

Easter Sunday: The Day of Freedom

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(Pick up a newspaper) – Look at this --

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/still-in-the-grip-of-burmas-tyrants-7619307.html>.

During the last 30 years, thousands of Burmese men and women have been imprisoned by their own government as “political prisoners.” On January 12, of this year, the government announced that they were releasing 651 of them. They have a long way to go, but what would it be like to be freed after a decade or more behind bars?

You walk out into the bright sun. You shield your eyes. You breathe in the fresh air. You feel soft grass under your feet for the first time. You notice the birds are singing. You receive your first embrace in years. You think of all the foods you want to enjoy. Everyone who you once knew now looks much older. The horizon stretches out before you and looks so distant. You regret the lost years but you are thankful for today – this is your Day of Freedom, and you vow to make the most of your future.

Today, on Easter, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus – the empty tomb. When Jesus opened that door, and walked out of that tomb, it must have been an amazing experience, even for him. He invites us to walk with Him out that door as well, to enter into the full implications of resurrection life.

The resurrection of Jesus was the Day of Freedom. If you want to follow along, the account of Jesus resurrection that I will be using is found in John 20.

- I. (Vss 1-10) It was early in the morning, on the Sabbath, and Mary Magdalene walks in the darkness of the dawn and the darkness of her emotions – gripped with grief and disappointment, to the tomb of Jesus.

She had been there when Jesus had been crucified. She loved Jesus and believed in Him. She had been miraculously healed by him. She was horrified to see the events of Calvary. She hadn't run away. She stayed there. She watched him die. Three

days later she isn't ready to move on. She isn't free. She is full of fear and regret and sorrow. Those emotions weigh on her like heavy stones. She gets to the tomb and the stone that covered the entrance is rolled away. She is horrified, angry, upset and convinced that the Romans (or someone) had taken away His body.

She literally runs to the house where the disciples are staying and she finds John and Peter who are getting their day slowly started, and begins her rant.

Peter, and John, sharing in her panic and curiosity, run for the tomb. John outruns Peter and once at the tomb entrance, he stops in his tracks. John peers into the tomb and it's true. The burial cloths are there but there is no body.

An out of breath Peter comes barreling around the corner and races into the tomb, past John. They go deeper into the tomb where they see the burial cloths curiously folded.

It was at this moment that John "believed". He didn't say anything and his mind was swirling with questions.

We know that Jesus had conquered death. Jesus had paid the price for our sins. Jesus had removed the biggest obstacle. The one that kept us from a relationship with God. He had done it. He was victorious.

1 Cor. 15:54b-57

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sin and death are closely related. The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life. Jesus, during the time between the cross and His resurrection, took care of the sin problem. He conquered death!

We are set free from sin and death and set free *to know God personally and deeply.* We have been offered an incredible gift – a golden ticket. I'm sure you heard that last week the lottery was at \$656 million. I am sure some of you bought tickets. Apparently 3 winning tickets were bought, each worth \$218 million. None of those winners has yet come forward. Perhaps the winning tickets were thrown away. What a bummer! God's gift, available to us, is worth so much more.

II. (Vss. 11-18)

In 1996 I was running in the Portland Marathon and was only 1.5 miles from the finish. I was in 5th place. I was running alone. I crossed one of the bridges there in Portland and I came to an intersection and I didn't know which way to go. I didn't see any marks on the road and whoever was supposed to be monitoring the course had taken a break. I went the wrong way. After running 24 miles I was now ruining my race. I was panicked and frustrated. I was confused. I knew that I was close to the finish, close to the course, but slightly off track. This is where many people live, spiritually. Close but off track. With good intentions but heading the wrong direction.

Kind of like Mary Magdalene. She now makes another trip back to the tomb.

In the fog of the trauma of recent events, she shows up and she is still confused. She is still grieving. She looks into the tomb and sees two men inside – actually they are angels. I don't suspect that had wings. They ask her, "Why are you crying?"

She expresses her concern over his missing body. She is confused and full of grief. Out of nowhere, a man comes up behind her and asks the same question: "Why are you crying?" and "Who are you looking for?" She answers. He then says "Mary!" and when she hears him speak her name she recognizes his voice...She then carries this message to the other disciples – the first one to announce the Good News of the resurrection.

When Mary encountered Jesus she was set free from sorrow and confusion and she receives peace. Jesus was so approachable, she confused him as a gardener. He is approachable and comes to us in our dark times.

We are set free from sorrow and confusion and set free to know hope and the truth.

Often, in a person's grief, when confronted with mortality, they will find Jesus and they will find hope. "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32). The truth isn't information. It is a person. His name is Jesus.

III. (Vss. 19-22)

That evening the disciples are together. They have the doors locked and bolted. After seeing what the Romans did to Jesus, they know that they could be next. There is fear in the air. You can taste it. They don't know what to make of today's stories, and then, suddenly, Jesus appears in the room and says, "Peace be with you". The fear that was in the room disappears. The fear that was in the hearts of those in the room is instantly replaced with GREAT JOY and peace.

Jesus says, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Just like that, they are set free from fear. Jesus love fills that room. The one whom they rejected, accepts them.

How much does fear control our behaviors?

Many parent their children out of fear of embarrassment or fear of rebellion.

A fear of rejection motivates me to be a good husband.

A fear of failure motivates me to work hard.

A fear of hell motivates me to obey the Bible.

If you follow this pattern of living, like I have at times, then we become slaves to fear. Locked up. Awkward. Hand cuffed. He holds the keys to our homes and he holds the keys to our hearts.

God wants us free from that. Perfect love casts out all fear.

Jesus stands in our circumstances and says, "Peace."

¹² Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3)

We are set free from fear and we are set free to experience joy and the motivation of love.

IV. (vs. 23)

Jesus speaks to them: "If you forgive anyone their sins, they will be forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

The future of Jesus message depended on forgiveness. Jesus forgives His followers.

They, in turn must become forgiving people. It was the only way people would believe.

“Your forgiving of others will enable others to be forgiven. “

God is a forgiver. He doesn't engrave our sins in stone. I think He uses one of these (an Etch a Sketch)

And when we ask Him for forgiveness, He remembers them no more.

We are set free from guilt and set free to forgive others.

V. (vss. 24-29)

Then there is Thomas. He missed out on these encounters with Jesus. He wasn't there when any of these things happened. Ever feel like everyone else has the miracles and the mystical encounters, but not you? That is exactly how Thomas felt. He declares “I cannot believe and I will not believe unless I see the nail marks in his hands and I place my finger upon those wounds and I put my hand in his side.”

One week later, Jesus appears to Thomas. He says, “Peace be with you!. Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

The biggest skeptics make the greatest believers. **We are set free from our doubts set free to have convincing faith.** This happens when we seek Him. “Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” – Matthew 7:7-8

Cut out the start (Scripture) and the end of this video:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=tAvxnfVSaOs

Conclusion

On this “Day of Freedom” – Follow Jesus out of the tomb and into freedom. Take your golden ticket and cash it in for its full value receiving freedom from your doubts and fears. Freedom from shame. Free to forgive. Free from sins. Free from self hate. Free to love.