

A
MESSAGE OF HOPE,
comfort and freedom in Jesus Christ

“Why Easter” by Kyle Murphy

With Easter coming up (or just past by the time this newsletter gets to you), I thought it would be prudent to share a great article published by Nicky Gumbel from Holy Trinity Brompton Church in London, England. I have quoted him previously having learned a great deal from his teachings over the years. The following is from a publication of his entitled, “Why Easter.”

Easter is all about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ did rise from the dead on the first Easter Day then he is alive today and we can know him – we can have a relationship with him. Relationships are exciting. They are the most important aspect of our lives. Christianity is first and foremost about relationships rather than rules. It is about a Person more than a philosophy. It is about the most important relationship of all: our relationship with the God who made us. Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is to love God. The second is to love our neighbor. So, it is also about our relationships with other people. Why do we need Jesus? You and I were created to live in a relationship with God. Until we find that relationship, there will always be something missing in our lives. People try to fill this emptiness in various ways. Some try to close the gap with money, but that does not satisfy. Others try drugs or excess alcohol or sexual promiscuity. Still others try hard work, music, sports, or seek success. There may not be anything wrong with these in themselves, but they do not satisfy that hunger deep inside every human being. Even the closest human relationships, wonderful though they are, do not in themselves satisfy this ‘emptiness deep inside.’ Nothing will fill this gap except the relationship with God for which we were made. He is the only one who can satisfy our deepest hunger.

Why bother with Jesus? Why should we bother with Christianity? The simple answer is because it is true. If Christianity is not true, we are wasting our time. If it is true, then it must be of vital importance to every human being. But how do we know it is true? We can test the claims of Christianity because it is a historical faith. It is based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our faith is based on firm historical evidence. Who is Jesus? Jesus is the most remarkable man who ever lived. He is the centerpiece of our civilization. Jesus was and is the Son of God. Some people think he is just a ‘good religious teacher.’ However, that suggestion does not fit with the facts.

His claim: Jesus claimed to be the unique Son of God – on an equal footing with God. He assumed the authority to forgive sins. He said that one day he would judge the world and that what would matter would be how we had responded to him in this life. His character: Many people who do not profess to be Christians regard Jesus as the supreme example of a selfless life. As far as his teaching is concerned, there seems to be general agreement that it is the purest and best ever to have fallen from human lips. His conquest of death: The evidence for the physical resurrection is very strong indeed. When the disciples went to the tomb on the first Easter day, they found that the grave clothes had collapsed and that Jesus’ body was absent. In the next six weeks he was seen by over 500 people. The disciples’ lives were transformed and the Christian church was born, and then grew at a dynamic rate. The only satisfactory explanation for these facts is that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead and thus confirms that he was, and is, the Son of God.

Why did he come? Jesus said that the entire reason for his coming was to die for us. He came ‘to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mark 10:45). Why did he die? Jesus said he died ‘for’ us. The word ‘for’ means ‘instead of.’ He did it because he loved us and did not want us to have to pay the penalty for all the things that we had done wrong. On the cross he was effectively saying, ‘I will take all those things on myself.’ He did it for you and he did it for me. It was out of love for us that he gave his life as a ransom. Jesus paid, by his blood on the cross, the ransom price to set us free. Free from what?

Freedom from guilt: Whether we feel guilty or not, we are all guilty before God because of the many times we have broken his laws in thought, word, and deed. The result of the things we do wrong is spiritual death – being cut off from God eternally. We all deserve to suffer that penalty. On the cross Jesus took the penalty in our place so that we could be

totally forgiven and our guilt could be taken away. Freedom from addiction: Jesus said that ‘everyone who sins is a slave to sin’ (John 8:34). Jesus died to set us free from that slavery. Although we may still fall from time to time, the power of addiction is broken when Jesus sets us free. Freedom from fear: Jesus came so that ‘by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death’ (Hebrews 2:14–15). We need no longer fear death. When Jesus set us free from the fear of death, he also set us free from all other fears. Freedom to know God: The things which we do wrong cause a barrier between us and God: ‘your iniquities have separated you from your God’ (Isaiah 59:2). When Jesus died on the cross, he removed the barrier that existed between us and God. As a result, he has made it possible for us to have a relationship with our Creator. We become his sons and daughters. The Spirit assures us of this relationship, and he helps us to get to know God better. Freedom to change: People sometimes say, ‘You are what you are. You can’t change.’ The good news is that with the help of the Spirit we can change. The Holy Spirit gives us the freedom to live the sort of lives that deep down we have always wanted to live.

God offers us in Christ Jesus forgiveness, freedom, and his Spirit to live within us. All this is a gift from God. When someone offers us a present, we have a choice. We can either accept it, open it, and enjoy it. Or else we can say, ‘No thank you.’ Sadly, many people make excuses for not accepting the gift which God offers. Here are some of the excuses:

‘I have no need of God’ When people say this they usually mean that they are quite happy without God. What they fail to realize is that our greatest need is not ‘happiness’ but ‘forgiveness.’ We all need forgiveness. Without it we are in serious trouble. Either we accept what Jesus has done for us on the cross, or else one day we will pay the just penalty ourselves for the things we have done wrong. ‘There is too much to give up’ Sometimes, God puts his finger on something in our lives which we know is wrong and which we would have to give up if we want to enjoy this relationship with God through Jesus. But we need to remember: What we give up is nothing compared to what we receive. What we give up is nothing compared to what Jesus gave up when he died on the cross for us. ‘There must be a trap’ Understandably, people often find it hard to accept that there is anything free in this life. They think it all sounds too easy and that there must be some hidden trap. However, what they fail to realize is that although it is free for us, it was not free for Jesus. He paid for it with his own blood. ‘I’m not good enough’ None of us is good enough. Nor can we ever make ourselves good enough for God. But that is why Jesus came. He made it possible for God to accept us just as we are, whatever we have done and however much of a mess we have made of our lives. ‘I could never keep it up’ We are right to think that we could never keep it up. We cannot by ourselves, but the Spirit of God, who comes to live within us, gives us the power and the strength to keep going as Christians. ‘I’ll do it later’ This is perhaps the most common excuse. Sometimes people say, ‘I know it’s true but I’m not ready.’ They put it off. The longer we put it off the harder it becomes and the more we miss out. We never know whether or not we will get another opportunity. Speaking for myself, my only regret is that I did not accept the gift earlier.

What do we have to do? The New Testament makes it clear that we have to accept the gift that God offers. This is an act of faith. John writes that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16).

Wow! What a message!! This Easter season, my prayer is that you will put your faith in God – no more excuses. For those of you who have already done this, my prayer is that you will share this message with someone else in the hopes of leading them to put their faith in Jesus and accept the gift that God has offered to them. As Nicky said, nothing can compare to what we receive when we accept the free gift God has offered to each of us.

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)