

# **The Morning That Changed Everything**

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*Matthew 28:1-10*

March 27, 2016

## **Introduction:**

The most important days in history often begin rather normally. Those who climbed out of bed on such days did so unaware that the date on their calendar would become a day long remembered. Take, for example, October 31, 1517, the day Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of Castle Church, sparking the Protestant Reformation. Little could the townspeople of Wittenberg have realized that the sound of the hammer they heard pounding away that autumn morning would still echo in the ears of the world nearly 500 years later.

Or consider some historical dates a bit closer to our lifetime. It was a normal Sunday morning on December 7, 1941 as Americans were getting ready for church when the news came in over the radio that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Or who can forget the Tuesday morning of September 11, 2001, a day that began like any other typical weekday, whose only exceptional quality seemed to be the beautiful intensity of the blue sky. None of us knew when we awoke that morning that it would be a morning which would be seared into our memories for the rest of our lives.

While those mornings marked the beginning of incredibly historic days, none of those match the importance of the morning we're commemorating today. Today is Easter and this morning we remember what is without question the one morning that truly changed everything. Easter is the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As Christians, we believe on that Easter morning nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus came back to life three days after being crucified on a Roman cross.

But like so many other important days in history, the morning of this day began normally, with ordinary people doing normal, ordinary things. Let's review how that first Easter morning began by opening your Bibles with me to Matthew 28. If you don't have a Bible with you, I'd like to invite you to follow along in one of the Bibles you can find in the pews in front of you. If you'd please grab one of them, you should be able to find our passage on page 706. Again we're in Matthew 28, reading verses 1-8.

## **Story:**

**"After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see**

**him.” Now I have told you.’ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.”**

The Easter story begins with two women, both by the name of Mary, who go to the tomb of Jesus early in the morning. Now there’s nothing unusual about that. It was customary for loved ones to go mourn and anoint the body of someone who had recently died. So they went that morning expecting to do what they had likely done before for others who had died within their circle of family and friends.

But they soon discover this particular morning would turn out to be anything but normal. We’re told in v. 2 there was an earthquake and an angel appeared in radiant splendor and moved the massive stone that was blocking the entrance to the tomb. The Roman guards who were stationed there to make sure nobody disturbed the body were terrified by the angel’s appearance and **“became like dead men.”** So then, by the time the two Marys arrive, the guards had fled, the tomb was empty, and an angel was awaiting them. This angel greets the two women by telling them that Jesus is no longer there. He says, **“[Jesus] is not here; he has risen, just as he said,”** and instructs them to go and tell this good news to the other disciples.

Needless to say, this is not what they expected when they got up that morning! But there is one more surprise awaiting them. Look back in your Bibles at v. 9-10 to see what happens as they head off to tell the disciples about the empty tomb. **“Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’”**

Can you imagine the shock they experienced at seeing Jesus? It’d be like arriving early to a funeral for a friend who had died and finding that friend greeting you at the door! You’d be filled with joy and excitement and fear all at the same time. Well, that seems to have been the case with these women because they fall at his feet to worship him and Jesus has to tell them, **“Do not be afraid.”** Then he gives them the same instructions as the angel did: go and tell the other disciples that he has risen from the dead.

So they go and do just that. They tell the disciples about what happened and then later in the day Jesus appears to the twelve disciples as well. The disciples in turn begin to go out and proclaim the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead and this message has been continuously proclaimed for the past 2000 years, starting first in Galilee and then across Europe, Africa and Asia, and now today to every single corner of the globe. And that message about the events of that very first Easter morning that started out so innocently enough, has in both great and small ways managed to change nearly every aspect of world history. Easter morning was above all other days in the history of the world a morning that changed everything!

But need to ask, “Why?” Why did the events of that Easter morning change everything? What is it about the resurrection of Jesus Christ that is so important for us sitting here today? Let me give you two answers to that question. First, Easter morning changed everything because:

## 1. It proved Jesus was who he claimed to be

Most everyone agrees Jesus was at least a great moral teacher. Whether you are a Muslim or a Hindu or even if you don't consider yourself religious at all, most people recognize that Jesus said some pretty remarkable things that would make the world a much better place if would follow them, things such as "Love your enemies" and "Turn the other cheek."

But Jesus also said some other things that won't allow us to merely regard him as a spiritual guru or philosopher. Jesus claimed to be more than just a wise man: Jesus claimed to be God himself. This was a claim he made on a number of occasions in the gospels, but none as clearly as he did in John 8:58. In that passage Jesus was arguing with the Jewish religious leaders about his identity and towards the end of the discussion Jesus mentions that he has seen Abraham. Now Abraham was the forefather of the Jews who lived about 2000 years before Jesus was born, so this was to them as about as outlandish a statement as if I were to tell you that I had lunch yesterday with Alexander the Great. So they respond to him saying,

**“You are not yet fifty years old,’ the Jews said to him, ‘and you have seen Abraham!’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’ At this they picked up stones to stone him...”**

In book of Exodus, when God was giving the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, God revealed his name to the Israelites as **“I am who I am.”** So when Jesus said, **“...before Abraham was born, I am,”** the Jewish religious leaders understood precisely what Jesus was claiming. Jesus was identifying himself with the divine name of God, claiming that he was God. The implication of what Jesus was saying was not at all lost on them, so they went to pick up stones to immediately stone him for what they believed was blasphemy.

So Jesus claimed to be God which you have to admit is a pretty crazy thing to say, unless of course it's true. But how would you know it's true? Well, certainly all the miracles Jesus did provide convincing evidence that he was actually who he claimed to be, but Jesus said one thing in particular that was to prove his credentials beyond a shadow of a doubt. In Mark 8:31, Jesus predicted what would happen to him. It says there that, **“He then began to teach [the disciples] that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.**

Jesus predicted in this passage and at other points during his ministry that he would die and rise again after three days. If he really was God, then he'd be able to come back from the dead. If not, if instead he was just a delusional lunatic, then he'd die and that would be the end of him, obviously proving his claims were false. So the fact that Jesus died and rose again just as he predicted demonstrated what Jesus claimed about himself was true. Easter morning proves Jesus wasn't a madman who made wild, but unsubstantiated claims to be God. The resurrection on Easter

Sunday is the undeniable proof that Jesus was exactly who he claimed to be: Jesus is God made man, crucified but raised from the dead, and that changes everything! So the first answer to our question of how Easter morning changes everything is that the resurrection proves Jesus was exactly who he claimed to be: not merely a great moral teacher but that he was actually God in the flesh.

This then leads us to the second reason why Easter morning changes everything. If the resurrection proves Jesus was God, then that means what he taught about our need for salvation must be also be true. And as we'll soon discover, what Jesus taught about salvation changed everything as well. So our second answer to the question of "How did Easter morning change everything?" is that...

## 2. It proved Jesus offer of salvation was true

Not only did Jesus claim to be God but he also claimed to be the way by which one could find salvation. In John 11:25 Jesus said, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."** Then a few chapters later he said, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."**

Jesus made pretty exclusive claims about himself. He made it clear that the only way to heaven and to have a right relationship with God was through him. But why did Jesus say that? What's so special about Jesus that allows him to categorically exclude everyone else and claim it is through him and him alone that a person can be made right with God? The Bible tells us why.

In Romans 3:23 it says we've **"all sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** Sin is anything that falls short of God's righteous standard for mankind. Now this needs to be explained a bit because many people have the notion that God's standard is similar to what we're used to in school. If we take a test and get more answers right than wrong then we pass the test. If not, we fail the test. So people often have this notion and imagine that God works the same way. They think if we do more good things than bad things, we'll "pass" the test of life and go to heaven when we die.

Even though that's a common view of how God works, that's not actually what the Bible teaches. God identifies his standard for us in Scripture like this: **"Be holy as I am holy."** In other words, God's standard is perfection. No sin whatsoever. Or if I might use the school analogy, God expects us to score 100% on the test of life. You can't get anything wrong. No sin at any time, in any way. From the day you're born to the last breath you take, God expects you to live a life of perfect obedience.

But if that's the case then we have a bit of a problem, don't we? If we take God's holy standard as revealed in the Ten Commandments and measure our lives against them, we fall short. At some point in our lives we've all told a lie or took something that didn't belong to us. And while perhaps we've never actually murdered anybody or cheated on our spouse, Jesus said if you hate your brother, then that's the same as murder and if you look at someone with lust in your heart, then you've committed

adultery as sure as if you had done the physical act itself. I know I can't honestly say I've never lied or never looked at a woman lustfully or have felt never hatred towards somebody else. I've done that far more times than I'd care to admit and I'm sure each of you could say much the same.

So then, none of us have measured up to God's standard because we've all sinned, some in really bad ways and others in ways than may not seem as serious, but the end result is the same. None of us have lived the sinless, perfect life God demands of us. And because God is a holy and righteous God he needs to punish sin. God can't just look the other way and pretend it didn't happen. The Bible tells us, "**the wages of sin is death,**" which is not just physical death but spiritual death. Even if we were guilty of only one small little sin, God would still need to punish that sin by sending us to hell for all eternity. So since we've all sinned in great and small ways, we've all earned the same wages from God. Because of our sin, God must and will punish sin by sending us to hell.

But thankfully that's not the end of the story and that's where Jesus comes in. In the most famous verse of the Bible, John 3:16 it says, "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.**" Jesus came and did something we couldn't do for ourselves. First, he lived a sinless life. He alone lived up to God's perfect standard. Jesus was totally innocent of sin and therefore didn't need to suffer God's wrath for sin. But secondly the Bible tells us Jesus took our sins upon himself. In 1 Peter 2:22 it says, "**He himself bore our sins in his body**" on the cross. In other words, Jesus died in our place. It would be like a judge finding you guilty of murder and sentencing you to death by the electric chair but then the judge steps down from his bench to the floor of the courtroom, takes off your handcuff, puts them on himself and volunteers to take your place. He's willing to suffer the punishment you deserve so you can go free. That's what God did through Jesus. Jesus came down from heaven in order to take the punishment we deserved for our sin by dying on the cross for us. As a result, God no longer needs to punish us for our sins because Christ already suffered God's wrath by dying in our place.

That's why Jesus said no one comes to the Father except through him because he's the only one who could die for us. Since he wasn't guilty of sin, he could die for our sins and take our place on the cross. And since he was also God, his death has an eternal value, which means he can die not just for one person but for every person who has ever lived since his death is of eternal worth in the sight of God.

But in order to receive the benefit Jesus' death on the cross, we need to believe in him. Once again John 3:16 says, "**God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**" To believe in Jesus means to trust him with your life. It means you believe God won't punish you for your sins because you trust that he took care of the guilt of your sins through Jesus' death on the cross. You believe that God poured out his holy wrath against your sin at the cross. But believing in Jesus also means you are willing to surrender control of your life to him. It means turning away from self-centered living

and instead living your life for God, which the Bible calls repentance. And when you do that, when you put your faith in Jesus as the Lord and Savior of your life, God in turn changes you. He takes your life and transforms it from the brokenness and sorrow that comes from living life apart from God to a life of joy as you follow Jesus.

I for one know this personally. The morning that changed everything for me was October 27, 1990, when I became a Christian as an 18-year-old college freshman down at Savannah College of Art and Design. I had grown up attending church and I know a lot about God, but I didn't know him personally. It wasn't until that day over 25 years ago that God transformed my life from one of pursuing sin, of living life on my own terms, to one that believed Jesus died for me on the cross. And more than just Jesus hanging on the cross, he was the resurrected Lord of Easter morning whom I submitted to as the Lord and Savior of my whole life.

What Jesus did that day, saving me from my sin and bringing me into a relationship with God through faith in Christ is the hinge upon which my entire life turns. The single most important date in my life wasn't the day I got married or the day my children were born, as important and as life-changing as they were. The day that literally changed everything else in my life was the day I came to faith in Christ. I wouldn't be here right now if it weren't for that day and I wouldn't have the wife and children I love right now if it weren't for the fact that Jesus died, rose again and called me to surrender my life in faith to him.

## **Conclusion**

So that's why Easter morning changed everything. It proved that Jesus really was God incarnate, the promised Messiah who came to take the punishment we deserved for our sins on the cross. And his resurrection showed that if we believe in him as our Lord and Savior, we too will one day rise again from the dead, not to eternal punishment in hell but to eternal life in heaven. This truth has not only radically changed my life but has changed the lives of millions of people over the past 2000 years.

So we need to close this morning by asking, what about you? Has Jesus changed your life? Maybe you think Jesus was a great moral teacher but you haven't yet placed your faith in him for salvation. If that's you, and the testimony of the empty tomb has shown to you that Jesus really is who he claimed to be, then perhaps this morning could be for you personally the morning that changes everything.

Jesus offers you forgiveness of sins and a new life of joy and peace with God if you turn from your sin and simply believe in him. The Bible says that God loved you so much he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the cross and raised him from the dead so you could know that you will be resurrected from the dead, not to punishment but to eternal life. God says anyone who believes in Jesus, who turns from their self-centered life of sin and surrenders their life to him as their Lord and Savior, will have eternal life. It's as simple as saying a prayer, telling Jesus you believe what the Bible says, that he died for your sins on the cross and was raised from the dead on Easter morning. It's a

matter of surrendering the rest of your life to him so you can spend all of eternity with him one day in heaven.

If that's you, I'm going to close us in prayer in a moment and I'd ask you to pray along with me. I can't imagine a better morning to make that change in your life by turning from sin and believing in the wonderful gift of salvation that God so freely offers to you through faith in Christ. Let's bow our heads together in prayer right now.

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the glory of Easter, when your Son Jesus Christ rose from the dead with the promise of new life for anyone who would believe in him.

You see into the hearts of all men, Lord, and you know those whom you have spoken to through this message this morning. You know those who are listening who have grown weary of the pain and destruction of sin in their life. You have made it plain to them that their self-centered, sinful choices have not brought them the happiness or the peace they long for. You know those who have come to the end of their rope and are thirsty for forgiveness, for healing, and for a deep and satisfying joy that has long eluded them.

Father, for those who desire to be free of the power of sin over them and who long to receive the forgiveness that you offer, move their hearts to seek you. Help them to reach out to you in faith and say, "Lord, I am sorry for my sin. I know that my self-centered choices have hurt and wounded others, have reaped destruction in my life, and most importantly, have been an offense to you, O God. I know I deserve nothing but death and judgment, but yet I trust in your Word, that you in your mercy and grace have given your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die in my place on the cross. I believe Jesus died and rose again from the dead that Easter morning so long ago and that by trusting in him, I am forgiven of all my sins. I no longer want to live my life according to my own selfish desires; I want to live my life to honor and serve you. Please take this broken life and transform it so that I can find joy and peace that comes only from you. I don't want a life of sin anymore; I want to be free of sin and guilt and find the forgiveness you alone offer me through faith in Christ. I believe in you Lord Jesus; help me to follow you all of my days. Amen."

If this is something you've prayed, then this is not a thing to keep to yourself. This morning has become the morning that changes everything in your life and you need to let somebody know. We want to be able to share in your joy with you. If you came with someone today, let them know, or speak with me after the service so we here at Grace Fellowship Church can help you take the next steps in following Christ.

**This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship Church of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2016.**