

THE FIRST EASTER

John 20

What was the first Easter like? You could not compare it to the Easters we've experienced, because there was no frame of reference for comparison. The first Easter that I remember is indelibly etched in my memory by the help of a photograph of my brother and me standing in front of the church parsonage wearing our new suits, holding our zipper Bibles in the way we had observed our preacher father held his Bible. The photo reveals a rather prophetic glimpse into our future. The next outstanding Easter was when my brother and I were again all dressed up and we got into an altercation in our backyard in Florida. The wrestling match that brought us rolling about in our best clothes brought such parental wrath, that we never did that again. Another photo that has helped keep a very special Easter memory is a photo of my family surrounding me as I was holding my Scofield Reference Bible in front of The Baptist Evangelistic Temple. I had just preached my first official sermon, Easter morning, 1970, 54 years ago this past Friday. I was 18 years old, with my whole life in front of me. Easter probably brings back a lot of memories to most everyone hearing my message this morning. To some it represents the longest church services of the year. To others, it's a marvelous Easter basket that, unlike Halloween when you had to get out and work for the candy, you would awaken on Easter morning with this basket full of candy that was supposed to have been brought by the mysterious Easter Bunny. It was the one and only day that parents allowed their kids to have chocolate for breakfast, that is, after having eaten something nourishing first. Then it was off to church. To some of another faith or perhaps no faith, there is no Easter memory. To those who have been a Christian for a long time, or those who have recently become Christian, or those who have not yet become a Christian, let's return and find out the true meaning of Easter. We will not be going on an Easter egg hunt or line you up for an Easter parade. Let us begin with:

I. THE DARKNESS BEFORE THE DAWN

John 20:1-15

The wording, "...it was yet dark...and we know not...," taken from John 20:1, 2 tells the mindset of Mary Magdalene, the lady delivered from a very dark existence, now plunged into another kind of darkness that is most disturbing. Her Lord had been crucified and buried and now she comes to pay tribute to Him by giving her Lord a more formal anointing of His body, only to find that His body was gone. Mary could not find Jesus! What do you do when you cannot find Jesus? What did Mary do? She ran to find Peter and John. These were two men who knew Jesus better than anyone. Herein is a great lesson for all. If you would like to find Jesus and you don't know where to go, find someone who knows Him well. Yes, it very dark for Mary—but dawn was approaching! Psalm 30:5b: "...in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Peter and John bolt for the tomb. Upon entering they found the grave clothes had been vacated, the napkin that covered our Lord's face had been neatly folded—but no Jesus! Mary lingers and then enters the tomb herself and finds two angels, one at the foot, the other at the head where Jesus had lain. It is rather interesting that Mary carries on a conversation with heavenly beings as though she were just talking to anyone else. Her desire for an answer outweighed all her fear. John 20:13: "And they say unto her,

Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.” Unbeknownst to Mary, our Lord was standing behind her and again she is asked, this time by Christ Himself as disclosed in John 20:15: “Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.” How very touching; Mary is willing singlehandedly to take the body of Jesus to the proper place of burial. But Jesus is finished with tombs!

II. THE DEFINING DAWN

John 20:16-23

John 20:16: “Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.” At first, Mary thought she was seeing the gardener. There are differing reasons why Mary did not recognize her Lord. Perhaps in this glorified state, Christ looked different. When John saw Jesus on the Isle of Patmos He apparently had the look of “The Ancient of Days”, notice the comparison in Daniel 7:9: “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.” Revelation 1:14: “His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire.” I believe our Lord’s features hadn’t changed except for an added brilliance. On the other hand, perhaps His countenance was similar to when Jesus kept the two disciples on the road to Emmaus from recognizing Him until the day was ended.

Once Jesus spoke Mary’s name she immediately responded. John 20:16: “Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.” The dawn had come and it is true, Jesus had risen indeed! Mary quickly grabbed our Lord (probably around His ankles), restraining our Lord. Jesus had to tell her in her excitement that she was preventing Him from His need to get some other things done. She quickly went and told the other disciples.

The disciples were now fearful that they too will be taken and killed for being the faithful followers of Jesus. Our Lord in His magnanimous way appears to the disciples later that day. John 20:21, 22: “Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” So Jesus encourages His disciples to get busy. They have but 2,000 plus years to get things ready for His return.

III. RESURRECTION MEANS RELATIONSHIP

John 20: 17, 24-30

Notice the wording in John 20:17: “Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” What an honor! All who know Christ as Savior and Lord have the incredible privilege of calling God their Father!

Thomas was not in the company of the other disciples when Jesus first appeared. John 20:25-27: “The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after

eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." How precious and how like our Savior Who said in Matthew 11:29b: "...I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Thomas' response declared the greatest singular statement in Scripture defining the Deity of Christ. John 20:28: "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."

CONCLUSION:

Jesus tells Thomas that those who believe without seeing have the even greater personal satisfaction and blessing. Reaffirming II Corinthians 5:7: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." We must stand by faith on the promises of God! II Corinthians 1:20: "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." If we are bereft of faith we cannot even begin to please God! Hebrews 11:6: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." And we Christians have been commissioned by our Lord to communicate this faith to others that they, too, may find Christ as well as we. John 20:31: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

John 20:30: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book." In the last verse of John's Gospel, he records these similar and intriguing words: John 21:25: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."

Won't it be wonderful when we join our Lord in our glorified body and behold those myriad of other things that He did that we knew nothing of!

-Pastor Pope-