

LENT 7 - EASTER SUNDAY
GOD'S PROMISE IN THE EMPTY TOMB; WHAT WILL YOU LEAVE AT THE CROSS
MATTHEW 28:1-20; JOHN 20:1-9
2025-04-20

JESUS' LIFE:

His birth: When King Herod was told of the birth of Jesus he said: "Kill Him. There is only room for one king in this corner of the world.

The number of religious leaders who believed Messiah had been born in Bethlehem? Zero. The type of people who did believe it? Some stargazers, night-shift shepherds, and a couple of newlyweds who claimed to have more experience giving birth than having sex.

The reward given to Joseph and Mary for bringing God into the world? Two years in exile, learning Egyptian.

This was the beginning of the Christian movement (and these were the calm years).

JESUS' MINISTRY:

The word on the street of Jesus' hometown when He claimed to be sent from God? Weird family. Have you seen His cousin?

The reaction of the hometown folks? Stone Him.

The opinion of His brothers? Lock Him up.

The number of disciples Jesus recruited? 70.

The assessment of Jesus' followers as found in the Jerusalem editorial page? A group of unemployed ne'er-do-wells recruited off the shipping docks and out of the red-light districts.

The number of lepers and blind and lame people Jesus healed? Too many to count.

The number of healed lepers and blind and lame people who defended Jesus on the day of His death? 0.

JESUS' EXECUTION:

The popular opinion regarding Jesus before He cleansed the Temple? See if He'll run for office.

The popular opinion regarding Jesus after He cleansed the Temple? Let's see how fast He can run.

The decision of the Jewish council? Three spikes and a spear.

The talk on the streets of Jerusalem after Jesus died? He should've stayed in the furniture business.

The number of times Jesus prophesied that He would come back to life three days after His death? Three

The number of apostles who heard the prophecy? All of them.

The number of apostles who waited at the tomb to see if He would do what He said? Zero

The number of His followers who believed in the resurrection before it occurred? You do the math.

The odds a street-corner bookie would've given the day after the crucifixion on the possibility that Jesus' name would be known in the year 2025? "I'll give you better odds that He'll rise from the dead."

JESUS' MOVEMENT:

The official response of the Jewish leaders to the rumours of the resurrection? Of course they say He's alive. They have to. What else can they say?

The actual response of the Jewish leaders to the resurrection of Jesus? "A great number of the Jewish priests believed and obeyed." (Acts 6:7)

The decision of the Jewish leaders about the church? "If their plan comes from human authority, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them" (Acts 5:38-39).

The response of the church? "The number of followers was growing" (Acts 6:1)

The official response of the Jewish leaders to the conversion of Saul (Paul)? Good riddance to the former Pharisee. Won't be months before he's in jail, and then what will he do? Write letters? What Saul (Paul) understood that his former colleagues didn't? "God gave (Jesus) as a way to forgive sin" (Romans 3:25).

JESUS' MOVEMENT CONTINUES:

The belief of French philosopher Voltaire? The Bible & Christianity would pass within 100 years. He died in 1778. The movement continues.

The pronouncement of Friedrich Nietzsche in 1882? "God is dead." (Also Time 1967)
The dawn of science, he believed, would be the doom of faith. Science has dawned; the movement continues.

How a Communist dictionary defined the Bible? "It is a collection of fantastic legends without any scientific support." Communism is diminishing; the movement continues.

The discovery made by every person who has tried to bury the faith? The same as the one made by those who tried to bury its founder: He won't stay in the tomb.

The facts: The movement has never been stronger. Over 1.4 billion Catholics and nearly as many Protestants (1.1 billion) and Orthodox (300 million).

The question? How do we explain it? Jesus was a backwater peasant. He never wrote a book, never held an office, never journeyed more than 200 miles from His hometown. Friends left Him. One betrayed Him. Those He helped forgot Him. Prior to His death they abandoned Him. But after His death they couldn't resist Him. What made the difference?

His death and resurrection. For when He died, so did your sin. And when He rose, so did your hope. For when He rose, your grave was changed from a final residence to temporary housing.

Why did He do it? The face in your mirror.
The verdict after 2000 years? Herod was right: there is only room for one King. Jesus has won the victory.

WHAT WILL YOU LEAVE AT THE CROSS?

Toward the end of Jesus' crucifixion, He shouted a question to the heavens: "Eloi (My God), Eloi! Why have you forsaken Me?" Then He spoke His last earthly words: "It is finished. Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. As He gave His final breath, the earth gave a sudden stir. A rock rolled and a soldier stumbled. Then silence. Two men arrive—Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea to take Jesus body. Bizarre, isn't it? That this blood is not man's blood but God's. To think that these nails held your sins to a cross. That a thief's prayer was offered and answered. Or more absurd that another thief offered no prayer at all.

Absurdities and ironies—both are at the cross. If you asked us how God should redeem His world, no doubt we would have done it differently—certainly not with God on a cross! Sponge thrust in His face; spear plunged in His side; dice tossed at His feet. But we weren't asked to write the script. The players and props were heaven picked and God ordained. **However, we have been asked to respond to it. In order for the cross of Christ to be the cross of your life, you and I need to bring something to the hill.**

We have seen what Jesus brought. With scarred hands He offered forgiveness. Through torn skin He promised acceptance. He took the path to take us home. He wore our garment to give us His own. **We've seen the gifts He brought.**

Now what will we bring? We aren't asked to paint the sign or carry the nails, to wear the spit or bear the crown. But we are asked to walk the path and leave something at the cross. We don't have to—many don't. Many have pondered what Christ left; fewer have pondered what we must leave. **Until you leave something there, you haven't embraced the cross.** Maybe start with your bad moments or bad habits. Selfish moods, white lies? Binges and bigotries? **Give them to God—He wants them all—every single one.** Because He knows we can't live with them.

Yet, when we fall, we pretend we never did, as if we don't want anyone to know we fell. As a result, we live in pain—can't walk well, sleep well, rest well. God doesn't want us living like that. He does more than forgive our mistakes; He removes them. **We simply have to take them to Him. He not only wants the mistakes we've made, He wants the ones we're making.**

Are you mismanaging your life? If so, don't pretend nothing is wrong. Go 1st to God. The first step after a stumble must be in the direction of the cross. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." **So, don't just leave your bad momenta at the cross, give them to God while you're there.**

We tend to fight back, to bite back, to keep lists and snarl lips. God wants your list: "Love keeps no record of wrongs." (1 Corinthians 13) Leave the list at the cross. Not easy! But,

Doug **you don't know what they did to me!**" Jesus says, **"Look what I did for you"** and points to the cross. Paul says, "If someone wrongs you, forgive that person because the Lord forgave you (Colossians 3:13). Do you really want a catalogue of all your mistreatments, to growl and snap your way through life? God doesn't want you to either. **Give up your sins before** they infect you with bitterness and anxiety. **Give God your anxious moments.** Next time you're worried about your health or finances or, or, or, take a mental trip up the hill. Run your thumb over the tip of the spear, balance a spike in the palm of your hand, read the wooden sign in your own language, touch the dirt, moist with the blood of God. He did all this for you there. **Don't you think** He'll look out for you here?

And, bring Him your final moment. Barring His early return, you and I will have a final breath. We're always a bit skittish about the unknown. Leave your final moments at the foot of the cross. **If you do this enough with bad moments, mad ways, anxious moments you might well be left with only...good moments!**

You might even want to think about what your last words would be to your loved ones. **Jesus, like us, was given 1 chance to make His last statement.** Knowing they would be forever pondered, do you think He chose them carefully, deliberately? Of course He did. There were no accidents that day, nothing left up to chance. God chose the path, He selected the nails, He planted the trio of crosses and and painted the sign. God was never more sovereign than in the details of the death of His Son. **And so, this is the message: "I did it for you. I did it all for you."**