

Title: Best Day Ever?

Text: Matt 27:45-Matt 28:1-15

Date: April 21, 2019 Easter Sunday

Welcome to the most exciting and sacred day for those of us who believe in Christ.

Question: what's the best day ever?

- Picture of Madie going down the water slide: *best day ever!*

Question: what was your best day ever?

- Graduation...Engagement...Holding your child...big promotion...championship trophy...cancer free...retirement from work?

Question: Can you say definitively it was the best day ever? And what made it the best day ever?

Read aloud: Matthew 27:45-50; Matthew 28:1-7 (a painful day; and a glorious day)

Pray aloud.

INTRO. Ironically, the best day ever, was actually preceded by the worst day ever.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, on Good Friday from noon to 3pm, darkness fell over Jerusalem, and according to the Bible, this darkness covered the whole earth.

There, alone, hung Jesus on the cross. He was on a hill called Calvary, just outside the city.

- He'd been betrayed by his former friend, Judas.
- Even the boldest of his friends, like Peter, denied they knew him.
- His disciples had fallen asleep the night before in the loneliest moments of Jesus' life, (and all he'd asked them to do, was to stay up and pray for him while wrestled to know the will of God).

The large crowds who'd flocked to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast had praised him and hailed him as their Messiah earlier in the week.

- But people are fickle. The crowds turned on Jesus (From *Hosanna!* - To *Crucify!*)
- They ultimately called for the notorious prisoner Barabbas, to be released from prison and for Jesus to be crucified.

His trial was scandalous. It happened so abruptly; literally overnight...even though... Pontius Pilate admittedly found no fault in him.

Q: So why would they kill him so mercilessly?

A: Because he refused to renounce the title that was his before the foundation of the world – Jesus, Son of God!

Jesus of Nazareth – are you the Son of God?

They beat him. Oh, they brutally beat him. He was scourged. His body was covered in blood. A crown of thorns was mashed into his brow.

First, in complete and total darkness, Jesus died on the cross.

Matt 27:45, “*From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over the whole land.*”

- This is quite telling.
- Everything became dark.
- Is it an eclipse? Is it some scientific phenomenon?
(Can't be eclipse: Passover occurred during full moon; eclipse only during new moon.)

Or is this really → Jesus, Son of God, also called the Light of the World (hanging in the darkness).

It's bizarre, really:

- John 8:12, *Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”*
- Jesus personally hung the sun and stars and gave them their names (Isaiah 40:26).
- It was the hands of Jesus that touched the eyes of the blind at Bethsaida (Mark 8:23) and gave the man perfect sight and clarity.

FACT. But from Noon to 3pm on Good Friday – during this personal act of Jesus becoming your sin substitute on the cross – it was dark; very, very dark.

Matthew 27:46 → hear His cry: “*My God, my God – why have you abandoned me?*”

- Do you hear the loneliness of this cry?
- Apparently, God couldn't look at the nastiness of all of our compounded sins!
- Apparently, God couldn't behold the view of his perfect Son suffering for my crimes?

Is it really that God turned his back on his Son? Or is it that the dreadful sting of sin is this bitter? Or both?

Whatever it is – Jesus Christ, Son of God – in this moment (Jesus Christ, Son of Man) feels abandoned by God.

Was it for crimes that I had done

He groaned upon the tree?

YES, yes it was!

Amazing pity! Grace unknown!

And love beyond degree!

YES, yes it was!

IRONY: Jesus was not all alone, in that all my sins hung with him on that cross.

- All my lust, lies, greed, and sinfulness was with him.
- Jesus, in the moment of your pain, was the sin not helpful? Comfortable? Fun?

FACT: if God isn't with you – if you aren't living in the presence of God – I don't care what you have with you, it's lonely! *If you don't have God in your life, you're lonely.*

Matt 27:50, *But Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and gave up his spirit.*

- Jesus felt alone.
- Jesus cried out.
- Then Jesus died; life left his body.

Surely this is the saddest scene in the Bible; Jesus is dying for people...the very people who don't understand the depths of his love, nor what he's sacrificing to save them!

Second, Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

Matthew 27:57, *When it was evening, a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph came, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. He approached Pilate and asked for Jesus's body.*

Note, Jesus didn't just attract the poor, the marginalized, or women.

Joseph of Arimathea – wealthy, access, educated – perceives Jesus as real and converts!

Steps:

- Approaches Pilate...asks for the body of Christ.
- Takes the body...wraps body in clean, fine linen.
- Places the body in his personal tomb.
- Has a large stone placed over the tomb's entrance.

Note, Matthew 27:60-61 → guess who was there to watch this? The women!

- Again, the men are nowhere to be found!
But the women are present...watching every step of the way.

Third, the authorities take every measure to ensure the integrity of a closed, secure tomb.

Matthew 27:62 reports the following:

- All the chief priests and the Pharisees approach Pilate, saying:
 - *Let us not forget Jesus was crafty.*
 - *He predicted multiple times that he would be raised on the third day.*
 - *Give orders for extra security at the tomb!*
- His disciples may come and steal the body and announce he was raised.
 - *This would be the biggest problem of all...*
 - *The scandal of a resurrection!*
- Pilate: you have a guard of soldiers (Matt 27:65) – do your thing!
 - Make it as secure as you know how.

- They placed extra guards there.
- They put a seal on the stone to detect any movement.

Note, the devil has been trying to hijack and muddy this story since the beginning!

Note, the devil and fallen men have been doing all they can to keep Jesus dead and kill this story for centuries!

Irony: the disciples might come and steal the body? No way! The disciples have run scared! The disciples are nowhere to be found; only the women are close by.

Fourth, notice Matthew's description of the first resurrection morning (Matt 28:1-10).

Here come the faithful women again!

- They want to view the tomb.
- They come early, at dawn.

We are not sure if the women come for: worship...grief...questions...hope...processing, etc.

Good word:

- But we know the women arrive at the tomb *early*!
- They come to the last place they know they saw Christ.
(don't try to move on in life without Christ) (go where you know Jesus is)

Lessons from the women:

- 1) Come as you are to Jesus Christ.
- 2) Bring all the baggage/grief you have (come pour out your heart).
- 3) Come to Jesus now (do not wait).

Matthew 28:2-4 includes the following details:

- This time, another earthquake occurs!
 - Not because of darkness or death...
 - But a very bright, white-hot light is shining at the tomb.
- The angel's action we are told takes place like this:
 - The angel descends from heaven.
 - The angel approached the tomb.
 - The angel rolled back the stone.
 - The angel was sitting on stone.
- The angel's appearance is like:
 - Like lightning.
 - Clothing as white as snow.

(So bright and strong...conveys authority, purity, strong ambassador)

- And notice the report of the extra special security team brought in to guard the tomb:
 - They were so shaken by fear.
 - They became like dead men.

Matthew 28:5-7 records what the angel says to the women:

- Don't be afraid.
- I know you're here looking for Jesus.
- But Jesus isn't here.
- He has risen, just as He said He would.
- Come and see the tomb where he was laying.

Note, again, women are critical to the telling of this story!

- The men have run scared.
- But the women are present!

Note, there is a special blessing for those who persevere in faith!

- They don't quit.
- They now get to see what others never see/experience.

Matthew 28:7 – God used the women to affirm what Christ originally taught the men.

- 1) Christ has risen.
- 2) He is going ahead of you to Galilee.
- 3) You will see him there.

One of my favorite verses in the world! Look at these three promises! (Matt 28:7)

- He did – the *past* fact! He has risen!
- He is – the *present* reality! He is going!
- He will – the *future* hope! You'll see him there!

This is the story of Christ! 1) He has done something for me in the past 2) He is with me right now 3) I am assured to see his face in the future!

Fifth, the reality of Christ's empty tomb transforms us forever! (Matt 28:8-10).

LESSON. Notice this pattern about the women's obedience:

- They lingered at the cross.
- They followed him to his burial.
- They were there first thing on Sunday morning...

And now in Matt 28:8, we see the women "*quickly departing*" to tell the disciples the news.

When you stay close to Christ, you have "quick obedience" – in other words:

- The closer I am to Christ, the easier it is to obey.

- The further I drift from Christ, the harder it is to obey.

Notice they quickly depart with fear and great joy (Matt 28:8).

- a) Fear = reverence, awe, holy wonder.
- b) Great joy = thrill, indescribable fullness, “an experience I must share.”

Sadly, we live in a modern church culture where:

- a) Jesus gets very little reverence.
- b) And the people have very little joy.

Notice this link: when you’ve seen the risen Lord...when Christ has touched your heart...you are full of:

- 1) Deep respect and 2) lots of joy!

Many in church think: *they need to be respectful.*

Many in church think: *I just want to have fun.*

Christianity is the ONLY thing in the world that will *fill* you and *thrill* you.

Jesus commands your respect – you will be full of awe. (Oh, wow!)

Jesus blesses your heart – you have joyous news you can’t help but celebrate! (Oh, yes!)

FACT: when the church realizes that Christ is alive...when we encounter Christ...we will become a church full of:

- 1) Fear and reverence → we are unworthy; in awe of the mystery!
- 2) Great joy → We love Christ; we can’t stop talking about Christ!

FACT: I don’t know everything about the Gospel, or church, or theology, or doctrine. But I know enough to attest: I’m unworthy of Christ’s love...but he loves me anyway...his love is better than life!

Sing it:

*Who can cheer the heart like Jesus
By His presence all divine
True and tender, pure and precious
O, how blest to call Him mine*

*All that thrills my soul is Jesus
He is more than life to me
And the fairest of ten thousand
In my blessed Lord I see*

Matthew 28:9-10 is quite a sight to behold.

- The ladies turn from the tomb to go and report the news.

- Jesus meets them on their way and says –
 - Greetings!
 - Rejoice!
 - *I know y'all...I know why've you come...bless you.*
- The women approach Jesus:
 - Grab hold of his feet (NKJV – they held him by his feet).
 - They worshiped him!

Lesson. The wonderful, majestic beauty of seeing Jesus, touching him, and worshiping him!

Q: What do you think they said?

- We love you...you are worthy...thank you...
- You did just as you said, Jesus! You've come through for us, Jesus!

Matt 28:10 sketches a microcosm of the church's mission.

- A) They meet Jesus.
- B) They worship Jesus.
- C) They obey Jesus (go tell others the news).

A closing juxtaposition in Matthew 28:11-15. This is a painful reality, but the devil always has a counterfeit to the gospel!

- V11: the guards go and tell the priests the true story of JC's resurrection.
- V12: the priests and elders try to create the false narrative, appealing to:
 - Power
 - Money
 - Pride

IRONY: It's the best news in history! Here's the resurrected Lord!

- Just repent and believe in the gospel.
- But no, the religious crowd refused to believe.
- Instead they chose to cling to their traditions, power, and money.

LESSON –

- 1) The guards took the money, told a lie, and lost everything!
- 2) The women had no money, told the truth, and gained eternity!

What's the resurrection of Christ worth?

Q: What's truly the best day ever?

Big Idea. The best day ever is when I discover that Jesus died on the cross to cover my sin, and Jesus rose from the grave to give me life, and as a result, I commit to love Him with all my heart.

What does the cross mean?

- It means you are a sinner. (Confess this)
- It means God loves you. (Believe this)
- It means God desires to forgive you. (Embrace this)

Notice where the penalty of sin/judgment is in today's story – it's in the past! The cross is in the past!

- Have you allowed your sins to be forgiven, and put in the past?

Notice how the telling of the story reveals the quality of believers' faith –

- Some can't be found (many of the men were absent).
- Some can't be pushed away (many of the women watched every step).

Resurrection means –

- Keep obeying.
- Keep worshiping and singing and holding on.
- Keep telling others.
- It means Christ's new life → is the guarantee of your new life!
- It means the devil will not, and cannot win.
- It means the world/earth cannot satisfy or solve or deepest need!

Come to Christ today and tell him, "Jesus, my Resurrected King...my Living Lord...I give you my life today...I love you and trust you today!"

So that one day I will join the chorus in heaven:

Rev 5:12, They said with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

Rev 5:13, I heard every creature in heaven in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

There's nothing in your life a good resurrection can't fix!