

The Biggest Story Bible Storybook

EASTER

STORIES



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A Note to Parents

FROM KEVIN DEYOUNG



If Easter isn't true, then the Christian faith is worthless. That may sound a bit over the top, but that's exactly the point Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 15.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins (1 Cor. 15:16–17).

Christianity is more than believing in the resurrection, but it is never less. When Jesus declared to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life,” he followed up this pronouncement with a simple and bracing question: “Do you believe this?” (John 11:26). That's the question we should ask ourselves and—when appropriate—our children every Easter.

Do we believe a Jewish man born in a feeding trough in the backwater of the Roman Empire was the Son of God incarnate? Do we believe this man died on a cross to take away our sins? Do we believe that he rose again three days later? Do we believe that

after this resurrection he appeared to hundreds of witnesses, ate fish for breakfast, showed off his scars, and walked through walls? And do we believe this same man, who later ascended into heaven, is coming back to earth someday to judge the living and the dead? Jesus's question to Martha is his question to us: Do you believe this?

To be sure, the resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact whether we believe it or not. But when we embrace for ourselves the story of Jesus, and the person and power of Jesus, it makes all the difference. If Jesus is the Son of God, we should listen to him as if he were God. If he rose from the dead, he is worthy of all our praise and worship. If he could be trusted to keep his word then, he can be trusted to keep his word now. What could be crazier than saying you believe this man defeated death, but then denying that he has any claim over your life?

The annual holidays of Good Friday and Easter provide a wonderful opportunity to talk to our children about what Christ accomplished for us through his death and resurrection. Whether we get to tell the story to children in a Sunday school class, to family around the dinner table, or to a neighbor wondering what the fuss of Easter is all about, the message about a man who died and couldn't stay dead often resonates with young people more than we (or they) understand.

Whether we realize it or not, we are all formed by stories. This is especially true the younger we are. It is our job (and privilege!) as parents to pass on the stories of our faith to our children, and it is the work of the church to do the same with the people in her midst. I hope that the five stories in this booklet—taken from *The Biggest Story Bible Storybook*—can be a helpful reminder of the good news we believe as Christians, and the good news we get to share with others.


Kevin DeYoung

CHAPTER 77

The King Comes

LUKE 19

The Biggest Story is all about Jesus—the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the Snake Crusher. And believe it or not, the story that is told is mainly about his death. Yes, there's the Christmas story about his birth. And there are plenty of stories about his miracles and his ministry. But the biggest thing about the Biggest Story is that Jesus died—and of course, that he didn't stay dead.

That's why the Bible tells us nothing about Jesus the toddler, or Jesus the teenager, or Jesus the college student (okay, there wasn't college yet), but it does tell us a lot about the last week of Jesus's life. The last week started happy on Sunday, but for just a few hours. Then things got sad, and sadder, and sadder still, until Friday and Saturday were the saddest days in the history of the world.

Then Sunday came, and it turned out that all the very sad things were a part of God's very amazing plan. But we'll get to that Sunday soon enough. If you skip the sad parts of the story, the happy parts won't seem nearly as happy as they really are.



So let's start with the first Sunday of the last week of Jesus's life. We call the day Palm Sunday, because the crowds lined the road with their coats and with palm branches, like a king was coming to town.

And he was! The king was Jesus, and as he rode to Jerusalem on a donkey, the disciples and the crowd of pilgrims gathered round to sing his praises. "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they shouted. "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"

In other words, they believed Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for. What a happy day.





Except it wasn't happy for everyone. The Pharisees didn't like all the attention Jesus was getting, and they didn't think Jesus deserved the praise he was receiving. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "tell your disciples to be quiet."

Jesus made clear he didn't agree with the professional party poopers. "If these people were silent," he said to the Pharisees, "the stones would start singing in their place." You can't shut up the whole world when its Creator comes to town.

As happy as the crowds were on Palm Sunday, by the time Jesus made it near the city, his smiles had turned to tears. He looked at the great city of Jerusalem and wept because he knew what was going to happen. The people were going to reject him. They were refusing to follow the true King. They were going to kill the one who came to save them. Jesus cried for the sad days that would come upon Jerusalem in the years ahead. That was hard.

Harder still, Jesus knew on that happy Palm Sunday that the hardest, saddest days of all would be the ones he would have to endure over the next week.

PRAYER: You are the Savior, King Jesus! Give us life to sing and shout your praise. Amen.



CHAPTER 80

A Meal for the Ages

MATTHEW 26



Jesus knew he was going to die and that he needed one more meal with his disciples. Jesus made the plans. He found a room and got everything prepared for supper. Jesus was going to be the host of this special meal.

The meal was special in a lot of ways. For starters, it was Passover—the holiday where God’s people celebrated when the angel of death passed them over in Egypt and the Lord set them free. It was also the last supper Jesus would have with his disciples before Judas betrayed him. And it was the meal where Jesus handed down the practice of the Lord’s Supper (sometimes called Communion) to the church. This was no ordinary dinnertime.

As they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it. He then broke the bread into pieces and gave it to his disciples. Nothing too extraordinary so far. But then Jesus said something very important. “Take and eat. This is my body.” Jesus wasn’t saying that the bread somehow became his body. He was saying, “You used to eat the bread of suffering from Egypt. Now you will eat the bread of suffering from my death. Whenever you eat this bread, I will be with you.”



Then Jesus took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave each of the disciples something to drink. “This is my blood of the covenant,” Jesus said. Jesus wasn’t saying the red wine they drank was actually his blood. Jesus was saying, “You used to sacrifice the blood of bulls and goats for the forgiveness of sins. Now there is a better promise. If you feast on me in faith, God will wipe away your sins and you will live forever.”

When Christians meet together for worship, they still celebrate the supper that Jesus gave his disciples. It’s a special meal for those who repent of their sins, trust in Jesus, and belong to a church. Communion is a time to remember what Jesus did and to tell the world that he died for sinners.

It’s also a time where Jesus is with us. When we eat from the broken bread and drink from the cup, we have fellowship with Jesus. We are joined with one another and joined with the one who died for us. It’s food to help our faith, a supper to give us strength.

PRAYER: Jesus, we thank you for the bread and the cup. We thank you for life in your name. Amen.



Everyone Leaves Jesus

MARK 14

Jesus knew he was going to die and that his closest friends would desert him.

Judas was the worst. He was one of the twelve disciples, but he never truly loved Jesus. He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. For a little bit of money, Judas agreed to turn Jesus over to his enemies. Many of the Jewish leaders hated Jesus. They were jealous of his popularity. They were envious of his power. Most of all, they wanted to kill Jesus because he said he was the Son of God. They didn't have eyes to see who Jesus really was.

Early on Friday morning, after the Last Supper, while it was still dark, Judas came with a mob to arrest Jesus. The men had swords and clubs. The chief priests and scribes and elders were there too. Judas gave Jesus a kiss on the cheek and said, "Teacher!" That was the sign to those who were with Judas. They laid hands on Jesus and took him by force. But he didn't put up a fight. It was almost his time to die.





Jesus's friends and followers ran away. They were too scared to be seen with Jesus.

Judas wasn't the only one to turn on Jesus. Before the arrest, Peter, James, and John were supposed to watch and pray with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. But it was late, and they were sleepy. Jesus's best disciples couldn't even stay awake one hour to help their teacher and friend.

Later in the morning, after his arrest, Jesus stood trial before the chief priests and scribes and elders. It wasn't a fair trial. They brought in people to lie about Jesus. Even the things Jesus really said, the priests didn't understand (or try to understand). They had already decided that Jesus deserved to die.



If that wasn't bad enough, Jesus's boldest disciple was turning into a chicken, or a scaredy-cat, or whatever animal you can think of that is the opposite of courage. A few hours earlier, Peter made a big boast that he would never, ever leave Jesus. But Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew Peter. And sure enough, before the rooster crowed on Friday morning, Peter had denied Jesus three times.



Unlike Judas, Peter would later repent of his sin and go on to do great things for Jesus. But there wasn't any greatness in Peter on that day. He swore up and down that he had never even met Jesus before. No one wanted to be near Jesus, let alone follow him.

Jesus was hated, when he should have been loved. He was despised, when he should have been worshiped. When his friends and followers should have been there for him, they all scattered. What Jesus was about to face, he would have to face alone.

PRAYER: Dear God, forgive us for the times we have denied Jesus or been too scared to follow him. Amen.



CHAPTER 82

The Snake Crusher Is Crushed for Us

MARK 15



Jesus knew he was going to die and that it was going to be no ordinary death.

We call the day he died “Good Friday.” And it was good—very good, amazingly good. We would say it was unbelievably good, except that it happened and we should believe it. Jesus suffered so that we can be set free. Jesus died so that we can live forever. Jesus was the good shepherd laying down his life for his sheep. That’s why we call it Good Friday.

But for anyone who loved Jesus, that Friday seemed anything but good. It must have seemed to the disciples like Sad Friday or Tragic Friday or The Worst Friday in the History of the World.

As soon as it was morning, the Jewish leaders bound Jesus and delivered him to Pilate. Pilate was the Roman ruler in that region. He was the one who would decide whether Jesus lived or died (even though he could only do what God had already planned).

Pilate wasn’t convinced Jesus had done anything wrong. He wanted to release Jesus and be done with him. But Pilate was more concerned about people liking him than doing the right thing, so he gave the crowd in Jerusalem an option: “I will release one prisoner: this murderer Barabbas or the King of the Jews. Who should I release?”

They chose Barabbas instead of Jesus.

“Then what shall I do with Jesus?” Pilate asked. “Crucify him!” they shouted.



So the soldiers took Jesus and led him away. They clothed him in a purple robe and gave him a crown of thorns. They pretended to worship Jesus, but it was all a joke. They struck him on the head and spat on him.

If you could have seen Jesus being led to his death that afternoon, everything would have looked upside down. Here was the Maker of all things too weak to carry his cross. Here was the loving King killed between two thieves. Here was God's beloved Son mocked and mistreated by anyone and everyone.



But there he was—Jesus, the Christ—hanging from a cross. The sky went black because it was a day of judgment, and Jesus cried out to heaven for help. But this was a time to feel the curse of the law, not the smile of God.

Jesus had become sin for us. He breathed his last, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. The disciples were scared and confused. The world was dark and sad. Everything seemed wrong.





But one Roman soldier at the foot of the cross got it right. “Truly,” he said, “this man was the Son of God.” And if Jesus was the Son of God, maybe that last breath was not the last word from Jesus.

PRAYER: Dear Jesus, we thank you for your sacrifice on the cross. You faced God’s frown for sinners like us. Amen.

CHAPTER 83

Jesus Lives

LUKE 24



Jesus knew he was going to die and that he wouldn't stay dead.

Friday was dark and sad. Saturday was stone-cold silent. But Sunday—the third day—was not just another day or another week. It was another age. A new time had begun. The Biggest Story had turned a page. The world would never be the same.



At the break of day, Mary Magdalene and a group of women went to the tomb. They thought they would find Jesus there and put perfume on his dead body. What they found instead was a complete surprise. On the outside of the tomb the stone had been rolled away, and on the inside of the tomb there was no Jesus!

The women wondered what this meant. But before they could think very long, two angels as bright as the sun stood by them. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" the angels asked. "Jesus is not here. He has risen, just as he said!"



Then the women remembered that Jesus had said that he would be raised on the third day. They had not understood what this meant. But now they did. The slithering serpent had not won after all. Death had been defeated. The wages of sin had been paid for. The long-awaited Snake Crusher had kept his promise, and all the promises of God would forever be kept in him.





Mary and the other women ran back to tell the disciples what they had seen and heard. At first, the disciples didn't believe them. "A dead man back to life? What a fairy tale," they thought.

But Peter got up and ran to the tomb to see for himself whether the good news was too good to be true. When he arrived at the tomb, it was even more amazing than he had dared to hope. Peter hurried into the tomb and found nothing but grave clothes. Jesus wouldn't be needing those anymore. He wasn't dead any longer, and he wouldn't be dead ever again.



In the days and weeks ahead, Jesus appeared to the disciples several times—in a room, along the road, on the beach making breakfast. He even appeared to more than five hundred of his followers at one time.

God raised Jesus from the dead, and plenty of people saw him with their own two eyes. The light of the world was still shining. The bread of life was still alive. The true vine was the firstfruits of a new hope. It turns out the best news in the history of the world was too good not to be true.

PRAYER: We thank you, God, for the resurrection and the new life we have in Jesus. Amen.





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