

Easter – What and Why:

So let me ask you a question – When I say the word Easter – what comes to your mind – when you hear the word Easter – what is the first thing you think of?

Show Video Clip - Meaning of Easter

Do you know what you believe, what a great question. I wish I could say that the video was not a true depiction of today's society, but sadly it is. Not only is it a depiction of today's non-Christian world, but it is also a pretty true representation of many Christians as well.

Doing my on little study, (with my kids and some of their friends and their friends families, many who call themselves Christian), I found that when I asked the same questions of them, I got just about the same answers.

Most of them spoke about the Easter Bunny and about egg hunts, and of course, the all time favorite, chocolate. Very few even mentioned Jesus and even fewer still talked about his death upon the cross for our sins or of His rising from the dead.

Well if Easter is about celebrating Christ's death and resurrection (and it is) why the Bunny, why the eggs, why the confusion?

Well it goes all the way back to the first century Church: Up until about 116 – 126 AD, the early church celebrated Christ's Death and Resurrection by celebrating Passover (The Jewish Festival that recalls the Passing over of homes with blood on the door Post by the Angel of Death when they were captive in Egypt) but, that is a talk for another time:

Christ was in Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Passover and it was during this time that he was taken captive and was crucified. And so the early church celebrated Passover to remember this time and to Celebrate Christ's Death and Resurrection.

We'll around 116 – 126 AD some in the church started to substitute the celebration of Passover with the celebration of Ishter (pronounced Easter) which was at the time a Pagan festival that celebrated birth and life. Some in the early church incorrectly saw that celebration of life as the celebration of Christ coming back to life from the dead (His resurrection).

It is the celebration of Ishter that gives us the Bunny and the eggs (signs of fertility and new Birth).

Well this confusion went on for some 200 years until in 325 AD at the Council of Nicea Emperor Constantine put and end to the confusion and made the celebration of Easter (as he spelled it) the official celebration of Christ's death and resurrection. At that time the observance, by the church of Passover ended and the Bunny's and the Eggs took route.

Does that mean it is wrong to celebrate Easter, Wrong to share in the fun of the Easter Bunny and the Egg hunts, no not at all. That is all fine and fun and I enjoy all of that; it just means we need to be diligent to teach and to understand the true meaning of Easter, just as we must be

diligent to teach and understand that Christmas is about more than just a Fat man in a red suit bringing presents.

Okay then, if that is the case, then what is the true meaning of Easter, why do we celebrate Christ's Death upon a Cross, His victory over that Death, His Resurrection, His coming to life again.

Why? --- We celebrate it because it is our greatest message of hope:

You go to the tomb of Mohammed, and they will tell you, "Here lie the bones of the great prophet."

You go to the tomb of Napoleon, and they will say, "Here lie the bones of the emperor of France."

You go to Moscow and see the tomb of Lenin, and they will say, "Here lie the bones of the great founder of Soviet Communism."

But you go to the tomb of Jesus, and they will tell you, "Here lie the bones of no one. He is not here. He is risen, as He said he would."

What does come screaming out from that empty tomb though is a message of pure hope. Hope that there is someone greater than ourselves.

Hope that in that someone we can find forgiveness and we can find salvation, not because we have earned it, not because we deserve it, but because He paid the price for it, paid the price for us, paid it with His own blood.

Why though, why did blood need to be shed why did someone have to die in our place and while you at it, why do we need to be saved anyway?

That is the crux of the situation isn't it. If we do not understand the fundamental, the foundational aspect of our condition, of our sinfulness, then we will never understand, nor be able to celebrate Easter.

I would like to read to you some excerpts from an article in this Wed. addition of the USA Today: It was on the front page of the "Life" section and it was titled "**Is Sin dead**"

The article reads as such: As Easter approaches, some pastors and theologians worry: How can Christians celebrate Jesus' atonement for their sins and the promise of eternal life in His resurrection if they don't recognize themselves as sinners? The article goes on to quote Pope Benedict – quote "The modern world is losing the notion of sin – and not just personal sin, but social sin such as allowing injustice to flourish" and they Quote Rev Albert Mohler – President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary – Quote "I wonder weather churches are making the connection between Christ's death and resurrection and victory over sin – the linchpin doctrine of Christianity"

That is the key point – that understanding is the linchpin doctrine of Christianity and if we do not understand that as a people, we will never truly be able to accept Christ as our Lord and Savior and we will never truly be able to celebrate Easter.

The USA Today article went on to show the latest Barna research poles that showed that 81% of Americans believe in sin, but that they overwhelmingly believe that sin is based on their own standards of right and wrong and not God's standards – that small point resulted in only 56% of those who profess to be believing Christians saying that having an abortion is a sin, 45% believing sex before marriage is a sin and only 41% believing that smoking marijuana is a sin.

And there lies the problem. If we based our acceptance of what sin is on our own standards, then that means we can atone for sins in our own standards and when we do that – who needs a savior, who needs God!!!

Why do we need a Savior, why did Blood need to be shed for the atonement of our sins? Why – not because of who we are, but because of who God is:

God is a God of Love yes and God is God of Mercy absolutely, just look at what he did for us, He sent us his only Son (Jesus Christ) to die for us. Now I don't know about you, but I could see myself dieing for something I believed in. I could see myself laying down my life for my country or stepping in front of a moving car to save one of my kids and I think that would be true for most of us, but the flip side of that coin, is I could never send Jesse, my son, to die for me, to die in my place, let alone send him to die for you, but that is exactly what God did. He sent Jesus to die for each and every one of us.

Why, because He Loves Us:

John 3:16 (New American Standard Bible)

16"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

But God is also a God of purity and a God of righteousness and in His purity and righteousness He can accept nothing less. His Purity and His righteousness demands that sins be punished, be accounted for:

Romans 3:23 tells us:

Romans 3:23 (New American Standard Bible)

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 6:23 lets us know that:

Romans 6:23 (New American Standard Bible)

the wages of sin is death

Tell Story of the General in the Army and someone stealing the food.....

This is what Christ did for us and to do it, He had to come down from His place of Deity and become one of us, become human so He could truly take our place.

Now that we have a background understanding of the history of Easter and the Why of Easter I would like to take us on a journey to understand the what of Easter; a journey to look at what happened during that Passover celebration some 2000 years ago

To do this, we need to start in a Garden: Interesting isn't how life began in a Garden (the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve) and Man's ultimate hope will be manifested in another Garden, in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Let's look at Matthew 26: 36-49

Matthew 26: 36-49 (New American Standard Bible)

36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. 38 Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

Doctor Luke in His Gospel says it like this:

Luke 22: 44 (New American Standard Bible)

And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

The notion that someone could actually sweat blood seems pretty contrived. However, there is a recognized medical condition called hematohydrosis, in which capillary blood vessels that feed the sweat glands rupture, causing them to bleed. This usually occurs under conditions of extreme physical or emotional stress.

Now I don't believe for one minute that Jesus was sweating blood because he was afraid of the physical pain of the cross. Indeed, the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus looked forward to the cross:

Hebrews 12:2 (New American Standard Bible)

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

No I believe Jesus was in such Agony because He knew He would be separated from God the father for the first time ever or since and it is that fear of separation that caused Jesus to be in such agony as to sweat drops of blood. In such Agony as to cause Jesus to pray not just once,

but 3 times if you read the whole story *“Father if there is any other way to accomplish this, any other way to get to heaven then lets take it please”*.

But God didn't grant him a plan B. So if you ever wonder if there is any other way to get to Heaven except through Jesus, this should set the record straight for you, because God didn't give Him another way.

Now, it was at this point that Judas came and betrayed Jesus identifying him with a kiss to the Roman Solders.

Let's pick the story up in John 18: 3- 8

John 18: 3-8 (New American Standard Bible)

3Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. 4So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" 5They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. 6So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. 7Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." 8Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way,"

The things I would like you to note here are:

- 1) Jesus was in control of the whole thing. They thought they were coming to get Jesus, but the scripture clearly states that Jesus went out to meet them. Also, if you read all the different Gospels closely, you will find that the plan was to not take Jesus at this time, but to wait until after the Passover, until after all the crowds had gone, but Jesus forced their hand when at the Passover dinner, he called Judas out and told him he knew he was going to betray him and go and do what he must do. You can just see Judas running back to the High Priest and the Pharisees and saying hey the jig is up, he knows what we are going to do, so if you want to take him you need to do it now. Jesus forced their hand, he was in control.
- 2) When Jesus responded to them he used the phrase "I Am" (the he we see in scripture is an implied he for our language structure, but what Jesus actual said was "I AM" (anyone who speaks Hebrew or Aramaic understands that is the way their language is structured,, the pronouns are left out, they are implied) Anyway, Jesus said "I AM"., the ineffable name of God and in doing this, Jesus was making the claim that he was the voice of the burning bush. A reference that would have not been missed by the High Priest and the Pharisees.
- 3) When he spoke the words "I AM" they all fell down. Now this is interesting because scripture tells us that there was a Roman cohort with them. A cohort was 1/10 of a legion or roughly 600 men. Jesus says I am and the all fall down. He had to wait for them to get back up, all 600 hundred of them.

4) Lastly I want to point out to you that they brought weapons with them. This was against the Roman law to carry weapons on the Passover, but they arrested Jesus as the Law Breaker. It was at night when they took Him and they immediately bound Him and brought him to trail.

All of this was illegal:

- The binding of a prisoner before he was condemned was unlawful unless resistance was offered. Jesus offered none (Jn 18:12, 24).
- It was illegal for judges to participate in the arrest of the accused (Jn 18:3).
- No legal transactions, including a trial, could be conducted at night (Jn 18:28).
- No arrest could be affected through the agency of an informer and traitor (Jn 18:5; Ex 23:6-8).
- No prisoner could be convicted on his own evidence (Mt 26:63-65).
- It was illegal to carry weapons on a feast day (Jn 18:3).

There are over a 2 dozen plus illegal things that occurred during the arrest and trails of Jesus.

For time sake, I will not list all the illegal acts that were committed in the arrest, trail and crucifixion of Jesus, but I will post them on the web. site if you are interested --- But just keep in mind this theme throughout this whole event.

Now in fact Jesus had 6 trials:

3 Jewish Trials:

Before Annas	John 18:12-14
Before Caiaphas	John 18:19-24
Before the Sanhedrin	Mt 27:1,2

3 Roman Trials:

Before Pilate	John 18:28-38
Before Herod	Lk 23:6-11
Before Pilate	John 18:39-19:16

He went through so many trials, because no-one wanted to take the responsibility for him and they kept bouncing Him back and forth. All the while the beating and whipping of Jesus continued.

Jesus goes through 6 trials and no less then 7 times in those trial the one judging him proclaimed him innocent. Now by law, at anyone of those times, Jesus should have been set free, but he wasn't and the pressure was put on Pilate to sentence him to death. So Pilate tries one last time to get out of it, by offering them the Jewish Passover tradition of setting one prisoner free. Pilate asked them Should I then not Set Him Free, but the crowd called out not Him, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas is one of three prisoners who we see that night with Jesus. Barabbas gets set free and the other two we see crucified with Jesus.

There are a few very interesting points that happen here that I would like to point out to you:

First, I think Pilate knew more then we think he might have, because scripture teaches us that Pilate himself wrote the inscription that was placed on Jesus' cross:

we see in John 19: 19-22

John 19: 19-22 (New American Standard Bible)

19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." 20 Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek. 21 So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

You and I miss it here, because we are not Jewish and we don't speak or read Hebrew, but what the Chief Priests were angry about, is they wanted Pilate to write that Jesus said "I AM" This would have then shown his claim to be God and that was blasphemy and it would have been right to put him to death, but Pilate didn't do that. In fact what Pilate wrote was even more powerful, because when you look at it in the Hebrew (and we see it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek) but in Hebrew, the first letters of each word written spell out YHWH

The unspeakable name of God. Could it be that Pilate knew more than we think he did?

Secondly I want to point out the Gospel of Barabbas as I call it (No it is not a real Gospel written by Barabbas, but Gospel means the Good News and well this is definitely some Good News for Barabbas and when we look closely at it, it highlights some very Good News for us).

- 1) Barabbas stood under the righteous condemnation of the law.
- 2) Barabbas knew the One who was to take his cross and take his place was innocent.
- 3) Barabbas knew that Jesus Christ was for him a true substitute.
- 4) Barabbas knew that he had done nothing to merit going free while another took his place.
- 5) Barabbas knew Christ's death was for him perfectly efficacious.

It is interesting to know that the name Barabbas means - "Son of the Father" Bar meaning son of (Like Simon Bar Joseph – Simon, the Son of Joseph,) and abba meaning Father; so Barabbas is the son of the father and that is so interesting because we see in this that Barabbas and Jesus changed places. The murderer's bonds, curse, disgrace, and mortal agony meant for Barabbas were transferred to the righteous Jesus; while the liberty, innocence, safety, and well-being owed to Jesus became transferred to Barabbas. Barabbas is given all the rights and privileges of Jesus Christ; while Jesus takes upon himself all the infamy and horror of the one that was condemned. Both mutually inherit each other's situation and what they possess:

And that is such Good News for us, because that is exactly what Jesus did for us when He became sin for us and took our place upon that Cross. When He washed us clean of our sins through His payment in blood. He gave us the right to become daughters and sons of the Father.

Now that term "became sin for us" is a heavy term and it has a whole lot of meaning behind it, but that will have to be a study for a different time). What I want to leave you with today is the Illustration of Barabbas, the Good News of the Cross and the Hope of the Empty tomb.

I started off today's talk with a video clip that looked out what people thought Easter was all about. I would like to end with a Video that might bring it full circle and then give an opportunity for all those who desire to proclaim their believe in Christ by sharing in Communion together.

Show Video Clip – “Priceless”

On Easter, we celebrate what Paul proclaimed in 1 Corinthians 15:

1 Corinthians 15: 3&4

3For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins ---- 4and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day.

As we close out today's service I would like to give all who have not already done so, the opportunity to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. There are no magic words you have to say, all you have to do is believe in you heart that Jesus Christ is Lord and that he died for your sins, for the sins of all and that He rose from the dead. Believe that truth and in that truth, accept His gift of salvation as you invite Him to be Lord of your life.

As we end today, we offer anyone who as done so either before or today to share with us in the sacrament of communion. For as Scripture tells us, we as believers are to do this in remembrance of Him

1 Corinthians 11:23-25

23For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."