

6 PREACHING FOR TIPS EASTER

by: Mark Driscoll

For most churches, Easter is the biggest Sunday of the year. It is an occasion to celebrate the resurrection victory of Jesus Christ over Satan, sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God, while also seeing lost sheep return home and lost people become Christians.

For some preachers, though, it is a difficult time because they struggle with the weight and pressure of preaching an Easter sermon in fresh ways year after year. Having now preached on every Easter at Mars Hill Church since 1996, I relate, and I would like to offer the following six preaching tips for Easter in hopes of serving those who serve others by preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. Keep your Easter message short

It is very difficult to get children's workers on Easter because so many of your key people want to bring family, friends, and coworkers to church and then go enjoy brunch or some special time together. So, it is wise to do the Easter service "family style" with no childcare. This gives your kids' workers a day off, allows you to turn services around more quickly (as Easter requires multiple services for many churches), and also allows the service to be uniquely fun. For little kids, perhaps some crayons and coloring sheets as gifts would be helpful. Let the parents know in advance that the service will be short, that some noise from the kids is welcome—indeed, the sound of children is a good sign of God's grace and the church's future—and that there will be lots of singing and celebration that the kids will enjoy.

2. Keep your Easter message simple

Easter is not a time to get fancy. The goal of the Easter sermon is not to impress your people with your oratory skills, your Greek syntax expertise, or your clever cultural insight. Easter is a time to boldly, loudly, passionately, gladly, and publicly proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ! So, keep your Easter sermon simple. Hearing the good news of Jesus is something your people will delight in if the Holy Spirit resides in them, so make it plain. They know you will tell them Jesus is alive, they are coming to hear it, and it sounds good every time, much like a wife whose husband often tells her he loves her and is devoted to her—she never tires of hearing it and rejoices every time.

3. Keep your Easter message invitational

Make sure to clearly, winsomely, persuasively, and passionately invite people to repent of sin and trust in Jesus as God, Lord, and Savior during your sermon. Do not assume that everyone in attendance is a Christian, or assume that they will figure out salvation by themselves. Be an agent of the Holy Spirit who instructs people about the finished work of Jesus and what it means to repent of sin and trust in him for new life. Be bold, take a risk, and do the work of an evangelist like Paul commands.

4. Keep your Easter message special

For believers during the Old Covenant era, [Yom Kippur](#) (the Day of Atonement) was referred to simply as “the Day.” For Christians, the chain of events from Jesus’ crucifixion on Good Friday to his resurrection on Easter Sunday is the fulfillment of Yom Kippur. This makes Easter “the Day.” To celebrate the Day, the entire Easter service should be special. Some examples of special aspects to incorporate are a greatly decorated stage, fantastic joyful songs to sing, and a choir. Also, everyone on stage should be dressed up for the special occasion (for casual churches like Mars Hill, this is particularly noteworthy, and so I always wear a full suit, including a tie, on Easter and request that all our elders-pastors do the same). In addition, you should baptize people to show the personal application of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in our place for our sins.

At [Mars Hill](#), we baptize more people on Easter than any other time of the year. Some people sign up to be baptized in advance and come ready to share their salvation story in a few minutes from the stage during the service. Others are invited to repent of sin, trust in Jesus, and be baptized on the spot, and it is not uncommon to see men in suits and women in Easter dresses being baptized in response to the power of the gospel. We do baptisms after the sermon while taking communion and singing loudly together. We even like to have the baptocam positioned to show people going in and out of the water on the screens for everyone to see. On the Day, people are singing, crying, laughing, and cheering after the sermon. The celebration of changed lives erupts into something of a sanctified resurrection party. I would encourage every pastor to do something similar.

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5. Keep your Easter message personal

Before we preach or teach, those entrusted with this high honor need to first have a deep encounter with God the Holy Spirit to ignite in us an ever-deepening thankfulness and passion for the living Jesus. In the week before you preach, you will be busy with all the details of services for Good Friday and Easter Sunday, plus the family plans you must juggle with your ministry responsibilities. So, it is imperative that you intentionally set aside some sacred silence and solitude time to get with Jesus and remember his death, burial, and resurrection in place of sin for salvation. During that time it is good to read your Bible, repent of your sin, pray, invite the Holy Spirit to meet with you, read a good Christian book on the gospel, sing, and journal what God reveals to you. It is good to remind yourself of who you would be and what your life would be like had Jesus not saved you.

It would also be beneficial to remind yourself of the evidences of God's grace you have witnessed in your own life, family, and ministry because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Personally, I like to think of those people who have shed tears over sin they have committed and sins that have been committed against them and picture Jesus wiping every tear from their eye on the other side of resurrection as Scripture promises. I like to think of those people I know who are disabled one day being free to run and leap for joy on the other side of the resurrection. And I remember the deceased whom I love and I look forward to seeing them again on the day when we rise together to walk into the kingdom that never ends.

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6. Keep your Easter message biblical

Most importantly, your Easter sermon must be biblical because the Word of God about the Son of God is the means by which the power of God is unleashed to transform lives by the Spirit of God. The following list of Old and New Testament Scriptures regarding resurrection is by no means exhaustive, but is offered in hope of helping preachers and teachers find a section of Scripture in which to root their Easter sermon:

- 1 Genesis 22:13 and Hebrews 11:19 show how the story of Isaac is a type of the resurrection.
- 2 2 Samuel 7:7–16 contains the Davidic Covenant, which promises that Jesus will rule over an everlasting kingdom, and Romans 1:3–4 shows the fulfillment as God the Father anointed God the Son as Davidic king at his resurrection.
- 3 Psalm 16:10 promises that Jesus would not be abandoned in the grave.
- 4 Isaiah 26:19 promises that the dead will rise.

- 5 Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is the entire prophetic promise of Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection, with the resurrection emphasized in 53:10–12.
- 6 Ezekiel 37:1–10 gives an illustration of the resurrection of the dead.
- 7 Daniel 12:2 is one of the clearest Old Testament Scriptures on the bodily resurrection of believers and unbelievers.
- 8 Hosea 13:14 speaks of resurrection victory over death and is quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.
- 9 Jonah 1:17 and 2:10 and Matthew 12:40 speak of Jonah's three days in the fish as a type of Jesus' resurrection after three days in the grave.
- 10 Matthew 9:18–26 records Jesus resuscitating a young girl from death (unlike resurrection, in which the risen never dies again, resuscitation is followed by a second physical death). This passage could be used to show how one day Jesus will also cause believers to rise from death, despite mockery from the world as Jesus experienced at that event.
- 11 Matthew 11:1–6 records that, as evidence of his divinity for John the Baptizer, Jesus appealed to the fact that he could raise the dead.
- 12 Matthew 12:38–40; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; and John 2:18–22 all reveal Jesus prophesying his resurrection in advance.
- 13 Matthew 22:23; Luke 20:27; and Acts 23:8 all report that the Sadducees denied the resurrection in arguments with Jesus.
- 14 Matthew 28:9 and John 20:17, 20–28 all report that Jesus rose physically from death, not just spiritually.

- 15 Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all close with large sections reporting the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from death, and any of them, or portions from them, could make a good Easter sermon.
- 16 Luke 14:12–14 is a parable Jesus told about the repayment that will come to the just at the resurrection.
- 17 John 5:19–29 records Jesus teaching that we will stand before him for final judgment and rise for eternal life or eternal death.
- 18 John 11:1–44 records the death of Lazarus and Jesus resuscitating him from death. Jesus also declares himself to be the resurrection and the life who can also raise us from death.
- 19 Twelve of the twenty-eight chapters in the book of Acts report that the continual refrain of the preaching in the early church was that Jesus had risen from death, and all or some of these sermon snippets could make a good Easter sermon.
- 20 Acts 9 reports the dramatic conversion of Saul—who had overseen the murder of the early church deacon Stephen—when he was confronted with the risen Jesus.
- 21 Acts 17:32; 23:6; and 24:11–15 report how belief in the resurrection can result in mockery and persecution.
- 22 Romans 4:25 connects Jesus' resurrection and our justification.
- 23 Romans 6:5 says that we are united with Jesus by his resurrection.
- 24 Romans 8:1–11 speaks of the new power we have, through the Holy Spirit, to say no to sin and yes to God because of Jesus' resurrection.

- 25 Romans 8:11 and 2 Corinthians 5:15 say that believers have the same power as Jesus did for his resurrection through God the Holy Spirit.
- 26 Romans 10:5–13 speaks of how to be saved through Jesus' resurrection.
- 27 Romans 14:8–12 describes how Jesus is Lord of the dead and the living because he was dead and is now alive.
- 28 1 Corinthians 15 is arguably the most comprehensive treatment of resurrection in all of Scripture. While one sermon on the entire chapter would likely be impossible, there are innumerable options that could be emphasized in an Easter sermon.
- 29 2 Corinthians 5:1–10 teaches about the state between death and resurrection as well as the kind of body we will have after resurrection.
- 30 In Galatians 1:1–2, Paul declares that the resurrected Jesus Christ gave Paul his apostolic authority.
- 31 Ephesians 2:1–10 explains how we are dead in sin but made alive in Christ through his resurrection.
- 32 In Philippians 3:1–11, Paul teaches that the resurrection is infinitely better than religion.
- 33 Colossians 1:15–20 speaks of the preeminence of the risen Jesus over every created thing.
- 34 Colossians 2:6–15 and 3:1 say that we have been raised with Christ.
- 35 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10 encourages Christians to wait patiently for the second coming of the risen Jesus.

- 36 1 Thessalonians 4:16 teaches us that at the second coming of Jesus Christ, the dead in Christ will rise like him to be with him.
- 37 2 Timothy 2:1–13 reveals Paul using the resurrection of Jesus Christ as motivation for a life of faithful ministry in the midst of suffering and trial.
- 38 2 Timothy 2:17–18 actually names false teachers who denied the resurrection, and Paul declares them to be heretics for doing so.
- 39 Hebrews 6:1–2 lists the doctrine of the resurrection among the most elemental and essential of Christian truths to learn.
- 40 Hebrews 13:20–21 reminds us that the same God who raised Jesus from death is faithful to keep his promises to his people as well.
- 41 1 Peter 1:3–9 speaks of the inheritance that Jesus has purchased for us through his resurrection and how our suffering in this life reminds us of him until we rise in his kingdom.
- 42 1 Peter 3:21–22 and Romans 6:5 explain how the Christian act of baptism shows us the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, which cleanses us from sin.
- 43 1 John 3:2 says that a Christian's resurrection body will be like Jesus' risen body.
- 44 Revelation 1:17–18 reveals Jesus as the Alpha and Omega who was dead and is now alive.

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Lastly, the ninth chapter of the book [Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe](#) may be of some help to those who preach or teach, or simply want to study the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In that chapter, called "Resurrection: God Saves," my co-author Dr. Gerry Breshears and I answer the following questions in an easy-to-read, succinct fashion:

- 1 What Is Resurrection?
- 2 What Were Ancient Non-Christian Views of the Afterlife?
- 3 What Is the Biblical Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection?
- 4 What Is the Circumstantial Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection?
- 5 What Is the Historical Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection?
- 6 What Are the Primary Ancient Objections to Jesus' Resurrection?
- 7 What Has the Resurrection Accomplished for Christians?

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