

From Despair To Hope

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Date: 31 March 2024

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. A blessed Easter to all of you as we've gathered to celebrate the empty tomb.
- It's a very blessed follow-through from Good Friday as we celebrate his death and burial. And so welcome here to all of you.
- We know that many have gone out to meet with families and so on and we wish them God's blessing as they do that. But for us that have opportunity to gather here, we want to worship together.
- As we think of Easter, maybe just getting you to share a few words. What comes to your mind or your heart when you think of Easter morning?
- Eternal life. Resurrection. A new beginning.
- [1 : 1 1] Hope. God's love. Yeah. It is finished.
- Salvation is complete. Any others? The only God that arose from the dead.
- Yeah. Yeah. All of these are part of the blessings the Lord has for his people.
- And the biggest one to me always speaks as hope. God has taken mankind from despair to hope.
- And we glory in that because hope gives us future. And that is what our Lord has done for us.
- [2 : 1 5] As we think of the Passover and resurrection morning, we have two elements that are key and probably the most important elements to mankind.
- They are life and death. And on Easter it's reversed. Death and life.
- And we have the highest range of emotions attached to both spectrums. And when we have a newborn baby, there is joy inexpressible.
- Is there not? And yet when there is death, we sorrow at our deepest. At the loss of life or a dead one.
- Or a, sorry, a loved one. And so we have the range of emotions attached to this. And so it's only right for us to come and celebrate Easter morning with the emotions attached with hope and with life.
- [3 : 3 6] And as we think, the baby Jesus was born as a baby and we celebrated that Christmas. And then we mourned, in a sense, his death.
- And yet, I had that discussion with a brother here on Friday. Do we mourn on Good Friday or do we celebrate that God gave his life for us? You know, it's a bit of both.
- It's a bit of, there's mixed emotions. We are so thankful that God was willing to go to the cross for us. And yet, sorrow.
- But then replaced with life. Eternal life. So that brings us, all of us, to grips with death.
- Because that is what Jesus faced on the cross. Was death and eternal life. Is it real or is it not? Does God have the power of life within himself?

[4 : 52] And he demonstrated that on Easter morning as he came from the grave. So that leads all of us to the point where we have to ask, Am I ready to die?

Am I ready to face death? Am I confident of my future? God has the power of life.

Am I really good? As God, through his Son, gave us the confidence to face death. And as we look at the scene on Easter morning out of Matthew 28, we can identify maybe a little bit with the women as they go to the tomb early in the morning.

Verse 1 in Matthew 28. Now after the Sabbath on the first day of the week, or as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

There's two ladies mentioned here. They were waiting for the day to dawn, the sun to rise, and they were going to go to the tomb.

[6 : 22] Other accounts tell us that they're going to bring further spices to anoint his body. And so these women, they are filled with mixed emotions.

As they have watched on Friday, their Lord and Savior suffer and die.

And the women watched as Jesus hung. They watched him die. And taken down, and as well, buried.

The Scriptures tell us that the women came to see where they laid him. And now on Easter morning, they come prepared to further anoint his body.

And to get a fuller picture, I thought it would be good to read a couple of verses out of the different Gospels. We get a fuller picture of the ladies involved.

[7 : 36] Matthew has Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Mark 16. Mark 16, the first two verses.

Now when the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices that they might come and anoint him.

Very early, in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. So here we have three ladies mentioned.

As Mark thought it important to mention these ladies by name. And then as we turn to Luke 23, Luke 23, Luke 23, and starting in verse 50.

So we're actually backing up to Good Friday now in verse 50. Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man.

[9 : 02] He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God.

This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in linen and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock where no other one had ever lain before.

That day was the preparation and the Sabbath drew near. And the women who had come with him from Galilee followed after and they observed the tomb and how his body was laid.

Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils and they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment. Now on the very first day of the week, very early in the morning, they and certain other women with them came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.

So in Luke, we're told that the women that had followed him from Galilee to Jerusalem were here witnessing the crucifixion where they laid him and it says then they, those women and certain other ones came to the tomb early in the morning.

[10 : 31] So that's the fullest picture we have. Although Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are mentioned more often but there were others present as well as we look at the Scriptures as a whole.

In Mark 15, I'm just going to go back there for a verse. Mark 15, the last verse.

Verse 47. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph observed where he was laid and when the Sabbath was finished or was passed, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices that they might come and anoint him.

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week they went to the, or came to the tomb where the sun had risen and they said among themselves who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?

So as the women are coming, their intent is not that Christ would rise from the grave even though they had heard that from Him.

[12 : 05] On numerous occasions, our Lord had prepared His followers, I will go to Jerusalem, I will suffer, I'm going to die, and on the third day I'm going to rise again.

And here, these women, very near to Jesus, they prepare spices who are going to anoint His body further. and, but no, no concept, they did not grasp that Jesus was going to rise on this day, the third day.

And so, with that, and with their question, who's going to roll the stone away? Now, if we think of, as is commonly believed, that the tomb was hewn out of the rock.

It was like a cave. And if you go to Israel today, they have a site there where possibly could have been the tomb of Jesus or very similar.

And it's, it's a hole in the rock face like a cave in a big room inside. And, and let's say that that hole, that opening to the cave was, was that high.

[13 : 28] Because it says, Peter, when he came to the tomb, he had to duck to go in, right? And to see. So, if that hole was that high, that opening, how big a rock did it take to cover the entrance?

About two tons? Okay. Very heavy. Yeah. Two tons is what? Four thousand, five hundred pounds. Yeah.

We don't have a number from Scripture, but, but that's an estimate that some people come up with of what it would have taken to cover. And they ask, rightfully, who is going to roll this stone away?

And, and they're filled with mixed emotions as they come to the tomb. Well, let's turn back to Matthew 28.

We see the dilemma of man is nothing to God. And as they're walking to the tomb and having this discussion, how are we going to do this?

[14 : 47] The tomb has a big rock. It's sealed. And not only that, there's guards there ensuring that nobody is going to move this rock.

Verse 2 in Matthew 28, Boom!

An earthquake and that, and that stone was rolled as that angel came down. And if Mr. Tychrope was right, two tons for an angel, it was obviously effortless as he rolled that stone aside and sat on it and waited for the angels or for the women to come.

It says in verse 3, his countenance was like lightning, his clothing as white as snow, and the guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.

The effect on the guards, the Roman guards, was that they became as one dead. And they were the ones who were supposed to make sure nobody moved that stone.

- [16 : 11] The angel, verse 5, the angel answered and said to the women, and we don't have the question by the women here, but they must have asked, where is our Lord?
- And the angel answers and said to the women, do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.
- He is not here, he is risen. As he said, come and see the place where the Lord lay. And so the instructions are, do not fear.
- The first words, do not fear. And as we face apprehension, the unknown, our tendency is to be overcome by fear.
- And Jesus says, do not fear. I but God through him. Okay, do not fear.
- [17 : 21] He is not here, he is risen. Astonishing news. As they anticipate finding the body, he is not here, he is risen.
- And I'm not sure that even now they remembered what Jesus had said. It would have taken maybe a little bit longer. Come and see. Come and see the place where the Lord lay.
- Come, look for yourself. He is not here. He is risen. And then go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen.
- And not only that, tell them that that Jesus is going to go to Galilee before them and there he is going to meet up with them.
- And so the women have astonishing news. And as they go in to the tomb and see for themselves that it's empty.
- [18 : 30] And so this is the scene. So from despair to overwhelming joy. You know, sometimes when we receive joy like that or joyful news, is it really true?
- Can it really be true? And here it was and is today. And the women must have asked that. Is it really true?
- And they saw for themselves. And then as they leave, and so they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy.
- So maybe fear in the sense that they're trembling what has happened? What has our God done? but yet great joy anticipating our Lord has risen.
- But God doesn't leave them there. Because they have not seen Jesus and there's still room for doubt.
- [19 : 44] And as they leave and they're going to run to the disciples with the word, they're met by Jesus and his first words are rejoice.
- Be filled with joy. Do not be afraid. He's repeating what the angel said.
- Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee and there they will see me. And that is the repeated message but now the women had witnessed first hand.
- It was no longer a third party news from the angel, now it was Jesus right before them. And they fell down and worshipped right there.
- Our God does not let us hang wandering, pondering, pondering. He gives evidence.
- [20 : 51] He gives certainty that we can believe. He wants us to believe.
- Now I want to turn to the other side, to the guards doors, and to the work behind what is happening there.
- And to do that, let's take a look at Satan. And just very briefly, when we look at Satan's background, his history, from being the chief angel, Lucifer, son of the morning, to being cast out of heaven for rebellion against God, to going to the garden when God created man and presenting them with deception to deceive God's creation and get them to fall.

Payback to God. deception of the entire human race. God choosing a covenant people, Israel, through him I will raise the Messiah.

This people will be a light to the world. And Satan caused them to stumble and to fail. And the Jewish race failed in being that light for God even though God was faithful in still raising up the Messiah.

[22 : 40] And then when Jesus was born, Satan through Herod were going to kill all the firstborn or all the babies, the boys in Bethlehem and its districts.

in Jesus' ministry, the Jews moved by Satanic influence, let us make Jesus our king by force and prevent him from going to the cross.

you know, when we read that, we often wouldn't maybe picture that's what's behind there, but that would be Satan's scheme, that if we make him our king, then he won't go to the cross.

And then the trial and crucifixion, Satan thinking there's some victory here, the deception of the Jews in turning against their Lord and Savior, one of their own.

Now, if we go back to Matthew 28 or 27, as we take that in context, Matthew 27, verse 57, I'm going to read quite a portion here, Matthew 27 from 57.

[24 : 20] Now, when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who himself also had become a disciple of Jesus.

This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, and then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Jesus had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his new tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock and rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb and departed.

And Mary Magdalene was there and the other Mary sitting opposite the tomb. On the next day, which followed the day of preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember while he was still alive how that deceiver said, After three days I will rise.

Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away and say to the people, he is risen from the dead.

So the last deception will be worse than the first. And Pilate said to them, You have a guard, go your way, make it as secure as you know how.

[25 : 50] And so they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard. The Jewish leadership, the very ones who had in the past year ascribed the works of Jesus to Satan.

Who, through the hardness of their hearts, refused to believe. Here they are saying, Let us make sure that this deceiver won't get out of that grave.

And they convinced Pilate to give them the tools they needed, a guard. And so, not sure how big that would have been, but that would have been quite a few soldiers that would have been there.

And so that's the scene, Friday night, and what the women faced. So Satan behind us, let's keep that deceiver in that rock.

Matthew 28, verse 11. Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened.

[27 : 20] So the women left as the angel had asked them to, and the guards are left there. the description was as dead, but some of them gather themselves together and go back into the city of Jerusalem and they're going to report to the chief priests what has happened.

And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers saying, tell them his disciples came at night and stole them away while we slept.

And if it comes to the governor's ears, we will appease them and make him secure. And so they took the money and did as they were instructed. And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews unto this day.

As we consider this, who is behind this? It is the devil.

it is Satan. And the guards, you know what the guards went through? They witnessed an earthquake.

[28 : 40] They witnessed an angel as white as snow coming down and single-handedly rolling that huge stone away.

they witnessed the women coming. They witnessed the angel speaking to the woman. Was this real to the guards?

Did they experience? Do you think they peeked into the tomb? before they left to tell the chief priest?

I do. Scripture doesn't tell us. I think they looked. it. I would if I would have been a guard there. I want to see for myself.

Is it really empty? And lo and behold, it is empty. And so, in their hearts, there has to be realization.

[29 : 47] Wow. everything Jesus said is true. And they went and told the chief priests and the elders what had happened.

And they have a meeting, and they come up, we have to deal with this. We have to deal with this. And so, they agreed to pay a large sum of money, however big that is, large sum, to the soldiers to go out and spread false rumors that we fell asleep and the disciples came and rolled away the stone and took the body away and hid Jesus.

And if this comes to Pilate's ears, we will take care of Pilate. We're going to appease him to make sure nothing happens to you. Generally, when soldiers were put on guard, whether at a prison or here, it was at their life stake that they had to guard.

And if the thing that they were guarding, something happened to it, it was life for life. And so, they would have feared. So, we have a few decisions made here.

The guards, even though they witnessed everything, accepted a bribe. They accepted money, a large sum.

[31 : 26] And they had to live for the rest of their life knowing that they had told a lie. And when in the years and the days and months and years that followed, the rumors went around that Jesus never rose, he was stolen away, every time they would have heard that, their conscience, we lied.

It was not like that. But for the Pharisees and the leaders, remember when they turned to Jesus back a year ago and said, you know, you're doing this by the power of Satan.

And then they said, show us a sign. Show us a sign. And Jesus answered, the only sign that is left for you is the sign of Jonah.

And as Jonah was in the belly of that fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be. That is the only sign that is left to you.

Here, on resurrection morning, the third day, Jesus comes out of the grave. And Jesus had told them, these same individuals, this is your last sign.

[33 : 01] If you will not believe when I come out of that tomb, then you're doomed. Then there's nothing left but hellfire.

there. And this leadership made a decision in a council meeting to deceive and to deny the empty tomb.

And they had made their decision. And God said, there's nothing more I can do for you. and for each one of us here this morning, there's nothing more that God can do for you, for me, than to show the empty tomb that he died for my sins and rose to bring newness of life.

the ultimate evidence in its Easter morning. Praise the Lord as we celebrate if you're uncertain about your future.

And as I ask up front when we think of death, does that bring fear? If the answer is yes, Jesus is the answer to your fear.

[34 : 57] And he wants us to put our trust in him as taking our place on the cross, conquering death, taking our sin upon him, and then coming to life.

And without that, every single individual is doomed. God will end up with Satan in the lake of fire.

So Easter morning is a reminder as well to ensure that we have made peace with our God. And that replaces, is replaced by assurance as his peace comes over us when we commit to him.

For the Pharisees and the elders, I cannot imagine that there was any joy in their life till their death.

As they saw such clear, clear evidence, without a doubt, and they rejected and pushed away.

[36 : 29] And so doom and gloom follows, and they will have had heavy hearts right to their death. Let's turn to 1 Corinthians 15.

As we wrap up here this morning, God did not leave us without witness either, as the women saw him first.

1 Corinthians 15, starting in verse 3. 3. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he arose again the third day, according to the scriptures, believers, and that he was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve, after that he was seen by over 500 believers, brethren, sorry, at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

And after that he was seen by James, then by all the apostles, and then last of all, he was seen by me, and that would be Paul, also as by one born out of due time.

So the Lord God took every precaution or effort to show the living Christ to many people, before he went back to heaven.

[38 : 36] And at the time of the writing of the Corinthian letter, he says, of the 500 who saw him at once, the majority were still alive at the time of the writing.

Eyewitnesses that Jesus had been resurrected. So God did not leave himself without witness. Even though the rumors, the false stories, went around, and to this day, many Jews still believe that Jesus never came out of that grave.

He was stolen away. And yet, all these witnesses are all believers. Coming out of the grave, Jesus now only focused on his followers.

believers, and they were the only ones that saw him. The last sign. I haven't seen him, and yet I believe.

You haven't seen him, but I trust that you believe. we celebrate Christmas, the birth, but we didn't see him there either.

[40 : 05] And so we don't doubt. Easter, we weren't there either. But in both cases, God had people that did see, and it's recorded in scripture.

And we know without a doubt that it happened. And so this morning as we bring these thoughts together, God calls us to be believing, not unbelieving.

To exercise faith. As we face death, the last victory, in 1 Corinthians 15, you know, death is something that we have not experienced.

we know, we know all about what happens because the Bible tells us.

We know that as a believer, to die is to be with Christ. But none of us here have been there. And so in that aspect, it's an unknown.

[41 : 16] one. But we are not to allow that to create fear, but rather to trust that we know with confidence that to die is gain, is to be with the Lord.

We have the witness of the Spirit. The witness of the Holy Spirit. Right. Yeah, within us. Yeah. Absolutely. yeah.

And I have watched numerous people pass with that confidence and just wanting, desiring to go to be with our Lord. And praise the Lord for that.

So as we celebrate again Easter, or the resurrection morning, I think is a better name for it, let's let's keep, let's focus on this concept.

Our Lord is alive, and therefore I have eternal life. As I put my faith in him, we need not fear. Let's close in prayer.

[42 : 24] Let's close in prayer. Father, all your promises are true.

Not one has failed, and those that are remaining will not fail either. we praise you for that.

And as we remember the resurrection, the promise that you made that Jesus would come to life, or his body would be resurrected on the third day.

And so again, Lord, you proved yourself to be faithful. What a testimony. testimony. And thank you, Father, that as we, as your children, continue our journey, our pilgrimage here on earth, as we walk towards that time when we're going to pass from earth to heaven, from death to life, Lord, that we can do that with confidence.

not in us, but in you. And again, Lord, we praise you. May your joy fill us. May we be filled with hope as we leave, and just to share that with one another.

[43 : 57] To the glory of your name, amen.