

What Easter Means to Me

(Reverend Boanerges)

Revelation 19:11-16

April 15, 2001

Peter Hiatt

[Man with sloppy appearance takes the stage, speaking with a Jewish accent.]

Good morning. My name is John. My friends call me Boanerges, which means “Sons of Thunder.” I brought some notes with me because this morning I have been transported through space and time to speak with you on the topic “What Easter Means to Me.”

I know some of you are having a hard time with that idea. You don't *have* to believe, but I will tell you this: you people take space and time *way too seriously*. You, of all people, ought to know better! You think you're so smart! You “discovered” that space and time is relative to light.

Well, two thousand years ago I wrote, “God is light.” And I wrote that God is one other thing. But everything is relative to Him.

Time is really just God's way of making sure everything doesn't happen all at once. Of course, for Him it does. For Him it's always here and now, but for us God stretches out time long and deep so that we could learn of His glory and learn to sing His song of grace.

Space and time are like pages in a book. You argue about the pages but never read the story! The angels in Heaven are commanded not to speak much to you about space and time, because it makes you do reverence to nothing and pass by what's truly great.

You take space and time *way too seriously*;
Then you laugh at what's real.

By the way, that's your huge problem with that Revelation I got. In Scripture it says a couple times, “A day is as a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years as a day.” And you *argue* about that. Right in the middle of The Revelation an angel flies through saying, “Yo! Down there! This is an eternal gospel! An eternal gospel! No beginning; no end. Eternal!”

There is . . .

the gospel according to Matthew,
the gospel according to Mark,
the gospel according to Luke, and
the gospel according to me—John.

But there is *also* the gospel according to Jesus!—The Revelation! That’s the title of the book: The Revelation of Jesus.

He appeared to me, and beginning in chapter four He said, “Hey! Come up here!” So I did. And He showed me Himself.

In the other gospels Jesus was incarnated. That means He was in-fleshed into our space and time, speaking *our* language. But in The Revelation *I* was *out-carnated*, *out* of our space and time, listening to *God’s* language . . . eternity.

Even in the book the stars fall from the sky two or three times. What is *that* about? Christmas happens in the middle after Jesus sits on the throne. I wrote:

“The new Jerusalem *is* coming down.”
“Behold, he *is* coming on the clouds of Heaven.”
“The time *is* at hand.”

You see, everything is starting to happen at once! Eternity. It’s not a chronology, it’s a kairology. Chronos is calendar time; kairos is *God* time . . . *impact* time . . . *eternal* time.

I said, “The kairos is at hand.”
 God’s eternity,
 His kingdom,
 His power,
 His glory is breaking in on this temporal reality. First and last chapter: “The time *is* at hand”! Don’t you know what “*is*” is?

Sorry . . . I get all worked up about that, and I do the thunder thing. My point is simply this: I was transported through space and time, from the Island of Patmos, long about 95 AD, Mountain Standard Time. I was exiled there—cast away.

I brought some things with me so I would feel a little more at home.

[Pulls a face-painted volleyball out of a bag and sits it on a stool.]

This is my friend Spalding.

And I’m going to take some things back with me from your breakfast bar. You have good eats here!

[Puts danish in side pant pocket.]

I was cast away by the Romans for preaching the Gospel. *Exiled* . . .

No phone
No light

No motorcar
Not a single luxury
As primitive as can be

They told me it would be a three-hour tour! *A three-hour tour!*

Anyway, I'm here to tell you what Easter means to me.

So sit right back and you'll hear a tale,
A tale of a fateful trip,
That started from this Galilean port
Aboard this tiny ship.

Actually, the ship was a fishing boat that belonged to my father Zebedee. Me and my brother Jim were in business along with Pete and Pete's brother Andy. One day Jesus comes along, and the next thing you know he makes us fishers of men. It was Jesus who gave me and Jim that name Boanerges, "Sons of Thunder."

I *was* a hothead. Had it been *your* time, I would have chewed tobacco, listened to Van Halen, and ridden bulls (that's crazy — riding bulls!) or that white horse "Thunder" that they ride around in the coliseum.

I would have fantasized about things like the WWF and Goldberg. ("Goldberg" sounds Jewish! I like that.) But in our day we didn't have Goldberg, so boys like me fantasized about guys like Elijah the prophet bringing fire down on his enemies, preparing the way of the Lord.

I would picture myself as John the Enchanter throwing fire on the earth. "You half-breed, no-good, Samaritan scum! Prepare the way of the Lord of the Jews!" Like Elijah.

Or we fantasized about the Son of Man in Daniel,

with eyes blazing fire,
a sword coming out of his mouth,
legs of bronze,
a voice like thunder,
riding in on the clouds,
the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Me and James were always thundering on somebody, looking for a fight. I suppose that had something to do with our temperament. It also had something to do with the times in which we lived. I still remember my dad telling me about the rebellion that happened right before I was born . . .

The Romans crucified two thousand Jews outside the walls of Jerusalem and left their bodies to rot in the sun and be eaten by the birds! I *hated* Romans! . . . almost as much as I hated Samaritans.

But if I'm honest, which I am sometimes, I have to tell you that I think I was a Son of Thunder mostly because I was scared. I was scared of being cast away . . . an outcast . . . forgotten. You know, I was *second*, so I always felt I had to make a *name* for myself; make an *impact* somehow.

So I liked the name Thunder Boy. But later it confused me. "What did Jesus mean by that?"

You may be wondering, "Why would Thunder Boy follow *Jesus* of all people, the gentle Lamb of God?" This is ironic, but Jesus was like walking thunder. He was a lion. Jesus was scared of *nobody*! Romans . . . Pharisees . . . demons . . . death . . . storms . . . nobody . . . nothing. And He could thunder. You should have seen Him in the temple.

One day He took me and Pete and Andy up this mountain. On top of the mountain He was transfigured. Moses and Elijah showed up! Peter was so stressed out he started yapping. (That's what he does when he's stressed out.) Suddenly a voice from Heaven thunders down, "Shut up! This is my beloved son! Listen to him!"

Jesus was a Son of Thunder. We got the message: Wherever Jesus was from, it was 100% thunder! Jesus was walking thunder! The only problem was, you never knew where the thunder was going to hit.

In the third year of hanging with Jesus, He set His face toward Jerusalem. I remember thinking, "Here we go! Thunder showdown." He even sent folks on ahead to prepare His way (like Elijah in the prophecy).

There was one Samaritan town that would not receive Him. Jim and me got word of that and came to Jesus and said, "Jesus! Can we call down fire from Heaven and fry their no-good, Samaritan butts?!" That's when The Thunder turned on me. He looked at me with eyes blazing with fire, and He said, "You do not know what spirit you are of. The Son of Man [He said Son of Man!] did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."

Then it got worse. *Mom* got involved. You know how moms are. Me and Jim made the mistake of complaining to Mom. The next thing we know, we're standing in front of Jesus, and Mom is talking to Jesus: "Jesus, You listen to me. When You come into Your kingdom, I want my two boys, Jim and John, sitting on Your right and left." That *was* what we wanted, but moms don't have any finesse.

The guys began to catch on to what was happening and they got ticked off at us. I can understand, because for the Thunder Boys everything was a competition, even with my buddy Pete and my brother Jim. I didn't see it then, how dead my heart was, but I see it

now. Their successes felt like my failures. And I remember rejoicing over their failures because it made me feel like a success. All the time it was like survival of the fittest.

I heard somewhere that you people actually think that's responsible for life, as if you discovered some new theory or something. *We* knew about that! We just called it hatred! And it's not responsible for life, it's responsible for death!

Jesus said, "He who hates his brother is a murderer."

I was a murderer of my brother and my best buddy, all the time wishing them to Hell, wishing that I would win and they would lose. No one could get to me; I was alone, my heart encased in arrogant thunder. Dead, and didn't even know it.

Like I was saying, the guys caught on to what was going on, and they were furious with me and Jim. The weird thing is, they were doing the same thing.

Competing,
posturing,
fighting for a name.

Peter the Rock against Johnny Thunder Boy! It was like that all the time. And then Jesus thundered. He turned and said, "It will not be this way with you guys. He who wants to be first must be slave of all, just as the Son of Man [He said it again!] did not come to be served but to give his life as a ransom for many."

The Son of Man a *slave*? Payment? I was so confused, convicted, and more insecure than ever. I felt like going and finding some Samaritan guy and beating the crap out of him!

When we got to Jerusalem, Jesus rode into town on a donkey. I had always pictured a white, war horse! But no, a donkey. I know what some of you are thinking. "Hey, Johnny Thunder Boy — I thought you were the apostle of love. Didn't you write:

[Singing]
Beloved, let us love one another,
For love is of God,
And everyone that loveth is born of God,
And knoweth God;
He that loveth not,
Knoweth not God for God is love;
Beloved, let us love one another,
I John 4:7 and 8."

Yes, I wrote that! Something happened to me that week on Thursday. It just so happened it was Passover week in Jerusalem, when hundreds of thousands of pilgrims were there remembering how God delivered us from bondage and death at the expense of

a spotless lamb. Jesus sent me and Pete, Rocky and Thunder Boy to prepare the Passover.

Making preparations was much more than calling a caterer. We had to take a spotless lamb, go to the Temple along with hundreds of thousands of other pilgrims, and stand in line. And priests stood in lines with gold and silver bowls. The choir sang, and we waited for the signal of a trumpet sounding.

Each of the pilgrims had to take their lamb, slit its throat, and drain the blood into bowls. A bloody priest took the blood and threw it on the brazen altar. Screeching lambs . . . smoke . . . fire . . . blood everywhere!

Peter was a wuss. *I* had to slay the lamb. I still remember that lamb . . . how it looked at me . . . blood running down its neck onto its chest while the choir in the Temple sang the Hallel—Psalm 118. “The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.”

One hundred and fifty thousand lambs slaughtered! A literal river of blood . . . bloody priests . . . smoke, fire, and smells . . . it was awful! Horrific! What a religion!

One thing was absolutely clear. Without payment there was no liberation for souls in bondage to death. Someone paid.

You know the story . . .

. . . how Jesus administered the Passover after we had a little tiff about who would wash the feet;

. . . how I laid my head on His chest;

. . . how we literally crossed a river of lamb’s blood flowing down the Kidron valley into the valley of Gehenna (our word for “Hell”).

Do you see how God is not just a theologian? He’s an *artist*. A terror-ific, horrific, awesome artist.

We crossed the river of lamb’s blood into the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus dropped to His knees and prayed to His Father. And I listened.

. . . how Jesus called Judas friend even as He was betrayed with a kiss;

. . . how I got Peter into the High Priest’s courtyard where Peter the Rock denied Jesus in fear, and I, Johnny Thunder Boy, hid in the shadows and then ran into the night;

. . . how they beat Him and flogged Him;

. . . how the crowd turned on him, marching Him out to the Hill of the Skull where Roman centurions stretched Him across that cross and pounded nails through His hands and feet. They lifted Him up into the air from the earth so that we could see Him and the crowd could mock and revile Him. And He suffered and died.

I don't know where the other guys were, but early that morning I came back with some of the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus. We stood there and watched him suffer. We watched Him die. And I remember praying, "Oh, God, where is Your thunder? Where the Hell is Your thunder now?! Where is Your judgment, God?"

This is the strange thing: hearts were judged that day, like a sword that split the crowd right in two. And it *did* thunder. The other gospels record how He cried, "Father, forgive them"; how He ministered to the thief dying on the cross next to Him; how for three hours the sky grew dark; how He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

He was cast out! He was forsaken! He was cast away, and He became sin for us . . . suffered Hell for us . . . paid the ransom for us. It's *all* true, yet I recorded none of those words in *my* gospel. It wasn't those words that broke my heart and set me free.

At one point Mary and I made it to the front of the crowd, and I could tell He did battle in regions unknown to me. Demons raged, blood flowed, the crowd mocked and spit upon Him, and the sky began to mourn.

While all of this was occurring, all at once He *saw* me, and His eyes looked on me and burned with fire. He saw His mother, and they burned with fire for her too. Then, in the midst of everything, as if nothing else in all the world mattered, not even His suffering, looking at me He said, "John, your mother. Mom, here's your son."

I know that may seem small to you, but it was *how* it was said and *where* it was said and *why* it was said. You see, He didn't want either of us to be cast away, to be alone. He loved me furiously, relentlessly, and irrevocably, even then.

You know, it's what happens in the cracks of life,
the unscripted moments of life,
that matters most.

Even then, hanging between Heaven and Hell, He loved me. He didn't have to, yet it was like it was His nature to love me. It was then that I saw myself for the first time, the spirit I was of:

Arrogance,
Pride,
Hatred,
Fear,

Shame,
Envy.

I was slaying the Lamb all over again!

Then He lifted up His head and said, “I thirst.” I wanted to die with Him! I wanted to be there with Him, suffering with Him. Somehow, in that moment, it was like He *knew* it, He *drank* me in, and I *satiated* His thirst! He lifted His head towards Heaven and cried, “It is finished!”

And it was. In me, it was.

I couldn’t explain all of it at the time, but I knew then that I loved Him. I knew that I wanted Him more than anything else in all the world. I *loved* Him for the first time.

I know this may seem strange, but His death was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. I now know why it was the heart of God revealed. It was love . . .

Deeper than conviction,
Deeper than emotion,
Deeper than all our definitions of love,
Because God *is* love.

All our words dropped to the ground in front of Him, and Love Himself rode in, captured my heart, and set me free!

And He split that crowd in two.

Somebody once said about a beautiful piece of artwork, “We don’t judge beauty like that; it judges us.” My friend, you do not *judge* the death of Christ; it judges you. If you want to believe, you will find the evidence. If you don’t, you won’t. His love split that crowd.

A Roman centurion dropped to his knees, and I, Johnny Thunder Boy, dropped next to Him. One thief dying next to Him cursed God and Jesus, even while the other thief sang with joy and wonder over this Jesus who had died for him.

As the ground began to shake, some people hated Him—cursed Him—more than ever. Some people believed in Him for the very first time.

I remembered what He had said only a few days before. “It was for this purpose that I came to this time. Father, glorify thy name.” Then the voice boomed from Heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again!” Jesus turned to me and said, “Hey, Thunder Boy—that voice was for *you*.”

Now is the time for judgment on this world. *Now* will the Ruler of this world be cast out.

*I, when I'm lifted up, will draw all men to myself.
Now judgment;
Now victory;
Now the advance of His kingdom;
Now Easter;
Now Revelation!*

One other thing is very important. On the third day some of the women went to the tomb bright and early. And the *stone* had been rolled *away!* They came back and told us about it. Me and Pete (Thunder Boy and Rocky) raced to the tomb! I beat him. But I let him go in first. (You see, I was changing already!) We saw that the tomb was empty. Jesus had even rolled up the little head cloth!—that's *so Jesus*.

Mary was talking to a gardener, and it turns out to be Jesus. Two guys near Emmaus entertain a stranger, and it turns out to be Jesus. We are fishing down at the Sea of Galilee and see Jesus on the shore. He appeared over and over again after that third day, but I'm here to tell you that for *me* Easter began on Friday when he cried, "It is finished."

He even said this to the people next to him: "This day [it was Friday] you will be with me in Paradise." Sunday on Friday! You know, we say "It's Friday but Sunday's coming." Maybe Sunday is already here!—when we believe in love and walk in His love.

Jesus even said this, and I quote me, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life." Born again! First resurrection! Easter even now!

We don't understand resurrection all that much. We are like children in our thinking. A little girl was walking down the beach with her mom and saw a dead seagull lying on the sand. Her mom, trying to comfort her, said, "Sweetie, that seagull went to Heaven."

The little girl looked at her mom, looked at the seagull, looked back at her mom, and said, "And God threw him back *down?*"

There is more than these old bodies we have.
There is more than space and time as we know it.

My buddy the Apostle Paul—great guy—wrote this: "At the last trumpet the dead will be raised in Christ." He was so right, but he also said this: "Even now we are seated in the heavenlies with him." *Even now*.

A little boy found his dog dead. His father, trying to comfort him, said, "Buddy, God took your doggy to Heaven." The boy looked at his dad and said, "Why would God want a dead dog?"

God doesn't want dead dogs! He doesn't want dead people either! He loves life so much that even while we are still in these bodies dying and decaying . . . even here . . . He

creates new life in our hearts—Easter now!—Resurrection now!—when we believe His love and live in His love.

Some of you are thinking, “What fluff.” Well, I am here to tell you that you are so wrong and so blind and so intoxicated with death, that unless you repent you may never know life, and you’ll burn in Hell.

Now I will tell you what Easter means to me.

I was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord’s day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a voice like a trumpet. I turned to see the voice, and I saw Him, the Son of Man . . . eyes like blazing fire . . . feet like burnished bronze . . . a voice like the thunder of many waters . . . a sharp sword issued from His mouth! I fell down as if I was dead.

I thought I *was* dead. But then, like on the mountain, He touched me. He said, “John, it’s me. I was dead, but now I’m alive forever!” *Forever* alive. And he out-carnated me. I saw the throne of God. Somebody said, “Look at the Lion.” I looked, and I saw a Lamb. It was a Lamb I knew, The Lamb I had slain, still wet with blood. And He looked lovely.

The Lion is the Lamb. The Lamb is the Lion. Then I saw wonder upon wonder upon wonder . . . At one point the seven thunders (seven is a big number in the Bible) spoke, and then someone said, “Don’t write that down, John.” *Incredible mystery*. It all revealed Jesus.

I saw Jesus
 delivering His Word to His people.
I saw Jesus
 singing the new song on Mount Zion
 with His people.
I saw Jesus
 harvesting the earth.

John 4 (and I quote me): “Even now he harvests the crops for eternal life.” I saw *Christmas!* I saw the *Baby* hated by the Dragon, and I saw Easter!

I know some of you would disagree with me. That’s okay; you *can*. But I must say that I tend to agree with your pastor on this point, and I’m a good reference: *Apocalypse now*. The time *is* at hand.

In chapter one I wrote, “Look, he *is* coming on the clouds of Heaven.”

Chapter 19 verse 11 (and I quote me):

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are

like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.

The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Jesus told me in chapter one He *is* the Ruler of the kings of the earth. Right now . . . Easter happened *now* . . . the writer is Easter *now*.

Some of you are thinking, "Oh, but that's making too little of what God is going to do in the end." Wrong! It's making too little of what God has already done and what He's doing *right now*. The Word of God is riding across this dark planet even now. All eyes will see Him in the end.

One day this world will be destroyed by fire, and God will make a new heaven and a new earth. I *know* that; I *saw* it. But right now the Rider is riding across this dark planet, and His Word is falling like thunder.

The Word of God is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The Word of the cross is folly. It's fluff to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it *is* the power of God. I am saying that the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord *is thunder*. There is no greater thunder. There is nothing more solid in all the world.

We take space and time so seriously, and we ignore God, for God is love. You seek signs and wonders, policies and laws, and governments. You write books on Russia and the Antichrist and ignore God right under your own nose.

I worry that if some of you had been there that Friday when God exposed His bleeding heart of love on a wooden cross, you would have said, "There's no thunder here. There's no power here. *God's* not here. Let's go have a revival somewhere and hope He shows up."

"*Now* is the judgment on this world," said Jesus.

The Rider judges. Just as His cross judged the crowd that Friday, the Word I preach is judging you. What will you do with the love of God in Christ Jesus the Lord?

"*Now* is the Ruler of this world cast out," said Jesus.

Do you know that when He cried "It is finished" He paid for our sins? He ransomed us from the kingdom of darkness—principalities and powers—and made a public example of them.

If you've ever cast out demons you know that you call on the love, grace, and mercy of Jesus. The very same Spirit of love that so wonderfully draws us and woos us to the

Living God falls like fire on those demons from Hell!

"Now I will draw all men to myself," said Jesus.

The Rider's robe is dipped in His own blood. When nothing else in all creation could reach my dead heart, the love and blood of Jesus on that cross rode in, broke my heart, and set me free. That's *power!*

For two thousand years His Church has been growing like He said it would. It is *so good* to see all of you here this morning! Wheat and tares together, but *growing*, just like He said.

A pinch of leaven;
A mustard seed,
But nothing more powerful
In all the world.

Ask yourself: Where was the thunder?

Was it Christian emperors like Constantine who made a law that everyone had to be Christian? Or was it martyrs hanging on crosses in the provinces out of love?

Was it the Crusades? (Those Muslims really love us, don't they?) Was it the Inquisition? Or was it more like a monk named Francis living in the woods near Assisi in Italy?

Where was the thunder?

Was it legislation, policy, or books on how Russia is the Bear and Gorbachev is the Antichrist? Or was it more like an old nun holding dying lepers in her arms on the streets of Calcutta and doing it in the name of Jesus?

Where is the thunder? *Where* is the light shining in the darkness which the darkness cannot overcome? *Where* is the Rider riding with great power? *Where* is the kingdom advancing? *Where* is the *thunder*?

I'll tell you. It's in *you*.

. . . in the cracks of life
. . . in the unscripted moments
. . . when you kiss your children good night
. . . when you tell a lonely coworker "God really loves you"
. . . when you forgive your brother or sister

. . . when you stick with your marriage and tough it out
. . . when you wash somebody's feet
. . . when you care for your mom
. . . when you love a naked, despicable thief hanging alone on a cross somewhere,
and maybe that thief is even *you*.

When you love.

The Rider is riding with great power, and thunder is falling upon this dead earth, and Easter is breaking out all around you.

I did call fire down upon that Samaritan town (Acts 8). The fire was the Spirit of God. It drove out demons and filled those Samaritans with joy: the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I *am* a Thunder Boy. I just didn't know back then what thunder was. In my gospel I don't refer to myself as Boanerges. I simply call myself The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved. It means exactly the same thing.

I hope you are a son or daughter of Thunder. I hope you believe the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord for you. If so, you, my friend, are anything *but* a castaway.

I'm just kidding about old Spalding here. Because when I feel like I can't do it, when I feel outcast and forgotten, like a no-good, ridiculous Gilligan, I don't need an idol. I go down to the beach, I lie on the sand, I stare up at the stars, and I remember that the Lamb on the throne bleeds for me.

Stars fall,
The Dragon trembles,
The Rider rides,
And I *am* seated in the heavenlies with Christ.

Even if I am an outcast in space and time and in this world, Jesus the Christ is an outcast with me. Me and Jesus . . . and I abide in His love, and He abides in me. And I am seated on His throne in faith. Faith is more real than all space and time.

God is light, and all space and time are relative to Him. And the "one other thing"?—God is love. So with Him, for me and for you, *everything* is Easter.

Repeat this prayer, silently in your heart: "I believe; God, help my unbelief." Even if you're struggling with evidence, we can take care of that. It's whether you *want* to believe or not.

[Prayer] "Thank You for paying for me, Jesus; for dying for me, Jesus. Come into me, Jesus, and teach me Your love. Let me see Your love and live Your love. 'For he who loves is born of God and knows God.'"

[Singing]

Jesus loves me this I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong,
They are weak but He is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
The Bible tells me so.

If you prayed that prayer with me, you are what I call “born again.” But you’re born again as a baby. There is so much to learn; so much God has to show us. But you would *not believe* what God has already done for you!

The Rider has delivered you from the dominion of darkness, and He will not let you go. He really loves you, and He wants you to know that and live like that, so that every day would be Easter for you, even if you’re hanging on a cross.

It is *finished*. It’s a done deal.

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