooden cross, and then miraculously rose back to life, with a renewed physical body that would never die.

(And just as an aside, I’m sure there are some people here who would be helped by seeing the solid historical evidence for the resurrection as a fact explained to them. This little book, The Case for Easter, does that job superbly, and there’ll be copies on sale in the Welcome Area afterwards for just £2.)

At Easter we look back 2000 years. Yet Christians are not people who live in the past. The Christian church is not just the “Jesus Re-enactment Society”.

And that's because the historical facts of Jesus' death and resurrection are not just historical facts.

They are also spiritual events - spiritual acts which God himself did - acts which God will use to have the most profound spiritual impact on us, when we take Jesus seriously.

There's one visual picture that I want to give you in your mind, to help us get hold of this impact, this transformation, that the Easter events can have on us now.

Picture a scene in the English countryside, with two fields, right next to each other. Separating the two fields is a high stone wall. It's so high that no sheep could ever get from one field into the other on their own. The farmer has to reach down, grab the sheep, and physically lift it up and set it down in the other field.

If you've got that image in mind, now add something else in. All of us are born in one of those fields. It's a field where the ruling principle is rejection of God. We're all born with a lot of good in us, of course. But in the end that good is wrecked by a tendency we can't shake off - the bias in us that wants to rebel against putting God in charge of our life. That's what the Bible calls 'sin' - and we live in a world ruled by it.

The other field is ruled not by sin; it's ruled by Jesus Christ. The people in that field are not the ones who've hit such a high level of goodness and morality that they've managed to jump the fence. (They can't jump it, remember, because the fence is too high.)

They're the ones who've chosen to unite themselves with Jesus Christ - so God has lifted them up and set them down in the field that belongs to him.

So do you see that what Jesus came to do was to make a decisive shift in the basic position that we live in: from living under the power of sin, which only brings God's condemnation - to living under Jesus Christ - ruled by him - united to him.

God wants to make this shift in the whole position of our lives first, before he comes to make any moral demands on us.

He wants to re-orientate our position to him while we're still bad, before he then uses that new position to make us good. That's a very loving way for God to behave towards us - and the Bible calls it God's 'grace'.

Now the passage in the Bible we're looking at this morning tells us how God uses the events of the first Easter to make it happen.

I do recommend you open it up - Romans Chapter 6.

This was written by the apostle Paul, and it starts with him imagining what someone might say if they didn't like this idea of grace. See verse 1 of Chapter 6 [READ].

Someone might say: "If in the end it's all about God forgiving us, surely anyone can just live how they want, and then say sorry to God on their death-bed. That doesn't seem right."

As one famous philosopher once said: "God will forgive me; that's his job." Again, that doesn't seem right. It makes God's forgiveness too easy - too cheap.

Paul's answer to that is summed up in verse 5. Look at it with me [READ].

That's the central verse for understanding this part of the Bible.

And within that one key verse there's one key phrase - it's repeated twice, so we get the point. It's "united" - '**united with him, with Christ**'.

It's a double 'united' - united with Christ in his death and his resurrection.

First of all, everyone who puts their trust in Jesus and makes him their Lord, is united with him in his death.

What that means is explained in verse 6, which says this... [READ verses 6-7].

So, if you've put your trust in Jesus, your 'old self' was crucified with Christ - killed with him, when he died on the cross.

Now your 'old self' here is not talking about the bits of your character and your history that you don't like. It's not about your low self-esteem, or your temper, or your baggage from the past.

It's obvious that it's not about that - when we remember that when someone becomes a Christian those things don't die away completely.

Of course, Christ will want to deal with your low self-esteem, your temper, your baggage. But the temptation to give in to them, and the reality of sometimes falling for the temptation - that'll usually be there in your life till the day you die. These things are dying in the Christian's life - but it's a slow, lingering death that they're dying.

But what has already definitively died in the Christian is sin's ownership of you.

That's what it means in verse 2 when it says: 'we are those who have died to sin'. Sin still touches your life, but it's no longer your master.

Do you see in verse 6 how it says that our old self was crucified with him so that the body - that's "the old you" - the you that was ruled by sin - might be done away with.

So the 'old self' here is the you who didn't know Christ, whose sins weren't paid for by his death for you.

That old self was definitively killed on the cross, right there with Jesus. It's dead and gone.

So being "united with Christ in his death" isn't about turning over a new leaf.

It's about being giving a whole new identity - because your basic unity is now not with sin and condemnation, but with Christ and his good standing before God - lifted up out of one field, and set down by God in another.

The Christian is united with Christ on Good Friday, in his death. And we stay united with him right through to Easter Sunday - united with him in his resurrection.

See verse 5 again [READ].

And that is spelled out from verse 8 [READ verses 8-10].

I got married seven and a half years ago. As soon as we were married, Erica took on all the present-buying duties for birthdays and Christmas. And now my relatives thank me for buying them great presents - far better presents than they ever got from me when I was single.

So now, just before I phone my Dad on his birthday, I have to ask Erica: “What did I give my Dad for his birthday?”.

Because now we’re united in a marriage-relationship, I’m treated as if I’d done things that actually someone else done.

And of course the other thing that happens in a good marriage is that what happens to one of you really happens to both. One of you wins the lottery, and you’ve both won. One of you loses your job, and the other feels as bad as if they’d lost theirs.

Does that help you see what’s going here in this unity with Christ?

If we trust in Christ, we’re so closely united to him that you might as well say that we died on the cross - that we have already suffered for ourselves the condemnation from God that we deserve for rebelling against him.

Of course, we didn’t actually do it - Christ did. But if I trust in Jesus, God unites me so closely to him that he naturally treats me as if I’d done at the first Easter what Jesus did.

And so, once our old self has died with Christ, God will then raise us to a new life with Christ, just as Jesus was raised.

There are two parts to this being united with Christ in his resurrection. The first has already happened. We're still waiting for the second.

If you've put your trust in Jesus Christ, what's already happened to you is a spiritual resurrection.

You are alive to God in a way you never were before. You hear the message of Jesus, and something in you can't resist saying: "I believe that now." As someone said to me a while ago: "It's settled. This is me now."

If that's happened to you, you didn't do that to yourself. God did it to you, uniting you with Jesus Christ so strongly that you share spiritually in his resurrection - so you now live a new life for him.

And we're still waiting for part two - a physical resurrection. At the end of time, when Christ returns, everyone who's united with him will be raised to life with a new physical body.

If that seems extraordinary to us - isn't it actually just logical, if we're united with Christ, so that what happened to him at Easter will happen to us?

If you've put your trust in Jesus, then in three short lines verse 5 tells you the impact of Easter in you [READ].

Remember the two fields - and needing to be lifted out of one into the other?

The field where people belong to Jesus - that's what we often call heaven. And do you see that no one can exist there unless they've deliberately chosen to belong to him. It's his field! You can't be there without belonging to him.

If you're someone who wouldn't call yourself a committed Christian, this is the thing from this morning for you to take to heart.

We all start in the wrong field. And there's no moral ladder you can climb from that field over to God.

It is only by getting to know Jesus Christ and so being united to him that God will lift you out of where you are and into his presence.

Now for the Christian, here's the big message. It's summed up in one word in verse 5: the word 'certainly' - 'we will certainly be united with him'.

I bet if I drew a picture of those two fields and asked you to draw on it where you think you are, many of us, at one time or another in our lives, would draw ourselves on the fence, in the middle of the two. We're not certain that we're with Christ.

Here's the way out of that problem. Realise that Jesus didn't just come to forgive us.

Of course, he does forgive our sins, but too often we think like this:

We think: “God has forgiven my sins in Jesus dying for me - so that’s OK, I’m forgiven. But now what I’ve got to do is ask for Jesus’ strength to live for him - and sometimes that’ll go well and then I’m close to him, and sometimes it’ll go badly and then I’m far from him - as if I were heading back over the fence again.”

If that’s the way you basically think as a Christian, you’ll often feel uncertain, and you’ll often doubt yourself as a Christian.

The answer to that doubt is here in Romans 6. It’s one of the most vital parts of Scripture, and it’s often over-looked. It’s often something very mature believers have not been taught well.

Tell yourself: “I’m not just forgiven. I’ve been forgiven by being united with Christ. I belong to him now. I often act like I didn’t - but that doesn’t change the fact that I do.”

You see, you can’t sit on the fence - because you can’t even climb the fence.

You’re either in the field of sin, under its condemnation - or you’re in the field where Christ reigns, united to him.

Of course, even when you’re in Christ’s field, you’ll still behave in some ways like you used to do in the old field - because old habits are hard to shift.

And sometimes you’ll hear the voices of temptation calling to you from across the other side of the fence, and sometimes you’ll give in to them. But even when that happens, you haven’t changed field, have you - because you’re still united with Christ.

When God says ‘certainly’ there in verse 5, he means it!

Let me give you another picture, which may help.

Think of a man who’s released from prison after serving 40 years of a life sentence - like that character at the end of The Shawshank Redemption, played by Morgan Freeman, if you’ve seen that film.

The penalty for his crime has been paid, and now he’s truly free.

But 40 years of prison habits are not easy to shake off. It’s going to be a long time before he feels free - before he can stop longing for the security of prison and start acting like a free man. But the truth is that he isn’t a captive any more - he’s a free man.

We Christians don’t just remember Christ.

We are united now with him. What Christ did at Easter has also happened spiritually for us, if we come to him.

Our old condemned self died on the cross.

God has given us a new life.

And all because he’s united us with Christ, in his death and in his resurrection.