

## Acts 10:34a, 36, 39-43

### **An Easter Review**

Some of you are teachers. Some are students right now, the rest have been students at some point in their lives. No matter what you're studying, there comes a time when you must review the lessons you've learned and show that you've mastered the material. If you're learning a new skill at work, you will someday need to show that you can accomplish a task on your own. If you're studying in school, you will someday need to take a test to show you've learned the material.

Before you have to show your mastery of a subject, it's good to have some review: an opportunity to go over everything again and make sure you've got it right. How well do you remember your Easter facts? If you had to take a test right now on what happened on the first Easter and why it all is important, what kind of grade would you get? In Acts chapter 10, Peter gives us a little Easter review so that we can know exactly what Easter means.

Before reviewing anything, we need material to study. Peter gives a little hint as to what that material is. He said to Cornelius, "He sent his word to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all." This is Peter teaching the lesson to Cornelius.

Cornelius was a Roman centurion. You wouldn't expect him to know anything about Jesus or the gospel. He did not belong to the people of Israel to whom God had sent his word. But Cornelius defies our expectations. He is earlier described as a God-fearing man. He often prayed. He regularly and generously showed his faith by caring for the poor.

As faithful as Cornelius already was, he hadn't received the whole lesson. He knew of and put his faith in the true God. Cornelius did not realize that the Savior his God had promised had already come. Like many in the world who knew of God's promises but weren't around to see them fulfilled, Cornelius needed to hear how Jesus had fulfilled the prophets' words.

Peter told Cornelius, "All the prophets testify about him that, through his name, everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins." As a believer in the true God, Cornelius knew that God had promised to forgive his sins. What Cornelius did not know was that Jesus had won that forgiveness for him. As a faithful believer, Cornelius knew his sinfulness; his need for a Savior. He needed Peter to tell him about that Savior.

Now, it's time for your review. How well do you know your Easter facts? If I ask you how many people saw Jesus after his resurrection, you probably couldn't give me the answer. If I asked you to find Jesus' tomb on a map, you probably wouldn't even know where to begin. I certainly don't have those facts off the top of my head, and I don't expect you to have them, either. Those aren't the important details of our faith.

But let's say you did know those facts. Let's say you knew everything there is to know about the world and its history. You've got a sharp mind, a good memory, and you love to study. You can keep all kinds of names and dates and facts straight easily. Equipped with such powers of knowledge and logic, you must be all set. Surely you don't need to review if you already know the facts.

Let's look at what God says to those who think they've got it all figured out. God confronted Job with humbling words: "Do you know the laws of the heavens? . . . Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!" Job and his friends thought they were able, with human

knowledge, to comprehend God's plan. God showed them they were wrong. God spoke to Job with an irony that would wither even the greatest intellect: "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me."

The humbling reality is, that we are mere human beings, unable even to comprehend the knowledge of God. Our intellect is corrupt by nature; my mind can never be enough to stand before God with confidence. Some day, everyone will face the test of whether they measure up to God's expectation. When human beings, corrupt as we are, face that test, we will be found wanting, not just in knowledge, but in righteousness.

"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so," Paul wrote. It does not matter how smart you are, you will never be smart enough. It does not matter how many facts you know, because facts can't get you into heaven. Your powers of logic and memory and comprehension are no match before the righteous test God sets before you.

I want you to be prepared for God's final exam. Here's your study guide: Jesus did it all! He was crucified. God raised him from the dead. Those are the facts. The facts that you know because God has preached them to your heart. The facts that mean your ignorance and faulty knowledge will not condemn you. Jesus fulfilled every word the prophets spoke so that when you stand before God, you will not face his withering questions. Instead, you receive the forgiveness of sins through his name. That is the beauty of Easter, the facts that we want to review again and again.

Perhaps you noticed that I talked a lot about facts. The facts of Easter. But how do we know that they're facts? The first Easter happened a long time ago. None of us have gotten to witness the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection with our own eyes. Yes, we are unqualified to speak about the facts of Jesus' death and resurrection on our own. We need a teacher: namely, the Apostles who witnessed what Jesus did.

When you don't know a subject, you go to find someone who does. If you want to learn about history, you read a history book. If you want to learn about science, you talk to a scientist. If you want to learn to read, you go to school. If you want to learn about what Jesus has done to save you, you go to his eye-witnesses.

Cornelius needed one of those eye-witnesses. Cornelius did not know about what Jesus had done. He knew about his sin. He knew that God had promised a Savior, but he did not know the specifics about the Savior. God sent Peter to him to teach him about what Jesus had done for Cornelius.

Peter was a qualified witness. He saw everything Jesus did in his ministry. Peter heard Jesus preach and teach. Peter saw his Lord Jesus die. Peter saw his Lord alive again. He heard him speak. He ate and drank with him. He saw Jesus ascend into heaven. Peter was an authority on Easter. That's the kind of person you want to go to when you need an Easter review.

Today, we have a hard time with all of these Easter truths. We didn't get to see Jesus die and rise again. We didn't get to hear him preaching or see him ascend into heaven. Imagine being one of those blessed few: an apostle, who saw Jesus and got to hear God's word directly from the Son of God himself.

But even some of those eye-witnesses had a hard time believing. Thomas refused to believe until he saw the risen Jesus himself. Thomas experienced doubt. Thomas had no reason to doubt. Jesus told him that he would die only to rise again. Thomas heard Jesus preach that all

of the events leading up to and including Easter were foretold by the prophets. But Thomas doubted.

How often are we like Thomas! We have the eye-witness accounts. We've heard the truths again and again. God's Word has clearly presented the truth of our salvation before our eyes and in our ears, but we doubt. We wonder how it can be true if we cannot see it. We rely on what our eyes can see. But how reliable are our eyes? Our eyes fail us and fool us all the time. If we doubt God's word and demand a visible sign, how long will it be before the visible sign isn't enough?

Remember what Jesus told Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Faith is not based on what we see. Faith is based on the sure hope of the resurrection won by Jesus' own resurrection. Our hope is sure because we have the testimony of the apostles, who were eye-witnesses of the risen Lord.

Think about what the apostles went through. As Peter said to Cornelius, "[Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify solemnly that he is the one appointed by God." The apostles took that command seriously. They testified solemnly that Jesus died and rose from the grave, even when they faced death. Surely the apostles were certain of what they preached. No one would die if they were not certain in their faith.

We have the testimony of the apostles to rely on. They are the experts, and who better to go to when you need to review your Easter facts? Just as you would go to a scientist to explain scientific theory, so you go to the testimony of the apostles to learn what Jesus has done. God's Word was written by those eye-witnesses so that we know that our faith is founded on the truth of what Jesus has done.

The truth of Jesus' work is more than a list of facts. As Peter wrote in our second lesson, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." There's your Easter review: love, joy, glory, the goal of your faith, salvation. Easter is something worthy of regular review.

So, we come every Sunday for a little Easter review. The first Easter happened on a Sunday. Before the first Easter, Old Testament believers met on Saturday, the Sabbath. Because our Lord rose on Sunday, we gather every Sunday to remember what Jesus has done for us; to rejoice that we are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls. We have the facts that Jesus did what was necessary: he died and rose for us. We have the expert testimony: the apostles saw it happen and wrote it down for our benefit. Let us review Easter and rejoice, for through Jesus, we have received our salvation.