

The Resurrection and Creation

As we prepare to celebrate Easter, it is good for us to reflect on why it is so important that we take a day of the year to meditate on the Resurrection of Christ. It is not an overstatement to say that the belief in the physical Resurrection of Jesus has been one of the most consequential, and controversial doctrines believed by Christians. But it is by understanding this singular belief that many of the doctrines of Christianity come alive for us. And through this paper I will be focusing on one particular passage in Romans 8 that explains for us how the reality of the Resurrection causes us as believers to see this life as being significant in a way that no other belief can.

Are Holidays Good?

But, before we get into that particular passage, I think that it is important to explain why it is so important for us to take a day out of our calendars to focus on this wonderful truth. In order to do that, we have to reflect on the purpose of holidays, or holy days, in general. Some would argue that, in one sense, all days are holy unto the Lord, and even point out that we are seemingly discouraged from elevating particular days of worship.

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

-Colossians 2:16-17

In this passage, the apostle Paul is specifically going against the Jews who had converted to Christianity and were insisting that the Gentiles had to conform to Jewish customs, including observance of Old Testament feast days and Sabbaths. Paul says that in the New Covenant, these things are no longer necessary because they were only a shadow of Christ, and now that He has revealed Himself to us through His incarnation, we no longer need to celebrate these things. In light of passages like this, many Christians think it unnecessary to celebrate any particular day. After all in Romans 14:15-16:

One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

They might even believe that all current holidays are arbitrary inventions of pagans that Christians later on put a thin veneer of faith over, but the source of such things is clearly anti-Christian. So, they may point out that Easter is clearly of pagan origin, given that it is celebrated on the spring solstice and uses bunnies and eggs as symbols. While I don't think it is important to give a full historical argument as to why I believe that these symbols were not pagan in origin, I do find it important to defend holidays in general, and Easter in specific.

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes...

-Psalm 19:7-8

Although we live in the time of the New Covenant, in which the specifics of the Old Covenant are fulfilled in Christ, we must understand that this doesn't nullify the wisdom of the Law, or make it ineffectual for us as believers today. In the above passage, the Psalmist is arguing that the Law of the Lord is efficacious for the individual in making us wise. So even if the modern believer doesn't follow the specific form of the Law, which is why Paul tells us that we need not celebrate particular feast days, it doesn't negate the spirit of the law that brings us to wisdom and greater intimacy with God. So, it is vital for us to ask, not do we have to celebrate particular holidays, but instead, why were holidays commanded in the Old Covenant?

In Exodus 12 God institutes the Passover celebration for the children of Israel as a perpetual holiday. After He describes the form of the holiday and the customs that would accompany it, He tells the Israelites the specific reason as to why they are commanded to celebrate it.

"And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.'" So the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

-Exodus 12:26-27

God tells His people that the specific reason for celebrating the Passover is to communicate to the next generation the deliverance of God through a specific ceremony. The fact of the matter is, that, especially as kids, it is very hard to learn the specific doctrines of Christianity. The doctrines are dense, and the specifics are too ethereal to really grasp when you are young. There is something beautiful and efficacious when a community acts out through ceremony the doctrinal truths contained

within. This also creates societal cohesion. It is so easy to get wrapped up in our lives and forget about our families and our close friends. Holidays act as a time to “rest”, this is why we don’t traditionally work on holidays, and spend this time gathering with our families and close friends. Societies that have strong, unified, cultural holidays tend to be much more cohesive and strong, societies that lack these centralizing “holy days” tend to be much more fractious and divided.

God understood that we are self-focused, prone to forget, slow to understand, and bad at explanation, and so He gave His people specific days in which they would not only meditate on His deliverance, but even collectively act out through symbols the deliverance that He had given to His people. He found this to be so important that He not only prescribed that they do this, but He actually commanded that they do it in the Law.

In the New Covenant we are not under law but under grace, and so there are no specific holidays prescribed for the Christian. The tendency of man to bend towards legalism is so strong, that the Apostles went out of their way to not institute new holidays for the early church, knowing that by doing this they would be yoking the church underneath a new legalistic structure in order to please God. But, they never denied the wisdom, or the inherent goodness of such things.

This is why the early church quickly began to celebrate what they called “Pascha”, after the Passover, and what we call Easter, after the old name for April, “Eosturmonath”, which was the month that Easter tended to fall in. This is not a commandment for Christians to celebrate, but instead a recognition of the wisdom behind holidays in general and therefore a cultural prescription to begin practicing these things collectively.

For the Christian we should understand that many of the things that we do are not directly commanded, but instead we see the wisdom of them and so we see them as good. For instance, there is no specific wedding ceremony or vows commanded for us in the Bible. Over time, Christians developed a ceremony and basic vows based on their beliefs of what marriage was supposed to be. Because of this, while we don’t see this as a command, we do see it as wise and good for a couple to follow this traditional ceremony and to stick close to the traditional vows.

In the same way, while the specifics of Easter are not given to us in the Bible, the wisdom of this developed over time through tradition within the Church by Christians understanding our need for “holy days” that cause us to gather as a church and act out our faith towards God through ceremony. So while it is not commanded, it remains wise and good for us to practice these things. With that being said, let’s take a look at one

element of the Resurrection that I believe will benefit us to meditate on this Easter season and give meaning to the symbols that we use to celebrate this great holiday.

The Meaning of Easter

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

-Romans 8:18-25

In this passage, the apostle Paul is addressing Christians who were undergoing terrible persecution in Rome. In order for him to help them cope with their immense suffering, Paul uses the Resurrection to first, provide meaning to their suffering, second to give purpose to their lives in general, and finally to provide future hope.

Meaning In Suffering

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope...”

-Romans 8:18-20

Because we live in a fallen world, though we are loved by God, we are all subjected to the consequences of living in a world gone wrong. These consequences include natural suffering, things like disease and natural disasters, and malicious suffering perpetrated by sinful people. Since suffering is so pervasive and terrible, it is absolutely essential for us to understand why God would allow suffering in our lives. There are many solutions to this question that Christians have offered through the years, ranging from the philosophical, to the practical, to the foolish, to even the heretical, but I believe what Paul is pointing to is not a clear answer, but instead a potent meaning behind suffering in general.

It can be easy for us to read the first part of his statement, that the present sufferings are not to be compared with the future weight of glory and determine that Paul is giving us a “consolation” view of suffering. A consolation view of suffering is when someone says something like, “Yes it is terrible that they suffered like that, but they are in a better place now.” Statements like this convey an overly simplistic idea that can be very hurtful to those who are undergoing real suffering and loss. It essentially asks people to endure suffering in anticipation for heaven, which will be so good that it completely makes up for their loss. This not only devalues someone’s suffering, it also makes God look foolish for making His children suffer for no good reason and instead merely trying to “make up for it” with future glory.

We can know for certain that this is not the argument that Paul is making due to his following statements about creation.

“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope...”

-Romans 8:20

What Paul does here is put our individual suffering in the broader context of suffering in general. By doing this, he gives us the understanding that creation has been subjected to futility by God, meaning that suffering in general is ordained by God, but that God subjected the creation to futility in hope. This means that suffering is allowed by God, not due to cruelty or indifference, but instead for a hopeful purpose that God is preparing. But notice that Paul never gives the specific hope that God intended with this “futility”, he merely states that God has an intended hope in what He is doing. While there is speculation as to what this hope might be, and what God accomplishes through subjecting the creation to pain and death, Paul leaves this point to our imaginations. When this idea is applied to us personally, this means that while we can’t say for certain, given our limited perspective, why we are undergoing our specific sufferings, it shows us that there is meaning behind what we are suffering, and an intended hope by our loving Father.

Outside the subject of the Resurrection this topic becomes very abstract and not very helpful, but in this context, it becomes incredibly beautiful. By referencing the future hope of not just the resurrection of believers, but the resurrection of the creation itself, Paul is directing our attention to Christ’s Resurrection and relating our suffering to His. Later on in the same chapter Paul says this:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

-Romans 8:31-32

We are given a reason to trust the purposes of God because our God is the only One in the universe who was immune to pain, but He decided to subject His Son to it. He didn't do this arbitrarily or casually, but purposefully. It was through the death of Christ that we can be saved and forgiven for our sins. It is this truth that has allowed Christians over the millenia to celebrate, not only the Resurrection, but even the Crucifixion on a day that we have called "Good Friday".

For those who were watching Jesus be crucified, they would have gasped at the idea that future followers of Christ would dare to commemorate that day as "Good". But because of the Resurrection, we look back at the Crucifixion and see its intended hope. This fulfilled hope allows us to view the brutality of the cross as glorious. We adorn our churches, and even our bodies with images of the cross, not to mock the way our Lord died, but to celebrate what He bought for us in His sufferings. This truth transforms the brutality of the cross into victory for us, to put it another way, the Resurrection reveals to us the meaning of Jesus' suffering and the hope that was intended in it.

While this truth doesn't illuminate our individual suffering, it teaches us that there is a purpose and a hope behind everything that we suffer. None of it is meaningless, and all of it will be worked towards God's intended hope for our lives. As Paul puts it later in Romans 8:28: *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."*

This hope, when appropriately believed, can give Christians immense strength and endurance no matter what they are suffering. A powerful example of this is found in the April 12, 2004 issue of Time magazine, the question was asked, "Why Did Jesus Have To Die?" Joanne Marie Terrell, author of the book "Power in the Blood? The Cross in the African American Experience", was interviewed, and it was explained how the truth of Jesus' death gave her a way to cope with and even grow from the tragedy of witnessing her own mother being murdered. Several years ago, while sitting in a seminary class, Joanne had a flashback to when she was a girl, and her mother had just been murdered by her boyfriend. She saw the blood-soaked mattress and her mother's bloody handprint on the wall. Suddenly, she had to find a connection between her mom's story, her own story, and Jesus' story.

Terrell said the Christ connecting those stories was not just the one whose death had delivered her from sin. He was also the Christ who generations of African Americans had believed suffered with them as well as for them. Terrell realized that Jesus had stood by her in her pain, enabled her to see her mother as having died standing up to her abuser, and helped her find her place as a person living for God. She concluded that Christ's death was not only substitutionary, but He was also the one who truly identified with us in suffering and could provide an example of how to live our lives.

After we endure suffering, we can reject the fact that what we went through is a part of our story, and so we seek to repress the memory and pretend as though it didn't happen. The cross is an integral part of Jesus' story, and whatever we suffer is a crucial part of ours, though on this earth we don't understand exactly how what we endure fits into our bigger story, the Resurrection gives us the means to believe that there is a way that even the worst things that we suffer can be considered "good" in the broader context of our eternal lives. This point may seem challenging to accept, but I wanted to end this section by looking at a quote from Joni Eareckson Tada, a Christian author and radio host who suffers from quadriplegia due to a diving accident:

"Most of us are able to thank God for His grace, comfort, and sustaining power in a trial, but we don't thank Him for the problem, just finding Him in it. But many decades in a wheelchair have taught me to not segregate my Savior from the suffering He allows, as though a broken neck—or, in your case, a broken ankle, heart, or home—merely 'happens' and then God shows up after the fact to wrestle something good out of it. No, the God of the Bible is bigger than that. Much bigger. And so is the capacity of your soul. Maybe this wheelchair felt like a horrible tragedy in the beginning, but I give God thanks in my wheelchair. I'm grateful for my quadriplegia. It's a bruising of a blessing. A gift wrapped in black. It's the shadowy companion that walks with me daily, pulling and pushing me into the arms of my Savior. And that's where the joy is ... Your "wheelchair," whatever it is, falls well within the overarching decrees of God. Your hardship and heartache come from His wise and kind hand, and, for that, you can be grateful. In it and for it."

Purpose In Life

Next, by talking about the future resurrection of the creation Paul tells us that there is meaning to this life.

"For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope..."

-Romans 8:19-20

When Paul talks about the “futility” that the creation was subjected to, he is describing the futility that comes as a result of death. For no matter what we accomplish, or how we might choose to live, time and death afflict all of us. This makes the result of our life ultimately meaningless, and even if our lives are followed by heaven, it still brings the sum total of our achievements to nothing. But the coming of Christ changes all of that, and I love how Athanasius of Alexandria put it in his book “On The Incarnation of the Word:

And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death He gave it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father — doing this, moreover, of His loving-kindness, to the end that, firstly, all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone (inasmuch as its power was fully spent in the Lord's body, and had no longer holding-ground against men, his peers), and that, secondly, whereas men had turned toward corruption, He might turn them again toward incorruption, and quicken them from death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of the Resurrection, banishing death from them like straw from the fire.

-Athanasius - On The Incarnation of the Word

Since the creation is subjected to death, in order to restore it, Jesus had to be subjected to that same death. The One who is Life itself had to bear the consequences of our sin, and through bearing our death in His body and then rising from the dead, He has re-established rule over the universe and communicated life and meaning to all aspects of the creation that were previously subjected to the rule of sin and death. If Jesus were to have merely risen spiritually, then we would still be under this bondage since the creation would have been left futile. But because He rose bodily, that power has been communicated to the cosmos and we now have assurance that this life and this world will not merely melt away, but be reconstituted in heavenly glory with Christ reigning supreme.

This means that the Christian can look at our lives with wonderful joy. The limitation of this life, that it will end in death, doesn't make our lives meaningless, but instead they have a level of preciousness to them because they are finite.

“So, teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

-Psalm 90:12

It is the fact that each of our days are numbered that make us see this life as precious and create in us a heart that seeks meaning in each second that we have here. We don't want to waste our lives, but instead to redeem the time that we are here as Christ has redeemed us. This hallows every element of our existence and cultivates within us an ability to now honor God in this world through the lives that He has given to us.

This is why Christians in the medieval times spoke of the transcendent nature of creation. They believed that if God is the author and the redeemer of this creation, then He is not absent from it, but merely hidden. Like Moses in the book of Exodus, we can't see Him directly in this world due to our sin, but we can glimpse His glory through His creation. Prior to this time, most Christians believed that God could only be pursued in expressly religious ways, which is why so many of them sought to become monks in order that they might put off the material and instead focus on the spiritual. They saw pain and death as proof that the creation was inherently bad and therefore the purpose of life was to leave this world and be translated to heaven. But if God is hidden, and will return to redeem this earth, then the evil we see in this world communicates that hiddenness, and the presence of good communicates His glory that is now, and is to come.

In this time, they realized that God has communicated His grace and His life to this earth. And so in it, we can perceive His presence through His transcendent attributes of the true, the good, and the beautiful. When Christians discovered truth through their intellectual pursuits, they did not see this as secular, but instead as a religious act. They saw what they were doing as acts of worship to the God who doesn't merely speak truth, but our God who is truth. They realized that they could worship God not merely by coming to church or sharing their faith, they saw that they could serve Him by being good parents, servants, masters, and artisans. The creation now teemed with beauty that spoke of God's invisible glory found in His creative works. This transformed European society and produced the best elements of what we call today the Renaissance.

Beyond that, the Resurrection tells us that the deeds done in our body will be translated into heaven. Just like Jesus ascended into heaven bearing the scars of His crucifixion, so we will bear our own bodies into heaven and see the fruit of all that we have done in our lives forever. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul uses the metaphor of refining precious metals in a furnace. The good that we do in God will be made more pure in heaven and will eternally be with us in some form or fashion, for we are not told exactly what this process looks like. But, the evil that we have done will be burned up, judged upon the cross of Jesus in our stead that we might stand pure before the throne of grace.

This is a concept that needs to be re-established in our culture today. Our culture is quickly losing this idea and as a result you see a turn against the wonder of this present existence. In the issues of abortion and euthanasia, which is a fast growing conversation in the west, many talk about the relative benefits that less babies are being born into poverty, and less people will have to suffer with long term illness. We are seeing unprecedented numbers of people in our culture today, especially among the younger generations, give in to despair, falling into patterns of drug abuse, and even suicide. Even if these more extreme examples don't happen, many today are turning away from the things that help us to perceive the transcendent meaning of this life, they are refusing to pursue careers or family, they simply choose to live in existential angst as they perceive this world as burning down around them. These however are merely symptoms of an overall cultural turn away from the goodness of this present life, a perception of futility in this present world and a failure to recognize the incredible, eternal meaning that is contained within this life.

We must be Christians that don't look at this life as a burden or an obstacle to our joy, but instead a gift from God. We inhabit a world in which we can pursue and know God through His created works, and in the limited time we have here where we can be vessels of His glory. People who shine forth the beauty of our God in our work, in our homes, in our churches, and in our communities, in such a way that we can help others recognize God's glory peeking through His creation. While the Christian ought not to fear death, since we believe that our lives don't end when our bodies die, but instead that our lives continue, and will even be consummated in the best possible way in heaven for all eternity; we also should not celebrate death. Death is a tragedy and marks an end of this life that we have now. So while we welcome the life to come, since we see it as an extension of the life we have now, we should not see death as an escape from this existence and squander our lives in the here and now.

The Symbols of Easter

This also helps us understand the symbols that are used in holidays like Christmas and Easter. Many Christians are afraid that what we are actually doing is taking over pagan celebrations and simply Christianizing them for our purposes. They have a worry that doing this leaves us vulnerable to the underlying pagan influences behind these holidays and therefore we should not celebrate them, or at the very least utilize these symbols. However, what we see in history is that this is not what Christians did, instead this was a practice that had begun in the New Testament of subjecting all things to the Lordship of Christ.

A profound example of this practice is recorded for us in Acts chapter 17. In this chapter Paul goes to the Areopagus to dialogue with the Greek philosophers in Athens. During

the conversation, Paul starts to share the gospel message with them, and this is what he says:

“...for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you...”

-Acts 17:23

Notice what Paul does. He approaches the worship of the Athenians, and instead of pointing to their practices and calling them pagan worship of demons, he instead points to a portion of their faith that points to the Lordship of Jesus. In Greek mythology their account of creation has the gods emerging from an already existing created order, they did not have a named god who was, as Aristotle called Him, the “unmoved mover”. Paul recognizes this as a gap in their faith that only the true and living God could fill. By alluding to this “Unknown God” he is not validating their overall theology, but instead showing that there were elements of Greek thought that could be brought under Christ, and that is what he did. To drive this point home he later quotes from the Greek pagan philosopher Epimenides:

“...for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’”

-Acts 17:28

Once again, this is not a validation of all Greek thought, but instead a recognition that the general revelation of creation is available to all men, and so they may know true things about God while still missing the overall truth of God. This is what the direct revelation of God does. It doesn’t falsify all that came before, but instead it hallows it and shows the truths contained within. JRR Tolkien pointed this out when he was talking with CS Lewis, before Lewis converted. Lewis pointed out that Christianity can’t possibly be true because of all the similarities between it and pagan myths, but Tolkien responded to him with a poem entitled “Mythopoeia”:

“The heart of Man is not compound of lies, but draws some wisdom from the only Wise, and still recalls him. Though now long estranged, Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed. Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned, and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned, his world-dominion by creative act: not his to worship the great Artefact, Man, Sub-creator, the refracted light through whom is splintered from a single White to many hues, and endlessly combined in living shapes that move from mind to mind. Though all the crannies of the world we filled with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build Gods and their houses out of dark and light, and sowed the seed of dragons,

'twas our right (used or misused). The right has not decayed. We make still by the law in which we're made. Yes! 'wish-fulfilment dreams' we spin to cheat our timid hearts and ugly Fact defeat! Whence came the wish, and whence the power to dream, or some things fair and others ugly deem? All wishes are not idle, nor in vain fulfilment we devise -- for pain is pain, not for itself to be desired, but ill; or else to strive or to subdue the will alike were graceless; and of Evil this alone is deadly certain: Evil is."

-JRR Tolkien - Mythopoeia

Lewis believed that the similarities between the gospel and pagan myths disproved the truth of the gospel, but Tolkien believed that these similarities actually *proved* the truth of the gospel. After all, how could all these different cultures over such a long time create myths that sought to dispel the same problems and answer the same innate desires? The failure of all other myths though is that they didn't actually happen, they don't exist on any real human timeline and therefore they only exist in the imagination of man. The gospel however happens in history. Jesus was a real man who had a verifiable existence and a physical resurrection that proves the truth of His claims. In another essay that Tolkien wrote, "On Fairy Stories", he says this:

The Christian joy, the Gloria, is of the same kind; but it is preeminently (infinitely, if our capacity were not finite) high and joyous. But this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men—and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused.

-JRR Tolkien - On Fairy Stories

In Christ the imagination of the human soul and the cry of the human heart find their end. We don't just believe in a God who taught another philosophy, but instead we believe in a Savior who enters history and then seeks to redeem it by the power of His resurrection. Because of this, Christians need not throw out all that came before, but instead see truth where it is present, even if that truth is present within pagan thought. Once again, it doesn't mean that all become holy through our Lord, but simply that all that can be brought under His Lordship must.

And so, modern Christians who are scandalized by the usage of rabbits and eggs to celebrate Easter are missing the mark when they say that these symbols are pagan. It is true that pagans have used these as symbols to represent spring festivals, but we must ask why the pagans did this? God left hints at His plan throughout the created order, it isn't a mistake that every day we see the sun be "buried" as it sets and then "rise" again the following day. Or that the moon goes through cycles of death as it wanes and resurrection when it waxes. Or that nature goes through a cycle of death in the winter and resurrection in the spring.

And so yes, pagans looked at these things and came to conclusions that were false, they believed that there must be some deity that goes through perpetual phases of death and resurrection, and they used symbols of this cycle through things like rabbits, who hibernate in the winter, or eggs that lie seemingly dormant and then life emerges from within them. It does need to be said that there is no evidence that Christians directly borrowed from these cultures, we actually don't see these symbols being used until the late medieval era and they actually had a utilitarian purpose behind them that I won't get into here. So while there was no repackaging of these concepts by Christians, the similarities of the symbols make sense. It isn't Christians copying pagans, but instead Christians seeing the glory of the gospel in all creation and using these symbols to speak of God. This also fulfills what holidays in general are supposed to do for us.

*“And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’
-Exodus 12:26*

Remember that one of the main reasons why God gave His people holidays in the first place was to be able to better communicate deep truths to children who can only understand through the use of symbols and ceremony. So when Christians hide easter eggs and children discover candy in them, while this is supposed to be fun and silly for them, we are supposed to have an answer for them when they ask us “What do you mean by this service?” Just as Christ was hidden in the tomb and emerged from the darkness in new life, so eggs represent the emergence of life. Just as the rabbits go to sleep through the winter, so our Lord went to sleep as He descended into the grave, and rose, ascending into the heavens that *“He might fill all things.” (Ephesians 4:10)*

As Christians, we need not be scandalized by such things, but instead we should be able to see the hiddenness of the gospel that permeates all things. But we need to be careful here. Some Christians throughout history have tried to import things into their faith that couldn't come under Christ and ended up polluting the gospel. These would be like the early gnostic “Christians” who did try to bring Christ into Plato's philosophy and ended up creating a heresy that was addressed in multiple books of the New Testament. But we should also be wary of the Christians who rejected all things that weren't expressly Christian and ended up separating themselves from the world in a way that caused what we call today “The Dark Ages”. This balance is hard to achieve, but infinitely worthy of our effort.

Future Hope

“...because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans

and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

-Romans 8:21-25

Hope is one of the most important virtues of the Christian life, and yet one of the most difficult to properly develop. On one end, it is very easy to become overly optimistic, to the point that we aren't able to properly deal with present difficulties, or to realistically wait for future glory. But on the other hand, it is also easy to become cynical. In this world of disappointment and pain we can turn off our hope.

But Paul here presents us with a wonderful balance. He doesn't ignore the present difficulty, but addresses it head on when he says that "the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs until now." He isn't dismissing the pain, but he also doesn't ignore the future hope. By calling these "groans" "birth pains", he is drawing a parallel between our present circumstances and the "labor" that a mother goes through. Since I am a man, I will never really understand what goes into the birthing process, but having witnessed this process for both of our kids, I can speak to what I saw in my wife during this time.

The pregnancy process was painful and uncomfortable for her in almost every way imaginable, especially for our first kid. But through it all, in every pain, in every food aversion, there was a future hope that made my wife be able to endure what she was going through. Each discomfort had a purpose, and each had a future hope. It was the joy of being able to get to know our babies in the womb, and the anticipation of knowing that she would be able to meet them one day that gave her the ability to endure, and in a way even savor the discomforts that she went through. For as painful as the process was, I know for my wife that she did cherish "experiencing" our kids in the womb and would not choose to forget that time if she could.

But for our first baby, the hope was very ethereal, we hadn't gone through the experience yet and so we had to rely upon the stories of others to help shape our hope. But, after we had our child we realized, no one could really prepare us for the immense beauty of meeting our little girl for the first time. That experience was so high that it was almost as though all the joys of our life, all the wonders of our marriage, were preparing us for the honor of knowing our kids.

The Christian experiences a similar thing. None of us has seen the face of God, none of us has experienced the glories of heaven, and so we have to rely on the symbolic words of people like the apostle John who was shown heaven, or the words of Jesus. It is in our experiences in this world that we catch glimpses of heaven, like a mother can get glimpses of her child's personality with every kick and movement in the womb. When we fall in love, experience beauty in the arts or in nature, when we experience God in our time with Him in His word, or prayer, or in church, these are glimpses of our future glory, but they are not the real thing.

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

-1 Corinthians 2:9

From verses like this, we know that the reason why God doesn't show us His full glory in the here and now is not because He is withholding, but instead because we know that we couldn't even handle the fullness of His glory in our present state. Our eyes aren't strong enough to take in His glory, our ears can't hear well enough to perceive the wonder of His voice, and our hearts aren't large enough to experience the fullness of His presence and love. Here, we can only see in a mirror dimly, but we anticipate the time when we will see Him face to face. It is this hope that not only helps us not only “endure” this present time, but rejoice in these moments of experiencing God, always allowing them to point us to the higher glory of knowing Him face to face. I think that CS Lewis put it best in his book “Mere Christianity”:

“The Christian says, 'Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or to be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that country and to help others to do the same.’”