



THE GREAT EXCHANGE: The Reward

By: Peter Bales

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Most people enjoy hearing a good story or a mystery. Sometimes it's easy to guess how things are going to end, but other times there's a twist in the plot and a surprise ending! The story of Easter is one of those stories, but for many people it just doesn't make sense. Paul writes, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The message of the cross is foolishness to some and the power of God to others.

If you've been around toddlers when they are learning to speak, sometimes they ask "Why?" a lot! They are curious and they want to know! Of course, it can drive others crazy too. What about Easter? Why Easter? Why the cross? Why the Resurrection?

- 1. What do you think is the craziest thing that people think about Christianity? How do you explain it to them?**

If the story of God is a good movie, then Easter is like the surprise ending. If you just started watching at that point you might not understand what is going on! That's why we have the rest of the Bible.

Here's the backstory in simple form:

- God created us, then mankind decided to do his own thing and sin entered the world
- Now mankind is separated from God
- God is not cool with that. He wanted a relationship with people, but sin is in the way!
- The only person who could fix it is God himself. God is three-in-one: Father, Spirit, and Son. So, Jesus is the son who was sent to fix things. Jesus is a "man on a mission"!

- 2. What are the hardest parts of this story for you to explain to people? How would you do it differently?**

The most famous Bible verse is probably John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This tells us part of the story. God loved us and didn't want us to perish. READ 1 Peter 1:18-20.

Under the Law of Moses in the Old Testament, animals were sacrificed to cover the sin of the people. But we need to remember, it didn't change the people, it just covered their sin! They were cleansed for a time, but they were still separated from God. God was not content to leave

us separated from him, so he sent Jesus! Hebrews talks about this and says, “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

3. How do the Old Testament sacrifices help us understand Jesus’ crucifixion? How is it similar or different?

We are starting to see the BIG WHY? Why Easter? Why did Jesus go to all this trouble and suffer so much? It comes down to a big word, *reconciliation*. The cross isn’t *just* about forgiveness. Jesus offered people forgiveness before the cross. It must be something more. Forgiveness is the doorway, but what we walk into is reconciliation.

Reconciliation is about two things being brought together. We were made to live in relationship with God. But with sin in the world, we were separated and unable to reach him. Isaiah (64:6) says that our “righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” On our BEST DAY we are still filthy compared to God. We are helpless and in need of help! READ Colossians 1:15-22.

4. Based on this Scripture, how would you describe our reconciliation to God?

Jesus did it! This is what we celebrate at Easter. He rose from the dead and because he lives, we can live. He doesn’t just forgive us, but he reconciles us. He removes all the barriers to our fellowship with him. It’s popular to encourage people that they can do anything they set their mind to. We celebrate tenacity and determination. But that won’t help you here. Before we knew Jesus, we were truly separated from him. We lived in this broken condition, and we could not fix it, no matter how much we might try. But this is the good news! We give him our filthy rags and our sin. And he gives us new life!

But God doesn’t force himself on any of us. We need *repentance*. We have to say YES to God. Which means we turn away from our own desires and our own thinking. This is what is so hard. This sounds like foolishness to the world. The world says, “Why would you do that?” Why would you want to stop having so much fun and be a Christian! At some point for each of us we realize that what used to be fun is hurting us.

Romans 10: 9-13 says, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Romans 10:9-13).

5. What do you think makes repentance so hard and look so crazy?

6. What is your story of coming to repentance?

GOING DEEPER> READ John 3: 1-21 and imagine Jesus is talking with you. What questions would you have for Jesus? Would you drop what you had and follow him.