

The New Day!

- I was a young preacher, 30 at the most, and it was either my first or second Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday here at Antioch. I don't remember. But I will never forget the reaction I got from one man when I said on Palm Sunday, as I was preaching about the cross, that the day Jesus died was the most important day in history. He made a beeline for me right after the service, and he wasn't just upset; he was outraged. As he was making his case he said, "I guess you're going to say *next* Sunday that the day Jesus rose from the dead is the most important day in history!" I don't know what I said; I mumbled something in response and he stormed off. As I look back on it, I smile and think, *he was right*. There was no day more important than the day Jesus rose from the dead. Because had Jesus stayed in that tomb, the cross would have been of no significance. As Paul said, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." (1 Cor. 15:17). But you know what? I was right, as well. Because God could not have raised a live body. Jesus had to die. So the cross of Jesus validates the resurrection. You cannot have one without the other and still have hope! We have great hope. Because of the dark day when Jesus died. And because of the new day when Jesus was raised from the dead.

- **The Dark Day**

- Mark 15:33
- There was darkness over the whole land for three hours. We know what it's like when the power goes out, don't we? But even when we had no power a few weeks ago because of the ice storm, we could see during the day. The "light" was still on. But at noon on that Friday, as Jesus hung on the cross, God turned off the lights. The darkness of the cross was magnified when God turned the sky black. Can I remind you for a moment of what Jesus was going through?
- The article on "Cross" in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia describes crucifixion: The punishment was meted out for such crimes as treason, desertion in the face of the enemy, robbery, piracy, assassination, sedition, etc. . . . Among the Romans, crucifixion was preceded by scourging, undoubtedly to hasten impending death. The victim then bore his own cross, or at least the upright beam, to the place of execution. . . . The number of nails used seems to have been indeterminate. A tablet, on which the feet rested or on which the body was partly supported, seems to have been a part of the cross to keep the wounds from tearing through the transfixed members. (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, ii.42)
The suffering of death by crucifixion was intense, especially in hot climates. . . . The swell[ing] about the rough nails and the torn lacerated tendons and nerves caused excruciating agony. The arteries of the head and stomach were surcharged with blood and a terrific throbbing headache ensued. The mind was confused and filled with anxiety and dread foreboding. The victim of crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths. . . . The sufferings were so frightful [Josephus wrote] that "even among the raging passions of war, pity was sometimes excited" (BJ, V, xi, 1). The length of this agony was wholly determined by the constitution of the victim, but death rarely ensued before thirty-six hours had elapsed. . . . Death was sometimes hastened by breaking the legs of the victims and by a hard blow delivered under the armpit before crucifixion. *Crura fracta* was a well-known Roman term (Cicero Phil. xiii.12). The sudden death of Christ evidently was a matter of astonishment. ("Cross," ISBE, Henry Dosker)
- Jesus suffered more than any man ever has, but not just because of the brutal killing instrument that He hung upon. It was a dark day also because of the pain He bore. It was a darker day because of the punishment He bore. Perhaps God turned off the lights because it magnified the separation between God and His Son on those six hours.
- Alistair Begg says that the basic meaning of sin is to forsake God. Before you say, "Oh, I never do that," wait a minute! To forsake God can mean to go through your days as if God is not

important. To live life on your own terms and only fit “God” into the picture when it is convenient, to have Him as a sub-category in terms of what is really important to us. You are fine having him in the backseat. But you certainly don’t want him driving the car! The idea that He would take over and you would be under His authority in everything is offensive to you. The essence of sin is to forsake God. And the consequence of sin is to be God-forsaken. That’s why Jesus cries out as He does from the cross in His darkest hour: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” Why was He God-forsaken? Because He was bearing your sin and my sin in His body on the tree! Peter wrote, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit.” (1 Peter 3:18) This is the mystery of Easter. That the dark day had to come first. So the new day would dawn once and for all.

- **The New Day**

- Mark 16:1-6

- We see that the women went and bought spices after the Sabbath. Probably at 6:01pm Saturday evening, one minute after Sabbath was over, they were headed to market. The next morning they met, and began to carry the 75 pounds of spices to the tomb. Jesus had been anointed in life by the woman who broke the alabaster jar of ointment and poured it over His head. Now He would be anointed in death, and clearly the women were in a hurry to get there after the Sabbath, before the body really started decomposing. As they were walking, lugging the spices, they had a big question. What was it? Was it, “I wonder what Jesus will say to me when I get there?” NO! It was, “How are we going to be able to get to Jesus’ dead body. There’s a 2-ton stone in the way.” Luke says that when they arrived the angels asked the women, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” And of course, the answer was that they weren’t seeking the living among the dead. They were seeking the dead among the dead! Though Jesus has promised over and over that He would be resurrected, the women didn’t remember it or didn’t believe it. How are we any different? It’s 2000 years later and there are twenty centuries of testimony to the risen Savior, and we still struggle with fear and doubt. We wonder who’s going to roll away the stone that is blocking our way to a joy-filled life. Or to lasting peace. Or to real security. Or significance. As the women get closer, they are amazed to see that the stone has already been moved. Matthew tells us an angel moved the stone and sat on it. Let me ask you something. Why did the angel have to remove the stone? Was it to let Jesus out? No! No more than Jesus was kept from entering the locked door behind which the disciples were hiding that same day. No, the stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out, but to let the women in. And to let Peter and John in. In the same way, when Jesus died, at the moment He died, Mark says, the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. (verse 38) Did that have to happen in order to let God out of the Holy of Holies? No, it happened to let us in. The Holy of Holies was only for the High Priest and only on one day of the year, the day of atonement. But on Friday, the day before Passover, at the very same moment the Passover lamb was being killed, the perfect Lamb of God was being sacrificed. Jesus breathed His last breath, the curtain was torn from top to bottom, and the Holy of holies was opened to all who come to God through the blood of His Son. It was a new day! The new day of Jesus’ resurrection started when He cried out, Tetelestai!, “it is finished” from the cross and breathed His last. As we sing here often, “Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place, condemned He stood, Sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah, what a Savior!” Victory was won at the cross. Sin was conquered. All that was left was the grave. And the stone was rolled away. It was empty.

- “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.”

- **The resurrection was powerful.**

- Why did the angel have to say, “Do not be alarmed?” Because they were alarmed. Stunned. In shock. Terrified. Not just because they were talking to an angel, or one was talking to them. But because of what the angel said. “He has risen; he is not here.”
- Just imagine this story with me, and it really happened this past February in Mississippi. Here’s the lead sentence of the newspaper article: “Workers at Porter and Sons Funeral Home were preparing to embalm Walter Williams on Thursday when he moved.” Yep. Seems the man’s pacemaker stopped working temporarily, so the coroner was called, couldn’t find any vital signs, and put him in a body bag and sent him to the funeral home. That evening, as they were preparing to embalm him, he started kicking and moving. So they took him to the hospital. “The coroner said, ‘Mr. Williams’ family were rejoicing and “just in a state of shock” after learning of his recovery.”
- That tells me two things. Number one, don’t get sick in Mississippi, whatever you do. Number two, when the one you thought was dead is now alive and well, you are going to rejoice and be in shock all at the same time.
- **The resurrection was personal.**
- The angel says, “But go, tell the disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you.”
- I love that. The resurrection was and is a personal gift to all who will follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Every disciple. And the Lord knows you by name. He made sure that the women knew that the disciples AND Peter were invited to meet with Him. He longed to see all of them, including Peter. Why does the angel single out Peter? Maybe because Peter wasn’t feeling much like a disciple right then, was he? He was awash in guilt, playing over and over in his mind that scene in the courtyard where he was asked if he was with Jesus, and he denied Him three times. “Tell Peter, too,” the angel says. That goes for anyone else here this morning who believes your sin is too great, and that Jesus couldn’t possibly care about you. There is no greater proof than the cross that Jesus cares about you. That He suffered and died in your place. AND! There is no greater proof than the resurrection that Jesus cares about you. That He got up from where He lay, conquering death and the grave in order to save you and me!
- John said, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” I heard JD Greear say in a sermon not long ago that he used to think of that verse as if when he would sin, Jesus would step up and say, “Father, would you not punish JD for that sin? Give him mercy.” And sometimes Jesus would say, “I know, seriously? He’s committed the same sin again, and I came to you about it just yesterday. I know, Father. But can we let it go one more time? Can you maybe extend your mercy to JD one more time?” But that’s not it at all. Jesus stands before the Father and when one of His children sins, Jesus says, “Father, you cannot punish Mark for that sin, because I have already been punished for it.”
- It’s not a matter of mercy, but justice. The Father would be unjust to punish us for the sin that has already been laid on His Son and that He died for. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous!
- “He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:4-5)
- Do you believe this? The dark day had to come. Jesus prayed that the father would let this cup pass from Him, but the dark day had to come, and Jesus said, “Not My will, but Yours be done.” The New Day had to come. It’s here. Not just then, but now. That new day is here. Now. For you.