



# *Easter*

**UNCUT**

What really happened  
and why it really matters

Carl Laferton

  
the good book  
COMPANY





*For Suzy and Sam,  
with thanks for letting me use your parents'  
house to write this book.*

#### **Easter Uncut**

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The Good Book Company

Tel: 0333 123 0880; International: +44 (0) 208 942 0880

Email: [info@thegoodbook.co.uk](mailto:info@thegoodbook.co.uk)

#### **Websites:**

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# Introduction

I recently found a diary that I kept for a month while I was at college.

As I remember it, my life at 19 was exciting, and I was interesting. But the evidence remembers it a bit differently. In truth, life was quite dull, and I was quite dim.

So 19-year-old Carl wakes up late because he went to sleep late simply because he couldn't be bothered to go to bed, and then records that he is very tired and needs more sleep. He lazes around most days, and then one day a week records that he worked "extremely hard" (four hours in a single day) because a work deadline was looming. Then he writes that he must be more organised, before repeating the same timetable the week after.

And, apart from watching lots of sport (on a TV or from the substitutes' bench), and spending a fair amount of money he didn't have on things he didn't need, that's life. Quite dull, and fairly dim.

## Not your average week

Most of our diaries would be similar, I'd imagine. Things happen, life goes on its way, resolutions come and go, mistakes get made but not learned from... and then there's the odd burst of great joy, or worry, or grief. That's ordinary life—a large amount of mundane details, punctured by the odd life-changing event.





But every now and then, an ordinary person finds themselves at the centre of extraordinary events. The diary of someone who marched with Martin Luther King, or who lived in 1945 Berlin, or who worked for King Henry VIII, would be fascinating—not because of who the writer is, but because of what they saw, who they were with, and what they were part of.

This book is about a diary. Thankfully for all of us, the diary is not mine. It's the account of a man called John who lived in the first century, grew up as a fisherman, met someone who changed his life, and wrote down what happened next. And the part we're focusing on is a week in which John witnessed loyalty, arguments, betrayal, love, desertion and injustice; a week of great plans, shattered dreams, nightmare scenes and renewed hope.

It was not your average week. It was the week in history that we now call "Easter".

## Eggs or execution?

Easter is strange, when you think about it. On the one hand, there are fluffy bunnies and lots of eggs. On the other, there is a man being brutally executed. Since it's hard to wrestle both those images into the same story, we tend to focus on the fluffy bits and cut out the execution part.

But this book doesn't. In fact, it ignores the bunnies. That's because John is writing down what really happened in history—the version of Easter that comes with an 18-certificate, and is much more interesting for it. In each chapter, you'll read ► **What really happened**—what John saw. In each of these sections, you'll see some words in **this kind of text**. Those are taken straight out of the Bible, and are the really important ones. Those in normal text are written by me, just to help you grasp what was going on.





But John's diary doesn't only tell us what happened in all its gripping twists and turns. It also shows us ▶ **Why it really matters.** The man who changed John's life was Jesus, a carpenter who claimed to be a king, and who still grabs the attention and draws the devotion of millions of people even today, 2,000 years later. As you'll see, John tells us far more about Jesus than he does about himself. In fact, when he refers to himself, he doesn't even use "I" or his own name—he describes himself just as "the disciple Jesus loved".

In each chapter, you'll read one of John's entries about this strangest, most disturbing and thrilling of weeks. And you'll read about why those events back in distant history still live on—how they can change your own life and future.

Not many diaries are very interesting—mine certainly isn't. But this one is. Not many lives matter 2,000 years later—mine certainly won't. But this one does.

Welcome to Easter—uncut.







# 1. *Saturday night.*

## *. Dinner with friends.*

.

### ► What really happened

Six days before the Passover, the greatest festival of Israel's year, Jesus came to Bethany, a village a short distance from the capital, Jerusalem. This was where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had recently raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Lazarus' sister Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

Then Mary, Lazarus' other sister, took about half a litre of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages."

He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the disciples' money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will

\* Words straight from the Bible are in this kind of text.





always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews—the people who lived in Israel—found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

**READ THE FULL STORY** John 12 v 1-9

### > Why it really matters

I knew I loved her when I spent all my money—and a chunk of my overdraft—on her birthday present.

At the time, I'd only been dating Lizzie for a couple of weeks. Aware of my own shortcomings, I asked a friend to help me choose a suitable gift. Julia pointed to a necklace. It was stunning—and its price tag was, to a student, startling.

The normal Carl would have walked away and bought something cheaper, sensible, affordable. But something strange happened to me. I found myself in the shop, credit card in hand, buying this necklace. I didn't even pause to calculate how many nights out or tickets to the football it was costing me. I bought it.

It was at that moment that I realised I was in love.

### The best thing I have...

You can tell what you truly love by what you give to it, and what you give up for it. We all have something, or someone, we would give anything to. Why? Because we're in love. It could be an idea, an ambition, a job, a possession, a person. It could, of course, be yourself. There will be something.

And as Jesus pauses in Bethany on his way into Jerusalem—and on the way into the hardest week of his life—John records for us an act of true love, of overwhelming generosity. As Jesus ate with





his closest friends, “Mary took about half a litre of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair”.

In that culture, it wasn’t strange to put perfume on a man’s feet; it was a place of dusty roads and open sandals, and male feet are not known for being naturally sweet-smelling. What is strange—startling—is the type and amount of perfume Mary used. It was worth a year’s average salary. She was effectively pouring 5,000 five-pound notes or ten-dollar bills—over a man’s feet. Me putting my credit card onto the jewellery shop’s counter has nothing on this.

Mary is saying to Jesus, in a stunning, perfumed way: *I love you. The best thing I have is this perfume, and it’s yours. You are worth it.*

## I am worth it

It is startling. But even more startling is how Jesus responds. I don’t know what picture of Jesus you have in your head—but most people think that, if he did exist, he was a reasonable, humble kind of guy. So what do you expect him to say, as someone gives him a present they can’t really afford?

“You shouldn’t have. No, really, you shouldn’t have.”

But he doesn’t say that. When others object, and point out that if Mary didn’t want the perfume for herself, she could at least have sold it and given the money to the poor, Jesus doesn’t agree. No: “Leave her alone,” he replies.

Mary thinks Jesus is worth everything—more worthy even than helping the poor. And Jesus agrees. “You will always have the poor among you,” he says, “but you will not always have me.” He’s saying: *Yes. I am worth it.*

It’s a claim of staggering audacity—arrogance, even. How do you respond? To be honest, I want to respond as Judas does:

“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?”

It’s a very good point.





## Money talks

But John, as he records this event, knows Judas better than that. Actually, it isn't lifting poor people from poverty that Judas cares about; it is lining his own pockets to increase his prosperity. What does Judas love? Money. Judas is focusing on the money-bag, because that's where he'll find all he needs. It's worth bending a few rules (John would call it thieving; Judas would call it being savvy) in order to grab some more money. It's what he loves.

You can tell as you read John's entry whose side he is on here, and it's not Judas'. But it's worth asking, *Whose side am I on?* Do you line up with Mary, pouring out everything she has because she thinks Jesus is worth it? Or with Judas, seeking to maximise his own wealth because he thinks money is worth it? To put it another way, if Jesus were here now, would you set up a direct debit to divert your whole salary, for twelve months, into his bank account?

No? Neither would I. Unless... unless he really is worth it. What if Jesus offers something that money can't buy, which Judas won't find in the moneybag and we won't find in our bank balance?

## Worth it?

The answer to that question is not found by looking at Mary wiping the perfume with her hair, nor at Judas grumbling as he counts the cost to his personal wealth, nor at Jesus telling Judas to leave Mary alone. It's found by looking at another member of the dinner party.

A strange thing happens at the end of the dinner. A large crowd come to have a look. Eating dessert is not usually a spectator sport—but this dinner is different. The crowd of locals are there “to see Lazarus”. They want to gawp and gaze at Mary's brother.

Why?

Because last time many of them had seen him, he hadn't been lying beside a table, eating, as was the fashion in this outpost of the Roman empire. He'd been lying in a tomb... dead.





So they came to see Lazarus, whom “Jesus had raised from the dead”. Jesus had stood at the tomb of this man and he had wept tears at his friend’s death, just as we all do when a loved one dies. Then he had said, “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11 v 43). And Lazarus had come out, this dead man, now alive.

When we look at Lazarus, alive and eating, suddenly Mary’s actions don’t seem so extravagant or over the top. Jesus had given her brother his life back. He had cancelled her grief. The guestlist of this dinner was literally miraculous. Of course Mary would give everything she had to Jesus, because he had given her so much more.

That’s love. That’s why I spent my overdraft on Lizzie’s birthday present. Deep down I had a sense that whatever I gave to her, she would give more back to me—that whatever I gave up for her, it would always be worth it, because I was getting *her*.

That’s why Mary spent so much on Jesus. And that’s why Christians today spend their lives on Jesus. You’re probably reading this book because you know a Christian who is normal in most ways, but sometimes does things that are at best confusing and at worst crazy. They give up money, time or energy that they could use to enjoy themselves. They are willing to miss out on a promotion or a pay-rise, on being respected or having a relationship. They are willing to say things that aren’t popular. They’re normal in many ways, but strange in some.

They’re like Mary. They’ve discovered that when you give everything to Jesus, he gives back far more.

## Second best

Judas never discovered that. He loved money more than he loved Jesus. He followed Jesus around, but Jesus was a sideshow to him—not the main event. If he was around today, Judas would have gone to church at Christmas and Easter—Jesus was welcome to have those times of the year. Perhaps he’d have given Jesus his





Sunday mornings, too. But he wouldn't have given Jesus his life. Monday mornings would have been about getting money, about grabbing the life that he wanted and that a good income would buy him.

And the irony is that because Judas held back, he missed out. He missed out on all that Jesus would give—on life, on an end to grief, on hope and security for the future. He ended up with second best—and, within a week, he ended up with nothing at all.

What are you aiming for in life? Could it be that you're settling for second best? Could it be that what you love most can't give you as much as Jesus can?

Jesus thinks so. He thinks he's worth everything. That's either breathtaking arrogance, or it's breathtakingly accurate. The events of the next few days would first suggest that Jesus couldn't have been more wrong about himself—and then make plain that he couldn't have been more right.

## A house full of...

So, as Mary wipes up the perfume, Judas stares angrily at the money bag, and the villagers all gaze at the risen Lazarus, what strikes John is that "the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume". But it's not just sweet fragrance the house is full of.

It's full of questions: Is Jesus really worth it? Is Mary being sensible, or stupid?

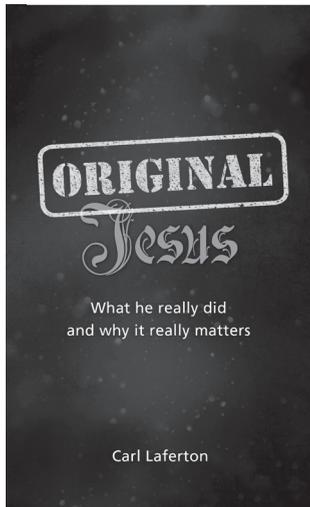
It's also full of tension—because Jesus doesn't only tell Judas to leave Mary alone. He adds that "it was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial". Whether she knew it or not, Mary was preparing a corpse for burial. Jesus is saying, *Look at Lazarus. He was recently dead. Now look at me. I soon will be.*





EVERYONE HAS A PICTURE OF JESUS.

*Why not meet the real one?*



## ORIGINAL JESUS

Carl Laferton

“Lively and engaging, this book makes clear who Jesus is—and why we need him. A great introduction to the true Jesus.”

**Gavin Peacock**, ex-English Premier League midfielder with Chelsea and Newcastle

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*Opening up the Bible*

Thanks for reading this book. We hope you enjoyed it, and found it helpful.

Most people want to find answers to the big questions of life: Who are we? Why are we here? How should we live? But for many valid reasons we are often unable to find the time or the right space to think positively and carefully about them.

Perhaps you have questions that you need an answer for. Perhaps you have met Christians who have seemed unsympathetic or incomprehensible. Or maybe you are someone who has grown up believing, but need help to make things a little clearer.

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