



By Tom Ward, Sr., January, 2009
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“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid” (Mark 16:1-8—NIV).

INTRODUCTION

Mark chapter sixteen begins with these words, “When the Sabbath was over.” The Sabbath Mark refers to was the darkest Saturday in human history—Black Saturday. On this Saturday Jesus lay deathly still in the tomb having been brutally tortured and crucified by the Romans. Crucifixion had become a cruel art form for the Romans. They had perfected their skills over many decades and knew how to inflict extreme pain on the enemies of Rome.

Jesus was dead and his disciples were in hiding, fearing they were next. All hope was gone. Jesus, who they had hoped would lead them to freedom from Roman domination, had become another victim of Rome's merciless hand. This was a day of shattered dreams and brokenness. A day filled with terrified and wounded hearts. The one who promised never to leave them was gone. The one who had stolen their hearts and filled them with hopes and dreams of better days lay still in the grave and, as far as they knew, was never coming back. Every waking hour for Jesus' followers must have been torture. It was a day of darkness and gloom like no other. It was Black Saturday.

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S BIBLE

There have been countless numbers of people through the years since Black Saturday who find no hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. One such person was one of our most famous presidents, Thomas Jefferson. On three consecutive nights in 1803, while in the White House, Thomas Jefferson meticulously proceeded to cut up the Gospels of Jesus Christ in an effort to excise all the miracles, arranging Jesus' life and teachings into one continuous narrative.

Apparently Jefferson had no plans to share his miracle-free bible with anyone. He simply performed this pruning process for his own spiritual purposes, believing that the writers of Scripture were not inspired by God and instead were unlettered and superstitious men. He believed he was rescuing Jesus from biographers whom he called theological "sophisticates." He was constructing a book for his evening devotions that omits all references to Jesus higher status as a God among mortals. He opens his bible with the

Annunciation of Jesus' birth and ends with the words, "Their laid they Jesus, and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed."

Easter is a weird holiday for deists like Jefferson and those who follow religions like Unitarianism denying Jesus resurrection, miracles and deity. A Unitarian pastor named Forrest Church wrote these words:

"Easter remains an awkward holiday for Unitarians. The trumpets sound, we all sing, and Jesus is not resurrected—at least not as God's only son. So what are we doing here? Why even bother? Are we simply creatures of habit who have forgotten why we do the things we do? Are we all dressed up with nowhere to go, witless participants in a vain show designed to make us feel better about death, without offering any good reason why we should?"

If religion, as I believe, is the human response to the dual reality of being alive and having to die—if we are the religious animal because we know that we must die and therefore question what life means—what is our response? Lacking a heavenly insurance policy, is the best answer we can come up with simply that flowers return in the Spring? Is that enough for you? Will Spring work its magic the year you die? If you don't ask yourself such questions today, I can almost promise that you won't do so tomorrow, In fact, you will surely do so only when the trap door is swinging beneath your feet, and then it will be too late."

My heart goes out to this Unitarian pastor and the Jeffersonian skeptics who have no hope and live spiritually captured by a never-ending Black Saturday. With no hope of life beyond the grave how do they cope with the fact that death surrounds them on every side and is coming for them one day soon?

CHECKMATE

Lynn, a wonderful lady in my church formerly attended a church in Los Angeles where Bishop Kenneth Ulmer is the pastor. He tells a wonderful story about a couple of men who visit a museum and see a painting of a chess game. One person in the painting appears to be the Devil while the other looks like any other man. The painting depicts a man who is down to his last chess piece. The artist titled the painting *Checkmate*.

It so happens, that one of the guys looking at the *Checkmate* painting is an international chess champion. He begins to analyze the painting and becomes captivated by it. He gets so intrigued by the painting that the man with him gets annoyed and asks him what he's doing.

The international chess champion says, "I am bothered by this painting. I want to study it for awhile. You go ahead and look around. I'll be right here when you get back."

His friend comes back after some time and the chess champion says, "We have got to find the person who painted this because he must either change the title or the picture. There is something wrong with this painting."

His friend asks, "Well, what's wrong with the painting?"

The chess champion replies, "He has entitled the painting *Checkmate*, but that is totally wrong. The king still has one more move."

**God always has one more move even when
death seems to have the final say.**

“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb” (Mark 16:1-3)?

When the women made their way to the tomb, they were not coming to have breakfast with the risen Christ. They were coming to anoint his dead body with spices so that his decaying remains would not reek of the stench of death. They were completely and utterly expecting Jesus to be dead just like every other man. But, Jesus was and is not just any other man. They were totally unaware that King Jesus had one more move

King Jesus always has one more move. The grave could not hold him. Satan could not bind him and death could not defeat him. King Jesus was not backed into a corner when he lay in the tomb—he was carrying out God’s eternal plan to redeem that planet from the wages of sin.

All of us are going to face death. It’s a certainty—everybody dies. Norman Van Rooy, the producer of the near-death documentary called “Shadows” sums it all up this way:

“It all begins for us at birth. We are thrust from the womb onto the carousel of life, carried away in a blur of activities from childhood to adulthood and then to old age. Each of us has our dreams, our relationships, and we go to school, we work and play day after day, week after week and

year after year. Life is certainly busy. And yet we tend not to think about the fact of our inevitable death. It doesn't seem to make any sense that we will no longer exist as we know it. The fact is we will die and there is no way to avoid it. Like the child being born, we have no choice but to yield ourselves to the unknown. Like the 70 billion who have already passed this way through life, we will join their ranks at the rate of 130,000 a day. And in that same day, 400,000 new lives will be born. The cycle of life and death continues at an ever-increasing pace.”

You are going to die. I am going to die. I doubt you're shocked to hear it. But it's not something that comes up often. You don't hear it from your neighbor, your co-worker, or dry cleaner. It's not pleasant but it's true: unless Jesus comes back to rapture the church, unless he comes back in that great wonderful event and we are raptured to the heavens, you and I are going to die. Like taxes—it's an unfortunate certainty.

The good news is, because the grave could not hold Jesus Christ so it will not hold those who believe in him and follow him with all of their hearts. Paul wrote, *“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive (I Corinthians 15:20-22).* When death knocks on the door of Christ-followers, Jesus answers and declares us “alive.” He explains that he has one more move for us: to raise us from the dead. For believers, even in the face of death we know God has one more move: eternal life.

**God has one more move when it comes to giving hope
to a world dominated by death.**

“But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. “Don't be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him” (Mark 16:4-6).

Mark begins verse four with these words, *“But when they looked up.”* When we’re “looking up” with our hearts set on things above we begin to see and hear what God sees and hears. What they saw was the stone rolled away which was not at all what they expected. When they entered the tomb they saw an angel and heard the angel declare that Jesus had risen from the dead. King Jesus had conquered death—life reigns! Death has no more power over the grave for Jesus or his followers.

Scripture says they fled the tomb “trembling and bewildered” (Mark 16:8). It doesn’t say they ran out of the tomb hopeless. King Jesus had one more move and that move was to instill hope in all those who trust in him. Paul wrote, *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).* Hope absolutely reigns eternal for the Christian. Jesus, through the power of the resurrection, has secured for us the hopes and dreams God has for us. God says, *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper*

you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). We have been given living hope and a future that is eternally bright, a hope that no one can take away from us.

**God always has one more move even when
life is hard, despairing and painful.**

“Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb.

They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid” (Mark 16:8).

It was obviously an extremely frightening experience running into an angel inside an empty tomb. Like them we would have been running for our lives if we had encountered a celestial being in a cemetery. However, because Jesus rose from the dead fear no longer rules. Yes, life is hard at times, even despairing and painful, but we have seen Jesus with our spiritual eyes and he lives within us giving us hope and peace that passes all understanding.

When you have lost a precious loved one your heart can shout, “Thank God for the resurrection.” When your health fails and you’re facing pain Jesus is at your side because of the resurrection. When your heart is broken over a relationship gone bad there is One who will never leave you or forsake you all because of the resurrection. When you’re told you have a terminal illness and you’re not going to make it, there is still a Jesus, by whose stripes we are healed. And, if death does come knocking, King Jesus still has one bigger, audacious move. That move is to give you life and heaven all because of the resurrection.

No matter what the obstacle. No matter how hopeless things look, God always has one more move—one more play in his playbook that will be awesome to see.

David was just a teenage boy when he came face to face with a giant named Goliath. He was so young, he couldn't even manage to walk around in Saul's armor. So he faced Goliath with his staff, some stones, and his sling. Goliath, over nine feet tall, was wearing full body armor, a javelin, a sword, and a spear. David looked like he was a goner. But the King still had one more move, and Goliath fell that day.

Remember the guy named Daniel who wouldn't stop praying even though the King had declared his prayers illegal and a threat against his kingdom? Daniel defiantly prayed with his window open for all to see, and was punished by being thrown into a den of hungry lions. After leaving Daniel in the den overnight, King Darius showed up and called out to Daniel. Surprisingly, Daniel answered. He was alive and well. The King always has one more move.

The Apostle John, tradition tells us, was boiled in oil for his faith. But the King had one more move and John survived—he still had work to do. On the Isle of Patmos, God told John to take down some serious eschatological dictation which we recognize as the Book of Revelation.

Peter followed Jesus, and, just like Jesus, he was poor. He was having such a tough time he couldn't even pay his taxes. Jesus tells Peter to do what he's good at—go fishing. He lands a fish with money in its mouth and goes and pays his taxes and Jesus' taxes. If you're in the middle of tough financial times and you don't think there is any way you can make it. It's not checkmate by a long shot. God has a fish somewhere with money in its mouth.

When things look really bad and we think it's over you need to remember one thing—with God it's never over. He always has one more move. Eugene Peterson summed it up this way in the Message Bible:

*“Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God. It cost God plenty to get you out of that dead-end, empty-headed life you grew up in. He paid with Christ's sacred blood, you know. He died like an unblemished, sacrificial lamb. And this was no afterthought. Even though it has only lately—at the end of the ages—become public knowledge, God always knew he was going to do this for you. It's because of this sacrificed Messiah, whom God then raised from the dead and glorified, that you trust God, that you know you have a future in God” (**The Message**, 1 Peter 1:18-21).*

Jesus was raised from the dead and because of that we always have options—God's options. You have a future in God. Don't give up. Don't lose hope. Don't despair. Live in hope. King Jesus always has one more move.

Even when death is staring you in the face just remember—King Jesus is risen from the dead. He's alive and well and if you believe in Him with all of your heart even death can be conquered.

