The Easter Story
Betrayal, Murder, Despair, Life
The **EASTER STORY**

*Betrayal, Murder, Despair, Life*

It’s the crucial halfway point. If it were a chick flick, the guy and girl would have just had a seemingly relationship-ending bust up. If it were a football match, the fans would already be leaving the stadium, thinking it’s all over.

That’s kind of what the Easter story looks like. Except that it has a jaw-dropping second half, including the comeback to end all comebacks. Easter really is a story of two halves!

During that first Easter, God revealed his love for humanity (despite the fact that many of us generally don’t give a chocolate-stuffed Easter egg about what he says or does). He sent his perfect Son Jesus to earth, but it all seemed to go wrong when he was executed in the most painful way ever invented. Good job that was only the first half. Here’s the full story ...
JESUS Betrayed and deserted by his best friends, illegally arrested by a mob, mocked and beaten by Roman soldiers, falsely accused and finally dragged off to be nailed to a cross of wood where he was left to die. “Down and Out” just got a new dictionary definition. If this were a boxing match, Jesus would have been on the floor, seeing stars.

Jesus had actually told his followers that this would happen. In fact, he had said he was God and that he’d come to offer us a place in God’s home. He said he’d come to wipe our slates clean; to take care of every single thing we have ever done wrong. He said he’d come to give us life to the full and life without end.

Yet when the mob came, he didn’t fight at all. He barely said a word. It was like he saw the end coming and just gave up.

The Bible describes what it was like for Jesus hanging on that cross: “My mouth is dried up... A pack of villains encircles me; they pierce [nailed] my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them” (Psalm 22:15-18).

It was over.

Who could come back from that?
Peter was one of the friends who betrayed Jesus. Just hours before the arrest, Jesus had told his closest followers that he was about to leave them. Peter, having eaten a good meal with his friends, was sure he’d stick with Jesus ‘til the end!

Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”

Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the cockerel crows, you will disown me three times!” (John 13:37-38).

When the arrest happened, however, Peter bottled it and pretended he didn’t even know Jesus. He was asked three times if he was a friend of Jesus. Fearing for his life, he abandoned everything he’d stood for. Swearing and cursing he totally denied even knowing Jesus—each time he was asked! Once the cockerel crowed, he remembered Jesus’ words and completely fell apart. He realised he was a total failure and the worst friend ever.

Jesus was gone, his followers were scattered and Peter was left alone. He’d given up on Jesus to save his own skin. It was over.

Who could come back from that?
Jesus had been teaching people about God for three years. The religious authorities hadn’t had the guts to arrest him because so many were amazed by him. So what changed? That would be the other friend who betrayed him: Judas.

For a nice cash pay-out, Judas helped lead the religious leaders to a quiet place where they could arrest Jesus without causing any fuss. But, then, when Judas saw that Jesus was going to be killed because of his betrayal, he couldn’t take the guilt.

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the [religious leaders]. “I have sinned [messed up],” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied.

“That’s your responsibility” (Matthew 27:3-4).

Judas was left distraught. He tried to make himself feel better by giving the money back. It didn’t work. He’d just killed one of his best friends. It was over.

Who could come back from that?
THE COMEBACK

He was executed. He was buried in a tomb. But no way was it over; it had only just started! This was God’s plan all along! Three days after the cross, Jesus’ tomb was empty. He had come back to life!

The Bible explains saying, “This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the [payment] for our [wrongs]” (1 John 4:10).

It’s true: we don’t love God. He created us to live with him in a safe, loving relationship. But we often ignore him, doing our own things and living our own lives. Along the way we mess up like Peter and Judas did. We hurt ourselves, those around us and God. The Bible says this rejection of God deserves the death penalty. But God hasn’t left us to it. Neither did he send Jesus to judge us. Easter is the story of how far God has gone to make us his again!

Jesus came because God loves us! He came to die in our place for all the things we’ve ever done wrong, taking all God’s anger on himself! When he came back to life three days later, it showed Jesus had paid our penalty in full and beaten death itself. That is quite a comeback! It changed his friends’ lives, and the whole world, forever.

Let’s look at what happened …
Some women came to Jesus’ tomb to put spices and oils on his dead body, as was traditional at the time. But when they got there, Jesus was nowhere in sight. Instead they were met by an angel who said:

“You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples—and Peter—‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you’” (Mark 16:6-7).

Jesus had been betrayed and abandoned by his closest friends. Yet he had paid for all wrongs and mistakes by dying on the cross. Now he wanted to meet with his followers (including Peter who was mentioned by name) to show them he was alive and to give them new life!

Jesus later spoke with Peter face to face, forgiving him for his cowardice and betrayal. He understood Peter’s weaknesses and, instead of judging him, he loved him and forgave him. From a seemingly hopeless situation, Peter joined Jesus in a new life with God! By trusting Jesus, Peter knew he was forgiven by God and now had a secure place in heaven to look forward to. His days as a coward and failure were over. He could have given into despair, but instead he trusted Jesus and then began to boldly tell others about the new life God offers.
THE CHOICE

From an egg-shatteringly bad start, to a shell-shocking finale! Instead of heading for judgement and death, those who trust Jesus are now God’s children! But it isn’t all fluffy bunnies and spring chicks. The Easter Story comes with a choice.

Let’s look at Judas again. He was no worse than anyone else. But, filled with guilt, “he went away and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:5). Would Judas have been rejected if he’d asked Jesus for forgiveness? Absolutely not! Jesus paid for all wrongs. But Judas’ guilt led him to despair and self-pity rather than to trust Jesus and say sorry.

That wasn’t the case for another guy. When Jesus was on the cross, there were criminals being executed next to him. These were not petty thieves. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst of the worst: murderers, rapists... you name it, they probably did it. But one of them cried out to Jesus: “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

What did Jesus say? “Get lost! My kingdom isn’t for disgusting people like you!” Nope. He said, “Today you will be with Me in paradise” (v.43). God looked into the eyes of someone with the dirtiest hands imaginable, and told him “I’ve got you”. This criminal knew he was doomed, and he knew he deserved it. Yet he chose to trust that Jesus was able to rescue him and give him a place in heaven.
DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

We’re all in the same boat with Peter, Judas and the criminal. We’ve all messed up in some way; none of us have lived for God and under his care and protection. We all deserve his judgement. But instead of leaving us to die, Jesus died for us so that we can live with him forever. If you think you are too bad to be forgiven by God, think again! If Peter and the criminal were welcomed by Jesus, then you can be too.

God promises to always be with us, guiding and strengthening us for the challenges we will face. And after we die, Jesus will bring us into heaven to live with him forever. But will you trust him?

The decision to trust Jesus is up to you. But a decision needs to be made. This isn’t something that’ll just ‘work out alright in the end’; the Easter story tells us to make a clear, deliberate choice. If you want to think more about what Jesus has done for you and what it means to give your life to him, then Our Daily Bread Ministries is here to help! We have lots of online resources, Bible reading notes, short booklets, DVDs and CDs to help you think further about who Jesus is and what difference he makes.
Please visit us at ourdailybread.org/locations/united-kingdom to see everything we have available.

Also, you can find out more about the Easter story by reading *So What Is Easter All About?* All our resources are available without any obligation to donate. Please just email us at europe@odb.org (with your name and address) to request your copy!

It’s important to talk to any Christians you know as well, or visit a local church. They can tell you why they trust Jesus and help you think through any questions you have.