

The God of Surprises!
Easter 4/16/2006
1 Cor. 15:1-20, John 20

I. Introduction

- A. A Sunday School teacher asked her class to write one sentence each on "What Easter Means to Me." One pupil wrote: "Egg salad sandwiches for the next two weeks!"
- B. Easter is a celebration of victory, snatched from the jaws of defeat. It's a wonderful holiday.
- C. Waterloo
1. It was June 18, 1815, the Battle of Waterloo. The French under the command of Napoleon were fighting the allied forces of the British, Dutch, and Germans under the command of Wellington. The people of England depended on a system of signals to find out how the battle was going. One of these signals was on the tower of Winchester Cathedral. Late in the day it flashed the signal: "W - E - L - L - I - N - G - T - O - N - - - D - E - F - E - A - T - E - D - - - ." Just at that moment a fog cloud made it impossible to read the message. The news of defeat quickly spread throughout the city. The whole countryside was sad and gloomy when they heard the news that their country had lost the war. Suddenly, the fog lifted, and the remainder of the message could be read. The message had four words, not two. The complete message was: "W - E - L - L - I - N - G - T - O - N - - - D - E - F - E - A - T - E - D - - - T - H - E - - - E - N - E - M - Y!" It took only a few minutes for the good news to spread. Sorrow was turned into joy, defeat was turned into victory!
 2. So it was when Jesus was laid in the tomb. Hope had died in the hearts of Jesus' most loyal friends. After the frightful crucifixion, the fog of disappointment and misunderstanding had crept in on the friends of Jesus. They had read only part of the message. "Christ defeated" was all they knew. But then on the third day the fog of disappointment and misunderstanding lifted, and the world received the complete message: "Christ defeated death!" Defeat was turned into victory; death was turned into life!
- D. Creative Scientific Theories sponsored by Omni magazine:
1. GRAND PRIZE WINNER: When a cat is dropped, it always lands on its feet. And when toast is dropped, it always lands with the buttered side facing down. I propose to strap buttered toast to the back of a cat; the two will hover, spinning inches above the ground. With a giant buttered cat array, a high-speed monorail could easily link New York with Chicago.
 2. RUNNERS-UP:
 - a) If an infinite number of rednecks riding in an infinite number of pickup trucks fire an infinite number of shotgun rounds at an infinite number of highway signs, they will eventually produce all the world's great literary works in Braille.
 - b) Why Yawning Is Contagious: You yawn to equalize the pressure on your eardrums. This pressure change outside your eardrums unbalances other people's ear pressures, so they must yawn to even it out.
 - c) The earth may spin faster on its axis due to deforestation. Just as a figure skater's rate of spin increases when the arms are brought in close to the body, the cutting of tall trees may cause our planet to spin dangerously fast.
 3. HONORABLE MENTIONS:
 - a) Birds take off at sunrise. On the opposite side of the world, they are landing at sunset. This causes the earth to spin on its axis.
 - b) . The quantity of consonants in the English language is constant. If omitted in one place, they turn up in another. When a Bostonian "pahks" his "cah," the lost r's migrate southwest, causing a Texan to "warsh" his car and invest in "erl wells."
 4. As creative as these are... they are theories that are still false.
 - a) There are some very creative theories that explain away the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - (1) "The disciples stole the body."
 - (2) "The women who reported that the tomb was empty went to the wrong tomb."

(3) "The appearance of Jesus after the resurrection were mass hallucinations."

(4) "Jesus never died; He fainted and then regained consciousness in the tomb."

b) We often as humans come up with theories **when God's ways don't make sense.**

II. God's Ways Seen in:

A. Jesus Coming as a baby.

1. No fanfare, just a babe in a stable, no hospital.

B. Jesus' death and resurrection

1. When you think of men dying on a cross, you probably think immediately of Jesus Christ. But, over the years, there have been many men who have died by crucifixion. In 519 B.C., for example, the Persian king Darius crucified 3,000 Babylonians. In A.D. 66, the Romans crucified 3,600 Jews which started a revolt. By the time order was restored, the executioners had run out of wood for crosses.

2. It is not merely that Jesus of Nazareth died by crucifixion which makes people look to him for salvation. It is the fact that three days later, the tomb stood empty. Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

3. During his earthly ministry, Jesus said that he would be resurrected. "From that time Jesus began to show to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Matthew 16:21). Even his enemies told Pilate, "Sir, we remember, while he was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I rise.'" (Matthew 27:63).

C. The Early church

1. Their idea was to build the Jerusalem church, with its 12 apostles.

2. persecuted and scattered... as was God's plan.

D. Revival

1. Pentecostal revival was a surprise to the holiness people

2. Toronto blessing rejected by the Charismatics

3. There is always a stigma.

E. Jesus' Second Coming

1. How will he surprise us?

III. Truths to live by

A. What God does will always fulfill Scripture

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C. Some religions have taught soul sleep, in which the body dies and disintegrates, while the soul or spirit rests. Materialists believe in utter extinction, total annihilation. Nothing human, physical or otherwise, survives after death. Death ends it all. Some religions teach reincarnation, wherein the soul or spirit is continually recycled from one form to another -- even from human to animal or animal to human. Others believe in what is generally described as an absorption, in which the spirit returns to its source and is absorbed back into the ultimate divine mind or being.

1. **Swoon Theory Illustration**--One lady wrote in to a question and answer forum. "Dear Sirs, Our preacher said on Easter, that Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think? Sincerely, Bewildered.

2. Dear Bewildered, Beat your preacher with a cat-of-nine-tails with 39 heavy strokes, nail him to a cross; hang him in the sun for 6 hours; run a spear through his side...put him in an airless tomb for 36 hours and see what happens." Sincerely, Charles.

- D. There are well over 130 Messianic prophecies
 - 1. Psalms (16:10) - resurrection
 - a) Acts 2:27 – Peter’s 1st Sermon
 - b) Acts 13:35 – Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey

- E. What God does will not be the way we would do it.
 - 1. Stigma

IV. If There was no resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-20)

- A. Preaching of the Gospel Would Be Meaningless (1 Cor. 15:14)
 - 1. 1 Cor. 15:3,4 -- the resurrection was the only way Jesus could have conquered death, and had ultimate victory, Satan would still be the victor.
 - 2. Gospel = good news. Without victory, there is no good news.
- B. Faith in Christ would be worthless (1 Cor. 15:14)
 - 1. A dead Savior could not give life
- C. Christ, all Witnesses and Preachers of Resurrection would be liars (1 Cor. 15:15)
 - 1. Christ
 - a) “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up (John 2:19).
 - b) “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt. 16:21).
 - c) Matthew 12:40, “For as Jonas [Jonah] was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”
 - d) 20:18-19 He predicts, “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death. And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.”
 - e) “But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee” (Mark 14:28).
 - 2. It would call every apostle, every leader of NT Church, not mistaken but liars. Not an honest man among them.
 - 3. If they lied about this, then you could not believe anything, and Christ himself was a liar, or deceived.
- D. All Men would still be in their sins (1 Cor. 15:16-17)
 - 1. We would be no better off than non-Christians, because there was no absolute victory unless death was defeated.
 - 2. Romans 4:14,15 -- raised for our justification
- E. All Former Christians would have eternally perished (1 Cor. 15:18)
 - 1. Every OT saint would be forever perished, or any Christian who died before Paul wrote the letter.
- F. Christians would be the most pitiable people on earth (15:19)
 - 1. No Savior, no forgiveness, no gospel, no meaningful faith, no life, no hope.
 - 2. If Christ was not raise, he’s not alive and our life is lifeless with no hope.
 - 3. If Christ is not risen, why bother to go to church? You would be better off somewhere else. If Christ is not risen, why bother to put money in the offering plate? You’re only giving to a lost cause. If Christ is not risen, why bother to serve Him? You’re only wasting your time. If Christ is not risen, why tell others about Him? You might as well save your breath.
 - 4. 1 Cor. 15:20-22- Christ is risen from the dead!

EULOGIES Illustration

3 Buddies were discussing death and one asked the group: What would you like people to say about you at your funeral?

... "He was a great humanitarian, who cared about his community."

... "He was a great husband and father, who was an example for many to follow."

... "Look, he's moving!!!"

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychiatry, wrote: "And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be!" But Christians have victory in death and over death because of the victory of Jesus Christ in His own resurrection. Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19).

Heaven's Gate/ Hale Bopp Illustration

A mansion in Rancho Santa Fe, California became a grisly scene of death in late March of 1997. Thirty-nine bodies draped in purple diamond shaped shrouds were found inside. New Nike sneakers ornamented their feet and a bag packed with clothing was located at the foot of their beds. The most disturbing fact about this scene is that the group had committed suicide. Whether or not they committed suicide under their own will is questionable.

The thirty-eight men and women were part of a cult called Heavens Gate. Their leader, Marshall Applewhite, brainwashed the cult to believe that the way to cheat death was to physically ascend into another realm beyond Earth. At first the cult believed that a spaceship would land on earth and whisk them away. When that didn't happen Applewhite changed his tactic.

The news of the comet Hale-Bop passing close to the Earth provided Applewhite with another opportunity. He then lead the cult to believe there was a spaceship following in the comets tail. That spaceship was the one they were supposed to board. This would be accomplished by leaving their earthly "vessels". Applewhite filled his follower's heads with thoughts of a wonderfully privileged life somewhere beyond Earth. The idea of such an immortal life convinced his followers to commit suicide in order to leave their bodies and be brought onto the spaceship.

The 39 men and women died by ingesting poison mixed with applesauce. They packed their bags with clothes and each person carried \$5 bills, quarters and their passport. This evidence proves they put faith into what Applewhite told them.

The fate of cults with such a strong belief and an influential leader is usually the sad fate chosen for them by the leader. Only those who have strong will power can leave the cult, and all the pleading of their family members do little good. A few members left the Heavens Gate cult when talk of suicide became more serious, but the 38 followers who were left had such enormous faith in what Applewhite was saying that they stayed and met their fate willingly.

Why would people join such a cult? Finding meaning in life lies at the center of religion. Always, people seek to satisfy their spiritual longings. With today's rapid social change, traditional meanings are constantly challenged and sometimes uprooted. Most significantly, cult teachings are learned among a group of people who satisfy deep needs of belonging, who provide a life-enhancing sense of community.

Newcomers are isolated, cut off from family and friends who would provide a balancing perspective on reality. Their sense of individuality is erased as well. In the case of the Heavens Gate Cult, Applewhite had everyone wear the same clothes, shaved everyone's hair into the same short buzz cut, castrated some of the men, and stopped using personal pronouns such as "he" and "she". As the group's views are regularly confirmed by people one has come to like and respect, the bizarreness of these beliefs gradually wears off. Instead, cult members come to be viewed as "insiders" who are privy to secret messages that lie beyond the grasp of "ordinary" people.