

**IMAGINE THIS: “THE MESSIAH ARISES”**  
**(EASTER SUNDAY)**  
**(Matthew 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-49; John 20:1-31)**

4.17.22

**Description:** *God raises his Son Jesus from the dead, and many different reactions follow — some of joy, some of disbelief, some of fear, and some of disbelief — reactions that are still found today.*

## INTRODUCTION

I love history. History is filled with some amazing moments. But in all of human history, there is only one moment that can truly be called the greatest moment of all time, THE most pivotal moment in all of human history. That moment is what we celebrate this morning: the resurrection from the dead of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now, once again, I am going to ask you to join me in diving into our imaginations. Once more, as with Maundy Thursday, I am going to ask you to imagine that you are Christ’s disciples. Think about all you have seen and heard since you left the scene of your last supper with him — Gethsemane, arrest, Golgotha, crucifixion, “It is finished,” death. A week after witnessing his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, with shouts of “Hosanna” ringing through the air, your master lies dead in a tomb with the shouts of “Crucify him” still echoing in your hearts.

And there’s just so very much that defies explanation. You remember your anger as you heard all his enemies saying such incredibly cruel things while he was hanging there on the cross: ***“You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”*** . . . ***“He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him”*** — ***Matthew 27:40, 42.*** But even in your anger as you remember their insults, a part of you is still stuck on wondering the same thing: Why didn’t he come down from the cross? You’d seen so much from Jesus, so much power over illness and injury, and even over nature; remember how you saw him still the wind and the waves, and even walk on the water? Remember how he fed so many with so little out in the wilderness? And just a little while ago, you even saw his power over death as he called Lazarus, dead four days, out of his tomb! You saw it; you were there. But then you saw him — beaten like you had never seen anybody be beaten before. The thorns on his head, his face so bruised and disfigured he was hardly recognizable — and so much blood; it seemed to be pouring out of him from everywhere. But why? Why did he seem so unable to do anything about it? How could just nails hold him to that wooden cross? Your own minds are drowning in all your confusion.

But you also remember that your comrade John got near the cross and, even as those cruel things were being said, heard Jesus say, ***“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”*** — ***Jesus Christ, Luke 23:34a.*** In fact, John told you that Jesus kept saying it, over and over again. And you remember thinking, “How could such love be treated with such cruelty, and how could such cruelty be treated with such love?” You still haven’t figured that one out. But then, in a moment, with the slump of a head, it was finished. It was so dark when he died. There was the rumble of an earthquake; even nature seemed hurt. But now that Jesus was dead, who’s next? Was the leadership satisfied, or were they going to want more? You all decided to disappear. You remained in Jerusalem, but few people would know where.

And with that, let's pick up the story that God has so graciously preserved for us. But before we continue, **let's have a meeting with God in prayer!**

## **BACKGROUND**

As we get into this, we need to connect with some things that happened before this greatest day of all time. Now, even though you all are in hiding for fear that, with Jesus dead and gone, you might be next, there are some pieces of news and information you are getting. So this is what you know, or at least what you're hearing and sharing with each other:

First, let's go back to Friday — if your hearts and minds are able. As evening was approaching, a wealthy guy by the name of Joseph, a man from the town of Arimathea who was also a member of the Sanhedrin, went to Pilate with a request: Could he take custody of the body of Jesus of Nazareth, dead but still hanging on the cross? Now what nobody knew was that this Joseph was also a disciple of Christ — but in secret due to his fear of the leadership. Anyway, Pilate was pretty surprised by Joseph's request, mostly because that meant that Jesus had died really quick; it was not unheard of for it to take even 2-3 days for a crucified somebody to finally pass. That was no state secret — even you guys knew that — but Jesus had died in only about nine hours. So Pilate contacted the lead officer onsite, a centurion who had supervised the crucifixion, who informed him that Jesus was in fact dead. You all heard that one of the soldiers had even jammed a spear in Jesus' side, and blood and fluid had flowed out of the wound, pretty much declaring his death a done deal. And now having that confirmation, Pilate had granted Joseph's request.

So, as you all understood it, Joseph went to the cross and took down the body of Jesus. He was accompanied by another member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus — the same one who you all remembered had met with Jesus one night some 2-3 years ago. He had brought some 75 pounds of precious spices: myrrh and aloes, things like that. Together the two men had placed Jesus in a clean linen cloth and then, taking Jesus' body, they wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen — the way it was supposed to be done in accordance with your Jewish burial customs. Following that process, the two men had placed Jesus' body in a brand new tomb, one that had never been used, cut out of rock, that was in fact owned by Joseph. Once Christ's body was in the tomb, Joseph had had a big stone rolled in front of the tomb's entrance, and then he and Nicodemus had left the area.

However, two of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee with you all had watched what Joseph and Nicodemus did and saw where Jesus had been laid. They could see that Jesus' body had been prepared for burial in somewhat hasty circumstances, so they left and went home to prepare the appropriate spices and perfumes because, you guess, they probably felt that Jesus deserved something better than what was done in such a hurry. But they didn't immediately return to the tomb; instead, they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

So that brings us to the end of Friday. But the next day, Saturday, things were still happening — one thing in particular: ***The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."*** "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go,

*make the tomb as secure as you know how.” So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard — Matthew 27:62-66.*

And this now sets you all up for a day of “You ain’t seen nothing yet,” a day like none of you could ever imagine — not in your wildest dreams — and it happens like this:

### **TEXTS (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20)**

After the Sabbath had concluded, right around sunrise so way yonder early in the morning, Mary Magdalene and some other women made their way to the tomb. They were bringing a whole bunch of spices with them, you know, to be able to properly complete the anointing of Jesus’ body for burial. Now they had heard that the tomb was being guarded by somebody that Pilate had approved but, as they were on their way, they were growing more and more concerned — not about the guards but about one other thing: “How in the world are we going to get that huge stone moved that Joseph placed at the entrance?” Good question! But as they arrived, they were met by a stunning sight: There were no guards — not a Roman soldier, not a temple guard — nobody. But most amazing of all, there was no longer any stone rolled in front of the tomb; in fact, the entrance to the tomb was wide open. They entered the tomb and peeked in, and wow: On top of everything else, Jesus’ body was gone; they couldn’t see it anywhere. But what they did see, all of a sudden, were two men, dressed in brilliant, gleaming white — as white as snow and as bright as lightning. The women in their fright bowed their heads to the ground, but one of the men said: “Don’t be afraid, but why are you in here looking for the living among the dead? We know that you came seeking Jesus of Nazareth, who you saw crucified. He is not here. He has risen! Remember what he said while he was still in Galilee, that he had to be handed over to sinners and crucified, but that on the third day he would be raised again? Come here, and see the place where they laid him.”

Now those two men who had so suddenly appeared to these ladies could see how overwhelmed they were with their amazing news, so they gave them some help: “Go quickly to his disciples and tell them what we have told you: He has risen! Make sure Peter hears about this, too. And also tell them that the Master will meet them back in Galilee.” So the women ran back here to where you all were staying; that’s how you heard about the angels and what all they had told them.

Now remember when you first heard their story? You all thought those women were crazy; every last one of you thought they were nuts. But then you paused. You realized you all knew these women. They’d been with Jesus themselves, just like you — some of them for quite a long time. They’d never made up stuff before, certainly nothing like this, and there’s no way they’d ever make up stories about the Master. And remember that, in the silence of wondering what to do with all this, two of you, Peter and John, all of a sudden got up and took off running for the tomb. John got there first and, the way they tell it, he peered into the tomb far enough to see the strips of linen lying there, but he didn’t fully go in. Then Peter arrived, and he did go in. He saw exactly what the women had described — the strips of linen, and the cloth that had been wrapped around Christ’s head, laying where his head should have been — but wasn’t. After a moment, John joined Peter and saw the same evidence. While John believed what this meant, Peter was kind of struggling; he admitted he was still unsure. So after departing the tomb, they came back here and told you all what they had seen.

But then came the best part of all — where Jesus actually began to prove his resurrection by appearing to you all. The first one to actually see Jesus resurrected was Mary Magdalene. She had returned to the tomb, aware only that she didn’t know where the body of Jesus was. She stood outside of the tomb,

heartbroken. As she cried, she took a look inside the tomb and saw two beings dressed all in white, actually sitting where Christ's body had been laid. They gently asked her, "Why are you crying?" She told them through her tears, "The body of my Lord has been taken, and I don't know where it is." At that moment, she turned around, maybe having heard something, and saw Jesus standing there but, for whatever reason, she didn't recognize him. He asked her the same question: "Why are you crying?" She thought this might be the gardener — after all, the tomb was located in a garden — so maybe he could help her. "Sir, if you've taken him, tell me where he is and I will go and get him." Then Jesus had simply said, "Mary." In that one word, she immediately recognized him. She wanted to just grab him and hold him tight and maybe never let him go, so fearful was she of losing him again. But he was only going to be remaining on earth for a little while longer, so he directed her to go to you guys with her news. And, as you know, that is what she did.

Which was also the news that the guards from the tomb brought to the chief priests in Jerusalem. Now remember that it was the chief priests who wanted the guard posted in the first place. It wasn't enough that Jesus was dead. They'd seen him die, but now they were worried about any myths taking hold that, somehow, Jesus had fulfilled his promise of rising from the dead. But right now, it was hard to make sense of the story these guards were trying to tell; remember these guys were the ones so traumatized by witnessing this supernatural event that reportedly *they shook and became like dead men* — **Matthew 28:4b**. They did, however, finally recover from their trauma enough to tell their story to the religious leaders. Some of you smiled when you heard this, thinking, "Poor boys! Even after they kill him, they can't kill him." But in the meantime, what do they do now? What else? Call a meeting: *When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.'* *So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day* — **Matthew 28:12-15**.

But, in the meantime, other news of appearances by Jesus were coming into you all so quickly: later that morning some more of the women saw him, then later that afternoon your friend Cleopas and a companion of his on the road to Emmaus. Can this be true, can this really be happening? Can that beaten, broken body you all saw hanging so limply on a cross now actually be alive? It genuinely seems too good to be true.

But then that evening, in one glorious moment, all your doubts and questions completely vanish: *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* — **John 20:19**.

*They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."* *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence* — **Luke 24:37-43**.

*The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord* — **John 20:20b**. And none of you would ever be the same again!

## APPLICATION

Now, at this point in the service, I usually do an “application” piece, you know: “What does this portion of Scripture mean for us today?” But as I thought about it, the best way I think I can present an application for something as glorious as our Lord’s being raised from the dead is to share a somewhat stylized version of my personal testimony for, if Jesus is not raised from the dead, as Paul said, we are still in our sins; in other words, if Easter doesn’t happen, none of us have a testimony.

Now this is actually based on words that Satan spoke long, long ago in the Garden of Eden when he was tempting Eve, trying to convince her to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — fruit God had forbidden to be eaten; he told her: ***“God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”*** — ***Satan (the serpent), Genesis 3:5***. Based on those words, this is my testimony:

My name is God. My Name Is God. MY NAME IS GOD — or so I thought for oh so many years. I was the greatest person who ever lived upon the face of the earth. There wasn’t anything I couldn’t do, ‘cause I was God, or so I thought for oh so many years. Didn’t everyone see that I had the most brains, the most talent, of course the most poise and personality? Why should I care how I got ahead, or who I hurt, or how, or why? I was God, or so I thought for oh so many years.

I lived in my own private kingdom of ME, ruler of all I surveyed. So everybody else, you all better stay in your place, ‘cause I was God, or so I thought for oh so many years.

But then one day I meant Another, who claimed that He was God. Huh, this must be a stranger to these parts, I thought, for didn’t everybody know that I was God, for so I’d thought for oh so many years. But I decided to let Him talk, to tell me about Himself, so I could show Him how I was God, for so I’d thought for oh so many years.

But as He spoke, something deep down inside told me that He was very different from anybody I had ever met before. He said that He was and always had been — the Alpha and Omega as it were. He said that He had created all things, including all people. But one day His people had revolted, becoming bad, which made Him sad that He had ever created them. I asked Him, “So what made them revolt?” He said, “They thought they were God.”

But He told of how He sent a Son, His only Son, to die, and then to rise from the dead, to save them from their sins, that they might be clean and pure and holy and sinless once again. Wow! Inside I was shaken, for it seemed that, well, it seemed that maybe I’d been mistaken in thinking that I was God for oh so many years.

I asked Him if He had more to tell, and He said that He loved me as well. He said that, no, I wasn’t God — I wasn’t even close. My “god” was just an idea I’d had, that I was very good. But He said that He still loved me; He always had and He always would.

Well, try as I might, I could not turn from this message of love, for I could finally see that this God from above really meant what He said. And I could finally see that not I but He had been God for oh so many years.

For a little while now I've walked with this God, learning how to obey His word. I've seen His love for me every day, and I've seen how I need Him to guide my way. You know, in many ways He's like a good father — happy when I'm following His path, oh but disappointed and sad if ever I leave him, even for a moment. "Oh why did you leave my side?" He'll say. "If even for a moment, it was too long." Yeah, and I'll know that I am wrong, for I've learned where I belong. I may try, I may really try, but you know something? I just can't do anything without Him. So . . .

My old "god" is dead. He doesn't live with me anymore. I follow a new God, the one true God, and He's with me now. My old "god" is dead. He doesn't live with me anymore.

Let's pray!

## **CONCLUSION**

He has risen! Have a wonderfully God-blessed Easter, everybody!