



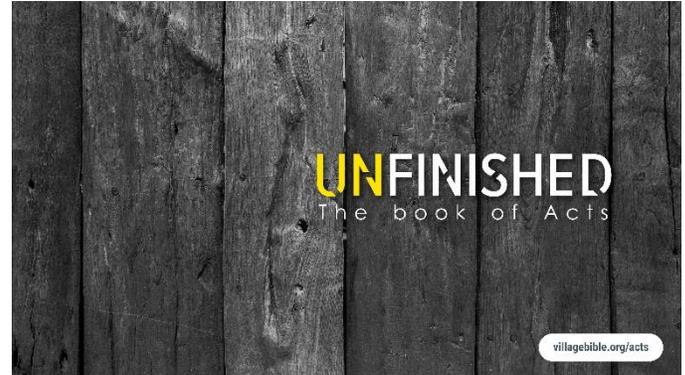
# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Unfinished

The Joy of Easter – Acts 10:34-43

Tim Badal | April 1, 2018



This morning we'll look at the account of Peter preaching to a man who lives far from Jerusalem. He's a Roman centurion—a military guard—to whom God has brought Peter to share the good news of Jesus Christ. In the process of telling this man about Jesus, Peter gives us the Easter story as well. In it we find God's promise of the joy that Easter brings. We'll be reading it in Acts 10:34–43:

<sup>34</sup> So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup> As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), <sup>37</sup> you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup> And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

The week prior to Easter—Holy Week—was a time of unbelievable ups and downs. While we speak of joy and sing of hope and peace on Easter Sunday, the days preceding that day were anything but joyful, hopeful and peaceful. The disciples were experiencing the culmination of three years of ministry during that week.

It started out on the high note of Palm Sunday. Jesus entered Jerusalem with people rejoicing and proclaiming that He was the One Who had come as the Messiah; Who had come in the name of the Lord. But that celebration quickly faded, and it didn't take long for the disciples to realize something was going terribly wrong. Even though Jesus had told them what would be taking place, they really hadn't comprehended that things would be much worse before they got better.

That first Holy Week was filled with confusion, betrayal and a loss of trust and faith. As the disciples watched Jesus be arrested, put on trial and crucified, they reached a point of utter despair. The Saturday after His death, the eleven remaining disciples were hiding in an upper room, afraid for their lives. They had lost their Leader, and they had lost hope. They could not understand how the One Who had taught them so much and Who had so powerfully transformed their lives was now gone.

Of course, that would all change the next morning. But before we get to the good news of the resurrection, I want you to realize that the difficult days Jesus and His disciples experienced in that final week should remind us that this world is filled with trouble. Many of us may have come here today feeling betrayal, loss or discouragement because of unmet expectations. Apart from Jesus, we will struggle to find any peace, joy or hope in this life.

But early on Easter Sunday, the word began to get out that the tomb had been opened and was empty. The women saw it first and they spread the word. Peter and John then came to the tomb to confirm that it was empty. But that didn't answer the question: where was Jesus? I wonder if they started to think about what Jesus had said would be taking place.

It wasn't until Sunday evening that the storm clouds really rolled away and great sunshine would enter their lives. It was then that Jesus appeared in their midst, and He even invited them to touch His hands and side—the wounds of the cross—so they could fully believe. It was then that their hearts were filled with immense, unspeakable joy.

It was that joy that led Peter and the other disciples to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ for the rest of their lives. The singular theme of Easter, I believe, is one of joy. Many preachers before me have also seen this to be true. Jonathan Edwards, the great colonial American pastor, said this: "The resurrection of Christ is the most joyful that has ever come to pass in human history." Charles Spurgeon, a British pastor, put it this way: "No man can ever take away from me the joy that Christ has risen from the dead."

You see, the resurrection is the most joy-filled event in human history and it demands our attention. Contemporary writers also speak of the joy that comes. John Piper, a pastor in Minneapolis, says, "The point of Easter is that God is in the process of clearing away this world of all its heartbreak and inaugurating joy in our hearts." Tim Keller, a pastor from New York, says, "Christ's resurrection not only gives us joy for the future, but it gives us joy so we can handle the scars we have right now."

Easter's theme is joy. This God Who put on flesh and made His dwelling among us, Who lived a perfect life, Who died a criminal's death in our place has risen from the grave. This should create in us the greatest sense of awe, worship and joy as followers of Christ.

## **The joy of Easter is extended to all people.**

What led Peter to speak about this joy in his conversation with Cornelius? First, he knew the joy of Easter had been extended to all people. Peter was preaching to a man he had never met before, so his opening words seemed a little odd. In Acts 10:34 he wrote, *"Truly I understand that God shows no partiality."*

If you have read the book of Acts, you've seen that this is a momentous shift for Peter and the church. Cornelius was a man who feared God, who had an understanding of God, but who did not know or understand Christ. Peter was sent by an angelic messenger to Cornelius to give him the good news of Jesus Christ.

But up to that point, Peter and the other Christians had seen the gospel as belonging only to the Jewish people. After all, the Jews had been the one nation who had affirmed that Jehovah was the one true God. It was the prophets of Israel who had spoken the oracles of God. But Cornelius was a Roman—the occupying force of that day—one of the soldiers who had been tasked with keeping the peace. As a centurion, he oversaw 100 soldiers and his assignment was to put down anything that might threaten Rome's rule.

### **No matter our culture or corruption**

But here Peter is, standing before this man, giving him the gospel. He opened by declaring that God shows no partiality, regardless of a person's culture. Regardless of a person's nationality or background or skin color, God extends the joy of Easter to all people.

This might have been hard for Peter to bring to a man who represented the enemy of the Jewish people. Cornelius' culture was also filled with all kinds of debauchery and sin. He stood for everything that was wrong with Peter's world. Israel wanted their independence, but the occupying force was everywhere around them. The culture and traditions of the Romans became part of the culture and traditions of the Jewish people—and for some, that meant going against God and His Word. So Peter was now meeting with a man whose job was to bring the Roman ways of life into the Jewish world—even with the threat of sword.

Peter had come to learn something that we also need to hear today —that Jesus' gift of salvation is given to everyone, red or yellow, black or white. It is given to Republicans and Democrats, old and young, rich and poor, educated or non-educated. It is given to those who are deep in their sin, and it's given to those who pride themselves on their religious qualifications. Salvation is given to everyone, regardless of their culture and regardless of their corruption. We need to praise God that He doesn't have favorites. He didn't offer His love and joy to only a few, nor in small amounts.

When I was younger, my older brother and I were staying at my grandparents' house. We were in a bedroom with two twin beds. My brother told me, "This is my room, not yours. You can sleep on your bed, but every other place is my space." So I asked him, "How am I supposed to get to the hallway." He responded, "That's your problem." He began to cordon off the area that was his, leaving only a tiny area for me. But God doesn't do this with His love. He doesn't just give us part of His presence. Jesus says to us, "My room is your room. My Kingdom is your kingdom. My inheritance is your inheritance." He doesn't consider our background or

the wrong decisions we've made. God's grace and joy this Easter is given to all people, and He invites every one of us to be part of it.

## **The joy of Easter is evidenced by certain facts.**

Not only is the joy of Easter extended to all people, but it is also evidenced by certain facts. Peter continues by telling Cornelius a story. Verses 36–37: *"As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed."*

The news about Jesus and His accomplishments was known throughout the Roman world. Even though the Centurion lived 80 miles north of Jerusalem, he still knew Who Jesus was and what He had done. Some of you here today may wonder about the historical nature of Jesus—whether He really lived or is just something someone made up—but in antiquity, even those who didn't believe in Jesus still knew He was a real Person Who made an impact wherever He went.

For example, a well-known secular historian named, Josephus, who lived at that time, mentions Jesus numerous times in his writings. Josephus did not claim to be a follower of Jesus, but his writings confirm to us that what Peter told Cornelius actually took place. Jesus went about doing good, healing and ministering to people. He died on a cross and many people even in that day believed that Jesus rose from the grave. Jesus is not a fairy tale figure, but a real Person Who lived in a real place and time.

### **The gospel tells of the virtuous mission of Jesus.**

Peter begins his story by telling Cornelius about the virtuous mission of Jesus. Verse 38: *"He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."* Twice Peter mentions to Cornelius that he was an eyewitness to these events. He's not bringing second-hand information—he was the "horse's mouth" who knew exactly what transpired, having spent three years with Jesus.

He may have told Cornelius something like this: "I met up with Jesus about seven years ago and watched Him travel around Galilee, teaching and ministering to them. He taught us about the Kingdom of God. He taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves. He told us how we could get right with God. The people loved His teachings and flocked to hear Him. Thousands of them would sit for long periods of time just to hear what He said, because He taught as One Who would speak on behalf of God."

Peter also told Cornelius about the miracles: "He healed the blind and the lame. He made the lepers whole. He ministered not only to physical ailments, but also to people's sin—their ailments of the heart. He forgives people—even when they're caught red-handed in their sin. He loved them, even as He called them to obedience. He even raised several people from the dead. He delivered people from tormenting demons. Jesus was a Man with no sin, no guile, no deception. Everything was done out in the open, before both His followers and His critics."

### **The gospel tells of the vicarious crucifixion of Jesus.**

But what did that cost Jesus? His enemies—the religious leaders of the day—wanted Him dead. They accomplished that through the betrayal of Judas. Jesus was arrested and taken through a brutal court system that accused Him of sins He never committed. They said His miracles and healings were works of the devil. They eventually consigned Him to death on a cross—or as Peter said to Cornelius, *"They put him to death by hanging him on a tree"* (verse 39).

We need to remember that the joy of Easter began with the agonizing death of Jesus on the cross, which eventually became the great symbol of the Christian world. The cross was an execution device that the Romans reserved for the worst criminals. Their hands and feet would be nailed to a wooden cross. The person would then eventually die through suffocation, because he would run out of energy and would become unable to expand his chest.

But we read in Hebrews 12:2 that Jesus went to that horrible execution with joy in His heart. Why? Why would God Himself want to die this way? Jesus knew that His death was vicarious, that He was dying in the place of those whom He loved. He went to the cross for your sins and my sins. He took the shame and penalty so we would not have to. He knew that by laying down His life, He was giving us eternal life through a restored relationship with His Father.

### **The gospel tells of the victorious resurrection of Jesus.**

Peter doesn't stop with the crucifixion. In verse 40 he tells Cornelius, "But God..." This was the turning point after verse 39, a time when Peter himself had lost his faith and hope. But now, looking back, he can say, *"But God raised him on the third day and made*

*him to appear.*" It wasn't like Jesus simply disappeared, never to be seen again—that would only leave us with big questions. It would be food for conspiracy theories.

Instead, Peter says, "We saw Him." He tells Cornelius, "*God...made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*" For 40 days, Jesus walked and talked with His disciples—not just the eleven closest disciples, but at one point we're told over 500 people saw Him as the resurrected Savior and Lord.

So the joy of Easter comes, not just because of the virtuous mission or the vicarious crucifixion, but also through the victorious resurrection of Jesus. We do not celebrate and proclaim a dead savior or a dead martyr. We can't go to the tomb of our great leader—because there is no tomb where He still lies. The tomb is empty. Jesus Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father and one day He will return.

Because of His great resurrection victory, you and I can have hope. We can have joy. Now, there may be some of you who are still skeptical, who want more proof for this story. If that's you, consider the eyewitnesses. Peter went from having no faith and no hope to being filled with joy for the rest of his life—and this was true for the other disciples as well. They spread the news of the gospel to everyone who would listen. Why would they do this, if it wasn't true?

One of my favorite authors is Charles Colson, who started a ministry to prisoners, because he himself was once a prisoner. Chuck Colson was part of President Nixon's inner circle cabinet and was involved in the Watergate scandal. He said that he can prove through Watergate that the resurrection was true. Here's what he said:

I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.

Why would these men, with great joy in their hearts, live and die for a lie, unless what they saw and what they experienced was the truth? Brothers and sisters, I too have seen many of you changed by the risen Savior and Lord. Can we not say amen to the reality that Christ has risen from the dead? That's why we're here and that's what Easter is all about—the joy of knowing that Jesus has fulfilled all He was given to do and now is presiding over the universe from heaven itself. We are so very blessed to be part of His family. But not all people have received this joy, because all have not received Christ.

## **The joy of Easter is experienced by all who receive it.**

Peter finishes his talk with Cornelius by saying, "*He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*"

In other words, all the people in history from the prophets on have been defined by Jesus. So my question for you on this Easter Sunday is this: has your life been defined by Jesus? Or are you simply trying to live life on your own? Peter says we are called to proclaim the good news of Easter joy to anyone who will listen and to all who will receive it.

### **We receive this by faith...**

Peter says forgiveness of sins is given to everyone who believes in Him and it begins with faith. We can't work our way into heaven. We can't do enough good to get into heaven. The Bible tells us our most righteous deeds are like filthy rags to a holy God. Rather, we are dependent on the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have to believe, as Peter tells us, that Jesus is the One appointed by God—the Messiah, the chosen One, the Savior of the world. We must put our trust in Him, then we must follow Him all the days of our lives. That's what it means to turn to Christ—and it is done by faith.

### **...and through it the forgiveness of sin...**

When we trust in Christ, what do we receive? Peter says in verse 43, "*Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*" Part of believing in Jesus means we must recognize and admit to God that we are sinners in need of His grace and mercy, that apart from Him we can do nothing. Then we must accept that when Christ died, our sins were taken to the cross and payment was made for them. This results in our new birth and new life. The Bible tells us that though our sins were scarlet, Jesus has made us white as snow (Isaiah 1:8).

## ...which guarantees us a glorious future.

Christ's death and resurrection provides a bright future for us. In the last day, Jesus will preside as Judge over the living and the dead, according to verse 42. Scripture tells us we are appointed to die, and then the judgment will come (Hebrews 9:27–28). We will all face death and will stand before God. We might try to convince God that He should let us into His heaven because of all the great things we've done—but we'll fail miserably in that.

Or we can say—and we can believe even now—that Easter created a way where there was no way. Through Christ's work, you and I can have an eternal life of peace and blessing in heaven. But the Bible also speaks clearly that there is a place called hell, for those who have rejected the message of Christ and who have chosen to live life on their own. Still, God says, "Whoever will come, whoever will believe, I will not cast them out" (John 6:35–40). He won't push you away, because He wants you to experience His love and mercy.

So this morning I ask, do you have the joy of Easter? Have you experienced that joy? If you have never bowed your knee to Jesus Christ, let today be the day of your salvation. It simply requires you to confess your sins and ask Jesus to come into your life as Lord and Savior, the Master of your life. It's a prayer of dedication that says, "Lord, I want to live according to Your ways rather than my own."

You can pray that prayer right where you are, in your own words, expressing your own heartfelt desires. Romans 10:9 says, "*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*" If you want to know more about this, talk to me after the service or stop by our Welcome Center or one of our ministry booths. We'll be happy to tell you more about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me add one more thing. Many of you already have a relationship with Jesus Christ. I want to ask you, how much joy do you have because of Easter? Last night I watched two teams walk off a basketball court without joy—Loyola and Kansas. They looked sad. They looked defeated. They looked like their futures had been destroyed. One of my pet peeves is that far too many Christians walk around like they have already lost the game.

Then I saw the victors running around, jumping and hugging each other. Those were the teams and fans from Michigan and Villanova. They were screaming and rejoicing in what was to yet come. Brothers and sisters, let me remind you, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are not defeated. We are not given to despair. We are not losers. As followers of Christ, because of the work that He did on the cross and because of that empty tomb, we are more than conquerors in Him (Romans 8:31–39).

Let's show the world that—amen? Let's be the most joy-filled people our friends, neighbors and coworkers have ever seen. The reason we need to be joyful is that we have been given this gospel. Peter was told to proclaim it to all, and we have been given that same calling. Why are we called to serve and honor God in the far-flung places of the world?

I'm going to close today by showing you a video that asks that question—why should we as Christians reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

[Video \(click on this link to watch\):](#)

Why do we do it? Why do we engage the world for gospel impact? Why do we make the sacrifices? Why do we give up the familiarity of our culture? Why do we give up the luxuries and comforts of our society? Why do we invest the time and money training for something others think is absolutely crazy? Why do we fall in love with people we've never met before and do everything in our power to live among them?

Why do we traverse expansive oceans, dirt paths, rocky canyons, raging rivers, thick rain forests, snowy peaks and blistering deserts? Why do we fly on airplanes with dangerous service records? Why do we ride on over-packed buses on broken roads? Why do we take leaky boats through uncertain waters? Why do we walk mile after mile after mile?

Why do we choose to live in difficult environments, restricted areas, polluted urban centers or remote rural villages? Why do we work so hard to get into places others are trying to leave; places stricken by disease, war, poverty, corruption and despotism? Why do we learn unfamiliar languages, become immersed in unfamiliar cultures, eat unfamiliar foods and embrace lifestyles that make us unfamiliar to our own families?

Why are we willing to help those who hate us, serve people who suspect us and work for the good of some who at first wish we would just go away? Why do we raise countless dollars, invest countless hours and shed countless tears for the billions-and-counting who have never heard the truth? Why do we obey the call of God to go into all the world, sharing the gospel and making

disciples of all peoples? Why are we compelled by love and willing to risk everything to see even one person transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ?

Because the tomb was empty!

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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