

It's Sunday but Monday is Coming - April 24th, 2011 – Matthew 28:1-15

Matthew 28:1-15 1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." 8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." 11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

- I have to confess, that while I always look forward to Resurrection Sunday every year, I find myself a little more conflicted than usual this year.
- As I enquired of the Lord, and petitioned the throne as to what the source of the conflict in my heart was, the Holy Spirit began to minister to me.
- During this last week, we call Passion Week, the Lord put His finger on, and identified that which, has become the source of this internal struggle.

- Perhaps you'll indulge me for just a moment as I share candidly and personally from my heart to yours why this Easter is very different, this year.
- Every year at this time, pastor's like myself prepare a Resurrection message, in anticipation of the many visitors that will likely attend his church.
- In addition to this, there's still a tradition in this, in that the faithful who regularly attend, do so in anticipation of the pastor's resurrection message.

- Predictably, the pastor will usually do an altar call at the end, with the hopes that those visiting his church will accept Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- Now, about now, you may be asking yourself, "OK... so pastor, what's wrong with that, isn't that's what Easter is all about, what is your problem?"
- Well, thank you for asking, and thank you for caring. Here's my problem, and it's "THE" problem with Easter every year, it's the same every year.

- So much so, that we all know the drill, if you will. Even my four year old daughter knows that Jesus died for our sins, and He rose from the dead.
- We all know what Easter Sunday is all about, so we get all dressed up very nicely, as I see many of you have, and we celebrate the Risen Christ.
- Then, after the service we'll eat a bountiful meal to our hearts content, some of whom will stuff themselves only to wish we hadn't eaten so much.

- Here's a question; does what I just shared provide, for the most part, a fair description of what Resurrection Sunday is like for you every year?
- If so, I want to encourage you to revisit with me, a fresh fire from the Holy Spirit on the altar of our celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- The reason I say that, in this way, is because I do not have the Lord's permission to just preach another sermon in a can, on this special Sunday.

- If you came to this church today hoping for a nicely packaged sermon and conveniently delivered Easter message you'll be sorely disappointed.
- However, and I think I speak for most all of you here in this service, I would venture to say that you share my frustration with Easter's status quo.
- Every Easter, we witness those who hear the gospel, and they even raise their hand, then repeat a prayer at the end of it, but that's the end of it.

- While I am keenly aware that this may be perceived as a typical pastor who's become cynical, please know that I am not cynical, I am concerned.
- Since planting this amazing church, which I'm privileged to pastor, over six years ago now, we have experienced an unusual amount of deaths.
- Some recently, others suddenly, even one, my own daughter, very unnaturally, and as the pastor, I'm forced to deal with this thing called death.

- When I, as the "clergy," stand before grieving family and friends at a loved one's memorial service, I'm expected to offer some hope and comfort.
- The problem is, I cannot and will not offer a false assurance that, "they are in a better place" because they raised their hand and prayed a prayer.
- Let me hasten to say that I am in no way talking about those who have genuinely come to Christ and been truly born again by doing it in this way.

- What I am talking about, and that which I am most concerned about, are those who think that they are Christians because they did it in that way.
- This is why they're called; "C" and "E" Christians. It's because they will usually only go to church on Christmas and Easter thinking "it's all good."
- They believe God is good and that they are good, because they heard the pastor preach that Easter sermon; "It's Friday, but Sunday is coming!"
- Don't get me wrong, I praise and thank God for the Sunday Resurrection that is a coming after the Friday crucifixion, but it does not end there.

- I would suggest, that Sunday's already here, but Monday is a coming, and when it does, it's like nothing happened, it's back to business as usual.
- It's for this reason that I've been so conflicted this Easter then, as I was lamenting before the Lord about this struggle, He hearkened unto my cry.
- Actually, it came vis-a-vis preparing for the teaching out of the book of Deuteronomy chapter two at our midweek Bible study on Thursday night.

- Deuteronomy? Isn't that the Old Testament? Yes it is, but before you blow me off, you may wish to hear me out. Consider just these five facts:
1. The name of the book, is the nature of what's in the book. Deuteronomy means second repeating of the law; "two," (deuce), "law," (nomos).
2. Deuteronomy is amongst the most quoted books in all of the New Testament, with what some have counted to be over one hundred references.
3. It is from this book that Jesus would quote when He was tempted by the Devil in the desert after he had been fasting 40 days and nights.
4. Jesus quoted more from the book of Deuteronomy than He did from any one of the Old Testament books, even more than the book of Isaiah.
5. Unique to this fifth and final book of Moses, we find that the word "love" is mentioned more than any of the other four books in the Pentateuch.

- "Wow pastor, thank you ever so much for telling us about this Old Testament book of Deuteronomy on this celebration of resurrection Sunday."
- Well, you are ever so welcome! Now, here's what the Lord both revealed to me, and answered for me, from this amazing book of Deuteronomy.
- In this second giving of the law to this second generation of Israelites, Moses needs to prepare them for the battles, being prepared for them.

- To do this, Moses, in chapter two, preaches the first of five sermons retelling them of the many battles their forefathers encountered before them.
- He recounts how that God did not have them battle the Edomites nor the Moabites, but they would have to rise up and battle with the Amorites.
- That's when it hit me. This was the "why" behind the "what" of Moses preaching a sermon, and repeating what would be seen as a familiar story.

- Moses is prudently and passionately providing a full disclosure of all the fine print, prior to the Israelites taking possession of the Promised-Land.
- God knows, and Moses is made keenly aware, that just because God has promised it to them, it does not mean that it won't be a battle for them.
- We would be grossly remiss to not take notice of this most profound principle woven into the fabric of this truth, as it will connect the Easter dots.

- Just because God has promised it to us, does not mean that it won't be a battle for us. The Christian life is not a playground, it's a battle ground.
- We do err when we develop a faulty mindset thinking we can take it easy, because it will be easy, when in reality it will be riddled with difficulty.
- It's for this reason that a lot of people either backslide, fall away, or were never truly born again to begin with. Consider the parable of the sower.

Matthew 13:3-9 NIV Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. (4) As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. (5) Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. (6) But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. (7) Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. (8) Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (9) He who has ears, let him hear."

Matthew 13:18-23 NIV "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: (19) When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. (20) The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. (21) But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. (22) The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. (23) But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

- In this parable, Jesus is teaching us that unless the seed of God's Word is met with the supple soil of our minds and hearts, there will be no fruit.
- While we're given the different reasons all the others did not grow and produce a crop, there does seem to be some similarities with all of them.
- One hears it but doesn't understand it, another is shallow with no root, and the other is worried about, deceived by, and choked with life's riches.

- Now, here's the common denominator with all of them; they all had a faulty mindset thinking the Christian life is a playground not a battleground.
- The trampled down don't understand - the shallow with no root deep down don't last - the rich choked with worries they'll go down don't produce.
- They all become disillusioned when the trampling by the wayside, the heat of the day, and the troubles of life come on and in their Christian life.

- I believe this is one of the main reasons that Moses goes into this detail for this next generation. He prepares them for battles prepared for them.
- There's one more thing here before we move on; if the truth be known, we really don't want it any other way. If it's not hard, it's not worth it.
- We are wired to devalue that which comes too easily, because the end product is cheapened, by virtue of how that the process is weakened.

- I've heard it said this way; "the bitterness of poor quality lingers on long after the sweetness of a cheap price." Yes, you can quote me on that :)
- Like with the Israelites entering the Promised-Land to easily, so too are we prone to cheapen the quality of God's promises by wanting it easily.
- Then, when the spiritual battles in the Christian life trample us down, burn us out, and choke us up, we become disenchanting and disillusioned.

- This would explain what happens, and why it happens, when it happens, on Sunday, because Monday is a coming, and the battles are a coming!
- They've been told the Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ on Sunday, but they have not been told the bad news of death to self on Monday.
- They've been told the Good News of the cost Christ paid for our sins on Sunday, but not the bad news that we must count the cost on Monday.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 NIV (1) Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. **(2) By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.** (3) For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

- Notice how Paul says you are saved IF you hold firmly to the Word preached to you otherwise, you may fancy yourself a believer, but it is in vain.
- This would imply that it will be a battle to "hold firmly" to the Word you heard preached, meaning that there's the propensity for it to not take hold.
- IF the seed of God's Word falls on soil that's hard, dry, and full of thorns and thistles, then, even if it takes hold initially, it won't last eventually.

- Does this mean that if only one fourth of the different soils are supple, that only 25% of people who hear the Gospel preached will produce fruit?
- This may come as a surprise to you, but I have actually heard it taught in that way. Be that as it may, I have considerable difficulty with that.
- Here's why; contrary to a loving God Who wills that none perish it allows an abdicating of and acquiescing to the unbroken and unplowed ground.

- The plow of preparation breaks the soil of the hardened heart, and rids the mind of the thorns and thistles of its stubbornness and its obstinance.
- When the ground is plowed by counting the cost, picking up the cross, and dying to self, then it's ready for the new life in the seed of God's Word.
- When the ground is broken by the bad news of its fallow and shallow condition, the seed of the Good News germinates, sprouts, and bears fruit.

Hosea 10:12 NKJV Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For *it is* time to seek the LORD, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you.

The fallow field is smug, contented, protected from the shock of the plow and the agitation of the harrow.... But it is paying a terrible price for its tranquility: Never does it see the miracle of growth; never does it feel the motions of mounting life nor see the wonders of bursting seed nor the beauty of ripening grain. Fruit it can never know because it is afraid of the plow and the harrow [till]. In direct opposite to this, the cultivated field has yielded itself to the adventure of living. The protecting fence has opened to admit the plow, and the plow has come as plows always come, practical, cruel, business-like and in a hurry. Peace has been shattered by the shouting farmer and the rattle of machinery. The field has felt the travail of change; it has been upset, turned over, bruised and broken, but its rewards come hard upon its labors. The seed shoots up into the daylight its miracle of life, curious, exploring the new world above it. All over the field the hand of God is at work in the age-old and ever renewed service of creation. New things are born, to grow, mature, and consummate the grand prophecy latent in the seed when it entered the ground. Nature's wonders follow the plow.

A.W. Tozer, "Paths to Power," pp. 31-32