



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

The Easter Questions: Why Are You Crying? Who Are You Looking For?

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Dr. Matthew J. Hook

John 10 - 18

NIV John 20:10 Then the disciples went back to their homes, 11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her."

Easter rocks. But it's freaky. Because even though we get it, we don't really *get* it. It's not about butterflies, or eggs, or crocuses, or how we feel at funerals, though it impacts all of them. Easter is about Jesus rising from the dead. Alive again, alive forevermore... Whoa. Today, we're celebrating the most important event in history. Some may say "It's Christmas," God being born into the world. But, that's not so big. After all, *I did that*. Chances are, you did too! ☺ No, *Easter* is the best day of the year. The resurrection is an amazing, amazing event. It is the centerpiece, the central tenet of the faith and foundation of all we believe.

Listen, if you're visiting here because someone promised you brunch, and they said you have to come, of course you're skeptical. The Easter questions are big. Rising from the dead is not something *we've* ever seen. It's probably *the* most difficult idea to get your arms around and believe, because death is our greatest struggle. And rising from the dead is just so stinking hard to believe. So, if you're just checking this out, here's what you have to understand: Christianity, unlike every other religion of the world, is not built on the teachings of a person. This is new news for some of you. The thing that holds Christianity together is *not* the teachings of Jesus. It's the resurrection. If you were to pull the resurrection out of Christianity, it would completely deflate. We might as well sell the building, shut down, and go up north next weekend. The whole thing rises and falls *not* on a person's teaching, *not* on a philosophy, *not* on a view of heaven and hell, or eternal life. The whole thing rises and falls on the fact that the One who said it rose from the dead, on one single day in history. It's *the* big event. Still have questions?

Andy Stanley points out, if all we had were the teachings of Jesus, or the claims of Jesus, I don't think we'd have ever heard about them after he died. They were so odd, that you'd write Jesus off as an idiot or a crazy man. He went around equating himself with God. He said "*I have come to*

judge the world.” (John 9:36). Is that someone you’d want to introduce to your friends?

In history, there were dozens of people who came along and claimed to be the Messiah. For someone to walk around and claim to be God, that’s not *new* news, that’s *bad* news ☹. (to claim to be God). If all we had were the claims, we’d have never heard of him. He taught “*Love your enemy.*” (Yeah, right. That’ll draw a crowd. Think about what that means!) He said “*Pray for those who persecute you.*” What kind of message is *that*? I don’t remember to pray for all the people I love, let alone those who *persecute* me... And remember His times: Israel was occupied territory. Their enemy ROME had its foot on the neck of the Israelites. Taxing them to death. *Their* enemies had armor and swords, the latest military technology, and intimidated them daily. Jesus said “No, no, don’t rebel, love them! Pray for them!” Who’s going to listen to *that*?! Nobody! Then he said “*Forgive—every single time.*” But Jesus, what if it goes on and on? And He said “*Any time someone asks anything of you, just give it to them.*” You say, “Yeah, I’m going to follow that! I’m supposed to love my enemies, pray for people who persecute me, and give to anyone who asks? (Can I follow you? Sounds like a great life! I won’t have anything!”) His claims were so marginal, so fringe, so strange. (And a number of them were said before by others).

So why in the world have we heard of him? Why are we gathering in his name? Why are we following him? Why did his name make it out of the first century?! It *wasn’t* because of what he claimed or what he taught. Unlike every other religious movement, when Jesus died, the guys that were closest to him, his followers didn’t have a big meeting and say “Let’s spread his message everywhere!” Before Mohammed died, there was a *lot* of momentum. He was a military leader and a political leader. All that momentum was carried by his followers into the next century. When *Jesus* died, there was NO momentum. When you read in the accounts, you see the movement was slowing down. People were leaving by the dozens. On the night of his arrest, do you remember what his brave followers did? By their own admission, they ran. They hid. Why’d they record that? Because it was true. When Jesus was arrested, *they* didn’t try to keep it going, they didn’t even wait for him to die! They ran. Peter “the Rock” said “I never *heard* of the guy!” They were already abandoning the cause.

It wasn’t his teachings. It wasn’t his claims. It was the Resurrection that took hold of those cowardly guys who hid during his trial. The Resurrection took them right back to the scene of the crime, into that same Jerusalem neighborhood. And *that* was their message. “We believe he is who he claimed to be, not because of his teaching, not because he died on the cross, but because we saw him die. We saw him buried. And 3 days later, we had a meal with him! He’s alive. He’s really alive!” And that’s it. It is the resurrection that catapulted Jesus out of the first century. Not what he taught. Not what he claimed. Because his message wasn’t all that relevant. His claims were the claims of a crazy man.

The resurrection that was the primary point of every message his followers taught. They didn’t go around saying, you know, Jesus rose from the dead, *AND* let me tell you what he said in the Sermon on the Mount. Let me tell you about love. His followers didn’t go around telling about what Jesus taught. They went around telling people of this: Jesus rose from the dead. He rose from the dead. And they were teaching it right there in the area where it happened, where it would have been *so easy* for the religious leaders and people who hated Jesus to say “Whoa, hold on, we’ll fix this. Let’s all just come out to the *TOMB*! Roll away the stone. Here’s the body of Jesus! You *can’t* keep this story alive!”

If you’re skeptical, you need to know this. The last thing you may have heard was from your freshman English class, and you just went on with life after that. The story of the Resurrection did

not develop over a 100 years of time where folklore and legend made it bigger and bigger. The message of the Resurrection was *the* primary point of the message in the 1st century. In the day it happened eyewitnesses were still running around. It would have been *THE* easiest event to discount because all you had to do was produce a body. Christianity was catching fire. The Romans and the religious leaders of the day had a lot at stake and a lot of reason to produce, and they had the authority to do so. They all lived right there! But it just didn't happen.

It leads us to the weirdness of this first account. It's not teaching or doctrine. It's not some guy going up on a mountain coming back with "the truth from God." This is simply an eyewitness account. And again, Jesus' first words back from the dead formed a question to a crying, wailing woman: His friend Mary. "**Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?**" John 20:15. Those are Jesus' Easter questions.

Why are you crying? Mary doesn't even answer the questions. "*She said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."* She didn't know it was Jesus. You know **your tears can blind you**, can't they? Even to Jesus. Even today. Did you ever think God's been asking you questions for years, but you didn't hear, because you were so caught up in your own agenda or grief?

Why was she crying? Because her best friend was dead. Because the man who brought her from darkness to light was dead. Because all her hopes and dreams had been crushed. Three days earlier, the world had beaten righteousness and truth to death, when they tortured and killed Jesus of Nazareth. God asks us today: **What do you cry for?** Is it for the same things that break God's heart? Or is it for things that really don't matter?

Mary was looking for a dead body. What Mary didn't know was, on her way to the tomb, she'd left the old world behind. The old world, where:

- War is a constant reality, and millions of people live their lives forcibly displaced from their homes.
- Millions of people live their whole lives in fear.
- The old world, where death grabs even our youth and children.
- Where people live lives hurt and broken by sin, and those same hurting people hurt other people.

The old world is where God is distant, God is absent, or at least God can be put in a box and we can get on with our lives. But Mary? She'd come to a new place. This was Ground Zero of a whole new reality, in which Satan, sin, and death lost. She just didn't know it yet...

And Jesus asks "**Who are you looking for?**" In the *new* world, Jesus doesn't ask "**What are you looking for?**" A lot of us spend our time looking for "What's." We look for "it" on the TV, the computer, our planners, our attitudes. But in *that* moment, when all history was turned upside down, Jesus asks "*Who?*" It's not what, but who. Who will meet your deepest need in life and death? Are you focused on "Who?" Are you focused on others?

"*Who are you looking for?*" is the Easter question. But you know, Jesus asked that question one time before. Actually, just 3 days before, in John 18:4. But He wasn't talking to Mary. It was Judas, leading a crowd carrying torches, lanterns and weapons, to kill him. The agenda is yours. The choice is yours.

Whether or not you realize it, **you answer that question on a daily basis, decision by decision.** Who are you looking for? Are you looking among dead stuff? Are you living in the way of

thinking? Or, have you allowed the resurrected Jesus to call you by name, so that you might celebrate daily and *fully participate* in the world to come?

I admit this is hard to talk about to someone in the 21st century with an ipod and 2 computers who likes cars and wants a place up north and freedom to travel and kids who are all champion-level. It would have been easier if he hadn't come out of the tomb. It would have made Christianity like all the other religions. You could say "I believe in the book of whoever" and the prophecies of whoever, the teachings of whatever, and I can believe in the teachings of Jesus, and we can go our merry way. But the resurrection removes that option. It put Jesus in a unique category.

It makes this day *the* event that validated all those crazy claims and crazy questions and crazy teaching. We can *risk* following Jesus' teachings, letting him judge us and heal us. We can *risk* obeying his call. We can *risk* claiming Jesus' claims, and answering the Questions of Jesus. This week, be confident. You can believe and be free. Forgive lavishly. Give extravagantly. Love freely. Focus on the other person. Proclaim His message. Because we know what we know, we can be confident in life. Jesus has overcome life *and* death. Imagine the impact your life can make. Imagine our world if we lived out of this paradigm shift in such a way that people had no doubt that Jesus is alive and lives in each of us. Hallelujah and Amen!