

Easter 2021 Encounters with Jesus

Easter is just a few weeks away. Our daily Bible readings, beginning March 15, focus on encounters Jesus had with people. Some were women, some were men, some were religious, and some were non-committal. One thing is clear in every one of the passages you will read—one could never be the same after encountering Jesus.

Some of these stories are familiar. Don't let that cause you to read them casually. Ask God to give you a fresh understanding of his Word.

And read these passages with your spiritual eyes looking for the miracle of Easter—Jesus is alive!

Written by Troy Freeman

Monday

March 15 – Acts 9:1-19

In the book of 1 Timothy, Saul (Paul) calls himself the “worst sinner of all.” After years of persecuting Christians, a divine encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus brought about a seemingly impossible transformation in his heart. Jesus chose to take hold of a misguided man's heart and use him to change the world.

No one is ever outside God's reach. He has the ability to change even the darkest heart. After seeing Jesus, Paul went on to write thirteen books of the New Testament and travel on several missionary journeys that resulted in countless people following Jesus. Do you know someone who needs the life-changing experience only God can provide? If so, pray for their salvation today!

Tuesday

March 16 – Mark 5:25-34

The woman in today's passage suffered physically, was shunned socially, and could not find relief from various doctors for twelve years. Imagine her emotional state at this point in her life. Yet, she still had faith that by pushing through the crowd and touching Jesus' clothing, she would find healing. Jesus healed her because of her faith in him and publicly addressed it so others would see that her faith had made her whole.

You have a Healer who loves you. The Great Physician notices you and wants you to be whole. Take a moment today to reach out and touch him. He knows your needs before you even ask. How can an encounter with the Living God bring healing and restoration to your life today?

Wednesday

March 17 – John 3:1-21

Nicodemus was a Pharisee with many questions about God. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well, but in these verses, we learn he had a very important encounter with Jesus. During these moments with the Savior, a new covenant is revealed—one that centers on forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life only realized through the grace of God.

If you are a Christ-follower, spend some time today thanking him for his incredible sacrifice, grace, and love. If you have not decided to follow Christ yet, spend the next few moments rereading these verses and ask God to open the eyes of your heart so you might know what it truly means to be “born again.”

Thursday

March 18 – John 9:1-38

This chapter in the Gospel of John tells us the story of a blind man who is miraculously healed by Jesus. After his encounter with Jesus, he did exactly what Jesus told him to do and experienced sight for the first time in his life. Not long after experiencing this miracle, he was interrogated by the Pharisees. He was quick to give a testimony of what Jesus had done for him. In 9:25, he states, “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

Consider your own encounter with Jesus. How has that encounter changed your life? Do you share this word of testimony with others whenever you are given the chance? We were all blind at one time, but now we see. Tell others what he has done for you so they might have sight, too.

Written by Rob Peterman

Friday

March 19 – John 12:1-11

In this encounter with Jesus, one sacrificed what was most valuable out of love, devotion, and honor while another only sought selfish gain. Which one are you? Are you a thief or a worshiper?

Saturday

March 20 – Catch up day

Sunday

March 21 – Psalm 63:1-7

Are you satisfied? True satisfaction can never be found apart from Jesus. The love of Jesus is better than life itself (63:3)! When you seek, thirst, and long for him (63:1), you find every need met “*according to his riches in glory.*” (See Philippians 4:19.)

Monday

March 22 – John 4:1-30

A Jesus-encounter doesn't always initially lead us to repentance. Instead, we often resist the living water he offers because we fear being exposed. We are grace averse! However, in his kindness, the sin he exposes in us also reveals a thirst that can only be satisfied by him. Like the woman at the well, we cannot experience the grace of his living water by using broken cisterns that hold no water (see Jeremiah 2:13).

What does your cistern look like? Are you looking to someone or something other than Jesus to do what only he can do?

Written by Julie Hammer

Tuesday

March 23 – Luke 17:11-19

What happens when we truly meet Jesus? How are we changed in this eternal exchange? The pages of Scripture yield hundreds of examples of the transformation that takes place when the Son of Man meets man.

Luke 17 tells of lepers who cried out for Jesus' healing. As the lepers leave to show themselves to the priests, they are healed. Caught up in the blessing of their healing, only one leper returns to thank Jesus. Luke tells us he was a Samaritan; Jesus calls him a foreigner. The other men, perhaps Jews, should have known better. Of all people, they should have been the ones who realized their healing was from God himself. And yet, the least likely to thank Jesus was the one who gave thanks.

What about you? Have there been times in your life lately that you've cried out to God for pity, for healing, for restoration, and he's heard you and answered? Did you stop to give thanks? More than that, did you worship with abandon—

falling at Jesus' feet? Some interpretations say Jesus' response is an indication the Samaritan received salvation in addition to physical healing. Jesus' use of the word "well" indicates the man was healed body and soul.

Meeting Jesus brings healing for our souls. Sometimes, it brings physical healing. But it always should result in thanksgiving.

Wednesday

March 24 – Luke 24:13-35

We meet Jesus in times of crisis and questioning. Two of Jesus' followers traveling to Emmaus met Jesus in their disillusionment. They walked with the Risen Christ but they didn't recognize him.

Perhaps they were kept from recognizing Jesus so they could articulate and process the meaning of Jesus' life and recent death. Jesus wasn't playing a game of "Hide and Seek"; Jesus doesn't play games with us either. When we encounter Jesus in times of crisis, he may seem hidden. In these times, healing can come as we tell Jesus. Describe the disillusionment; ask the hard questions. Jesus already knows. And Jesus knows healing and awareness of his presence come as we process in this way.

As they broke bread with Jesus, their eyes were opened. Clarity was given to all Jesus had taught them, and clarity was given to their experience as well. As we encounter Jesus in times of crisis like these first-century believers, we too find evidence and explanation of our faith.

How have you met Jesus in times of crisis or questioning? Did you come away from this experience better—eyes opened to the presence of Christ—or bitter—stuck in an endless loop of reliving the pain? Either way, tell it to Jesus.

Thursday

March 25 – John 11:1-46

Jesus risks hurting those he loves to reveal himself. In these painful exchanges, he hurts with us. Jesus wept as he saw his friends' grief. But Lazarus' resuscitation is the perfect opportunity for Jesus to show he is God's Son—the One who holds the keys of life and death.

When we meet Jesus, definitions of life and death change too. What looks like the end is only the beginning. And the hope we have of resurrection reveals himself to be THE Resurrection. Before we meet Jesus, life isn't really life—

true life is only found as we experience eternal life. After we meet Jesus, death isn't really death—it is a passageway into eternity.

Dr. Hulitt Gloer, Emeritus Professor at Truett Seminary, writes, “the resurrection of Jesus is God’s exclamation mark on Jesus’ life.” And just as God put his exclamation mark on Jesus’ life in his death and resurrection, so will he on ours. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Friday

March 26 – Matthew 14:22-33

We meet Jesus at the times and places he has appointed for us. It wasn't an accident Jesus sent the disciples in a boat ahead of him as he dismissed the crowd. It wasn't a coincidence Jesus watched as the waves beat against the boat. And it wasn't Jesus' lack of compassion that caused him to wait until the darkest part of the night, the fourth watch, to show himself. The storm provided the perfect occasion for their meeting.

As Jesus defied the laws of nature, walking to the disciples on the sea, it terrified them. Only a ghost might do this. Then Peter realized it was Jesus. And he met Jesus' inconceivable appearance with an inconceivable request. Peter walked on water. He did what Jesus did as long as his eyes were on Jesus. Peter met the appointment Jesus set. He met Jesus and had the opportunity to demonstrate his developing faith. He met Jesus and had the opportunity to succeed and to fail. And the exchange no doubt left a lasting impression on Peter's life.

Have you ever encountered Jesus in a way that moved you from fear to faith? What “boat” is Jesus calling you out of today?

Saturday

March 27 – Catch up day

Spend today reflecting on how you have encountered Jesus this week. Thank God for the ways in which he is showing you himself.

Written by Mikel Porter

Sunday

March 28 – Palm Sunday, Mark 11:1-11

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that final Sunday, he made a powerful statement. The crowds that lined his route waved palm branches as he passed by. This was a familiar symbol of a warrior king returning home from battle.

Yet, Jesus did not look the part. He rode a donkey, not a charger stallion. A sword did not hang from his belt. He looked more the loser than the victor.

These same crowds that welcomed him on Sunday turned against him by Tuesday. He simply was not the kind of messiah they wanted and demanded.

What kind of messiah do you want? A warrior or a suffering servant?

Monday

March 29 – Mark 11:15-18

The temple's purpose was to symbolize God's presence and dwelling with his people and to welcome the nations. However, it had turned into a means by which to exclude "outsiders." This encounter in the temple is couched between Jesus' cursing of the fig tree and the parable of the tenants. In light of those stories, Jesus' cleansing of the temple was more than just condemning the commercialization of the temple or the exchange of money. Jesus' actions painted a physical picture of the judgment to come. As he disrupted the sacrificial system and the whole function of the temple was put on hold for a short moment, Jesus warned: the temple is under God's judgment. This physical act escalated the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders, and in just a matter of days, it would lead to his crucifixion.

Tuesday

March 30 – Luke 20:1-8

When I was a kid, my sister Haley and I were riding in the car with my Aunt Kay. I can't remember what Kay asked Haley to do, but, whatever it was, Haley did not obey. Instead, Haley muttered words that have been quoted hundreds of times since: "You're not my boss. Meme is MY boss." And there you have it. Meme is the boss (and she remains so to this day)! Jesus was teaching in the temple when the religious leaders posed the questions: Who gave you the authority to say these things? Who gives you the right? Why should we listen to you? Jesus turned the questions on them and asked their view on John. What does John have to do with Jesus? Jesus' authority over the temple was his authority as the Messiah. That authority was confirmed at the time of his Baptism (by John) with the dove and the voice from heaven. If John was a true prophet, then Jesus is indeed the true Messiah. Jesus' authority and identity had been affirmed by John and the spectacular event at his baptism.

And I will leave you with one of my favorite quotes from Clive Staples Lewis: “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Wednesday

March 31 – Matthew 25:14-30

The scribes and the Pharisees had been given the law of Moses, the temple, and wonderful promises about how God would bless Israel and the world through them. But, they had buried them in the ground. They were supposed to be a light to the world, but they had kept the light to themselves. We have also been given grace, hope, and a story that we are to take to the world. Will we bury it and keep it to ourselves? Or we will share it with our neighbors and friends?

Thursday

April 1 – Mark 14:12-25

It is a deep human instinct to mark significant moments with significant meals. We have special dinners for the one celebrating another year of life. We have traditional meals placed around holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas. And when someone in our family achieves a special goal or milestone, we celebrate with a meal together. The meal not only feeds our bodies, but it says something about who we are and how we feel when we are together.

The great Jewish festival meals told the stories of how God rescued his people from slavery. The night before Jesus’ crucifixion, he reframed the meal to tell the story of his sacrifice. He instructed his followers to take part in this same meal for years and years to come so the story could be told again and again.

Friday

April 2 – Mark 15:22-39

Jesus is the “King of the Jews” and his reign was very different from any other King to ever walk the earth. His purpose was to suffer so that his people might overcome sin. His power was over death so that we might not die. And his throne was a cross so that we may take up our own. Jesus’ death changed everything.

Saturday

April 3 – Psalm 22:1-5; 22-24

Today marks the darkest day in the history of the world—the day God was dead. It is a silent day and a sad day. We must not move quickly through it. It is important for us to sit in the sadness and the grief before we move on to the resurrection. Grief over Jesus’ death leads our hearts to grieve over our own sin. Grief over sin leads to repentance and repentance leads to life. Sit in the darkness and grieve today before we rejoice in the morning.

Sunday

April 4 – Matthew 28:1-10

He is alive!