

Talks – Easter – myfishbites.com

Introduction

So here we go with another Easter session / talk – but this is more than an Easter session. It addresses many issues of holiness, shining with the light of Christ, the faith of women, Christ opening our minds to the Bible, living in the full life of Christ and more commentary and points from the Road to Emmaus story in Luke 24.

Here to make us think, challenge, encourage..

Images

Why not get a selection of Cross or Easter images from around the web and create a presentation or video with an Easter song.

Other Video Clips

Maybe show something from Jesus Video, Jesus of Nazareth, The Passion (if can find a bit to show). Or plenty of other online content may inspire you!

Some Suggested Easter Songs

- Forever (Moon and stars they wept) – Kari Jobe
- Living Hope – Phil Wickham and Brian Johnson
- O Praise The Name (Anastasis) – Hillsong
- How Deep the Father's love for us – Stuart Townend
- As Angels Looked On (Matt Redman)
- When I Survey the Wondrous Cross (Chris Tomlin version)
- You Led Me To The Cross (Matt Redman)
- You chose the Cross / Lost in Wonder (Martyn Layzell)
- O Happy Day – Tim Hughes

Easter Questions

(No answers offered for these, sorry, not without financial payment (haha!). Some are rhetorical, others need thinking about and maybe some personal research..)

1. Who rolled the stone away?
2. Why was the stone rolled away? (I mean, was Jesus unable to get out without this happening?)
3. What did Jesus do after the tomb was sealed?
4. Why was the Easter 'episode' 3 days? Was it 3 days? If so, when did it begin (Thursday?)
5. When the whole land went dark, what does this mean? What happened, what was it like?
6. How long was Jesus 'dead' for, before he rose again? (Take a look at Matthew 27.2 – does this help or not?)

Easter Eggs

Get a whole bunch of Easter eggs for the group. If you are loaded with wadges of cash then buy them a nice big ol chocolate egg each. If you're an averagely off person then Cadburys Creme Eggs do the trick. If you are less well off then get Cadburys Mini Eggs. If you are completely and totally non rich in a financial type way, then draw a picture of an egg and show the students what you're not going to get them..

The purpose of giving out Easter eggs? Well, placate noisy students, pacify others, feed others. But also there are spiritual principles involved around new life. Don't worry, there aren't any strange objects going to grow out of the eggs (unless they're very out of date). The principle is real though. Before you give out the eggs encourage students to think and thank..

- Thank God for what he did, thank Jesus.
- Thank God that we can have new life, that we have food to eat, thank God for anything you can think of.
- Ask God to change / bring new life for one or more of your friends or family.
- Think about how you can give money, time to those less fortunate. Maybe sign something and make a pledge.
- Consider asking everyone to donate money equivalent to the price of an easter egg and give to a needy cause.

Bible verses – some from...

Matthew 27.45-61

Matthew 28

Luke 24.1-12

Luke 24.36-53

A Challenge

Easter is a key time in the Christian calendar. But it's strange..

In my local town there is an Easter day service and sometimes there is a Passion of the Christ march / performance. One year on the march of witness through the city high streets, many people commented how miserable the Christian walkers were! Meanwhile other Christians were in churches in Easter services while the world around was out shopping!

This Easter, I'd challenge you to start to think outside of the box we call church services. There is a world dying out there, a world that does not know Easter relates to Jesus, a world that is unaffected by the Christian message. You know, many travellers into Heathrow (including me) find return to the UK as a heavy, oppressive and depressing experience. Many call this 'unbelief' and that's what it is.

This Easter, as we look to the Cross, we see the passion and the sacrifice of Jesus for people like you, me and the people around us. Let's make sure these guys actually hear the message, see the transformed lives of Christians and hear things relevantly!

The Pre-Talk

First up, when we read the Easter story, let's make sure we read at least Matthew and Luke, to help us get a more complete picture. Both passages have different angles and information about the same story. Reading from 2 Gospels is like taking a picture from front and behind, you get a far better perspective.

Jesus Dies – then rises

We read some amazing stuff in Matthew 27 about the immediate aftermath of the death of Jesus. Listen again – the curtain in the Temple was torn apart (separating God from man) – the earth shook and rocks broke apart (sign of things to come?).

After Jesus was raised to life – graves were opened and many of God's people were raised from the dead and appeared to many people in Jerusalem (a proof, evidence of the truth about Jesus, the Kingdom of God and that one day we who Christ knows as his own people will be raised into eternal life with Jesus).

We see some key points from this. First, Jesus has great power. In his death and resurrection, extraordinary things happened. Second, where Jesus is rejected and disrespected, where his people are tortured and killed, there is a physical result as well as a spiritual result. Where God is hated and his people killed, there will be physical consequences to the earth, to nations.

But there will also be a reverse effect in the miraculous, the power of God. We see this with persecution. With persecution, the Kingdom of God invariably increases in number and power. In the Easter story, we see that an earthquake when Jesus died made the soldiers guarding Jesus almost make a profession of faith – 'Surely this was the Son of God.'

Finally we also have a hope, a truth. We will one day be raised to life, as Jesus promised, as the Word of God promises (Romans 8.11 and 2 Corinthians 4.14). There is a future, there is a hope and the future is bright. The future is Christ! Christ rose from the dead. As he did, so did some of his people on earth (presumably those who'd recently died? We don't know). But it's a sneak preview of the return of the resurrected Christ in power.

If we move the story on to Matthew 28, we read again in verse 2 that there was a strong earthquake. This has been 3 days of some exceptional weather and environmental interest and people are probably beginning to get a bit freaked out. But again, we see something of the demonstration of God's power.

The Ladies

In experiments, it has been shown that females are generally more resistant to pain. The average bloke thinks he's got the plague when he looks at his finger and it's a bit red. OK, exaggeration. But let's look at Matthew 28 and Luke 24. Who were the first people to go to the tomb? The women. OK, so maybe it was part of their culture and tradition. But nevertheless, they went. They took action. And they were the first to get the good news about Jesus and see Jesus to worship him. (Matthew 27.9) We also find that both the angel and then Jesus himself gave the women gentle and graceful words that would have set their minds at rest and at peace, with no doubt masses of happy feelings too. I also find it

amusing that Jesus said to the women just the word, 'Greetings!' In modern speak he'd say, 'How's it going?!' I wonder if Jesus popped out from behind a rock for a laugh.. I would have done! But seriously, Jesus said 'don't be afraid'. He's saying the same to us today.

I also like Luke 24.11 – the disciples did not believe the women because it “sounded like nonsense” (Youth Bible). That makes me laugh. First of all, the disciples couldn't believe what they were hearing, it would have been hard to comprehend. But there's another angle to all this – one for ladies and gents.. Was it that the disciples couldn't understand because like typical men, they weren't really listening and couldn't take in more than one thing at a time..? Or was it that the women were making such a babbling noise, the disciples couldn't get a word in edgeways.. There's a sketch in this somewhere...

The Shining

I noticed something incredible from the 2 Gospels – namely that we get another picture of an Angel. We find someone who is shining as bright as lightning and whose clothes were shining as white as snow. Sounds a bit like Lord Of The Rings!

One night in our youth work we had a powerful heavenly light show with some forked lightning right above our church. The power was incredible. We turned the electrics off before a couple of the lads ran outside, one of them looking up and shouting at the lightning, 'choose me'. Yes....

When the Angel of the Lord appears, the women are frightened and the soldiers are so petrified they are like dead people. Now that is serious fear! This is getting God in his right perspective (and this was only an angel!)

Imagine the brightness of the Angel and that was someone in the employment of God. God's holiness is not something we can look at because of our sinfulness. God can only look at us through the blood of Jesus which cleanses us (we should keep confessing sin and wrong stuff remember!)

But this is a picture of holiness and a challenge for us. In the Psalms, David prayed to God that he would make him whiter than the snow (Psalm 51.7) David did this in light of his awareness of his own sin and need to be cleansed by God. We should see ourselves in the same way as we all mess up. We don't reject ourselves and hate ourselves but get ourselves in the right perspective.

Let me explain.. If the light is off, you can't see yourself in a mirror. If you turn on a candle, you see a bit more of yourself in a mirror. If you turn the light on, you can see yourself properly. If God's Word is our mirror, let's make sure we get into the light so we see ourselves in true light – but then ask God to help us, clean us, change us to be more holy.

One day it may be you in those white clothes, shining to reflect the glory and holiness of God.

Looking for the living among the dead

This was the question the 2 angels posed to the women as they found the empty tomb. We find that the women were in search of Jesus. They continued their search and went into

the tomb but found nothing. They were perplexed and no doubt in a state of shock and confusion. What was going on? Had the body been stolen, who'd stolen it?

Why do we still do this? Why do too many Christians worship in a dead way? Why don't we worship the risen Jesus?

I've been to churches where death is written over the faces of the people and those leading it. It's a miserable experience. No life, no vision, no excitement. No wonder people don't go to church..

Our response to the resurrection of Jesus is very clear. Worship, praise, spreading the message. The women took hold of the feet of Jesus, bowing at his feet (Matt 28.9), the disciples went and worshipped Jesus on the mountain (Matt 28.17), Peter ran to the tomb to find his master (Luke 24.12), Jesus revealed himself on the road to Emmaus and talked, walked alongside the disciples and gave them new understanding (Luke 24.13+), Jesus appeared and told the disciples to go make followers, baptising them in the power of the Holy Spirit, to go make disciples, to follow his teachings, to obey and honour him.

Even the soldiers went and told the priests what had happened (Matt 28.11)! The news about Jesus is an active news, a living gospel, a shining light in the darkness. It is a message of hope, of change and of action. It is the message of truth, of life.

Christ opened their minds so they could understand

We find this in 3 places throughout the Easter story and I want to look briefly at each of the 3 incidents..

1. The role of the angel. This is minimal, but as a servant of God, the angel was able to explain the happenings of Easter on a human and basic level. The angel pointed out that Christ was not dead but had risen, just as the Scriptures said he would. The angel reminded the women at the tomb what Jesus had said in Galilee about being handed over to be killed but that he would rise again on the third day. But this was a basic reminder of what Jesus said (and a challenge to us to know Jesus and his Word in this way..)

2. Jesus on the Road to Emmaus. I love this because Jesus walked and talked with the 2 disciples. What a picture of Jesus walking alongside us, sharing our journey, hanging out with us. If you're a youth worker, this is an encouragement as we see a picture of Jesus chilling with friends (students) but also mentoring and guiding them as they walked and talked. What an awesome and humbling image of both Jesus – and our role as youth workers. Jesus didn't tell the 2 disciples, 'Oy! You're going the wrong way... this way you fools..' He gently and lovingly guided them and opened up the Bible to them. They knew they'd been with Jesus. But only when Jesus had broken bread (had communion) with them were they allowed, did they, recognise him as Jesus. What an exciting feeling. But a challenge, let's not miss Jesus in life, in what we're doing, waster time doing the wrong things. Let's make Jesus a part of our everyday lives. Let's also not be like the pharisees who knew all the answers, all the lingo and all the rules – but never knew Jesus. Let's have churches, students of God who know Jesus, hear his voice and obey his call on their lives.

3. Jesus then appeared to all the followers. We read in Luke 24.25, 'Then Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.' You see, it's not enough this Easter

just to know about Jesus. It's not enough to have heard the stories, know the Bible, know who Jesus is. It's more than that. Even if you have accepted Jesus in your life, the story doesn't end there, just as the story of Easter didn't end with Jesus dying and rising and returning to heaven. We need Jesus to show us his ways, to enlighten us, to guide us, lead us into truth.

If we don't know Jesus yet, we need to ask Jesus to open up his words and truth to us. If we know people who don't know Jesus, we need to pray that Jesus would open their minds to hear what he has to say and accept his truth. This is hard in this age where the evil one has blinded the minds of non-believers (2 Cor 4.4). But just as with many stories in the Bible (for example Daniel 10.12-14), we know that prayer can break through the evil one's plans as Jesus has already won the victory on the Cross.

4. A final point worth noting comes from Luke 24.30-31: When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. Now, while I find this amusing as I've said, there's a spiritual principle here – Jesus is with us but he knows when it's time for him to back off and let us stand on our own two faith feet..

Today, with Jesus in heaven, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to open our minds to God's Word the Bible and to what Jesus is saying to us. Only through the insight of the Spirit do we understand the Bible, understand the past, present and future. Only when we allow our minds to be increasingly open to Jesus can we walk into his will, his best for our lives.