"An Unanswered Question"
Sermon for Easter, 2016
Texts: Gal. 3:22; Mark 15:6-39 & 16:1-11

By the time of Jesus' resurrection, Christ's death on the Roman cross was history. The Sabbath had passed. Conclusions had been drawn. It is likely that the Jewish authorities breathed a collective sigh of relief: the long, drawn-out manhunt for Jesus, that pretender and deceiver, had, with the help of one of His own disciples, been successfully concluded. Jesus was undeniably dead and had been interred for three days. They were right, He was wrong. What could be happier? Well, the answer to "What could be happier?" is found in another place in town. For what happened on Easter dawn, out at the gravesite and in the temple, was unprecedented and birthed a hope and a joy which I am here to declare to you.

In the passion narrative of Jesus' bogus trial, a kangaroo court if ever there was one!, we have the unanswered question found in Mark 15:14: **Why, what evil has He done?** What evil had Jesus done that would justify His being executed among His fellow prisoners? Men who had committed **murder in the rebellion,** including Barabbas, the worst of them, a violent man comparable to an Isis commander, were awaiting execution by crucifixion—a horrible, degrading and public example kind of death. Jesus in effect took Barabbas' place at the people's request. The crowd's, **stirred up by the chief priests,** clamored for Jesus to be crucified**.** They **began to ask him (Pilate) to do just as he had always done for them.** And Pilate, ever the people pleaser, gratified them. And again we read, v. 15, **and Pilate wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them, and he delivered Jesus, after he had scrounged Him, to be crucified.** So, the treacherous animosity of the chief priests, the spinelessness of Pilate and the blood-lust of the frenzied mob, all contributed to the unfounded, baseless and vicious crucifixion of an innocent man. *Yes, and I must say, the first and only innocent man who ever lived!* The question, **what evil has He done?**, hangs in the air, blatantly unanswered.

So, I will answer it. There answer is *none.* Jesus didn't die for any evil that He had committed because He committed none. Therefore, the evil He died for was not personal, He died for the evil committed by everyone else! He died, starting with the cast of those involved in His betrayal, arrest, trial and judicial murder; He died for them and He died for us.

Scripture interprets Scripture. This principle of interpretation has its roots in Petrine doctrine, or, commonly expressed in the recorded teachings of Peter. Namely, in 1 Peter 3:15: **But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;."** And 2 Peter 1:20-21: **knowing this first that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.** Therefore, because Scripture is prophecy through and through, we are to understand that the proper understanding of any passage within Scripture must harmonize with the whole testimony of the Word.

Let's put that to immediate use. Galatians 3:22: **But the Scripture has confined all under sin, <u>that the promise *by* the faith *of* Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.</u>** This verse, properly understood from the original language, holds the key to understanding Easter! *Please note that, in addition to what I am about to say about this* **faith of Jesus**, Galatians 3:22 is <u>not</u> an isolated, or stand alone verse! We also have Philippians 3:9, Romans 1:17 and 3:22—demonstrating a common thread of Paul's teaching on the matter. What is **faith of Jesus?** *It is the faithfulness, the same word in Greek as "faith," the obedience of Jesus* (**I have come to do My Father's will**) *and it is the work of Jesus* (the mission, or what He came to do as the Word made flesh, **who dwelt amongst us**). It is faithfulness, obedience and the work. The **faith of Jesus** is the ground of our salvation; we have hope because He kept faith. He was the faithfulness of God in the form of man. He was sent from God to die for those in captivity of sin. Yes, He died for the evil committed by everyone else! If we fail to get that, then we fail to get the significance of the cross, the death and the rising, all three.

This is such crucial truth we need to re-iterate it: <u>Jesus' faithfulness is Jesus' obedience is Jesus' work</u>. Had Jesus not been faithful (obedient) to die on the cross (paying for sin, atoning for and answering for our evil), <u>which is His work,</u> we would not have salvation. Jesus believed God (had faith in God) that He would effect our forgiveness (through His obedience unto death) and grant us right standing with God (the "righteousness which comes by faith") effecting our reconciliation with the Father (which is our restoration) ***if we have faith in Him <u>as He had faith</u> in the Father.*** This is the proper meaning of the **faith unto faith** of Romans 1:16-7: **For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of salvation <u>for everyone who believes,</u> for the Jew first and also for the Greek** (that would be the Gentiles, the heathen or pagan, i.e. us!). **For in it** (the gospel of Christ) **the righteousness of God is revealed from faith** (the faith of Jesus) **to faith** (our belief in Jesus as Lord and Christ)**, as it is written, *The just shall live by faith.*** (Hab. 2:4) And to be completely clear about the "gospel of Christ," I submit that when Christ commands us <u>to proclaim forgiveness in His Name</u> we are to share that faith and faithfulness are obedience and work! That <u>in His Name</u> means we are to impart that Jesus' faith, faithfulness, obedience and work is the ground of our salvation. Everything hinges on what Christ came to do and did for us. Acts 4:12 "**And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.**"

Yet, there is no limit to the provision of forgiveness in Christ. <u>All</u> may share in that forgiveness *if they will call upon the Name of the Lord, if they will repent of unbelief and have faith in the One Who kept faith for our salvation's sake.* Jesus died to atone for the evil of others, for the sins of the whole world and everyone who lives, has lived, or will live! Can this be so? By Easter, yes it is. For if, in the great scheme of things, the provision of forgiveness in Christ is not for all, there can be no offer of salvation to those excluded. And if there is no genuine offer of forgiveness, *there is no responsibility, or blame in rejecting said offer.* Indeed, if there is no provision of forgiveness for all, then

those who reject salvation are rejecting a spurious invitation to come to Christ *for a salvation that is not, in fact, available to them!* Such persons are to be commended, not condemned. If Jesus did not pay it all for all, then He is not Lord of all! But Easter says, He did. When He died He died for all and when He rose He did the same: He rose for all. Our circumstances do not exclude us, He rose for us as He rose for them. It is our faith response to this great salvation, this deliverance, that determines whether we shall live or die, whether we shall go to heaven or to hell, ascend or descend.

Where Jesus gave up His physical body to death upon the cross, *obeying the Father's express and manifest will,* He gave His flesh for the life of the world. This gesture of grace is exactly what we celebrate at the Lord's Supper: **This is My body which is for you . . . do this in remembrance of Me.** And this is "provision" for all who partake in faith, believing in, or on Him. And when Jesus did this, He is made the Savior of the whole world *and not just for little ole me.* I want us all to grasp that it doesn't matter if we say, "we are saved by our Lord's death," or that "we are saved by His obedience"—for they are one and the same. We may even affirm that "we are saved by the Lord's faith in faithfulness to God." But the rubber hits the road when we accept that if is our faith in Jesus as Lord that secures for us the Lord's faithfulness—and that His faithfulness unites us with, or binds us to the very faithfulness of God. This is the transfer of faith by which we must be saved, redeemed, restored.

Returning to our passion narrative, we note, with a faith quickened heart, that "King of the Jews" is the main strand upon which actions, conclusions and convictions are threaded. **What would you have me do . . . with Him whom you call "King of the Jews?"** The soldiers mocked Him in the Praetorium, the whole garrison of them, to mockingly salute Him, **Hail, King of the Jews!** They held Him in utter contempt and derision—this was the world's accusation: surely, you are no king! The inscription was written: **King of the Jews.** Passers by mocked Him, **You who destroy the temple and build it in three days!** They had heard His resurrection prophecy *and did not believe it!* The chief priests, mocking amongst themselves with the scribes, **He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now, from the cross that we may see and believe.** I think we should not be too harsh on them, those who have no faith do not believe and if they do not believe they are surely deceived. Here's what they missed: Jesus did not come from heaven to save Himself, but them! He had no need of salvation, *but we do!* They did not get that when Jesus took His place on the cross, He was just about done with descending. I am excepting His term in the tomb, the descent into hell. And they didn't understand that He was more than the King of the Jews, or King of Israel . . . yea, He was and is and ever shall be the High King of Heaven. ***It is the High King of Heaven who burst the gates of the grave, and blew asunder the bars of death . . . and strode forth from the emptied tomb full of glory, grace and power.*** **He is the King of Glory as well as Lord and Savior. He is our King . . . and at His Name every knee shall bow on earth, in heaven and under the earth and declare that "Jesus Christ is Lord."** That's my Easter story and, by golly, I'm sticking to it!

When Jesus cried out and breathed His last, the veil in the temple was torn. **So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that "He cried out like this and**

breathed His last, he (in saving faith, by faith in the faithful One) **said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God."** Then is Jesus taken down, wrapped in fine linen and deposited in a hewn rock tomb. A great round stone secured the entrance of that tomb for the term of His internment there. It was sealed, and guarded against the superstitious fears of the Jews! They wanted to insure that His disciples didn't steal the body by night and claim a fake resurrection: this last deception being worse than the first (that is, Jesus' claim to be Messiah and King of Israel). There darkest blackness enveloped the corpse. Then, as we read, the women came with spices to anoint Him. They worried about the heavy stone needlessly; **the stone had been rolled away!** An angel, seated on the right side, greeted them: **Do not be alarmed, you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, <u>as He said to you!</u>**

So the unanswered question: **Why, what evil has He done?** has been answered. None. Rather He has answered for our evil—engaged our Enemy and won! In closing I want to summarize Easter for us:

Jesus bore the consequences of justice on our behalf. We suffer from the injustice of sinners.

Jesus bore everyman penalty for we all deserved separation from God—we have done evil and were rebels. We deserve the outer darkness and He drank the wrath of God to the very dregs. We have escaped the wrath to come by faith.

Jesus overcame the enemy of our soul, bringing to naught the Devil, the Accuser, the Murdered and Thief who, up until this moment held everyone in subjugation through the fear of death—all imprisoned in the stockade of sin! He overpowered the strong man and now plunders his household at will!

Jesus kept our obligation to keep the Law and did so perfectly! Jesus also paid off our sin debt in full. Jesus has bound the Evil One. He did so by taking on everyman's nature, enduring everyman's curse, meeting everyman's obligation and overcoming everyman's Adversary! He arose glorious from the dead and left our sins behind Him—in His emptied tomb.

Therefore, if the Lord has made you clean, you are clean indeed. Go forth in purity, forgiven, raised and new. Obey Christ. "He who says he believes and does not obey is deceiving himself."

Amen.