

Easter: A Good Time to Re-think the Gospel

By Bob Young

Many Christians do not realize how central the resurrection is to the Christian faith and message. The Christian message is often summarized by the word “gospel”, literally, good news. Paul claims that the basics of the gospel are the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This gospel message saves us, must be constantly remembered, and must be shared. There are at least 91 New Testament occurrences of the word gospel. There are many more references to the events of the Passion Week—the suffering, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. A casual reading of the early chapters of Acts suggests that the fundamental message preached by the early church was the gospel. This message of fulfillment, promise, and power was communicated and confirmed by Old Testament prophecy and the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes initiation into the Christian faith as participation in the gospel of Jesus (Romans 6:1-6), baptism into the death of Jesus so that participation in his resurrection is assured. I am thrilled during the Easter season that so many people are reminded of the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus, and celebrate the importance of the resurrection of Jesus as the crowning truth of the gospel. Indeed, Paul affirms that without the resurrection, little remains but misery and a pitiful existence (1 Corinthians 15). But mere celebration of the resurrection of Jesus is not God’s ultimate goal for his human creation. Personal participation in the resurrection is God’s intent. What does it mean to participate in the resurrection as Paul describes it in Romans 6? At least two answers are possible. First, you and I experience new life in Christ as we are baptized and the “old man” of sin is destroyed so that a new person comes forth. This may also be what Paul has in mind in using the phrase, washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5). Second, our hope of participation in the ultimate resurrection at the end of time is tied to our participation in the death and burial of Jesus in the initiation of immersion.

I am glad for the desire of many to celebrate the resurrection.

→Let us continually celebrate the good news of Jesus, the gospel, which is the story of his love demonstrated at the cross—his death, burial and resurrection.

→Our baptism into Christ is evidence of our participation in the gospel, and marks his presence in us and our life in him.

→Changed lives are the result, and thus evidence that we are participants in the gospel.

→Hope for participation in resurrection to enter the presence of Jesus is connected to our participation in the gospel.

At this season, may you let the message of Resurrection lead you to faith, obedience, newness, and hope. If Christians are those who are like Christ, the connection between the experience of Jesus (the gospel) and our own experience as we imitate him in death, burial, and resurrection must not be overlooked.