

EASTER SUNDAY 2022

Good morning Church, and Happy Easter to each of you!

I am so glad that you have chosen to come and spend

Easter with us...

This morning we have come together, to celebrate that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and that He rose again! His resurrection, means that we worship a living God! Jesus is alive and seated at the right hand of God. Amen?!

This morning you had some choices to make...

What time to get up... What to wear... And if you would choose to eat Easter eggs for breakfast? Who of you did that?! Come on, own up! Nice ☺ I did too!

Choices. We all make them every day. You could have chosen to stay home and skip church today – well done making the decision to get here by the way! For those watching online, we won't give you a hard time, well done for connecting with us, I know there are so many other options you could have chosen to watch, so thank you for joining us! It is truly an honour.

For the past month or so, we have been going through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where we have been looking at the Beautiful Life that Jesus wants us to live. A life that is often countercultural, to the world we live in.

This morning we are looking at the last words that Jesus shared in this message, and most of it, has to do with choices. Choices.

Easter also presents us with choices...

How so? Well, in the world we live in, with all its options, opinions, ideas, there are so many choices. But Jesus' words make us rather uncomfortable, because simply put, Jesus says that in life, we basically have two primary choices – to follow Him, or not to.

So let us look at what Jesus said;

Matthew 7 verse 13; ...

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

You may not have realised it yet, but we all have a big choice in front of us. The choice to take the wide road in life, or the choice to take the narrow road. The wide road is easy going, it has plenty of room for opinions and tolerances. It's the easy road. It's like when you go to Mugg & Bean – and you order a 'Easy' Cappuccino. It's just so eeeasy. But for the coffee snobs out there – we know that narrow is the road that leads to life! Right?!

Jesus said, there is a narrow gate, and a narrow road, and that means that not all roads lead to life. Like that old song said; “One way, Jesus.”

The world will tell you there are many many, ways, wide ways, easy ways, but that is not the truth that Jesus teaches us. Narrow is the gate, and the road that leads to life.

So here is the BIG choice in front of all of us this Easter...

Which path will you take in life?

Jesus said,

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

I know that a lot of people know the Easter story, it is familiar then, but you know what, they just don't care too much about it.

Maybe that's you today. You've heard the story before, of Good Friday, of what Jesus did on the cross, of the sacrifice he made for us, and you think it's lovely, but it's not really that big a deal to you, and it has not really changed you, or impacted you.

Or maybe you are someone who considers yourself spiritual, and you have your own beliefs, and you are happy for us to have ours.

Or maybe you are cynical, you know the Easter story, you know what it's about, and you can't believe you've come here today, or that you're watching online, because your girlfriend, or your wife, or your mother made you! And you're wondering how long it's going to take before you can get out of here!

Here's the thing, I know it may feel like this does not really concern you, and you've probably heard about Easter lots of times before, but can I tell you why this is so important.

It's personal. It concerns you. It concerns your present. It concerns your future. It concerns your eternity. It is relevant to you.

I have learnt that people will do extraordinary things when they know why it matters. People will get up to watch their kids play sport at 4am. Because they know it matters. It's personal.

People will change their diet and their lifestyle when their doctor tells them a heart attack is months away if they don't change.

When it comes to Jesus. The story of Good Friday, Easter, and even Christmas. It is the story of the Gospel. It is not just historical, or logical, it's personal.

Jesus said,

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

Which path are you on my friend? Are you on the road that leads to life, or the road that leads to destruction?

I know that as a general rule, people don't like commitment. We like to keep our options open, don't we. Just in case something better comes along! We don't like to tie ourselves down.

We all say we don't like it when people do this – and then we do it. We get invited to something, but we stall in responding, just in case something else comes up that we might want to be at more! Be honest! I know, because someone did that to me the other day when I invited them to something!

We all would prefer more choices than only one. We like to keep our options open. But as John Stott says; "Jesus cuts across our easy-going syncretism." He will not allow us the comfortable wide-road. Narrow is the road that leads to life.

You see, it is not just about the wide road, and wide gate, it is where the wide roads leads to that is important. If you think about it, you are not really choosing the road, but you are choosing the destination.

Let me put it like this, if you want to go and see the pyramids in Egypt, and you decide to drive through Africa to get there, which way do you go?

Well, the N1 is a national road in South Africa that runs from Cape Town, through Bloemfontein, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Polokwane all the way to the Beit Bridge border to Zimbabwe. It forms the first section of the famous Cape to Cairo route. If you want to get to Cairo. That's the way you go.

So, if you want to go and see the pyramids, but rather than taking the N1, you decide to take the N2. That's going to be a problem. That's the wrong road. You won't land up in Cairo. You will go through Gqeberha, East London, and you will end up in Pongola, and a place called Piet Retief!

My point is, all roads do not lead to the same destination!

Now it is very unpopular today, to say that if you follow Jesus and His way of salvation, that you will go to heaven, and if you do not, then you will go to hell. It's the kind of message that the world wants to cancel out.

And let's be honest, even for us, it sits uncomfortably. Some people argue, that God is a loving God, so He would never let that happen. They go down the route that hell is not real, or it is just a metaphor to get children to behave, or alternatively, that hell is not permanent.

But this is not what I see in the Bible. I see that we have a choice to make, and that there are eternal consequences of that choice.

So which road do you choose? Which, destination do you choose?

Please don't think it doesn't concern you. It does. Jesus says it does.

Here is the next choice you have to make this Easter;

Whose voice will you listen to?

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus then goes on to warn his followers, that not everyone who speaks for Him, speaks on His behalf, and that not everyone who says that they follow Him, truly belong to him. He says;

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (Matthew 7:15-16)

¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Everyone is listening to somebody or something. We are all influenced by someone or another. It has been hard to see some more significant Christian leaders fall recently, and my how the world loves to pounce on that and milk it for all its worth. But people will always make mistakes, great or small. Our faith should not rest on big personalities.

Jesus knows that there are people who are not all they say they are. So he says, by their fruit – you will recognize them. Friends, it’s easy to fake it. Not everything and everyone are legit. Fake news is not an invention of our social media era – there has always been fake news, right back to the serpent in the Garden of Eden!

But we live in an era of communication, when it is so easy to listen to teachings from so many different sources. Tik Tok, YouTube and WhatsApp clips are forwarded left right and centre, often without context, and they fly around so quickly and before you know it, its viral and everyone has seen it, heard it, experienced it.

Paul said this in 2 Timothy;

For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (2 Timothy 4:3)

Friends, don’t go with whichever communicator out there makes your ears itch nicely. You have a choice to make on what is true and what is false.

Not everyone who claims to follow Jesus actually does – time will show in the fruit of their lives. Time will show the fruit of our lives.

So just because your university lecturer tells you that you are naïve to believe in God, just because your school teacher tells you that you've got to fit in to the way the world does things, just because some big brained atheist thinks they have the universe figured out, does not mean you have to go along with that!

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. Have been led astray. We have left God's path, to follow our own.

Whose voice are you listening to?

Jesus said;

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27)

A teacher once said, “A farmer had 10 sheep, and 1 of them jumped out of the pen. How many were left?” “None” said the farmer's son. “You don't know math” said the teacher. “Yes, but you don't know sheep” said the boy.

Sheep are so easily led astray. They get distracted all kinds of things. Let's not be silly sheep that just rush off into danger. Let's listen to the voice of Jesus, the true shepherd of our souls.

Here is the final choice we have in front of us this Easter;

What foundation will you build your life upon?

Look with me at the words of Jesus in Matthew 7;

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. (Matthew 7:24-25)

²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

We've just seen some tragic flooding in KZN. It was heart-breaking to hear about the lives that have been lost, and to too see the devastation the landslides caused, and the rubble and ruins of what were once beautiful homes.

Strong foundations are important, homes built on weak foundations cannot stand in tough times. Yes, things might look great on the outside, someone's life might look grand, like an episode out of Grand Design's, and their view is lovely, but when the storms of life come – ill health, financial difficulty, relationship challenges, grief, will the foundation stand strong?

When you build your life on things like success, status, popularity, are those trustworthy foundations to build your life on?

Like sandcastles in the sand, some people build their lives upon empty dreams, and weak foundations.

As a pastor, I have had the privilege of walking with many incredible people who have experienced some heavy storms in their lives, and their foundation, their faith in Jesus, and their understanding that God is in control through all things, has got them through. Storms will come, I wish they would not, but they just keep coming.

What foundation will you build your life upon?

The only true and trustworthy foundation for life - is Jesus.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

Friends, what is Easter to you?

The truth of the Easter story begins long before we were around. It begins long before this city was here. The story begins with God. The One God, who is the maker of heaven and earth, and God created us, he made us in his image and likeness, male and female with dignity, value, worth, and purpose.

He made us to worship. We can worship him, or we can worship other things. And we chose the latter. We chose to sin against him, to rebel against him, to disobey him, and as a result we were separated from him. And to this day, we live under the foolish myth, that to some degree we are each our own God, declaring what we think to be right and wrong, and living our own life, by our own standards.

But God lovingly came into history, broke into history, as the man, Jesus Christ, fully God, fully man, he lived a life without sin, though he was tempted, in every way, as we are, and he went to the cross, and there he substituted himself for us. Jesus lived the life we should have lived, and died the death we should have died. When Jesus went to the cross, he took willingly upon himself the sin of those who would come to trust in him. That means me, as a sinner, Jesus went to the cross, and took upon himself, all my sin, past, present and future, and Jesus Christ, the God-man, died, in my place, for my sin, paying my debt to God, and purchasing my salvation.

Jesus' dead body was then laid in a tomb, and for three days, he was buried, on the third day, a Sunday, which is why Christians worship on that day, Jesus rose in victory over Satan, sin, death, demons, and hell, and he commissioned us by the Holy Spirit to be missionaries, to tell this amazing story, this good news, that there is a God who passionately, lovingly, continually, and relentlessly pursues us. And he ascended into heaven, and today Jesus is alive and well, and he is seated on a throne, and he is ruling and reigning over all nations, and over all cultures, and all philosophies, and all races, and all periods of time.

He is ruling over all generations, and women, and men, and children, and those who are living, and those who are dead, and those who have been born, and those who

will be born. And he is living, and he is King of Kings, and he is ruling and reigning, commanding everyone everywhere to repent of sin! Because he is coming again to judge the living and the dead and those who trust in him, will enjoy eternity in his kingdom of heaven forever, and those who do not will suffer apart from him in the eternal torment of hell.

And so today, I believe God is inviting you to respond to his good news of salvation. He wants you to make a choice this Easter. He wants you to choose life!

So today, I want to encourage you to open your heart to God. We are not here to push a religion... Religion says IF we obey God, he will love us. We are here to share with you about Jesus. Jesus says I love you, just as you are, and if you come to me, I will change your life. Religion leaves you uncertain of where you stand with God because it's based on you. Jesus leaves you sure of where you stand with God because it's based on Jesus and what he has done, not what you have done or can do. So friends, today, Jesus says;

Choose my path – through the narrow gate and road that leads to life

Choose to listen to my voice – I am the way and the truth and the life.

Choose to build your life on my foundation, on the rock, that will never be shaken, no matter how big and scary the storm may be, I will hold you firm. Amen.

Please bow your heads;

Friends, if you have never come to the point in your life where you have decided to follow Jesus, but you want to. I want you to pray this prayer;

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite you to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow you as my Lord and Saviour.

While everyone's eyes are closed. If you prayed that prayer. Won't you slip up your hand so that I can be praying for you...

...

Jesus, thank you for what you have done for us! Thank you for...

Friends, we have come to the end of our service, but if you want someone to pray for you, just come up to the front and there will be someone to talk to you.

Next Sunday we are starting an exciting new series called "Finding your fit." Perhaps you're wondering what God is calling you to do with your life. I can't wait to get into this new series, because I know we are going to see people step into God's plan for their lives.

God bless you all, and a happy Easter!