

# Celebrating Easter in The Way of Christ and His Apostles

*An apostolic Paper - Presented and written by Michael Vos, April 2021*

*Equipping the:*

- *ADMCC Network of Churches*
- *The BILD Global Family Network of Churches*

## **Introduction**

About forty days ago I was part of a conversation with a leader of a bible society, which are the groups that are responsible for the distribution of translated bibles in specific region<sup>1</sup>. This leader was from the county of Georgia and he was Eastern Orthodox, a comment was casually made that in the Protestant tradition, the time of Lent has begun in preparation for Easter, he said, “it is interesting to me that Protestants put so much tradition on the death and resurrection, but not on the Kingdom during Easter traditions”.

This casual comment sparked a series of questions that I needed to explore, it has stuck with me for the last forty days. He used the word tradition a couple of times, and he used as a way to describe expected patterns for an entire group of people, and thus I knew what he was saying that these Easter traditions are really paradigms. He was describing a part of the Protestant paradigm.

Today we are celebrating Easter, but as we continue to understand the paradigm of The Way of Christ and His Apostles, what do we want our traditions to be in celebrating Easter? What is it that we should be pausing to remember? What is it that we need to truly be rooted into?

These are the questions we will begin to answer today in celebrating Easter in The Way of Christ and His Apostles paradigm, as we are establishing patterns now for the paradigm for generations.

## **Brief overview of Protestant Easter Traditions**

Let's look at a few of the Protestant patterns of Easter before we move into The Way of Christ and His Apostles paradigm.

- The date of the Easter celebration day is in the beginning of April each year. The specific day is different each year as it is based on the cycle of the moon. In the Easter Orthodox tradition, May is the month that Easter is celebrated, as they use the Julian calendar.
- Easter is focused on Jesus' resurrection from death. Many denomination patterns use the greeting, “he is risen” with the response, “he is risen indeed”. The primary focus is on the conquering of death, that death could not hold Jesus thus death will not be able to hold us, He conquered it and because of this we will raise up to be with him forever.
- Lent is about a six week preparation time for Easter. It begins on ash Wednesday and proceeds up to the Saturday before Sunday's Easter resurrection day.
- Holy Week is the week before Easter, with Maundy Thursday which is the last supper and washing of disciples feet. Then Good Friday which is the day that Jesus died, often memorialized with people rehearsing the sayings that Jesus said from the cross.
- Passion of Jesus remembers that patience of Jesus during his final days
- Lilies are traditionally used during Easter to decorate, as they symbolize new life, the resurrection. This plant has been used for so long that many people commonly call them easter Lilies.

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<sup>1</sup> I am many conversations concerning the translation and distribution of the Bible as I am the chairman of unfoldingWord team. This team is stewarding building tools for church networks to translate, own and then distribute bibles.

- Eggs are associated with Easter as they symbolized that stone was rolled away from the tomb, while also symbolizing new birth inside. This symbol has grown into decorating eggs, hunting for eggs and easter bunnies with eggs.

### **Celebrating Easter in The Way of Christ and His Apostles Paradigm**

Together we are carrying these principles and teachings, we continue to recover them and then we are rooting them into our lives, churches and communities, we are stewards of passing on what we have first been taught. We also need to understand that we are establishing patterns today that will be looked at and may even become traditions for the paradigm for generations. These are important days, the patterns of our lives and churches matter!

I will outline four critical patterns of how we should be celebrating Easter.

### **By the way we are meeting as churches each week, we are celebrating Jesus as the promised King.**

The structure and settings of our churches matter, we need to continue to be intentional about how we meet. Like the early church we have simple gatherings in homes and businesses around an evening meal. Each week we celebrate our new life in Christ. We should be inviting friends, coworkers, neighbors and relatives to come and have a meal with us. Our church meetings are in a family setting because we our churches are a family. Thus by the way we are choosing to meet, we are kerygmatic, we are celebrating the gospel story which includes Jesus' resurrection.

The meal is an intentional part of our churches. It is simple yet profoundly impactful for conversation and having our minds be renewed. We are intentionally following this pattern from the scriptures, not setting up institutional structures for our individual church meetings where the meal has been reduced to bite-sized wafer. Over time the meal<sup>2</sup> was removed from the center of the meeting, it was debated in the 2nd century and by the 4th century it was prohibited.<sup>3</sup>

By meeting as a family, we learn more about the gospel message in the context of an authentic community where others can see and understand real life. People need real answers to their questions about life and we see that this was the patterns set up by the apostles throughout the biblical narratives.

As our churches meet as families each week, it is very healthy for us to collectively pause each year to celebrate. It is good to pause and reflect for two main reasons:

God instructed Israel to pause and remember His deliverance. In Exodus 12: 2-3:

*"the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of*

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<sup>2</sup> See supplemental chart entitled: History of the Meal, Timeline and Pictures.

<sup>3</sup> A summary of how the meal was removed from our churches looks like this:

- 1st century - evening meal - for creating a family environment, open to everyone, benefactoring to those needing a meal, creating a relational and familial atmosphere, reminding everyone about Christ's broken body which is a sign of the new promises He has made to His church.
  - called a love feast - a festive, large meal together
- mid-late 2nd century - the bread and cup began to be separated from the meal
- 4th century - the love feast, the whole meal was prohibited, the terms "Lord's Supper and breaking of bread" disappeared from use
- 4th-5th centuries - increasing sense of awe and dread associated with the physical table where the sacred eucharist was celebrated
- 10th century - the meaning of the word body changed in Christian literature, thus the Christians become even further away from "breaking of bread" being a meal
- 11th-13th century - the rise of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the wafer of bread was the physical body of Christ
- 15th-16th - church goers are told to examine themselves before the partake of the bread

*Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household."*

We live in a fast paced world. We live in a hyper-fast paced world today. Thousand years ago it took about 200 years for the cultures to change, thus many generations of people lived in the same culture that their great grandparents did. But today this is not the case, we live very different than our great grandparents. It is estimated that our culture significantly changes every 5 years. Adding to the fast paced changes in our culture is the invention of individual technology devices. Today a plethora of content is produced by individuals all over world every minute. If we put all the ancient written texts up until 2011 and digitized them, this is equal to the amount of content that is produced in two days today.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that we live in a fast paced world and thus it is good to pause and remember, but the way we are pausing to remember each week, we are celebrating our new life in Christ.

**Like the apostles, we should always be equipping each other to understand Jesus' resurrection as part of the kerygma which is fully understood inside the context of God's Story.**

The leaders and apostles that we read about in the New Testament were establishing the believers in the fullness of Jesus' gospel and God story. When we look at Peter's five messages in Acts and Paul's gospel teachings in the letters to the churches, what we see is that the leaders were attempting to establish people what we have recovered and what the early church called, the Kerygma. This proclamation, the good news that the kingdom of God is at hand is that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, that He came to earth to inaugurate a new Kingdom, was put to death, then conquered death and will come back to again, and until then we are to be building His Kingdom.

With the gospel message understood and believed, the apostles dedicated themselves to teaching everyone how to live with this belief in the good news. This is referred to as the apostles teachings, the deposit, the faith, what the early church leaders also called the didache. They dedicated their leadership to teaching people how to live with a special emphasis on everyone understanding the first principles of living with this faith.

Thus we have the kerygma and the didache as core recovered aspects that Jesus' apostles taught, yet they also equipped the churches to understand these teachings as part of God's story. The best example of this is how Luke tells us how Stephen message tied Jesus to God's meta-narrative and how Jesus' walk on the Emmaus road unfolded all the scriptures. What we see is that Luke shared what Jesus' unfolded in his careful account of the messages he records in Acts, thus by tracing these messages of Peter, Stephen, and Paul we can see how the apostles were always equipping the churches to understand the resurrection as part of the kerygma, the didache and God's story.

We should be careful not to separate our Easter celebrations from it fuller gospel story, or how we should live (the didache) or from God's story. We can easily see today how churches doctrinal statements that have become separated from a full understanding, lead to generations of people protecting the doctrines but not able to connect them to the scriptures. Thus like the pharisees before us, we end up protecting secondary teachings that become our traditions and then falsely become our scriptures that we protect.

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<sup>4</sup> Many of these statistics and an author's implications are from Thanks for Being Late by Thomas Friedman.

This is evident today in many of our institutional churches. Many bible studies are little stories of the Bible but not integrated or weaved together to be understood in God's story, thus people do not mature. Their faith becomes about rules of what they believe rather than the freedom of living in Christ's principles. The real things today that people struggle with is not fighting issues and getting people into simple bible studies. Instead, like the apostles we need to equip people with answers to their substantial questions about life.

**The apostles were aware of how the good news of Jesus was part of a larger narrative. We should be aware that we are part of stewarding TWCA patterns as part of building Christ's Kingdom that has been inaugurated but not fully realized yet.**

Can you see us as being part of the common thread throughout the beginning of the world? Do you believe that this can really be true? Can you tie yourself to the apostles and people in the early church? Can you tie yourself to the leaders and churches throughout history?

The apostle did not get it right away nor did they put it all together all the time, but as the letters unfold we have evidence that they tied the good of Jesus to the unfolding story of God. What they were able to do was this: They understood the significance of the time that they lived in and tied to both the past and the future. It is easy to read books and get an overview of the past, putting it all together. ***But can we have this deep understanding in the moment we are currently living?*** The apostles were not perfect, nor did they get everything all the time. But with the Spirit guiding them they did understand the time in which they lived.

What we need to understand about our current epoch of time is that we are shifting back to an apostolic age. This true worldwide, but especially relevant in Western cultures. In the past Western culture was a Christendom culture. Not everyone was Christian, but christian values were at the base of decisions and life. For example the United States in this definition was never a Christian nation, rather it was a culture that had Christian values at its base.

Today, this Christendom culture is shifting western cultures. Today Christianity is viewed as narrow, inequitable and naive. When the mainstream culture is viewing Christian values in this way it is similar to the apostolic age.

A metaphor is helpful here<sup>5</sup>. In a Christendom culture, Christians can float down the river with the culture as many of the decisions and life is in harmony. But in an apostolic age, Christians are swimming against the mainstream culture, their views and life are seen as naive and even blamed for the evil problems in the culture. This is the current days in which we are living.

We need to understand the days in which we are living, like the apostles, connecting it to the past and the future. ***We should make no mistake about this, God is re-introducing the Way of Christ and His Apostle patterns for us to follow in such a time as we are living!***

Be aware that authentic family churches, that love each and the world, and that connect their lives to the beginning of time and to building Christ's kingdom until he comes again, is what will ultimately amaze the rulers of the world.

**Faith that God continues to do miracles, that the Spirit is doing things that are beyond this world.**

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<sup>5</sup> Monsignor James P. Shea has a great book on this entitled: From Christendom to Apostolic Mission, Pastor Strategies for an Apostolic Age.

Notice we said faith, not just belief. We can believe something to be true, but faith is more, it is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we cannot see. We must continue to have faith that God is doing miracles. We live in both a visible and invisible world, what some scholars also call the immanent and the transcendent.

What often happens to us humans overtime is that we lose sight of the invisible or transcendent aspects of our world. We spend our days problem solving the visible aspects that we begin to believe that this is the only aspect that exists. But we should not be lulled asleep. John Calvin is quoted as saying, "the churches job is to make the invisible world visible!"

Today we live in a post modern world, this means we view science, religion and history in a particular way compared to previous times. Here is very brief overview of how the transcendent or invisible world was viewed in each time period:

- Premodern, up to 1200 AD - the invisible was mainly understood to be superstitious
- Modern, 1200-1800 AD - these are the days of Enlightenment<sup>6</sup>, invisible is replaced by science whereby we can research and then prove or disprove beliefs of the past. (Also referred to as the scientific revolution<sup>7</sup>.)
- Post Modern, 1800 until today - there is no right way to view anything, everything is to be interpreted, there is no one right history, no one can see the world for the way it is. The results of living in a post modern world is there is a lot of lost hope, anxiety, and depression.

We need to understand that we live in both the immanent and transcendent world. Ecclesiastes 3, God said that there is time for everything for every activity, and that He has put eternity has been put on the hearts of man. This is the transcendent world, the invisible aspects that we cannot see but we have faith knowing that it is real and has impact on immediate lives.

Let's pray that the transcendent can be felt but us all. We cannot reason ourselves into the super natural, it must be experienced and felt individually, we need to go from believing it to having faith in the invisible world that affects our visible world.

In the past two years:

- I have been depressed beyond despair, unable to understand why work is worth it because the visible signs have been depressing
- I have had a holy spirit experience in Hong Kong flowing through my hands
- I have had a dream that showed me what unfolded the following day, seeing the day before it visibly occurred
- We have had teammates that have had dreams the prompted them to listen
- We have had teammates that heard inaudible speaking (sounds of silence) that confirmed we have called people to be part of this work

The invisible world is real, and the Spirit is guiding us and encouraging us in this journey to recover and root The Way of Christ and His Apostles. Believe it and then move towards faith in it, pray to experience it.

Now we pray together our prayer from Ephesians 3 that has defined this next chapter of our lives, God is doing things in the invisible world, things that we cannot even imagine.

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<sup>6</sup> See chart entitled: How the Enlightenment Neutralized Western Christianity.

<sup>7</sup> The scientific revolution were events that mark science as a form a reasoning utilizing mathematics, physics, astronomy, biology and chemistry to changes humans view about the world and nature. It had significant influence on the societies and cultures and became known as as the Enlightenment.

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.*

*I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.*

*I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.*

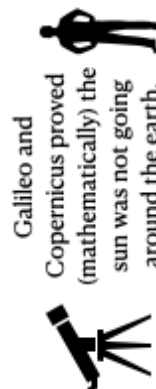
*Amen.*

The solutions for life change traditionally offered by the church have failed. We need a new solution. The previous age has failed to produced transformation because our models have been focused on defending the faith rather than establishing the church in the first principles of the faith, the teachings!

This has produced generations of Christian leaders who are more concerned about being right, than transforming their own or other peoples lives.



What else could the church be wrong about?



Galileo and Copernicus proved (mathematically) the sun was not going around the earth.



Church training curriculum was centered on defending the faith and the 'right truth'



The church knows the truth. We need to train our leaders in more truth and we can reason and defend our faith against these.



This is the age of "Reason", science, rationalism and philosophy will show us the truth!



Focusing on the right truth has caused endless divisions in the church, with over 45000 denominations today.



The church attempted to figure out how God's will and mans will/choice could be reconciled.

Enlightenment

reasoning says God is a determinist, he knows everything, what will happen, so man's choices do not matter.



Modernism turned to power - in the church the Pentecostals emerged speaking boldly about Spirit power

Enlightenment

continued to argue that choices were the key to life change - the church agreed and offered better choices

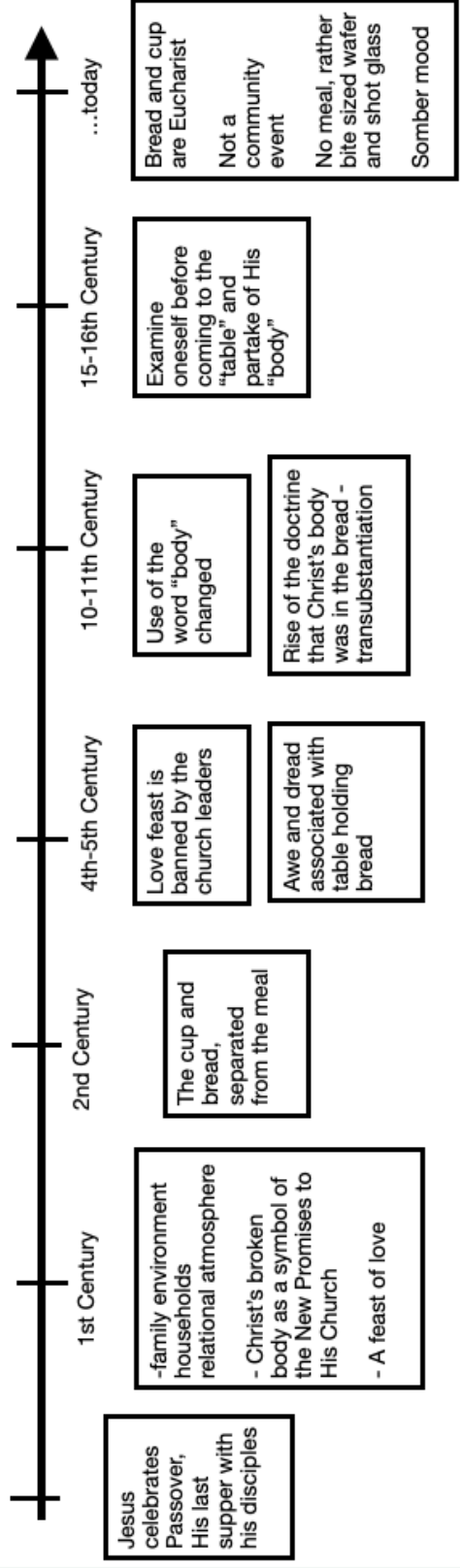


Postmodernism has now said that tolerance is central virtue, suggesting that some things just cannot be changed

Age of Enlightenment - Enlightenment made truth the most important part of being human - thus the church made truth the foundation of the faith



Do not touch the table



...today

15-16th Century

10-11th Century

4th-5th Century

2nd Century

1st Century

Jesus celebrates Passover, His last supper with his disciples

-family environment households relational atmosphere  
- Christ's broken body as a symbol of the New Promises to His Church  
- A feast of love

The cup and bread, separated from the meal

Love feast is banned by the church leaders

Awe and dread associated with table holding bread

Use of the word "body" changed

Rise of the doctrine that Christ's body was in the bread - transubstantiation

Examine oneself before coming to the "table", and partake of His "body"

Bread and cup are Eucharist  
Not a community event  
No meal, rather bite sized wafer and shot glass  
Somber mood