

# Explore the Bible Series for March 23: Celebrating Easter's Significance

March 15, 2008

Posted: 3/14/08

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## Celebrating Easter's Significance

• John 20:15-18, 1 Corinthians 15:3-6, 20-22

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What do you think about when you hear the word Easter? Is it brightly colored eggs, large Sunday lunches with all the family, elaborate dramatic presentations, or fancy new clothes? Apart from the special music and events with our church families, Easter should do something in our lives each year. Easter lies at the heart of the Christian message. The miracle that happened on Easter is the why we have hope. Jesus rose from the dead. He overcame humanity's greatest fear, the grave, and offers new abundant life to all who would believe. Many today may not believe that this happened, but the Bible clearly tells us He did. As believers we are called and encouraged to celebrate and proclaim the truth and significance of Jesus' resurrection. We are called to do this not only as we gather to celebrate through worship on Easter Sunday, but to celebrate the new life through our individual lives every day. The Good News of Easter is that Christians worship a Savior who is alive. Our response to this holiday

should be to celebrate the significance of that message by allowing it to transform our lives.

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### **Marvel at the Empty Tomb (John 20:1-9)**

She had watched Jesus die on Friday. She saw where they buried Him. They did not have time to prepare His body to be buried, so she had decided to take the spices to His tomb on Sunday morning. Early Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene went to His tomb in order to finish Jesus' burial. When she got to the tomb, she saw that it was open and the large stone was moved from the doorway. In her shock and confusion, she did the only thing she could think to do. She left the tomb and went to find the apostles. When they arrived at the tomb, the disciples could hardly believe what they found. The tomb was empty and the burial clothes looked as if they were awaiting the burial of someone. Today we are very familiar with this story of Easter morning. For nearly 2000 years we have heard it read and preached and watched dramatic reenactments. This familiarity has in some measure robbed us of the sheer amazement which greeted the first visitors to the tomb that morning. We read the story of the horror of the crucifixion on Friday knowing that Sunday morning changed everything. Perhaps it would deepen our appreciation and celebration of the significance of Easter morning if we could try to approach the tomb the way that Mary, Peter, and John did that first Easter morning.

### **Listen to the Witnesses (John 20:15-18)**

After Peter and John left the tomb to find the other disciples, Mary, still lost in her confusion, remained to consider what she had witnessed over the previous three days. As she did, a man approached and asked why she was crying. Locked in her perception of the way the world worked - a world where the dead did not return to life - Mary's mind did not recognize the man as Jesus. Yet as he spoke her name, her eyes were opened to the truth. Mary is then sent by Jesus as the first evangelist of the resurrection. Many today are bound by a worldview which can only accommodate those things which can be understood through the senses and explained through reason and the laws of nature. Their minds cannot grasp that anyone would willingly die for the sins of others and that that person would rise from the dead. Such things simply do not happen in the "real world," they conclude. Yet beginning with Mary, hundreds during the first few weeks and millions since have proclaimed (some at the cost of their lives) that the tomb was indeed empty and Jesus is alive.

### **Recognize the Gospel's Significance (1 Corinthians 15:3-6)**

Paul was not among those who personally met Jesus prior to his death or during the time between His resurrection and ascension. It was during that time that the man then known as Saul was in training as a Pharisee. It was only after he began to actively persecute the new "Christian" believers that Saul met Jesus. Yet following his brief encounter with Jesus on a road to Damascus, Saul the persecutor came face-to-face with the life-transforming significance and power of the Gospel and became Paul, the greatest evangelist and church planting missionary the church has ever had. Just as we can often lose the impact of the sight of the empty tomb, we can also lose sight of the real significance of the Gospel. This is especially a danger for those who perhaps grew up in the church and accepted Christ as our

Lord as a child. Yet if we truly wish to live out our salvation and fulfill our divine commission to proclaim the Gospel to a dying world, we must never allow ourselves to become too casual in acknowledging or describing the infinite significance of the message of Easter.

### **Celebrate New Life in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)**

In John 3, Jesus describes the act of accepting the Gospel as being “born again.” Paul talks about experiencing a new life as we surrender our lives to Christ. In a very real sense believers do enter into a new or reborn life when they choose to believe the Gospel. They are no longer bound by the penalty or guilt of past sin and experience the indwelling of the very presence of God in the form of the Holy Spirit. They enjoy the abundance of life which Jesus promised in John 10:10. Yet there seems to be a slight misunderstanding about this new life. The newness of this “new life” refers to our experience after we accept God’s gift of salvation. The experience of hope, peace, joy, meaning, and purpose in life is “new” to us, but it has been available to us all along. This new experience of real life is what God created each of us to experience from our physical birth. We were not created to live as slaves to sin, but were created to enjoy a constant flow of abundant life throughout our lives. Thanks to the price Jesus paid, as we accept and celebrate the truth of the Easter story, chains are broken and we experience the real life in the presence of God which God always intended us to enjoy.

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