

## Easter = Change

03/31/24

As we celebrate Easter today, we usually don't tie in the word "change" with Easter. Easter Day itself hasn't changed that much from when we were small children. They still make the marshmallow peeps and Hershey still makes the Reese's peanut butter egg which are the greatest thing since sliced bread. We still have Easter egg hunts. We still try to visit our families on Easter Sunday. Many places still close on Easter Sundays. Many parts of Easter that we enjoy haven't changed over the years. However, Easter is all about change and this is what we're going to be looking at today.

Let's turn first to Matthew 13:55 where we read this, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? (ESV, 974)" This piece of Scripture takes place in the small town of Nazareth. Jesus had come back and taught at the local synagogue and the local people had a hard time believing in Jesus as the Son of God. They knew Him as the brother of James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. In fact, this is the first place we hear the name of James. We've been talking about James for the past few weeks. James is the half brother of Jesus. Mary had given birth to Jesus, but it was through the Holy Spirit and not Joseph the human father. So, the question we have to ask is how did James view his half brother Jesus?

Let's now turn to John 7: 2 – 5 where we read this, "Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.' For not even his brothers believed in him. (ESV, 1061)" So, now we see the type of relationship Jesus had with His brothers. James and his brothers only saw Jesus as a regular human being. They didn't see anything special in this Jesus. We don't know much about Jesus' childhood. We know that Jesus was wise beyond His years because of the Temple event in which His parents had found Jesus discussing Scripture with Jewish teachers. It appears Jesus' brothers may have taken a negative view of Jesus being a Rabbi since they mock Him in this piece of Scripture in John's Gospel. They don't believe that Jesus is who He says He is – the

Son of God and this includes James. Let's look at another piece of Scripture about James.

Paul gives us a small account of the Resurrection of Jesus where He mentions James in 1 Corinthians 15: 3 – 8 and we read this, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (ESV, 1142)" Now, Paul gives us an account of Jesus' activities after His Resurrection on Easter morning. Tradition has it that this James Paul talks about is the half brother of Jesus. There is a good chance that James was a witness to seeing Jesus' death since Jesus' mother was there (see John 19: 25). So, Jesus makes sure that He visits James personally after His Resurrection and before His ascension into Heaven. He visits a half brother who had mocked Him earlier. We don't know what happened during this visit. Maybe it was like the visit Jesus had with Peter after His Resurrection, who had denied Him before He went to the cross. Maybe Jesus was trying to get James on the right path like He did with Peter.

Then we read this about James in Acts 15: 13, "When they had finished, James stood up and said, 'Brothers, listen to me. Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. (NLT, 1728)" Paul had gone to Jerusalem to solve a problem that arose with the Gentile Church about following Jewish customs. Paul, who was the leader of the Gentile Churches, came to Jerusalem to talk to the elders of the Church and James is the head leader for the Church in Jerusalem. James makes a decision on how to handle the problem. This is the same man who we had read earlier that had mocked Jesus. This is the same man who grew up beside Jesus. This was the same man that Jesus singled out after His Resurrection to talk to. What caused James to change to racially? We had talked about this a few weeks ago where James starts his letter to the Church in this fashion, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. (ESV)" James no longer treats Jesus as a family member. He now sees Jesus as the Son of God. This is a racial change. James had become a



new person. We don't have James' testimony, but we do have the testimony of Paul who was touched by Jesus in the same way. Paul gives an example of his testimony in Acts 22: 3 – 10, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And I answered, 'Who are you Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, 'What shall I do Lord?' And the Lord said to me, Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do. (ESV, 1107)" Paul, like James, didn't first believe in Jesus. Paul took it a step further and he personally went after those who followed the Way to put them in prison. Both were guilty for their crimes against Jesus. We don't know what happened to James when Jesus met him along a road, but we do know what happened to Paul because Paul records it here as his testimony. What we do know is that both James and Paul were radically changed because of their meeting with Jesus. In James letter, James calls Jesus Lord and Paul does the same during his talk with Jesus along the Damascus road. Both men were changed during their encounter with Jesus and both became leaders in the New Testament Church. Not everyone who encounters Jesus will become a leader in a Church, but they will become a new person – they are changed. Easter is all about change. When we meet the Risen Savior and we allow Him into our hard hearts, He changes us radically or we can say changed into a new person. I remember a Pastor of a church tell me one time of a young man that allowed Jesus into their heart during a service. The Pastor told me that when that young man came into church the next Sunday, no one recognized him. He was now clean shaven, had a new hair style, and was dressed different. In other words, this young man was changed inside and then outside. This is only possible because Jesus died on the cross and His Spirit can change anyone's life. So, because of Easter, James and

Paul were able to become new a person through Jesus. This is why we celebrate Easter. We celebrate the “change” that happens when we hear that knock on our heart’s door and we then allow Him in. However, it goes deeper than that.

We have to realize the horrible cost that Jesus had to pay so that we can enjoy becoming changed from within. Jesus had to die on the cross because He had to become a sacrifice for our sin. His blood had to be shed. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel sacrificed animals to receive forgiveness for their sins, but there was no change. The people had to continue to sacrifice animals every year at the Temple. Then Jesus came and allowed Himself to take the place of the animals so we can enjoy having His Spirit to live within us when we allow Jesus into our hearts. We don’t need to sacrifice animals anymore. If we sin, we can go straight to the One who was our sacrifice. James and Paul knew what kind of persons they were before Jesus touched their lives or before they were changed. They knew what Jesus’ blood that was shed on the cross did for them. Paul makes this statement in Colossians 1: 19 – 20, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross. (ESV, 1168)” This peace that Paul is talking about is the peace we find when the blood of Jesus washes all our past sin away and we can now have a true relationship with our Heavenly Father. We get to enjoy fullness in God because our past sins have been washed away through His blood. His blood completely changes our relationship with God. Paul adds onto this in Ephesians 1: 7, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (ESV, 1159)” In other words, we are saved through His blood because of the forgiveness of our sins and because of this; we gain wisdom and insight in knowing His Will for us. The Lord wants to save us from our sins. The Lord wants to make us anew. The Lord wants to change us so we can live in freedom from the grip of sin. The blood that was shed on the cross can make this change possible. There is no other way. Easter gives us time to think about His blood shed on the cross and how Jesus can change our whole life for the better. How thankful we should be this morning for Easter. How thankful we should be for the gift of salvation.

*ESV Holy Bible. Crossway: Wheaton, 2001.*