

# What Do You Want for Easter?

By Phil Brainerd

Presented to Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ

On Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

## Introduction



Holidays are funny things. You may not realize it, but there are two sides to almost every holiday. The first side is an event or an idea. Someone decides to celebrate the event or the idea. The second part is traditions that grow up around the celebration.

For example: How about the Fourth of July? Way back in 1776 on July 4<sup>th</sup>, the founding fathers of America signed the Declaration of Independence. We decided to have a holiday to remember that event. Since that time, we've developed all kinds of traditions like parades and fireworks.

There's always a danger with traditions. If you're not careful, the traditions can overwhelm the event. In fact, we sometimes find ourselves wondering where the traditions came from.

Easter is a good example of this. On the one hand, there is the event. Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world and then three days later, he rose from the dead. That was a monumental, history-changing event. That's why Christians all over the world celebrate.

Then, there is the Easter Bunny and there are Easter Eggs. You could say that there are two separate concepts: "Resurrection Day", and "Easter".

Those who have any contact with the Christian Church understand why we have celebrations on Resurrection Day. But, where did the Easter Bunny come from? For that matter, why does the Easter Bunny bring eggs? We think we know the answers, but those are long stories for another day. For now, I want to focus today on this problem of a disconnect. The traditions of a holiday sometimes overwhelm the event that started the holiday. In particular, we'll focus on the disconnect with Resurrection Day and Easter. For me this was personal. I grew up in a home that was non-religious. We went to church when I was very young, but somewhere along the way, we had some kind of falling out.



By the time I was 5 years old, we stopped attending any church. But we still liked the holidays and the traditions. So, we celebrated Easter - We just didn't hear anything about the Resurrection. Instead, we heard a lot about the Easter Bunny and Easter Eggs. And in particular, we always looked forward to an Easter basket.

Ah yes, the Easter basket. That brings back fond caloric memories! When I was young, an Easter basket would have mostly candy - A chocolate bunny, some other kinds of chocolate, jellybeans, and maybe a marshmallow chick.

Now, what I find interesting about holiday traditions is the way they grow. We're used to this at Christmas time. Christmas started as a celebration of the Advent, or the birth of Jesus. Somewhere along the way, we started seeing Santa Claus. I usually talk about Santa at Christmas, but he's another long story, so come back then to learn more. For now, we're concentrating on this idea that holiday traditions can overwhelm a holiday.

Santa got associated with gifts. So, someone in a department store a long time ago got the idea that you could dress someone up as Santa, and kids could come and visit. You know the drill: Santa asks, "What do you want for Christmas?" Parents listen in. If a child says they want a new baseball glove, then Mom or Dad comes back later, and they buy a baseball glove. The same for sleds or toys or dolls, whatever. So, parents get a heartwarming picture of their kids with Santa, and they don't have to guess what their kids want for Christmas. The store owners sell more gifts during the holiday season. This is thought to be a "win-win".

Except, in all of this, some people forget why we celebrate Christmas.

I've noticed that the same thing appears to be happening with Easter and the Easter bunny. I was walking through a shopping mall a little while ago and we saw a big colorful chair surrounded by giant, colorful eggs. My friends asked, "What's that?" We looked at the sign and it said, "The Easter Bunny is coming". So now, the Easter Bunny gets a big display with a throne. Parents bring their kids for a picture.

As it turns out, some Easter baskets are getting a little complex. They used to just have candy. Now, better Easter baskets are expected to have some gifts. Maybe the Easter Bunny can ask kids, "What do you want in your Easter Basket?" "What do you want for Easter?" So, Easter is starting to look a lot like Christmas.

Now, if you gave your kids an Easter basket, don't feel guilty. There's nothing wrong with having some special treats on a holiday. But, let's ask, *"Is there a way to make sure we connect to the reason for the holiday of Easter - The real reason? Is there a way to remember Resurrection Day in the way it should be observed?"*

Actually, the answer may start in that Easter basket.

Sometimes when child psychologists work with children, they ask questions like, “If you could have anything you want, what would it be?” This is called “Values Clarification”. Since it’s Easter, let’s rephrase the question slightly: “What do you want in your basket? If it could be anything – what would you want for Easter?”

Some kids will answer in the traditional way. They want a chocolate bunny or something like that. But sometimes, kids have a funny way of being more aware than we might expect. Sometimes the kids sit in the corner and listen as the adults watch TV. They see a riot taking place somewhere. So, when they’re asked what they want, they might say: “I want people to stop fighting - I want everybody to be happy.” Maybe they hear Mommy and Daddy talking about paying the bills. A lot of people are concerned about that. So, if you ask those kids what they want, they say: “I don’t want anybody to be worried.” Maybe they hear about terrible diseases? So, perhaps they say: “I want to live somewhere where nobody gets sick.” Or, maybe they really get to the point: “I don’t want anybody to die.”

Those children are stating from their hearts what we all feel. These are the longings of the human heart.

- We don’t want to feel pain.
- We want peace.
- We don’t want to be afraid of the unknown.
- We don’t want to be alone.
  - Instead, we want to be loved.

And this is where we leave the traditions of Easter. We leave the traditions of the holiday of Easter and get back to Resurrection Day - The day when we remember who Jesus is and what he did for us. Because on this day we learn that God is aware of our fears and our deepest longings - And he’s done something about them.

Let’s read. Centuries ago, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to some of his friends in the city of Corinth in ancient Greece: Here’s what he said:

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. (I Corinthians 15:1-2)

On Resurrection Sunday, we celebrate the Gospel. “Gospel” is a word that means, “Good News.” The writer, the Apostle Paul, says that he’s speaking to a group of people who took their stand on the Gospel. He says that the gospel saves people. How does that work? Let’s read more:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time... (1 Corinthians 15:3-6)

Let's break this apart. It says here that Christ died. Why? Christ died for our sins.

We have a problem of sin. Sin is disobedience to God. And, we have all sinned – no one escapes this. In another place, Paul said these things: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... (Romans 3:23)” Then he says: “For the wages of sin is death... (Romans 6:23)”

We have all sinned. And sin has a wage, a price – death! Because we have all sinned, we all deserve to die for our sins - We deserve to be punished.

But Jesus Christ loves us and doesn't want that for us. So, he died for our sins. Because he died for our sins, we don't have to die. He was punished for our sins, so we don't have to be punished.

But that wasn't the end of the story. Jesus died, we're told, according to the Scriptures. There are hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament of the Bible predicting things about the Messiah, Jesus Christ. They were all written centuries before Jesus lived. Some of those prophecies concerned his death and resurrection. Let's read one of them:

9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;  
my body also will rest secure,  
10 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,  
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.  
(Psalm 16:9-10)

This prophecy says the Messiah won't be allowed to die and be left in the grave - the “realm of the dead”. So, he must rise again. And that's exactly what Jesus Christ did, and many other things, according to the Scripture. That's why he was buried and was raised.

You might ask, “Why did Jesus have to be buried? Wouldn't it be enough for Jesus to sort of nod off and then come back?” This is where the witnesses come in. Witnesses saw Jesus die. They saw him buried. The government was worried that someone might try to steal his body and pull off a stunt, so they sealed the tomb and posted guards. Three days later, witnesses saw that tomb opened. Witnesses saw Jesus walking around. In the end, more than 500 people who knew Jesus saw him return from the grave.

So, Jesus died for our sins. He died to save us. This brings up a big question: ***What do we need to do to take advantage of this?*** That was a question that a man once asked of Paul. Here's how that went:

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They (Paul and his friends) replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...” (Acts 16:30-31)

What do you have to do to be saved from your sins? What do you have to do to take advantage of the sacrifice that Jesus made for you? You only have to believe. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

Maybe you're like me growing up. You heard about Easter, but all you heard about were Easter Bunnies and baskets. If that's the case, contact us. Let us tell you how you can be saved from your sins through faith in Jesus Christ. There will be some helpful links at the end of this article.

If you're not sure, let's dig deeper. The next question is: Why do you want to be saved? You want to be saved because, if you believe, you can have all the things we spoke about - The longings of the human heart. Let's look at those things.

First: You can live a life where you never fear death. Here's something else Paul said:

51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—  
52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

55 “Where, O death, is your victory?  
Where, O death, is your sting?”

(I Corinthians 15:51-56)

If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you can live a life where you never fear death. Death will have no “sting”.

Another thing that people fear is pain. It's not possible to live a life without pain. But, did you know that it's possible to live a life ***where you don't fear*** pain? Let's read about another episode in the life of the apostle Paul. He and his friends thought that this message of the Gospel was so important that they travelled the known world in their day to tell people about it. Many received the message with Joy. Those people formed the foundation of the early church. But sadly, some people didn't want to hear about it. Those people sometimes got violent. This happened in a town called “Lystra”.

Let's read:

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. (Acts 16:22-24)

A mob attacks Paul and his friend Silas. Then, Paul and Silas are beaten by Roman soldiers. I've read that some Roman soldiers were very skilled at causing pain and injury that didn't quite kill people. But, the victims of these beatings were scarred for life. Their skin showed it, and further, they might have bones broken. Paul and Silas received this kind of beating. After that, they were thrown into a cold prison and locked in chains.

How did they respond? Do they cry all night? Do they scream out in pain? Let's read and see what they did:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. (Acts 16:25)

After all that they went through, Paul and Silas were **praying** and **singing**. When they weren't praying and singing, they were telling their fellow prisoners about Jesus - And their fellow prisoners were listening.

What could do this in someone's life? What could make someone sing when they should be crying? Something very powerful: The gospel - The gospel can do that.

And there's more. The gospel gives us a vision of where we will go someday. There will be A new heaven and a new earth for those who follow Jesus. The Apostle John was given a vision of this. Here's what he said about it:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Revelation 21:1-4)

Because of what Jesus Christ did, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. In that place, there will be no loneliness. We're told that God himself will be there. No one who goes there will ever be alone again. In that place, there will be no sadness. It says, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes." If there is any recollection of sad things, it will be wiped away. The people who live in this glorious place will be filled with such visions of beauty that no one will ever be sad. Anything else that you could want will be there. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

It's a wonderful place. But, to be there someday, *you must choose to follow Jesus.*

Let's pull this all together.

## **Conclusion**

I grew up in a family that had Easter. We had Easter Bunnies, and Easter Baskets. However, we had no Jesus - No Jesus, no resurrection. We had all the candy we wanted. But we had no hope.

Now, if you like Easter baskets, that's fine. I like chocolate bunnies, too. But, what do you really want for Easter? Today, we've learned that you can have the things you deeply long for. Today, in our church, we celebrate Resurrection Day. We celebrate that our Lord Jesus died for our sins. He did just as the ancient prophecies in Scripture predicted. And he showed his power and authority by walking out of the tomb. Because of that, we can all enjoy new life. We can hear the answers all the desires of a child's heart. And when children grow into adults, the answers are still there.

Friends, there is a God in heaven - A God who sees your fears, your pains, and your deepest longings. He is good. He loves you. So, he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to help. You can find the answers to questions that the human race has been asking for centuries.

You only have to believe. Would you do that today? Let us share with you how you can know you'll walk in the new heaven and the new earth someday. Again, see the links at the end of this article.

Before we close, let me address another group of people. Maybe you've accepted all this. But somehow, you got off track. There's always time to get back on track. Again, let us tell you how.

Sometimes, the traditions of holidays have a way of overwhelming the event that started the holiday. I hope that today, we have re-connected for one of those days. I hope that today, everyone here will enjoy the hope and joy of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Happy Resurrection Day! May you find contentment, peace, and hope from our Lord, Jesus Christ.

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## Important Links

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Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ:

[TrinityTeaneck.org](http://TrinityTeaneck.org)

Phil Brainerd's web site:

[PhilBrainerd.com](http://PhilBrainerd.com)

To learn about how to start a new life with Jesus, with Billy Graham's helpful site:

[PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net)

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