

Why Easter Matters Session 4: Leader Guide

Session Four Overview:

Jesus' closest followers believed he was a teacher and a miracle worker from God. They had hoped he was the Messiah. But they were wrong. God would not allow his Messiah to be crucified. And they had watched Jesus die. They had followed Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who probably paid Pontius Pilate to get Jesus' body. They watched these two men hurriedly embalm Jesus' body and place it in a fresh tomb.

After Passover, they decided they'd try to get inside the tomb and take the time they didn't have earlier to properly prepare Jesus' body and, more important, to say their final goodbyes. This would be closure. It would be their way of closing the book on this chapter of their lives.

But Luke's Gospel tells us what happened next:

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. **Luke 24:2-3**

When Jesus' closest followers peered into the empty tomb, not a single one of them assumed a resurrection. When Mary and the group of women peered into that empty tomb, they assumed exactly what we would assume: Someone had stolen the body.

John's Gospel says:

So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"
John 20:2

Luke says that the disciples were so skeptical because of how frantic and emotional the women were. They didn't believe them. If you acknowledge that Jesus was a historical

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person and you agree he taught some good things, but you think the resurrection part of the story is nonsense, you're in good company. Jesus' best friends felt the same way on the morning they discovered his body was gone. None of them assumed resurrection. Again, they assumed what everyone would: that Jesus would stay dead. But Peter and John were being told that Jesus' body had been taken from the tomb. They couldn't just sit there, so they headed for the tomb:

Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

John 20:4-10

Notice how they documented their own disbelief. These were not superstitious people. These were men and women who had given up hope. There was no dream to keep alive. There was no movement to keep moving.

They were hiding from the religious leaders in Jerusalem the evening after they discovered the empty tomb when Jesus paid them a visit. They were startled. They were frightened.

He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. **Luke 24:38-40**

And then he looked them in the eye and said something so extraordinarily important it would not only change their lives but human history.

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

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Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things, I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." **Luke 24:44-49**

The disciples were witnesses to the event that changed the world. They were witnesses to the event that launched the church. They were witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

The church didn't create the Bible. The church didn't create the story of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus launched the church and created our faith. Before the resurrection, there were no Christians. After Jesus was crucified, there were no believers. His followers gave up hope. Hope didn't return until they saw Jesus alive with their own eyes.

The reason we believe Jesus rose from the dead isn't because the Bible tells us so. It's because of the testimony of Jesus' closest followers. We believe Jesus rose from the dead because skeptical eyewitnesses wrote down the extraordinary event they had watched.

Peter, who peered dumbfounded into the empty tomb, later dictated these words:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... **1 Peter 1:3**

If you could ask Peter what the foundation of his faith was, he wouldn't say Jesus' teachings. He would say the resurrection, by dying on the cross for our sin, Jesus paved the way for us to have a relationship with God—a relationship described as that between a perfect father and a child.

Session Four Discussion Questions:

1. What are you looking forward to during this Easter season? Why?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you struggle with the question of why a good God would allow bad things to happen to good people? Has Jesus' resurrection changed your perspective on that question at all? Why or why not?
3. In the video teaching, Andy said, "It wasn't the teachings of Jesus that convinced Peter and the others. It was the resurrection of Jesus that completely reframed their lives." Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Is the implausibility of the resurrection a stumbling block in your faith or has it been in the past? If so, does it help to know Jesus' own disciples weren't expecting Him to rise from the dead?
5. What can you do this Easter to remind yourself that God intervened in human history in order to rescue you?
6. God loves you so much, He sent His only Son to die in order to set you free from sin and to adopt you as a child into His family. How does that change your perspective on faith? How does it change your perspective on life?