

The Resurrection Made Every Year a Part of HIStory

Romans 6:1-14

Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017

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Every year at midnight on December 31, people stay up all over the world to usher in a new year. Now with modern technology, we can watch people all over the world begin their celebrations.

The New Year is first ushered in with the tiny Pacific Island of Tonga, a full three hours before it is ushered in down under in Australia. The New Year swings around the globe to Tokyo, Beijing, Dubai, Paris, New York City, and out to San Francisco. The last place to usher in the New Year is the American Samoa Islands, just 558 miles from Tonga. You could get a quick flight between the two places and count down the New Year twice in the same day.

(<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2503015/country-celebrates-new-year-first-latest-times/>)

Some churches and some people pray in the New Year. As they do, they ask God's blessing, leadership, and guidance on the upcoming year, remembering that our days are numbered and that God is the author and creator of all time and life.

But what does the New Year have to do with Easter?

Perhaps you've never thought about it, but every time you write the year, 2017, or any year, you are making a historical statement about Jesus—every time, even if you do not believe that Jesus was the Son of God.

Easter may have no real bearing on your everyday life, but it is difficult to deny that Jesus and his followers changed the world. Because of that, Jesus' life eventually became a marker of history, a dividing point that separated all of time.

Everything that happened before Jesus came to be known as B.C., or before Christ. and everything after Jesus came to be known as A.D., Anno Domini, Latin for "in the year of our Lord."

Dionysius Exiguus created the system in the sixth century. He didn't like counting years starting with the foundation of Rome or by numbering local conventions, so he proposed that they calculate Easter dates by starting from the year that Christ was born, even though it is estimated that he misjudged the year of Jesus' birth by 2-4 years.

By the 15th century this method of counting the years had solidified itself with universal appeal, at least among Christians. Non-Christians and those Christians who wish not to be offensive to non-Christians began to move to a less controversial abbreviation system of C.E. and B.C.E. ("common era," and "before common era.")

Whether you use B.C. and A.D. or C.E. and B.C.E., the year remains as a distinctive marker that says, “Regardless of your beliefs, Jesus’ life is a dividing marker for all of history.”

For Dionysius, the date was a statement of faith. He needed a number to keep up with Easter year after year.

For Christians like Dionysius, history is actually “His story.” Whether you are a Christian or not, you cannot tell the history of the world without including the story of Jesus.

The bigger issue, though, is this: “Can your history be told without telling the story of Jesus?” If so, you are missing the gift of God’s Holy Spirit. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:13)

Jesus entered the world and he changed world history. That fact cannot be refuted. But the larger question is whether Jesus has entered your life and changed you. Has your personal history been changed because of Jesus?

Jesus led a remarkable life. What we know about him is recorded in four books called the Gospels. We also have records from a Jewish historian named Josephus who speaks of the works that Jesus did, of his miracles and his reputation.

However, as great as Jesus was as a teacher, as a healer, as one who performed miracles, at the end of the day, Jesus ended up being another casualty of the Roman empire. It is not likely that much would have been written about him or that he would have had any kind of lasting following had it not been for Easter—the Resurrection.

While the virgin birth is mentioned in Matthew and Luke and has a prominent place in our theology, all four gospels speak of Jesus’ resurrection. The passion narratives and stories of his resurrection make up a disproportionate amount of the gospel stories.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, it would not be 2017. Time would be measured by some other standard.

The year 2017 is testimony that Jesus’ life was more than just a life lived exceptionally. There have been hundreds and thousands of exceptionally lived lives, but we do not measure time by any of them, nor is our eternity in the hands of any of them.

Alexander the Great, Christopher Columbus, Isaac Newton, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Marie Curie, Martin Luther, Anne Frank, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Bill Gates, were all men and women that helped shape their world, change the landscape of history, or contribute to the betterment of humanity.

When you compare Jesus to the people on the list, at first comparison, his life doesn’t compare to theirs. He didn’t conquer 2 million square miles of territory like Alexander the Great. He didn’t discover a new world like Columbus. He did not formulate the laws of motion or universal

gravitation like Sir Isaac Newton. He didn't preside over the convention that drafted the United States Constitution like George Washington, or preserve the Union and abolish slavery like Abraham Lincoln. He never won a Nobel prize like Marie Curie. He was never recognized by his peers for his efforts to bring peace to the world like Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King, Jr. He was never elected to lead a country like Nelson Mandela. He was never the wealthiest man in the world like Bill Gates.

But take a closer look. Jesus didn't need to conquer a world. It already belonged to him.

John's gospel says that everything that was made was made through Jesus. That's possible because Jesus came from heaven. John the Baptist said, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." (John 1:30).

Jesus came from heaven, not to conquer the world like Alexander the Great, but to conquer death and deliver us from sin.

He was able to do that because he lived a life free from sin.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the devil tempted him by taking him to a very high mountain and showing him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

⁹ 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."'

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:8-11)

Jesus didn't need to rule the kingdoms of the world like a king. Jesus came to rule the hearts of those who are willing to worship him and serve him.

Columbus is credited with discovering a new world even though he thought he found India when the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria bumped into the shores of the New World.

Unlike Columbus, Jesus where he was going. Jesus knew his destination was the cross. He knew he had to take upon himself the sins of the world because he wanted us to discover a world where death no longer had a grip on us, a world where our sins did not hang around our necks like a millstone.

Jesus wanted us to discover a world of grace and forgiveness. Jesus wanted us to discover a world where we could live with joy and love, peace and hope, even when we live among people who seek to wound and harm us.

Isaac Newton discovered and explained the laws of motion and universal gravitation. While Jesus lived in a time where scientific discovery was virtually unknown, Jesus was God in the flesh who apparently had miraculous powers available to him that defied the laws of nature. The winds and the waves obeyed him because through him they were made.

Satan knew that Jesus had power over the elements, so he tempted him to turn the stones into bread. Satan knew that he could. It was a temptation for Jesus to do this for selfish reasons.

He could have called ten thousand angels to come to his aid while he was upon the cross, but he didn't. Philippians 2:8 says, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" Why didn't he?

Well, one reason is that you cannot defeat death unless you die.

Science has been trying everything to help us live longer and longer lives. Jesus was awarded a Nobel prize like Marie Curie for life-saving discoveries, but Jesus claimed that he came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. Not only that, but he came to offer to us life everlasting.

Some scientists are spending their lives trying to make cells live forever. Some have suggested that perhaps death will one day be an unnecessary condition of life. I think we know that is just a dream.

What is unnecessary is entering death without the assurance of heaven.

A Sunday School teacher was trying to explain to his class what you had to do to go to heaven. He started off by asking some questions.

"If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale, and gave all my money to the church, would that get me to heaven?"

"NO!" the children all answered.

"If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?"

"NO!" said the children.

"Well, if I were kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?"

Again, they all shouted, "NO!"

"Well then, how can I get to heaven?"

A boy in the back row shouted, "You gotta be dead!"

And we are going to be. All of us. But just being dead will not get you to heaven. Just living a good life and doing a lot of good works will not get you there either.

The Bible tells us that “as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people.” (Hebrews 9:27)

The question is, “Has he taken away your sins?”

At death, I have yet to meet anyone that the family didn’t think was going to heaven. But I have known people who have died that did not have faith in Jesus.

Here is a simple test you can apply to your life. It’s not a perfect test but it may be helpful. We can call it the B.C./A.D. test.

What was your life like before you met Jesus? What is your life like now? Is there a difference?

Some of you might say, “Well, Michael, I can’t remember a time when Jesus wasn’t a part of my life.” Wonderful. Then, think of your life like this. “What would your life be like had you never met Jesus?”

What if Martin Luther, Abraham Lincoln, Mother Theresa, or Martin Luther King, Jr. had never met Jesus? Think how different the world might be.

Eternal life isn’t something that begins when we die. It is a gift that begins now, through faith, not by good works so that no one can boast.

However, when the Holy Spirit of God comes into our lives, we are changed, and the fruits of our labors become the evidence of the change that has been made within us. The gift of eternal life becomes the guarantee that death does not, will not, and cannot have the final word on those who are in Christ Jesus. The fruits of our lives become the witness, the testimony of the changes that Jesus has brought about in our lives.

It is the year 2017. That could be the year that is etched on the tombstone of someone in this room. That year might put it on mine: John Michael Helms, 1962-2017. If that happens, why don’t you add the letters, A.D. to remind people that I died “in the year of our Lord?”

That is a statement of faith. Every year is his year. History is His story. Every time you write 2017, you could be writing a statement of faith. But if you don’t believe His story, if you don’t believe that God defeated death through Christ, then what story do you believe? How can you be sure your story is right? Who are you living your life for? When you die, what will happen to your soul?

Are you confident enough in your story to be sure that it’s going to carry you through the remainder of your years in this life and into the one to come?

I could never trust a story of my own making or a story that someone else made up, which is what religion is. It is a story that someone else has made up in an effort to answer questions of morality.

Christianity becomes religion only when we make it legalistic and get away from the simplicity of following Jesus and pervert it with our own rules and regulations like the Pharisees did and when we become hypocritical and do not live lives that reflect the love of Jesus.

When His story intersects our story, it's not a religion; it's a new life. Our world changes. We are changed. We are forgiven of our sin. We live a changed life.

That's what happened when Jesus' followers looked into the empty tomb. That happened when they met the resurrected Lord. That happens for us when we meet him and receive the gift of his Spirit.

This is the reason we still live in Anno Domini, "in the year of our Lord."

I invite you this morning to trust in the one who changed the world and continues to change lives every day. Make the numbers 2017 mean something life changing for you this morning. Make this the year that Jesus' story intersects with yours.

While we sing this hymn, come and allow me to pray with you to receive Christ into your life.

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