

Easter Makes All the Difference!

Scripture -- Matthew 28:1-6

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene & the other Mary to see the sepulcher. And behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, & came & rolled back the stone from the door, & sat upon it.

His countenance was like lightening, & his raiment white as snow:

And for fear of him the keepers (guards) did shake, & became as dead men.

And the angel answered & said unto the women, "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. **He is not here: for he is risen**, as he said.

Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

On Good Friday, as Jesus hung upon the Cross, He uttered those words found in **Matthew 27:46**, "**My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?**" This is the **only time** that Jesus called on God without addressing Him as **Father!**

In that moment -- Jesus was feeling the very depth of loneliness. In that moment -- Jesus felt the pain of rejection & misunderstanding. **But even more painful than human rejection for Jesus was the fact that even God Himself appeared to have abandoned Him.**

That was on Good Friday! -- But Easter Sunday tells an entirely different story! On Resurrection Sunday we hear only shouts of **Victory & joy!** The angel reported: "**He is not here: for he is risen.**"

JESUS IS ALIVE! God has raised Him from the dead! In all of history, no three words have counted for greater importance than these: -- "**He is risen!**" There is no longer any groan of loneliness. There is no talk of abandonment. There is only **joy & blessing & excitement** at the realization that **Jesus lives. Easter Sunday makes all the difference!**

On Friday Jesus suffered -- & was crucified. On Friday Jesus felt abandoned by God the Father. On Friday Jesus laid down His life at Calvary. On Friday Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb. **But on Easter Sunday morning, Jesus arose from the grave -- alive & victorious!** EASTER changes the entire picture! EASTER changes defeat into victory! EASTER changes despair into hope! EASTER changes darkness into light! EASTER changes the dark hour of the soul into purpose & meaning! **God had not forsaken His Son!** God the Father was only working out His divine plan & purpose in the life & death of His only Son, Jesus.

If you & I are totally honest this morning, everyone of us would probably admit that at one time or another, **we too have felt abandoned -- forsaken by God!** We have all experienced that dark hour of the soul when we felt like crying out: "My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me." We have experienced that feeling of **Abandonment**. We have felt all alone -- forsaken -- deserted -- **even by GOD!** Our inner spirit cries out saying: --"**My God, my God, why?**"

Well, I have **GOOD NEWS** for you this morning: -- **EASTER makes all the difference!** EASTER brings us a message of **HOPE!** EASTER paints a different picture all together! There are some important lessons EASTER teaches us today: --

1. Easter tells us that GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL!

Sometimes we feel as if life is out of control! The pain of our lives is so intense. The humiliation is too great. The sorrow is so overwhelming that we can no longer stand it. **We feel as if things are just out of control!** Even the most committed of Christians experience such thoughts at times.

If you had been one of the disciples of Jesus, & you stood beneath the Cross of Jesus, & there you witnessed the Crucifixion first hand, **you would no doubt have felt that everything was totally out of control!** **But Easter Sunday paints an entirely different picture!** The disciples soon realized that God was in **complete control!** That, in fact, God gave meaning & purpose to those events which took place on Good Friday. Today we sing about that **Old Rugged Cross**, & we use the symbol of the Cross as a sign of our **redemption!** **EASTER tells us that God is still in control!**

In the 16th chapter of Acts, we are told a story about two missionaries, named Paul & Silas. Whipped & beaten, they were cast into prison. Their bodies ached; their feet were fastened in stocks. We are told that "**at midnight**"; that is the dark hour of the soul! **During the dark night of the soul it is always midnight!**

I believe Paul & Silas were tempted to feel like things were out of control! So they "prayed & sang praises unto God." You know the rest of the story! Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, & all the doors were opened, & the chains were loosed; **even the jailer was converted!** As a result of that trying time in the life of Paul & Silas, a great church was established; the Philippian Church! When Paul writes that church years later, he writes with the full confidence that **God is still in control!** **Easter tells us that God is still in control!**

2. Easter tells us that GOD DOES NOT FORSAKE HIS OWN!

Sometimes, we like Jesus, may **feel** as if God has completely abandoned us! But Easter proves God's promises to be true! God promises us in Isaiah 43, "**WHEN** (not if -- but "when") you pass through the waters, I will be with you; & when you pass through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. **WHEN** you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze" (43:2).

The fact is that in the trials when we may not **feel** His presence **HE IS NEVER NEARER TO US THAN IN THOSE VERY MOMENTS!** The great **Hymn, How Firm a Foundation**, reminds us: --

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to his foes.

That soul, tho' all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake!

There are times when trials & sorrows & heartaches **will come**, & we may feel totally abandoned! But even as God was **with** His Son in the darkest of hours on Good Friday -- **even so** God will hold on to you & me with His never failing presence!

My favorite hymn has changed over the years of time, & at this stage of my life my favorite has become *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*. *Great is Thy faithfulness -- O God my Father; There is no shadow of turning with Thee. Thou changest not; -- Thy compassions, they fail not. As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.*

God has proved His **faithfulness** in my life many times over!

Eight months into his tour of duty in Vietnam, **Dave Roeber** was burned beyond recognition when a grenade he was poised to throw **exploded in his hand**. The ordeal left him hospitalized for fourteen months where he underwent numerous major surgeries. When he looked into a mirror & saw himself for the first time, he threw the mirror & broke it! He felt like God had abandoned him! His miraculous survival & life is an amazing story. Today, while his face is **still badly scared, his spirit** does not even have a hint of a scare, because of God's **inner** healing. Today with his humorous style, Dave Roeber is enthusiastically received both nationally & internationally as he communicates the grace & the love of God with others! **EASTER** tells us that God will not go back on His Word: -- that His promises are still true; -- that in fact He **WILL NOT** desert nor forsake His own! **EASTER makes all the difference!**

3. Easter tells us that **GOD BRINGS VICTORY OUT OF DEFEAT!**

At face value it would seem that the words of Jesus from the Cross **convey utter despair**, "My God, My God, why has thou?" The disciples watched that awful scene of violence & wickedness. The multitudes had shouted their blood-thirsty words, spitting out their hatred against Jesus. The heavy blows of the hammers as nails were driven through His flesh announced in no uncertain terms that Jesus was crucified. Even as darkness fell across the earth, everyone could still see the Son of God hanging on a Cross between two thieves.

The verdict was in -- Jesus was crucified! The verdict was in -- Jesus was dead! The verdict was in -- Jesus was buried! **BUT WAIT!** -- That is not the final verdict! That is not the final word! That is not the end of the story! On **Easter morning** the stone is rolled away! On Easter morning the tomb is empty! On Easter morning the announcement is made: "**Jesus is not here! He is risen!**"

On Friday, it looked as though Rome might have triumphed. It appeared as though Jewish prejudice had prevailed. It seemed that hell's fury had succeeded in crushing the Son of God. **But Easter proclaims a message of triumphant victory!** Easter Morning the tomb was **found to be empty; -- Jesus has risen from the dead!**

The empty tomb proclaims the fact that the forces of sin & death have been overpowered! The empty tomb promises ultimate victory over every scheme of hell. The empty tomb publishes the fact that Satan is the defeated foe. The empty tomb provides everlasting life for "whosoever will". The message of **EASTER** is that God can bring **VICTORY** out of our apparent **DEFEAT!** In fact the word **defeat does not exist in the dictionary of God**. Easter brings victory over death & the grave. Easter brings victory over sin & its punishment. Easter brings victory to the life & soul who puts their trust in Jesus! **Easter means that God can bring glorious victory out of what would appear to be defeat & despair!**

Conclusion: -- **EASTER** makes a tremendous difference in our lives! When we believe in **Easter** it changes our whole attitude toward the **trials & the sorrows & the tragedies & the burdens & the heart aches & the adversities** of our lives! When those times come when we would cry out from deep within us, & say: "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" -- **then** just take a moment to **Remember Easter!** **EASTER** tells us that God is still in control! **EASTER** tells us that God does not forsake His own! **EASTER** tells us that God brings victory out of defeat!

Edith Burns was a wonderful Christian lady who lived in San Antonio, Texas. She was the patient of Dr. Phillips, a gentle doctor who saw patients as **people**. His favorite patient was Edith Burns. Edith Burns had a habit of introducing herself this way: "Hello, my name is Edith Burns. **Do you believe in Easter?**" Then she would explain the meaning of Easter -- & many times people would be saved.

That is how Edith had first introduced herself to Dr. Phillips' nurse, when Beverly was taking Edith's blood pressure. Edith began by saying, "My name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?" Beverly said, "Why, yes, I do." Edith asked, "Well what do you believe about Easter?" Beverly said, "Well, it's all about egg hunts; going to church; & dressing up." Edith kept pressing her about the **real meaning of Easter**, & finally led Beverly to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But one morning when Edith went to see Dr. Phillips, he came into her examining room with a heavy heart! Edith looked at Dr. Phillips & said, "Doctor, why are you so sad? Are you reading your Bible? Are you praying?" Dr. Phillips said gently, "Edith, I'm the doctor & you're the patient." With a heavy heart he then said, "Your lab report came back & it says you have cancer, & Edith, you're not going to live very long."

Edith said, "Why Dr. Phillips, shame on you. Why are you so sad? **Do you think God makes mistakes?** You have just told me I'm

going to see my precious Jesus, my husband, & my many friends. You've just told me that I am going to **celebrate Easter forever**, & here you are having difficulty giving me **my ticket!**" Dr. Phillips thought to himself, "**What a magnificent woman** this Edith Burns is!"

It wasn't longer before Edith called her doctor & said she would have to be moving her **Easter story** to the hospital, & said, "Doctor, I am very near home, so would you make sure that they put women in next to me who need to know about Easter." Well, they did just that, & one by one Edith would say to them, "Hello, I'm Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?" And by that simple question, she led many women to being saved.

Everybody on that floor from nursing staff to patients heard her Easter story, that is everyone **except Phyllis Cross**, the head nurse. Phyllis made it plain that she wanted nothing to do with Edith because she was just a "**religious nut**." Phyllis had been a nurse in an army hospital; she had seen it all & heard it all; she was the original G.I. Jane. She had been married three times; she was hard, cold, & did everything by the book.

But one morning the two nurses who were to attend to Edith were sick, & Phyllis Cross had to go in & give Edith a shot. When she walked in Edith had a big smile on her face & said: "Phyllis, God loves you & I love you, & I have been praying for you." Phyllis Cross said: "Well, you can quit praying for me. It won't work & I'm not interested." And with that Phyllis walked abruptly out of the room!

Every day Phyllis would walk into the room, & Edith would say, "God loves you Phyllis, & I love you, & I'm praying for you." One day Phyllis Cross said she was **literally drawn** to Edith's room **like a magnet would draw iron**. She sat down on the bed & Edith said, "I'm so glad you have come, because God told me that today is your special day." Phyllis asked: "Edith, you have asked everyone here the question 'Do you believe in Easter?' -- but you have never asked me." Edith said, "Phyllis, I wanted to many times, but God told me to **wait until you asked**, & now you have asked."

Edith Burns took her Bible & shared with Phyllis Cross the Easter Story of the death, burial & the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Then Edith asked, "Phyllis, do you believe in Easter? Do you believe that Jesus is alive & that He wants to live in your heart?" Phyllis Cross said, "Oh, I want to believe that with all my heart, & I want Jesus in my life." Right there, Phyllis Cross invited Jesus Christ into her heart!

For the first time, Phyllis did not walk out of a hospital room; **she was carried out on the wings of angels!**

Just a few days later, on Easter Sunday, Phyllis came into work, did some of her duties, then went down to the flower shop & got some Easter lilies to give to Edith. When she walked into the room, Edith was lying in bed with her **big black Bible** on her lap. Her hands were in that Bible, & there was a sweet smile on her face. When Phyllis went to pick up Edith's hand, she realized Edith **was dead**, but she also noticed her finger was pointing to the words of John 14, "In my Father's house are many mansions ..." Phyllis Cross took one last look at that deceased body, & with tears streaming down her cheeks, said, "Happy Easter Edith -- Happy Easter." With that, Phyllis left Edith's body, walked out of the room & over to a table where two student nurses were setting. She said, "My name is Phyllis Cross. Do you believe in Easter?"

My friends, **even as Jesus was uttering those words from the Cross:** "My God, My God ..." -- He was still expressing His **PERSONAL FAITH** in God. He cries, **not** -- "Oh, God" -- but, "**MY God** ..."

His were words of trust -- not despair! Can you call upon Him today & say He is "**MY GOD**"? Do you know & experience the significance of **EASTER** in **your life** personally? As Christians around the world today proclaims the great truth of the Resurrection -- **CHRIST LIVES -- can you say: "HE LIVES IN ME"**?

In the late 1800's, Mrs. Louisa Stead watched as her husband died while trying to save a drowning boy. In her struggle with the "**why?**" **questions**, which she asked God during that difficult time, she penned the words of the familiar song: --

*'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to take Him at His word,
Just to rest upon His promise, Just to know, "Thus saith the Lord."*

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