

From Sorrow to Joy

Paul opens his letter to the church in Rome with these words: **Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 1:1-4 NASB)** According to Paul, Jesus had to be raised from the dead. Paul asserts that the resurrection is the proof that Jesus is the son of God. This morning we are here to celebrate that resurrection.

The events of Friday were still fresh on the minds of those who were close to Jesus. Upon His death, He was taken from the cross and placed in a tomb. The tomb was sealed and guards were stationed by the stone that sealed the grave. Each of the four gospels record the resurrection. The exact details vary only in a few details. The main points are in agreement. The heavy stone that sealed the tomb was removed, an angel (or two) was present to tell the women that Jesus had risen from the dead, and the women went to tell the disciples.

In Mark, we read that three women went to take spices. These spices were aromatic spices in an ointment that were used to mask or cover the stench of a decomposing body.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. (Mark 16:1-2 NASB)

These three women were present near the cross on Friday afternoon (Mark 15:40). They observed the Sabbath day and went to finish the preparation of the body of Jesus. According to Jewish tradition, the Sabbath ended at sunset or around 6:00 PM. Since it was still too dark to attend to their mission, that awaited until dawn on the first day of the week. Their mission was one of love and respect and not a duty. The spices were not used to embalm or preserve the body. On their way to the tomb, they were concerned about how they would gain access. They knew the grave had been sealed with a heavy stone. Little did they suspect what was awaiting them that morning.

They were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, *here is the place where they laid Him.* (Mark 16:3-6 NASB)

In Mark’s gospel, the women who were at the crucifixion weeping, are now walking to the grave where Jesus had been placed. Their grief was still there yet they engaged in a normal conversation. Their immediate concern was removing the stone that sealed the tomb.

When they arrived at the tomb, they find the stone has been removed. There are no details of how this has happened. We may draw the inference that an angel rolled the stone away from the

tomb. In each of the gospel accounts, we find at least one angel awaiting the early morning visitors.

There is one note of irony. There are two miraculous events in the life of Jesus on earth. First, His virgin birth and second, His resurrection. At His birth, only a few people are mentioned being there for that occasion: Joseph, Mary, and a few shepherds. At His resurrection, there are no people listed as having seen it first-hand. Yet, at both events, we see angels are present. John gives us some details that are missing from Mark's account. In particular, John gives us the conversation between Mary Magdalene and the angels and then with Jesus.

Let's open our Bibles to John the 20th chapter and we will begin with the 11th verse.

But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and *that He had said these things to her.* (John 20:11-18 NASB)

It appears that Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb after her initial visit. She is still seeking Jesus. We may wonder why she is still looking for the buried Jesus when we just read in Mark's account, that the angel had told her to go get Peter and that Jesus was raised in fulfillment of what He had said. Well, if you had attended a funeral of a friend and seen them laid to rest only to come back to an empty grave, would you believe they had risen from the grave? Would you still have questions? This is not a natural event. People are not crucified on Friday and alive and out of their grave on Sunday. Someone has stolen the body.

In this scene, we see that Mary loved Jesus and was weeping in grief. Added to her grief is the fact that she is unable to complete her task of anointing the body with the aromatic spices. Here emotions demand a flood of tears. Perhaps she is frustrated to the point of tears as well.

What stopped the tears? Her tears did not stop until she realized the man, she thought was the gardener was Jesus. Her tears of sadness turned to tears of joy.

Jesus had told His disciples that they would soon have grief but the grief would be turned to joy. Let's read from John the 16th chapter.

"A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again, a little while, and you will see Me." Some of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again, a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" So, they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is talking about." Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'? Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. (John 16:16-20 NASB)

Jesus told His disciples this just hours before His arrest. He was telling them not only was He to be crucified and buried, but there would be a time when He returns to the Father and they would not see Him. One of those times would bring grief. However, the grief would become a cause for rejoicing.

When Jesus was crucified and placed in the tomb, the world was rejoicing while the disciples were grieving. The resurrected Jesus turned the situation around.

Here's where it gets personal. Have we cried because of the crucifixion of Jesus? In the words of an old hymn, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Does the image of Jesus being nailed to the cross bring us to tears of grief? Do we grieve over His death and our sins that placed Him on that cross? If so, maybe then we can know the joy of knowing that Jesus is no longer in that tomb. When we know that He is risen, our tears of sadness can be turned to tears of joy.