

INTRODUCTION

Life is so full of bad news. What's different about this time and when I was growing up is that we only got bad news once a day. Now you can read your newsfeed, or watch any news channel and you can get bad news 24 hours a day now. We get a steady diet of Coronavirus, the election, hurricanes, and people looting and rioting. It's easy to grow weary of all this bad news.

A man who came home from work after a long, tiring day. He could tell that his wife was exhausted and he could just see in her countenance that she was about to deliver some bad news. He held up his hand and said, "I've had a rough day at work. Nothing went right and I can tell you have some bad news. Whatever you do, *don't* tell me any bad news. Give me some good news." His worn-out wife looked at him and said, "Okay. Well, you have three children and today *two* of your children didn't fall out of a tree and break their arm."

But the message of the Bible is good news. That's what the word "Gospel" means, good news. We will visit the tomb of Jesus today to talk about the climax of the story—spoiler alert—I got good news: He ain't in there! He rose from the dead and He is alive evermore.

Let's take a moment and go back to spring. Easter Sunday was April 12, exactly six months ago. It was an unusual Easter to say the least. For the first time in our 65-year history, we had to cancel the Easter Sunrise service. And it's a good thing because you may recall that severe weather hit Tyler at exactly 7:00 a.m. that morning. Tornado alarms were sounding and many people lost power.

And for the first time in my lifetime, and probably yours, church buildings were empty on Easter this year. But the glorious truth is that the tomb is still empty and now, thank God, we are able to gather. Since we're talking about the resurrection, I'm declaring today as Easter Sunday. So, let me hear you respond to our Easter greeting: He is risen! He is risen INDEED!

John 20:1-18. "On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, (*John*) and said to them, "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we (*Mark tells us Mary was there with two other women*) don't know where they've put him!"

At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first. Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself. The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying. But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus's

body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "Because they've taken away my Lord," she told them, "and I don't know where they've put him."

Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. "Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it that you're seeking?" Supposing he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you've put him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic, "*Rabboni!*"—which means "Teacher." "Don't cling to me," Jesus told her, "since I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them what he had said to her.

I saw a cartoon in a Christian magazine once. The setting was the tomb of Jesus with the stone still over the opening. Two demons were posted there to guard the tomb. One of the demons said to the other, "I sure hope Jesus doesn't come out of that tomb, because if He does, Hell help us, all Heaven will break loose!" That's what happened! He's alive and all Heaven has broken loose!

In the past, when we used to travel, you might book a hotel and ask for a room with a view. But nobody has ever asked for a tomb with a view. But Jesus had a tomb with a view. Not so that He could look out—but so that we could look in. In this message, we want to examine the tomb from the perspective of how the two disciples and Mary viewed the empty tomb.

1. THE DISCIPLES' VIEW: They saw evidence of a miracle.

There was a lot of running on that first Easter morning. Mary Magdalene and two other women arrived so early on Sunday morning that it was still dark. When they came to the tomb, they were shocked when they saw that the huge stone had been rolled away. I'm sure they were frightened, and they saw that the tomb was empty. Mary went running back to where the disciples were hiding. She burst in, and out of breath she said, "Somebody has stolen the Lord's body away and we don't know where they put Him!"

Peter and John took off running toward the garden. John adds the detail that he outran Peter. That's obvious because tradition tells us that Peter was one of the oldest disciples and John was one of the youngest. It would be like if Michael Gossett and I were in a 100-yard dash, he would win—but I wouldn't stop running. And thank God, Peter didn't stop running. When John got there, he stayed outside and glanced into the tomb. Finally, Peter arrived puffing hard, and he didn't hesitate, he went right inside the tomb and John followed him. What they saw had to make them scratch their heads.

So let's play CSI Jerusalem and consider two important pieces of evidence.

(1) The stone: no barrier could hold Him.

I've always found it interesting that even though His disciples didn't expect Jesus to be raised from the dead, His enemies remembered His predictions. The Jewish leaders went to Pilate and complained, "This imposter said, 'After three days, I will rise from the dead.' We're afraid His disciples may steal His body, so we need your help."

Pilate said, "Here's my Roman seal, and my soldiers. Make it as secure as you can." There were many similar tombs in Jesus' time and they can be seen today. There is a large round stone that was rolled over the opening to the tomb. So there was a huge stone as a physical barrier.

Once the stone was in place, wax was melted and Pilate's Roman seal was imprinted into the wax. It meant "Anyone breaking this seal without government authority will face execution." So there was a governmental barrier. Finally, there was a military barrier. A usual cohort of Roman soldiers were four soldiers who rotated every four hours.

But our God is a mighty God. Those barriers were no problem for Him. He dispatched angels to the tomb. In Matthew 28 we read that it only took one angel to remove the stone. Angels are so powerful that I imagine him taking the stone and tossing it away like a Frisbee. When the soldiers saw the angels, they were so frightened that they became catatonic.

But don't miss this point: the stone wasn't removed so Jesus could escape – He was already alive. The stone was removed so that all the world could look in and see that the tomb was empty. He wanted us to view the empty tomb.

Today there are many forces trying to oppose the Lord and suppress the Gospel. But there is no barrier so strong that God can't overcome it.

(2) The graveclothes: no decay would touch Him.

When we talked a month ago about the burial of Jesus, I mentioned that the Jews didn't embalm bodies. Expensive spices were soaked into strips of linen and the linen was wrapped around the body to mask the odor of decomposition. A separate cloth was placed around the head and fastened under the chin to keep the mouth shut. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had wrapped the body of Jesus in 75 pounds of a sweet-smelling gel made from aloe and myrrh. Mary and the other women were coming to add even more spices. But when Peter and John arrived they observed that the long strips had been removed. And the face cloth was folded up in another place.

The human body is a crowning part of God's creation. The Bible says we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Right now, you and I are a soul/spirit living inside a human body. There are thousands of organic processes that are happening to keep this body functioning. At death, those functions stop. The body begins to cool immediately. *Rigor mortis* sets in within 2 to 6 hours. The chemicals in the body begin to break down and decay begins. This happens quickly unless the body is refrigerated or embalmed. Some cultures bury their dead within 24 hours.

For instance, Muslims and Orthodox Jews forbid embalming, so burial has to take place as quickly as possible.

Jesus really died on the cross, and He was wrapped in spices and laid in a tomb. But the scriptures tell us that He didn't suffer any decomposition. In the book of Acts, the Apostles preached that the resurrection of Jesus was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. For instance, in Acts 13 Paul quoted Psalm 16 as he preached: "Therefore he also says in another passage, 'You will not let your Holy One see decay (Psalm 16:10).' For David, after serving God's purpose in his own generation, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and decayed, but the one God raised up did not decay." (Acts 13:35-37)

Every dead body before and after Jesus experiences decomposition. But the unique thing about Jesus is that no decay touched His body.

Based upon this evidence the Bible says that John believed but he only believed that there was some kind of miracle. He commented that they still didn't understand that Jesus would come back from death.

2. MARY'S VIEW: She encountered the Master.

After Peter and John left, Mary lingered. She kept trying to solve the mystery of the empty tomb. After looking into the tomb, she saw a man in the garden. With her heart full of pain and her eyes full of tears, she didn't recognize that it was Jesus. Jesus asked her two important questions. And He is asking those questions of each of us today.

(1) Jesus is still asking today: Why are you crying?

Before she met this man, she had looked into the tomb and saw two angels. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" Then as she walked through the Garden she met a man who asked her the same question. The angels asked the question out of curiosity. They probably thought, "This earth creature should know that Jesus is alive, so why is she crying?"

But Jesus asked her again, "Why are you crying?" He asked the question out of compassion. He knew the answer, but He wanted her to say it.

From the cradle to the grave, our existence is one long trail of tears. What are you weeping about today? God cares. The Psalmist says in Psalm 56, "Lord, you keep track of all my sorrows. You collect all my tears in your bottle." According to the Academy of Ophthalmology, on average a person will cry 15- 20 gallons of tears in a year.

As followers of Jesus, we're not immune to sorrow. Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. But we don't express sorrow as those who have no hope. Even our sorrow is infused with hope. In Psalm 30:5 the Bible says, "Weeping may stay overnight, but there is joy in the morning." (Psalm 30:5)

C.S. Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures; but He shouts to us in our pain. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." So today, the risen Lord cares and He asks you, "Why are you crying?"

(2) Jesus is still asking today: Whom are you seeking?

I know in East Texas we say, "Who are you looking for?" But whom is grammatically correct. When Jesus asked Mary, her answer showed the deep love she had for Jesus. She still didn't recognize Jesus. She thought he was the gardener so she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, please show me where you put him and I will get him." That's love. Maybe Mary weighed 110 pounds. Let's assume Jesus weighed 180, and John tells us that Nicodemus and Joseph had wrapped His body in 75 additional pounds of aloe and spices. So this little woman was willing to heft a corpse weighing over 250 pounds on her shoulder and carry it back inside the tomb. That's love. Her hope was shattered, and her faith was absent, but her love was still there. And remember, among faith, hope, and love, that the greatest of these is love.

At that point Jesus couldn't conceal Himself any longer. He simply spoke her name. In Aramaic, He said, "Miriam." And as she fell at His feet and answered His second question. "Who are you looking for?" She was looking for Jesus; and she had found Him.

Jesus knows your name, too. He knows everything about you. The Bible says in Isaiah 43:1 "Now this is what the Lord says—the one who created you, Jacob, and the one who formed you, Israel, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine.'"

Today, Jesus wants to come to you and say, "(YOUR NAME), Who or what are you looking for?" What is your goal in life? Everybody is looking for someone or something. They're searching for truth, or purpose that one secret that will make their life better. Jesus is at the end of your search.

According to Matthew's account, Mary fell at the feet of Jesus. Jesus said, "Don't hang on to me." He wasn't telling her she couldn't touch Him. Later that night He would appear to the disciples and invite them to touch Him to confirm He wasn't a ghost.

He said, "Don't hang onto me because I have a job for you. I want you to go tell my brothers that I'm alive." The person to serve as the first witness to the resurrection was a woman named Mary from Magdal. The Bible says that before Jesus delivered her, she had been tormented by seven demons. In First Century Jewish society, a woman couldn't even serve as reliable witness in court, but Jesus gave her the most important job of all. "Go tell my brothers that I'm alive."

There is an ongoing issue today about the role of women in our culture and every culture around the world. It wasn't until 100 years ago that women in America had the right to vote. The first witness to the resurrection was a woman. Women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. The job Jesus gave Mary is our job as well. We are to go and tell people that Jesus is alive and that He can change their lives.

Here's the TAKE-AWAY TRUTH: Sorrow is transformed to hope when you seek the risen Savior. In that moment when Mary recognized that Jesus was alive, her sorrow was turned to hope and her misery was turned to joy.

So, do you really KNOW that Jesus is alive today? How do you know? Are you basing it on the evidence of an empty tomb? That's what Peter and John had that morning. Evidence is important but it can only take you so far. Mary ran back to the disciples after meeting Jesus and said, "I've seen the Lord! He's alive!" So, do you think the disciples started celebrating and shouting, "He's alive!" Nope. In Mark 16 we learn that they didn't believe her. It wasn't until they encountered the Lord that night that they believed. The way we know Jesus is real is not because of the evidence. It's because we have had an encounter with the Lord. Evidence can change your mind, but only a personal relationship with Jesus can change your heart.

As we live in a world where people are asking, "How can we make it?" We have the answer. We are the ones who know, "because He lives we can face tomorrow; because He lives all fear is gone." We have a supernatural edge to deal with all the bad news.

Toward the end of World War II, a secret message got through to some American prisoners in a German concentration camp that the war was over. But it would be three more days before that word got to their German captors. During those three days, nothing changed in terms of their hardships in the prison. But their attitude changed from despair to hope. They knew that soon they would be released because the Allies had won the war. And their hopes were fulfilled three days later when the Germans fled the camp and soon the Allies came to rescue them. We're like those prisoners. We're facing hardship and suffering, but because of the resurrection we know Jesus has won the war over death and the grave. We have an assurance that gives us hope when everything around us seems hopeless.

We're celebrating Easter today because we celebrate it every day. I love that last verse of that Easter song: "Death could not keep its prey; Jesus my Savior. He tore the bars away; Jesus my, Lord. Up from the grave He arose; with a mighty triumph over His foes; He arose a victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign. He arose. He arose. Hallelujah, Christ arose!"

OUTLINE

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TAKE-AWAY TRUTH

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For the Joy...
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