



Easter- the unbelievable story of our rescue. The Bible describes this story as the Gospel-Euangelion- “Joy News.” JRR Tolkien, the famed English author of the Lord of the Rings once said that some stories are so powerful they can bring unbelievable joy. He termed these stories eucatastrophes = joyful catastrophes

Tolkien thought that every person has a bass string on your heart. And that beautiful stories have the ability to move/reverberate your soul. But, only one joyful catastrophe, one Gospel has the power to pluck the string and give you eternal joy. The greatest story: the unbelievable story of our rescue. So may we hear the Gospel today with new ears and open hearts the only story that has the power to save!

On a cool evening, Jesus along with most of his disciples walked across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane: “Olive Press.” As he was accustomed, the Messiah spent solitary moments in prayer. However, this night, the crushing weight of His mission would consume his prayer, so much so that the Christ would sweat drops of blood. On that evening one of his best friends would betray him and turn the Rabbi over to authorities.

With a **quick succession** of events, Jesus of Nazareth was whisked to the High Priest who found him guilty of blasphemy: claiming to be God himself. The sentence was death, but they had no legal authority to execute. Early Friday morning Jesus was handed over to Pilate, the local Roman delegate who found **no legal charge to indict** the man from Nazareth. To **appease** the crowd, Pilate let the Roman guards brutally torture and mock the “king of the Jews.” A procedure that would weaken and possibly kill the tortured individual. Pilate, presents the innocent Jesus and yet the crowd shouts, “crucify him.” So Pilate relented. The Messiah carried his cross (75-100 lbs) but was too weak, so Simon a man from the crowd carried it. On the cross the true innocent king was executed between two

common criminals. And after all Scriptures and predictions were fulfilled Jesus said, **It is finished** and gave up his Spirit.

For John, the Gospel writers, nothing could be more disastrous than to consider the cross in isolation from the resurrection. Yes it is finished, but the story does not end here.

John 20:1-10; 15-18

The unbelievable story of the resurrection calls you to participate. On the first day of the week, Mary came to the tomb, she saw the stone rolled away and she ran to get others. Peter (slow disciple) and John (**Ussain Bolt**) saw the linen clothes, entered the tomb and believed. After this Mary crying at the grave turned around and saw Jesus, when she heard his voice she rejoiced! Later Jesus appeared to the disciples and showed him hands and his side. Thomas, not with them, didn't believe. **To this point – there was no thought of the resurrection.** Thomas proclaimed (20:25), "If I don't see the marks of nails I will never believe. Jesus appearing to Thomas said "put your finger here."

Over and over we find active verbs, participatory language. This is the power of the resurrection. **The gospel calls you to participate, to take part-take possession.** For Mary, John, Peter, Thomas, the resurrection story becomes their story (I'll never forget). In the same way, **God wants you to participate in His redemptive plan. Easter is your invitation. Be a part of God's redemptive plan.**

Far too often, spiritually we become spectators. I am a watcher of the NBA playoffs, particularly the GS Warriors. I have family in that area and I like winners. As much as I love to watch basketball, it would be foolish to think that I am a part of that team and **to tell others that I am a Golden State Warrior.** And yet, this is often how we think about our spiritual lives, because we have the replica jersey from china town.

But, what would happen if coach Steve Kerr called me up on game 7 of the finals. And said, Josh we are in a bind- Steph Curry is hurt and we need you. I get on the private jet, fly to Oakland, walk to my locker and put on my jersey. And then coach gives me a pep talk. He says, josh when you put on your uniform you became part of the team. Now, I can participate in the story. The resurrection provides righteous clothes, a new uni, for you to participate in the unbelievable story. **The resurrection redeems us from spectatorship. It's God's way of saying, "I want you on my team."**

The unbelievable story of Easter challenges you to believe (20:27): Thomas, upon hearing a historical reenactment of the resurrection said this: Unless I see the mark of the nails **I will never believe!**

Isn't this quite interesting? Thomas' **test** was based on **empirical evidence that Roman crucifixion was lethal and final**. No one survived this brutal execution. Thomas did not have to wait long for his answer. Jesus appeared to the disciple a week later and "put your finger here and look at my hands... don't be faithless!

In this moment, Jesus forever links your belief and your faith. Thomas: I believe it when I see it. Jesus: don't be faithfulness. The **resurrection** of the Messiah is such an **absurd claim** that it forces for every person a crisis of faith: you either **believe** this powerful account or you will **reject** this ridiculous narrative. **The heart of man is not changed on the basis of fact- your heart changes on the basis of faith.**

This is the purpose of the resurrection- your faith- and the salvation of your soul. And the Scriptures are clear and bold about this aim: **31 But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

The object of saving faith/belief is not a creed, not a church, not a pastor, not a set of rituals or ceremonies. Jesus is the object of saving faith –MacArthur. **Do you believe this unbelievable story??** It is by grace you are saved-through faith- it is the gift of God.

And Thomas responded to the resurrected Christ, "My Lord and My God!" **The unbelievable story of Easter: changes your life.** Do you know what happened to "doubting" Thomas? Well, as we read, **Thomas was the first person in recorded history to explicitly acknowledge Jesus' divinity post resurrection.** Eusebius (early church father), wrote that Thomas was the first to bring the Gospel to what is now modern day northern Afghanistan. Church history attributes mission efforts in India to Thomas.

Thomas staked the rest of his life on the fact that the unbelievable good news of the resurrection was worth believing and worth sharing with the entire world! Seeing Jesus was the catalyst for the one who doubted to see the world declare "my Lord and my God!" Is Jesus worth it for you?

That first generation answered the question of why they were Christians with a straightforward answer: **because Jesus was raised from the dead** As they worked that out, their thinking about a lot of things changed profoundly. And what happened? **A new dignity given to woman in contrast to the classical culture, a remarkable change in worship from Sabbath to Sunday, a new focus on family, a willingness to embrace death as martyrs—because they knew that death did not have the final word in human history itself.**

Those who experience the power of the resurrection live as if they know the outcome of history itself. Not arrogance- faith.

Now what? John 20:30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

If this is true, this Messiah demands more than one day a year, or even one day a week. He demands our life, our strength, our all.

Have you trusted in Jesus alone for your salvation? The resurrection calls you to participate: believe (God raised), confess (He is Lord) you too can have life in His name! Why not you? Why not now?

The resurrection also radically changes your life. Are you living as if you know the outcome of history? We do, His name is Jesus. What is your next step?

Conclusion

And from this moment Jesus raised the dead, things changed. Some believed (11:45). Some saw

Who right now needs this abundant life that only Christ can bring? Maybe you realized that you were waiting for heaven and wasting your life.

Who

Notes

John: the same story from a different perspective.

Saturday is passed over in silence (ECNT).

For John, nothing could be more disastrous than to consider the cross in isolation from the resurrection, for nothing is more certain in his mind than that the cross is the route Jesus took to return to his Father (Carson).

The fact that John did not stop at “it is finished,” but went on to describe Jesus’ burial in preparation for the resurrection narrative, is further testimony to his fidelity to the primitive apostolic message, in which crowning emphasis was laid on the fact of the risen Christ (Bruce).

John 20:1 Now the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had been taken away from the tomb. **2** Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

It is remarkable that all four Gospels introduce their respective resurrection accounts by specifying the first day of the week rather than the third day after the resurrection (Carson).

The darkness of the hour is the perfect counterpart to the darkness that still shrouds Mary’s understanding (Carson).

Darkness is a clear motif in the Gospel of John: light shines in darkness (1:5) men love darkness (3:19) Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night (3:1) “he who loves me shall not walk in darkness (8:12), he who believes in me should not abide in darkness (12:46).

John may play on his light and darkness symbolism a different way; the light of the world was about to be revealed in its darkness (Keener).

The darkness may indicate Mary's fear or may emphasize her devotion.

The portrayal of Mary Magdalene stresses her determination. Earlier she is found near the cross as part of a group of women. Her surname suggests she was from Magdala, on the northwest shore of Galilee (ECNT).

She is numbered in the ladies who attend to Christ and the disciples during the Galilaean ministry and 'provided for them out of their means (Mark 15:41), mentioning that from her 'seven demons had gone out' (Luke 8:2.

The text does not tell us whether Mary looked inside, but gives the impression she did not. Had she done so, the fact that it was still dark would have made the cave a very black hole indeed (Carson).

A seven day mourning period was customary – though people often would visit tombs within three days after the burial—so that Mary might have remained at home had she not sought to complete work left undone because of the Sabbath (ECNT).

They have taken

Mary has no thought of resurrection (ECNT).

The robbing of graves was a crime sufficiently common that the Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54) eventually ordered capital punishment to be meted out to those convicted of destroying tombs, removing bodies or even displacing the sealing stones (Carson).

John 20:3 Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. **4** So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. **5** And he, stooping down and looking in, **saw** the linen cloths lying *there*; yet **he did not go in**.

6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying *there*, **7** and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. **8** Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed.

Linen

In contrast to Lazarus who came out of the grave wearing his grave clothes (ECNT).

John draws attention to the to the care that had been taken in the way the tomb was left (ECNT).

This rules out grave robbers who would have acted in haste (ECNT).

The word for napkin is a loanword from Latin (sudarium) and means literally “sweat-rag.” Lazarus also had a sudarium tied round his head when he emerged from his tomb at Jesus’ command. The description of the napkin suggests not it retained the shape which it had when the Lord’s head was inside, **but rather someone having no further use for it, had rolled it up and laid it tidily aside (Bruce).**

The point is that the disciple Jesus loved believed on the basis of seeing (the empty tomb left in a certain condition) rather than believing from Scripture

The description is powerful and vivid, not the sort of things that would have been dreamed up; and the fact that two men saw it (v.8) makes their evidence admissible in a Jewish court (Deut 19:15) (Carson)

Believed

With sudden intuition he perceived that the only explanation was that the Jesus who had been crucified, the Jesus who had so recently assigned him his mother, the Jesus who had been buried in this new tomb, had risen from the dead. The beloved disciple saw and believed—and thus the Evangelist introduces the themes of seeing and believing that reach their climax (Carson).

Historically, the preaching and the rapid growth of the early church are alike unexplainable apart from the empty tomb. The resurrected body of Christ did not lie exclusively at the level of Jesus’ personality; it lay also at the level of Jesus’ physical body (Carson).

The fledgling faith of the beloved disciples was grounded on what he had seen (and not seen!) in the tomb.

9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. **10** Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

Must

Points to divine necessity (ECNT).

John 20:11 But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down *and looked* into the tomb. **12** And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. **13** Then 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.”

Mary weeps not because Jesus has died, but because his body has vanished; abuse of the dead was considered an abhorrent offense (ECNT).

Mary may simply have been so blinded by her tears that she could only make out the form of a man standing behind her (Bruce).

John 20:14 Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. **15** Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”

The question constitutes a call for Mary to set aside her anguish and recognize the reality of Jesus return to life (ECNT).

Mary saw Jesus standing there, but she did not recognize that it was Jesus (ECNT).

Neither the removal of the stone (20:1), nor the angel inside the tomb (20:12) nor even the risen Jesus himself fail to remove it (ECNT).

John 20:16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).

Jesus says, “Mary.” Turning around, she saw. The present scene validates Jesus’ words in 10:3, “My sheep know my voice.” (ECNT)

Whatever the cause of her blindness, the single word Mary, spoken as Jesus had always uttered it, was enough to remove it. Anguish and despair are instantly swallowed up by astonishment and delight (Carson).

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’ ”

Mary is told to stop, because her enthusiastic and relieved grasping of Jesus does not really comprehend what is transpiring. She now believes him to be alive, but has understood neither that he is not about to disappear, nor that he soon will. Thomas is told to touch, because he has not yet believed that Jesus has risen from the dead (Carson).

Illustrations

“If the thing happened, it was the central event in the history of the earth” –C.S. Lewis

“Our old history ends with the cross; our new history begins with the resurrection” –Watchman Nee

Do you know what the word *gospel* means? *Euangelion*. It means literally *the joy news*. J.R.R. Tolkien, says there’s a kind of story ... that brings us unbelievable joy ... He says these stories always have a certain kernel to them. There’s always some incredibly hopeless situation, and victory is snatched out of the jaws of defeat. But how? Always through someone who comes in, and whose weakness turns out to be strength, someone whose defeat turns out to be a victory. He says it’s those kinds of stories that just seem to bring us joy. He called them *eucatastrophes*.

Do you know what the word *eucatastrophe* means? The joyful catastrophe. The tragedy that turns out to be a triumph. The sacrifice that turns out to bring joy. He said, however, there's a Eucatastrophe of the eucatastrophes. There is a Story in all of the stories. He believes there's a bass string to the human heart, and those stories can kind of make it reverberate a little bit but can't pluck it.

Tolkien says the gospel story is the only story that will pluck that string so the whole heart never stops reverberating and vibrating with joy. The reason it will reverberate is ... this is *the* reality to which all of the other stories point. It happened. It really happened. There really *is* a hero who defeats the villain. There really is Jesus. The word *gospel* means the joy news. Joy. It's real. You have to have it.

In a *Wall Street Journal* [article](#), George Weigel gives a combination history lesson and apologetic for the Resurrection:

There is no accounting for the rise of Christianity without weighing the revolutionary effect on those nobodies of what they called "the Resurrection." They encountered one whom they embraced as the Risen Lord, whom they first knew as the itinerant Jewish rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, and who died an agonizing and shameful death on a Roman cross outside Jerusalem.

As N.T. Wright ... makes clear, that first generation answered the question of why they were Christians with a straightforward answer: because Jesus was raised from the dead As they worked that out, their thinking about a lot of things changed profoundly.

The article mentions some of the positive secular outcomes brought to the ancient world through Christianity:

- A new dignity given to woman in contrast to the classical culture.
- A self-denying healthcare provided to plague sufferers.
- A focus on family health and growth.
- A remarkable change in worship from the Sabbath to Sunday
- A willingness to embrace death as martyrs—because they knew that death did not have the final word in the human story.
- Living as if they knew the outcome of history itself.

Weigel suggests that it's only through, what he calls the Easter Effect, that these changes make sense. The social changes that followed Good Friday occur only if they actually believed in the resurrection of Jesus.

Application
