

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. Scripture text: **Acts 12:1-5.**

Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. [2] And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. [3] And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. [4] And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. [5] So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

-  B. Each year at this time we hear things about colored eggs and rabbits. Throw in something about the resurrection of X and having to wear some new clothes and you have Easter.
- C. Not to mention how merchandisers use the weekend to peddle their products and make a little extra money.
- D. In the past, from this pulpit, I have talked about Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas but not Easter. This morning's lesson changes that.

II. EASTER, WHY DOES THE DATE CHANGE?

A. Easter is the convergence of three particular events:

1. The Hebrew Passover.

This is celebrated during the first month of the Jewish calendar which is called Nisan. Nisan is always in the Spring of the year.

2. The commemoration of the crucifixion and resurrection of X.

This takes place at the feast of the Passover.

3. A pagan festival of Spring.

This was celebrated at the vernal equinox on March 21st. The celebration marks the end of winter and was in honor of the goddess of the Saxons.

B. The date on which Easter was to be celebrated has been disputed for many years. In the 4th century a method to calculate "Easter Sunday" was adopted and is still followed today.

1. The first Sunday after the first full moon.
2. After the vernal equinox.
3. On or after March 21st (the first day of Spring).

Easter can fall on or between March 21st and April 25th of any given year.

C. This year (2008):

1. The vernal (Spring) equinox was on Thursday, March 20.
2. The full moon was on Friday, March 21.
3. Today (March 23), is the first Sunday following these two events.
4. The last time Easter was this early (Mar. 23) was in 1913. And it will not happen again until 2160.

D. This method was adopted in 325AD by the Council of Nicaea. Hence, it is far too late to have any NT authorization.

E. The holiday was named for a Teutonic (German or Scandinavian) goddess of light (Anglo Saxon title Eastre or Ostera) and her festival was held in April. Therefore, the celebration of Easter is purely pagan.

F. Easter is celebrated for several reasons:

1. "Christendom" considers this to be the greatest event in the Christian religion.
2. Many believe that the new plant life in the Spring symbolizes the new life people have in X.
3. Easter marks the end of the Winter season and ushers in the season of Spring.

III. SOME EASTER TRADITIONS.

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-  A. Lent and Ash-Wednesday.
1. Lent is the 40 days preceding Easter Sunday. Ash-Wednesday begins the period of Lent. In the OT people would sit dressed in sack-cloth and ashes to show repentance. Lent is a tradition to show repentance and it is begun with ashes.
 2. Lent and Ash-Wednesday are traditions of men. There is no Biblical authority for these practices.
- B. Maundy-Thursaday and Good Friday.
1. Some believe that Jesus ate the supper with the apostles on the Thursday before His crucifixion which makes Friday the day Jesus died.
 2. Maundy-Thursaday and Good Friday are terms and designations of men and not found in the NT. There is no Biblical authority for having special services on these occasions.
- C. Easter Eggs and Rabbits.
1. The egg is a symbol of life and creation. The giving of multi-colored eggs was a custom throughout the East. In church history, the egg symbolized the immature hope of the resurrection. Rabbits are associated with fertility of Spring because of their ability to produce many young.
 2. Eggs and rabbits are traditions of men, with no special significance in the Scriptures.
- D. Wearing New Clothes.
1. This long established tradition can be traced back to how in times past new Xians would wear white robes for the Easter service to symbolize their new life because of the resurrection of X.
 2. The NT does not authorize the wearing of special garments for any work of Xian service.

IV. ACTS 12:4 AND EASTER.

-  A. There is an unfortunate translation in the KJV which uses the word Easter.
- B. The Greek word is “pascha” and is translated as passover in every other translation instance. It should have been so translated in the KJV, Ac. 12:4.
And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.
- C. Herod had arrested Peter and since it pleased the Jews he decided to keep him in prison until after the Jewish feast of the Passover.
- D. The KJ translators allowed the traditions of their present day determine the English word used.

V. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

-  A. Easter is about the resurrection of X. We should never allow our view concerning the “holiday” interfere with our belief in this essential part of Xianity.
- B. Story of preacher denouncing Easter on Easter Sunday and how one listener said, “I don’t believe in the resurrection either.”
- C. Four important reasons to believe in the resurrection (see 1Cor. 15:14,14b,15,17).
and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. [15] Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised... [17] and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.
1. **Our preaching is in vain.**
The apostles preached the resurrection (see Ac. 2:24; 4:2,19,20; Ac. 17:18,31).
(Ac 17:18) And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, “What would this idle babbler wish to say?” Others, “He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,”-- because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.
(Ac 17:31) because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”
See also Heb. 6:1,2; 1Cor. 15:1-4; Rom. 4:25,26.

(1Cor 15:1-4) Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, [2] by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. [3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,



2. **Our faith is in vain.**

If one cannot approach God by faith then:

- a. One cannot be pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6).
And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.
- b. One cannot be saved by grace (Eph. 2:8,9).
For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; [9] not as a result of works, that no one should boast.
- c. One cannot be baptized (Mk. 16:16; Col. 2:12).
(Mk 16:16) “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.
(Col 2:12) having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.
- d. One cannot have acceptable works (Jas. 2:22).
You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;



3. **The apostles are false witnesses.**

In effect this makes, the NT one big lie. The church, is built on the preaching of the apostles (Eph. 2:20).

having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,



4. **Everyone is still in his or her sins.**

Baptism is a sharing in the death, burial and resurrection of X (Rom. 6:3,4). Baptism saves by the resurrection of X (1Pet. 3:21). If Jesus was not raised neither are we able to rise to walk in newness of life.

(Rom 6:3,4) Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? [4] Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

(1Pet 3:21) And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

VI. CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.



- A. Not everything about Easter is “off limits.”
- B. Belief in the death, burial and resurrection is essential to becoming a Xian.
- C. I do not have to wait for one Sunday a year to celebrate the resurrection. We do it every Lord’s Day as we assemble for worship.
- D. Three great celebrations:
 1. The Lord’s Supper celebrates the Lord’s death.
 2. The Lord’s baptism celebrates the Lord’s burial.
 3. The Lord’s day celebrates the Lord’s resurrection.
- D. Plan of salvation for non-Xians; erring Xians.