

THE MESSAGE OF
EASTER

According to the Apostle Mark

EUGENE H. PETERSON

NAVPRESS 



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INTRODUCTION

Embrace this God-life. Really embrace it, and nothing will be too much for you.

The Bible is an epic story spanning thousands of years. It is earthy and human, written by kings and shepherds, prophets and fishermen. It is also grand and true, telling how God created the universe as a good place and how it went terribly wrong, giving the world over to sin and death. It describes how God chose to work through the family of a man named Abraham to restore the goodness of his original creation.

The Message of Easter picks up the latter part of the story of Abraham's descendents, the Israelites. Israel is living under the harsh oppression of the Roman Empire. Trying to accomplish God's purpose by their own means, they have broken into factions. Some want war with the Romans. Others compromise with the Empire to keep the peace. One group demands an impossible moral excellence from God's people, thinking their goodness would cause God to give them freedom. Each group was expecting God to act on their behalf and save them from their sorrow.

The Message of Easter tells the story of one man from Abraham's family who did act. He performed signs to show that God's kingdom had arrived, that the God-life was coming upon them. Each faction hoped he would be the Messiah they were waiting for. But rather than work

with the Empire, he let them know who was really in charge. And instead of starting a war with the Empire, he called his own people on their sins, challenging them to change their ways. And he insisted that Rome was neither the enemy nor the king. God, his father, was king, and the enemies were the ancient adversaries known as sin and death.

For his trouble, his own people called for his death. The Empire gladly obliged. He was nailed to a cross, where he died naked among common criminals. God, it would seem, had lost ground in his mission to restore the world.

But what appeared to be a defeat was actually the greatest victory of all. In his death, Jesus defeated sin. On Easter morning, death too was defeated.

This is the climactic point of the story, but it isn't the end. Today, you and I are invited into this story, to follow Jesus and embrace the God-life. Read this story. Find the life you were created to live.

Time's up! God's kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message.

MARK

JOHN THE BAPTIZER

1 The good news of Jesus Christ—the Message!—begins here, following to the letter the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

Watch closely: I'm sending my preacher ahead of you;
He'll make the road smooth for you.
Thunder in the desert!
Prepare for God's arrival!
Make the road smooth and straight!

John the Baptizer appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins. People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, were baptized by him in the Jordan River into a changed life. John wore a camel-hair habit, tied at the waist with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild field honey.

As he preached he said, "The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will change your life. I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out."

At this time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. The moment he came out of the water, he saw the sky split open and God's Spirit, looking like a dove, come down on him. Along with the Spirit, a voice: "You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."

GOD'S KINGDOM IS HERE

At once, this same Spirit pushed Jesus out into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by Satan. Wild animals were his companions, and angels took care of him.

After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee preaching the Message of God: "Time's up! God's kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message."

Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed.

A dozen yards or so down the beach, he saw the brothers James and John, Zebedee's sons. They were in the boat, mending their fishnets. Right off, he made the same offer. Immediately, they left their father Zebedee, the boat, and the hired hands, and followed.

CONFIDENT TEACHING

Then they entered Capernaum. When the Sabbath arrived, Jesus lost no time in getting to the meeting place. He spent the day there teaching. They were surprised at his teaching—so forthright, so confident—not quibbling and quoting like the religion scholars.

Suddenly, while still in the meeting place, he was interrupted by a man who was deeply disturbed and yelling out, "What business do you have here with us, Jesus? Nazarene! I know what you're up to! You're the Holy One of God, and you've come to destroy us!"

Jesus shut him up: "Quiet! Get out of him!" The afflicting spirit threw the man into spasms, protesting loudly—and got out.

Everyone there was incredulous, buzzing with curiosity. "What's going on here? A new teaching that does what it says? He shuts up defiling, demonic spirits and sends

them packing!” News of this traveled fast and was soon all over Galilee.

Directly on leaving the meeting place, they came to Simon and Andrew’s house, accompanied by James and John. Simon’s mother-in-law was sick in bed, burning up with fever. They told Jesus. He went to her, took her hand, and raised her up. No sooner had the fever left than she was up fixing dinner for them.

That evening, after the sun was down, they brought sick and evil-afflicted people to him, the whole city lined up at his door! He cured their sick bodies and tormented spirits. Because the demons knew his true identity, he didn’t let them say a word.

THE LEPER

While it was still night, way before dawn, he got up and went out to a secluded spot and prayed. Simon and those with him went looking for him. They found him and said, “Everybody’s looking for you.”

Jesus said, “Let’s go to the rest of the villages so I can preach there also. This is why I’ve come.” He went to their meeting places all through Galilee, preaching and throwing out the demons.

A leper came to him, begging on his knees, “If you want to, you can cleanse me.”

Deeply moved, Jesus put out his hand, touched him, and said, “I want to. Be clean.” Then and there the leprosy was gone, his skin smooth and healthy. Jesus dismissed him with strict orders: “Say nothing to anyone. Take the offering for cleansing that Moses prescribed and present yourself to the priest. This will validate your healing to the people.” But as soon as the man was out of earshot, he told everyone he met what had happened, spreading the news all over town. So Jesus kept to out-of-the-way places, no longer able to move freely in and out of the city. But people found him, and came from all over.

A PARAPLEGIC

2 After a few days, Jesus returned to Capernaum, and word got around that he was back home. A crowd gathered, jamming the entrance so no one could get in or out. He was teaching the Word. They brought a paraplegic to him, carried by four men. When they weren't able to get in because of the crowd, they removed part of the roof and lowered the paraplegic on his stretcher. Impressed by their bold belief, Jesus said to the paraplegic, "Son, I forgive your sins."

Some religion scholars sitting there started whispering among themselves, "He can't talk that way! That's blasphemy! God and only God can forgive sins."

Jesus knew right away what they were thinking, and said, "Why are you so skeptical? Which is simpler: to say to the paraplegic, 'I forgive your sins,' or say, 'Get up, take your stretcher, and start walking'? Well, just so it's clear that I'm the Son of Man and authorized to do either, or both . . ." (he looked now at the paraplegic), "Get up. Pick up your stretcher and go home." And the man did it—got up, grabbed his stretcher, and walked out, with everyone there watching him. They rubbed their eyes, incredulous—and then praised God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this!"

THE TAX COLLECTOR

Then Jesus went again to walk alongside the lake. Again a crowd came to him, and he taught them. Strolling along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, at his work collecting taxes. Jesus said, "Come along with me." He came.

Later Jesus and his disciples were at home having supper with a collection of disreputable guests. Unlikely as it seems, more than a few of them had become followers. The religion scholars and Pharisees saw him keeping this kind of company and lit into his disciples: "What kind of example is this, acting cozy with the riffraff?"

Jesus, overhearing, shot back, "Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I'm here inviting the sin-sick, not the spiritually-fit."