

“The Journey of Easter - Death”

Scripture: Mark 15:33-41

Graphics: road, milestones, seeds, plants

Big Truth: The journey of Easter is a journey of death, new life, waiting, releasing, and being given new power. We often think that the journey is about the destination, but it's not. The journey changes us along the way. If we are intentional about the milestone and knowing more about Jesus on the journey of faith, His death, resurrection, waiting, ascension, and Spirit all transform us into the faithful disciples we are called to be. This Lent, we will spend time in a process of death, rebirth, and being filled with His power. Then, once we get to Holy Week, we will be ready for Him to Rise in us!

Focus Question: What needs to die in me so that God can bring new life to me?

1. Introduction

A. PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)

B. Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit.” (Jn 12:24)

C. He said that to his 12 disciples who had been following him for three years... for just about his entire public ministry. But he said that right after He told them that, soon, He would **die**. He would fulfill the mission God gave Him to be born as a human, yet fully divine, to grow and live among the people God loved, to teach them about God's love, to call them to repentance for their sin, to show them signs and wonders that proved who He is, AND then to suffer and die on a cross, only to then be raised again to new life. That right there is the whole gospel!

D. And Jesus used the simple image of a single seed falling into the ground and dying...to remind the disciples that when a seed falls into the earth and dies, only THEN, will it be able to come to life (full life) and bear the fruit it was meant to bear.

E. Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension, along with the coming of the Holy Spirit, is the full life cycle of Jesus - the seed from God that transforms the world for God's Kingdom.

F. His disciples would eventually get it...but only after the whole life cycle played out right before their eyes. After they'd spent all that time with Jesus, it was time to complete the mission and birth the church!

i. So they watched as He went to the cross to die. So painful!

ii. They waited three days to then be surprised and terrified when Jesus rose from that grave. So shocking!

iii. For 40 days after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples in a glorified physical body...and then to hundreds of others. That took some getting used to. So hopeful!

- iv. Then, one day, Jesus ascended back into heaven as the disciples looked on with mouths gaping open in disbelief. So confusing!
 - v. But then just like Jesus promised, He sent the Holy Spirit to fill the disciples and the church, so that the life cycle could be complete. Such power!
 - vi. And, AND, so that life cycle could then begin again in them...and in us... the same process
- G. This Lent, we'll be on a Journey of Easter. But that journey is not getting from point A to point B - it's not getting from Ash Wednesday to the Easter Sunday, only to celebrate like crazy and go back to being the same as we were before.
- H. This journey is a life cycle...and the main point of a life cycle is to change us to such a degree that we're ready to bear even more fruit for Jesus. To bear more and more fruit for Jesus. Seeds produce hundreds of seeds, which produce hundreds of seeds!
- I. The season of Lent is based on the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness right after He was baptized. While in the wilderness, Jesus was being prepared, by the Holy Spirit, to step fully into the mission from the Father...to enter into the life cycle of death, new life, waiting, going, and sending power.
- J. What that entails for US is the hard part.
- i. It starts with death. Death like Jesus.
 - ii. The journey then goes to New Life. Like Jesus' new life from the grave.
 - iii. Then, in the waiting, we spend time with the alive-again Jesus...to bring us hope for what's to come for US!
 - iv. Then, we have to let go of the things that we think are what being a disciple is all about.
 - v. Only to then be filled with the Holy Spirit...and begin the whole cycle again and again. To make disciples of Jesus Christ!
- K. Each time a disciple - you and me - goes through this cycle, we don't keep doing the same things in the same ways. We grow together. We worship more. We are more open. We obey more. We serve others. We share what we have.
- L. This Journey of Easter is the life you and I have chosen...a life of following a man who lived, died, rose again, ascended, and who is living IN us.
- M. So where do we begin? Today, we begin with death. Lent is a season of reflection and searching. It's a time of pondering and wondering. That's why we often give something up for Lent. We're giving something up so that we can make a little more room for the Holy Spirit to take those moments we'd be on social media or eating or indulging ourselves...and using those to show us

what needs to die and be reborn in us...what needs to be grieved and released...what needs a new spirit for the mission.

- N. “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit.”
- O. Each week, I’ll ask and leave us with a question to ponder for the week. Our first question is this: **What needs to die in me so that God can bring new life to me?**
- P. Turn with me to Mark’s gospel. Today, we’ll start by reading about the death of Jesus. Mark 15:33-41. Let’s take a deep breath (come, Holy Spirit, come!)

2. Scripture

A. READ Mark 15:33-41

- B. One of the unfortunate trends in our current culture, is that we seem to be very much against dying. Rightfully so, in some ways. God designed our bodies to want to live!
- C. Yet, we sometimes go to incredible lengths to avoid death. Death is not easy. Death is not painless. Death is a tearing of the very fabric of our relationships and the attachments we have with this earthly world. So, we avoid it. Fiercely.
- D. I’m thankful for ministries and organizations that give us pathways to end this earthly life well. I’m also thankful for the promises we have for everlasting life with the Lord.
- E. There’s a significant difference between *terminal death*, which ends our earthly life, and the death to which Jesus calls us through His own death. We will all experience terminal death...but that death doesn’t need to have any hold on us or cause us fear. We are in Christ! Christ’s death is our pathway to everlasting life!
- F. Mark gave us a vivid picture of Jesus’ physical death on that cross.
 - i. It was noon. Yet, the sky was dark, like night. In that culture, cosmological signs like that were often attributed to the death of someone important. Mark said it was dark for three hours.
 - ii. We see Jesus in anguish - emotionally and physically. No surprise there.
 - iii. As He cried out to the Father, He felt abandoned. Alone. Afraid. Wondering.
 - iv. The people standing around the cross watching Him wanted to see a show. “Maybe Elijah will come to save him.” They gave him some sour wine - a drink for peasants - so they could keep the show going, maybe.
 - v. Yet, this was Jesus’ time. He died...with a loud cry of pain and anguish and feeling the full wrath of God, as He took on the full weight of our sin.

- G. Now, the question could be asked: Why? Why death on a cross? Why death at all? The Father certainly could've done something else to deal with our sin nature. Jesus could've avoided this, right?
- H. Yes. That's true. He is God and we are not. Yet, in order for the full weight of the sin of all humans for all of history to be atoned for, Jesus became, willingly, the sacrificial lamb. The Jewish people had, for centuries, had sacrificed animals and grain and wine to atone for - to deal with - their sin. It was all required by a loving and holy God who wanted to be in relationship.
- I. Yet, God was ready for a new way. A new day. And so, it was time for the Seed - Jesus - to go into the ground...to die. And what more could the Father do than to make His only Son, Jesus, that sacrificial lamb...that seed?
- J. Nothing. Nothing more. I can't even imagine.
- K. God did that for you and me. The life cycle had begun. The fruit was coming.
- L. And at the moment Jesus died - when He breathed his last - the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.
- i. The curtain was the barrier between the Temple proper and the Holy of Holies. In the temple, the Holy of Holies was the place where God was revealed to the High Priest.
 - ii. Only the High Priest could go behind that curtain...and only once per year...so that the sins of the people could be forgiven on the Day of Atonement, which was THE most holy day of the Jewish year.
 - iii. Basically, this curtain was what held back the powerful glory of God from the people, so that it wouldn't immediately destroy them.
 - iv. THAT curtain, we believe, is the one that was torn from top to bottom the instant Jesus died. No longer was there a barrier to hold the people and God's glory apart.
 - v. Jesus' death opened a new and direct connection to God's glory in the lives of the people of God...through Jesus.
- M. Death wasn't the end, but the incredible beginning of God's new way of relating directly to His people...and, by God's grace, to us.
- N. We know this because Mark said there was a Centurion assigned to guard the cross of Jesus. He'd witnessed countless numbers of crucifixions. He was a hardened witness to death like this. He'd stood at the base of many crosses and watched many criminals die. There was a pattern, I'm sure. Ho hum. NBD.
- O. Yet, THIS one was different. This Jesus. He watched it all and then simply said, "Truly this man was God's Son."

- P. And there were women there as well. Women who'd been with Jesus, serving Him and disciples, learning from Him, loving Him and being loved by Him. They were there.
- Q. Where were the male disciples? We don't know. Not there, we think, most of them. Hiding in fear...watching from an even greater distance than the women.
- R. This must've been one of the worst days in the life of the women and the disciples. It certainly was the worst day in Jesus' 33 years on earth.
- S. Yet, (listen) **death isn't always the end**. In fact, for Jesus, for the centurion, for the women, for the disciples, and for every person who has an encounter with Jesus, **death is the beginning**.

3. Application

- A. Our minds and culture are quick to think that death is bad and that nothing good can come from it.
- B. Death is indeed difficult. Death of a loved one or a relationship is very painful - emotionally, physically, relationally. There's no denying it.
- C. God doesn't take any of the deaths in our lives lightly. Whether it's the death of a person or pet...death of a dream, a hope, a project, or a vision...the death of an addiction or sin or grudge or anger or hurt.
- D. Every death has a cost. Sometimes, a very big cost. Death changes what we think of our own lives...our worth...our future. It causes grief every time. Every one of those things has the potential to be placed into the ground and die, so that new life can come from it...so the life-cycle can begin.
- E. Death always has the very real potential to be the beginning of something new.
- F. For Jesus, His death was the beginning of God's new plan of salvation!
 - i. For the disciples, Jesus' death was the pivot from one mode of following Jesus to a radically new and better mode.
 - ii. For the centurion, the death of Jesus was salvation itself! He believed! "Truly this man was God's Son!"
 - iii. For you and me, and every one who puts their faith and trust in Him, Jesus' death is the beginning of this life-cycle that bears kingdom fruit through us!
- G. If Jesus' death can be used by God for such an incredibly powerful and amazingly wonderful purpose, what might God be asking you to allow to die in YOUR life so that He can use you and it for His glory?
- H. The question I asked earlier was: **What needs to die in me so that God can bring new life?** To my church? To my work? To my family? To my community? To my life?

- I. This Journey of Easter begins with death. The season of Lent calls us to look inward to allow the Holy Spirit to say, “Steve, let it die. Let the pride die. Let the control die. Let the disappointment and discouragement die.”
- J. What about you?
- K. Now, I’ve been a pastor long enough to know that the people of the church are busy...distracted...often have many things happening all at once. We spend lots of time and emotional capital letting things spin in our heads and hearts. We’re often spent.
- L. Spending time thinking about what needs to die in your life may not be at the top of your list. You may not even have the first clue how to start praying about it.
- M. Let me encourage you, as a Lenten discipline, to simply ask yourself this question every morning: **What needs to die in me so that God can bring new life?**
 - i. Start with giving thanks for the people you’ve loved that have died and the gifts they gave to you...even physical life itself, if a parent.
 - ii. Then think of the sin in your life that has died as you’ve grown as a disciple of Jesus. You aren’t the same as you were before and you don’t do the same things you did before. Be thankful! Give praise to God!
 - iii. Then, go even deeper. What is the Holy Spirit asking you to allow Him to help die in you? Pride. Anger. Fear. Sadness. Disappointment. Is the Spirit asking you to let something go that you can’t control?
 - iv. Don’t let this season go by without finding the time every morning...or every evening...to let this journey of Easter change you.

4. Conclusion

- A. I’ve sat at the bedside of multiple people who have died in my presence. It’s a holy time...a time of profound change between this life and the next. Some people fight it and it shows. Others welcome it and that shows in a very different way.
- B. This season, let God show you what needs to die. And welcome that, loved ones. When we begin that life cycle, God will start a new way to giving you life through that death. He has something ready to be birthed to new life in you.
- C. This Journey of Easter is the time and the place to do just that.
- D. Let’s PRAY!**