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Passion Scenes: He IS Risen!

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TEXT: Mark 15:42-16:8 (ESV)

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Dear friends,

Instead of saying “Happy Easter” to each other, as many of us do, I would like to suggest another Easter greeting we could very well use on a day such as this: “Happy V-Day!” V-Day means Victory Day. It's a term used for celebrating victories after important battles, and Easter is all about that. Jesus has victoriously conquered sin and death and the power of the devil that held us captive. I mean, that's the bottom line of the Easter story, isn't it? The women went to the tomb expecting to anoint a dead body. They got the shock of their lives: instead of a dead body, they found the huge stone covering that tomb rolled away, and an empty tomb, and an angel who said, “Jesus? He's not here. He is risen.” Those are three of the sweetest words you and I will ever hear.

How can we be sure this is true, though? Some people ask, where's the evidence? Well, first, there's the empty tomb. He showed the women where Jesus had been laid. Not even the opponents of Jesus disagreed that the tomb was empty. And then there's the complete surprise of the women, and later on, the surprise of the disciples of Jesus, which makes the resurrection all the more credible. The women didn't expect this, and obviously the disciples didn't expect this either. They weren't there. They had heard three times from Jesus that he would die and rise on the third day. Surely, wouldn't you think at least one of those disciples would have said to the others, “Hey, it's the third day, maybe we should go check out the tomb? What could it hurt?” But they didn't, did they? They were grieving and they refused to believe the women later on. Fact is, no one expected a resurrection at all, except Jesus. The angel had to remind those women to tell the disciples, “You will see Him just as He told you.” If Mark had made up this story, he wouldn't have written it this way. And here's the point: the resurrection was as inconceivable for the first disciples and impossible for them to believe as it is for many of us today; which, for me, makes the story ring all the more true, because they did become convinced later that Jesus is risen. Something changed.

There's another bit of evidence for us to consider. It's the women in this story. Women had no social credibility in that society. If Mark were making this story up and wanting to give it some credibility, why have women be the first eyewitnesses of the empty tomb? Why would he do that? It's Mark's way of saying: it's because it's actually the way it happened. It's true. And notice how specific Mark is with the name of these three women. He uses them repetitively, as if to say this is a historical account, not a legend.

These are source citations I'm giving you. The women must have been alive at the time Mark's Gospel was written, or he wouldn't have cited their names. Could it be that Mark is saying to his contemporaries, "If you want to check out the truth of my story, you can go talk to these three women."

In one of his earliest letters, the apostle Paul, a former enemy of Christianity, tells us that Jesus made many appearances to his disciples: in an upper room, on the road, by a lake... And then over 500 people saw him, and then Paul himself encountered him on the road to Damascus. If you want any more evidence, look at the impact this event had on those lives: no one could keep quiet about Jesus. They were fearless. They were willing to be beaten, thrown in jail, and they were martyred. Would someone do that for so long for a conspiracy, a lie? Greater minds than mine have thus concluded that the resurrection was an objective historical event. Jesus was victorious over death. We live and die. He died and lives. Christ is risen – He's risen indeed. And this good news is not just good news, it's true news. That true news has some implications for us.

Pastor Lloyd Ogilvy, reflecting on Easter in one of his devotional books, wrote,

The purpose of Easter is not to tell us that we should live better lives. It's not a time for moralizing or compulsive improvement programs. Easter is a celebration of victory – Christ's and ours. Because Jesus lives, we shall live also, eternally.

Jesus told us that. Someone has said, "When Christ rose, your grave was changed from a final residence to temporary housing." Death has no power to take you and keep you from the father. As Scripture says, "We can now confidently say death is swallowed up in victory. Oh death, where is your victory? Oh, death, where is your sting?"

Now, on a personal note, this Easter, that victory news is especially comforting to me. My dad died last April, a few days after Easter, and of course, we cried; but they were not tears of despair. We missed dad. We knew he was in good hands. You see, he trusted Jesus as his savior Lord. So we know that he's safe in the arms of the Savior and we'll see him again someday. Christians don't say goodbye. Instead, they say, see you later. That is our strength and confidence as each one of us face our own death or the death of a loved one, as perhaps you have since last Easter. The victory is won through Christ.

Now, on Easter, the V in V-Day could also be for "vindication". Jesus was vindicated on Easter, meaning all His claims were justified. By His resurrection, God is saying to us,

“Jesus really is the son of God, the king, the savior of the world who rescues us.” He’s everything He said about Himself. The resurrection vindicates His claims and His promises and His purposes. The bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the crowning proof of the Christian faith. As I was preparing this message, I came across this great little quote from Pastor Stuart Briscoe. He writes,

Practically everybody puts Jesus in the category of “Best man that ever lived.” Many agree He’s the greatest teacher the world is known. Not a few insist that He showed us how we are to live. Others say He taught us how to face death. But however true these opinions may be, they all fall short of what the scriptures say about Him. Even a moment’s reflection will show that the resurrection immediately lifts Jesus beyond the options just mentioned into a position that only He can occupy. He’s more than a revered teacher, a glowing example, and a role model. His resurrection is seen to be the Father’s endorsement of all His claims. Easter means that everything Jesus said about God’s kingdom, about our status before God, values and priorities for living the good life, and the big eternal picture is absolutely true, and should be listened to and followed.

God really does love us and value us. He has gone out of his way to claim us and bring us, lost sinners that we are, into His kingdom to be His own. God’s kingdom has drawn near in the person of Jesus, just as He said, and we enter in by repenting, which means turning away from the old way and turning to Christ and believing in Him for our salvation. We surrender ourselves to Christ’s care. And real living really is about giving yourself away for the sake of the Gospel as Jesus said: denying yourself and looking out for others is the way to go. Jesus is right when He asks us, “What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose his soul?” Life is so much more than that. It is a spiritual testifies, “You can have all this world, but give me Jesus.”

In the resurrection of Jesus, God is affirming that Jesus has told us the truth about the future, the big picture. We live with hope, with solid confidence about our future, because we know He is the future. He holds the future. He will finish what He started. History is “His story,” as I’ve said before. Believing in Jesus Christ as your savior and Lord holds an eternal promise for you and me. Jesus has said that in the end, the consummation of history, He will reappear in power and glory, with a new Heaven and a new Earth. And there will be no more tears, no more sorrows, no more suffering, no more death. He will take you to Himself so that where He is, you may be also forever. It’s a heavenly future that we have.

So today is about victory and vindication; we have one more word to consider. Finally, we can call Easter “V-Day” because the resurrection of Jesus is God's validation of the sacrifice Jesus made for our sins when He died on that cross. Pastor Tim Keller writes in his book, *Jesus the King*,

Jesus had risen just as He told them He would. Now, after a criminal does his time in jail and fully satisfies the sentence, the law has no more claim on him and he walks out free. Jesus came to pay the penalty for our sins, and this was an infinite sentence. But He must have satisfied it fully because on Easter Sunday, Jesus walked out free. The resurrection was God's way of stamping, “paid in full” right across history so that nobody could miss it.

Jesus came to give His life as a ransom for the forgiveness of sins, He said. And His resurrection is God's seal of validation that His death takes away our sins.

You can leave the burden of past guilt behind at the foot of the cross and receive this forgiveness and start over again. You can have a restored personal relationship with God forever. That's good news.

Victory, vindication, validation. Happy V-Day! A great thing's happened for us on Easter. Christ is risen, He's risen indeed. Now, what's the best way, do you suppose, to celebrate V-Day? I would point you in this direction: I appeal to you, trust in the resurrected Jesus Christ. Trust in Him, hope in Him. Rejoice in Him every day and go to Him every day. He's waiting for you.

There's a bit of a personal touch in this story for today for you and me to consider. The angel said, “Go tell the disciples and Peter that I'll meet them.” Tell Peter. As you know, Peter had really let Jesus down on Friday: denied Him three times. But Jesus still made a point of sending this message as a personal message to Peter, as if to say, “I still want you, Peter. All is forgiven. Come to me.” You can feel free to put your own name in that story. The risen Jesus Christ is with us. He's talking to each one of us, waiting for us ahead of us, saying,

Come to me, Sam, Mary, Sarah, Steve, John, Maya, Larry... I'm alive. I want you to come to me and live with me in the center of your life, you can have a personal, life-changing relationship happen in your life as you walk with me. No single moment of your life will be faced alone, if you will but come to me in faith. I want you to be mine forever.

Friend, you can have that. You can ask Him in today and that relationship can continue as you start meeting with Him every day, as you open your Bible and read those gospels about Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the letters written about Him that follow. It's there you'll get to know Him personally. He promises to meet you there during that quiet time with Him in His word, and you will walk away from that time, each time, blessed. The story of Jesus has changed the trajectory of so many lives, and that's because it's true. And that can be your story as well, beginning today. God made you to love Him supremely, but he lost you. He returned to get you back, but it took a cross to do it. He absorbed your darkness and rose again so that one day you can finally, dazzlingly, become your true self and take your seat at His eternal feast in His Heaven. Come to Him. He's waiting for you.

Christ is risen, He is risen, indeed. Happy V-Day!

Amen.