

“Joy Comes with the Morning”
Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.
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Have you ever had a time of sadness, and then came relief? E.g., when I was in school I recall exam time right before the summer always seemed to be like that. I recall one particular year I was in college and in finals in May, and I was thinking that exactly one week from that day I would be fishing with my uncle in Selma, AL, and I couldn't wait. I just had to apply myself to the drudgery at the moment for the joy that was awaiting. Sometimes we have a time of difficulty at night and then when day dawns, all is much better. E.g., I recall in my first year of ministry Elena and I had a lock-in at the church where we stayed up all night—and I had never done that before! Elena and I stayed up with the youth until morning came, and we were so happy for the parents to come and pick up their children and we could go to bed! You have probably also had similar experiences where you went through a hard time and joy came afterwards. But what do we do in the face of a tragedy of death? What do we do when we lose a loved one, whether unexpectedly or not. E.g., I recall a family who had lost a teenage son in a car accident, and they kept his bedroom exactly as it had been when he died. That type of grief is enormous. When does the joy come? Our passage helps us answer that.

READ Matthew 28:1-10 (pp. 33-34)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just been crucified. His body is laid in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea; he asks Pilate for Jesus' body. Instead of Jesus' body being thrown in a common grave like most crucified people, Jesus is given a proper burial. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary watch while Jesus is being buried. The Jewish religious leaders are concerned, since Jesus had told the crowds that after three days He would be raised, that Jesus' body could be stolen by His disciples, so they request from Pilate a guard to watch over the tomb, So a guard is set over the tomb.

READ vv 1-6. "The women come to the tomb at dawn, when their hearts are consumed with grief, but they are startled by the unexpected and the unthinkable— as the psalmist said, 'weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning' (Psalm 30:5b)! But see 16:21-23." There are some things we think are unexpected and unthinkable. E.g., the world record for the mile is 3:43.--- the four-minute mile was broken by Roger Bannister in 1954, and 46 days later his record was broken. I recall in high school I ran the half mile (800) and my best time was 2:04, but to break the four-minute mile one must do back to back half miles in a bit under 2 minutes. The record today means one must run two 800s in nearly 1:52 each. E.g., the Crescent City Class last year was won in the time of 27:52, or about 4:30 seconds per mile. The resurrection is like that, but far greater. It's like saying one can run a mile in the snap of a finger! Now, Jesus did tell His disciples during His ministry that He would undergo great suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and rise on the third day, as in Matthew 16:21. But they did not expect it, and they are extremely grieved when He is crucified and buried. The women come to the tomb and there is an earthquake, and angel of the Lord comes down and moved the stone away from the grave and he sits on it, and tells them He is not there but has been raised from

the dead. Their emotions went from sadness to great joy in the morning! E.g., I am reminded of someone I had heard interviewed on the news who had a very serious case of the coronavirus and his life was in danger, and he got well, and it was a joyful interview!

READ vv 7-8. “The angel’s message to the women is both simple and astonishing: don’t fear; the crucified One is not here but raised from the dead; go and tell His disciples. This is a nice summary of the gospel message! Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.” Again, the message of joy is here, as can be seen with the women being told not to fear. It becomes all the more impressive a command when Jesus also says it in v 10. This is a theme we find often in the Bible. Like in Joshua 1:9 when Joshua is about to take the Promised Land; in Jeremiah 1:8 when the young Jeremiah is called by God to deliver a message to Israel; when Jesus stills the storm in Matthew 8 and walks on water in Matthew 14 Jesus tells His disciples not to fear; in 2 Timothy 1:7 Paul says the Lord has not given us a Spirit of timidity, but of power, and love, and self-control. The reason for not fearing is because it is stated directly or implied that God is near, He is with them. The same is true here. E.g., I know a woman who lives alone, but the fact that family lives right across the street from her gives her comfort. We also don’t need to fear because the tomb was empty— Jesus rose from the dead. It has been said that the greatest fears people have are speaking in front of people and death, and for Christians I would include in that sharing the gospel with a non-believer. I think the reason is we sometimes think of the Christian faith as “my” truth, but not the truth for others— like those who are Jewish, Muslim, or Buddhist. But Jesus claims to be the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). We also may think the evidence for the Christian faith is weak. The resurrection is the core of the Christian faith. Richard Dawkins has said that belief in the resurrection is like believe in Jack and the Bestalk. But

such a statement is surely one of profound ignorance, for *no one* ever died or risked his or her life for Jack and the Beanstalk. In his book *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, New Testament scholar William Craig has a chapter which I think is perhaps the strongest argument for the resurrection, and that is the existence of Christianity. As I said, the resurrection is the core of the Christian faith—without it, there is no Christianity (1 Corinthians 15:14). He quotes from New Testament scholar from Cambridge University, Professor C.F.D. Moule, who said, “. . . the birth and rapid rise of the Christian Church. . . remain an unsolved enigma for any historian who refuses to take seriously the only explanation offered by the Church itself” (p. 131). One cannot find a convincing explanation for Christianity without the resurrection. He has conquered our greatest fears. He is with us, and that is enough. And we are to tell others. Often this idea of telling others makes us very uncomfortable, but if we think about our fear in telling others we will see it is highly inappropriate. E.g., imagine someone finding a cure for the coronavirus, but did not tell anyone about it, what would you think of that person? We would think that person is responsible for many deaths.

READ vv 9-10. “When the women see the resurrected Jesus they do the only appropriate thing: they fall, grab His feet and worship! Cf Revelation 22:8-10.” The final way we see joy is not only in their grief turned to joy, the gospel message of joy, but also joy is in the grabbing! All four gospels and Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 are consistent with this one thing at least-- the resurrected Jesus was physical. I.e., it was not a dream vision, it was not a subjective experience, but rather it really happened. The message of the resurrection is *true*. E.g., recall the fairy tales of childhood? I recall in the second grade I was a big defender of them— getting in arguments at lunch time with friends over it! But when I became an adult I gave up the childish fairy tales. Some adults feel that way about

Jesus' resurrection— another one of those fairy tales to give up. The only problem is, people don't die for fairy tales, especially when they claim objective experience with it. The only appropriate response to the resurrected Jesus is to worship Him, as the women do here. Notice that Jesus accepts the worship, unlike the angel in Revelation that John falls down to worship; READ Revelation 22f:8-10. For Jesus, this is appropriate, and indicates His divine status.

“What is your and my source of joy in the morning?” We have talked about joy through three “Gs”: grief, gospel, and grabbing. The grief of the women was turned to joy with what they found— or better, didn't find— at the tomb. The gospel inherently one not of fear but joy, and we have to tell somebody! And there is joy in the grabbing, as the women grabbed Jesus' feet— it showed Jesus was real, not imaginary. I invite you into this joy this morning and trust Jesus, whether for the first time as Lord and Savior, or to trust Him more deeply and know His joy.