

## **Easter Sunday Message: Jesus is Alive!**

### **What happened?**

There's been a dramatic change of events since the last time we heard about Jesus. A week ago, there was a parade in his honor, people were shouting “Hosanna” and lifting Jesus up as the promised King of Israel. On Thursday, Jesus spent a quiet dinner with his closest friends. He made a communion covenant with them and washed their feet, teaching us one, final lesson: love one another as he loves us. That evening, Jesus spent time in his favorite garden, praying to God, affirming God's will in the events to come. Early Friday morning – perhaps around 1:00-2:00 am, Judas betrayed him, leading the authorities to arrest Jesus. After a series of trials that were shams, Jesus was rejected by the very people who praised him earlier in the week.

**This is a sudden, shocking change!** Jesus was beaten, flogged and led to a hill outside town and crucified at 9:00 am. He hung, naked and bleeding, on the cross where he was mocked and publically humiliated by everyone who passed by him. The sky turned dark at noon, so dark no one could see the sun shine. Jesus died around 3:00 pm. He was taken down from the cross, wrapped in linen cloths and placed in a nearby tomb carved out of rock. A large, heavy stone was rolled in front of the tomb so no one could interfere with the body. Everyone went home for the Sabbath. Saturday passed, the day of Passover, and the events of Friday were on the lips of every person in the city.

### **What happened?**

Throughout the final week of Jesus' life, everyone who knew, heard of, or met Jesus had an opportunity. They had the opportunity to uphold the truth and embrace Jesus for whom and what he was. They all failed! His best friends betrayed, denied or fled from Jesus. The leaders of the faith community, who should have embraced Jesus, rejected him and sought his death. The political leaders, Herod and Pilate, had their own, self-serving agendas. The people, who cheered Jesus on, on Sunday, showed their fickleness. They threatened to riot, released a murderer from prison, claimed Caesar as king and cried out “crucify him!” Even his family and those closest to Jesus didn't understand what was happening, even though he told them ahead of time.

**What happened?**

God’s will was done. Humanity was given every possible chance to turn to God and show Jesus mercy. As the Son of God, Jesus knew what was in the hearts of his enemies, friends, disciples and family. It must have made him sad, but he did not flinch, reject us or hold back. He didn’t call down armies of angels to change things. Jesus willingly submitted to death on the cross, knowing what was to come, with full approval of God the Father. God knew who Jesus was, what he was doing and why Jesus came. We are the ones who struggle to understand.

**What happened?**

That’s the question the world has posed every day since. It’s the **answer to the question Mark asks in his gospel: Who is Jesus?** Is Jesus a humble servant, washing his disciples’ feet? Is Jesus an obedient Son, praying to God in the garden of Gethsemane? Is Jesus a sacrificial lamb, dying on the cross of Golgatha to atone for us once and for all, and teach us a moral lesson? Jesus was all those things and more.

**But what does it mean?** What did it mean when the Jesus’ mother, Mary Magdalene and Salome went to the tomb the first thing in the morning on the day after Passover, only to find Jesus gone?

**These are very real and practical questions that give meaning to the gospel of Mark.** The women saw where Jesus was buried on Friday and they are returning to the grave. The women were going to do the things necessary in preparing a body, according to Jewish customs. Because they will spend time visiting and others will use the tomb later, it was the custom to wrap the body with herbs and spices to help with the smell. So they were on their way, with spices, to see him. We have our own customs today. When we go to visit a grave, we often take flowers to place on the grave and may tend to it as we sit there, remembering our loved one. Without a doubt, the women knew Jesus was dead and where he was buried.

**There is reality in the question the women ask** when they get there, “*Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?*” This is a very normal, human response. They forgot all about the heavy stone that had been placed in front of the stone to keep people and

animals away. With the stone in place, no one would have been able to steal Jesus’ body. Nor could he have left on his own, as some have suggested. To the women’s surprise, when they look up, the stone has been rolled away! This is a cause for concern. According to Jewish custom, no one could have come to the tomb any earlier and the disciples were in hiding. Who would do such a thing? Their concern turns to alarm when they enter the tomb, finding “*a young man, dressed in a white robe,*” but no body, no Jesus! Where is Jesus?

### **What happened?**

We don’t have a record of the women saying anything, but that must be what they were thinking. It’s what we would think if we were in their situation. They don’t ask the young man who he is, which leads some scholars to believe it’s John, the youngest apostle. Others see the young man as an angel. The young man’s identity isn’t important. It’s what he says to the women that rocks the world: “*Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.*”

**The young man knows amazing things.** First, he knows the women are upset, so he seeks to calm them. Second, he knows they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth and how he died. And he knows where Jesus had been laid. Third, he knows amazing news: “*He has been raised; he is not here.*” Three days after his death on a cross, Jesus has risen from the grave, just as he promised, against all odds. **This is incredible news! Earth-shattering news! It’s good news that changes the universe.**

### **What happened?**

**It’s simple: Jesus did what he said he would do.** Jesus died and rose again on the third day. No one in all of history has EVER done that! No other being in all of creation has claimed divinity and then been able to prove it. Buddha didn’t claim divinity or prove it. Neither did Muhammed. The Hindus and Daoists don’t believe in the soul. The Mormons don’t believe Christ was divine, neither do the Jehovah’s Witnesses or the Jews. There is no one else, in any other faith, who foretold their own death and resurrection. And there is certainly no one else who backed up the claimed and proved it in such a convincing way. Praise God!

**What happened?**

Jesus took the weight and burden of our grief and sorrow and lifted it from us. “Jesus wasn’t thinking of his own safety or comfort while he hung on the cross, dying. Jesus wasn’t thinking about saving himself, which is what the mockers and Satan were whispering in his ear. **Jesus was thinking about you!** Jesus didn’t go to the cross because he was abused by God or because he had some strange death wish. Jesus went to the cross because he was thinking about the joy he would have when he presented you to God the Father, washed clean in His own blood. But Jesus couldn’t save himself from the cross and save you from the penalty of your sin. Without his sacrifice, you would never be able to go before God the Father. So Jesus chose his death ... and your life. Jesus chose you, and it gave him enough joy to stay on the cross, endure and be your risen Lord and Savior.

**Only a person who has suffered shattering grief** in an intimate way can understand why Mary was at Jesus’ tomb so early in the morning. Nothing could have kept her away from her one, last act of love. Her shock at seeing the stone rolled away and Jesus’ body missing is unimaginable. Imagine her surprise when she heard the words, *‘He is not here; he is risen.’*

**Only a person who has failed utterly and completely** can understand the shame and remorse of Peter. His promises meant nothing and, by cursing the Lord, he had severed his relationship completely. His life was in ruins and his leadership meaningless. Imagine his surprise when he heard the words, *“Tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”*

**Now imagine the joy** of Mary, Peter and all of Jesus’ family, friends and disciples when the truth sank in, filling in all the gaps between the shocking events and Jesus’ teaching. **Jesus is alive!** They went from sorrow and loss to life with him in a new way. Nothing could, or would, ever be the same again. They can spend eternity rejoicing in what happened, free from their sorrow, guilt and shame.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Material drawn from Charles R. Swindoll, “Sunday to Sunday”, *Insight for Living*, 2010, pp. 51, 67

**You have the same promise of hope, love and joy. All you have to do is believe: Jesus is alive!** Jesus came to save you, no matter how deep, dark and intimate your grief may be. Jesus came to save you, no matter how badly you have failed yourself or others. Believe in Jesus’ promise: I will rise on the third day. Believe in the empty tomb. Be free from your guilt and shame, and rejoice with me:

**Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed. Halleluia!**

If you believe Jesus is alive, I invite you to join me now in prayer:

*Jesus, I need your love. I believe you are alive and you came to save me from my sins. Forgive me for all I have done, or failed to do. Save me from my sorrow, guilt and shame and give me joy with you in heaven. Amen.*

I have good news: if you prayed these words truly in your heart, Jesus has forgiven your sins. You are his child and a child of God. Please let us know of your decision, so we may celebrate this joy with you.

**To God be the glory!**

**Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24 (NRSV)**

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly; the right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.” I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. The LORD has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

**Mark 16:1-8 (NRSV)**

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.