

Easter 2023

What is Easter?

John 20:11-18 | [watch online](#)

Summary: Easter is so much more than just an annual religious holiday. It's so much more than a nice story we hear once a year that inspires us to be nice people. The true story of Easter has transformed people's lives for 2000 years. And it can still transform ours.

Main Points:

If we let it, the true story of Easter can change our lives now.

When Jesus died everyone expected him to stay dead.

What life has done to us can numb us to what God is doing for us.

We often don't recognize Jesus in our lives because we aren't expecting to see Jesus in our lives.

Jesus is always pursuing us.

Jesus' first priority is personal relationship

Jesus didn't rise from the dead to condemn us as sinners, but to restore us as family.

Jesus is alive and he is personally seeking you out.

Easter proves that God personally sees you and loves you.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you have a favorite Easter tradition? What makes it special to you?
2. What makes it difficult to believe God knows, accepts, likes, and loves you? Why do you think that is?
3. Take some time and read John 20 together. What stands out to you?
4. What does it mean to you to "pledge allegiance to Jesus"? What would/does allegiance to Jesus look like in your life?
5. How can your group pray for you this week?

Transcript:

IN: Easter. Just another religious holiday? Just a nice story we hear once a year to encourage us to be nice people?

It's so much more... the true story of Easter shows us there is so much more we are invited to experience in our lives...

So let's talk about it... together.

WE: If you are celebrating Easter this year... you are part of a tradition/celebration that has been going on for the last 2000 years.

Celebrating an event that has changed the world...

- an event that inspired the building of the 1st hospitals and orphanages
- inspired the 1st abolitionists
- and has given rise to the idea that every human no matter what race, gender, background is worthy of respect and love

That can seem so... big.

Almost makes the story of Easter abstract/out there... hard to see how it has anything to do w/us personally.

So easy to just do the traditions... Eggs. Baskets. Maybe go to church (if that's your background) read the story, sing some songs and then move on...

- Go back to our normal lives, normal frustrations, hurts, fears, worries, boredom, discontentment.

But Easter is a real historical event... that real people experienced and lived through...

It not only changed the world as we know it but has changed millions of individual people for the last 2000 years.

And **if we let it, the true story of Easter can change our lives now.**

Let me show you by looking at this event through the eyes of the 1st person who personally experienced it and the 1st person to have their life changed forever b/c of it...

GOD: Recap story...

In 1st century Middle East a Jewish peasant named (Yeshua) Jesus claimed not only to be the King of Israel but also God on earth.

Said he was bringing God's Kingdom to earth.

- Things like... I am the resurrection and the life anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying.
- "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"

Then he was executed by the religious leaders and the Romans on a cross...

- Must not have been who/what he said he was...
- Obviously, he was wrong. He's dead. It's over.

When Jesus died everyone expected him to stay dead.

Two men, Joseph and Nicodemus, wrap Jesus' body in strips of linen and 75 pounds of spices/ointment

Place the dead body in a tomb in a garden.

Rolled stone in front of it... prevent animals and whatnot.

Mark + Matthew tells us two of Jesus' followers, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, watch all of this take place.

Side note: If you've read the biographies of Jesus' life, ever wonder... Why so many Marys?

- Historical documents/inscriptions show Mary was most common female name in that area at the time
- So if these are really eyewitness accounts it would make sense that a lot of the women would be named Mary?

On morning of 3rd day, Mary Magdalene went w/other women to finish the job of taking care of Jesus' body

Get to the tomb and the stone rolled away.

Mary runs and tells Jesus' disciples someone had taken the body.

Peter and John run to the tomb...see that it's empty... see the strips of linen Jesus was wrapped in lying there...

John says he believed that Jesus was risen at that point... but he still seems too dazed to talk about it...

So Peter and John walk away, heads swirling... But Mary stays...

Put self in her sandals...

- Jesus had completely changed her life... Luke says he had healed her from demon possession.
- He had given her dignity and identity. Maybe for 1st time ever.

And now the person she has based life on for last 3 yrs or so, completely/violently/gruesomely/traumatically ripped away.

- And the one thing she wanted to do to help w/her closure/grieving, preparing Jesus' body, is now also taken away from her.

V. 11-13 She seems to be in complete shock... Not a response of, "Oh my gosh ANGELS!"

She is almost numb and can't react to/be surprised by anything. Can't take in what is actually happening around her.

Just so matter of fact... "Well random angels... I'm crying b/c I don't know where Jesus' body is."

What life has done to us can numb us to what God is doing for us.

But someone has something better in mind for her...

V. 14 *Doesn't recognize him...* WHY? Mary's known him for three years! Maybe she's overwhelmed w/ grief... eyes are filled w/ tears... Sun in her eyes...but...

- Main reason... she wasn't expecting to see him

We often don't recognize Jesus in our lives because we aren't expecting to see Jesus in our lives.

And then Jesus does what Jesus always does... he asks some questions.

And I picture him asking these w/a twinkle in his eye, maybe a little grin to himself...

- "This is going to be so good, she's going to be so happy"
- "I can't wait to take this pain away from her. To show her who I really am... and the life she can have now."
- HE knew the answer... **His questions are never for him, they are always for us.**

V. 15 *Why are you crying...*

- She thinks it's just someone wondering what's going on...
- But it's probably more like... Why are you crying right now?
- Why is your heart heavy? Why are you feeling so lost?
- I'm here... there's nothing to cry about...

Who are you looking for?

- A dead rabbi? The one you thought would overthrow Rome?
- Maybe you need to look again... I'm so much more... There's something/someone so much better here for you.

BUT She still doesn't recognize him...

"Gardener, did they have you move him somewhere? Just tell me where he is and I'll take care of it."

Look at her devotion/determination. Nothing was going to stop her from honoring her Rabbi/teacher/Lord/friend.

But she didn't need to go find him... He had already come to her and found her... **Jesus is always pursuing us.**

One of the most beautiful passages in the history of literature...

V. 16 *Mary*. He says her name.

How did she recognize him then?

Was it the tone, the tenderness, the switch from general "woman" to her personal name, the laughter w/which he said it? All of it?

She cried out, Teacher! The name she had always called him...

Imagine the surprise, joy, elation, giddiness!

Death had separated them, she thought it was over, she had mentally and emotionally prepared herself to be dealing w/Jesus' dead body this morning

And now here he is... personally seeking her out...they are restored...

Jesus could have made his first resurrection appearance in a cloud of fire at the temple... **instead he chose Mary.**

Instead Jesus specifically and personally sought HER out... to be the first to see him.

Jesus' first priority is personal relationship

And Mary clings to him... who knows for how long he hugs her... proves he is really alive, not a vision, not a ghost/spirit... but physically raised from the dead...

After the perfect amount of time that Mary needed...

V. 17 *Don't cling to me.* He's saying there: "We can't stay like this forever... don't keep this Good News to yourself... I need you to share it... I need you to tell the others. I need you to go and share this joy..."

Sends her to tell the other disciples what we call the Gospel... the Good News. Jesus has conquered death.

He personally sought out Mary and personally sent her to be the first to proclaim this amazing news.

Why she is often called the Apostle to the Apostles. And the first Apostle.

One of the many historical/cultural/literary proofs that this isn't a made up story/legend...

In that patriarchal culture/time... a woman's testimony wasn't considered trustworthy... Especially if it's just a single woman.

If a male Jewish writer was trying to create a story to convince others the impossible has happened, someone predicted their death and resurrection and then actually died and came back to life...

- There's no way he would add that a woman was the 1st witness and the 1st to tell others Jesus had risen.

But John had to be honest to what actually happened.

So Jesus sends Mary to the disciples to tell them the good news...

And what does he call them...

- "tell Those cowards who ran away when I was arrested?"
- "tell Those boys who have been hiding ever since I was executed?"

Go tell my **brothers**... not cowards/servants/not students/not even followers/disciples... my brothers.

Jesus didn't rise from the dead to condemn us as sinners, but to restore us as family.

Go tell my brothers... Inviting her and them to the new family he was creating.

Not just to experience Jesus' resurrection as a personal thing but to experience and live a new life together.

V. 18

Mary was a single woman. Unseen in her culture. Insignificant. Most common name of the time.

She was completely lost and overwhelmed... And Jesus chose to show himself to her first.

When she didn't recognize him or understand what was going on... when she didn't believe his promises to rise from the dead... Jesus was patient and kind with her.

She thought her life was over... nothing to live for now that Jesus was dead... but Jesus sought her out and gave her a larger purpose than she could have imagined...

He chose her to be the first to tell what had happened and to start in motion a family/community of new life that has been growing for 2000 yrs.

YOU: Jesus said he would die and rise again... and then he did.

And he was seen first by Mary, then the other disciples, then for 40 days after his resurrection he appeared to over 500 of followers, including his brother James... who became a leader of his big brother's first church.

- What would it take for you to lead a community of people based on worshiping your older brother? (probably seeing him come back from the dead, right?)

He talked w/ them, ate w/ them, restored them.

And this Jesus promised to give new, eternal life to everyone who trusts in him.

- Everyone/anyone who pledges their allegiance to him as their King.

He invites everyone to give up trying to live on their own, control their own lives, trying to have the universe revolve around them...

He invites everyone to enjoy the full life of living for the King of love and peace.

We can trust him not b/c this is some nice story... but b/c it's a historical eye-witness testimony.

The same Jesus that sought out Mary is the same Jesus that has sought you out.

The same Jesus who was patient and kind to Mary is patient and kind to you

The same Jesus who renewed Mary's life and gave her true meaning and purpose is the same Jesus who wants to renew your life and give you true meaning and purpose.

The same Jesus who spoke Mary's name is gently and knowingly speaking your own name.

Whoever you are, wherever you are from, whatever you have or haven't done... **Jesus is alive and he is personally seeking you out.**

He knows you... knows everything about you... and accepts you, likes you, loves you... and he wants you to know him.

He is calling **your** name. He is inviting **you** to a new life in a real relationship of love, mercy, forgiveness, and purpose with your heavenly Father.

All you have to do is accept the invitation. Accept a new identity as a child of God... a member of the new family Jesus created w/his life, death, and resurrection.

Starts w/ saying Yes.

Maybe today can be the day you take your 1st step into the new eternal life this day has represented for 2000 yrs

If you want to say yes to his offer, you can tell him w/ something similar to this...

Prayer: Yes Jesus I accept your invitation. I pledge my allegiance to you. Forgive me, make me new, make me yours. Thank you for the new and eternal life you have promised me by conquering death for me.

WE: God loves us so much that he came to earth, lived, died, and rose again for us. For you.

You are known.

You are loved.

You are pursued by your Creator and Heavenly Father.

The celebration of Easter is that **this isn't about just one special day a year...** This is a celebration of the new life we can live today and everyday... forever.

A life we don't just keep to ourselves but share w/ those Jesus is also pursuing...

Jesus invites all of us to discover, enjoy, and share true, full life... together.

Easter proves that God personally sees you and loves you.