

Easter, The Cast of Characters

Unlikely Believers

World Outreach Church
Sermon Discussion Guide
Easter Sunday Sermon: **March 31, 2024**



The challenge of Easter is we know the story and the cast of characters involved with the events surrounding Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. But as we dig deeper, we see the most unlikely characters are the ones who become believers in Jesus and come to understand Him as a risen Lord. On the other hand, there were many we may have expected to follow Jesus who instead chose to withdraw from the arena. It's helpful to examine the lives of the people in the Easter story because God is still calling a people to Himself—a people who will believe in Him and acknowledge the truth about Jesus of Nazareth. Considering that, let's look at Deuteronomy 26:8:

*The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,
with great terror and with signs and wonders.*

When God moves in the earth, He consistently does so with “a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.” For those who oppose Him, there is “great terror.” But for those who are looking for His activity, there will be miraculous “signs and wonders”—God intervening with His power and might. Church, our goal is not to convene another Bible study. Our generation desperately needs expressions of the power of God, and that recognition, desire, and expectation *must* begin in the hearts of God's people. It is time for us to determine the alignment of our lives.

- 1. What are some practical ways you honor the Lord every day? How can you use your Jesus-story to encourage others to do the same?**

THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH

Matthew 27:27–31

²⁷ Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

- 2. How has your faith influenced your decision-making in the past? What invitations do you think the Lord has in front of you today?**

ALMIGHTY GOD

Matthew 27:50–66

⁵⁰ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. ⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. ⁵² The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

⁵⁴ **When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”**

⁵⁵ Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.

⁵⁶ Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

⁵⁷ As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. ⁵⁹ Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, ⁶⁰ and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

⁶² The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³ “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’” ⁶⁴ So give the order for the

tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”

⁶⁵ “Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” ⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

Pastor Allen shared Hebrews 12:26-27, which says:

²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”²⁷ The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

3. What “shakings” or spiritual “birth pains” are you witnessing in the world today?

THE RESURRECTION

Matthew 28:1–10

¹ After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone, and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ **The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.**

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

4. What does “He is Risen” mean to you? How has this truth impacted your life?

THE “MISINFORMATION” — A BATTLE FOR THE TRUTH

Matthew 28:11–15

¹¹ While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² **When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ ¹⁴ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”** ¹⁵ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

5. What would it look like if we became a community of truth-tellers? What would be the blessings and the consequences? How would it change your life?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, forgive me for all the times I have resisted You. Thank You for Your great love and the mercy You have shown. I want to honor You with my life, to honor Jesus in my life — in everything I do. Forgive me of my sins. I forgive all those who have sinned against me. Today is a new beginning, a new life for me. Jesus, be Lord in me and through me each day. I thank You for my freedom. In Jesus’ name, amen.