

“Good News From the Graveyard!”

Easter 2020

The Bible records that after Jesus’ death on the Cross:

Matthew 27:57-66 LB “When evening came, a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, one of Jesus’ followers, 58 went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. 59 Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and placed it in his own new rock-hewn tomb, and rolled a great stone across the entrance as he left. 61 Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting nearby watching.

62 The next day—at the close of the first day of the Passover ceremonies—the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate, 63 and told him, “Sir, that liar once said, ‘After three days I will come back to life again.’ 64 So we request an order from you sealing the tomb until the third day, to prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he came back to life! If that happens, we’ll be worse off than we were at first. 65 Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go your way, make *it* as secure as you know how.” 66 So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.”

Now, all four gospels give the account of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

But only Matthew tells us about the Roman government placing a squadron of soldiers at His tomb to make sure the disciples did not come by night and steal His body away.

This was the great fear of the religious leaders—and it was they who went to the Roman Governor Pilate and said:

“Command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away...” (Matt. 27:64 NKJV).

“Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how’” (27:65 NKJV).

Now, the “guard” Pilate commissioned to the burial site was a group of four Roman soldiers whose shift changed every three hours.

The changing shifts assured that the tomb would be guarded 24 hours a day by soldiers who were awake, attentive, and fully alert.

We're told that when the Roman guards got there, they proceeded to seal the stone.

This was done by wrapping a string or rope around the stone and placing a soft clay seal in the middle of it.

The seal was then imprinted with the Roman imperial insignia.

The soldiers knew that if the seal was broken under their watch it would cost them their life.

Now all of this was done because Jesus had repeatedly said publicly and to his disciples privately that, after being killed, He would rise from the dead on the third day.

Mark 8:31 LB "Then he began to tell them (the disciples) about the terrible things he would suffer, and that he would be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the other Jewish leaders—and be killed, and that he would rise again three days afterwards."

Mark 10:34 LB "They will mock me and spit on me and flog me with their whips and kill me; but after three days I will come back to life again."

So there was no denying that Jesus had claimed He would rise from the dead after being killed.

So now we have the amazing sight of four burly Roman soldiers standing guard over the tomb of a dead man for three days and nights in 3 hour shifts.

That said, it is ridiculous to imagine the disciples, who had ALL FLED in fear and gone into hiding when Jesus was arrested...

- *approaching the tomb in the dead of night**
 - *getting past 4 Roman soldiers guarding it for their life,**
 - *breaking the seal,**
 - *rolling back the huge boulder,**
 - *and kidnapping the dead body of Jesus while the soldiers looked on!**
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The Bible records what actually happened that first Easter morn:

Matt. 28:2-6 LB "Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. 3 His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. 5 Then the

angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying."

So by the supernatural power of God, Jesus was raised from the dead.

And the great stone across the tomb was moved by an earthquake caused by the appearance of God's mighty angel.

That's why I've called this message, "Good News From the Graveyard."

Graveyards are usually places of sorrow and loss.

But the empty tomb of Jesus is a place of victory, joy, and good news!

Now, some have asked, "What's the big deal? How does this story from over 2,000 years ago that happened on the other side of the world matter to me today?"

- *I mean, we're in the middle of a terrible plague.**
- *The economy is in deep trouble.**
- *Manu have lost their jobs.**

***Many more are about to be evicted from their house or apartment.**

***On top of that, violent storms and earthquakes are striking different parts of the country.**

So how does this matter in our current situation?

Let me tell you the number one reason why the resurrection of Jesus matters to us all...

I. The resurrection proved Jesus was who He said He was!

You see, the resurrection Jesus promised would happen was what we might call His *GRAND FINALE*.

Since He had promised that God would raise Him from the dead, His entire ministry and message were riding on it!

If Jesus had not been resurrected then everything else He had promised and taught would be instantly nullified.

And that matters A LOT because our eternal future rides on what Jesus said about Himself!

Like this statement: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25 NASB).

So if *EVEN HE* did not rise from the dead, how could His followers believe that placing their faith in Him would bring them the eternal life He promised?

Here's another one: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6 NASB).

Jesus claimed that placing faith in Him was *absolutely necessary* to being saved and making it to heaven.

So if He had NOT RISEN as He promised, this statement would have been a cruel joke...

It would have proven that He wasn't *THE WAY* anywhere!

And here's a big one...Jesus had also said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16 NKJV).

The word "begotten" that Jesus uses here means "one-and-only, or one of a kind—or, the only one of its kind."

In other words, Jesus is saying...

***There's no one like Me.**

***My immaculate conception in Mary's womb through the power of the Holy Spirit was the only conception of it's kind...**

***It never happened before and will never happen like that again!**

But if He hadn't risen from the dead, ALL of these claims of His were only the ramblings of a badly deluded man and His followers were terribly deceived.

But the Bible says He DID rise from the dead!

Paul triumphantly declares, "But now Christ is risen from the dead!" (1 Cor. 15:20 NKJV)

He goes on to write, "I passed on to you right from the first what had been told to me, that Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures said he would, 4 and that he was buried, and that three days afterwards he arose from the grave just as the prophets foretold. 5 He was seen by Peter and later by the rest of "the Twelve." 6 After that he was seen by more than five hundred Christian brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now. 7 Then James saw him, and later all the apostles. 8 Last of all I saw him too, long after the others..." (1 Cor. 15:3-8 LB).

So what does this tell us?

**His resurrection proved He WAS the only begotten Son of God,
just like He claimed.**

It proved He IS the way, the truth, and the life.

That He IS the one and only way to heaven.

**That He CAN and DOES give eternal life to those who place
their faith in Him.**

**And one day soon He WILL return to earth to gather His church
to Himself.**

**And He WILL one day rule the world as King of Kings and Lord
of Lords!**

And until then, we can say along with the famous song:

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow

Because He lives, all fear is gone

Because I know He holds the future

And life is worth the living just because He lives!

So I close with this assurance:

***Because He lives, Dark days won't last!**

It was a dark day, when Jesus was led down the road, carrying His cross, while the crowds yelled and cursed at Him.

It was a dark day, when they laid Him on the cross, and drove the cruel spikes into His hands and feet.

It was a dark day when darkness fell over the entire land from noon until 3 while He hung there.

But Easter Sunday was just around the corner, and then the night was turned to day!

Dark days won't last!

***And because He lives, nothing is impossible with God!**

If God could raise Jesus from the dead, He can raise you up out of your trouble and despair!

The same power that stood Him up filled Him with life again is the same power of the Holy Spirit that lives in you as a believer!

***And because He lives, better days are coming!**

When we get past this present grief, and the pain of it, when we get past these hard times, we know that better days are coming.

Because it seemed like hard times were there to stay when they laid Jesus in the tomb.

But now that tomb is empty.

And it brings us Good news from the graveyard.

He is risen!

Because Jesus lives we know better days are coming.
