

# The Story of Easter as told by John

**Carol:** Easter is a very special time of year. I wonder if you celebrate Easter in some way. Or, maybe you've heard of Easter and wondered what it's all about.

**Tammy:** Hello, and welcome to Women of Hope. Carol's here with me again and we're looking forward to spending some time with you and talking about this very special day... why?

**Carol:** Because Easter is the time when we especially remember that Jesus, God's Son, died and then came back to life. So, it has a sad aspect, but it is also a very happy time.

It is not often that we invite a man to join us on Women of Hope. But today, Ralf is with us and he is going to tell us the story of what happened at Easter in a different way. He's going to act the part of one of Jesus' close friends, a young man called John. But Ralf's not making this up- it's all written in God's holy book, the Bible.

**Tammy:** Welcome Ralf. We're looking forward to hearing you tell the story.

**Ralf:** Thank you Tammy and Carol. Now I want *you* to use your imagination. Imagine you are back in the year 33 AD, just two years after Jesus died and came back to life. And imagine I'm John, a close friend of Jesus, one of his followers.

**Ralf (as John):** It's been two years now since the most amazing event *ever* happened. It was the event that changed the whole world. Now that's a big claim to make isn't it? But let me start by telling you about myself. My life has changed completely. Things have changed for a lot of us.

I live in Jerusalem and now there are a few thousand of us here who are followers of Jesus. Everyone is so excited because we are carrying on Jesus' work here. That's what he told us to do. And we are seeing people healed from sicknesses, masters who are starting to treat their slaves fairly, and many, many people joining us and wanting to follow Jesus.

People are believing in their hearts and saying out loud, so others can hear, 'Jesus is alive. God raised him from the dead.' People are asking Jesus to change them and we are seeing people change in really good ways. It's so exciting.

Now I need to take you back a bit, to explain how it happened that Jesus was killed, by crucifixion. And I'll try to explain what that meant for the whole world too.

I met Jesus three years before he was killed. Back then, he asked me to be one of his first followers. He asked my brother James too, and ten others. I was a fisherman before I met Jesus, but I knew I should take up his offer and become his follower. He was a rabbi – a teacher who called people to spend time with him and learn about God from his teaching.

But he wasn't like any of the other rabbis. He chose some very ordinary people to be with him. We saw him do amazing things. He turned water into wine, he brought a dead man back to life, he fed a huge crowd of people with only a few fish and a couple of pieces of bread. But his teaching – it was powerful. He got to the really important issues and some of his teaching really surprised and challenged us. He taught us to *love* our enemies, to keep *forgiving* people who did wrong things to us, to treat everyone well. He said that God's kingdom, his rule, was coming and it was among us. He even said *he* was the way to God.

He had the crowds enthralled. People flocked to him – to hear him speak and teach, and to be healed. But then he started to say things that were even more difficult to understand. He said that he was going to die and come to life again after three days. He said things that showed he believed he was one with God. So then some people decided they didn't like him. They couldn't accept his words. He was challenging our religious leaders.

So, the leaders wanted him killed and they started to plot for this to happen. Things started to get a bit unpleasant.

**Tammy:** I don't know about you, but I feel like I'm really listening to John himself. Let's hear what happened next.

**Ralf:** It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover feast and Jesus had decided we'd all go up to Jerusalem for this celebration. Some of our group, like Thomas, were a bit worried about it

because they knew there were people there who wanted to kill Jesus- and maybe us! But Jesus was determined to go. He knew that was what God wanted. It was part of God's big plan, as we would find out later.

So we went to Jerusalem, and Jesus had someone prepare the special feast for us to celebrate. All the Jewish people celebrated Passover. It reminded us of how God had rescued us from being slaves in Egypt many centuries earlier. We always had a special meal at Passover time.

Well, we all sat down for the Passover meal – Jesus and twelve followers. We ate the usual foods and had the usual drinks, but then Jesus took some bread and wine and told us that we were to use these from now on to remember his death. We didn't understand what he meant at the time, but now we do.

Look, it's easier if I explain it this way The Jewish people - and I'm one of them - we had to sacrifice lambs to God each year as a way of showing we were sorry for our sins of that year. We knew we weren't good enough to approach God and we needed him to forgive us. But Jesus was bringing in a new way. At the meal he talked about a new covenant – a new agreement, sealed by *his* blood. From now on – well, from after his death and resurrection – these sacrifices would not be needed any more. Jesus was going to die, like the lambs of the old sacrifices, and once he had died that was it. No more sacrifices would be needed. He was the perfect sacrifice that paid the penalty for all our sins. From then on people had to just accept that Jesus' had taken their sins away by dying.

But back to the Passover supper. We finished it and then Jesus went to pray in a garden called Gethsemane. We went with him, but it was late, I was tired and I could hardly keep my eyes open. Something was going to happen, that was for sure. Jesus wanted us to stay awake and pray but we kept falling asleep.

Then it happened. I heard people coming. They were carrying burning torches. They came up to us all and we could see that they were guards from the temple. They came waving swords and they arrested Jesus. I was so scared, I must admit, that I took off. I ran away. So, did most of the others!

They gave Jesus a mock trial. It wasn't in any way fair and it was illegal. They accused him of blaspheming by claiming to be God's Son. He just kept quiet and let them get away with it. Remember, he knew this was all part of God's plan.

Then they beat him really badly. The soldiers were very cruel. Jesus' enemies stirred up a crowd to call out 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' He hadn't committed any crime, and there was no real evidence against him. But they took him outside the city of Jerusalem, to a hill called Golgotha. They nailed him to a wooden cross, to die.

I'm ashamed to say that I hung back and kept out of sight during the trial. But when they took him out to be killed, I was there. I had to be.

**Carol:** I wonder how you feel as you listen to Ralf acting the part of John, Jesus' friend? It must have been so hard for John and the others who had grown to love Jesus, who had spent a lot of time with him. I always feel so sad as I think of him being put to death so unjustly.

**Tammy:** Yes, this is definitely the sad part of the Easter story. But let's hear 'John' tell us the rest of the story.

**Ralf:** Jesus was put on a cross, between two other men, criminals who were also being crucified. The soldiers stripped Jesus' outer clothes from him and gambled over who would keep them. It was already written in the Scriptures that this would happen. In fact everything that happened to him that day was prophesied. I can't tell you about all that; it would take too long.

But some strange things happened that day. When Jesus was dying on the cross the sky went dark for three hours. In the temple there was an important curtain guarding the most holy place; at the moment Jesus died it was torn from top to bottom.

Before Jesus died, he prayed to God, 'Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.' Even while he was dying he was thinking of other people.

Then Jesus asked me to look after his mother, Mary. And I took that very seriously. I still do. She lives in my home, with my family. That dark day we stood together for hours watching her son, my friend, suffer on the cross. Then at last Jesus cried out 'It is finished' .... and he died.

I was heart-broken, and so were all his friends and followers. We thought something wonderful was going to happen but now... he was dead! We felt lost. Scared. Confused. We went and hid in a room, afraid of the authorities and not sure what to do.

**Tammy:** Here on Women of Hope we've been listening to the story of how the Lord Jesus Christ was put to death, though he was completely innocent. But that wasn't the end of Jesus! No, there's more to this true story. Let's listen to Ralf again as he acts the part of John, a follower of Jesus. The last thing John told us was that Jesus was dead and that he and the other followers went and hid in a room. Things didn't seem to have turned out well.

**Ralf:** Jesus died on a Friday. A rich man offered that Jesus' body could be placed in a tomb he owned, a burial place like a room carved into rock. The authorities placed a big stone at the entrance of the tomb and put soldiers there to guard it. They didn't want anything unusual to happen. They had heard that Jesus said he would come back to life, and they thought someone might try to steal his body and pretend that he had come back to life. So, there were soldiers guarding the place. Some of the women followers watched and saw where they put Jesus' body. (Luke 23:50-56)

On the Sunday morning, some of these women went to the burial place, where the soldiers had put his body. These women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna and another Mary. They took some spices that they had prepared to anoint Jesus' body; that's the custom here. But when they got there they found the stone had been rolled back and the soldiers were lying unconscious on the ground. So, they could just walk into the tomb. They walked in there, but Jesus' body was gone! They didn't know what to think!

Suddenly two men in shining white clothes appeared beside them. They were angels, God's messengers. The women were scared, and they bowed down with their faces to the ground. The men said,

'Why are you looking in the place of the dead for someone who is alive? Jesus isn't here! He's been raised from death. Remember that while he was still in Galilee, he told you this. He said, 'The Son of Man will be handed over to sinners who will nail him to a cross. But three days later he will be raised to life.' Then they remembered what Jesus said...at the time they had not understood what he meant. (Luke 24)

One of the angels said to the women:

'Now hurry! Tell his disciples that he has been raised to life and he's on his way to Galilee. Go there, and you will see him. That's what I came to tell you.'

Well, the women were frightened and but also very happy. They hurried from the tomb.

But as they were heading off, suddenly Jesus himself met them and spoke to them. There he was – alive! They went up to him, knelt down and held on to his feet. They worshipped him, then they ran to tell us all that Jesus was alive (Matt 28)

So that's how I heard about it. I didn't know what to think. If only it could be true!

**Carol:** This has to be the most exciting story ever told! I know I feel excited every time I hear it.

**Tammy:** Yes, I know what you mean. It's so wonderful to know that Jesus didn't stay dead. He came back to life. He was able to beat the power of death in a way no-one else can. Let's let John finish the story he's telling us.

**Ralf:** Now when the three women came and told us the news, I thought it was nonsense. So did the others who hadn't seen him. I'm ashamed to say that we didn't believe the women. And Peter, always the one to rush into things – well, he rushed down to the tomb to check for himself. And he just found the burial clothes there. As the women said, Jesus' body wasn't there. So we waited, listening to the women's story again, wondering if it could be true. And that evening, the Sunday evening, we were still there, with the doors locked. You see we were afraid of the authorities– after what had happened to Jesus.

Then it happened! Suddenly *Jesus* was in the room with us. He was right there among us. He said:

'Peace be with you.' Then he showed us his hands – where the nails had been pounded in. And his side, where they had pushed a spear in. There was absolutely no doubt that it was him. We were just so happy and full of joy. I couldn't keep the grin off my face!

Jesus, my Lord, was alive! I had seen him and heard him! This wasn't a dream. It was real.

**Tammy:** What did you think about John's story about the first Easter? Didn't he sound excited and happy! How wonderful to be there when Jesus appeared to his disciples after he came back to life!

**Carol:** You know, Jesus came back to life forever, not just for a little while. After forty days alive and meeting and talking with his followers, Jesus went up to heaven. Before he ascended to heaven he told his followers that the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit, would come and live in them and be with them at all times. And this is how Jesus is with people on earth today.

**Tammy:** There's one big reason for Easter. Jesus died so that we can be put right with God. We deserved to die for our sins and for ignoring God. We need to accept that Jesus was perfect, yet he died in our place. God wants to forgive you; just ask him! If we do this, our lives belong to God and we are made right with him.

**Carol:** Now . . . That's why Jesus *died*. But why did God bring him back to *life*? It was to show clearly that God had fully accepted Jesus' sacrifice (Acts 17:31). And it was to show us that Jesus is still alive. Now Jesus can be our friend and our leader! We can be his followers - love him, and feel his love, just like John did. And he can help us day by day to live our lives in the right way (Romans 4:24-5).

Easter is a very special time for me and it can be for you too. Would *you* like to make Jesus your friend and leader? Would you like to accept his forgiveness and invite him to make you right with God?

Perhaps you would like to pray and tell God what you're thinking. You can pray silently or out loud. It doesn't matter. God will hear you as you simply tell him what's in your heart. He's listening for you right now!

**Tammy:** Today's story is the most important story in the world, and it's true. That means we can't just treat it like a folk story. We need to decide what to do about it. We're praying for you as you think about this decision.

**Carol:** It's time for us to go now. If you'd like to contact us, you can do so in care of this station or at Women of Hope.

**Tammy:** The address: [TWRWomenofHope@twr.org](mailto:TWRWomenofHope@twr.org). That's [TWRWomenofHope@twr.org](mailto:TWRWomenofHope@twr.org). If you have missed a program or would even like to hear one again you can do that on our website [TWRWomenofHope.org](http://TWRWomenofHope.org) that's [TWRWomenofHope.org](http://TWRWomenofHope.org). or by visiting our Facebook page.

**Carol:** We do hope you will be with us again. Remember – Jesus is Alive! Have a great week filled with God’s blessings.

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