

# The Dumb Bunnies' Easter

November 20, 2005

## Matthew 9:9-13 (New Living Translation)

*[Kid's leader reads The Dumb Bunnies Easter with kids up front—kids stay for the beginning of the message]*

*The Dumb Bunnies Easter?* Guys, did I miss something? What holidays are we getting ready to celebrate? Okay, okay Thanksgiving and Christmas...that's what I thought. So what's up with the Dumb Bunnies? Even though they were confused about their holidays, what did the Dumb Bunnies do that seemed to be good?

I'd like to thank The Garden Kids for helping us out this morning. [kids return to Garden Room] Well, what on earth *do* the Dumb Bunnies have to do with upcoming holiday season? Frankly, I'd like to know whose idea this was. Probably someone with kids who reads bedtime stories...Okay, okay, I confess it was me. Let me tell you how this happened though. *The Dumb Bunnies Easter* is one of Annie and Harry's favorite stories—one of those stories we get to read over, and over, and over. Many of you probably know how that works. However, the last time I read this to the kids I heard something new. Have you ever had that happen to you, where you read or hear a favorite story, a passage from the Bible, or a song, and you hear something new...something you'd swear wasn't there before? Well that's what happened with The Dumb Bunnies.

Just look at the Dumb Bunnies [\[picture on screen\]](#). They're downright goofy looking—they're oddballs. They look funny, they dress funny, and they can't seem to get anything right. They mess up every tradition possible. They don't do things the way we are supposed to do them! *They just don't get it.*

Every night after we finish a story like the Dumb Bunnies, I always read a story from the Bible with the kids. Along about the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> chapters of Matthew begin some of the stories about the amazing deeds Jesus performed—that is, some of the miracles stories of Jesus.

Matthew tells of the leper who came to Jesus and knelt before him asking to be cured—Jesus reached out and touched the man and cured him of his leprosy. Keep in mind leprosy is a contagious disease—Jesus reached out and touched this person. Jesus also visits the servant of a Roman centurion who is paralyzed—likewise, Jesus heals the servant too. Keep in mind that the Romans were the enemy—Jesus helped the enemy.

Now, I know you are going to think I'm nuts, but when I was talking about these stories with the kids, somehow the Dumb Bunnies crept into my head. Remember the part about hearing something over and over, and hearing it for the first time...Well, somehow I was putting the Dumb Bunnies and Jesus together and hearing something new. Then I came across this story from Matthew 9:9-13, and it clicked with me why these stories seemed fresh. Listen...

*As Jesus was going down the road, he saw Matthew sitting at his tax-collection booth. Remember, tax collectors represented the Roman authority and were greatly disliked. "Come, be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him.*

*That night Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors and many other notorious sinners. The Pharisees were indignant. "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" they asked his disciples.*

*When he heard this, Jesus replied, "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do." Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices.' For I have come to call the outsiders, not those who think they are already good enough."*

Here is where the two stories began to merge for me. In the Dumb Bunnies, you just want to shake them and say, no, no you're not doing it right, that's not the way it's supposed to be done. Likewise, the Pharisees and people who didn't know Jesus looked at him with disgust and said, no, no you're not doing it right...that's not the way it's supposed to be done .

However, as we enter into the holidays, I really think the Dumb Bunnies and Jesus are doing things *exactly* as they should be done. You see, the Dumb Bunnies aren't worried about the particulars. They aren't worried about doing things the right way. What *is* right about the Dumb Bunnies is their spirit. So they may have a few of the details wrong, but they sure do have the big picture right—they have the right *spirit* of the holidays.

I really think Jesus would identify with the Dumb Bunnies...Jesus did things rather unconventionally too. He healed on Sunday, something you weren't supposed to do in those days. He actually touched lepers, he ate in the home of tax collectors, and he prayed with prostitutes—Jesus reached out to those who society marginalized; he reached out to those in the deepest need—something that seems exceedingly appropriate during the holidays.

I really believe we often get caught up in the details of life—especially during the holidays. Everything has to be just so; you know, the decorations, menus, all the planning. Often we focus on those particulars and miss the big picture.

When we were growing up my mom tutored a boy named Marty Crutcher. From time to time mom would take me with her when she tutored Marty. I would have been about 9 or 10. I can't tell you how much I disliked going to the Crutcher's house. It was in the worst part of town; it was always dark and had a very distinctive odor. Mom developed a very deep relationship with this family—she kind of took them under her wing. At the time I remember being kind of angry about this. Why did she love these people, she had her own family to love. Mom never really explained why she had taken such an interest in this family—for whatever reason, unbeknownst to me at the time, she had a deep passion and commitment for this family.

I think the straw that broke the camel's back came the year mom wanted to invite the Crutcher's for Thanksgiving dinner. All of us siblings, and dad too, made our stand. NO WAY! No way were we going to wreck our perfect Thanksgiving with the Crutchers. Thanksgiving in the Abell home was a formula not to be tampered with. Arise early to watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, play football in the yard, watch the Dallas Cowboys play the Detroit Lions, and eat the perfect meal of Turkey, dressing, green beans, and *burnt* rolls—just the way Grammy likes them.

Well, we struck a compromise which was to take the Crutchers some food. Mind you, this was a great sacrifice. One of us was going to have to give up something, my sisters refused to give up the parade, I refused to give up football in the yard, and dad wouldn't budge on Dallas and Detroit.

I really don't remember how it all worked out in that end, but I do remember I was the one chosen to take the meal into the house.

Many of you are aware that last month I traveled to India to attend an international conference on AIDS. While I was there I met two men who are lecturers at Madras Christian College, Drs. Joshua Kalaapati and S. Yagna Sekhar. I found out that Dr Sekhar is also a social worker and the director of the TCD Society, a non-profit group that reaches out to women who are HIV+. Dr. Sekhar visits these women and their families in their homes and helps provide and coordinate the most basic needs for them. I asked them if they would take me out to visit some of these women in their homes. They made the arrangements and I met them the next day.

I met with two families [first picture(s)]. The first woman was 25 years old and had two boys 4 and 6. She and her husband both are HIV+. They are too afraid to tell the neighbors or even their two boys about their status because if they do, they will be thrown out of their house, and their children will be ostracized.

When Valanthi found out I was a pastor, she said that she is a Christian and asked if I would pray with her. [picture of hands] It's hard to describe the feeling, but the synergy in our group during that prayer was incredible.

We left her home and traveled to another where we met Aamina and her family [pictures]. Aamina and her family are Muslim. Upon learning that, I uttered the only Muslim greeting I know... *assalamu alaikum (peace be upon you)*. Hearing that her eyes widened and she said, yes, yes, yes, assalmu alaikum. We prayed together too. When we left Aamina's house I commented how beautiful her family is. Her response to me was that "the beauty on the outside masks the pain on the inside."

As I sat in our car on the way back to the hotel, those words, *the beauty on the outside masks the pain on the inside*, rolled hauntingly around my head. I was meditating on that when Dr. Sekhar said he wanted to share something with me that he hadn't before. He told me that his non-profit group—TCD—works specifically with women that are HIV+ that used to be sex workers. Or, in the west what we might call prostitutes.

Dr. Sekhar explained to me that this was the only way these women had to support their families. It was either that, or their families starve to death. That is why they use the term sex worker—prostitute has such an ingrained meaning for us...one typically that comes with a great deal of moral judgment. One of the members of our group said he would prefer to take it a step further and call it survival sex. This makes it clear—this is not a choice for these women—there really is no other choice. In the midst of this tragedy, I thought to myself what a great blessing these two men are reaching out to these marginalized families. AIDS is still very taboo in India...those with AIDS and those that work with them often face great stigma.

That night in my hotel room, I was having a tough time processing the day. Where did God, Jesus, religion and the church fit in this picture? As is often the case when I struggle with these issues, I turned to my mom for some wisdom. I emailed her and shared the story of our day.

In her reply she commented on how she too was amazed that these two guys had such compassion—that in her opinion these two were following in Jesus' footsteps. But then she said

something that really stunned me. She said, “Do you remember the Crutcher family? The family that we used to visit...Mrs. Crutcher was a prostitute too.”

Have you ever had it happen to you where you read or hear a favorite story, a passage from the Bible, or a song, but you hear something new...something you'd swear wasn't there before? It took over thirty years, but I finally think I understand the real lesson my mom was trying to teach me when I was a kid.

All these stories I've heard over and over and over again became crystal clear to me in a hotel room in India. The Crutchers, The Dumb Bunnies, Jesus—it's all about radical hospitality—it's all about reaching out to those who may look different than we do...who may do things differently than we do...who might find themselves in a different life circumstance than we are—it's all about reaching out and doing things in the spirit of the season.

CLOSING: Former president Jimmy Carter said something I think sums up this idea of reaching out and doing things in the spirit of the season, he said:

*I have one life and one chance to make it count for something . . . I'm free to choose what that something is, and the something I've chosen is my faith. Now, my faith goes beyond theology and religion and requires considerable work and effort. My faith demands -- this is not optional -- my faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference.*

Have a great Sunday, and go in peace. Amen