

PREPARING FOR PASSION ***How to Celebrate the Last Week of Jesus' Earthly Life***

Christians always welcome the approach of Easter. We look forward to warmer temperatures, beautiful blossoms, greener grass and spending time outside. We think of Easter egg hunts and cookouts, Easter hams and Easter baskets. And of course, a little chocolate.

But more than anything, we anticipate the celebration of the Risen Lord!

It's our most important holiday in the church, but unlike Christmas, Easter usually is given only a weekend. We know that there is much more to Easter than wearing pastels, hiding eggs, and going to church on Sunday morning. But just how can we give Easter the attention it deserves???

Just for fun, I googled "how to celebrate Easter." Here are some results:

- 1. Invite over a friend or family member to play an Easter game.** Hide some eggs while your friend's eyes are closed. When you're ready, tell them to open their eyes and search for the eggs. If your friend finds them all, give them a treat and it's their turn to hide the eggs. Or you can use chocolate eggs and whoever finds the chocolate egg can eat it.
- 2. Be fun and creative with eggs!** Paint the shell of the egg any color of your choice and let it dry. When it's done drying, give it as an Easter gift to someone or keep it yourself. That way, you will have an Easter decoration.
- 3. Make some Easter gift baskets for your family and friends!** Get a basket and some food wrap. Put some plushies, toys, candies, etc. into the basket and put the food wrap all over the basket. Also, to show more Easter spirit, leave a little note saying *Happy Easter* or something similar.

And there's more. This was under "Related Searches:"

- * How to Make a Fun Easter Basket
- * How to Make Glow in the Dark Easter Eggs
- * How to Grow a Spring or Easter Basket
- * How to Make Easter Story Cookies
- * How to Create Easter Décor Confetti
- * How to Celebrate Lent
- * How to Select Unbroken Eggs at the Store
- * How to Dye Eggs for Easter
- * How to Cook a Ham
- * How to Make Roasted (Baked) Asparagus
- * How to Make Dinner Rolls
- * How to Make Glazed Carrots
- * How to Know Jesus as Your Personal Saviour

Q: Are we wrong to celebrate Easter with games, Easter egg hunts, chocolate bunnies, Easter baskets, etc.?
> No. We celebrate because of the holiness of the day. Making it fun and different from a regular day is a way of saying, "this is very special to me!"

Q: Are we out of balance celebrating Christmas in a bigger way than Easter?
> No ... the elements of Easter (death & resurrection of Jesus) are celebrated year-round, whereas the birth of Christ is mostly limited to December.

Q: Why is Easter so different from Christmas?

- (1) DEATH vs BIRTH (ill: where is the happiest place in a hospital?)
- (2) Easter demands A RESPONSE (Christmas can be easily celebrated without a deciding moment.)
- (3) The EASTER BUNNY is not as GENEROUS / COOL as SANTA CLAUSE.

My prayer for all of us is that we get the most out of our celebration of Easter. But how do we do that? First, don't skip the events that lead to Easter! These give Easter Sunday its significance.

PALM SUNDAY

* Read Matthew 21: 1-11

* "Hosanna" – Hebrew expression meaning "SAVE, I PRAY"

- (1) A Cry for SALVATION
- (2) a Declaration of PRAISE

* Palm Branches – John 12:12-15

- > Only John mentions *palm* branches
- > Also used by John in Revelation 7:9-10. Read for the context.
- > Palm branches were used in CELEBRATION OF VICTORY!

* Key Thought: It's a little strange that a cry for help or salvation and victory paraphernalia would go hand in hand. To illustrate, picture this:

It's the NCAA Basketball National Championship game, and UGA is trailing UCLA by 15 points. Georgia's All-American and National Player of the Year is out of the game and in the locker room with a possible injury. Things look bleak for the Dawgs! Then, with 5:00 remaining in the game, the player – the savior – comes back out to the court. The arena goes bonkers. The UCLA players are deflated. Everyone knows what is about to happen. The UGA fans celebrate wildly because they know they are going to win and with confidence and assurance, the fans implore this player to "win it all for us!"

* So, how do we celebrate Palm Sunday?

→ We celebrate VICTORY in the midst of imminent DEFEAT!

GOOD FRIDAY

Q: How can we celebrate good Friday?

INTROSPECTION -- 1 Cor. 11:28-32

* Make time for SELF-EXAMINATION

* Recognize the BODY OF THE LORD

Q: What does Paul mean by the "body?" (2 options)

- 1- The physical body of Jesus (and his suffering for our sins)
 - > If I don't recognize his body – his passion – I'm not taking his sacrifice SERIOUSLY!
 - food for thought: *When I sin, aren't I dishonoring Christ's sacrifice?*

- 2- The body of believers (see 11:20-22, 33-34)
- > If I don't realize that fellow believers are Christ's body along with myself, it results in SELF-CENTEREDNESS

Q: In either case, what is the result of failure to recognize Christ's body? JUDGMENT!

– What is its nature? WEAKNESS, SICKNESS, DEATH

→ Why I believe “the body” is Christ's body.

Q: What is the opposite of “drinking judgment” upon ourselves ?

> See v.31 JUDGING OURSELVES

i.e. – recognizing the physical sacrifice Christ made for our sins and asking him to forgive & cover our sins! In essence, we're talking about REPENTANCE!

If we don't ...

- > Unrepentant sin leads to sickness and death ... so deal with it!
- > The SPIRITUAL affects the PHYSICAL! (*any examples?*)

WOW! Think of the implications!

– If we're praying for healing ... we should 1st deal with unrepentant sin!

Q: How often do we pray for people and never encourage them to examine themselves spiritually?

Notice the progression:

- (1) We judge ourselves, we enjoy health, strength, life ... and we avoid
- (2) the Lord judges us as DISCIPLINE – may involve weakness, sickness, death ... and we avoid
- (3) the Lord condemns the world, which ignores what He did on the Crossroads Community Church

A GREAT IDEA:

With your family on Good Friday ... celebrate communion!

- > Don't worry about the elements ... improvise.
- > Don't worry about what to say ... keep it real and simple.

Ill: Jack Hayford