

The Quiet Power of the Resurrection

Good morning and happy Easter! Some of my earliest memories of church as a child were of Easter Sunday when everyone got all dressed up, and the service was more upbeat than usual and we always sang one of my favorite hymns *Christ the Lord is Risen Today* and then afterwards our family would gather for a big family dinner together. One year my grandma worked so late the night before getting everything ready that she fell asleep during grace. I didn't understand all that Easter meant, but I knew it was a special day and even then Easter gave my heart with a sense of hope.

Hope is what Easter is all about. Peter said we have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that is a particularly timely message for us today in light of the global pandemic we're facing. My prayer on this Easter morning is that the message of the empty grave and the risen Savior fills your heart with unspeakable joy and unshakable hope! He *is* risen...he is risen *indeed!*

Let's grab our Bibles and read Luke's account of that first Easter beginning in chapter **23:55-24:8**

Pray.

If it felt a little out of sync to celebrate Palm Sunday with its crowds and shouts and party-like atmosphere in the quiet of our homes last week, I think we can use the quiet of our living rooms to see something rather unexpected about that first Easter morning. Something that we might be inclined to miss in a noisier environment.

That first Easter was a surprisingly quiet event. There were no crowds. No shouting. No fanfare. This is surprising because there is no more powerful, resounding, triumphant, hopeful day or message in all of history than Easter Sunday! Sometimes God makes His loudest statements in a quiet whisper.

1. The quiet sadness of the trip to the tomb

So let's make the trip to the tomb with these women, and the first thing we notice is the quiet sorrow they carry in their hearts. They are going to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial, and their tender love for Jesus is mingled with a deep sense of loss and hopelessness.

When they get to the tomb and find it empty, they have no idea what's going on. Luke says they are perplexed – *what's going on here? Where's Jesus?* The angels have to tell them what the empty grave means.

He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.⁸ And they remembered his words...

Now they remember! Jesus told them ahead of time that he'd be handed over, crucified, and *on the third day he'd rise*. How could they forget that last part? It's the most important part! Sometimes when I read moments like these in the Bible I feel like it's so clear that if I had been there I would have known, I would have expected the grave to be empty. You ever feel like that?

But when we take a closer look we see there's a very human thing going on here, something we do all the time. Yes, Jesus did tell them ahead of time these things *must* happen. God has ordained it to happen, it must happen. The darkness of Good Friday was as essential to God's plan as the brightness of the resurrection. Jesus had to die on the cross, the sky had to be darkened for three hours as God poured out the storm of His wrath on His Son, for us to be saved. If there were no cross, there would be no resurrection. If there were no Good Friday there would be no Easter Sunday. These are sound,

biblical truths that are easy for us to see as we hold the Bible in our hands.

But these women aren't sitting on a couch reading about this in their Bible. They're living this out in real time. And here's where we see this very human thing going on. For these women, the darkness of Good Friday, the reality of Jesus' death, the finality of his body being laid in the tomb, was so overwhelmingly real they couldn't imagine any reality beyond that. I can relate to that.

When we're walking through a dark time, when sadness, or fear, or disappointment, or regret, or loneliness, or death is right in front of us, it can be easy for us to forget – at least for a while – the promises of God. It feels like the reality you're walking through is the only reality there will ever be. It *feels* like where you are right now is where you'll always be. The Bible speaks to that in Ps. 30:5

Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning. Psalm 30:5

If we could feel the reality of the joy coming in the morning, we wouldn't be weeping in the night. We'd be looking forward to the morning! But the weeping is real when we're going through the night, and the joy is real when the morning comes.

I find it encouraging that these women couldn't see beyond the dark reality they woke up to, in fact, not a single disciple was expecting or believing Jesus would rise from the grave – but he rose anyway! Joy coming in the morning didn't depend on their faith, it depended on God's faithfulness!

Jesus is near us in the weeping of the night and is leading us into joy of the morning. Even when we lose sight of that!

2. The quiet power of the empty tomb

Consider with me the quiet power of the empty tomb. It's all incredibly understated. Consider the power of the resurrection. What kind of power exploded in that quiet tomb to raise Jesus up from the dead, and transform his body into a glorified body, never to die again? Resurrection power is like no power we know of. And yet it all happened in the quiet, and privacy, of a tomb. No one saw it, no one heard it.

Consider the angels. Have you ever wondered why those two angels needed to be there? Do you think Jesus would have been stuck in the tomb if the angels hadn't moved the stone away? Don't you think the resurrected Jesus could explode the stone into a million pieces or rolled it away with a wave of the hand? Or he could have just walked through it the way he walked through walls to join the disciples. Jesus didn't need the angels to let him out.

What about the guards? Do we really think the Son of God needed angels to get rid of them? Why were the angels there?

On Palm Sunday we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. On Easter Sunday we celebrate Jesus' triumphal exit from the tomb. And that's why I think the angels were there. They were there to make way for the King. Just as servants open the doors and gates to make way for a coming king, the angels were there to prepare the way for King Jesus and his triumphal exit from the grave.

They clear away the guards, they roll back the stone, and I imagine the angels were a mixture of worship and awe and high fiving Jesus as he came out of the tomb. Can you imagine that moment as they congratulated Jesus on doing what no one else could ever do – he accomplished our salvation! But I have to imagine it, because it wasn't televised. That moment wasn't recorded. Maybe in heaven we'll get a replay of that moment but for now, it's shrouded in silence. The quiet power of the empty tomb.

The resurrection tells us God accepted Jesus' atoning death as full payment for our sins. No sin was too costly for Jesus' death to pay for. No stain too deep for Jesus' blood to remove it. No guilt too bad for Jesus to cleanse it.

If Jesus is your Savior, God has no wrath left for you. He exhausted His wrath for our sin on His Son. There's no wrath left. If there was, if God wasn't fully satisfied with His Son's atoning death, Jesus would not have risen from the dead. The empty tomb assures us we are forgiven of all our sin!

Finally, one more thing the quiet of that morning speaks loudly to our hearts:

3. The quiet hope that Jesus' resurrection was the first of many!

I hate death, don't you? Yeah, I know that as Christians we know that death means being with Jesus. I love the promise that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord – love that! But I hate death!

We were warned that this past week would be one of the darkest weeks we endure in our fight against the coronavirus. And it was. On Thursday the US had over 17K deaths. Over 7K of those deaths were in NY. Every death is a sad story of loved ones being taken from their family and friends. A wife in NY had to say goodbye to her dying husband by FaceTime to avoid being infected. How sad that when you most want to be with your loved one and hold them, you can't. I hate death.

You know what? I'm allowed to. The Bible calls death our enemy. In fact, when Jesus returns to make everything right, the last enemy he will conquer is death. And then there will be no more death anywhere ever.

In our hearts is this quiet but deeply powerful hope of the resurrection. Jesus was resurrected, we who believe in him will one day be resurrected too. I have loved ones who have died holding that quiet, powerful hope in their hearts. Even so it's sad saying goodbye to them. We grieve with hope. And I hate death.

But the Bible tells us that the moment they close their eyes in this world, they open them in the next – to a raucously loud welcome party hosted by Jesus himself!

I love Henry Van Dyke's poem *Gone From My Sight*

I am standing upon the seashore. A ship, at my side, spreads her white sails to the moving breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength. I stand and watch her until, at length, she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other.

Then, someone at my side says, "There, she is gone."

Gone where? Gone from my sight. That is all. She is just as large in mast, hull and spar as she was when she left my side...her diminished size is in me -- not in her.

And, just at the moment when someone says, "There, she is gone," there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices ready to take up the glad shout, "Here she comes!" And that is dying...

I would add, *and that is resurrection*. Jesus' resurrection gives us the sure hope that one day we will be resurrected too. Only that resurrection won't be a quiet event, it will be an explosively noisy event.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive,

who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ *Therefore encourage one another with these words.* 1 Thess. 4:16-18

That is the awesome, life-changingly powerful, and surprisingly quiet, message of the empty tomb and the resurrection.