

JESUS
LIFTED
UP

A HOLY WEEK DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Jesus Lifted Up

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SUNDAY

MARK 11:1-10

AND THOSE WHO WENT
BEFORE AND THOSE
FOLLOWED WERE
SHOUTING “HOSANNA!
BLESSED IS HE WHO
COMES IN THE NAME OF
THE LORD! BLESSED IS
THE COMING OF THE
KINGDOM OF OUR
FATHER DAVID! HOSANNA
IN THE HIGHEST!”

MARK 11:9-10

THE day was March 29 of the year AD 33. And the people of Jerusalem were eagerly waiting. News that a man from Nazareth had raised his friend from the dead was spreading like wildfire. He had gone into hiding after the miracle, but the feast of the Passover was at hand and the city was waiting for him to show. The people were excited that this man just might be the one to bring the long awaited Kingdom of God. But not everyone joined the excitement. Fearing what the Romans might do if the people try to make him King, the leaders of the Jews go to Caiaphas, the High Priest, for counsel. His wisdom is this: "It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish,". And from that point on they sought a way to kill Jesus.

Jesus' face had been set toward Jerusalem for some time now. He knew what awaited him there. And his gaze was fixed upon his coming cross. As Jesus drew near to the Bethany, he sent two of his disciples into the village to find a colt that had never been ridden. His goal was to make an entrance into Jerusalem. Bethany was a small village on the Mount of Olives. It was about a quarter of a mile from the mount upon which Jerusalem sat. There was a major road that ran down the Mount of Olives, through the Kidron Valley, and up to the city of David. This road was visible from much of the city and would not have been the path into the city if you were trying to go unnoticed. There are much less noticeable ways to come into town.

But Jesus was not trying to go unnoticed. He wanted a grand entrance. Jesus at once sat upon the colt and began his entry into the city. To us

the animal seems insignificant, but not to the Jews. Riding the colt was a symbol of kingship. The kings of Israel at their coronations would ride into the city upon a colt. The prophet Zechariah spoke of a day when a new King would ride on a colt into Jerusalem. And the people around Jesus picked up on this significance. They began to throw their cloaks upon the path that Jesus rode. They began to wave palm branches, a symbol of triumph and victory. And they began to shout the praises of their coming King: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" This would have been quite a spectacle. The shouts would have resounded through the Kidron Valley. There's no doubt that everyone in the city would have heard the commotion. And the sight of Jesus upon this colt would have sent a clear and bold message — the King is coming into the city.

The Son of David was now here. The One who was coming in the name of the Lord to shepherd his people had now come. Jesus was here to save his people. The word Hosanna comes from the Old Testament. It means "save us now." It is both a shout of praise and a cry for help at the same time. Over and over the people cried aloud, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Save us now!" And that is exactly why Jesus had come. But he had not come to overthrow the Romans. He had not come to set up Israel as their own state. He had not come to establish a new form of religion. No, he had come to lay down his life. And it would be through the laying down of his life that he would indeed save his people. The hour had come for Jesus to be lifted up.



MONDAY

MATTHEW 21:12-17

AND JESUS ENTERED THE
TEMPLE AND DROVE OUT
ALL WHO SOLD AND
BOUGHT IN THE TEMPLE,
AND HE OVERTURNED THE
TABLES OF THE MONEY-
CHANGERS AND THE SEATS
OF THOSE WHO SOLD
PIGEONS. HE SAID TO THEM,
“IT IS WRITTEN, ‘MY HOUSE
SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE
OF PRAYER,’ BUT YOU MAKE
IT A DEN OF ROBBERS.”

MATTHEW 21:12-13

THOUSANDS of people had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. It was a busy Monday morning and the crowds were buzzing with what happen the day before. It was no doubt the talk of the town. The city had just welcomed Jesus to the city as the coming King! So what would he do know? Would he try to overthrow the Romans or gather the Jews to his side? Would he seek to overthrow the leadership of the chiefs priests and the Pharisees? What would be in store for Jerusalem with Jesus there?

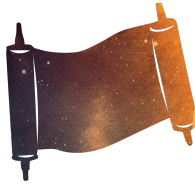
Jesus had returned to the city from staying the night in Bethany at the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And he went straight to the temple. But he didn't come to pray. He didn't come to teach. He didn't come to politic. He had a different agenda. The gospel writers tell us that he began to drive the money changers and vendors out of the temple. He turned over their tables. And he drove the animals out with a whip. What would cause Jesus to do such a thing? This is very bad PR for someone trying to become Israel's next King? What made Jesus so angry? His anger was kindled against them because they had made the temple "a den of robbers."

Jesus saw that the poor were being abused. We are told that part of Jesus' disgust was directed toward those who sold pigeons. The normal animal to bring to the temple was a lamb. But because of God's compassion for the poor, provisions were made for those who could not afford a lamb. Pigeons were a worthy substitute for the poor. Selling the pigeons would have been a good thing. Maybe people had traveled too far to bring their own lamb. Or maybe they just couldn't afford one. But the problem was in

the ways they were selling the pigeons. Prices were raised to maximize profits. The quality of animals was lowered to minimize overhead costs. All in all the poor were being abused. The temple was no place to make a profit. They had rejected the purpose of the temple — a place for people to worship God.

And on top of that, he saw that foreigners were being abused. Jesus' disgust was also directed toward the money changers. People from all around would come to the temple to worship. And they would come with their own currency. Having people to change money was a good thing. But again the problem was in the ways in which they were changing money. They were being unfair in their exchanges. Rates were high to again maximize profits. Fees were high as well to ensure that business was good. All in all the foreigners were being abused. The temple was not a place to make a profit. It was to be a "house of prayer for all nations."

They had made the temple a curse rather than a blessing. Jesus, quoting from Isaiah, said the temple was to be a house of prayer. Men and women were to come to experience the blessings of knowing God. They were to be blessed by the teaching of the law and by the prayers of the priests. They were to be blessed by the making of sacrifices to atone for their sins. The temple was to be a place of blessing. But the Jews had turned it into a money making machine. People were being abused rather than being blessed. It had become a curse. This is why Jesus was angry. This is why he did what he did. And it was time for someone to come and restore true worship for God's people.



TUESDAY

MATTHEW 22:15-40

AND HE SAID TO HIM, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. THIS IS THE GREAT AND FIRST COMMANDMENT. AND A SECOND IS LIKE IT: YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS DEPEND ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS."

MATTHEW 22:37-40

JESUS' actions in the temple were the last straw. He had gone too far. And it was time for the religious leaders to get rid of him. They decided to round up as many people as they could find and try to bombard him with questions hoping that he might get entangled by his words. Now the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees were not known to share much company. On many counts they even considered each other enemies. But nothing unites enemies more than a common foe. And this foe's name was Jesus.

The first question came from the Pharisees and the Herodians. After some introductory flattery, they posed his first trap. "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" This appeared to be a very tough question for Jesus. If he said "no," then they would accuse him of insurrection against Rome. If he said "yes," then they would accuse him of having no loyalty to the Jewish nation. But knowing their hearts, Jesus asked for a coin. And revealing their hypocrisy, someone pulled a Roman coin out of his pocket. "Whose inscription is on this?" Jesus asked. "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus told them to give to Caesar what is his and give to God what is his. It is not wrong to give someone what is owed, no matter how cruel his crimes. But the greater crime is failing to give themselves to God, whose image they bear.

Then the Sadducees stepped up to pose a question about the resurrection. This whole episode is ripe with hypocrisy because they did not believe in a literal resurrection from the dead. "Suppose", they questioned, "a woman had been married to a family of seven brothers. She married each successive brother as his elder died. Whose husband is she going to be in the

resurrection?” Jesus then scolded them for neither knowing the power of God nor the Scriptures. We will not be married in heaven, that is not married to other people; we, as the church, will be married to Christ. And more than that the Scriptures say that by the power of God we will not be among the dead but among the living. Jesus points out not only their hypocrisy, but their unbelief in the power of God to raise the dead.

After failing twice to trap Jesus, the Pharisees put forward one of their best — a lawyer who made his living by studying and teaching the Law of God. Maybe Jesus was just good at getting out of jams. But did he know the Law? Maybe if they could show his unfamiliarity with the Law, they could persuade the people not to follow him. “What is the greatest command,” the lawyer asks. Jesus quotes the *shema*: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” And the second was like it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two laws. Jesus knew that at the heart of the Law was the command to love God and love others, something that these men obviously were not doing.

Love is at the heart of what God commands of us. But, all of us, just like these men, have a problem of the heart. We do not love rightly. But that is why Jesus was in Jerusalem. That is why he was preparing for what would take place in three short days. That is why his eyes are fixed to his cross. He has come to die so that we would be made new and so that we would be free to truly love God and truly love others.



W E D N E S D A Y

JOHN 12:1-8

MARY THEREFORE TOOK A
POUND OF EXPENSIVE
OINTMENT MADE FROM
PURE NARD, AND
ANOINTED THE FEET OF
JESUS AND WIPED HIS
FEET WITH HER HAIR. THE
HOUSE WAS FILLED WITH
THE FRAGRANCE OF THE
PERFUME.

JOHN 12:3

DEBATING Jesus in public was no longer an option for the Jewish leaders. It was clear that Jesus couldn't be trapped and that he had the hearts of the people. So as Jesus returned to the temple on Wednesday for more teaching, the high priests continued to plot his murder. Not much happened on this day. However, Matthew and Mark use this space to place an event that John tells us happened the day before Jesus came into Jerusalem. As each day passes in this holy week, Jesus is getting closer and closer to his crucifixion. And so we turn now the story of Jesus' friend Mary as she prepares him for the grave.

We are told that while Jesus was in the village of Bethany, he was reclining at table together with his disciples and dear friends. At some point during the meal, Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, came to where Jesus was sitting and anointed him with oil. She broke a flask of oil and poured it upon his head and feet. And the smell of the oil filled the entire home.

The perfume was made from spikenard, a very expensive type of ointment. Mark tells us that the flask was the value of about three hundred denarii, which was close to the wages an average person would earn in a year. And the flask was made so that once it was broken, the perfume must be used. It was like breaking the seal on a \$30,000 bottle of wine. This isn't something you do by accident! The flask would no doubt have been very precious to Mary. Perhaps it was a family heirloom. Perhaps it was a prized gift. It may have even been something that she was saving to use for her wedding. But whatever plans she had for her treasure, Mary had found a

greater treasure and the best possible use she could think of for her oil.

It makes sense that the disciples were upset over this action, especially Judas, who was in charge of the money and was a thief. What a waste! Think about how many hungry mouths that could have fed. Think about how many cloaks that could have bought for the naked. Think about how many debts that could have paid off. But Mary wasn't thinking about the poor. Her heart was fixed on another. Jesus turned to his disciples and scolded them. The poor would always be around. But he would not be with them much longer. Mary saw clearly what they failed to see — that Jesus would soon lay down his life for the sins of his people. And she wanted him to be ready.

An oil like this would have no doubt been very potent, especially if the whole bottle was poured upon someone. During all the events of the Holy Week Jesus would have been covered with the aroma of this perfume. Anyone who came near would have smelled it. It could have been smelled on him as he rode into Jerusalem, as he cleared the temple, and as he debated with the religious leaders. His disciples could have smelled it as they ate the Passover, as Jesus washed their feet, and as he taught them in on the Mount of Olives. The men that arrested him, the council that tried him, and the guards that beat him would all have smelled it. And to every single person it would have been a familiar aroma — the aroma of someone prepared for burial. Jesus knew that he would soon lay down his life in death. And he rejoiced at Mary's costly act of love that will be remembered forever.



THURSDAY

MARK 14:12-25

AND HE TOOK A CUP,
AND WHEN HE HAD
GIVEN THANKS HE GAVE
IT TO THEM, AND THEY
ALL DRANK OF IT. AND
HE SAID TO THEM, "THIS
IS MY BLOOD OF THE
COVENANT, WHICH IS
POURED OUT FOR
MANY.

MARK 14:23-24

EVER since Jesus was a little boy, the Jewish month of Nisan would have been very special to him. For on the fifteenth day of Nisan the Festival of the Passover would begin. It was a week-long holiday to remember the Exodus from Egypt. It was a time to remember how God has passed over Israel but brought judgment upon Egypt. The first night of the festival began with a special meal. It was a meal the Jesus had eaten for many years. But this year the meal carried a great weight — it would be the last meal Jesus would eat before his death.

The first day of the festival fell on the Thursday just before Jesus' death. And as that day came, Jesus instructed his disciples prepare for the Passover meal that night. They secured an upper room, as Jesus directed. A lamb was sacrificed for the meal. And the bread and wine were prepared. Then later that evening Jesus gathered with only his twelve disciples to remember the past and to celebrate the new Exodus that was soon to come. Jesus had longed to be with them at his last supper. He had longed to serve them by washing their feet. And he had longed to announce for the first time that the New Covenant had now arrived.

The Old Covenant was broken. In fact, it was broken even before Moses came down from the mountain to deliver it. The history of the people of Israel is a history of covenant unfaithfulness. God had saved his people from the bondage of Egypt and called them to live in covenant love toward him. But their hearts lead them away as they gave themselves to other gods and idols. This covenant was surely broken. And God's people needed a new one. And this is exactly

what God promised to give. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both spoke about the coming of a new covenant. This New Covenant would change hearts, forgive sins, and pour out God's Spirit. Where the old failed, the new would not.

But God's people were left waiting. Years turned to generations. Generations turned to centuries. It seemed that God had forgotten his promise. Had Israel strayed too far for God to bring them this covenant? When would God come and save his people? When would this New Covenant come? All of these questions, no doubt, filled the hearts of God's people in Jesus' day, especially the disciples. They had seen the wondrous works of Jesus. They had heard his teachings. They had confessed him to be the Christ.

And then as they were eating the Passover with him, they heard what their hearts had longed for. After breaking bread and explaining that it represented his broken body, Jesus took the cup and said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." It was finally here. God's New Covenant with his people had come. And Jesus was ushering it in. But it would not be without blood. When God inaugurated the Old Covenant, Moses was told to take blood and sprinkle it on the people. Blood has to be shed in order for a holy God and sinful man to be in covenant together. This is why Jesus said it was his blood that was bringing in the New Covenant. Jesus knew that he was hours away from being beaten, from being pierced with thorns, and from being nailed to a cross. His blood was about to be shed. And it would bring with it a New Covenant of hope and salvation for God's people.



FRIDAY

PART ONE

LUKE 22:47-71

SO THEY ALL SAID, "ARE YOU THE SON OF GOD, THEN?" AND HE SAID TO THEM, "YOU SAY THAT I AM." THEN THEY SAID, "WHAT FURTHER TESTIMONY DO WE NEED? WE HAVE HEARD IT OURSELVES FROM HIS OWN LIPS."

LUKE 22:70-71

THE religious leaders decided that the Feast was no time to deal with Jesus. That is until an opportunity approached them that was too good to pass by. One of his very own disciples had come and asked what sort of payment they would give if he turned Jesus over. The Jewish leaders jumped at the opportunity and paid Judas thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus.

Just past midnight on Friday morning, while Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, Judas approached him and kissed his cheek. The guards swept in and arrested Jesus. And so began what Jesus had three times foretold: "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

The events that took place in the middle of the night were quite astonishing. He was brought before Annas the former High Priest. He was brought before Caiaphas the High Priest. He was beaten, mocked, and spit upon. He stood before the whole Council of the Jews. One of his best disciples, Peter, denied him three times. He was brought before Herod. He was brought before Pilate, twice and was condemned to death. In a matter of six hours, Jesus stood trial six times.

The meeting of the Jewish Council in the middle of the night was not exactly protocol. It was the kind of thing done when things are being kept secret. If they were going to condemn Jesus it would have to be under the cover of darkness. And so they sought false testimony against

Jesus. But none could be found. Some stepped forward and charged him with speaking against the temple. And when he claimed to be the Son of God, that was all the proof they need that he was indeed guilty of blasphemy.

Even the Roman portion of the trial was a mockery of justice. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod who hoped that Jesus might preform a miracle for him. But after Jesus refused to be his court jester, Herod put royal clothes on him to mock this would-be king. Pilate, then, questioned Jesus again and found him innocent. But because he feared the crowds, he condemned Jesus to death. All the water in the world couldn't wash Pilate's hands clean of this horrific crime.

Now, Jesus was very clear about who he was. He clearly told the Council that he was the Son of Man — that figure from Daniel 7 who would come as God's King to reign over all the nations of the earth. He told Pilate that he was a king, but that his kingdom is not of this world. Here, standing in front of them, was the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the very One to whom God would give the right to reign over all the earth. And in their pride they refused to bow the knee in worship.

Jesus trial was a display of great humility and meekness. Like a lamb, he didn't argue back. He didn't revile back. He didn't mock back. He didn't fight back. The very King of Heaven accepted his Father's will and was condemned to death. For he knew that by his stripes we would be healed. And he knew that by his death he would rescue they very people who would reject and deny him.



FRIDAY

PART TWO

JOHN 19:1-37

SO PILATE DELIVERED
HIM OVER TO THEM TO BE
CRUCIFIED. THEY TOOK
JESUS, AND HE WENT
OUT, BEARING HIS OWN
CROSS, TO THE PLACE
CALLED THE PLACE OF A
SKULL, WHICH IN
ARAMAIC IS CALLED
GOLGOTHA. THERE THEY
CRUCIFIED HIM.

JOHN 19:16-18

JUST hours before Jesus was to be betrayed, he went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He took with him Peter, James, and John. The burden of what was about to take place was heavy upon him. And he went to the only place that seemed natural to him — his Heavenly Father. It was there in the garden that he prayed the most difficult prayer of his life: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” Three times he pleaded with the Father to let the cup of wrath pass. And three times he submitted to the Father’s perfect will. Jesus’ praying was so intense that he began to sweat droplets of blood. The weight of all the world was now upon his shoulders. His life purpose was now unfolding. The very thing that he had been sent for was about to happen. The hour of his death had come.

Jesus’ death was one of the most brutal ways to die. He had already been beaten many times by the time that he arrived at the feet of Pilate. But his suffering would not end there. Jesus was flogged with the Cat o’ Nine tails, which would have left his back a mangled mess of flesh. A crown of thorns was forced upon his head as he was beaten even more. Nails were driven through his wrists and ankles as he was hung on the cross. It would have been very difficult to even recognize Jesus at this point.

But that wasn’t the end of his suffering. Death by crucifixion came through suffocation. The position in which criminals were hung made it very difficult for them to breathe. They would have to push themselves up on the nails in order to take a breath. This would happen for hours

until the person simply had no strength left. This is why they would often break the legs of the criminals to speed up the process. Jesus suffered for hours in this way. With every breath he took he felt the bitter sting of pain and death.

But his suffering did not end there either. It was no accident that Jesus was killed on a cross. In fact, there is an incredible amount of significance with his dying on a tree. We are told in the Law that any person who is hung on a tree is cursed by God. The fact that Jesus was killed on a tree shows us that not only did he suffer under the hands of men, but he suffered under the almighty wrath of God. As he hung on the cross he bore the entire weight of God's wrath toward the sins of his people. He bore the curse of our sin on his body as he hung there dying. In those six hours on the cross, Jesus spent an eternity in hell for every person he would save. He starred the fullness of our punishment in the face. And he bore it on the tree.

And this is at the heart of our faith. Paul puts it like this: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The life that we could not live, Jesus lived for us. The death that we deserved to die, Jesus died for us. At the cross we see the most beautiful of exchanges: Jesus takes our sin; we take his righteousness. At the cross we find the greatest display of justice and mercy: Jesus pays the penalty; guilty sinners go free. At the cross we see most triumphal of victories: Jesus dies; death is defeated. And at the cross we see the most amazing affirmations of love: we were sinners; Christ died for us.



SATURDAY

MATTHEW 27:57—66

AND JOSEPH TOOK THE
BODY AND WRAPPED IT
IN A CLEAN LINEN
SHROUD AND LAID IT IN
HIS OWN NEW TOMB,
WHICH HE HAD CUT IN
THE ROCK. AND HE
ROLLED A GREAT
STONE TO THE
ENTRANCE OF THE
TOMB AND WENT AWAY.

MATTHEW 27:59–60

“FATHER into your hands I commit my spirit!” And at that saying Jesus breathed his final breath on the cross. The moment for which Jesus had been sent had now arrived. His life’s purpose was now being fulfilled. The earth trembled. The day was turned to night. The curtain of the temple rent from top to bottom. It was as if all of creation knew what was happening to its Creator. And in that moment it happened — Jesus died.

At this point nearly all the followers of Jesus had scattered out of sight. Only the apostle John, a few women, and two unlikely characters remained. One was a man by the name of Joseph from the town of Arimathea. He was a rich man who was also a member of the Jewish Council. Unlike the rest of the bunch, he was deeply distressed over the events that had taken place that day in Jerusalem. And despite whatever ramifications he might face, in his courage he went to Pilate and asked that he might have the body of Jesus. Pilate, amazed that Jesus had died so quickly, granted Joseph’s request. The other man was someone we have seen before. It was Nicodemus, who was also a member of the Council. Bringing a mixture of burial spices, he came to assist Joseph in burying the body of Jesus. The men took Jesus’ body, anointed it with the spices, wrapped it in a shroud, and put the body of their Maker in a grave cut in the rock of the ground.

On the dawn of the next morning some of the chief priests and members of the Council came to Pilate with another request concerning the body of Jesus. They told him how Jesus had told his followers that after he died he would rise again. For fear that the disciples would steal the body they ask Pilate to guard the tomb. Pilate

ordered that his men go and guard the tomb until the third day to ensure that no one steal the body. And so they did.

And this is where the story leaves us. On this Saturday, we are left with a dead body, wrapped in grave clothes, buried deep in a tomb. We are left with a grave sealed with a large stone and guarded by the world's best soldiers. We are left with a Savior who has died to save his people, but is still held by the power of darkness. A King who is still under the reign of death. And a Man of Sorrows who still feels the bitter sting of the grave.

This day was no doubt filled with much sorrow. Mary grieved for the loss of her son. The disciples mourned the death of their teacher and friend. The city was disappointed as they watched their hopes for a better kingdom lay buried in the grave. But this day was also a day of rest. This day was the Sabbath — a day to remember how God rested from his work in creation. And now on this Sabbath day, the Creator rested again, this time from his work of salvation. He had finished his work on the cross. And so Jesus rested.

But it was not a day for sorrow and Sabbath alone. It was also a day of great hope. Jesus lay lifeless in the grave just as he said he would. He had laid down his life and he was ready to take it up again. This was a day for hope because it was not the end of the story. A day was coming for light to shine in the darkness. A day was coming for the power of sin and death to be broken. A day was coming for hope to become reality. There would be great joy coming when morning dawns.



SUNDAY

LUKE 24:1-12

THE MEN SAID TO
THEM, "WHY DO YOU
SEEK THE LIVING
AMONG THE DEAD? HE
IS NOT HERE, BUT HAS
RISEN. REMEMBER
HOW HE TOLD YOU
WHILE HE WAS STILL IN
GALILEE!

LUKE 24:5-6

MORNING dawned. Two women by the name of Mary were up together early that morning. The damp dew had settled in. And the half light of the breaking dawn would have been enough for them to make their way to the place where Jesus was laid. They came bearing spices that they might make sure that Jesus had received a proper burial. The brisk of the cool air was in their breath as they discussed how they would move the stone that sealed the grave of their Lord. What exactly they were thinking we do not know. They were no doubt heart broken over the events that had taken place just two short days before. They had seen the horrors of Golgotha with their own eyes. They had heard the cries of their beloved friend from his shameful cross. And they watched as his body was taken from the cross, wrapped in linen, and sealed at the tomb. Their pain was too deep for words. Their pain, however, would not tarry.

As they approached the tomb, the earth trembled and the stone that had once covered the tomb was now moved. And immediately they saw two men, arrayed in light at the entrance to the tomb. These angels, sensing their fear, told them to be still and be not afraid. Then came the announcement that would change the world forever. "I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said,". He is not here, they said. He is among the living, not the dead.

What news! What glorious news! Their Savior who bled and died was now alive. Their King who laid down his life had taken it up again. Their master whose dead body laid under the curse of death had now defeated the grave. We can only

imagine the amazement and joy that must have filled their hearts, to be there for the very first announcement of Jesus' resurrection. Sin was defeated. Death was dead. And the grave was empty. Jesus was alive. Their hearts rejoiced!

Nothing greater has ever happened in all the history of the world. The resurrection of Jesus is the most profound and world-altering event to ever take place. And it is the hinge-pin of our faith. At the heart of the Christian message is this: a man lived, died, and on the third day walked out of the very tomb in which he was laid. Our faith is empty without the empty tomb.

The resurrection is the proof that Jesus' sacrifice was accepted by God. It is the sign of approval from a loving Father to his Beloved Son. It is the seal upon him that he is the Christ, the Son of David who is to reign over all of creation. It is the declaration that sin, Satan, and death have been vanquished by King Jesus. It is the evidence that Jesus is who he said he was — the God-man. It is the reminder that God keeps all his promises and will bless all the families of the earth in Christ. It is the testimony that those in Christ will one day be raised to live a resurrection life just as he now forever lives.

There is no greater thing to celebrate. There is no story greater to be told. There is no King greater to be worshiped. And there is no joy greater to be found. Jesus died for our sins. And he was raised. He was lifted up so that we might be saved and so that he might raise us up with him on the last day. That's good news worth celebrating not just one day a year, but every moment of every day of our lives, now and forever.

HE IS THE IMAGE OF THE
INVISIBLE GOD, THE FIRSTBORN
OF ALL CREATION. FOR BY HIM
ALL THINGS WERE CREATED, IN
HEAVEN AND ON EARTH, VISIBLE
AND INVISIBLE, WHETHER
THRONES OR DOMINIONS OR
RULERS OR AUTHORITIES—ALL
THINGS WERE CREATED
THROUGH HIM AND FOR HIM.
AND HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS,
AND IN HIM ALL THINGS HOLD
TOGETHER. AND HE IS THE HEAD
OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH. HE IS
THE BEGINNING, THE FIRSTBORN
FROM THE DEAD, THAT IN
EVERYTHING HE MIGHT BE
PREEMINENT. FOR IN HIM ALL THE
FULLNESS OF GOD WAS PLEASED
TO DWELL, AND THROUGH HIM
TO RECONCILE TO HIMSELF ALL
THINGS, WHETHER ON EARTH OR
IN HEAVEN, MAKING PEACE BY
THE BLOOD OF HIS CROSS.

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20