

Don't Wait Till You Die to Celebrate Easter

1. Warm-up question: Tell us something good or bad (large or small) that has happened to you this week.
2. If asked the primary meaning of Easter, most of us would say something like, “By rising from the grave, Jesus conquered death and showed us that the grave is not the end. Like Christ, we too will rise.” But that’s not the only meaning of Easter. Easter is not just about what happens when we die, it’s also about how we live. To deepen our understanding of that aspect of Easter, this week we’re exploring an often overlooked Biblical Easter passage. Read John 20:19-25, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. On the first Easter morning, shortly before the events we just read about, Mary Magdalen encountered Jesus at the tomb, reported her experience to the other disciples, and “these words [of hers] seemed to them like an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” Luke 24:11. If you had been in that morning meeting, hearing Mary tell about seeing Jesus, how do you think you would have reacted?
 - b. In the passage we just read, we’re told that on Easter evening the disciples were meeting behind lock doors “for fear of the Jews,” yet despite their fear they were still meeting together rather than disbanding and fleeing. What does this tell us about their emotional and psychological state at the time?
 - c. If you had been there in the evening meeting when Jesus appeared, how do you think you would have reacted? What might you have been thinking and feeling in that moment?
3. After greeting the disciples, Jesus shared a few brief comments, then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” indicating that this was the critical outflow from his resurrection and the vital next step. That raises the question, what does it mean to “receive the Holy Spirit?” The Old Testament word for the “Holy Spirit” is *ruwach* (pronounced ROO-akh) which literally means wind or breath. The wind is something powerful that we can feel and experience, but cannot see. Breathe is also something we cannot see, but it dwells in us and gives us life. It’s our life force.
 - a. So if the Holy Spirit is like wind and breath, what does that tell us about the Holy Spirit?
 - b. Jeff summed it up this way: “The very life force of God – the same life force that animated Jesus and the same force that raised him from the dead – is available to dwell within each of us.” In other words, in our everyday life we potentially have access to the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. What are your thoughts about that? Do you believe it? If so, what are the implications for us?
 - c. But there’s a catch. To access the power of the Spirit, we’ve got to “receive” it. Receiving it means believing it. By faith, each of us must confess that we have

the very presence and power of God inside of us, then begin practicing using that power. Because you can't use something you don't even realize you have. Jeff gave an example of something he thought he could never do (caulking) because he had convinced himself that he couldn't. He told how empowered he felt when he finally tried and realized he could do it. Have you ever had a similar experience of discovering you could do something you never thought you could?

- d. In John 14:12, Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these. . . ." Then in today's passage, he tells his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." In other words, the world should see in us the same resurrection power once seen in the life and death of Jesus. Do you feel that people see that kind of power manifest in your life? Why or why not?
4. On Sunday Jeff suggested three key characteristics of people who are living with resurrection power. First, living with resurrection power means, for those who believe, **no defeat is ever final**. After all, that's the most basic pattern of our Christian faith. Jesus went down in flames, so to speak. From a human perspective, he failed, lost everything and got executed, but through the power of the Spirit – the ROO-akh of God – he was raised back up again. He came back from the grave. That is *the* most basic pattern of our faith. We who follow Jesus ought to be the most unbeatable people in the world.
 - a. When in your life has the unseen power of God in you, i.e., the Holy Spirit, given you the power to press forward despite bruising defeat?
 - b. Where in your life right now is God calling you to refuse to yield to defeat?
 5. Second, living with resurrection power means, for those who believe, **no tragedy is ever insurmountable**. What's the greatest tragedy you've ever had to surmount in life? Did you consciously draw on the power of the invisible presence of God within you in that experience?
 6. Third, living with resurrection power means, for those who believe, **not even death itself can prevail over us**.
 - a. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, they will live." John 11:25. What do you think that means?
 - b. Jeff quoted a Southern Gospel song that says, "Somethin's gonna get me, but nothin's gonna get me down." What do you think that means? Do you feel you're living with that same kind of defiantly positive faith-based attitude?
 - c. Have you ever watched somebody walk through the valley of the shadow of death triumphantly? What did that look like? Can you imagine yourself doing that some day?

John 20:19-25

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'