

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **Easter Broadcasts: Easter Message (2004)**

Good morning and welcome to our broadcast on this Easter Day.

Ask any of your friends what are the things they most associate with Easter and you will probably end up with some of the following: Easter eggs, Easter bunnies, baby chicks and lambs, primroses, new growth on the trees, new clothes. These are all images of newness and life.

The Easter message as we read it in the Bible is a two-fold message. The first part of that message, in total contrast to all these images, is a message not of life but of death – of Jesus dying an excruciatingly painful death on the cross of Calvary, derided by the crowds, abandoned by most of His friends. That took place on what we call Good Friday. The second part of that message most certainly has to do with life, resurrection life, life from the dead. On what we call Easter Sunday, Jesus rose triumphantly from the dead. Both parts of the Easter message are absolutely vital parts of the Christian Gospel, of God's good news.

To understand the significance of Jesus' death, we need to consider some words of the apostle Paul found in 1 Corinthians 5:7. They are these: "For indeed Christ, our Passover was sacrificed for us". The Jewish Feast of the Passover was, and is still, an essential part of Jewish religious life. It looked back to that time in Egypt, some 1,300 years before Jesus' death, when God's chosen people, the Jews, were slaves to Pharaoh. God had determined to bring His people out of Egypt, to set them free, to redeem them. So He sent a series of ten plagues on the land, calculated to force Pharaoh to let them go. Time and again, Pharaoh would agree to their going, only to change his mind at the last minute.

The last, and most serious of these plagues, was meant finally to force Pharaoh's hand. God would pass through the land of Egypt in judgment that night and the firstborn son in every Egyptian home would die. Take time after this broadcast to read the details in Exodus 7-12.

But before a holy God, the Israelites were equally guilty of judgment. Romans 3:23 reminds us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". In Exodus 12, we read how God instructed His people that, in each Jewish home, a lamb was to be taken, killed, and its blood put upon the lintel and doorposts of the home. He then made the all-important promise, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt". Note those words, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you". The Israelites were safe because God could see the evidence of the lamb that had been slain. The Israelites couldn't see it; they ate of the roast lamb inside the house. They were inside in obedience to God's command, sheltered by the blood, claiming God's promise. It was what God saw that mattered!

It is fashionable in some religious circles today to decry the message of the blood. It does not sit easily with 21st century ideas. But a bloodless Christianity is a contradiction in terms. It is not real Christianity.

And so, on that Thursday evening, Jesus and His disciples met together in an upper room to celebrate the Passover. It is significant that Jesus Himself took the lead on that occasion. Luke tells us, "He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it" (22:8). There was no attempt on His part to put off a feast which would be such a painful reminder of His imminent death. Who can tell what thoughts passed through the holy mind of the Lord Jesus as He gazed on that roast lamb on the table before them? "Roast with fire" had been the command in Exodus 12 – a picture so expressive of judgment!

After the Passover, the Lord Jesus introduced His own new remembrance Feast. Luke tells us, "And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you'" (Luke 22:19-20). But this new remembrance feast is equally a picture of death – His body given, His blood shed. That broken loaf, that cup of wine, still speak as eloquently to us today of the death of the Lord Jesus as they must have done to His disciples on that night.

But the Lord Jesus did not stay dead! On that first Easter Sunday, He rose triumphantly from the dead. That is the abiding good news of Easter, as important for us today as it was for His disciples on that first Easter Sunday!

The death of Jesus was absolutely necessary so that my sins might be forgiven. The well-known children's Easter hymn begins,

*There is a green hill far away  
Outside a city wall,  
Where the dear Lord was crucified  
Who died to save us all.*

But it goes on to add:

*He died that we might be forgiven;  
He died to make us good,  
That we might go at last to heaven,  
Saved by His precious blood.*

Just as, in Egypt, the Egyptians and the Israelites were equally guilty before God, so all of us, of whatever nationality or creed, are equally guilty because of our sins. Solemnly, the Bible pronounces, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The Israelites in Egypt were sheltered from judgment because another, the Passover lamb, had died in their stead. But those animal sacrifices could never take away sins. They enabled God to pass by those sins until the time when He knew that His Son, the Lord Jesus, by His death would do the work whereby our sins might finally be put away. So Peter writes of Him, "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

But how can we know that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus at Calvary is any better than all those animal sacrifices? Simply in this, that He did not stay dead! God raised Him from the dead so that all the world might know that His sacrifice was complete; the work was done. So Paul could confidently declare on Mars Hill, "God ...now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30 and 31).

Mrs. Thomas was a widow, struggling to make ends meet. Her pride and joy was the chiming clock that stood in the centre of the mantelpiece. It was a gift to her and Bert on their wedding day. One day, an unexpectedly large bill arrived. There was no way she could pay this. So the beloved clock had to go to the pawnbrokers. In the weeks that followed, the empty space in the middle of the mantelpiece only served to remind her of her outstanding debt. Eventually, after much scraping, she was able to save sufficient money to redeem the clock from the pawnbrokers. There was no more empty space! The clock had been away, but now it was back, rightly occupying pride of place on the mantelpiece. That it was back was clear evidence of the fact that her debt had been paid!

So the resurrection of Jesus is the good news that the debt of our sins has equally been paid. All we have to do is to turn to Christ, admitting our need and confessing our sins, and thank Him for dying for us.

The death of Jesus, then, and His resurrection are equally vital parts of the Easter message. It will be good, now, to look at some of the details of the resurrection story. After Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two of Jesus' followers, begged the body of Jesus and buried it in a new tomb in Joseph's garden. Early on that Easter Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene, another of Jesus' followers came to the tomb. To her astonishment, the stone which had guarded the entrance to the tomb, had been rolled away. The tomb was empty! In her sorrow, she stood there weeping. Jesus stood before her but, through her tears she did not recognise Him, supposing Him to be the gardener. His one word to her, "Mary", was sufficient. She knew His voice! He really was alive! His next words must have filled her with joy and astonishment: "Go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'" (see John 20). So Mary Magdalene became the bearer of the most important piece of news this world has ever heard. A new relationship for mankind with God, as Father and God, had been established as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection!

We have time only to touch on two other resurrection appearances of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15 lists them all. Please read it through after this broadcast.) Late that same day, two other disciples, one of whom was called Cleopas, the other probably being his wife, were journeying home to Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along, "Jesus himself drew near and went with them". They did not recognise Him and poured all their sorrows out before Him. Then Luke tells us, "Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and

while He opened the Scriptures to us?" So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread" (Luke 24:28-35).

Such was the joy of these two disciples that, whereas only a little while ago they had been full of sadness and probably weary with their journey, they were now ready, even at that late hour, to walk those seven miles back to Jerusalem to share the good news of Jesus' resurrection with the rest of His disciples. On this Easter Day, let us realise that same joy in knowing Jesus as our risen Lord and Saviour!

The third resurrection appearance that I want us to look at this morning is the Lord's appearance to Peter. Some scholars believe that Mark was greatly influenced by Peter in writing his Gospel. It is interesting that it is in this Gospel that we find that the women who came early to the empty tomb were told, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go and tell His disciples – and Peter – that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you" (Mark 16:6-7). As we read earlier, the two on the road to Emmaus clearly knew that Jesus had already appeared to Peter. In the list of resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas (or Peter), then by the twelve" (verses 3-5).

It is interesting that, in this list, the appearance to Peter is mentioned first. Scripture does not give us the details of this meeting. It was probably a very private matter. Peter was the disciple who, while Jesus was on trial for His life, was busy denying that He ever knew Jesus. After the third denial, we read, "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the words of the Lord, how He had said to Him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Then Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61 and 62).

Could there ever be any hope for such a failed disciple? The Easter message is a resounding "Yes". No doubt, Peter would have confessed his sin with even yet more tears but, there and then, he experienced the Lord's forgiveness. It was Peter's fellow disciple, John, who, years later, wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). So real and deep was that forgiveness, and so great was Peter's restoration that, just a few weeks later, Peter was able to charge the Jews in Jerusalem, "But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:14 and 15).

Listener, are you living a defeated, despondent life because you feel you've let the Lord down? Now is the time to turn to Him, confessing your sins and experience His forgiveness. So He will empower you to serve Him once again.

So yes, the Easter message is about both death and resurrection. It is about new life – about Jesus' new resurrection life and about that new life that He gives to us as we accept His death at Calvary as the only way in which God could forgive our sins and as we accept Him as our Saviour and Lord.

We close with the words of the Easter hymn,

*Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb!  
Lovingly He greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,  
For her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.*

*No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of life;  
Life is nought without Thee: aid us in our strife;  
Make us more than conquerors, through Thy deathless love:  
Bring us safe through Jordan to Thy home above.*

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won!*

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