

## Easter message all about God's love

Dan Nelson - pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

There are a lot of traditions that center around this important week, some of them have a spiritual tone to them and others are merely family fun. Once in a while I will speak to individuals who enjoy researching the history behind various practices and then are shocked to learn of certain origins like the advent of the egg hunt or gift-bearing rabbit. As a result, some people even become uncomfortable with the word Easter because of its ties to pagan roots. But for me the significance is in what each of these mean in our own lives, not what it means or meant to others.

I love the chocolate bunnies and sugarcoated marshmallow chicks that mark this time of year. From the moment I take a bite, the taste connects me with fond memories of childhood and celebrations with my family and friends, candy-filled baskets at home with green plastic strands of grass, and lessons at church that are packed with good news, the least of which were the sweet treats that we searched for around the playground. We learned of love that transcends time and geography and extends to each person on the planet in every generation.

Easter has always been one of my favorite holidays, but, I have to admit that it wasn't until more recently that it came to trump Christmas for me, and this is really due to the eternal significance in answer to the plight and prayers of humanity, not because it is more fun. In various languages, and from diverse cultures and backgrounds, people have cried desperate pleas to the God they know little about for help in what is experienced as a painful, sometimes seemingly purposeless existence. God replied. "For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). It is the essence of the message conveying powerful divine sentiment but only trite comfort without the second half, a bit like psychotherapy on steroids or the infamous afternoon sugar rush before the crash; feels good for a while but not what is necessarily needed.

God created a perfect world with mankind as his crowning achievement, made in his own image. Sinful choices betray the intimacy originally established and separation from God's holy presence results. A promise is made that God would do what man could not do for himself in reuniting what should never have been separated. He sends Jesus, unique in all the universe and solely capable to pay the debt that we are unable to grasp, who allows himself to be the martyr for this eternal cause. "For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). In doing so, he tears down the wall of separation between God and

man, giving total access to all who receive his free gift. His resurrection from the dead not only signifies his completed work of victory over death, his life today is what flows through everyone who chooses to follow him. Thus, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is no Christianity, nor any direct access to the throne of God, nor any guarantee that anyone is listening to your prayer, nor hope of eternity, nor ultimate reason to stand for good in triumph over evil, nor a loving message of redemption and restoration for the whole world to hear. In essence, people's passions for peace and hope for humanity, whether one understands this or not, centers with the message that Jesus died, rose again, and lives today in power!

Easter is the date on our calendars where we celebrate God's response to the needs of the masses, and new life is born in the hearts of so many by the Spirit of God as they put their trust in Jesus the Christ, the Savior of the World. And for some, every day becomes like Easter Sunday. Friday is the day to reflect on the cross of Christ, but it is Easter morning, Resurrection Sunday, that makes it all meaningful. Dust off your Bible, open it this weekend, and connect with one of the places where God's people will be gathering. This message and the invitation have always been all about God's love for you!

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



**Sunday Worship:**  
**9:00 & 10:30am**  
 Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
 195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

**Mid-Week Study:**  
**7:00pm Thursday**  
 Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
 195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

P.O. Box 1443  
 Ojai, CA 93024  
**(805) 640-9498**  
[www.calvaryojai.org](http://www.calvaryojai.org)