

This Easter, Show Them the Real Jesus

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Millions of "Easter Christians" and other curious spiritual seekers will crowd into America's churches on the next two Sundays. Some will visit simply to "put in their time"—either in an attempt to ease their consciences or to please relatives. A few will see it as an excuse to buy and show off new outfits. And many will come out of genuine spiritual hunger.

A recent survey conducted by Lifeway Research revealed that 56 percent of Americans would attend a church service if invited by a friend. And while polls show that many older denominations are losing members, non-denominational churches are growing in many regions of this country at a brisk pace (along with non-Christian religions). Despite all the grim economic news we've heard this year, some trends indicate that we could actually be on the cusp of a spiritual awakening.

"It is the church's responsibility to showcase the glorious Christ to a spiritually desperate multitude. He must be introduced properly. I pray we will be faithful in the way we present Him to our generation."

We all know that lots of people went to church a few months after 9/11—and nothing lasting changed. After a few weeks a humbled America went back to being cynical, spoiled and defiant. Today, because our wallets are being squeezed by layoffs and corporate meltdowns, many people are looking for spiritual answers out of desperation. My biggest concern is whether or not they will find that help when they show up at church this weekend.

What Jesus will we show them? Will they hear the true gospel? Or will they just hear a few songs, get some chocolate eggs for the kids and go home unchanged?

We can learn a lot about our presentation of the gospel from Jesus' own triumphal entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

When it was time for Jesus to be unveiled to the city—in preparation for His death on the cross—He gave very specific instructions to His followers. He did not want to enter the city just any old way. He had an exact time, an exact place and an exact method for His presentation. No detail was negotiable. Jesus followed the Father's amazing plan—and His disciples cooperated.

First, He was to appear to the Jewish crowds on the 10th day of Nissan, the Passover month. This was the day when Jewish families took an innocent lamb and inspected it to make sure it had no defect. Then, on the 14th of that month, the Passover lamb was to be placed on the altar in the morning and slaughtered by the priest in the afternoon. The same would happen to Jesus; at the same time lambs were being killed all over the city, He was placed on the cross in the morning and He died in the afternoon.

Second, Jesus was to enter Jerusalem on the back of a borrowed donkey colt. He did this to show the people that He had not come as a political revolutionary or a royal dignitary. His ways were not man's ways, and He did not come to prop up man's worldly system. Wealthy politicians rode on expensive horses, but Jesus came to us in humility—laying aside all His royalty so that He could stoop low enough to touch lepers, beggars, abused women, lunatics, criminals, social outcasts and sinners like you and me.

Third, He was to enter Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a high pinnacle that overlooks the ancient city from the east. This is where Jesus sat down a few days later, just before His

crucifixion, and taught about His Second Coming. It is also the spot where His feet last touched the ground before His ascension. Jesus wanted the people to know that just as He entered the city from the east during His earthly ministry, He will enter it again from that direction when He returns in His heavenly glory (see).

Sometimes we think we can reach the crowds with our pageants, our music and our trendy programs. But we must remember that after the crowds saw the waving palm branches and heard the noisy hosannas, they still asked, “Who is this?” (Matt. 21:10, NASB). A wonderful church service isn’t enough, no matter how loud the praise. There is only one thing that will answer that question, and it is the preaching of the pure and simple gospel. We must show them Jesus!

- We must present Him as the spotless Lamb of God who did not deserve to die, but who willingly gave His life to pay for our sins.
- We must present Him as the humble, loving Savior who came to this world not to be served but to serve—and to demonstrate to us the unfathomable love of the Father
- We must present Him as the King of Glory who will one day return to earth to judge both the living and the dead and determine who will and who will not receive eternal life.

Many in our nation today are confused about Jesus. Some think He is a great prophet who deserves respect alongside Buddha, Muhammad and the Dalai Lama. Others think He is a spineless blob of “love energy” that accepts everyone regardless of their sin and doesn’t require repentance. Still others imagine Him to be an American politician riding on a Democratic donkey or a Republican elephant. He is none of these things.

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introduced properly. I pray we will be faithful in the way we present Him to our generation.

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