

I. Introduction

A. Easter is the day when all around the world, Christians celebrate the most stupendous act of divine power ever recorded, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

1. He conquered death.
2. He conquered the grave.
3. He conquered every dark force in our lives.
4. He won for us, the tremendous gift of everlasting life.
5. So that right now, today, Jesus Christ is alive. And we are going to see him someday, and be with him forever.

B. My topic today is:

1. **The Easter Facts and the Easter Faith.**
2. And I do want to give you a heads up. At the end of my talk, I want to do something interactive. I'm going to invite you to do something more than just to listen to a message. I'm actually going to invite you to make a choice about the message you hear. I'll explain as we go.
3. I'm not going to embarrass you or single you out. I promise it won't be weird. But here we go.
4. Let's start with the Easter facts.

II. The Easter Facts

A. After Jesus died, he was taken down from the Cross, wrapped in linen cloths, and laid in a rich man's tomb, in a cave. A large stone was rolled in front of the tomb. The Roman authorities placed a guard outside that tomb, and sealed the stone with the Roman insignia.

B. After he was buried, all his followers gather in a large room called the Upper Room.

C. They're all depressed.

1. I can't live without him.
2. I thought he was for real, and he died.
3. I don't know what I'll do without him.
 - a) Fast forward to Sunday Morning, the third day.

D. Mary

1. On that day, Mary, not the mother of Jesus, but another Mary, has some spices. She wants to go anoint the body of Jesus. That's what they did back then.
2. She gets to the tomb, and the guards are gone, the seal is broken, the stone is rolled away, and the tomb is empty.

3. She runs and finds Peter and John, drags them to the tomb, they look inside and reach a brilliant conclusion: the tomb is empty.
 - a) Mary says, "I told you! I told you!"
 4. What does this mean? They don't know.
 5. Peter and John run off, and Mary falls to her knees weeping.
 6. Suddenly a man is standing beside her. Mary figures he's the gardener.
 7. "Please, sir, can you tell me where they put Jesus."
 8. The man says, "Mary! Mary."
 9. Immediately she realizes. "It's JESUS."
 10. She jumps up, wraps her arms around Jesus, and says, "YOU'RE ALIVE! YOU'RE ALIVE!"
 11. "Please let go, Mary, I have a very busy day... Go and tell the disciples I'm alive."
 12. So Jesus leaves.
- E. The Disciples
1. Mary races to the upper room, runs up the stairs, and knocks on the door.
 2. "Oh Mary. It's just you."
 3. "I've seen the Lord!" she says. "He's alive! I've seen the Lord."
 4. "Seen who?"
 5. "I've seen Jesus!"
 6. "Jesus who? Sit down, Mary! Boys, bring some wine!"
 7. Well, the story spreads like wildfire!
 8. Could it be? Could it really be true?
- F. Emmaus
1. Meanwhile two disciples, not the original twelve, give up on Jesus. They figure they'll head back to their home village, called Emmaus.
 2. A man appears and joins them.
 3. "Why are you looking so miserable?" the man asks.
 4. "Are you the only tourist in town who hasn't heard about Jesus?"
 5. The Man says, let me tell you about Jesus. And beginning with the first book in the Bible, called Genesis, he started teaching them everything the Bible said about the Savior of the world. He goes thru the five books of Law, and then the history, and the poetry and the prophets, and ends at Malachi.
 6. Did I tell you it was a 7 mile walk?

7. Well the little trio finally reaches Emmaus, and the man says, "I'll see you later."
8. They beg him to stay... "We live right around the corner, have some pasta with us." He says, "Pasta! Why didn't you say so!" They ask him to say grace. When he says grace, the Bible says it's as if the men's eyes were opened, and they realize it's Jesus! Jesus is alive!
9. One of the men jumps up, races back 7 miles to Jerusalem, flies up the stairs to the upper room, bursts in and yells,
10. "I've seen Jesus! I've seen Jesus!"
11. Mary jumps up... "I told you! I told you!"
12. The disciples start to believe, and a party ensues.

G. Thomas

1. Later on, one disciple who was out shopping, returns to a room full of commotion. Wine is flowing. Disco is playing. Disciples are dancing. A chicken is roasting on the spit. A good time is being had by all.
2. In walks this very confused disciple. His name is Thomas. "What's going on?" he asks.
3. Another disciple spits little gobs of hummus on his face as he tells Thomas, Jesus is alive! Mary saw him, and the women saw him, and Peter saw him! And men from Emmaus saw him. Thomas, isn't that good news?
4. Thomas says, "Not so fast. I don't believe it. It's too good to be true. Unless I stick my finger in the holes from the nails in his hands, and stick my hand in the hole from the spear in his side, I will not believe."
5. Unfortunately for Thomas, Jesus has a great sense of humor, he leaves Thomas hanging for 8 days. Mary is excited. Peter is excited. Hundreds of disciples are excited. Thomas is the only one not excited.
6. On the eighth day, Jesus finally joins the disciples in the Upper Room. They are arguing with Thomas, when suddenly Jesus appears in the Room.
7. He says, "Thomas, reach here, and stick your finger in these holes in my hand. And stick your hand in this hole in my side... and quit doubting, and believe."
8. Thomas falls to his knees in worship. He says, "My Lord and my God."

- a) Jesus said to him, **“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)**
- 9. He’s talking about you. He is putting the blessing of salvation on people, who, never actually, personally see Jesus, but believe in him anyway.
- 10. I want to invite you to do that today. Not only that, I want to actually walk you through the simple steps of receiving Jesus as your Savior. I promise you it won't be weird and I won't single you out.
 - a) Because having the Easter facts is great, but it's not enough. My prayer and my hope is that you will walk out of here today with the Easter faith too.
 - b) So let's talk about that.

III. The Easter Faith

- A. Jesus gave us a clear lesson of what this means in probably his most famous parable. Here's how that parable ends... and then we'll work backwards.
 - 1. **“We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!” (Luke 15:32)**
- B. This is the famous parable called the Prodigal Son, a parable that Jesus crafted about a father and his two grown sons.
- C. This parable begins when the younger son, we're going to call him Junior, asks for his share of the inheritance early. He, in effect, asks his father to activate his last will and testament, as if he had already died, right then and there.
 - 1. Which is a pretty horrible thing to ask, don't you think?
 - 2. Which, no self-respecting father would ever do, right?
 - 3. Yet, that's exactly what Jesus has the father do as he creates this story. It's really an over-the-top, almost shocking kind of love.
- D. The younger son takes a big wad of cash. He has a plan. His plan is to travel as far away as he can. This is a land Jesus calls “the far country.” Junior travels there, and lives the life of his dreams.
 - 1. He thinks.
- E. He actually lives an out-of-control, frat-boy, party life. Night after night. Partner after partner. He's living large.

1. Actually, this is why he's called the *prodigal* son. To be prodigal means to be extravagantly wasteful. To be prodigal means over the top. To go too far.
 2. Junior is the prodigal son.
 3. He's not only living large, he's also blowing through every last dime his father gave him.
 4. Finally, he's so broke that he's taking the most disgusting jobs he can, till he winds up slopping pigs with rotten food from the compost heap, and even *that* starts to look tasty to him.
- F. One day, he wakes up with another stranger in his bed and another hangover. At long last, he admits what a train-wreck his life is. "He came to himself," Jesus said, and Junior starts the long road home.
1. But he's nervous. All along the way, he worries about how his father will receive him.
 2. Will his father hate him? Will his father turn away? Will his father want nothing to do with him ever again?
 3. He went away thinking he knew it all and had it all.
 - a) Now he comes back heartbroken.
 - b) He comes back empty-handed.
 - c) He comes back racked with guilt and shame.
 - (1) His mind is consumed with fear that his father will never accept him.
 - (2) Who can love someone like me?
 - (a) There are times I've felt that way. Maybe you have too.
- G. As Jesus tells the story, all that time his son was in the far country, the father has been doing something that the son never knew about.
1. Every day, the father has been waiting for Junior to come home.
 2. Day after day, the father has stationed himself at the head of the road. Just waiting and watching. Waiting and watching for this day.
 - a) Can you picture God himself waiting and watching for you today?
 - b) That's the Easter Faith that Jesus has been trying to tell us all along.
- H. And when, after long last, the Father sees that lone son way out on the horizon, he runs to him. In the ancient world, a dignified man never ran in public. Yet this father runs to his wayward son, takes him in his arms, showers him with kisses, and cries out, My son's come home again!"
1. Because there's a wonderful truth I hope you take home with you today:

a) God doesn't run away from runaways.

- I. The father is so excited the son barely has time to get out all apology. All the son ever says is, "Father, I have sinned..." And with that the father declares it's time for a party.
 - J. They bring out the fattened calf, and throw ribeyes and T-bones and filets on the grill... Let's party! Junior has come home again!
 - K. But I want you to really see how Jesus describes this moment... the words Jesus puts on the lips of the Father as he's talking to the older brother:
 1. **"We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!" (Luke 15:32)**
 - L. For Jesus, this is more than a prodigal son coming home.
 - M. This is the story of another resurrection. "He was dead and has come back to life."
- IV. The Easter Faith
- A. As simple as this story is, it goes deep.
 - B. When Jesus tells a parable, he usually weaves in a character or figure that represents himself. Experts call this the Christ-figure.
 - C. Once you identify the Christ-figure, it helps you understand the parable. I can see two Christ figures here.
 - D. Stay with me, because this is the part I'm going to ask you to make a decision about, in just a couple of minutes.
 1. The first Christ figure is the Father himself. If you want to know the heart of Jesus, look at how the father acts.
 - a) According to Jesus, the son's behavior is prodigal and excessive.
 - b) According to Jesus, the Father's love is even more prodigal and excessive.
 - c) This is the love of Christ, which is more than you expect, more than you realize, and sometimes more than you think is right.
 - d) I'm telling you that God loves you today more than you expect, more than you realize, and sometimes, more than you think is right.
 2. The second Christ figure is mentioned three times in the story, and that is the fattened calf. Fattened calves were extremely expensive. The most valuable animal on the ranch. But now, the father orders that the servants sacrifice the fattened calf so that they could enjoy a party.

- a) You could say that the whole party comes at his expense.
 - b) To me, this is a striking illustration of the Cross.
 - c) When he died, he died for our sins. Which means that every act of indifference toward God... all your rejection of God's laws, all your unkind words, thoughts, or deeds, all your choices you have ever made as a sign of rebellion against God, all the stuff that embarrasses you, all the guilt, all the shame... all of that was lifted out of you, and transferred to Jesus on the Cross...
(1) "Behold the Lamb of God who TAKES AWAY the sin of the world." (John 1:29)
 - d) And then, God punished Christ for your sins instead of punishing you.
 - e) The punishment was death, and Jesus died.
 - f) So that therefore God can forgive your sins and take you to a perfect heaven someday without compromising his justice.
(1) And that is what it means to say Christ died *for* your sins.
3. Then, on the third day, the stone rolled away from the tomb, Jesus passed right through his grave cloths, dressed himself in glory, sent the demons flying, shattered the gates of hell, broke the power of the grave, effected the death of death, was raised from the tomb, did a victory dance on the devil's head, ascended into heaven, got a party going, turned around and looked back down on earth, and said, I love you and I want you up here.
- a) All of which means that dramatically flawed people like us can go to heaven.
 - b) Which is a giant celestial party, with prime beef on the spit and lots of celebration and dancing in honor of all the prodigal daughters and sons who have come home to God.
 - c) This is why the fattened calf is the main Christ figure in the parable.
 - d) Right now, Jesus is inviting you to join the party of those who embrace the Easter faith.
4. Because one of the consequences of saying is to that invitation is heaven.
5. Will you say yes today? That is the question. I hope so.
- E. And that leads to an even more basic point that most of us don't get most of the time... it is the bottom line reality of Jesus and his resurrection. Here it is:

1. God doesn't work by improving the improvable... God only works by raising the dead.

- F. Salvation isn't Jesus taking what goodness you've got and adding to it. No.
- G. Salvation is Jesus starting over. It's life from death. Salvation is a new start. New life. New birth. My child was dead and is alive again. It's a resurrection. It's an Easter faith.
- H. And this salvation can be yours today. I'll show you how soon. Open the door of your heart.

V. Invitation

- A. So his invitation and my invitation, goes out to every prodigal, every outcast. To every one who feels they don't quite fit in, to every wrong-way runaway rebel, ashamed of where you've been.
- B. This invitation goes out to every searcher, trying to fill that empty space.
- C. With Jesus, your searching days are over. Everything's about to change.
 - 1. Think of it this way.
 - a) Two thousand years ago God did an epic miracle: Jesus Christ literally rose again from literal death to eternal life.
 - b) Today, God's offers you your own epic miracle: You can literally rise from spiritual death to eternal life, right here, right now.
 - 2. It's called "being saved." That is the Easter faith, and it is the central truth of Christianity.
 - 3. We have been praying for you for this day. And I mean praying for you by name. If you look on these walls, you will see hundreds and hundreds of names. These are people that we love who need to come home to the father's love today. Your name is there.
 - 4. And those prayers are why you are here. And why God is tugging at your heart right now.
 - a) So I'm asking you to say yes to the Easter faith.
 - (1) I'm asking you to say yes to forgiveness of sins.
 - (2) Yes to new life.
 - (3) Yes to a love that will never let you go.
 - (4) Yes to heaven.
 - (5) Yes to Jesus Christ, crucified and risen again.
 - b) Of all days, Easter is the perfect day to say yes to his unparalleled invitation. It's the perfect day to bring your life back to God.

VI. Prayer

- A. We're going to talk to God now, just like we would talk to a friend. This is called prayer. And now, I'd like to walk you through a prayer of salvation.
- B. This is going to be a silent prayer. Just you talking to God in the quietness of his heart. He hears your silent prayer.
- C. And the way it will work is that I'm going to lead you in an ABC prayer, admit, believe, choose. I'll say one line at a time, and pause. During the pause, then you can repeat that prayer to God in your heart.
 - 1. So please bow your head and close your eyes.
 - 2. We do this to create some quiet, and give privacy for yourself and for the people around you.
- D. This is your golden opportunity.

VII.ABC

A. ADMIT

- 1. **God, I admit, I have broken your laws and have disrespected you. I am in that far country and I need forgiveness from you.**

B. BELIEVE

- 1. **God, I believe that Jesus died on the cross for me. I believe you punished him for my sins, instead of punishing me. I believe he rose again from the dead. I believe the Easter facts. Right now I embrace the Easter faith.**

C. CHOOSE

- 1. **God, right now, I choose to receive Jesus, as my Savior. He is my only hope. I officially receive Jesus and the gift of salvation he brings. So, I'm asking you, please save me, please forgive me, and please make me your child forever. Amen.**

VIII.Closing prayer

- A. Please keep your head bowed and eyes closed.
- B. I'm going to close in prayer.
- C. And I'd like to pray for you, so before I pray, if you just expressed your faith in Jesus for the first time—whether that was today, or last week too—I'd like you to tell me in a very simple and private way.
 - 1. Don't worry, I won't single you out. I won't embarrass you.
- D. Please just open your eyes and look at me. We'll make eye contact, and I'd like to personally welcome you to God's family.
- E. No one else looking around.
 - 1. Welcome to God's Family
- F. Prayer

1. God, now we praise you for Jesus, our Savior, brutally crucified and gloriously risen again.
 2. We praise you for new life in him.
 3. We praise you for every man, woman, and child who today received Jesus.
 4. Bless them this day and every day.
 5. And let us all live in light of a Savior who lives forever for your highest glory and our highest good.
 6. In Jesus' name we pray.
 7. Amen.
- G. Let's stand, and as we stand, let's welcome everybody who just prayed to receive Jesus into God's family.