

EASTER Sunday April 17 2022

Matt. 28; Luke 24 & John 20

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Today is. . . of course you know, don't you? This is EASTER Sunday, and all around the world, in almost every country of the world, wherever the story of Jesus is known, this is a day of great HOPE!!! WHY hope in such a desperate time in our world? HOPE because Jesus is not dead, He is alive! He is a resurrected Savior, and He is ascended back to heaven where HE reigns as King OVERALL.

Now I have a very important question... *is that true or is that fable or myth or wishful thinking?* What proof do we have that the resurrection is a fact? And maybe an even more significant question, what proof do we have that IF the resurrection of Jesus is true, that it makes any difference today, 2000 years later?

In Matthew's account of that Easter morning, he tells us **the women**, who went early to the tomb, were startled to see and talk with an angel who was there, perhaps the angel who had rolled back the stone which had sealed the tomb. Matthew also tells us **the guards** who had been on duty to assure no one came near that tomb were eyewitnesses to the angel rolling back the stone and **"they shook and became like dead men."** (Matt. 27:4) That doesn't mean they died, for Matthew reports that some of them ran into Jerusalem, to those who had assigned them to guard the tomb and reported what they had witnessed. In response the religious leaders paid them a large sum of money to spread a lie, a false report... that they had been asleep when the disciples had come and stolen the body! (Matt. 28:4,11-15)

*So, Matthew gives us two very different reports that were spread around Jerusalem that Easter Sunday morning... **women**, who saw the angel and reported the angel had said to them: **"I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples."** (Matt. 27:5,6) and the **guards** who said they'd fallen asleep but somehow knew Jesus' disciples came and stole His body! *Now, if you had been in Jerusalem that morning, which report would you have believed?**

John, another of Jesus' disciples and perhaps His closest human friend, gives us a different perspective of that Easter Sunday morning. John tells us he and Simon Peter were shocked with an out of breath Mary Magdalene came running to them early that morning saying she had been to the tomb, found the stone rolled away, and the body of Jesus missing. John reports they ran to the tomb and confirmed her report to be true. *He also reports that later that Sunday John and the disciples were together and suddenly the resurrected Jesus stood among them, physically, bodily and spoke with them and showed them the nail scars in His hands! J*

John tells us one of the disciples, Thomas, was not with the group that evening, and he refused to believe it saying, **"Unless I see the nail marks in His hands, and put my finger where the nails were, I will not believe it."** (John 20:25)

I don't blame Thomas for his doubts, do you? John tells us one week later they were together again, and Jesus appeared and specifically invited Thomas to touch His healed, resurrected hands, and **Thomas then declared his conviction that the resurrection was true!** (John 20:24-29)

John also reports to us that Mary Magdalene had returned to the garden tomb with Peter and John that Easter morning, and after they had seen the empty tomb and left, **she remained in the garden and had a personal, powerful encounter with the resurrected Jesus Himself.** Mary reported that through her tears she didn't recognize Jesus and thinking He might be the gardener she had said to Him, **"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him..."** (John 20:15)

Mary had been at the cross and watched Jesus die. Mary had watched Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea take Jesus' badly beaten, dead body off the cross and wrap it in some spices and a linen shroud. She had followed them from the cross to the garden tomb and watched them bury Jesus' dead body and roll the stone over the mouth of that tomb. **Mary had no doubt about His death. But she was totally confused WHY the tomb was now empty.** Who could have possibly stolen Jesus' body and why?

Suddenly her mind and heart were stunned with one word this man, she thought was the gardener, spoke to her: **"Mary"** She had heard Jesus speak her name many times, for Mary had been delivered by Jesus from several demonic forces which had tormented her, according to Luke 8:2, and since that time Mary had been among those who had spent the past several months with Jesus. **She knew His voice. In an instant the impossible became not only possible, but a wonderful reality! Jesus was alive...** standing right in front of her, speaking her name with the same love and compassion He always spoke to her. Mary could only do one thing, reach out to grasp Him. Jesus then said to Mary: **"Do not hold on to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to My brothers and tell them..."** (John 20:17)

How long Mary stayed in that garden, near that empty tomb, and talked with resurrected Jesus, we don't know, nor do we know what else they may have talked about. What John does report to us is that Mary did what Jesus urged her to do: **"Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' and she told them what He had said to her."** (John 20:18) So let me ask you, what would you have done if you had been Mary? Or what if you had been with the disciples when Mary came and announced what she had experienced?

Finally, my friends, let's consider Dr. Luke's report of that Easter Sunday. He tells us two disciples were walking along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a village a few miles away.

Many others were on the road that morning, for Sunday was the first day of the work week after Sabbath. As they walked, they talked about the various reports that were swirling around Jerusalem that morning. Crazy reports of a resurrection of Jesus. A man, walking in their same direction, joined them as they walked and talked. They didn't know him and were surprised that he seemed totally unaware of any of the rumors about the resurrection early that morning.

They told this stranger all they knew. As they approached the village, they stopped for something to eat, and this stranger joined them. Luke reports: **"When He was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks and broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him..."** (Luke 24:30) Suddenly these men realized the stranger who'd been walking with them was none other than the risen, resurrected Jesus Himself!!

So, on this Easter Sunday, no matter who you are or where in our world you are, the most important question you and I have to answer today is: **Is the resurrection of Jesus Christ a true fact?**

A few years later the Apostle Paul wrote this: **"What I received I pass on to you as of first importance. Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures. He was raised on the third day, and He appeared to Peter, and the Twelve.... Then He appeared to James and all the apostles and last of all to me..."** (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) Paul had heard it firsthand from those who had seen Jesus that Easter, and several more times in the subsequent 40 days. Paul had himself encountered the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, according to Acts 9. Paul's life was totally changed by that encounter. Paul continued: **"If Jesus Christ has not been raised, our preaching of the Gospel is useless and so is your faith... If Jesus has not been raised from the dead your faith is futile, you are still in your sins and those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Jesus Christ, we are of all people to be most pitied."** (1 Cor. 15:12-19) What a powerful, profound statement of truth. **If Jesus is not resurrected there is no salvation from our sin condemnation, for a dead Savior cannot save!** In order to rescue us from our sin bondage and condemnation, Jesus must defeat Satan, the power of sin, and death! *That is what happened when Jesus was raised from the dead and then returned to heaven from where He now reigns as Sovereign and can save anyone who calls on God for help.*

I leave you today with two very powerful truth statements which declare the significance of the certainty of Jesus' resurrection. Hebrews 7:25 declares: **"...because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, He is able to SAVE COMPLETELY those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them."** And 1 Timothy 2:3 **"...God our Savior wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people."**

So, my friends, *are you living your life today* built on the firm truth foundation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and *are you confident that eternity in heaven is your destiny* because you have fully trusted in the fact that Jesus rose from the dead that Easter Sunday morning, and HE is YOUR Savior?