

EASTER

A King Like No Other

Andy Stanley

Scripture: John 3:16; 20:1–8; Luke 24:11

[To understand the personal implications of the Easter story requires us to pause in the early moments of the story. I want to take you back to that moment in time when Jesus had just been crucified. There's a large crowd around. In the back of the crowd are Jesus's disciples, his mother, and the women who followed him during his ministry. But let me tell you who wasn't there. There were no Christians, church, Bible, or believers.]

[When Jesus was crucified, all that was left was just a couple dozen Galileans overwhelmed with sorrow, confusion, and fear. Their leaders had conspired with Rome to falsely accuse and crucify the best person they'd ever known, someone who wasn't supposed to die. He was the one they believed was the Messiah and God's final King.]

[Yet, in less than 24 hours, Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified. His closest followers were in shock. They thought they were on the verge of winning. Four days before, they had come into Jerusalem with large crowds following them. Jesus was welcomed as if he was a conquering hero. His followers thought he would now proclaim himself King and the long-awaited Messiah. Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, it's over.]

[The goal of crucifixion wasn't death. There were easier and quicker ways to kill a man. The goal was to terrify the community and oblivion of the crucified person. The goal was to make it like they never even happened. The body remains were dumped and later eaten by wild animals. But for a price, you could bribe someone to take the crucified body.]

[The gospel writers tell us that Nicodemus, a well-known Pharisee, and Joseph of Arimathea, a well-known citizen, ask Pilate for Jesus's body to give him a proper burial. They take it to a newly renovated cave, a family burial plot. They prepare Jesus's body for burial with spices and wrap him in layers of linen. They were going to seal the body in the tomb. It would be reopened years later so his family could collect the bones and put them in an ossuary box. We keep ashes. They kept bones.]

[Nicodemus and Joseph were secret followers of Jesus. Yet, because of their reputation in the community, they were torn about being public that they believed Jesus was the Messiah. They thought, Clearly, he wasn't. But he was a good man and didn't deserve the fate of a common criminal. They did what they could and headed home before sunset to celebrate the Sabbath.]