

Sunday 31 March 2024

## Life Group Leaders' Notes

Series: Easter

Title: Why Easter Changes Everything

Key Text: Matthew 28:5-6

History has witnessed many amazing moments of change. Yet there have been no events, no discoveries and no inventions that have had more impact on the world than what happened on that first Easter in Jerusalem 2000 years ago.

For the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ shifted forever the world's moral and spiritual axis and opened a whole new age of freedom and hope. The darkness of Good Friday was replaced by the bright new dawn of Easter Sunday. Sadness was replaced by joy. Life had conquered death.

The big truth of Christianity is that Jesus certainly was dead but that he didn't stay dead (Matthew 28:5-6). In other words, the Easter story is fact not fiction (see: Lee Strobel, 'The Case for Christ').

The most compelling reasons for belief, however, are so often not through intellectual arguments, but by seeing the power of Christ at work in real people which literally billions of people have experienced. Easter changes everything and can give us all new life.

1. Easter changes our past (1 Corinthians 15:14-22; Matthew 27:51; Romans 5:7-8; 1 John 4:10; Ephesians 1:7; Isaiah 53:4-5; Psalm 34:18)
2. Easter changes our present (Matthew 28:20; John 20:25; John 20:29; Luke 24:13-16,32)
3. Easter changes everything about our future (Matthew 28:7; Hebrews 2:18; Revelation 1:17-18; John 11:25-26; John 14:19)

## Apply

**1. Easter changes our past.** The great writer CS Lewis, in his parable the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, said that when the lion Aslan, representing Christ died, death started 'working backward.' In other words, God can reverse our history and cause us to be justified with God 'just as if I'd never sinned.' Through the shedding of the pure blood of Jesus and His resurrection, our hearts can be cleansed from past sins and healed from past hurts. We can be forgiven for past sins (1 Corinthians 15:14-22). When Jesus died, He made possible access to God which had previously been impossible. The 90-foot-high thick curtain blocking access to the most Holy Place in Jerusalem's temple was miraculously ripped in two from top to bottom symbolising the removal of the barrier between a Holy God and sinful humanity (Matthew 27:51). At the Cross Jesus Christ paid the full price of sin and made a way for repentant former sinners to come into fellowship with a holy God (Hebrews 10:19-22). Jesus took on Himself the punishment due for our sins (Romans 5:7-8; 1 John 4:10; Ephesians 1:7). Because of God's grace and love for every person, Jesus made it possible for us to be totally forgiven. The good news of Easter is that whatever sins you have committed, whatever mistakes you have made, you can be forgiven by God for every sin and washed clean and made a new person from the inside out. Your past will no longer define you. You can be made new in Christ. You can also be healed from past griefs (Isaiah 53:4-5). On the cross Jesus bore our sorrows as well as our sins and He wants to carry yours and comfort you (Psalm 34:18). Today give your grief to God and open your heart to receive His healing. You do not have to live any longer with the pain of your past.

**2. Easter changes our present.** The big shock for the first disciples was that Jesus was no longer dead. They were not alone as they had imagined. Jesus was with them, and He promises to be with us (Matthew 28:20). Jesus is with us despite our failures. Peter was full of guilt for how he had panicked and denied the Lord. But he found that the Lord was looking out for him. In Galilee Jesus had breakfast with Peter and recommissioned him to be one of the great leaders of the first century church. Jesus is with us when we doubt. Thomas wasn't there where Jesus first appeared to his fellow disciples, and he was cynical about their report (John 20:25). But his doubts disappeared when Jesus appeared before him and invited Thomas to see for himself that He was real (John 20:29). Jesus is with us when we don't realise it (Luke 24:13-16, 32). Today you may or may not feel the presence of God, but you can. For He is nearer to you than you think. He is the good shepherd who doesn't want us to walk

alone through life. That's why we need to reach out to Him and always ask the Holy Spirit to let you know that He is always with you and in all situations.

**3. Easter changes everything about our future.** As the song says: 'Because He lives, I can face tomorrow/Because He lives, all fear is gone/Because I know He holds the future/And life is worth the living/Just because He lives!' Jesus has gone ahead of you in life (Matthew 28:7). Just like a good shepherd goes ahead of his sheep, so we can have joy in our lives by knowing that Christ has gone ahead of us in life. Jesus came to earth to experience what we experience and show us how to conquer over all that life can throw at us (Hebrews 2:18). There is nothing on life's road that God is unfamiliar with and He can guide us through all troubles and trials, highs and lows. God's grace is available for every situation because He knows the ways we take. Jesus has also gone ahead of you in death. Death, the final enemy was put to death, through Christ's death and resurrection (Revelation 1:17-18). Through the death and resurrection of Christ, the curse and power of death have been broken. You don't have to fear death anymore. When you die and are buried or cremated it's not the end. For the Christian, death is the beginning of a wonderful new life in Christ's presence. To know that truth brings great joy and confidence through the passing years. On earth Jesus showed his authority over sickness, evil spirits and even storms. But it was in his death that he showed his ultimate authority (John 11:25-26; John 14:19).

Billy Graham said: 'The Christian has it all ways, abundant life now and eternal life to come.' As his time of death drew near at the age of 99 he said: 'I know I'm going to heaven. I'm looking forward to it with great anticipation because of what Jesus did on that cross. He died for us and was raised by God. When you read I am dead don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.'

Jesus' death and resurrection then has big implications for our past, present, and future. Since Jesus came back from death we also can come back in life. We can all have a total new start in life. We can have a new identity as a Christian. We can have a brand-new history and a very different destiny. Easter changes everything and Jesus can change you from this Easter Sunday.