

Matthew 28:1-10 "So, We Have Won!" 3/23/08

One Easter Sunday, the pastor was trying to emphasize the celebration of Jesus' resurrection with the children of the Church - The pastor asked them if they had noticed any changes in the music from previous weeks

When none of the children said a thing - The pastor continued, "For the last few Sundays, the music has been slow and somber, but today it's upbeat and joyful. Do you know why?"

Again, no one ventured an answer, until finally the organist's three-year-old daughter spoke up, "I know why, because Daddy has been practicing all week!"<sup>1</sup>

That was not exactly the answer the pastor was looking for - The pastor was hoping the children would notice the radical difference between the days of Lent and the celebration of Easter

Lent, the days before Easter, has a very serious tone - We focus on our sins - And on the cross of Christ - Where He took our punishment - And freed us from the bondage that our sinfulness brings

The celebration of Easter moves from those penitent thoughts - To the celebration that our Savior's life did not end nailed to the Cross - But that death could not hold Jesus - And He rose from the grave to assure us that physical death will not be our end either

The simplest meaning of Easter is that we are living in a world in which God has the last word

On Good Friday's night it sure looked like evil had won - The holiest and most full of love Person who had ever lived was dead - Jesus had been crucified and was in His tomb

He had brought humankind a fresh new hope - But now He was dead - Dying a most shameful death

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<sup>1</sup> Lyn Hill, London, Ontario. Christian Reader, "Kids of the Kingdom."

Fortunately, God's plan was not yet finished - Next came Easter morning and the glorious news that He is Risen! - Evil had not won after all - "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

All four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John record Jesus' resurrection - But as is often the case in our Scriptures - They all highlight different details - Therefore it requires a study of all four Gospels to fully comprehend the events of the day

First, in the early morning, women went to the tomb where Jesus had been buried, to anoint His body, even though they did not know how they could get into the tomb because it had been sealed with a massive stone (Mark 16:2-3)

There are three women named in the Gospel accounts - Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10), and Salome - They were followed by other women who had come with Jesus from Galilee (Luke 23:55-24:1)

The three women found the stone had been removed by an angel (Matthew 28:2) - Mary Magdalene hurried away to tell Peter and John, who ran toward the tomb (John 20:2-4)

Meanwhile, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and then the other women arrived at the tomb, entered it, and saw angels who assured them Jesus had risen - They ran from the tomb in fear and joy to inform the disciples (Matthew 28:8)

Peter and John ran to the tomb - John arrived first, but Peter was the first to enter - They saw the neatly folded grave clothes and the empty tomb - The Scriptures record that they believed, but they left without meeting the angels (John 20:4-10)

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:57 - Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, Today's New International Version, © 2001, 2005, (International Bible Society, Colorado Springs, CO)

Mary Magdalene also returned to the tomb, but probably not quite as quickly as Peter and John - She did not go in, but distraught with grief and overwhelmed with the events of that morning, she stood weeping just outside the tomb

Jesus first revealed Himself to her - Possibly because at that time she was the one person who needed Him the most (John 20:11-18)

As the other women were on their way to tell His disciples, Jesus appeared to them (Matthew 28:9-10) - The next event recorded in our Scriptures is that Jesus appeared to Peter - This probably took place that afternoon, but we are not given very many details about that meeting (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5)

Jesus also walked on the road to Emmaus with Cleopas and another disciple who remains unnamed - Many guess that this other disciple was Cleopas' wife - This journey and shared meal took place in the late afternoon toward evening (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13-32)

The final event recorded about that first Easter day is that Jesus appeared to ten of the remaining eleven disciples, with Thomas being absent - Much of this meeting is recorded in Luke and John - And Jesus was hungry, so they gave Him fish and a honeycomb (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25)<sup>3</sup>

An ancient legend tells of a priest who found a branch of thorns that was twisted around so that it resembled the crown of thorns that had been pressed on our Savior - Thinking it a symbol of the crucifixion - The priest placed it on the altar of the Church on Good Friday

It was a cruel-looking, ghastly thing - Thanks to a few spots of red here and there, one could easily imagine it covered with our Lord's blood - The people glanced at it for a moment and then turned away - It reminded them too much of the ugliness and cruelty of their sins

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<sup>3</sup> Harmony of Easter events adapted from The Scofield Study Bible, Cyrus Scofield (1843-1921), © 1909, 1917, 1937, 1945, 1967, (Oxford University Press, NYC, NY)

Early on Easter morning, the priest remembered what he had done - Feeling a crown of thorns was not appropriate for Easter Sunday - He hurried into the church to clear it away before the congregation arrived

As he approached the altar, he detected a strange fragrance - The sun was so bright he could not at first notice what had happened - The sun had centered its rays upon the crown, and had changed the sharp thorns and cruel twigs into roses of the rarest beauty and the most pleasing fragrance<sup>4</sup>

Too many in the Church today are clinging tightly to the thorns of Good Friday - They have handed Jesus their sins - And have trusted the Lord to take them to the cross for them - And that is a good thing - But it is not all our Faith has to offer

If you are stuck at the foot of the cross - I urge you to move past that point in your faith - There is true joy beyond the forgiveness of the cross - Let go of those Good Friday thorns and enjoy the roses of Easter - Jesus is alive

In the words a favorite Easter hymn, - "I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today - He lives, Christ Jesus lives today! - He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way."<sup>5</sup>

Veteran reporter Howard K. Smith tells of a wonderful remark made by Winston Churchill the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor

After the fall of France to the Nazis in May 1940, until December of 1941 - For the most part, Great Britain fought the war against the Nazis alone - President Roosevelt did what he could to help the British - But too many voices in America called on him to keep the United States out of "another of Europe's wars"

In London, when embattled Winston Churchill received news of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, he knew exactly how America would respond

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<sup>4</sup> James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited, © 1988 (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL)

<sup>5</sup> He Lives, Alfred H. Ackley, 1933

Churchill's words on that date were, "So - we have won!"<sup>6</sup>

It is the message of Easter - Christ's resurrection from the grave assures us of victory - There is nothing this world can throw at us, or do to us, that can defeat us now

After Pearl Harbor Day, there were many battles still to be fought, but the outcome of the war was determined - The same goes for the days after the Resurrection - There are still many battles - But we know who wins - Satan is defeated and righteousness has won

The victory is ours - Because our Lord Jesus is alive today - Guiding us - Loving us - Praying for us - And going ahead to prepare a place for us

I can picture when Jesus went to the cross - And His disciples were hiding for fear of losing their lives - When those nails were driven in and our Savior breathed His last - The forces of evil would have been celebrating because it looked like all Jesus had done was for nothing

But then came Easter morning - And Jesus breathed again - At that point I can picture an angel in heaven turning to a friend and saying, "So - we have won." - And so we have!

The resurrection of our Lord is not some dusty old fact - Not just an incredible miracle of 2,000 years ago - It is the victory of our Faith

Through the resurrection of Jesus, He is still with us today - Because Christ defeated death, we need not fear even that - Since our Savior rose from the dead we can face anything - We know He is right there at our side in the bad times and in the good

Thanks be to God! - He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ

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<sup>6</sup> Joe McKeever, Pulpit Helps, (AMG International, Chattanooga, TN)