

Leader-Telegram
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Easter is our yearly reminder that Christ is defeated death, gave us eternal life, and bought our salvation once and for before we were born or even “born again”. Which is to say, the promise is already realized, not something we wait for; that our call is to live into it now, not wait until death or some never-coming “Left Behind” rapture, day of wrath, Armageddon, or other end of the world event the fear-mongerers so popularize today.

Easter’s message is the same as what angels speak: “Be not afraid.” Have courage because God is merciful, gracious, and loving. Do not fail to live because you’re desperately appeasing God’s wrath with good works (they are never good enough) or saying the correct words (reducing faith to magic incantation). Doing good or believing only to avoid hell is not faith, it’s insurance. And perhaps you remember what Jesus did to the temple merchants selling religion and profiting off God: he flipped their tables and whipped them.

Rob Bell, Evangelical pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Michigan, wrote a book last year called “Love Wins”. He offers scriptural, historical, and logical reasons for the non-existence of hell. He says nothing that hasn’t been said since the church’s beginning, but the idea is new to his Evangelical community (itself a recent invention). He is in hot water with Evangelicals who appear incapable of finding comfort in their belief without assurance of eternal fiery torment for those they disagree with. Perhaps the chance to play God, working out aggression by condemning others is more tempting than the task of trusting God’s loving nature to protect and

preserve all creation. Envisioning a wrath-drunk God maliciously seeking any excuse to afflict us is a severely limited vision offered, unsurprisingly, by people who never envision themselves as being in danger. The only hell worth fearing is the one we make for ourselves or our neighbors. I cannot believe that the Universe's Creator, patiently guiding its evolution for 14+ billion years, did so just to eventually torture it. Jesus died on a torture device and rose from death for **everyone**, not just some or none. The latter seems a useless gesture, so this Easter I will celebrate again that I am already saved by Christ, not by any merit or act of belief on my part but solely because God loves me just as God loves you, freeing us to live without fear of ever being separated from that love.