

ROAD TO ANASTATIS

Oh! Glorious Day!

“Our old history ends with the cross;
our new history begins with the resurrection.” – *Watchman Nee*

As we rejoice in the glorious resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, let's begin by remembering exactly why the physical resurrection of Jesus brings about such a glorious day. His resurrection solved a problem – we can call it a ‘grave problem’ that began in the first garden.

Read Genesis 2:15-17 (ESV) ¹⁵ *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.* ¹⁶ *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”*

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is symbolic of the promise of death God made to mankind as the penalty for sin. Adam and his descendants would go to the grave – which meant not only physical death but eternal separation from God. The death promise went into effect the moment that Adam was disobedient and ate from the fruit of the tree.

There is a tree directly parallel to this Garden tree. It is the tree called Calvary fashioned into a wooden cross where Jesus died for the purpose of paying the sin debt we all inherited from Adam. By Jesus going to the grave and then rising from that grave in victory over death, He won for those willing to accept it – eternal life – a personal spot in the eternal Garden of the Glory of God. (**Revelation 22**). The tree in Eden promises death – the tree of Calvary promises life – eternal life for all who believe and accept Christ as Savior.

Now, let's move our thoughts to a another garden – specifically a garden tomb. It would have been small and insignificant in comparison to the Garden of Eden but what happened there was very significant – life changing in fact. Jesus had been laid in a new rock-hewn tomb that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, a rich member of the Sanhedrin. His personal tomb so happened to be located in a convenient place in a garden near to the Place of the Skull where Jesus had been crucified.

READ John 20:1-2 (ESV) ¹ *Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.* ² *So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”*

When suggesting a place for a non-believer to begin reading the Bible, most recommend the Gospel of John. John who wrote this account was personally present at the empty tomb.

Our Lord had told His disciples that He was to be crucified, but that on the third day He would rise again. For example: **Mark 8:31 (ESV)** ³¹ *And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

The disciples never grasped what Jesus meant. I think when Jesus told them He was going to die, something in them just refused to believe it. No one wants to think that suffering comes before glory. After Jesus did die, they certainly were not looking for Him to rise again. They thought the cross had destroyed His claims to be the Messiah because they did not yet comprehend the whole picture. I believe this was because they misunderstood the purpose of the First Coming of the Messiah which was to become the once for all sacrifice for the sins of the world. It was their belief that the Messiah at that time was going to set up His literal kingdom which we now know will occur at His Second Coming. It has always surprised me how the enemies of Jesus remembered what His disciples did not! Even in their disbelief of Jesus being the Promised Messiah, the ‘haters’ wanted to ‘cover all their bases.’

Even though events had not turned out as expected, the disciples still loved Jesus and some returned to the gravesite as soon as possible. A large stone had been fitted into a groove that ran along the front of the tomb. The stone was rolled into place in front of the tomb opening and then sealed. The seal and the presence of security guards were to satisfy the Pharisees.

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb on the first day of the week. She and the other women hoped to go in and take care of the body in a way it had not been taken care of when Jesus was hurriedly removed from the cross and placed behind the stone.

Some wonder why most Christians worship collectively on the first day of the week instead of the last day of the week as prescribed by the fourth commandment. When we study the New Testament we find that whenever Christ appears in His resurrected form and the day is mentioned, it is always the first day of the week. The only times the Sabbath is mentioned from Acts through Revelation is for the purpose of Jewish evangelism.

Recall what Jesus said when the Pharisees complained about Him breaking the Sabbath in *Matthew 12:8 (ESV)*
⁸ *For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.*”

God set the example of His resting on the seventh day of Creation to establish the principle of the Sabbath Day of rest. Later, God gave the Israelites this commandment in *Exodus 20:8 (ESV)*⁸ *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. One day out of every seven, they were to rest from their labors and give the same day of rest to their servants and animals.*

Ceasing to labor and resting on the Sabbath Day was a picture of the ‘rest’ the Coming Messiah would bring. *Matthew 11:28 (ESV)*²⁸ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Today we rest in Christ through salvation. Under the Old Testament Law, the Jews constantly labored to make themselves acceptable to God but the offerings and sacrifices they made were only temporary. Because of what Christ did, we no longer have to work at law-keeping in order to be justified in the sight of God.

Christians worship on Sundays in celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, our collective celebration of the risen Lord is not just on Easter but every first day of the week. It is very important to remember, though, Sunday worship is not commanded in the Bible, and Sunday has not replaced Saturday and become the Christian Sabbath. While the New Testament describes Christians gathering and worshipping on the first day of the week, it nowhere states that Sunday has replaced Saturday as the Sabbath. The key point is that

we are not to limit our worship to any particular day of the week. We are to rest in the Lord every day. We are to worship our Savior continually and there is a ‘third rest’ coming!

Read Hebrews 4:9-11 (ESV) ⁹ *So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,* ¹⁰ *for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.* ¹¹ *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.*

This passage refers to the future rest that all believers will enjoy with God. This word for rest is the Greek word *sabbatismos*—‘a keeping of a Sabbath’—and this is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. When the saints enter heaven, we will be sharing God’s great Sabbath rest, with all labors and battles ended. **Revelation 14:13 (ESV)** ¹³ *And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”*

Read John 20:3-4 (ESV) ³ *So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb.* ⁴ *Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.*

It is a glorious day when we run to Jesus – for the very first time and for all the years of our life. John never mentions himself by name in his gospel but it is clear that the *other disciple* and *the disciple who Jesus loved* are both references to John. John makes his own identity clear in **chapter 21**.

Read John 20:5-9 (ESV) ⁵ *And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.* ⁶ *Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there,* ⁷ *and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.* ⁸ *Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;* ⁹ *for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*

On the third day, the grave was empty! The grave clothes were all in order. In **John 11**, John recorded that when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he was bound in his grave clothes. He came out of the tomb in his natural body. But, when Jesus came out from the tomb, His natural body had been changed to a spiritual body. The grave clothes were undisturbed.

It was a glorious day when the truth “clicked” for John. This has always been one of my favorite parts of the resurrection narrative. I love the words John wrote concerning himself and the resurrection: *he saw and believed*. This statement means more than just believing Mary’s report that the tomb was empty. John wrote his account around 60 years after the resurrection of Jesus and he recorded in **John 2:22 (ESV)** ²² *When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.* I believe that John’s understanding of the resurrection came alive for him the moment he looked into the empty tomb.

For some, it takes a second look to see Jesus!

John 20:10-16 (ESV) ¹⁰ *Then the disciples went back to their homes.* ¹¹ *But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.* ¹² *And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the*

*body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.*¹³ *They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”*¹⁴ *Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.*¹⁵ *Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”*¹⁶ *Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).*

I can identify with Mary at the tomb! There she was crying over where “they” had put the Lord’s body when Jesus was alive! Mary was worrying for no reason! Mary was no different from us. Jesus passes by and we often fail to recognize His Presence with us for one reason or the other. But, like He called to Mary, Jesus will call to our hearts.

John 20:17-18 (ESV)¹⁷ *Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”*¹⁸ *Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.*

Mary grabbed the feet of Jesus and held on for ‘dear life’! This was natural. Now that she had found Him, she did not want to let Him go. She and the other believers had a great deal to learn about the risen Jesus; they still wanted to relate to Him as they had done during the years of His ministry before the cross and that was not to be.

Jesus permitted the other women to hold His feet. **Matthew 28:9 (ESV)**⁹ *And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.* He did not forbid them so why did He forbid Mary? One reason was that she would see Him again before He ascended to the Father. Mary had no need to panic; this was not her last and final meeting with the Lord. A second reason is that she had a job to do—go and tell the others that He was alive and would ascend to the Father.

Some Bible students feel that Jesus did return to the Father on that morning, and that was the ascension He was referring to. I agree with Wiersbe who says that to say that Jesus was fulfilling the symbolism of the Day of Atonement and presenting the blood to the Father may be stretching the picture of Leviticus 16 since Jesus had no blood to present; He had presented that on the cross when He was made sin for us and shed His precious blood there. In His resurrection glory, Jesus described Himself as ‘flesh and bones’ not ‘flesh and blood’ in **Luke 24:39 (ESV)**³⁹ *See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.* The Resurrection itself was and is proof that Jesus has completed the work of redemption. There is nothing more to do except believe in Him and rest in the One who is the Lord of the Sabbath!

Living, He loved me; dying, He saved me;
 Buried, He carried my sins far away;
 Rising, He justified freely forever:
 One day He’s coming—O glorious day!