

## AN EASTER MYSTERY NO MORE!



Christ is Risen! (He is Risen, Indeed!) Alleluia!

I'm sure there are a few fans here today of authors like Agatha Christie, Edgar Allen Poe, or Stephen King. These writers are known for their works of mystery and suspense. After all, who doesn't love a good brain twisting novel, tv show or movie, especially when it isn't until the end that you finally find who - "whodunnit?"

For Jesus' disciples... for the women who followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs... I'm guessing they felt like they were living one of the worst mystery novels of all time. They had reached the end of the story, so they thought, and they couldn't believe the conclusion. Their dearly loved Jesus - was dead. His lifeless body lay in the tomb. It was sealed shut and guarded by Roman soldiers. They weren't asking "whodunnit?" - they witnessed that part. 1000's of other questions swirled about their brains; for these last few hours and days just didn't add up.

When they awoke that first Easter Sunday, life was still a complete mystery. How could a few women move a stone weighing thousands of pounds? How would they get by the guards? Those disciples, cowering behind locked doors, afraid for their lives... could they escape from Jerusalem? Where would they go? What would they do now? Were these last 3 years a complete waste of their time? And what about - Jesus? They had no answers - until!

When the sun & *thee Son* rose that first Sunday - it was as though the last chapter of the book was being written. Like pages being turned as each hour passed, the light dawned upon their hearts. Jesus was not dead; he was truly alive! The stone... the guards... a total non-issue for Jesus and his holy angels. Even locked doors were no match for the all-powerful *living* Savior. The mystery was solved, composed by the only author capable of such a story.

The impact of that first Easter has not lost one bit of luster or power over 2000 years - and for this reason: the truth of Easter Sunday keeps solving the most perplexing mysteries that plague all people, including the answer to what will happen to me when I die? Anxiety, fear, doubt abound... all because they don't know what God has decreed from the cross and the empty tomb. Friends, Easter truly answers all these mysteries because Christ has removed the sting of death and he has opened the door to eternal life.

### I. Christ has removed the sting of death

At one point or another in every person's life they will ask themselves (or at least they should ask), "What will happen to me when I die?" It's an inescapable truth. We will all face death at some point, and we want to make sure we have an answer. But before we answer that question, let's ask it just a bit differently: "What *should* happen to me when I die?" "What do I *deserve* to have happen to me?"

You can imagine the wide variety of answers to this question. "Well, I'm not the best person; I'm no saint, but at least I'm not..." So often we try to justify ourselves over against other people who are obviously way more sinful. A different, but similar response, looks at all the good things they have accomplished in life: successful career... wife, family, kids, home... being a decent person. In short, they are justifying themselves, trying to come up with reasons why they feel they deserve good things after they die.

The truth of this matter is - we don't get to write this chapter in the book. God has already authored it. In the Scriptures, God has shed his clear light on this mystery. Verse 56 of our text says, "*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.*" These words sting because of the power of the Law. And about the Law, God himself writes: "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.*" (Gal. 3:10)

This is the power and sting of God's Holy Law: we have not done *everything* God has commanded - both in living a holy, perfect life... AND never once sinning... therefore, we fully deserve to be cursed. We fully deserve that cross and to be forsaken by God eternally. That is what *should* happen to you and me because of our sin. It's a horrible stinging truth - and for way too many people, the solution is a mystery. And no matter how many different solutions they think of, without Christ, eternity will be hell.

This is why Paul - and for that matter - all believers are so thankful for that first Easter Sunday morning. The light of salvation dawned! God wrote the final chapter! He not only penned the solution - he himself was the solution and he still is the answer to whodunnit! Paul writes, <sup>57</sup> *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*

Unpack with me - word by word - the depths of what God has done. HE - this is from the Almighty, all-powerful, eternal and Triune God who created all things. He GIVES - God does not charge for this truth, he freely gives. He gives to US... to you and me, the most unworthy and undeserving of all people! Amazing! He gives us THE VICTORY. Without him, everything is and will be a total loss; but with him there is VICTORY! This Victory

comes only through one way: the LORD – Jesus – Christ. **Only Jesus** fulfilled God’s Law perfectly and completely. **Only Jesus** never once sinned. **Only Jesus** became the perfect Lamb of God sacrifice. **Only His blood** shed on the cross could atone for the sin of the world. **Only Jesus** rose from the dead – and in this way, Jesus removed the sting of death forever. Through faith in him – Jesus’ victory is our victory! Jesus victory reveals the answer to the greatest mystery to mankind – that God graciously gives us, not what we deserve, but what Jesus has won for us. Only God could have authored and accomplished this!

This is a truth that is really freeing and liberating, isn’t it? Because of Easter, we no longer have to live in fear each day, wondering if we’re living a good enough life; or on the flip side, fearful that not every one of our sin has been forgiven. Through faith, Christ’s righteousness has been credited to us. Through faith, Christ’s death has been credited as full payment of our sins. Because of Easter, we can face our last day with a sense of calm and peace, knowing that Satan can’t steal from us what Christ has already given to us. Thanks be to God!

## II. Christ has opened the door to Eternal Life

Because of Easter, death is a mystery no more! And yet for as much as we hear these words, there are times when it just takes a bit longer to sink in... so we need to go back and reread things – just like with a good book or movie. I remember watching *Shawshank Redemption* probably 10 times in college. After a while, I began to pick up on and was fascinated by the subtle clues that Andy Dufresne dropped about his incredible secret plan to escape prison. That man had his future all figured out; he was just waiting for the perfect time.

To a greater degree, and in a much more wonderful way, isn’t it comforting to know that God had all the details of Easter worked out and timed just perfectly! And the same is true of the details of your future. Thanks be to God who doesn’t let these details remain a mystery; he shares some of them with us through the Apostle Paul in our text:

<sup>51</sup> *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—* <sup>52</sup> *in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.* <sup>53</sup> *For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.* <sup>54</sup> *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”*

Paul loads up these 4 verses with so much comfort and assurance! It starts off with that word, “sleep.” Often times, the Bible uses the word “sleep” to refer to the death of a believer. And what a calming truth that is for us. As normally and peacefully as we fall asleep at night – so too a believer can die in peace, knowing that when Christ comes again on Judgment Day, it will be like he is simply walking us up. But unlike our present waking up – where we groan as we hit the snooze bar... and sit on the bed in a fog... and then we still have to deal with those aches and pains... and after a few hours we need to sleep again. No, this waking up from the sleep of death on Judgment Day will be much different and far better!

Paul says, “We will be raised imperishable,” never to die again. Right now, we are perishable; we are mortal. That’s got to be changed for us to enter into eternal life – and God will do just that. We will be raised **imperishable**; we will be **immortal** as we enter eternal the glories of heaven. When that day comes, we will sing those words of victory: “*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*”

There’s more to this mystery that God reveals. He says: *For the trumpet will sound, **the dead** will be raised imperishable, and **we** will be changed.* “The dead” – including all believers and unbelievers – will be raised imperishable! Yes, unbelievers too will be raised from the dead imperishable – BUT – Paul makes it clear that only believers “will be changed.” Only believers will receive a glorified changed body – just like Jesus. Christ entered that tomb, beaten, blooded, pierced and crushed – but he was raised in glory. That’s what it will be like for us. No more aches and pains... no more cancer or failing organs... we will be raised and given a new and glorious body.

Such will not be the case for those who reject Jesus. Their physical sufferings they endured on earth will pale in comparison... And that puts a sense of urgency on our purpose and calling as Christians. Just as the women hastened from the tomb to tell those fearful disciples... so too is our calling to tell others what Christ has done for them.

By God’s grace we’ve heard this great mystery revealed once again to our hearts. Let us be God’s messengers, pointing people to the greatest book ever written, for it is the greatest truth – the truth that Christ is Risen! (He is risen indeed). Let us hasten to share the truth that eternal life is no longer a mystery... that Christ has conquered Satan... that death has been swallowed up in Victory. **Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!**