

## ***Easter With Love • Mark 16:1-8***

When you hear the Easter story you have to say, “That’s amazing! Could it really be true? It would be a miracle from God for that to happen!” That’s precisely the point. Dead men don’t come back to life again. This is possible only if there is a God and only if that God does something spectacular and miraculous.

And that is exactly the point of Easter! It is all about God and all about a miracle. One thing is for sure—if Jesus had not risen from the dead we would never have heard of him. It wasn’t the crucifixion that made him famous; it was his resurrection.

For those with doubts there is amazing evidence. You don’t have to search very long or very far to find historical and scientific evidence. There are plenty of books and lots of credible scholars. But the Easter story is not mostly a science book. Easter is mostly a love story—a love story that began forever before that first Easter. It began with God loving us.

An amazing New Testament statement explains the background of Easter. It was written in the first century by St. Paul to Christians living in Rome and it is found in Romans 5:6-8:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Here’s the point: God decided before we were even born that he loved us no matter what. That makes me feel great because I love to be loved. The trouble is that I really don’t deserve this love of God—and neither do you. God loved us when we were a mess—weak, sinful, powerless, mean, awful. God loved us enough to send his Son Jesus

from forever in heaven to become human on earth. That was a big deal all by itself. But the even bigger deal is that Jesus came specifically to die for us on the cross. It can get a little complicated to explain but the short explanation is that we were destined to an eternal death unless Jesus came and rescued us. He came to die so that we could live.

On August 16, 1987, Northwest Airlines flight 225 crashed shortly after takeoff from the Detroit airport. One hundred fifty-five people aboard that plane died. Only one passenger survived—a four-year-old girl named Cecilia Chican from Tempe, Arizona. When the rescue workers found her they assumed that she was a passenger in one of the cars on the highway where the plane crashed. But when they checked the flight manifest they confirmed that she was actually a passenger on the plane.

How did she survive? When the plane was going down, Cecilia’s mother, Paula Chican, unbuckled her seat belt, got down on her knees, put her arms and her body around her four-year-old daughter and held her as tight as she could. She took the impact of that crash and died so that her daughter could live.

That’s what Jesus did for us on Good Friday. We couldn’t save ourselves from sin so he stretched out his arms on

the cross, wrapped his body around ours and died so that we could live.

What Jesus did was wonderful but his followers thought it was awful. He was the best person they had ever met. He had changed their lives, and now he was dead and they couldn’t do anything to bring him back.

From Friday afternoon until Easter Sunday morning was a time of indescribable grief. Great grief is almost impossible to describe. Only those who have deeply loved and lost those they loved can really understand. There is a finality, a fear, a

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hopelessness and a sense of powerlessness that becomes a blur of emotion and pain.

The women who watched Jesus die wanted to at least give him a decent burial. They couldn't do that in the usual way right after he died. The law in Jerusalem was that burial had to be completed before the start of the Passover Sabbath holiday at sunset on Friday. Usually they would have washed his body and wrapped it up with a cloth that had special external embalming spices wrapped into the folds. But there just wasn't time to get it done on Friday. Since the laws wouldn't allow them to prepare his body on the Sabbath/Saturday their first opportunity was Sunday morning. So, the women got everything ready and headed out really early on Sunday. It was a sad journey. Their hearts were broken. Their grief was heavy. Jesus was dead.

Are you familiar with the *Jesus* film? It's a dramatization of the life of Jesus that has been seen by millions of people around the world. It may be the best watched film in history. The film has been translated into a long list of languages so that people can experience the story in their native tongue. Some of the scenes are powerfully graphic, especially when Jesus is crucified and dies. Many who watch the film are hearing the story for the first time.

When the *Jesus* film was shown on Good Friday in Chittagong, Bangladesh, the place was packed with people. Every seat was taken, the children sat on the floor in the front and adults stood in the back. When the story came to Jesus' agony and death the people in the crowd began to gasp and weep. It was so painful that one young boy stood up in the crowd and shouted, "Don't be afraid! He gets up again! I saw it before!"

We're like that boy. We've heard the Easter story before. We know that Jesus didn't stay dead. He got up again! We are on the resurrection side of Jesus' crucifixion. But what about us? We haven't died yet and we sometimes get afraid. But then God's offer came to us. Because of the resurrection of Jesus we can come back to life again just as he did. Believe in Jesus' death and resurrection and we don't need to be afraid. We get up again. We share in Jesus' resurrection. We've seen it before in Jesus.

Because of Easter we can live forever. Listen to another great line St. Paul wrote to the Romans that also applies to every Christian. In Romans 6:5 he wrote, "*If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*" Now that is fabulous. If we believe in Jesus and what happened when he died then we get to share in Jesus' resurrection after we die and we will live forever. It's the best deal anyone could ever get.

Of course, there is an "if" in what the Bible says: "*If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*" I always encourage people to clear up that "if". I ask them if they personally believe that Jesus died on the cross to save them from the consequences of their sins. When they say "yes" I ask if they want to take the next step and commit the rest of their lives to Jesus as Savior and Lord. When they again say "yes" I invite them to pray a personal prayer of faith and tell God that they believe in Jesus, accept him as Savior and trust him for the rest of their life.

Once this faith is in place and registered with God there is no more "if". It's a settled deal: ". . . *we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*"

Phillip was born with mental and physical disabilities. His parents took him to a Methodist church where he was assigned to a third-grade Sunday School class with nine other eight-year old boys and girls. Sadly, he was not well accepted by the other children because of his differences.

At Easter the Sunday School teacher collected ten of those egg-shaped containers that pantyhose used to come in. Each child received one container and they all went outside to find some symbol of new life to put into the container. They had a great time. All the containers were brought back and opened one-by-one. Sitting around a table the children ooh-ed and aah-ed as each container was opened. There was a flower and even a butterfly. The teacher used each one as a teaching symbol about the Easter story.

When the teacher opened one of the containers it was empty. The class erupted with com-

plaints and criticisms of unfairness and stupidity. Philip tugged on the teacher's shirt and said, "It's mine! It's mine!"

The children said, "You don't ever do thing right, Philip. There's nothing there."

Philip answered, "I did so do it. I did do it. It's empty! The tomb is empty!"

The class was stunned to silence. Philip got it better than anyone else. The teacher said a miracle took place that day in that Sunday School classroom. Those third-graders grasped the truth of Easter—and accepted Philip as one of their own.

It was in the summer that Philip died. Everyone knew that the problems with which he was born meant he would not live as long as most. It was an infection that most children would have shaken off but it took Philip's life. At the funeral nine eight-year-olds walked to the front carrying, not flowers, but nine empty egg-shaped pantyhose containers to place on Phillip's casket.

They got it! They grasped the great mystery

of Easter. The tomb is empty. Jesus has risen. So will Philip. And so will we—IF we believe in Jesus Christ!

Thank you Jesus for loving us.

Thank you for leaving heaven and coming to save us. Thank you for dying on the cross that Good Friday. Thank you for coming back to life again. Thank you for an empty tomb.

Thank you for eternal life. We believe! Yes, Jesus, we believe in you. Amen.

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