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RESOURCES
TO ENGAGE
THE LOST

TELLING THE
STORY OF JESUS
ACTS 2:37

ENGAGING THE LOST IN YOUR COMMUNITY

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RESOURCE OVERVIEW TO ENGAGE THE LOST IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Purpose Statement: This resource is designed to help you in **Telling the Story of Jesus** (MBCB Theme) throughout 2012. As Pastor, staff or Associational Missions Director you will find several ministry tools to assist you in equipping your people to penetrate the less churched and never churched in your community leading up to Easter and then beyond.

Packet Content:

Sermon Briefs Designed to help you lead your church family to **Tell the Story of Jesus** and to engage the lost. (*additional sermon outlines available at www.mbc.org*)

Topics for Sermon Briefs for messages leading up to Easter:

- 1) A Life
- 2) A Cross
- 3) A Tomb
- 4) A Living Lord

An Easter Week Meditations resource and worship service outlines for a Christian Passover Service and a Creative Lord's Supper Service are included.

Banners Display at your **Rooftop Experience** event or in the worship center/sanctuary to emphasize **Telling the Story of Jesus** in your church (*see order form or www.mbc.org*)

Bulletin Inserts Space has been provided on the 4.25" x 5.5" insert for you to list sermon titles or other information that relates to your worship services / you will be able to personalize for your church by printing your church information on the back. (*see order form or www.mbc.org*)

Door Hangers Outreach resource to promote your church worship services / you will be able to personalize for your church by printing your church information on the back. Lead your people to prayerwalk your community. (*see order form*)

DVDs / Video clips Illustrative emphasis for sermons/worship are available for download through www.mbc.org or a DVD provided if you are have trouble downloading the video clips (*see order form*)

Invitation cards Outreach resource to promote your church worship services or the special Easter emphasis in your church / you will be able to personalize for your church by printing your church information on the back. (*see order form or www.mbc.org*)

Posters Space has been provided for you to list sermon titles, church location information, etc. to promote an evangelistic emphasis in your community/church. Place the 11" x 17" inch posters in store fronts and church bulletin boards to promote your church services. (*see order form or www.mbc.org*)

Rooftop Experience / Mississippi version – Instructions for having a **Rooftop Experience** event in your community that provides a time to engage in praying for the lost in your community. (*see page 32 of the 2012 Church Design Handbook for more details*) (*see order form or www.mbc.org*)

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COUNTDOWN CALENDAR

Listed below are monthly suggestions for implementing *Telling the Story of Jesus* resources.

January

- Decide if you will do a sermon series
(see *sermon briefs*)
- Order banners and posters for Easter
Sermon series
(see *order form*)
- Order or download invitation cards
(see *order form* or www.mbc.org)
- Order door hangers
(see *order form*)
- Utilize or enlist a church prayer coordinator to put together a plan to pray specifically for lost people (i.e. **Praying Up the Sunday School** is a great resource to accomplish this goal. Go to www.mbc.org and click on the Sunday School Department tab)

February

- Finalize sermons
- Insert sermon titles on invitation cards
- Train selected leaders in **More to Life**
(contact the Church Growth Department of the MBCB for details or email Steve Stone at ssstone@mbcb.org)
- Train leaders in **One Won 1** materials
(contact the Evangelism Department of the MBCB for details or email Don Lum at dlum@mbcb.org)
- Utilize DVD version of **Courageous** the movie to engage the lost in your community
(see www.lifeway.com/courageous for resources, contact Don Lum for details dlum@mbcb.org)

March

- Put up posters on church bulletin boards
(list dates/times, sermons titles, place in blank space at bottom of poster)
- Church members distribute invitation cards to people in the community
- Plan a prayerwalk in the community and place door hangers on doors. Print the name of your church on the back of the door hanger
(these should fit your computer's printer)
- Begin sermon series if you choose to do a four week emphasis
- Place banner in worship center if you purchased one
- Assign deacons or greeters a section of pews in the worship center as their "mission field" during the sermon series. Their purpose is to greet everyone in their section and get names, addresses, phone numbers of any prospects and make sure the guests get introduced to the pastor.
- Set up special nights for visitation to follow up with prospects
- Play DVD **Telling the Story of Jesus** "stories" during the worship services
(download from www.mbc.org or see order form)



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April

- Continue sermon series
(conclude with DVD **Telling the Story of Jesus** “stories” during worship services)
- Set up special nights for visitation to follow up with prospects
- Set date for Mississippi version of **The Rooftop**
(see order form for booklets to plan an event for your church/community)

May

- Conduct **Mississippi Rooftop**
(A fresh vision of God’s Heart for the lost)
(see order form for Mississippi version of *The Rooftop* booklet and how to implement this experience)

June – August

- Train selected leaders in **More to Life**
(contact the Church Growth Department of the MBCB for details or email Steve Stone at ssstone@mbcb.org)
- Train leaders in **One Won 1** materials
(contact the Evangelism Department of the MBCB for details or email Don Lum at dlum@mbcb.org)

September

- Plan Simultaneous National Rooftop Experience. Set location.
(see order form for booklet with instructions for National Rooftop Experience, sponsored by LifeWay).

October

- Conduct Simultaneous National Rooftop Experience on October 1, 2012

November – December

- Continue prayer emphasis for lost
- Invite lost/unchurched to Thanksgiving meal at the church and also to Christmas music specials and worship services

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Everyone Can Tell the Story of Jesus John 4:4-42

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played the University of California in the Rose Bowl. In that game a man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. Somehow, he became confused and started running in the wrong direction. One of his teammates, Benny Lom, overtook him just before he scored for the opposing team. When California attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety which was the ultimate margin of victory.

During halftime the coach decided the same team that played in the first half would start the second. All the players started out, except Riegels. He looked up through tears and said, "I can't do it to save my life. I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life." The Coach put his hand on Riegels' shoulder and said: "Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over." Riegels returned to the game and played a great second half.

When Jesus comes into our hearts through faith, He makes us new. We receive forgiveness, everlasting life, and the promise of His presence as we live. Yet, when it comes to telling the story of Jesus, some of us feel unqualified. Our past mistakes, whether long past or recent past, haunt us, filling us with guilt and shame. As we emphasize "Telling the Story of Jesus," maybe you feel like "Wrong-Way Riegels." "When someone encourages you to share the story of Jesus, your past shackles you. The good news is that the true forgiveness we receive through Jesus changes our lives. Rather than being a source of condemnation, your failures can be a catalyst to telling the story of Jesus. John 4 gives an indispensable episode in the life of Jesus. From this text we learn how Jesus' love for sinful people changes their lives and will free them to tell His story.

I. **Jesus loves people in their problems**

The woman had the problem of being from the wrong culture (v.9). The Bible explains, "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans." The prejudice of generations made the enmity between the two cultures severe. Yet Jesus and the disciples' decision to go through the region of Samaria rather than the traditional route around the area indicates that He did not hold to the thinking of his day. He saw the woman as a special creation of God. He valued her.

Jesus' interaction with the woman surprised her: "How can you ask me for a drink?" (v. 9). She knew the problems of the cultures. Yet, Jesus broke through and showed her she was a person of worth. The woman had made immoral choices (v. 17) The story of the woman gives us hope. Married five times and currently living with a man who was not her husband, she was amazed when Jesus offered her, a sinner, the living water of salvation.

Salvation did for her what Bill Tucker's father did for him. Bill was sixteen years old when his father suffered a health crisis and eventually had to leave his business. Even after Mr. Tucker regained his health, the Tucker family struggled financially. Bill took a chance and made a bid to reupholster the chairs at the local movie theater. He had never stitched a seat and did not own a sewing machine. He found someone to teach him the skill and located an industrial-strength machine. The family scrapped together every cent they had to buy it.

As Bill was driving home, he saw the sewing machine begin to tip. He slammed on the brakes, but it went over the side. The dreams for the family's security were shattered on the ground. Yet incredibly, Bill's father looked at him and said: "Oh, Bill, I am so sorry." He put his arms around him and said, "Son, this is going to be okay." God is whispering the same to you.

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II. **Jesus' love for people changes lives**

Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." The woman at the well of Sychar is a perfect example of the change Jesus brings to people's lives. She struggled in her sin, perhaps looking for real love. A series of relationships had left her shamed.

Scholars agree that the time of day she came, the sixth hour or noon time, indicates her fear of interaction with others from her village. The guilt and shame of her lifestyle caused her to feel like she had no value. Jesus engaged her in an honest conversation about her life and offered her the "living water" of salvation. Receiving salvation changed her life. She found in Jesus the love and acceptance she desired.

Ephesians 1:7 says, "In him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins." Second Corinthians 5:21 teaches, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

A changed life is one of the most convincing stories of what Jesus does for us.

III. **Jesus loves for people to tell His story**

After Jesus gave salvation to the woman from Sychar, he did not go into the village to speak to the people. The adulterous woman did. Jesus entrusted the message of salvation to a redeemed sinner (v. 28). The woman's past served as a catalyst for the story (vv. 29, 39). The people knew her and saw the change in her. People are drawn to Jesus as we tell our story and His (v. 42).

Have you let your past failures make you feel so shameful that you've been embarrassed to tell the story of Jesus? Like this woman, we have all sinned, yet receiving forgiveness from God can serve as the catalyst to tell the story of Jesus.

Don Gann
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God's Final Word: Jesus Hebrews 1:1-3

The book of Hebrews begins not with an introduction of the author but with an announcement. I remember one morning when I was in high school that our principal called for a chapel meeting so he could make a special announcement. He told us that President John F. Kennedy had been shot in Dallas, Texas. What a shocking announcement! None of us could believe that the president of the United States had been killed.

The announcement that the writer of the book of Hebrews makes is even more shocking. This announcement says that God has given us His last word. There is nothing more He can tell us about Himself. Let's look at what this announcement says.

I. This Announcement Talks About the Past (v. 1)

He spoke through the prophets. He spoke in many parts ("many times"); He spoke in many ways ("various ways"). A study of the Old Testament reveals that God spoke to people and continued to make himself known. God was not limited to one means or method of communicating to people. He spoke to Moses out of the Burning Bush. He spoke to Balaam through a donkey. He used a great fish to get Jonah's attention. God spoke in the past through the prophets to get His Word out to His people.

II. This Announcement Talks About the Person of His Son (v. 2a)

God spoke through His Son. The idea is, "God Son-spoke." God's final Word, His complete Word, came by means of His Son. This indicates He made a full revelation of Himself through His Son. Many words can be spoken about all other subjects. For example, I read a story about an automobile owner's manual. It basically said, "The automobile has now developed to the point where it is not anticipated there will be further developments or changes and this manual should be a reliable guide for the motorist of the future." This was a manual for a 1913 model!

Notice three facts about the Word God spoke.

- A. It was a personal Word. He spoke to all men of all ages. He speaks to us today.
- B. It was a progressive Word. God did not reveal a full disclosure of Himself all at one time. A first grader who was going into second grade told his first grade teacher, "I wish you knew enough to teach me in the second grade." The Lord begins where we are and moves us from there. The Father only gives us as much as we can receive at one time.
- C. It was a pertinent Word. The word was pertinent because of the message it contained. Notice John 10:10: God wants us to have life to the fullest.



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III. The Announcement Talks About Proclamations Concerning His Son

A. Christ Is the Mirror of God (v. 3a).

A mirror reflects and reveals. Jesus reflects God's glory. He is the "Out-Raying" of God's glory. Jesus reveals God's nature or character (John 1:18; 14:9).

A statue of Emperor Napoleon was made of melted cannons. The statue was amazingly life-like. When it was placed in Paris one commented, "The emperor has come back to Paris." Even though the statue bore a remarkable resemblance to Napoleon, it wasn't Napoleon.

Jesus Christ does more than simply resemble God. He is God and perfectly reflects God's nature to man.

B. Christ Maintains Creation. (v. 3b)

Colossians 1:17

At first people believed they lived in a geocentric universe, one that was earth centered. Then people believed they lived in a heliocentric universe, one in which everything revolved around the sun. Actually we live in a Christocentric universe: Christ is the center of everything.

C. Christ is the Majestic One. (v. 3c)

He finished His work and sat down at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

This statement suggests four things.

1. It is a sign of honor (Phil. 2:11). To be seated at the right hand of the Father is indeed an honor.
2. It is a sign of authority. First Peter 3:22 tells us that Jesus "has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him."
3. It is a sign of rest. His work is done. The writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 10:12, "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."
4. It is a sign that He sat down to intercede for us. Paul tells us in Romans 8:34 that Jesus is at the right hand of God and is making intercession for all of us who belong to Him.

CONCLUSION

Who gives us this final word? Jesus who is Prophet, Priest, and Potentate. What does this mean to us? It means everything. To reject Him is to be shut out from His presence into an eternal hell. But to receive Jesus is to enter into all that He is and has. There are no other choices.

Bruce Cappleman
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Lead Me to the Cross 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Several years ago I was part of a mission team in a mountain village in Honduras. Each day I walked miles around the small village with a tour guide and hundreds of children. Through my translator I learned that the children wanted us to take them to a point high above the village where there was a huge cross. I resisted the pleas of the energetic kids until our last day when they playfully shouted, “La Cruz! La Cruz!” which means, “The cross! The cross!” Smiling, my translator said, “You know, you have to take them to the cross!” Within seconds I was huffing and puffing while the barefooted children scampered around me, communicating with their eyes, “What is taking you so long, Mister?” At the top we took in the awesome view of the village down below. We sat beneath the 25-foot cross, and I finally caught my breath. As I looked into the faces of those precious children, the words of the translator filled my mind and heart. I began to share with them the story of the cross, the powerful message of a Savior who loves them. There is no greater experience than leading others to the cross.

No one understood more the importance of being led and leading others to the cross than the apostle Paul. Countless times he led people to the cross. One of those moments is in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (read it).

What Will We Find As We Stand at the Foot of the Cross?

I. A Love with No Limits (2 Cor. 5:16-17, 19a)

A. Unlimited Possibilities for All People (v. 16)

Our view of the cross causes us to view others differently. After we have seen Christ on the cross we can never look at anyone else in the same way. Before we see them, their failures, or their sins, we must see the limitless love of God. When we look at them, we must look through the cross. No one is beyond His love.

B. Unlimited Potential (v. 17)

When we look first at Christ and then others, then we will be reminded of the potential of His love to completely change a person.

C. Unlimited Pursuit from Our God (v. 19a)

I love that powerful little phrase, “. . . not counting men’s sins against them.” The reality is that God could have and should have counted our sins against us. Amazingly, instead of condemning us, He pursues us!

II. A Commitment of Great Cost (2 Cor. 5:19, 21)

Let’s look at that same verse through a different lens: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” God’s limitless love includes a commitment of great cost. We see this even more clearly as we look at v. 21, “God made him who had no sin . . .” The idea here is that

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Jesus never experienced sin. Isn't that amazing! He did not know what it was like to feel the burning shame that comes after a moment of rebellion. He never experienced the feeling of separation that comes when we have willfully chosen anything other than God's best. Yet incredibly, "God made him who had no sin to be sin **for us** . . ." What Paul summarized so powerfully here can only be comprehended as we go to that moment on the cross where mysteriously but marvelously God was in Christ who paid a great price for your sin and mine. It was a commitment of great cost! But don't stop reading! Paul said, ". . . so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The cost was not only to save us from sin to make us right with God. The cost paid was also to save us for a life of right standing before God, not accomplished by our works but by His great riches of grace.

III. A Decision that Matters (2 Cor. 5:18, 19b, 20)

One final thing that we find when we stand at the foot of the cross—a decision that matters. This is the only thing that Christ could not accomplish at that moment on the cross. He offered us the opportunity to respond. Listen to Paul's words in v. 18, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ . . ."

A. The Decision to Receive (v. 18b)

Paul was referring to a moment in the past when his listeners had been reconciled to God. That moment involved a decision made. The word "*reconciliation*" is powerful. The idea behind the word is to take people or parties that are opposed to one another and bring them back into a right relationship. The most powerful expression of reconciliation is when a sinner receives by faith the gift of forgiveness, love, and life that Jesus offers because of the cross. **What Christ accomplished on the cross must be activated by faith in the heart and life of the one who is trusting Christ.** That is the most important decision anyone will ever make!

B. The Decision to Share (v.18b, 19b, 20)

The decision to receive is not the only decision. As we read on we see that our decision to receive obligates and appoints us with an opportunity to share.

C. We read that God "gave us the ministry of reconciliation....And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation....We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us ."

Do not miss that last part, God wants to make His appeal through you and me! While the decision to receive is the most important decision that you will ever make, the decision to share will be the most important one that you make for the person that needs to hear! Both decisions lead us to the cross.

Rob Futral
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The Crown of Thorns Matthew 27:27-31

I. Introduction

The late Dr. Adrian Rogers once preached a sermon entitled, “The Crown of Thorns,” in which he gave the following illustration: “There is a painting of Jesus standing beside the carpenter’s bench at the close of the day. He is standing with his arms outstretched giving the impression of stretching his body from a long day of toiling with the tools of His trade. The evening sun is setting with the final rays pouring into the room through a window. The sunlight rays drape his body and outstretched arms, casting a shadow of a cross on the opposing wall.” I share that illustration here to remind each of us that Jesus moved constantly under the shadow of the cross. The Bible says, “Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

The crown of thorns placed upon the head of Jesus may have a deeper impact on the meaning of His death than we first thought. Indeed, there is a significant theological message in the crown of thorns. It was not by accident that the crown was made and that it was placed on the head of Jesus Christ before He went to the cross. Please allow me to host you on this brief journey into why Jesus wore a crown of thorns and what this means to us.

- A.** The first time “thorns” are mentioned in the Bible is Genesis 3:18. This is the event where God placed a curse on the serpent, the woman, the man, and upon the earth because of sin. Our interest here is the curse on the earth: “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth” (Gen. 3:18). The sin of man brought thorns and thistles to multiply on the earth.
- B.** Prior to the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden, thorns and thistles either did not exist or they were not a problem. Thorns and thistles became a symbol of the sin curse (Heb. 6:8). Read again these words, “When they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head” (Matt. 27:29). What the soldiers did in mockery, our eternal God was doing in reality. God was placing on Jesus Christ the sin debt of all of humanity. The crown of thorns represents the sin curse of all time (II Cor. 5:21).
- C.** We are reminded again that the making of this crown was not by an individual but a group. We must always remember it was not the Jewish nation that crucified Jesus. It was not just the Romans, the scribes, and so-called religious crowd. He also was crucified by you and me. They had their part, but so did we. Jesus died for all of our sins. It was all of our sins that nailed Jesus to the cross.

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II. Body

Let me add one additional twist to this by recalling the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of his son Isaac (Gen. 22:13). You remember in the story that just before Abraham could push the knife blade into the heart of Isaac, an angel called out and said, "Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him." Then Abraham looked behind him and saw a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. The ram is taken and offered as a sacrifice, and Isaac is set free. What a beautiful picture of the cross. That is what happened on the cross. One died for someone else.

A. Abraham "saw" the cross. He saw a substitute sacrifice given on behalf of someone else. He saw a ram wearing "thorns," if you please (the symbol of the sin curse). Listen to the words of Jesus Himself as He responded to the Pharisees about Abraham. Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad." Wow! Did you hear that? Jesus said Abraham saw His day. Abraham saw the essence of cross that day on the mountain. I am not sure he understood what he saw, but nevertheless he saw a substitute sacrifice take the place of Isaac, and he rejoiced. Abraham named the place *Jehovah-jireh*. The Bible then says, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen (provided)" (Gen. 22:14). Abraham believed God would provide the sacrifice, and He did (Gen. 22:8). What did Abraham see? He saw God provide a substitute; Abraham "saw" the cross.

B. Let's hang around the statement that Abraham saw the day of Jesus. May I suggest that sometimes the **greatest proof is not always in what we do or say, as much as what we do not do or say**. If you remember as you look at the life of Abraham, you see he was always building altars and offering sacrifices. **It would appear that Abraham built altars almost every time he camped, until after Mt. Moriah. Why is it that for the rest of his life the Bible does not record that Abraham ever built another altar?** Perhaps he had no need to do so, or he broke from his usual custom. However, one thing is certain: On Mt. Moriah Abraham saw the greatest truth in the Bible. God loves us enough to sacrificially provide for us. Abraham "saw" the perfect sacrifice.

III. Conclusion

I believe Abraham "saw" the cross. I believe Jesus never saw a rose with a thorn without thinking that one day a crown of thorns would be woven and placed upon his brow. I believe when Jesus saw the flash of a Roman spear or the nail by the carpenter's bench, He thought of the cross. I believe He never handled a piece of wood without knowing one day He would die upon a beam of timber. Yes, hundreds of years ago when He was on the cross, I believe I was on his mind, and I believe that crown of thorns was the symbol of my sin placed on Jesus Christ. The song writer said it this way, "For He knew me yet he loved me... when He was on the cross I was on His mind" (Ronnie Hinson and Mike Payne, "When He Was On The Cross").

Jerry Mixon
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Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

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The Voice of the Tomb I Corinthians 15:1-5

George, an Israeli guide, amazed our group with his understanding of ancient Biblical history and his candidness about its relevance in the present. One afternoon during our tour of the Holy Land we visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher to see the place where earlier historians and traditionalist say Jesus was buried. The next morning we visited the Garden Tomb and entered the place many have come to believe to be the actual place of His burial. As we were leaving the Garden Tomb I asked our guide, “George, even though you do not profess to be a Christian, do you have an opinion about the place Christ was actually buried?” He responded, “It appears to me from all the evidence that the most believable and acceptable spot would be the Garden Tomb.”

The “where” of the tomb will always be debated but it is the “voice” of the tomb that must not be denied. The tomb has a message to tell. As I stood in the tomb on that beautiful Sunday morning I wondered, “If these walls could speak, what would they say?”

I. Yes, Christ was Here

Cemeteries, graves, and burial places dot the landscapes of the world. Some are modest and some are majestic pieces of architecture like the Pyramids and Tombs of Egypt, the Taj Mahal, Westminster Abbey and the tombs of the Ming Dynasty in China. Many of these graves are sacred because of who or what they contain. But the most sacred tomb of all is the simple hewn out burial cave somewhere near Jerusalem. The fact that Jesus was buried is supported by numerous texts within the Gospels and the writings of Paul. Luke 23:50-56 gives the details of Christ burial. People from all over the world have journeyed to Jerusalem to see the tomb where Jesus “was”.

II. Yes, Christ was Dead

The apostle Paul states in Romans 5:8, “Christ died for us.” C.K. Barrett in his commentary on I Corinthians wrote, “The tomb is the necessary stage between death and resurrection. If buried then he was dead and if resurrected then there was the reanimation of a corpse.”

Dr. J. Sidlow Baxter, in “Awake My Heart” (Zondervan, 1960), writes, “Think again of the *fact* that He died. That in itself is a strange marvel. Remember, He was God the Son. He had to become human in order to be even capable of death (Hebrews 2:9, 14). It is a mysterious wonder that God the Son *could* die; still more that He *should* die; still more that He *would* die; and most of all that He *did* die.”

Christ died not with honor but with shame, crucified between two thieves of the most “lingering and torturously excruciating of all legally inflicted killings”—J. Sidlow Baxter. Isaac Watts summed it up when he wrote these words in his immortal hymn, “When I survey the wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died; my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.”



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III. Yes, It is True Christ is No Longer Here

He is Alive! The empty tomb bears witness to a terrible tragedy that was transformed into a triumphant victory. The confusion, the dashed hopes, the crushed spirits of all those watching would soon give way to rejoicing when the discovery was made---“He is not here.”

The empty tomb is one of the three planks of the apostle Paul’s theology---Jesus died, He was buried and He rose again on the third day. The message of the empty tomb emphatically declares the ultimate triumph of good over evil. I Corinthians 15:55-57 says, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where O death is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

No tomb has ever had or ever will have a more remarkable guest than the one outside Jerusalem. Even though His stay was short those three days hold together the Cross-and the Resurrection. Our hope and our destiny hinges on these irrefutable facts. Yes, the tomb declares that He lives and is present with us demonstrating His love and concern for our salvation. We have a living Savior!

Conclusion: The empty tomb tells us that when we die we can have the assurance that Christ has gone before us and has prepared a way for all who will accept His forgiveness and love.

Dr. Billy Graham addressed a group of leaders in Charlotte, North Carolina in January 2000. Due to his struggles with Parkinson’s disease he hesitated to accept the invitation. The leaders desired to honor him and begged him to come. He was only asked to make a few remarks. He stepped to the podium, looked at the crowd, and said, “I’m reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist who this month has been honored by Time Magazine as the Man of the Century. Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of each passenger. Einstein couldn’t find his ticket. After a frantic search, the conductor told Dr. Einstein he knew who he was and was sure he had bought a ticket. The conductor went on down the aisle and as he was about to leave the car he looked back to see the old gentleman down on his knees looking under his seat for the ticket. The conductor rushed back and once again asked him not to worry because he know who he was. Dr. Einstein looked at him and said, ‘Young man, I too know who I am. What I don’t know is where I’m going.’”

Dr. Graham continued, “See the suit I’m wearing; it’s brand new. I went out and bought it for this luncheon and one more occasion. You know what that occasion is? This is the suit in which I will be buried. But when you hear I am dead, I don’t want you to immediately remember the suit I am wearing. I want you to remember this, I not only know who I am, I also know where I am going” (www.truthbook.com/stories).

The message of the tomb is “We can know who we are and where we are going”. “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.”

Jimmy Porter
Executive Director, Christian Action Commission
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

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TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS



When God is Silent Scripture: Matthew 27:57-66

Introduction

This message covers three days of questions. While rarely is much time or attention given to this aspect of the Gospel story, it is worthy for us to pause and think about for at times it seems as though this aspect of life is one that creates more difficulty for us than almost anything. We will seek to find help from God and even hear from God when He is silent.

I. The Facts

After Jesus died on the cross, the Bible says that His disciples took His body and wrapped it up in sheets and placed it in a garden tomb where Joseph of Arimathea had apparently prepared for his own death. As would be proper they would roll a great stone across the opening. To make sure that the grave would not be tampered with and the disciples could not steal His body, the Roman soldiers sealed the tomb and put 24 hour guards at the tomb. There would be no trickery or stunts pulled to fake a resurrection. Jesus was dead and even the people responsible for His death would play a part in proving the authenticity of what followed was truly of God. Our attention is on these moments of quiet for in day to day living it is at those points that our faith is often shaken the most. The list of real life experiences where God seems to be quiet is almost endless. Sickness comes and we ask God for healing. A crisis comes in decision making and we ask God for guidance. At many of those times, it seems as though God is silent.

II. The Focus

So as you and I think about the burial of Jesus and those three silent days, where do you turn when it happens to you? Where do you look for answers? What is your focus? It would help all of us through those quiet moments to consider these things.

A. Focus on what Jesus has already told us. Go back and search the Scriptures and you will find that not only did Jesus know that He was going to die but that He would be in the earth for three days. He repeatedly pointed this out to them as well as He does to us. It is amazing how many times the Lord has already told us what we failed to listen to and already know. Sometimes you see these dramatic moments as in the case when Peter so boldly said, "I will not deny you." Then he heard Jesus say, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." When it happened and the rooster started crowing, Peter remembered the words of Jesus.

B. Focus on the reality that God is working on many levels. While God was at work in the tomb and the resurrection would be a reality, He was also working in their hearts to strengthen their faith. Isaiah 55:8-9 records for us, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and my ways are not your ways," declares the Lord. "For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." Often times God is trying to do something in us as well as to work in the events around us.

C. Focus on the ever changing circumstances of life and the truth that God is unchanging. While the disciples may have been discouraged and dismayed because the stone had not been moved, Jesus was not alive, and the three days were passing by so slowly, circumstances do change. For those of us who know the Lord and trust Him, we need not



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panic, be disillusioned, or give up but rather be confident that whatever is taking place circumstances change and the God who cares about us will not change.

III. The Functions

- A. Trust!** What are we to do when God is silent? As we try to reason, think through, and understand what is taking place, we may ask what our responsibility is. What should we be doing? First and foremost we should trust God. “Trust in the Lord with all of thine heart” (Prov. 3:5a). A dear friend of mine used to say frequently, “Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light.” Trust Him whatever is taking place in your life.
- B. Talk!** The second thing that I would encourage you to do is to talk, interact, and be encouraged by fellow believers. It is helpful and even uplifting to hear others tell not only that they heard Him say in three days He will be alive, but in addition to that to see the wonder in their eyes and the faith in their faces that they believe Jesus. That day when Jesus raised Lazarus from his tomb the Lord said, “I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believe in me though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). Then Jesus asked this question. “Believeth thou this?” The disciples affirmed that they did, and so do we. God in His wisdom allows us to live out our faith in a living community of faith called the church so that week after week we can come together to think, pray, hear an encouraging word, and see living testimonies of people who work in the same places of businesses we do, go to the same schools we do, and live in the same communities we do.

In the midst of it all, there may be days that it seems as though God is silent and even then you can trust Him. You may hear that He is speaking to someone and that greatly encourages you. Receive that encouragement and when opportunities come, share the encouragement of a living Christ with others. Even when He is silent, He is busy.

Jim Futral
Executive Director-Treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board



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The Resurrection of Jesus! Hebrews 9:27

Job asked a very interesting question, “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). Job’s question has been debated for centuries. Liberals say, “When you die you rot,” (William Hendriksen, The Bible on the Life Hereafter, p. 32). Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, said, “Matter, sin, sickness, and death have no reality,” (Hendriksen, p. 32). Ghandi, the Hindu, said, “My days are numbered...For the first time I find myself in the slough of despond. All about me is darkness; I am praying for light,” (Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7000 Illustrations, p.315). Old Death laughs at those who deny its reality. And those who deny that these few years we have on earth are all we have are in for the shock of their lives. The Bible says, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). There is something “after this.” And the “after this” that we examine is the resurrection of Jesus. Because, if He did not come out of the grave there is nothing “after this.” But, if He did come out of the grave, there is something “after this.”

I. The Verification of His Death

John, in his Gospel, took us to the foot of the cross and allowed us to see the Crucified One for six hours. At the end of the six hours, Jesus “bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). He was dead. To test whether or not He was actually dead, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear. Blood and water shot out of the wound like an exploding volcano. Jesus was dead. The apostle John verified the death of Jesus for a reason. The reason is simple but profound. Resurrection requires death. An unconscious person may be resuscitated, but only a dead person can be resurrected. Forget about all the nonsense of skeptics and infidels regarding the notion that Jesus was just in a coma or that He was just unconscious. He was dead! Actually dead! Really dead!

II. The Preparation for His Burial

Since time immemorial human beings have buried their dead. The methods for burial have varied from age to age and from culture to culture. The ancient Egyptians embalmed their dead by eviscerating the bowels and brains of the deceased. Jacob and Joseph were embalmed Egyptian style (Gen. 50: 2, 26). The ancient Jews buried their dead the same day that the person died as with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5-10). Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus down from the cross shortly after three o’clock in the afternoon. They had to be finished with His burial before six o’clock. Thus, they had less than three hours to properly bury Jesus. These men tenderly removed the body of Jesus from the cross. Though the Bible is silent on my inference, I think they cleaned the body of Jesus by removing the coagulated blood. During those three hours they used some linen cloth and wound it around His body. Between each layer they inserted some of the one hundred pounds of spices, which largely served as deodorizers. Such was the burial custom of the Jews.

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III. The Information about His Grave

The Bible says that Joseph laid the body of Jesus in his own new tomb, which Joseph had hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb. Moreover, the soldiers made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard (Matt. 27:59-66).

At least five things quickly capture our attention about the grave of Jesus. One, it was a new tomb. That is, as Luke points out, no one had ever laid in it before (Luke 23:53). Two, it was hewn out of rock. Joseph of Arimathea had chiseled the tomb out of the sandstone common in old Jerusalem. Three, it had a large stone rolled against the door of the tomb. This large stone was placed at the tomb's door to prevent scavengers from abominating the body. Four, the tomb was secured by sealing the stone. A chain or rope was stretched across the door of the tomb to prevent thievery. Five, a guard was set up in the garden. Soldiers were stationed in the garden to make sure that no one removed the body of Jesus.

IV. The Appropriation of His Resurrection

The tomb of Jesus was empty that first Easter morning. The body of Jesus was missing. The central issue of the Christian faith is what happened to the body of Jesus. There are three possibilities or explanations about what happened to His body. One, some of his family or friends stole His body. Two, some of His foes took His body. Three, the Father raised Him from the dead. The Bible says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God (the Father) hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9). "To appropriate" means to take possession of. By faith we appropriate or receive into our hearts the Living Lord.

V. The Celebration of His Resurrection

The Christian community celebrates the resurrection of Jesus every Easter (annually), every Sunday (weekly), and every day (daily). One reason that evangelicals do not wear crucifixes or display them in their churches is that they see the cross as empty. Jesus was dead, but now He is alive. The cross and the grave are empty. Hallelujah! Our celebration focuses on victory. Jesus conquered death and the Devil. Because He is a winner, we are more than winners through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37). The same power that raised Him from the dead now lives in me. I sing and celebrate because I have something about which to sing and celebrate. Thus, I can sing, "You ask me how I know He lives: He lives within my heart." And, another Hallelujah!

Conclusion

A little boy was playing the part of an angel in an Easter pageant. He had memorized his lines, which were, "He is not here; for He is risen." But, under the pressure of an audience, he was a little discombobulated and could not remember his lines. After a few feeble attempts to say his lines he blurted out, "He ain't here. He's gone." Hallelujah. He is risen.

Dwight Smith
Associational Missions Director
Wayne County Baptist Association



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Why is the Resurrection Important? Acts 2:25-28

The holiest day of the year for Christians is Easter Sunday. Churches are packed. The parking lot is full. Even people who do not regularly attend worship services feel compelled to worship on this day. Why is that true? What is different about this day? A man and his wife visited the Grand Canyon for the first time. As they climbed to the rim, he observed, "Something big happened here." On that first Easter Sunday, something big happened.

I. The Resurrection was important historically

The resurrection was prophesied in the Old Testament. On the day of Pentecost right after Jesus' resurrection, Peter quoted Psalm 16 as a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:25-28). On Paul's first missionary journey, he preached in Antioch of Pisidia. He quoted Psalm 2 as a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 13:33).

Belief in the resurrection divided the major religious/political parties in the first century AD. The Pharisees believed in resurrection, but the Sadducees did not. Paul used that division to his advantage when he was brought before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:8).

The resurrection provided part of the credentials for the replacement for Judas Iscariot. The new apostle had to have been a follower of Jesus from the ministry of John the Baptist and be a witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22).

The resurrection divided people who heard the gospel. Paul preached at Athens on his second missionary journey. Some listeners sneered at him. Some were curious and wanted to know more, and some believed (Acts 17:32-34). Which reaction best describes your response to Jesus?

The resurrection was so important that early Christians felt led to change their primary day of worship to Sunday, the first day of the week. On that day, Jesus was raised from the dead.

II. The Resurrection was important Theologically

The resurrection of Christ proves He was God's Son. Skeptics today question the validity of the resurrection just as they did in Jesus' day. While at Thessalonica, Paul explained that Christ had to die and rise again. The verb "explain" means "open" (Acts 17:3). Paul helped to open his hearers' minds. The very same word is used in the story of the two men on the road to Emmaus after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus opened not only their eyes but their minds as well: "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, explaining (opening) the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

The resurrection reminds us of God's power. While on trial before Agrippa, Paul asked, "Why is it considered incredible among your people if God does raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8). By His very nature God is all-powerful. He can do whatever He desires. If He could send His Son from heaven to earth, He certainly could raise Him up from death. Many people balk at the idea of miracles. That contention says more about them than about our all-powerful God.



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The resurrection brings death to an end. Peter declared, "It was impossible for Him to be held in its (death's) power" (Acts 2:27). The last enemy to be abolished is death (1 Cor. 15:26). After death we cannot be hurt anymore if we believe in Jesus.

Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies" (John 11:25). Paul declared that God not only raised Jesus, but He will raise us up also (1 Cor. 6:14).

III. **The Resurrection is Important Personally**

Three powerful truths emerge about the resurrection that make it personal to us.

First, it clarifies how we are made right with God. Salvation is available only through Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Second, the resurrection motivates us to honor God. Before the Roman procurator Felix, Paul declared that his hope was in the resurrection, which is why he served God and strived to maintain a blameless conscience (Acts 24:14-16). Paul understood that accountability leads to responsibility.

Third, the resurrection gives us confidence for life. If Jesus had not been raised, our message and our faith would be in vain (1 Cor. 15:14). Jesus would not have died for us. He would have just died, and we would be the most miserable of all people (1 Cor. 15:16-19). But because of the resurrection we are to be immovable, abounding in God's work because we know our godly labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

A friend told me this story. One day in a Sunday School class, the teacher was talking about Abraham's obedience to God in sacrifice of his son, Isaac. As the teacher shared the part about Abraham raising the knife, a little girl was horrified: "I don't want to hear anymore." But the teacher continued. The girl insisted, "I don't want to hear anymore." Another girl sitting next to her replied, "Hush. This is a God story, and God's stories always turn out good."

On the cross Jesus died a horrible death, but God's stories always turn out good.

He was raised and guarantees resurrection to all who believe in Him.

Alan Woodward
Director, Pastor/Leadership Development Department
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EASTER WEEK MEDITATIONS

David Michel
Associate Executive Director-Mission Strategy, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

The assembled group of Easter Week meditations may be used as an aid to personal devotions or as suggestions for planning a series of Holy Week worship services.

Each is built on an event that occurred during Easter, and shaped by Scripture readings grouped around the framework suggested by Psalm 1 as characteristic of the godly man of righteousness. Blessings accrue upon his life because he has set his mind on God's word as his delight, because he has determined to meditate in his heart on God's truths, and then his life prospers and offers healing and nurture to others.

Surely, God has provided salvation and hope for eternal life through the passion of Christ. We commemorate His obedience at Easter and celebrate the gift of Spiritual empowerment available to us through faith in a resurrection life.

Palm Sunday

The Triumphal Entry

"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

- Luke 19:29-44
- Psalm 118:14-29
- Philippians 3:20 - 4:1

Monday before Easter

The Cleansing of the Temple

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

- Mark 11:15-18
- Psalm 51:1-19
- II Peter 2:4-10

Tuesday before Easter

Theological Disagreement

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth."

- Luke 20:1-47
- Psalm 2:1-12
- II Corinthians 10:1-5

Wednesday before Easter

The Anointing at Bethany

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

- Mark 14:1-11
- Psalm 27:1-6
- I John 3:1-6

Thursday before Easter

Gethsemane

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

- Matthew 26:36-56
- Psalm 63:1-11
- John 17:1-26

Good Friday

The Crucifixion

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

- Luke 23:13-49
- Psalm 22:1-31
- II Corinthians 4:7-18, 5:16-23

Silent Saturday

The Tomb

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

- John 19:28-42
- Psalms 42:1 - 43:5
- Romans 8:18-39

Easter Sunday

The Resurrection

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

- Matthew 28:1-20
- Psalm 103:1-22
- Ephesians 2:1-22

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Palm Sunday The Triumphal Entry

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Psalm 118:26

Sing the hymn: **To God Be the Glory**

- ◆ **Delight in the Word** - Luke 19:29-44
Easter celebration begins on a triumphant note with Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. The shouts of “Hosannah!” anticipate the successful completion of God’s work of Salvation.
- ◆ **Meditate on the Word** - Psalm 118:14-29
Psalm 118 is a festal chorus thanking God for his salvation. When we use it as a prayerful meditation on the meaning of Palm Sunday, we celebrate God’s powerful action on our behalf. The Triumphal Entry is public demonstration that the Kingdom of God has arrived. We are reminded that the Kingdom has both historical and mystical elements connected with it. So we wave physical palm branches, but we also pray for God’s righteousness to be established in our hearts and communities.
- ◆ **Prosper from the Word** - Philippians 3:20-4:1
Celebration of the arrival of God’s Kingdom and our citizenship within it demands a physical display. Rather than flying the stars and stripes this week, perhaps a banner with the cross and crown or a shock of lilies would make an appropriate Kingdom expression at your home. **Telling the Story of Jesus** banners are available to order from the Mississippi Baptist Convention at (800) 748-1651. Pray that God will enable you to “Stand firm, as eager participants in His Kingdom.

Monday Before Easter The Cleansing of the Temple

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God.” Matthew 5:3

- ◆ **Delight in the Word** - Mark 11:15-18
For Jesus, the first order of business during Easter Week is creating an atmosphere of prayer. He cleanses the temple of its materialistic distractions and demands more of true worshippers than just spiritual pretensions. At Pentecost in Peter’s first sermon, he appeals for repentance and baptism. A proper celebration of Easter demands our confession of sin and heartfelt preparation. The confession of spiritual poverty opens the door to Kingdom blessings.
- ◆ **Meditate on the Word** - Psalm 51:1-19
King David records for us a classic expression of repentance. He laments that his “sin is ever before me” (v 3). He pleads for God to “create in me a clean heart,” (v 10) and he longs that a “right spirit be renewed in me” (v 10). When the cleansing comes, the Psalmist anticipates the restoration of the “joy of thy salvation” (v 12). When joy is complete the gospel becomes effective in bringing sinners to repentance (v 15). Easter promises spiritual cleansing and renewed joy in Christ.
- ◆ **Prosper from the Word** - II Peter 2:4-10
Those who believe in Easter have joined together to form the body of Christ or the new spiritual temple. The Apostle Peter challenges us to a life of holiness and sacrifice (vs 4-5). Our assignment in this “royal priesthood” is to witness to those who have not escaped spiritual darkness. A practical expression for celebrating Easter is to make a generous mission offering and to open the doors of our churches for services of prayer and worship. Encourage your church leaders to plan special services for the community in harmony with Easter week.

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Tuesday Before Easter

Theological Disagreements

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5

- ◆ ***Delight in the Word:*** Luke 20:1-47
The Pharisees were threatened by Jesus' generous grace and authoritative teaching. After He had received accolades on Sunday and had cleansed the Temple on the next day, they were determined to stop His rise to power. They sought to embarrass Him with difficult theological questions regarding authority (vs 1-8), civil duty (vs 20-26), and marriage in the life to come (vs 27-30). Every question was only a dodge so they could avoid having to surrender to His Lordship. We would be wise to humble ourselves in obedience to Christ as we prepare our hearts for an Easter celebration.
- ◆ ***Meditate on the Word:*** Psalm 2:1
The Psalmist reminds us of the world's penchant for raging against the rule of God. Nonetheless, He has sent His only Son with an offer of abundant life to be realized through His provision of salvation "on Zion, my holy hill" (v 6). God's intention is made real at Calvary and harmonizes with the Psalmist's admonition to "embrace the King" (v 12) by faith while there is time and grace.
- ◆ ***Prosper from the Word:*** II Corinthians 10:1-5
The Apostle Paul also appeals to us out of a spirit of meekness, not coercion, to "take every thought captive for Christ" (v 5). Jesus' example before the Pharisees models Paul's appeal for us to live lives that are under the control of Christ. When we use every moment or thought to honor His Lordship we reflect the essence of Easter. Prayerwalking in your neighborhood and distributing Telling the Story of Jesus door hangers or invitation cards allows an inoffensive witness without neglecting the responsibility of demonstrating our love for Christ and expresses an attitude for obedience and surrender.

Wednesday Before Easter

The Anointing at Bethany

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8

- ◆ ***Delight in the Word:*** Mark 13:1-11
Jesus found respite in Bethany throughout Easter week. Two days before Passover, He is honored with an expensive gift while at dinner among friends who value his ministry. The donor is criticized for her extravagance, but Jesus defends her actions by indicating that she alone has correctly discerned his impending death. "She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial" (v 8). Easter demands that we look unflinchingly at the death of Christ to the significance of His death requiring a "pure heart" that blocks out all distractions from or rivals for our attention. To achieve that clarity of focus brings joy to the believer and a beautiful vision of God.
- ◆ ***Meditate on the Word:*** Psalm 27:1-6
"One thing I ask," writes the Psalmist, "...that I may gaze upon the beauty of the Lord" (v 4). In the clear vision of God is found not only beauty, but also the blessings of security (v 5) and victory (v 6). From these spiritual foundations come our ability to praise God and serve Him faithfully (v 6). The desire to see God should occupy our hearts at Easter.
- ◆ ***Prosper from the Word:*** I John 3:1-6
The vision of God and our personal holiness are intertwined. John writes to encourage us to reflect God's beauty for when He appears, "...we shall be like him" (v 2). A practical way of reflecting God's love is to prepare a testimony of how He has brought us to salvation. Elements could include descriptions of my life before I met Christ, the events that caused me to awaken and trust in Christ, and how am I different today as I live for Christ. If you have never prepared this kind of testimony, there is no better time to do so than during Easter celebration.

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Thursday Before Easter **Gethsemane**

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."
Matthew 5:6

- ◆ **Delight in the Word:** Matthew 26:36-56
Jesus secludes himself in the garden to steel his resolve for the crucifixion. His personal struggle overwhelms his physical strength, but he finds spiritual strength from his determination to fulfill the scriptures (v. 54) and his knowledge of God's presence and availability through the angels (v. 53). The disciples are unable to sustain their focus on righteousness and spiritual partnership with Christ.
- ◆ **Meditate on the Word:** Psalm 63:1-11
The Psalmist corrects the disciples' failings and awakens our spiritual attention. He calls for faithful participation from every aspect of our being: soul and body (v. 1), sight and apprehension (v. 2), lifted hands (v. 4), singing lips (v. 5), and thoughts and memories (v. 6). The outcome of such total involvement results in satisfaction of our hunger and thirst (v. 5), protection from our oppressors (v. 9-10), and security through God's sustaining power (v. 8). Easter can remind us of God's perfect provision for our everyday needs and our eternal salvation.
- ◆ **Prosper from the Word:** John 17:1-26
Jesus prays for himself, his Father's kingdom, the early disciples and "... those who will believe in me through their message" (v. 20). Easter is a time to pray for those who have not yet heard the gospel or believed in Jesus. Consider hosting a prayer meeting in your home during Easter week or another more appropriate time. Resources for conducting a **ROOFTOP PRAYER MEETING** are available to assist you from MCB (800) 748-1651.

Good Friday **The Crucifixion**

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10

- ◆ **Delight in the Word:** Luke 23:13-49
Perhaps the most tragic, but also the most insightful testimony about Jesus and his work of atonement comes from Pilate, who declares: "I find no fault in him" (vv. 4, 15, 22). The Apostle Paul later proclaims that Jesus was made sin for us, so that we might be redeemed. Persecution for righteousness sake reaps a harvest of holiness. In today's culture of tolerance, the one who believes unashamedly in Christ may be subject to persecution and considered a spiritual fanatic or terrorist. Nonetheless Easter calls us to declare: "Surely this was a righteous man" (v. 47)
- ◆ **Meditate on the Word:** Psalm 22:1-31
Psalm 22 offers a long reflection of the suffering servant of God and contains thirteen phrases that run parallel to the crucifixion story. In verse 24 comes a radical shift in focus from suffering and persecution to great assurance and affirmation: "God has not designed or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him, but has listened to his cry for help!" Those who suffer persecution can draw comfort from God's compassionate willingness to suffer alongside his servants. Easter allows us to commemorate Christ's work and contemplate how we may "...fill up what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions (Colossians 1:24).
- ◆ **Prosper from the Word:** II Corinthians 4:7-18, 5:16-23
"Jars of Clay" has become a popular metaphor for understanding the Christian's human condition. "Hard pressed on every side, but not crushed" brings together the cost of discipleship with the hope of glory. We are given over to death, like Christ, so that we may offer life to those who are lost. Our best role is as "ambassadors for Christ" imploring others to be reconciled to God. The new film **COURAGEOUS** makes such an appeal to men and their families. Consider using this evangelistic resource as a home-based fellowship opportunity this year during Easter.

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Silent Saturday

The Tomb

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4

- ◆ **Delight in the Word:** John 19:28-42
"It is finished," cried Jesus to mark His death. The words remind us of His determination to be completely obedient to His heavenly Father. The words should give us assurance that everything necessary for our salvation has been accomplished. Even so, we cannot read the words without a deep sense of loss and grief. Our sin demanded Jesus' death. It is right for us to mourn. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried Jesus' body, but no amount of respect nor weight of spices can wipe away our grief. Sin has exacted a terrible toll.
- ◆ **Meditate on the Word:** Psalms 42:1-43:5
"Why art thou downcast, Oh my soul?" (v 42:5,11 & 43:5) Three times the psalmist laments his grief and loss, and calls on us to follow suit. Easter is an excellent opportunity to reflect on our sin and the irreparable harm it has caused each of us, our world, and all mankind. The Psalmist matches laments with three exhortations: "Place our hope in God!" The eternal Father can redeem our hearts, restore our world, and recover hope from grief and despair.
- ◆ **Prosper from the Word:** Romans 8:18-39
From the mountaintop of divine revelation, the Apostle Paul declares us to be "...more than conquerors" (v 37) when facing challenges such as condemnation, persecution or death. Our grief over sin in a fallen world is overcome with the assurance that nothing in all of existence can "...separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (v 39). His last words from Calvary, "It is finished," now take on added significance.

Composing a list of personal sins and regret is appropriate at Easter. Making confession and amends among those we have wronged, or forgiving those who have injured us lends integrity to our sorrow and repentance. Claiming the promise of non-condemnation in Christ (v 8:1) prepares us for a joyful resurrection celebration.

Easter Sunday

The Resurrection

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." Matthew 5:9

- ◆ **Delight in the Word:** Matthew 28:1-20
"...you are looking for Jesus..." (v 5). Ultimately, everyone is looking for Jesus; if not for purposes of redemptive living, at least for some semblance of hope that we can overcome the devastating power of death and meaninglessness. So this text is encouraging. The angel says: "...He is risen, just as He said" (v 6). Jesus speaks to the women and says, "Go and tell my brothers...they will see me" (v 10). And finally the promise, "...I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (v 20). Our assurance at Easter is in a living Savior who keeps His word and fills our lives with His transforming presence.
- ◆ **Meditate on the Word:** Psalm 103:1-22
The Psalmist elicits praise from our soul's "inmost being" (v 1) all the way to the farthest reaches of God's "dominion" (v 22). Our celebration of Easter should remind us of the cosmic proportions of God's gifts and blessing through the resurrection of His Son. Our redemption is also characterized by those cosmic dimensions. God's love for us is "as high as the heavens are above the earth" (v 11), and our sins have been removed, "as far as the east is from the west" (v 12). God's ability to grant life and peace in its abundance is ours from "everlasting to everlasting" (v 17). What other response can we make than "Praise the Lord, Oh my soul!"
- ◆ **Prosper from the Word:** Ephesians 2:1-22
The Apostle Paul painfully reminds us how we were "dead in our transgressions" (v 1), "separated from Christ...without hope" (v 12), and "objects of wrath" (v 3). But through God's grace we have been "raised up with Christ" (v 6), given "access to the Father" (v 18), and made, "members of His household" (v 19). The work of Christ at Easter results in our spiritual peace. Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker and the benefit to us is that we become the "children of God." Share your joy this Easter by inviting others to join you in God's household and experience His peace.



A CHRISTIAN HAGGADAH OF PASSOVER

From Moses' day we read,
"So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance" (Exod. 12:14).

From Jesus' day we read,
"Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat'" (Luke 22:7, 8).

Some 1,400 years before the birth of Christ, God commanded His people to observe a special feast. It was an ordinance to be kept forever. The Lord wanted His people to remember that they had been slaves, but now they were free. Hopefully in recalling the Passover story, we too can remember our salvation and what life would be like without Jesus, our PASSOVER LAMB.

We are using a Haggadah, which means "telling." A Haggadah is a printed order of service as we recall the story of God's redemption of His people from bondage.

The Haggadah we are using tonight is an abbreviated one. A full length Haggadah includes several more passages of Scripture.

THE PASSOVER SEDER

THE TERM "SEDER" MEANS "ORDER" BECAUSE THE PASSOVER MEAL FOLLOWED A CERTAIN ORDER. HOWEVER, CHANGES HAVE OCCURRED THROUGH THE YEARS IN THE ORDER OF ITEMS AND IN SOME OF THE ITEMS INCLUDED.

THE PRELIMINARIES:

1. Purging the house of leaven: (Leader explains Luke 22:7-13 and Exod. 12:15 and the significance of leaven.) In Jewish homes the woman exerted great effort to remove all leaven (yeast) from the house.

Then the man would find a ceremonial piece of leaven to remove with a feather, a wooden spoon, and a white cloth. (Person enlisted acts as the father to find and remove any trace of leaven from the house and declares, "I have purged my house of all leaven.")

2. The invitation: (The father, holding up a piece of Matzah) Lo, this is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry enter and eat.
3. Lighting of the Candles: (The mother, with head covered) Blessed are You, O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, who commanded us to light the Passover lights. Today we recall Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12).
4. I remind you that on the night before Jesus' death He observed a Passover meal with His disciples.

(Pour the first cup, the cup of sanctification.)

The Lord encouraged Moses by sharing the plan by which He would redeem the children of Israel. At Passover we celebrate God's promises by drinking the fruit of the vine.

THE SEDER:

1. KIDDUSH: (The father, holding up his cup) Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

(Each person drinks the first cup.)

2. URCHATZ: The Urchatz refers to a ceremonial cleansing before the meal. Each of you dip your fingers in the water, and then let the person to your left dry your hands. Then continue clockwise.

TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS



3. THE FOUR QUESTIONS:

(The youngest at the table asks a question based on Exod. 12:26.) Why is this night of Passover different from all other nights of the year?

The Bible says when children ask what the ceremony means, the father explains it to them. Thus the time of remembrance also becomes a time of instruction. Four questions are usually asked in modern seders. (Four children can be used to answer the questions.)

- a. On all other nights we eat either leavened or unleavened bread, but on this night why do we eat only Matzah, or unleavened bread?
- b. On all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs, but why on this night do we eat only bitter herbs?
- c. On all other nights we do not even dip once, but on this night why do we dip twice?
- d. On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining, but on this night why do we eat only reclining?

4. THE ANSWERS TO THE FOUR QUESTIONS (THE LEADER):

- a. On other nights we eat leavened and unleavened bread. Tonight we eat only unleavened bread so as to remember that our ancestors, in their haste to leave Egypt, could not wait for the bread to rise, and so removed it from the ovens while still flat (Exod. 12:11).

In addition, leaven represents sin. During Passover we are to break our old habits of sin and selfishness.

Let us fill our cups a second time. This is the cup of joy.

Indeed joy came as God's people were freed from slavery. But, in order to free His people, God sent the plagues, one by one. Pharaoh hardened his heart, and the Egyptians were afflicted with discomfort, disease, and death.

As we recount the plagues, let us dip a finger into the cup, allowing one drop to fall into the saucer for each plague. As we do, name the plagues with me:

Blood! Frogs! Gnats! Flies! Cattle disease! Boils! Hail! Locusts! Darkness! Death of the firstborn!

(The father breaks the Afikomen and wraps it in the Matzah Tash. He asks the children to close their eyes while he hides it.)

The Jewish people wrap three pieces of Matzah in a special bag called a Matzah Tash. The rabbis call it a unity, with various explanations of how the three is a unity, for example, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We have a different concept of the tri-unity. Moreover, the Jewish people lack a good explanation for why the middle matzah is broken. That custom seems to have begun with Christian Jews to remember Jesus' death. As the bread of affliction is broken, we recall the Messiah was broken for us. One half of the Matzah is the Afikomen, which means "the coming one." It is wrapped in a cloth just as our Messiah's body was wrapped for burial. And just as the Afikomen will return to complete our Passover meal, so the sinless Messiah arose to ascend into heaven, and one day will return for us.

Let us each break off and eat a piece of Matzah.

- b. Father: (Lifting up a sprig of parsley) On other nights we eat all kinds of herbs, but tonight only bitter herbs to remember the bitterness of life in Egypt (Exod. 12:8). Each of you take a sprig of parsley, one of the bitter herbs used at Passover. This is called Karpas and represents life which comes from God.

(Pointing to the salt water): But life in Egypt was hard, a life of pain, suffering, and tears. Let us dip the Karpas into the salt water, remembering life sometimes is immersed in tears. Recall that Jesus during the meal dipped His hand in the bowl with Judas who betrayed Him (Matt 26:23). Also, He cried from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).



(Each person takes a spring of parsley, dips it in the salt water, and eats.)

- c. Another bitter herb is the Maror, horseradish. Traditionally a Jew would eat a tablespoon of the bitter herb, resulting in tears. I do not recommend that! Each of you take a piece of Matzah and dip a small amount of Maror and eat it.

On other nights we do not dip herbs even once, but tonight we dip them twice. The Israelites labored to make bricks. We remember this task with Kharoset, an apple mixture. Life is bittersweet, as symbolized by this ceremony. But the more Kharoset we take, the less we taste the bitter Maror. Likewise with the Lord, the more of Him we take into our lives, the less we taste of the bitterness of life.

Please dip some Maror onto some Matzah but also dip some Kharoset.

(Each person now dips the piece of Matzah into the Maror and Kharoset and eats it.)

- d. In biblical days meals were eaten in a reclining position. The Bible says that Jesus and the disciples reclined at the table as they ate the Passover Meal (Mark 14:18). Tonight we spiritually “recline” in rest to show the gratefulness we feel for our redemption from sin (Luke 22:14, 27; Matt. 11:28).

5. THE THREE SYMBOLS OF PASSOVER

Father: Paul’s teacher, Rabbi Gamaliel, taught that whosoever does not make mention of the three symbols used in the Passover has not performed his duty. The three primary symbols are the paschal lamb, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs.

The Family: You’ve already mentioned the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs. What does the paschal lamb signify?

Father: The paschal lamb, symbolized by the shank bone, is what our forefathers ate prior to and during the existence of the Holy Temple. It reminds us that the Lord passed over our houses

when He smote the Egyptians in their houses. Today Christ is our Paschal Lamb who delivers us (Exod. 12:3, 5-8; John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

The Family: And what then is the significance of the roasted egg?

Father: We mourn the burning and destruction of the Temple, as represented by this roasted egg called “Chagigah,” the daily Temple sacrifice. But the egg is also a symbol of new birth and eternal life, since its shape has no beginning or end. The Messiah offers us new birth and eternal life.

At this point in a Seder, the family would chant a song called Dayenu--“It would have been sufficient.” Then they would sing some of the Psalms (115-118, 136). Following that they would drink the second cup, the cup of joy.

(All drink the second cup.)

6. THE MEAL

(The full meal is served, and then the Father asks the children to find the Afikomen and bring it to him.)

7. SECOND CLEANSING

This seems to be the point in the meal when Jesus took a basin and towel and washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:4-5). This is a sign of our need for cleansing as well as our need to serve each other. This cleansing originally was not a part of Jewish seders but was added in the Christian era. Each of you dip your fingers in the water, and then let the person to your left dry your hands. Then continue clockwise.



8. THE BREAD AND CUP OF THE LAST SUPPER

a. The Afikomen

Father: (Retrieves Afikomen) In ancient times the paschal lamb was the last food eaten. In its place we now partake of this piece of Afikomen, with which the meal is complete. When Jesus did this at the end of His last supper, He said, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:14).

(Each one breaks off a piece of Matzah and eats it.)

b. Grace after the meal (The third cup, the cup of redemption, is filled.)

Father: Behold, we are about to partake of the cup of redemption. We are grateful for the freedom God granted our ancestors, and to us.

Family: Blessed be His name for ever and ever.

Father: The rabbis said the fruit of the vine at Passover was usually red, to remind us of the blood spilt by the first Passover lambs. At this point Jesus gave new significance to this cup. When Jesus shared this cup He said, "This cup, is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20).

(All drink the third cup.)

9. CONCLUSION *Elijah, the Prophet*

Father: (Holding Elijah's cup) Throughout history, Elijah has been pictured as the one to bring glad tidings in time of trouble. The Jewish people hoped Elijah would come at Passover to announce the coming of the Messiah. As the prophet, Malachi stated, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5-6). Perhaps this year is the year of the Messiah. In faith the Jewish people welcomed Elijah to the table and trusted that Messiah would come soon. Let us open the door and see if Elijah will come.

(All rise, and one person opens the door for the prophet Elijah to enter. The fourth cup is poured and all lift it up.)

But Elijah has not come at any Passover because he already "came" in the person of John the Baptist.

Cup of Praise (Hallel)--Please read responsively.

Father: What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward Me?

Family: I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.

Father: May the spirit of this feast remain with us throughout the coming year, and may we be full of its teachings.

Family: O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good. For His mercy endures forever.

Father: Traditionally a seder is concluded with the hope of eating the feast in peace in Jerusalem next year. So the people would say, "Next year in Jerusalem."

John the apostle had a vision about the New Jerusalem recorded in Revelation 21:4, about a time when there will be no more mourning, crying, or pain. When we are together in that New Jerusalem, we will praise Jesus for all eternity. For Jesus, who is our Passover Lamb, will have brought us into the Promised Land of eternal peace and rest. Therefore with new meaning we can say, "Next year in Jerusalem!"

Family: "Next year in Jerusalem!"

(All drink the fourth cup.)

Leader: Would you join me as we sing together (a song of your choice).

*Used by permission
Alan Woodward, Director
Pastor/Leadership Development Department
MBCB*

TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS



PASSOVER HOST GUIDELINES PLEASE READ NOW

1. Traditionally a host is the male head of the home. If no one fits that description then either the female head of the home or the oldest male can serve as host. If more than one male head of house is present, decide who is most appropriate to serve or the task can be shared.
2. PLEASE LISTEN CAREFULLY! DO NOT GET AHEAD, BUT KEEP YOUR GROUP ON TRACK. SET THE EXAMPLE WITH YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND ENCOURAGE ALL TO PARTICIPATE.
3. Make sure everyone has a glass of water.
4. THE PITCHER OF RED GRAPE JUICE IS FOR A SPECIAL USE ONLY DURING THE MEAL. AFTER YOU GET IT, PUT IT IN FRONT OF YOU AND USE ONLY AS DIRECTED.
5. Get the bowl of water for hand washing and place it near your place as well as the towel.
6. Tell the children (1-6 grades) at your table they will have a chance to participate and to do so!
7. Enjoy!
8. At this point secure a pitcher of red grape juice and a zip-lock bag of matzah (unleavened bread) for your table. Keep both near your plate. Use the juice and matzah only as directed and warn your group to be careful as they pour juice into small cups but only when directed to do so. You may choose to pour it yourself.

PASSOVER SUPPLY LIST

1. Full table setting including small cups and saucers and a place setting for Elijah
2. Red Grape Juice and pitchers
3. Parsley
4. Horseradish
5. Feather like a feather duster
6. Wooden spoon
7. White cloth
8. Bowls for hand washing and towels
9. Candles and matches
10. Matzah packages (1 ziplock per table with one matzah per person)
11. Copies of questions for children
12. Matzah Tash
13. Bowls of salt water
14. Mixture of applesauce (or chopped apples), honey, nuts, raisins, and cinnamon.
15. Platter with shank bone, matzah, parsley, and roasted egg (boil with a tea bag)
16. Copies of Haggadah



Creative Lord's Supper Service

Pre-service instrumental music

Examine Yourself

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 11:27-30

Reflection and Meditation

Use this as a quiet time to reflect and meditate on the above passage

Music options:

Soft instrumental music

Solo: "Jesus Paid It All"
(Hymn No. 249)

Congregation: "Remembrance
(The Communion Song)
by Matt Maher, Matt Redman

Visual Worship

Possible video clips:

The Visual Bible – Matthew

The Last Supper dramatized with narration
– Matthew 26:17-30
Copyright 1999 Visual International

Sermonspice.com is a website that contains downloadable video clips for a nominal price

Congregational Worship

Music suggestions:

"At Calvary"

(Hymn No. 245)

"The Wonderful Cross"

(Hymn No. 239)

"I Stand Amazed in the Presence"

(Hymn No. 237)

"In Christ Alone"

"Jesus Messiah"

"Above All"

Observance of Lord's Supper

Scripture Reading

Passing of the Bread

Music while bread is passed:

Choir – "The Bread Has Been Broken"

"How Beautiful"

Instrumental

Prayer

Scripture

Passing of the Cup

Instrumental – "At the Cross"

Solo - "The Old Rugged Cross"

"Amazing Grace" (My Chains Are Gone)

Ensemble – "Agnus Dei"

Choir – "Worthy Is the Lamb" (by Darlene Zschech)

Invitation

Congregation – "Have You Been to Calvary"
(Hymn No. 256)

Scripture – Matthew 26:30

Congregation Sings:

"Amazing Grace"

(Stanza 1 - a cappella)

"O How He Loves You and Me"

(Stanza 1 – a cappella)

Leave worship center in silence

*Note: All hymn numbers come from the Baptist Hymnal (2008)

Everyone telling someone about THE ONE.

RESOURCES TO ENGAGE THE LOST IN YOUR COMMUNITY

ORDER FORM



Banner

_____ 5 ft x 8 ft \$150
_____ 4 ft x 6 ft \$100
_____ 3 ft x 5 ft \$ 75



Bulletin Inserts

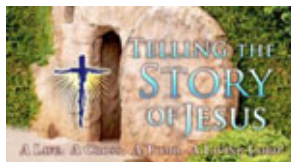


Door Hangers

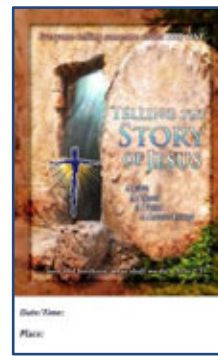


DVD

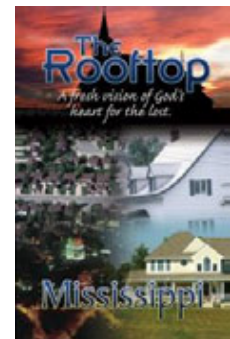
Video clips



Invitation Cards



Posters



Rooftop Experience Booklets (MS version)

NAME _____

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TO PLACE AN ORDER indicate quantity needed: (allow 2-3 weeks delivery)

Mail: Mississippi Baptist Convention Board
Church Growth
PO Box 530
Jackson MS 39205

Phone: 601-292-3310
FAX: 601-714-7424
Email: sbell@mbcb.org

RESOURCE OVERVIEW TO ENGAGE THE LOST IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Purpose Statement: This resource is designed to help you in **Telling the Story of Jesus** (MBCB Theme) throughout 2012. As Pastor, staff or Associational Missions Director you will find several ministry tools to assist you in equipping your people to penetrate the less churched and never churched in your community leading up to Easter and then beyond.

Packet Content:

Sermon Briefs

Designed to help you lead your church family to **Tell the Story of Jesus** and to engage the lost. *(additional sermon outlines available at www.mbc.org)*

Topics for Sermon Briefs for messages leading up to Easter:

- 1) A Life
- 2) A Cross
- 3) A Tomb
- 4) A Living Lord

An Easter Week Meditations resource and worship service outlines for a Christian Passover Service and a Creative Lord's Supper Service are included

Banners

Display at your **Rooftop Experience** event or in the worship center/sanctuary to emphasize **Telling the Story of Jesus** in your church *(see order form or www.mbc.org)*

Bulletin Inserts

Space has been provided on the 4.25" x 5.5" insert for you to list sermon titles or other information that relates to your worship services / you will be able to personalize for your church by printing your church information on the back.

(see order form or www.mbc.org)

Door Hangers

Outreach resource to promote your church worship services / you will be able to personalize for your church by printing your church information on the back. Lead your people to prayerwalk your community. *(see order form)*

DVDs / Video clips

Illustrative emphasis for sermons/worship are available for download through www.mbc.org or a DVD provided if you are have trouble downloading the video clips *(see order form)*

Invitation cards

Outreach resource to promote your church worship services or the special Easter emphasis in your church / you will be able to personalize for your church by printing your church information on the back. *(see order form or www.mbc.org)*

Posters

Space has been provided for you to list sermon titles, church location information, etc. to promote an evangelistic emphasis in your community/church. Place the 11" x 17" inch posters in store fronts and church bulletin boards to promote your church services. *(see order form or www.mbc.org)*

Rooftop Experience / Mississippi version – Instructions for having a **Rooftop Experience** event in your community that provides a time to engage in praying for the lost in your community. *(see page 32 of the 2012 Church Design Handbook for more details) (see order form or www.mbc.org)*



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