

## Easter

April 21, 2019

The Romans, The Jews and his followers saw him die.

As the first rays of light seeped into the Sunday morning horizon on the very first Easter—everyone agreed about one thing—Jesus the Nazarene was dead.

The Romans were expert craftsmen in the art of death. No one given over to their custody sentenced to death ever escaped. Jesus the Nazarene was no different. He was affixed to the preferred method of Roman death and torture. These merchants of death knew what they were doing as they put him on that cross.

Sunday dawned AND The Romans knew he was dead—they killed him.

And the Jewish elite knew he was dead too. From their perspective, that Galilean troublemaker was going to be a fly in their collective ointment no more! They stood around and relished the sight of him struggling for breath. The people would stop listening to that Jesus and come back to them.

Sunday dawned AND The Jewish authorities knew he was dead—they saw him die.

His followers knew that Jesus was dead too. They were huddled away out of sight defeated, dismayed and despondent. With him alive hope warmed their insides—now that he was gone—all hope was extinguished. His followers did not know what to do next.

Sunday dawned AND his followers knew he was dead—they saw him die.

As the sun shone through the first mists of morning—all were agreed:

The Romans

The Jews

The Followers

Agreed that Jesus was dead and gone, never to come back. First thing, a cluster of women including Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James trudged to the tomb that Jesus was interred in.

They knew no one walked out of the tombs.

They knew no one broke the bonds of death.

They knew no one who carried a cross came back.

They knew the dead ALWAYS stayed dead.

They knew Jesus was dead.

But these women would remember this morning—and billions more as well—not for what they found at the tomb. But for what they didn't find.

Surprise!

Let's find out what. Let's join these ladies in Luke 24. It is right around 6 am and about 67 degrees in the Mediterranean desert. Nothing is out of the ordinary—yet.

“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. <sup>5</sup> And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” <sup>8</sup> And they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb

they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest." Luke 24:1-9

Surprise!

God is the best at throwing surprise parties. These ladies are thinking they are going to relive the darkest moments in their lives and—surprise!

Guess what!

There are some shiny men hanging out around the open tomb—and the ladies are taken aback and bowed to the ground.

And the angels ask,

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

It is a lot to process.

If I were the spokesman for these ladies, I might say something like this,

"Hey Mr. Angel give these ladies a moment. We are not used to seeing or hearing shiny men where we come from. And your question is a little snarky."

Why do you seek the living among the dead?

What do you mean?

We saw him die.

We heard Jesus breath his last.

We heard him cry out, "It is finished."

We have come to the perfect place to find the dead—  
a graveyard.

Surprise!

Easter is the ultimate plot twist.

You might ask, "How do we know that these ladies  
expected to find the body of Jesus?"

Vs. 1,

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they  
went to the tomb, taking the spices they had  
prepared.

The spices.

This wasn't a few candles or some essential oils. They  
had about 75 pounds of in tow.

Normally when someone died, those in attendance would wrap the body in a shroud with something like 75 pounds of spices throughout. But Jesus expired toward the end of the day on Friday. Since Sabbath started at sundown Friday no one had a chance to prepare his body for burial.

These ladies went out to finish the job.

But—surprise!

Vs 2,

“And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,  
<sup>3</sup> but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. <sup>5</sup> And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?”

Why do you seek the living among the dead?

That is a little bit of a snarky question. The answer is, “Everyone who dies stays dead.”

You see what the angels are asking?

Why are looking for someone who is alive among the dead ones? It is a good question.

If you are in the mall in the way back time before cellphones and you lost your friend and your other friends form a search posse—and you go off in a few different directions.

One says, "I'll go to the food court."  
Another says, "I'll head to Foot Locker."  
Still another, "I'll go to the Movie Theatre."  
Last one, "I'll check out the cemetery."

How strange would that be.

You would say—that is weird. Our friend is missing, not dead. No one goes looking for the living amongst the tombs. But they had seen Jesus die, that is where he should be.

Vs. 6,

"He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

Despite what he had said before he died, the ladies expected him to stay dead.

That Sunday morning they were treating Jesus like he was still dead. They were ready to tend to his body and complete his burial.

But he was living and among the dead no more.

These women are not so different than we are—if the two men in dazzling apparel stood in front of us today—they could ask,

“Why do you seek the living among the dead?”

Do you treat Jesus like he is dead?

The Resurrection, if it matters is not really that big of a deal.

### 1. Not a big deal

Maybe that is not exactly how you would say it, but you think—what is the big deal about Easter anyway?

This whole story seems strange.

Maybe that is you. Maybe you are here as a favor for your friend or your mom or yourself. Welcome. Maybe you haven't given a ton of thought to whether Jesus is alive or not.



We Christians believe a strange story, I get it.

We are so used to the story that we forget how very strange it is. We Christians follow an obscure Palestinian preacher we have never seen, never talked to face to face, who never wrote a book and lived about 20 centuries ago.

“It’s true: The (story of Jesus is) humanly strange. A young Palestinian virgin miraculously conceives a boy-child whose Father is God, the Creator of the universe. This boy-child is born in ironic ignominy, yet heralded by a miracle star and angelic hosts, greeted by shepherds and Persian astrologers, and hunted by a homicidally paranoid king.

The strangeness continues through Jesus’s sinless life, miraculous public ministry, his betrayal and horrible crucifixion, and then his resurrection from the dead. This is followed by his ascension after he affirms his promise to return and commissions his small band of followers to preach his gospel throughout the world. His followers carry out this commission and launch the most influential and multi-ethnic religious faith the world has ever seen.” Jon Bloom

Strange for sure.

And those of you who are here and don't normally come to church—I get that you might think this sounds crazy. We Christians might be a strange lot—we are awkward in a lot of ways—but nothing compares to the Jesus we worship.

Strange.

Here is what it is all about. Jesus is our defining characteristic. When he was here on earth he promised he would die and rise again.

Others said that they could avoid death and did not. Jesus said he would die and come back and did.

The resurrection of Jesus proves that this Jesus of Nazareth is worth following. Him coming back from the dead was not just him flexing his power, it was him opening a way.

He opened a way to avoid the sting of death.

When Jesus was killed on that Friday so long ago, it was a tragedy—but it was much, much more. He did not just die, he died for others.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins...” 1  
Corinthians 15:3

Jesus did not just die, he died for others. His death was the fulfillment of a promise. Centuries before his death a seer named Isaiah described what happened when Jesus hung on that cross.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us  
peace, and with his wounds we are healed.  
[6] All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:5–6

His death was more than just an execution it was a substitution. Do you see what it says?

He was pierced for our transgressions.  
He was crushed for our iniquities.

He was killed for other people’s sins. All of us know that we do wrong and fall short on a regular basis. There are things:

- We did not do but should have.
- We did do but should not have.
- We should have said but did not.

- We should not have said but did.
- Things done against others.
- Things done against yourself.
- Things you did with actions
- Things you said with words.

And more.

All the punishment that deserved to be meted out for that sin was put upon him. He did not just die on the cross if we can put it that way—the LORD (his father) punished him for all the sins of his people.

“He was without any comforts of God — no feeling that God loved him — no feeling that God pitied him — no feeling that God supported him. God was his sun before — now that sun became all darkness... He was without God — he was as if he had no God. All that God had been to him before was taken from him now.

He was Godless — deprived of his God. He had the feeling of the condemned, when the Judge says: “Depart from me, ye cursed,” “who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.” He felt that God said the same to him. Ah! This is the hell which Christ suffered. The ocean of Christ’s sufferings is unfathomable... He was forsaken in the [place] of sinners. If you close with him as your surety, you will

never be forsaken... "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" [The answer?] For me — for me. The ocean of Christ's sufferings is unfathomable."  
Robert Murray M'Cheyne

That is how it can be said, "He died for us..."

But if he just died, he wouldn't be much worth following. He would have been a good man who tried hard but, failed. But Jesus lives on.

The resurrection of Jesus proves that his death—the payment of sin—was enough. His punishment for others was accepted.

We know this because he rose again to life.

That is why the resurrection is a big deal. Don't treat Jesus as if he is dead and that his resurrection doesn't matter.

You can treat Jesus as if he were dead if you don't think it is that big of a deal. You can also treat Jesus as if he were dead if you believe you are still not worthy enough. That your sins are too severe.

## 2. Not worthy enough

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth who helped to murder King Duncan is given to sleepwalking haunted by her deed. Her sleep brings no rest. She is tormented by the sight of seeing her hands perpetually stained by blood of an innocent man.

"Come out, damned spot!

Out, I command you! One, two. OK, it's time to do it now.—Hell is murky!—Nonsense, my lord, nonsense! You are a soldier, and yet you are afraid? Why should we be scared, when no one can lay the guilt upon us?—But who would have thought the old man would have had so much blood in him?

What, will my hands never be clean?—

I still have the smell of blood on my hand. All the perfumes of Arabia couldn't make my little hand smell better. Oh, oh, oh!"

Maybe you, like lady Macbeth look at all you have done and lament—will my hands never be clean? Maybe you have given yourself to betterment but still feel haunted by guilt. You survey your life and find a pockmarked landscape marked and marred by sin after sin after sin.

- You have made promises to others you could not keep.
- You have made promises to yourself you could not keep.
- You have tried to do better only to fail.
- You have given advice you did not follow.
- You have made vows and broken them.

And now you feel the stain of unworthiness so thick—and you can't wash it out.

Do you feel guilty?

- Was it something you did?
- Was it something you didn't do?
- Is it something you can't stop doing?
- Is it for the past?
- Is it for the present?

Those feelings of guilt are real. We are all guilty. But those feelings of guilt does not disqualify us from believing in Chirst and Christ alone.

Whoever believes in Christ alone—even those who feel guilty—may have eternal life.

Do you carry shame?

- Was it for something done to you?
- Is it for because you always feel out of place?
- Is it because you have never measured up?

We have a lot to be ashamed of but that sense of shame does not disqualify us from believing in Christ and Christ alone.

Whoever believes in Christ alone—even those who feel ashamed—may have eternal life.

Do you feel unworthy?

You might be sitting in here today thinking thoughts like—

- Everyone here is so put together, I don't fit.
- If people really knew me, they would reject me.
- They all look so holy.
- They all know so much.

We are all unworthy but that does not disqualify us from believing in Christ and Christ alone.

Whoever believes in Christ alone—even those who feel ashamed—may have eternal life.



I'm not going to tell you that those reasons are not real, they are. But here is the good news this Easter morning—your guilt, shame and unworthiness is not as powerful as a resurrected Jesus.

Think about it.

If Jesus strides forth out from the tomb as the victor—do you think he can overcome your guilt, shame and unworthiness?

- Jesus Christ was killed and the bonds of death could not hold him.
  - Can he kill your guilt?
- He was slain the grave could not contain him.
  - Can he slay your shame?
- He was murdered and the grip of death could not keep him.
  - Can he free you from unworthiness?
- He was destroyed but the powers of darkness could not hold him down.
  - Can he destroy your anguish?
- He was trampled but the prison of death could not hold him.
  - Can he trample your suffering?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Here is the logic of the empty tomb.

If he can defeat the very power of death—he is more than up to the challenge of conquering your guilt, shame and unworthiness.

"Death is a dreadful enemy, it defies all the sons and daughters of Adam. None dared cope with this king of terrors but Christ, and he, by dying, went into the very den of this dragon, fought with it, and foiled it in the grave, its own territories and dominions, and came off a conqueror." John Flavel

You can treat Jesus as if he were dead if you think:

- The resurrection doesn't matter
- The resurrection doesn't help you—too guilty

You might call yourself a follower of Jesus and yet STILL treat Jesus like he were dead.

How?

### 3. Not Connected

By not connected, I mean that Jesus does not make much of a difference in your life. You say that you believe Jesus rose from the dead but you look like everyone else.

It is not enough to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Worse, You might be convinced that Jesus rose from the dead but you can still interact with him as if he were dead.

Does Jesus make a difference in your life?

Knowing about God is not the same as knowing God.

This is true for us too:

There is a danger as old as the wind that lurks in the corners of our hearts. It is this—Knowing about God is

a substitute for knowing God.

It is not. Let me just talk to you straight—

- You can know a lot about the Bible but not know the God of the Bible.
- You can have prayed a prayer to ask Jesus in your heart but not know the God who dwells with his people.
- You can have sung thousands of songs but not know the God that inhabits the praise of his people.
- Your mind may be consumed by knowledge about God but you don't know the God who is a consuming fire.
- You might have prayed many a prayer to God but not know the God who is the shepherd of his people.
- You might talk a lot about your faith but not know the great Author and Perfecter of the faith and the faithful.
- You might be able to preach like Spurgeon but not know God who is the chief shepherd.
- You might believe in God yet not know the God who was, is and is to come.

Knowledge is not enough. Spiritual privilege does not make spiritual people. Another kind of spiritual privilege is the privilege of past experience.

Spiritual privilege of experience in and of itself is nothing—

- You might be able to speak in the tongues of men and angels with all power and might—and have not God—you have nothing.
- You might be able to have all prophetic powers—and have not God—you have nothing.
- You might understand all mysteries and have all knowledge and have not God—you have nothing.
- You might have all faith—faith able to move mountains—and have not God—you have nothing.
- You might have given away all your possessions to the poor—and have not God—you have nothing.
- You might deliver your body to die a martyr's death—and have not God—you have nothing.

Because even the spiritual privilege of experience does not make spiritual people.

We might not be all that different from the Jew. Are you trying to protect yourself against the wrath of God by your knowledge of God?

Those who merely know about God will have no protection from God. The mere knowledge of God is

no protection from the rising waters of affliction that comes to all.

The mere knowledge of God is no solace when the fires of doubt rage around us.

There may not be any promises for the spiritually privileged but promises aplenty for those privileged with knowing God.

Is he your savior?

Spiritual privilege alone is insufficient because spiritual privilege does not make spiritual people.

Not everyone who calls themselves a Christian really is. Many have been baptized or prayed a prayer or raised their hand at church and are not saved.

This warning is here to remind us that those who have the Spirit within will want to please God and obey. Those do not exhibit a general pattern of obedience have no right to think they are saved. Let me give you a few examples—both on the licentious and legalistic side.

- You might think you are saved but it doesn't bother you that you are having sex with your boyfriend. You think it is okay because you are really in love with him. Be warned.
- You might not think it is a big deal that you neglect your wife and family to give time and

- attention other places. They are hungry for your time and attention but you give it consistently to other pursuits: be they work, women or wine. Be warned.
- You have no desire to read the Bible and pray. You are good to come to church and give all the right answers but you are okay doing things on your own. Be warned.
  - You take advantage of people at work and just say—that is business. You are unfair and always looking only to your interests and never to others. You are dishonest and twist the truth. Be warned.
  - You love the applause of others. You will do whatever you have to make and keep a friend, even if it is wrong. Your only conviction is to do what you have to do to be popular. Be Warned.
  - OR you might think you are saved because of the things you do. You do all the right things and that is your hope. Be warned.
  - You can tell everyone else what the Bible says for them but you do not heed your own advice. Be warned.
  - You were baptized and have gone to church your whole life. If that is the ground of your hope. Be warned.

#### 4. Not Encouraged Enough

We think too little on the resurrection. There is a mighty power unleashed in the world today because Jesus lives. He is not just sitting up there alive going— I'm alive.

His new life is leveraging a new power in behalf of and in Christians. What is he doing?

He is leveraging

“immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places...” Ephesians 1:18-20

It is like this.

When Adam ate that fruit the door to darkness and evil was flung open and started to ravage humanity. There was no escaping the darkness. From that day forward mankind owned the heart of darkness.

When Jesus ate the bitter fruit of death and was rejected by God the door to bright goodness was flung open and started to push the darkness back. Evil



would not have the final say. Now there was a way for mankind to escape the darkness.

As SamWise Gamgee asks, "Is everything sad coming untrue?"

The resurrection of Jesus answers that question with a resounding YES.

There is now an immeasurably great power working in our lives because Jesus is raised.

Make no mistake, Christian, every blessing radiates from that empty tomb.

What are some of the promises that are ours because Jesus is alive?

- God is not now angry with you
- God is now your father
- God will never punish you for sins
- God will out his perfect will in your life despite our failings
- We can go to him again and again asking for forgiveness
- Made alive when we were dead
- Forgiveness from God
- Indwelling of the Spirit (God with us)

- Adoption as sons and daughters
- You will rise from the dead
- Good will triumph over evil
- I can trust Jesus
- Dead to sin—it does not reign
- Proof of future perfection
- Proof of future resurrection
- Revive his church
- Hears your prayers
- Upholds you when you are weak
- Close to you in trials
- Makes all things work together for your good
- Adopted into God's family—for keeps
- Protect us from remaining sin
- Protect us until the end
- Protect us from Satan
- An eternal inheritance
- Hope in this life and the life to come
- God works in you and for you
- God will provide for you needs even when you are short on cash
- Will have new bodies one day
- New hopes in a new world
- New hopes in a world that is not our home
- New feelings for the one who loves us
- New possessions that can never be taken away
- God will always love us despite our actions
- We don't have to play at religion
- No guilt

- No shame
- All love
- He will be with us always—to the end

All because of the report that was trumpeted so long ago that echoes even today,

“He is NOT here, for he has risen.”

He was not there which means he is working in and for us—for our good forever. Because Jesus is raised everything is yes and amen in Christ.

You don't have to be afraid anymore. The most common command is, “Do not be afraid.” How much comfort do we gain when we realize that the command is coming from one who has lived a nightmare and says, “You have nothing to fear.”

Hope echoes from the empty tomb saying:

- When seems lost—you can never lose God.
- When you lose your grip on reality—God will never lose his grip on you.
- When adversity pounces on you—God is your ever-present help.

- When you lose your dearest friend—you have not lost God.
- When your heart is breaking—God is near to the broken-hearted.
- When you are accosted by crippling disappointments—God says, 'be patient, these afflictions are for a moment soon you will be with me, forever'.
- When your children wander off—you can pray to the God who calls back the prodigal.
- When your marriage is breaking—God can repair what seems irreparable.
- When your bank account is depleted—God has resources to provide all you need.
- When friends abandon you—God can never leave you.
- When people falsely accuse you—God speaks ONLY promises and comfort to you.
- When you aren't all you should be or could be—God remembers his son was all he should or could be for us.
- When we lie dying and breathe our last—God welcomes us into life everlasting without death.

Hope is the reminder that everything sad is beginning to come untrue.

If you just believe in the resurrection you will not have hope. But if you believe in the Jesus who was

resurrected you will have hope.