



## Third Day Living

# Beyond the Grave

Biblical Text: Matthew 28:1-10

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(\* - change slide on screens)

**It all comes together on Easter.** Here, our faith story finds its conclusion! \*  
And here, on cue after a long winter, trees and flowers tell us it is spring! \*

And we will celebrate Easter fully. We'll celebrate with new clothes, Easter brunch, \*Easter baskets and bunnies - also Cadbury eggs, thanks be to God.

And here we are, with friends and family, believers and doubters and those still seeking - it's Easter! Here, in the beauty of this place, with orchestra, organ and choir, we sing Easter \*hymns and raise the "Hallelujah Chorus!"

We celebrate Easter today! We do, even if this year, for us, it is hard to celebrate! I know what that feels like. Does that surprise you? It's true.

In 1971, Easter came a few days after the death of my father. I wasn't sure I even wanted to worship, or just in whom I believed. But I went to Church.

In 2002, just days before Easter, our youngest son was injured, had surgery and was laid up, 225 miles away. I didn't want to go to Church. But I did.

This past year, the sudden loss of my sister leaves me, once again, dealing with grief, seeking Resurrection faith. And I know I'm not the only one.

This week, O.L. Plucker and Dick McMorris from Old Mission, and Robert Schuller, who brought hope to millions, passed from death to resurrection.

The truth is, the longer we live on this planet, the more days will come where we will lose someone we love. To quote Dr. Bennett, \**"And we don't like it. We don't like it one little bit."* Every Easter is hard for someone!

And it is hard for as many reasons as there are people. It's not only times of loss and grief, but also when depression, or doubt, or a hundred other wrestlings of the human heart vie with Easter for our attention.

**But there is help for us, I promise you there is!**

One of my favorite children's books is, *\*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. Everyone can relate. We could fill in our own name.

We've all had a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, or week, or month, or year, or season. And when that happens, even those of us with faith don't look beyond our circumstances. Even if we try, we are stuck.

In those moments, instead of trusting God for the long haul, Eugene Peterson says that we'd just rather, *\* "...find a point of leverage at which we can pry a miracle out of God to satisfy what we think we need at the time."*<sup>1</sup>

We stop our faith at our current experience. But God is not so constrained. Luke 1:37 says, *\*"Nothing is impossible with God."*<sup>2</sup> (Repeat that with me.)

The Bible doesn't say, *"Nothing bad will happen to you if you follow Jesus."* It doesn't say, *"You won't have pain, loss, disappointment, or heartache."* It just doesn't! But it also doesn't say those things are the end of the story.

**But it often feels like it.** It surely must have felt that way to the first witnesses the very first Easter Sunday morning.\*

They weren't going to the tomb expecting to celebrate the resurrection, even though Jesus promised. They were just putting one foot in front of one another, doing what was needed, necessary, trying to get by.

Matthew 28:1 says: *\* After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, \* Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.*<sup>3</sup>

But that doesn't quite capture it. They weren't there just to see the tomb. Mark 16:1-2 is clearer: *\*Early on the first day of the week, they bought spices, so that they might anoint his body for burial.*<sup>4</sup>

And they were afraid when they saw the stone rolled away.\* In fact, Luke says they were terrified. Who wouldn't have been?

What I think is the most important part of the text is next. Matthew 28:5-6:  
*\* But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid...  
 \* He is not here... He has been raised from the dead!"*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*, Copyright © 1992, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1:37, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Matthew 28:1. *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 16:1-2, paraphrased by the author.

<sup>5</sup> Op. Cit, Matthew 28:5-6, condensed. *New Revised Standard Version*.

And in verse seven the angel gives them clear instructions. \* *“Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised... \* he is going ahead of you to Galilee... there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.”* \*

It is his message for us also. He is risen! Christ goes ahead of us!

He is at work beyond doubt and despair, sin and shame, fear and failure. He goes beyond divorce and disappointment, layoffs and loss, heartaches and hell. **He goes beyond, ahead of us, and beckons us come there with him!**

The Psalmist, in the 30<sup>th</sup> Psalm, sings the message this way \* *“Weeping comes but for a moment, but joy comes in the morning.”* (Psalm 30:5)

John Claypool, in his marvelous book, The Hopeful Heart, said it this way:

\* **“Resurrection means the worst things are *never* the last things!”**<sup>6</sup>

**It changed my life and faith when I read those words.** And I can imagine how it might change your life and faith, if you really believed them too.

My short summary of Claypool’s truth is this, \***“The worst thing is never the last thing.”** That’s what this series is about. The worst thing is never the last thing. Even when that worst thing is death, **it isn’t the last thing for God!**

That’s the message of Easter. When God is involved, things don’t have to be the way they were! They don’t even have to be the way they are!

**The evidence in the lives of Christians is not scientific, but it is compelling!**

Consider W.E. Sangster, in 1956, he was the most renowned Methodist preacher in all of England. Then at the age of 56, he was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s Disease. Within a year he couldn’t preach or even speak. He had to leave his pulpit, the giant \*Westminster Methodist Central Hall in London.

**But the final chapter of his life wasn’t finished.** In 1960, on Easter morning, just a few weeks before he died, he wrote to his daughter. He said, \**“It is terrible to wake up on Easter and have no voice to shout, ‘He is risen!’”*

\**“But it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout.”*

Shout, sing, believe, hope! Don’t write the conclusion to your story before God writes the final chapter! **Christ goes ahead of you, beyond what you can see!** Don’t leave here stuck - wherever you are - when God offers you Easter! \***The worst thing is never the last thing!** Never! **Hallelujah!**

<sup>6</sup> John R. Claypool, The Hopeful Heart, Copyright © 2003, Church Publishing, Incorporated, Page 77.