

Some Thoughts on Easter Monday

By PAUL J. SCHARF

Another Easter season has come and gone. It's Easter Monday (yes, that's really a thing) as I write this, and I thought it might be a good time to share a few thoughts about the meaning and significance of the season, as I understand it.

These ideas really crystallized in my mind as I was driving home from a ministry appointment on Good Friday afternoon, searching for something meaningful to listen to on the radio—yes, even Christian radio—as the traffic raced past me. How many of these people, I wondered as I watched the cars, even know that today is Good Friday? More importantly—how many people in *our churches* remember that it is Good Friday?

I realize, by the way, that some will object to my use of the term *Easter*, and that's fine. In fact, I've trained myself to default to talking mostly about *Resurrection Sunday*, at least from the pulpit. There's uncertainty about the historical development of the term *Easter*, and some avoid it for this reason. But I will use it here for the sake of simplicity.

So, speaking of Easter—or, really, the entire Passion season—let me say this: I do not think we make nearly enough of its importance! I am referencing here our fundamentalist, conservative evangelical or dispensational circles, however you would like to describe them. Compare, for instance, our celebrations of Christmas and Easter, the two most prominent holidays on our Christian calendar.

I have seen churches begin their preparations for the Christmas season at least as early as September. Then, some of us listen to Christmas music easily into January. That covers nearly half of the year! We in our tradition make as much of Christmas as pretty much anyone does in the Christian world, broadly speaking—with the exception, perhaps, that many in our circles do not observe Advent (at least by its name).

Consider our preparations for Easter by way of contrast. Many devote just one day to it! That's all. Yet, Biblically, may I ask, where do we find the emphasis placed—on the birth of Christ, or on His death and resurrection (see Rom. 1:4; 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:3-4)?

Since joining the ranks of fundamentalism more than 35 years ago, I have sensed a hesitancy to put too much emphasis on Easter (as well as the days leading up to it). It has often appeared to me that this attitude grows out of a concern with being too closely identified with anything resembling the practice of Lent—or anyone who engages in it.

Lent, in this line of thinking, is associated mostly with the unbiblical extremes of the Roman Catholic Church—and, perhaps, secondarily with the concept of ecumenical or community-wide services. The experience that I had with Lent growing up in confessional Lutheranism, however, was radically different than either of these. It is also not generally understood by my fundamentalist brethren. Be all that as it may, I realize

there are still some troubling aspects tied into the history of Lent—and I am certainly not advocating for it to be instituted in our churches.

But here is the point I am driving at: If their association with Lent prevents us from remembering the importance of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, then why are we free to celebrate Easter Sunday at all? It's also part of the Passion Week—all of which is set forth on the church calendar. Is it only because the culture still celebrates Easter (to some minor extent) that we observe it in our churches? If we do not have the liberty to remember Good Friday, what is our rationale for participating in Easter ... or, for that matter, even Christmas?

And how can you truly proclaim and celebrate the resurrection on Easter Sunday morning with zero amount of preparation—taking time to meditate, at the very least, on the events that preceded it, most notably on Good Friday?

I propose that we take Lent out of the equation, but begin to emphasize Passion Week on a whole new level. I submit that it should receive at least as much of our energy and attention as the Christmas season does.

Of course, many congregations are already on this course, and I commend them for it. Yet, it really pains me that this is still a rather novel concept for many in our realm.

Since I began serving with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry and have learned to share Passover Seder demonstrations, I have seen how this can be a wonderful way to prepare a congregation for the celebration of Easter—whether the Seder is presented during Passion Week, or even before. Perhaps that would be a good way for your congregation to begin next year.

After all, God must love spring holidays—since He gave the children of Israel four of them (see Lev. 23:4-22)!

This Passion season continues for me personally, as I will still be doing at least two more Passover Seder demonstrations—and that's fine with me, too.

So, even on this Easter Monday, I'm not ashamed to say it: Happy Easter!

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