

A
MESSAGE OF HOPE,
comfort and freedom in Jesus Christ

“God’s Transforming Love” by Kyle Murphy

Happy belated Easter to you all! Hopefully you received the cards that were sent out last month. It is our hope and prayer that you were reminded of how much you are loved and cared for – by God and by us!

It was such a blessing to get together as a group to prepare the Easter cards. It had been over a year since we were able to do so. I huge thank you to Bethel Christian Church for hosting and for all the volunteers who came out.

Spring is here! I always love this time of year. It is around springtime each year that we celebrate Easter and the resurrection of our Lord and Savior. We are reminded of God’s great love for us and the lengths to which He went to reconcile us to Himself, to restore the relationship that was broken due to our sin. We are able to meditate on the sacrifice made for us and the freedom that we now have through Jesus. Words can’t fully express and my mind can’t fully comprehend what amazing love God has for me – and for each of you. This time of year, I find it much easier to focus my thoughts on God and all He has done for me. In doing so, I am also reminded how valuable each one of us is in the eyes of our Father. My spirit is renewed each spring!

This time of year, we are also able to witness the renewal of God’s creation. The sun rises earlier and sets later at night. The trees begin to bud and leaves appear – bringing color and beauty back to the trees. The grass becomes vibrant once again and begins to grow. Plants and flowers break through the surface of the ground, bringing bursts of color to the landscape. Bees and butterflies and birds return, which further renews my spirit and brings me joy and excitement.

On a personal note, bees and butterflies fascinate me. Like much of God’s creation, I am blown away by their curious and beautiful designs. Not only are they eye-catching, but they are quite purposeful in the way in which they pollinate our plants and crops. Butterflies are also intriguing to me because of the transformation they go through during their life cycle.

On my property, I have spent a great deal of time adding landscaping specifically designed to attract bees and butterflies. Last year, my wife and I were able to watch the full life cycle of butterflies in our flower gardens. It started with some Black Swallowtail butterflies laying their eggs on our fennel plants. Once hatched, the larva (or caterpillars) quickly devoured our plants. At one time, I counted nearly two dozen caterpillars of various sizes. Once they became full grown, they stopped eating and became pupae (or chrysalises). Within a few more weeks, we were able to witness the emergence of the butterflies!

I was fortunate enough to be home one morning when the temperature was still cool. Since butterflies are cold-blooded they do not generate enough heat from their own metabolism to provide them with the heat and energy they need to fly. They bask in the warmth of the sun to generate that energy. Since the sun had just come up, the butterfly was not yet warm enough to be able to fly away. That being the case, I had the opportunity to see it up close. I was even able to coax it onto my hand to have an even more memorable encounter. God’s creation is so beautiful and amazing!

Springtime, with all the new life and beauty it brings, is a reminder to me of the greatness of God and how He is always at work. Even when things seems dark and dreary, God is at work beneath the surface. He is bringing about transformation (metamorphosis). The word used to describe a caterpillar’s change into a butterfly after its seeming death in its chrysalis is also the term that the ancient world would use to describe the seeming decay of a seed underground before it begins new growth.

We see this word (*metamorphoo* in Greek) used in the New Testament in a handful of places. Paul uses it to discuss being “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:1-2). It is translated as ‘transfigure’ in the transfiguration narratives of Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2. It is also used in 2 Corinthians 3:18 when referring to believers being “transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.”

What a blessing it is to serve a God who is able to bring life from death, a God who is able to bring about transformation in our lives, a God who is able and willing to give us purpose and direction, and a God who loves us unconditionally. What a blessing to know that God wants a relationship with each of us, individually. For anyone who might be reading this and hasn’t yet entered into a relationship with God, there is no better time than now. Jesus loves you and wants to be in a relationship with you!

In my daily Bible reading plan, I was again reminded of this truth. Yesterday’s reading included the story of Zacchaeus found in the gospel of Luke chapter 19. We read about how Zacchaeus climbed a tree in order to try and catch a glimpse of Jesus. My daily reading plan includes commentary after each section of biblical text. After the Luke 19 reading, the commentator (Nicky Gumbel of HTB Church in London, England) shared an interesting point of view on the text. He proposed that maybe Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus without Jesus seeing him. Maybe Zacchaeus was apprehensive about encountering Jesus face to face because he was so aware of his own sin and imperfections. But God loves imperfect people, and instead of turning away from us, He turns towards us. Zacchaeus did not realize that you cannot hide from God.

Nicky went on to point out how, prior to his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus also did not realize that Jesus loved him, personally, and wanted to know him, individually. He quickly found out the truth though. As it turned out, Jesus knew him and He even knew his name! The same is true for us. Whatever you have done in your life and whatever your imperfections, Jesus loves you and wants to be in relationship with you. But, He requires a response. In the story of Zacchaeus, and in a dramatic moment of encounter, Jesus said to him, “Come down immediately” (v. 5). Zacchaeus humbled himself and obeyed Jesus. He did not put it off. He came down “at once and welcomed him gladly” (v. 6). The result was a total transformation in Zacchaeus’ life (v. 8). Jesus went on to say, “Today salvation has come to this house” (v. 9). Salvation came to his household in the arrival of Jesus! Salvation means freedom. It means a relationship with Jesus that goes on forever.

Each of us can have a similar encounter and undergo a transformation – the kind of life-giving transformation that only God can bring about! Jesus loves each of us, regardless of our sin and imperfections, and wants a relationship with us. Again, He is able to bring life from death. He is able to bring about transformation in our hearts, minds and lives. He is able to give us purpose and direction. And, the most exciting part, Jesus loves us unconditionally!

For anyone needing a further reminder of how much God loves you, we have enclosed a handout entitled “God’s Love Letter.” Please take a moment to read through and meditate on it, and then pass it along to someone else so they can be reminded as well!

Blessing

“The LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

(Numbers 6:24-26; Romans 15:13 NIV)