

Part 51: Fear and Great Joy (Easter 2019 Part 3)

Tyler Velin | Matthew 27:62-28:10

April 21, 2019

There is a really fascinating story in the Bible of a king named David. David was generally a really good king, a king who was called a man after God's own heart. But in the prime of his rule he did something really evil. He took an interest in another man's wife, a man who was a soldier in his own army. And while the husband was off fighting wars for David, David took his wife, slept with her, and she became pregnant.

In order to absolve his crimes, David tried to cover it up, and when he couldn't he committed internal espionage in his own army and caused the husband to die on the battle field. And David thought to himself: "I've done it. I managed to conceal my mess."

But a few days later, one of David's trusted spiritual advisors, named Nathan, came to him and shared with him this story: "There were two men in a certain city, one was rich, the other was poor. The rich man had all sorts of livestock and animals, and the poor man had one little lamb that he had bought with his limited money. He loved that lamb, and raised it with his family, he would even feed the lamb food from his own plate because he couldn't afford to buy food for the lamb itself. It was like a daughter to him. The rich man had a friend over for dinner who loved roasted lamb. But the rich man was unwilling to take one of his many animals to prepare for his friend, so he had one of his servants go to the poor man's house, take his one lamb, and cooked it for his friend."

When David heard this story he was indignant that this rich man would do this and responded to his friend, "As the Lord lives, this man deserves to die, he shall restore the lamb times four to the poor man because he did this evil thing without pity."

And then Nathan says one of the shortest but weightiest rebukes in all of human history: "You are the man."

Four words, and the story of the rich man became the story of David and his life was changed forever. On the surface the story had nothing to do with David, there were no direct tie-ins to his life. No clear mention of his specific faults. But in a few words his whole world was changed by a story which he understood in part, but quickly came to understand in full.

I'm guessing that as we sit here on this Easter morning, most of you know the story that we are going to look at today. I was talking to some friends this week about the new Avengers movie which comes out on Friday, and they were speaking with so much fear that they would find out the ending of the movie before they were able to watch it.

Not many of you came in with such trepidation today regarding the story of the Jesus. Our campus ministry used to partner with Michigan State University and I've always loved the chant that they use at the sporting events there. To tell who the real fans are, you say, "Go green," and if the person you are speaking true is a true Spartan fan they respond with, "Go white."

I'm guessing that at this point you have realized that Christians have invented a fan based call and response that comes out on Easter morning, "He is risen," and you say, "He is risen indeed." But I imagine that the first time you heard that phrase today you didn't respond with anger and frustration: "Well now you've spoiled it..."

We know that on Easter we remember the good news that though Jesus died for our sins three days ago, he rose out of his grave that Sunday morning. But what do you make of that story? More than the story Nathan used with David this story is a real story, one with eye witnesses and far more credibility than most you read on Facebook these days.

And I would argue that as we look at the story of the resurrection of Jesus today there are also four words which bring this story, as distant as it may seem to you, into the living room of your own heart. Those four words are spoken twice in this passage today: "Do not be afraid."

What we are going to look at today are two pictures of Jesus' tomb and inside of those two pictures are really the reality of two world views. These are what we are going to look at today: **The world as we'd like it to be** and **The world as it is**. And what I hope you will see with me this morning is that that world as we'd like it is really a world which we hope to escape, and the world that the resurrection of Christ has made it to be, is really the world that we all would like.

One world looks safe, but behind the veil is unshakable fear. One world looks fearful, but amidst the chaos is great joy. And at the center of all of it is Jesus who lives, speaks and acts so as to bring us into his story in a way that changes us forever. So here is what I'm going to do today, I am going to read our story for us again and what I want you to listen for are emotions and actions. What is going on, and how are people responding to what is going on. **Matthew 27:62-28:10**.

So there is the story in two scenes. Scene 1: the Roman governor and religious officials and the tomb. Scene 2: The women and the tomb. And in between these two stories is the miraculous emptying of the tomb.

So in looking at the worldview of the first scene we see our first point today: **The World as We'd Like it to Be**.

This perspective is seen most clearly in the story of the Pharisees and the Pilate. These two characters are the two central characters to the death of Jesus. The Pharisees didn't like that Jesus claimed to be God, and Pilate didn't like that Jesus claimed to be king.

And I imagine for some in here today you might run into the same issues in your own heart. If Jesus is God, we often run into two uncomfortable truths. The first is that there is a God, the second is that you are not. If Jesus is King, then he is the center of honor and power, and I'm not.

The Pharisees didn't like Jesus because the grace that Jesus claimed to bring undermined all of their best efforts to please God on their own. If the God who exists is a gracious God, then the whole of our world is more about his loving kindness than it is about our fantastic efforts, and for many that is a less than ideal world. The message this God preached was not that you have the power to save yourself, but that God has the power to save you. That by nature is humbling.

Pilate didn't like Jesus because he claimed to be king. If Jesus is king, then he is king greater than Caesar. If Jesus is a king then he has control over this world that we don't. If Jesus is king then he is our king, and we are his subjects. And it's much safer to be in a world where either I can be my own king, or at least I can see the king who rules over me.

And if we boil it down, don't we all share those same concerns about the world we'd like to live in? We want to live in a world where we aren't always burdened by some sort of performance, or where we don't run the risk of being oppressed or driven into the ground by some distant authoritative figure.

If that's your picture of who God is, then I don't believe in that God either. But that's often how we view God. And because of this blindness in our hearts, we begin to do everything possible to assure ourselves that this God doesn't exist. We work hard to make sure the tomb stays closed.

This is what the Pharisees and Pilate turn to do. Look back: **Matthew 27:62-66**.

For the Pharisees and for Pilate Jesus was an imposter, a deceiver, one who promised what he could never fulfill. And because of that he was a threat to the status quo. If more people continued to believe what Jesus said, then the world as they know it would be threatened, the second lie would be worse than the first.

I've found that it's not just Jesus' enemies who fall into this trap. If we're honest don't you who are believers sometimes mistake Jesus for an imposter? We see his encouragement to seek first the Kingdom of God, and his promise that if we do we will suffer no loss, and we think perhaps he is exaggerating. We read that God will always provide a way of escape when faced with sin, but we think he couldn't have meant my sin in this instance. Wasn't this the very same line of thought that Satan approached Eve with in the garden? "Did God really say..." "What was that imposter trying to get you to believe?"

So too do the Pharisees hold fast to their confidence that Jesus was a liar. In a victorious tone the Pharisees remind Pilate of what Jesus said, "while he was alive." While they still have some fear, they are quietly reassuring themselves that they've done what they needed to do: he's dead, we've managed to cover our bases.

And because they have such seeming control over Jesus, their attention now turns to his disciples. We must make sure they don't steal Jesus' body and tell people that he has risen. And we see how seemingly confident they are that Jesus posed no real threat to them because they said they wanted to make the tomb secure until the third day.

Meaning that they didn't fear Jesus coming out on day four. It's not that if Jesus came out on Monday and started walking around that people would check their watches and be like, "Sorry dude, you're late. You must not be the Messiah." It was that they really didn't believe there was any way for a dead man to come back to life and their only concern was making sure the disciples couldn't fake the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy.

And so they received a guard of soldiers, which we know was at least two. They secured the stone in place. And then they went and sealed the stone shut. Presumably by binding it in place with chains or leather straps.

Nothing was going into that tomb. For them the problem was always what was outside of the tomb. If they could keep the disciples out, then the perceived peace of their world would be safe. And I say perceived peace because that's all it was.

You might be one who looks at your world and says, "I've really found peace. My life is good enough that whatever is behind that stone might just be a bigger headache." But at what cost? Remember who is worried here: the Pharisees. What is the m.o. of the Pharisees? Rule keeping and self-righteousness. Their identity was that they could do enough to get to God without God coming to them.

Now remember what day it is. Jesus was killed on a Friday, and this text opens with, "the next day." That would make this day a Saturday, which would make this day the Sabbath, which would make this day the token day of law keeping. The Sabbath was a day where it was prohibited for Jews to do any work. To do work would be to break the law. And there was this scene earlier in Matthew where the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by saying he was breaking the Sabbath: **Matthew 12:9-14**.

Jesus healed on the Sabbath and for the Pharisees that qualified as work. But look at what the Pharisees are willing to do on this Sabbath day: **Matthew 27:65-66**.

In their minds Jesus' healing work on the Sabbath showed his failure. But here the Pharisees are willing to work on the Sabbath so that they might make sure Jesus isn't resurrected. On a day meant to rest in the salvation of God, the Pharisees labored out of their anxiety.

The Pharisees secured the tomb as they wanted, they had peace, but at what cost? You might think you have found the good life, the world as you want it to be, but what has it cost you? What has it cost those around you? What has it cost your family? And is every bit of enjoyment you experience in this world met by the immediate fear that one day the enjoyment might not be enough. Where is your rest in this world?

For fear they spent so much time making sure no one entered that tomb. But what they didn't realize is that the danger to their worldview wasn't what went into tomb, but what was going to come out of the tomb. Look at what happens next: **Matthew 28:1-6**.

We, just like the Pharisees are quick in our paranoia to spend and be spent trying to make sure Jesus stays dead. Trying to promise ourselves that we can do enough on our own, find enough joy on our own, save ourselves on our own. But what's in the tomb is always greater than what's outside the tomb.

You might be one who thinks your failures too deep for Jesus to heal. Heap it on the stone. Look at your failures in full and strap it to the rock. And find that it is nothing compared to the grace that it inside.

You might be one who thinks yourself too intellectual, too sophisticated to believe that dead men might live. Pour your cement into the cracks and watch it dry. See that the power in the tomb is far greater than your disbelief and that the reality of the gospel is the greatest truth there is.

Look at how the Psalmist speaks: **Psalms 2:1-4**.

You may even think yourself too sinful for salvation or perhaps too reasonable to believe in such nonsense. But stand it up, barricade the tomb, muster all you might, but in the end it might all contribute to a greater amazement at the savior you never wished to see.

You see your biggest problem was not what was outside the tomb, but what was inside, the wages of your sin was death itself. But Jesus took it, and died for it so that what comes out of the tomb might not be an enemy but your savior.

This is where we transition to our second worldview: **The World as It Is.**

Now let's examine again the second part of this story: **Matthew 28:1-10.**

So here we see the ultimate contrast between the experience of the Pharisees, Pilate and his guards and that of these meek women who went to the tomb. For those who plotted against Jesus, they experienced fear and anxiety.

But for those who sought Jesus, they experienced fear and great joy.

It was fearful because the world as these two women knew it was changed. Yes, they believed that Jesus was the Christ. Yes they loved Jesus and cared for Jesus. Yes, they knew Jesus spoke of a resurrection, but they figured that to be some sort of spiritual analogy.

But now they must learn to live in a world where everything has changed. Now when I say everything, I almost certainly mean one thing. But one thing can very quickly change everything.

I know for me, I'm never more aware of my surroundings than after I get pulled over. Most of the time when you drive, you never check your speedometer, you are unaware of those who are driving around you, and you feel like you'd probably make it in one of those Fast N' Furious movies.

But after I've been pulled over, I've never been more aware of my speedometer. I panic when I put on my blinker, did I use it soon enough? Am I far enough back at a traffic light? Am I accelerating so fast as to draw attention to me? And every car you see looks like it is another police car watching you.

When we witness big events, even the smallest details of our life are seen in a new light.

Can you imagine the questions of reality that these two women had not only as they were presented with a radiant angel in an empty tomb, but as they saw Jesus himself, the same Jesus they had watched die and helped bury a few days ago, standing in their midst.

Nothing was safe. And this is the transformative truth of this gospel story. We now live in a world where the dead can have life. And that means the world as we know it has been totally turned on its head. A new reality is emerging.

And if we are honest, it's fearful. For those of you who are believers, do you remember what it was like when you first believed the gospel? When you first understood that at one point in time you were cut off from God. That something far greater than a stone lay between you and Jesus and that the wages of your unbelief was death itself?

Do remember what it was like the first time you let go of your own attempt to find identity, joy, belonging, salvation in your own works and trusted that it was Jesus and only Jesus who could provide all those things?

Wasn't it fearful? That's what faith is right? If there isn't risk, then there isn't faith. Faith is precisely faith because it involves trusting something or someone who is not us. This is fearful gist of what **Proverbs 3:5-8** says. It is pressing out into what is beyond you, what is fearful, what is scary. But unlike what the guards and the religious officials experienced, this fear is for your healing. It brings with it great joy.

For those who seek Jesus, the great joy is that Jesus has already sought you. Did you notice that in this text? While the guards are frozen in fear like dead men, the angel turns towards these unarmed ladies and says, "Go quickly, go even to Galilee." And then look at what happens a few verses later, **Matthew 28:8-9**.

What a joy that all those who seek Jesus, are found by Jesus himself. And when Jesus has found you, when the tomb has been split in your heart and the life of Jesus turns your whole world upside down, then Jesus is able to come to you in your fear and say: "Do not be afraid."

Why? Why shouldn't we be afraid? For many of us such encounters with Jesus would only strike fear. It's easier to deal with Jesus when there is a stone between you. But when the stone is removed our fears are realized. There is a God, and it isn't you. There is a king and he has authority over death itself. There is a problem, and it's that I have not treated Jesus as that King.

But this is the great joy of gospel fear: Jesus is now with you, do not be afraid. For what's in the tomb is greater than what's outside the tomb.

Coming out of the tomb is all the worry that we really are broken and sinful, but Jesus was broken for you. Coming out of the tomb was the reality that we rejected God and felt the pain of loneliness, but Jesus was rejected for you. Coming out of the tomb was the reality of death in a painful world, but Jesus died for you. The resurrection shows that what comes out of the tomb is for your good always if what comes out of the tomb is your King.

As you try to piece back your world, Jesus is there. As you begin to fear the trials that this new landscape might present to you, Jesus is there. As you begin to trip up, and stumble back towards where you once were, Jesus is there.

For the first time we can simultaneously know fear and great joy. We can in the midst of our trials know that there is a promise of great rest because Jesus is with us. He has risen from the dead and so too will we if we seek him.

Just this Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka, thousands of believers just like you headed off to church to celebrate this empty tomb. While the services were underway, bombs were detonated in three of those churches, and elsewhere across the city leaving hundreds dead.

This is not the world as it should be. That world will come. There will be a world where the resurrection of Christ is not anomaly, but instead a precedent. A world where for those who hope in Christ, every tear will be dried, every piece of shrapnel will be softened, every cancer cell eradicated, every fear absolved. That is the very real and practical hope of this Easter Sunday, that there is a

better world to be had, and it is had only through Jesus Christ. There is death on the horizon, but those who hope in the son find refuge.

Even though that is our future, we have a hope now, and a hope only in the world as it is because of Jesus. You see amidst the tears of faithful believers across the world, Jesus stands and he points to the very tomb they gathered to remember and he says: “Do not be afraid. For what was inside the tomb is greater than what was outside.”

This story isn’t make believe. It is the true story of what Jesus has done for us. And the offer of those four words stands for you today. To lay down the anxiety which comes from avoiding God, and instead to find the fear and great joy that comes from knowing God through Jesus Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, what greater promise do you need that obedience and faith in Jesus is always for your good? It is fearful to give your life to a savior who calls you to come and die, but it is a joy when you realize that he has borne the brunt of death already for you. So follow him in fear and great joy.

For those in here who do not yet see this, what fear do you have if that tomb were to be opened in your heart? Because I promise you if the Holy Spirit were to open it for you today, you will be shaken, but you will see that what is inside is will bring you great joy. But to leave the stone in place means that you might one day know Jesus in fear and sorrow.

Jesus is in the business of breaking tombs, and I pray that today he is beginning to break the tomb of your heart so that you might repent, believe and worship. If that is you please talk to someone today.