
God will give us Jesus and graciously give us all things. We get it all back and more. We get salvation, we get God's presence and most of all... we get Jesus. That is always enough. Let's say it again.

Jesus lives and God is with us.



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Easter Sunday Get It All Back

Romans 8:29-39

TRINITY PULPIT

One of the best things I have done in recent years is get a credit card with a great rewards program. Most of us have some type of credit card or some type of reward card that help us get "something back" when we give something away. It might be travel miles; it might be one free drink after you purchase six at your local convenient store. It might be a bag of popcorn after you have spent hundreds of dollars going to see a movie. We like getting something back when we spend our money.

We like getting something back in relationships. When we show love or express kindness, it is nice to get the same in return. It is nice to at least get a smile or have a nice day back from those we greet along the way during the day. We like getting something back. When we invest in an education we want to get something back. If we spend tens of thousands of dollars on an education it would be nice if we or our children could get a job that at least allows them to be able to pay their rent and their student loans. We expect something back.

This year, during the Season of Lent, we have been urging each other to give it up. We have considered what it means to give up control, our idols, fear and our treasure. We discovered that trying to hold on to control was exhausting and useless. We discovered that holding on to our idols was futile, since they were nothing but what we had created. They really had no worth. We considered that we had to give up fear, for fear was a prison and it was not place for a follower of Jesus to live their life. We got honest with ourselves about our treasures and named them and confessed that they were all things that rot, rust or decay. We gave it up.

So, the question we might ask this Easter

is when we give it up to follow Jesus do we get anything back? First, we must say that God does not owe us anything. Let's just think of this logically. If God is God and we are not, then that means God who is all powerful and mighty and created all things can and should demand nothing, but our total loyalty, devotion and love. I mean, God is God and we are not. It only makes logical sense that if God is God, then we should serve God and really not expect anything in return. However, the God we serve is not only all-powerful but our God is all loving. Our God is gracious, slow to anger, abounding in grace and love. Our God delights in giving to us God's children all good things. Not because we deserve it, but because God loves us.

This Easter day, I want us to consider what is it we get back when we give it all up. Now we don't get back control, fear, passing treasure and our idols. We don't get these back from God because we have already determined that these things are not life giving but life taking. What God gives back to us are the very gifts that only God can give. They are the gifts of the Kingdom of God and not the kingdom of this world. They are the gifts of resurrection.

Paul, speaking of the cross and resurrection says, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all-how will He not also along with Him, graciously give us all things?"

What do we get back? First of all, we get Jesus. Paul says God gave us all Jesus and did not spare Him, but gave Him for us. God gave us Jesus. The most important gift we will ever receive from our loving God is God's son Jesus. Jesus is the eternal Word of God. Jesus has always been and through Jesus all things were created. Everything was created for the glory of Jesus. Jesus is God the Son, the eternal one. In Jesus, all

things are not only created but everything is held together through Jesus.

God gave us Jesus. What an incredible act of love. When God looked upon us in our sinfulness, our lostness, our helplessness... God gave Jesus. I have been thinking about each and everyday of the week this Holy Week. I thought about that Palm Sunday and the shouts of Hosanna. I thought about Monday and the chaos of the turning over of the moneychangers in the Temple Courts. I thought about Tuesday that is filled with parables and teaching about coming of the Kingdom of God. I thought about that silent Wednesday and how some days are just like other days and God is at work. Then there was that Thursday filled with preparation, friends, and the emotions of the upper room. There is Gethsemane and the agony. There is betrayal, arrest, desertion and accusation. Then the horror of Friday as Jesus, the Son of God, hangs on a cross between heaven and earth. Just where Jesus came to be. Jesus came to be the bridge between heaven and earth. The pain and humiliation of the cross gives way to abandonment and then death.

Then there is that Saturday. There is that day of nothing. There is that day of shock, numbness, and just nothingness. It is a day of helplessness and hopelessness. Little did they know that it was the day God was preparing to do the greatest thing in all of history... raise His one and only Son from the grave.

Max Lucado asks a question in his book "He Chose the Nails". He asks, "Why do the disciples hang around on Saturday?" Jesus is dead, it is over and yet they hang around and because they lingered. Because they did not go away, they were there on Sunday. Lucado asks what do you do on the Saturday's of life. What do you do between yesterday's tragedy and tomorrow's triumph? Do you leave God or do you linger near him? Lucado concluded they lingered because they knew Jesus.

You see my friends, knowing Jesus is the key. Knowing Jesus is all that matters. Jesus is the greatest gift God can give us. What does it mean that God gave us Jesus?

It means God did not spare Him. That is God knew that the only remedy for our sinful was the sacrifice of His perfect son Jesus. Out of God's incredible love for you and me He let His one and only son become the sacrifice for our sins. The one who knew no sin

became sin for us on the cross. God did not spare Him, but gave Him for you and me. This means that although we are separated from God because of our sin, we can be forgiven and reconciled to God through accepting what God has done through Jesus. God gave us Jesus because He is the only way to the Father. God gave us Jesus because it is only Jesus that can reconcile us to God. God gave us Jesus because God loves us.

God gave us Jesus because not only do we need forgiveness, but also we needed Jesus to know God. Jesus said if you have seen me you have seen the Father. Jesus came to show us fully and completely who God is. In the Old Testament we get part of the story. We get glimpses of God's love, salvation, and grace. Jesus comes to show us the fullness of God. Through Jesus we learn that God is seeking all people. Through Jesus we understand that God's love is deeper and wider than we can imagine. Through Jesus we discover that God's grace is greater than our sin.

When we give it all up... we get it all back. We get Jesus.

Paul continues, God will graciously give us all things. What are the other "things" that God gives? God gives us salvation. Paul uses a lot of words and to describe that through Jesus we have salvation. In verses 29-30, Paul describes the process of salvation in our lives. God chose us in Jesus. Remember God has given us Jesus. God chooses us in Jesus and those God chooses, God predestines that is those who come to Jesus are destined to become like Jesus. Those Jesus chose, which is everyone, are called to God. Those who God calls are then justified. That means to be set in a right relationship with God. Those God justified, God glorified. That means to one day become fully like Jesus. This is the salvation process that is set into motion through the gift of Jesus.

Let me put it in simple terms for us today. God gave us the gift of Jesus and God graciously gives us salvation. In the cross of Jesus, God chooses everyone who has ever lived for salvation. God calls through God's Spirit all to that salvation. In Jesus, God has justified us. What we could not do ourselves, God has done for us in Jesus. Set us right with God. And those who God sets right through Jesus, God will complete us by glorifying us that is we will spend eternity with God in heaven. When we choose to accept God's salvation plan, we are predestined to become the children of God. That is what happens

to us.

So, Paul concludes if we have been justified by God, then who can condemn us. Who can bring a charge against us? No one.

You don't hear this much any more, but in marriage ceremonies there use to be that question that would be asked of those who were witnesses for the union. If anyone knows any reason why this man or this woman should not be joined in Holy Matrimony, let him or her speak now or forever hold their peace. I guess there have been some in history who spoke up, but it is normally a moment of silence. There is no one. There is no one who can speak up against the union.

That is the image of Paul. When we come to a relationship with Jesus we get salvation. So, when our friends want to remind us of our past, when Satan wants to whisper in our ear you are not worthy, when others look down on us or someone wants to shame us, or we struggle in our own worthiness, we can respond we are justified by Jesus. There is no one who can stand and bring a charge against us when we belong to Jesus.

When we give it up to follow Jesus, we get it all back. We get Jesus and we get God's salvation through Jesus.

We get the presence and love of Jesus. Paul gives an exhaustive list of the things we might believe can separate us from God's love, or maybe we can say He gives us a list of the things we go through when we doubt the love of God. Paul's point is Jesus is with us in all things. Look at the list for a moment.

Trouble and Hardship- the trials of life- This Easter are you going through something difficult. Does this mean God does not love you? No, Jesus lives and God is with us.

Persecution- Those in our world who are facing persecution for their faith. Does this mean God has abandon them. No, Jesus lives and God is with us.

Nakedness or Famine- We might say helplessness. When we feel helpless does it mean God does not love us? No, Jesus lives and God is with us.

Death and life- When we loose loved one's to death.

Does it mean God does not love us? No. Jesus lives and God is with us.

Angels, Demons, and powers- When it seems that there are powers working against us and there are things that are beyond our control. Does this mean that God is inactive? No, Jesus lives and God is with us.

Present or the Future- When we can't see our way forward. When we look at our world and we wonder what in the world is going on. What is our world coming too? When we think of the future and we are fearful and worried more than we are hopeful. Does this mean God does not love us? No, Jesus lives and God is with us.

Height, Depth- Is there anywhere we can go and God will not be there? Is there any place we can find our self or put ourselves that is out of the reach of God's love in Christ? Is there any place from where God cannot save us? No, Jesus lives and God is with us.

Nor anything else... just to be all-inclusive Paul makes his point. Nothing literally nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus Lives and God is With Us.

In the gospel stories of the resurrection there are a lot of questions. When you read them you will discover that they are filled with more questions than answers. Questions like who is going to roll away the stone, who are you looking for, where have you taken Him, and why do you look for the living among the dead? There is also a sense of uncertainty. The body is gone, but they are uncertain about where Jesus is. The disciples, even after seen the empty tomb, were told wonder to themselves what has happened.

You see, the resurrection story of Jesus is filled with questions and uncertainty. Yet, all those who followed Jesus wanted on that resurrection day was Jesus. Jesus was enough.

Our lives are filled with uncertainty. We live with more questions than answers on most days. Yet, all we need to know this day is Jesus lives and God is with us.

WHEN WE GIVE IT UP TO FOLLOW JESUS, WE GET IT ALL BACK. WE GET JESUS AND WE GET GOD'S SALVATION THROUGH JESUS.