



For John, Jesus' cousin, he had come a long way since Jesus had 'dropped by' their fishing business and invited John to follow him to be his disciple. Maybe, because they were cousins Jesus seemed to confide in John and spend more one on one time with him than some of the other disciples. What that meant was that John was there when Jesus turned water into 649 bottles of wine at that wedding in Cana near the Sea of Galilee. It meant that he was on the Mountain top when Moses and Elijah came for a visit and John saw Jesus glowing with a radiance that took his breath away. And it also meant that John was front and center when the guards from the Temple came and arrested Jesus.

Maybe it was because of their friendship, that when everyone else ran away, John stayed the closest to Jesus that night. In the gospel of John he talks about how he was there, in the back row as the Sanhedrin grilled Jesus, struck him and talked about his fate. He was there as Pilate washed his hands and said to the crowd, "I find no guilt in this man". He was the lone disciple who stood at the foot of the cross taking a great risk to his own life to stay with his friend to the very end. He was there when Jesus shouted from the cross, "It is finished". He was there in the dark as they took Jesus off the cross. He heard the 3 nails being dropped into the bucket as Jesus was taken off the cross. And he was there in the silence after they took Jesus away to be buried.

Just think what it must have been like after all he had heard that day to be standing in silence before the empty Cross. There was not more ringing of the hammer as nails were being pounded in. No more mocking crowds. No more groans from the cross, just silence. I hope over this Easter season you have been able to grab a little 'silence time' to stand in your mind beneath the cross and be overwhelmed by what the cross is all about. Jesus coming from Glory to earth to die for those things in our lives that we wish we could have a 'do over with'. But because we are stuck in time we can never fix them ourselves. That is why God came to earth in the form of Jesus. For because He is the eternal God (the God who is not bound by space or time) He can in one day, with one act of dying on the cross forgive our past/ present and even future sins. We are able to live free, forgiven and begin again. Sometime grab some quiet-time and claim that forgiveness and be thankful for it was given for you at a high cost.

The next time we find John in the middle of silence he is standing in the empty tomb. Mary Madeline had been to the tomb on the Sunday morning, only to find the stone not just rolled away but lying 20 feet away as if thrown by some amazing force, and Jesus' body was missing. She ran and told the disciples what had happened and John along with Peter ran to the tomb. John arrived first but was afraid to enter so Peter pushed past him, entered the tomb and it would seem John then followed him. There in the silence of the empty tomb he had the most astounding aha's moment of his life. Listen to what he wrote, John 20:3-8, "*So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.*

Two things you can't miss:

1) In the original Greek the word they used to describe how the grave clothes (that had been wrapped around Jesus' body in a mummy form) were lying after Jesus' resurrection. It says that they were "rolled up" or 'still in their folds". It wasn't that someone had unwrapped Jesus' body by unrolling the strips of the grave clothes. Instead, it was as if he had evaporated right out of the air and they were lying still in their folds or wrapped form.

2) A while ago I heard Phil Callaway speak. He told us about an afternoon drive with his 5 year old son. On a lazy Saturday afternoon as they drove along in their van they passed a cemetery in their home town. As they were driving by the grave yard they noticed a freshly excavated grave with a pile of dirt beside it. Without thinking, his son said, "Look Dad! One got out." Of course they laughed until Phil was struck by how profound a thought that was. It struck him that his 5 year old child had uttered something that adults spend a lifetime missing. One got out! Talk about an apt summation of what took place in the wee hours of Easter Sunday morning. It is too bad we hadn't been at the tomb that first morning when Peter emerged from the tomb so perplexed. Maybe it would have help Peter make sense of it all if Phil's little boy had just quipped, "Hey Peter, did one get out?"

That simple line could be said of every Christian who has ever died," that one got out". For the grave is a thoroughfare – not a destination for us as believers. That simple line changed devastated disciples into a force that changed their world. That line changes an Easter service from a graveside remembrance to an expectation that the same Jesus will walk with us today and tomorrow and in whatever lays ahead for us in our lives.

Look again at verses 6 & 7. That the cloth that had been over Jesus' face was folded up by itself and then it adds these words, "He (John) saw and believed". Now what was so special about this folded cloth that chased away John's profound sadness and made him believe that Jesus was risen from the dead? Well, it goes back to something every Jewish boy/girl would have known. You will remember that the Crucifixion happened during the Passover Feast which celebrated how God freed the Jews from Slavery in Egypt. You see at the Passover meal (which was led by the Father of the family) each person has a napkin beside their plate. What is interesting is how the father uses the napkin in telling the kids in the family a couple important things. For example; when the meal is over the Father will wipe his hands, bawl up the napkin and throw it onto his plate. This meant that the meal was over. However, if he wants to leave the table for a moment and then come back, what he would do is neatly fold the napkin and place it off to the side of his plate. John entered the tomb looked at the folded napkin, remembered his Passover meal tradition and I believe caught not only the joke but the profound promise Jesus had made. He was saying, "I'll be back, I have just left the table for a few moments I'll be right back". And as we know He was good to His promise. He met Mary in the Garden that afternoon and later He walked with the couple from Emmaus then He walked through the wall into the Upper Room and said to those hiding there, "Peace be with you". The next week He met them again (with Thomas present this time) and for the next 40 days He kept meeting with them until they got it. Jesus Christ had risen from the grave. He kept His word, 'He came back, He is Risen". And because of that fact He is able to walk with us today for He is Our Risen Lord. He is your present Lord today.

The next time John meets his Jesus, is almost 60 years later. He is in his 90's and has faithfully preached, planted churches and lived a life following his Friend/ Saviors teachings. He is on the Isle of Patmos, a prison on a rocky island serving time because he is still a faithful follower of his Friend Jesus. He has one more encounter with Jesus in Revelation 1:9-12. The 2 golden lamp stands represent 7 specific churches in Turkey (we will be starting a 7 week series called You've God Mail beginning on April 25th on what Jesus said to these churches along with pictures, history, and how it affects us today); 13 (looked like the "son of Man" – a nickname used for Jesus. John was saying at first glance this person looked like my friend Jesus); : 13-17 but he was so much more than the Jesus he remembered for Jesus was clothed in all his Heavenly glory. And it was so overwhelming that he fainted dead away.

As he awoke: 17-19 Jesus gently places his hand on his shoulder and says," John it's me only now you have been given a larger glimpse of who I really am. I am the first (He who began time and created all things) and the Last (he who will always be and will always be in control of all things which will happen to you). And then for the next 21 chapters in poetic form he unfolds some amazing things about mankind's future. I wanted to end here because sometimes we forget that the wonder of Easter is that after Jesus came to live and die for our sins He rose again and went to Heaven. The good news is that He who died for us now lives in Heaven to watch over us and care for us. The amazing news is that He is no longer the human, earth bound Jesus instead, He is once again the God of the Universe; the King of Kings (who when John caught a glimpse of him caused him to faint in astonishment); He is the one whom the Hallelujah chorus is speaking about as it ends with us standing to our feet and then almost shouting, He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lord. Easter is when Jesus takes off his human body and puts on his eternal one once again. And the promise is that He who rules the universe – who was there as time began and will be there throughout all the rest of eternity will walk with us as we live our lives in this life and the next. Why? Because Easter tells us He is risen, He is risen indeed!

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