

I. 2008 Palm Sunday: The Number of Hope

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A. Easter is always the 1st Sunday after the 1st full moon after the Spring Equinox (which is March 20). This dating of Easter is based on the lunar calendar that Hebrew people used to identify Passover, which is why it moves around on our Roman calendar. Based on the above information, Easter can actually be one day earlier (March 22) and that is rare.

Here's the interesting information. This year is the earliest Easter any of us will ever see the rest of our lives! And only the most elderly of our population have ever seen it this early (95 years old or above). And none of us have ever, or will ever, see it a day earlier! Here's why:

B. The next time Easter will be this early (March 23) will be the year 2228 (220 years from now). The last time it was this early was 1913 (so if you're 95 or older, you are the only ones that were around for that!).

C. The next time it will be a day earlier, March 22, will be in the year 2285 (277 years from now). The last time it was on March 22 was 1818 so, no one alive today has or will ever see it any earlier than this year!

D. That makes today pretty significant. Today's date is 3-16. It is the only time Palm Sunday will fall on this date in our lifetime.

E. Does that date ring a bell?

F. Think about, 316.

G. One of the most memorized and quoted verses of the New Testament and maybe the whole Bible is *John 3:16 (NASB)* "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

H. Max Lucado was the first to bring this on the radar screen in a big way with the writing of a new book called *3:16, The Numbers of Hope*.

I. On the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people were crying out for Hope.

J. *Mark 11:9-10 (NASB)* And those who went before, and those who followed after, were crying out, "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; {10} Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!"

K. The literal meaning of *Hosanna* is *Save Us Now*.

L. As the people stood in the streets, they were crying out for a Savior. Crying out for someone to save them the oppression of Roman Rule.

M. They were hoping for another King like King David. They were hoping Jesus would be a military leader like David and lead the Jews into a victorious battle with Rome and regain control over their land and be a free people.

N. What they didn't know on that day was that God was starting a whole new parade of Hope.

O. John 3:16, as Max Lucado writes, is a 26-word parade of Hope; beginning with God and ending with life.

P. As he writes: If you know nothing of the Bible, start here. If you know everything in the Bible, return here.

Q. Let me rephrase it to say, if you know nothing about God, start here and if you think you know everything about God, it all began here and it never hurts to return.

II. God Loves

A. We love the loveable, but as C.S. Lewis writes: *He loved us not because we were lovable, but because He is love.*

B. *Experiencing God Day-by-Day The Devotional and Journal* Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, p. 250 "Don't ever judge God's love based on your circumstances. Instead, evaluate your circumstances from the perspective of God's love."

C. *Romans 8:35-39 (NASB)* Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? {36} Just as it is written, "FOR THY SAKE WE

ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." {37} But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. {38} For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, {39} nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- D. Every other form of religion is based on some type of performance: We are acceptable to God if we are Good, Smart, Spiritual, Faithful, Obedient... All nice qualities, and certainly the fruit of being in a relationship with God, but none necessary to be loved by God.
- E. There are no prerequisites for God's love.
- F. John 3:16 tells of a God who loves unconditionally.

III. **God Gave**

- A. When Wycliffe Bible translator Doug Meland and his wife moved into a remote village of Brazil to work among Fulnio Indians, the Indians referred to him simply as "the white man". It was not a complimentary title, since other "white men" had exploited them, burned their homes, and robbed them of their lands.
- B. After living in the area, learning the Fulnio language, and helping the people with medical and health needs, they began calling Meland "the respectable white man," a slight upgrade of how they felt about him.
- C. When they began adapting to some of the customs of the people that did not compromise their faith, the Fulnio gave them more respect and greater acceptance, referring to Doug as "the white Indian."
- D. One day, as Doug was washing the dirty, bloody foot of an injured Fulnio boy, he overheard one of the Indians watching what was happening say, "Whoever heard of a white man washing an Indian's foot? Surely this man is from God" From that day on, whenever Doug would go into an Indian home, it would be announced, "Here comes the man God sent us."
- E. The only way people could serve another in this way is as a response to the Gift that God gave us in Jesus Christ.
- F. Before God gave Jesus it would be easy to misunderstand God.
- G. God hasn't always had the best reputation, based on the kind of people he often uses to represent Him.
- H. Riding into Jerusalem on the back of donkey was not common practice for gods.
- I. It marked a new way God would be relating to the world.
- J. It is not common for a god to wash the feet of His followers, but just a few days after Jesus entered Jerusalem, during the last meal he would eat with His followers He Gave of Himself and washed the feet of His followers.
- K. *John 13:3-5 (NASB) Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, {4} rose^ from supper, and laid^ aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. {5} Then He poured^ water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.*
- L. John 3:16 presents the picture of a God who Gives.

IV. **We Believe**

- A. In some ways, all of this sounds pretty simple.
 1. Unconditional love there for the taking.
 2. Grace for the asking.
- B. All that is required is that we believe.
- C. This summer we were on a Cruise that took us to Belize for a day.
- D. While there we did one of the excursions of riding the zip line through one of the nearby rain forests.

1. Sandy did the research on the excursions and presented Hannah and me with the options.
2. It sounded like fun to me, but guys like things that ZIP!
3. I am not really sure what Sandy was thinking, but when we got there and she realized we were climbing up about 40 feet into the trees and getting strapped onto a line and shoved off a platform like a side of beef in a meat market, she began to have second thoughts.
4. The guides assured us they would not let us run out of line, but it became pretty clear that we would have to provide the Zip.

E.It is like so many things in life, the first step is the hardest and even though the guides seem reassuring and you may have even seen a few go ahead of you, it is still up to you to take the first step.

F.Jesus asks us to believe. It sounds simple, but we are asked to take a step of faith and say that we are trusting in a belief alone to save us.

G.Max Lucado states it well:

1. Islam says Jesus did not die on the cross, we must believe.
2. Judaism says Jesus is not the Savior, the Messiah, only a good man, a good teacher. We must believe.
3. Buddhists achieve Nirvana after no less than 547 reincarnations. We believe in one life, one death, one eternity.
4. Humanists don't acknowledge any divine design, no Creator God. We believe that Jesus is the source of all life.
5. Spiritual Mediums read your palm. Believers read God's Word.
6. Hindus believe in a plural of impersonal god's. Followers of Jesus Christ believe in one God.
7. Most people believe all roads lead to God, but we believe only Jesus can lead a person into a personal relationship with God.
8. Most people believe they can earn God's love, salvation, eternal life. We believe it isn't earned or deserved; it is simply received.
9. Many people don't believe in the need for salvation, but we believe it takes a cross and an empty tomb to bring salvation.

H.Because of John 3:16, We have to hold on to the Zip Line and take that step of faith.

V. We Live

A.When we start to believe, when we take that step of faith, that's when Life begins.

B.Though she may never sign up for another Zip Line adventure and never leave the comfort of the ship's deck chair around the pool, even Sandy is glad she took that step.

C.Ask her after the Service.

D.What many of us have discovered is that without Jesus there is really not much to life.

E.Max Lucado gives a great description of life: We feel the frustration I felt on Christmas morning 1964. I assembled a nine year old's dream gift, a genuine Santa Fe Railroad miniature train set, complete with battery-powered engine and flashing crossing lights. I placed the locomotive on the tracks and watched in sheer glee as three pounds of pure steel wound its way across my bedroom floor. Around and around and around and...around... and around. After some time, I picked it up and turned it the other direction. It went around and around and around....

"Mom, what else did you get me for Christmas?"

Similarly, our lives chug in long ovals, one lap after another. First job. Promotion. Wedding day. Nursery beds. Kids. Grandkids. Around and around...Is there anything else?

Our dissatisfaction mates with disappointment and gives birth to some unruly children: drunkenness,

power plays, eighty hour work weeks, nosedives into sexual perversion—nothing more than poorly disguised longings for Eden. We long to restore what Adam lost.

F. There are two words in Greek that can be translated *LIFE*

1. *Bios* from which we get the word Biology, the study of life and living organisms
2. *Zoe* life is not a thing, it is the nature, the vitality, the quality, the character of existence.
3. Lucado writes bios is life extensive, zoe is life intensive.
4. What Jesus promises is not life on a time line, not a chronology of events with a beginning and an end, life that is not based on quantity, but life based on quality. Life measured by an eternal perspective, not based on the temporal.

VI. A New Starting Point!

A. *The Case for Faith, Lee Strobel Pg. 219*

B. "He (Jesus) came into this world to make dead people live. He came so that those who are dead to God can come alive to God. If this life were only about morality, then how you live would be the most important thing, although it would still be connected to what you believe. But that misunderstands the Christian concept, which is no matter how well we live, we cannot live up to the standard and character of God."

C. "But philosophers from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, all the way to the Enlightenment thinkers like Immanuel Kant were unable to even define what morality is."

D. "But they contradicted one another pretty heavily, and the reason is that there was no transcendent, compelling moral reason. It was all reduced to mere survival. So I believe goodness or badness is the wrong starting point; life and death, spiritually, is where you begin."

E. Where does life begin for you?

F. Do you feel like you have Zoe life, Life Intensive. Life that is Vital. Abundant. Meaningful. Purposeful.

G. Or is your life just a biological existence. An Extensive collection of chronological events stacked one on the other.

H. Even the amoeba have Bios life!

I. If you want Zoe life, Jesus Life, then 316 is the number. Today is your day!

VII. Invitation