

The Outer and the Inner Door.

Text: Mat 28:1-10

Suggested Hymns:

88, 95, 99, 91, 92

1) Our Saviour's victory over death

2) The endless view Christ has opened to us

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 28:1-10, *¹ Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. ³ His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. ⁴ And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.*

⁵ But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. ⁷ "And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." ⁸ So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.

⁹ And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me." (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we rejoice and sing:¹

Christ the Lord is risen today,

Sons of men and angels say.

Raise your joys and triumphs high:

Sing, ye heavens; and earth, reply.

Easter is of such tremendous importance because it deals with the universal issues, not only of life and death, but of eternal life and eternal death. When Jesus said to His disciples, *A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me,*² they did not comprehend the significance of that statement. They simply could not grasp the immensity of God's plan of salvation, that Jesus was to be delivered for their offences and raised again for their justification.

Many times during that momentous year Jesus had foretold the happenings of Easter. Jesus said to His disciples, *“Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men,”*³ *“and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.”*⁴

In Matthew 20:18-19 Jesus told them,¹⁸ *“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death,”*¹⁹ *“and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.”*

Jesus also told them, *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”*⁵ And,⁹ *“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.”*⁶ Jesus clearly revealed that He is the only Saviour of mankind when He said in John 14:6, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

Easter is the keystone of Christianity. Without the knowledge and comprehension by faith of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the keystone would be missing in the triumphal arch of Christianity.

The drifting sands of Egypt and Babylon have long sealed the doors and buried the palaces and temples of the ancient world. Let us who stand on the pinnacles of Easter joy today, resolve, with the help of God, that the blowing sands of conflicting opinions, religious indifference, neglect, inactivity, and doubt, shall not seal to us, our children, and our countrymen, the door to our Saviour's tomb and the door to heaven!

So today let us consider the outer and the inner door. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Our Saviour's Victory Over Death

The story of Easter begins with a procession of sorrow. The awful storm clouds of Good Friday had settled into the sombre grey of silent resignation to the inevitable.

The women on their way to the grave, confused in their faith, their hopes shattered and half-buried, thought only to pay their last loving tribute to the dead.

At the end of the Sabbath, with the first streaks of Easter dawn, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, and others hastened to the grave where their dear Lord was buried.

An earthquake rocked the countryside. It shook the earth with considerable violence, but it could not shake the burden from their hearts and minds. They were *hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel.*⁷ To them the tomb was still sealed.

*"Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?"*⁸ they asked sorrowfully. But as they looked, they saw to their amazement that the stone was already rolled away! The governor's seal was broken! Not a man of the guard remained! What strange thing had happened here? Mary Magdalene, without going any further, turned and ran back to the city to tell the disciples.

The outer door of the tomb was open by divine intervention. The text explains that *an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.*³ *His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.*⁴ *And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.* They fainted dead away, and recovering, fled to the city.

But what about the inner door of the tomb? Was the Son of Man able to keep His promise and rise again the third day? Was He alive forevermore, or was He still held in the fetters of death?

The women, Luke tells us, were very perplexed. They lingered there a few breath-taking moments in the sacred precincts of Joseph's Garden, until they gathered sufficient courage to pass through the door of the tomb. Their eyes,

quickly adapted to the subdued light inside, which told them the truth: the body of the Lord Jesus was not there.

Suddenly the early morning visitors became conscious of a presence from another world. They saw angels. Two men in shining garments asked them the soul-searching question, *“Why do you seek the living among the dead?”* And the angel in our text, reassured them and said, *“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ “He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. ⁷ “And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him.”*

Now, at last, the Easter sunlight fell on their path. Now an overpowering joy gripped their souls. Now they remembered the Saviour’s words. *So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.*

In the meantime, John arrived at the grave all out of breath, having out-run Peter. Looking in, he saw the linen clothes lying, yet he did not go in, until Peter came, whom he followed in. There, apart from the grave clothes, folded by itself, was the napkin that had enshrouded the Saviour’s face; and he saw, and believed.¹⁰

The first to see the Lord was Mary Magdalene.¹¹ Remember it was from her that Jesus had cast out seven demons.¹² She returned alone, stood by the empty tomb weeping as though her heart would break. They were needless tears because Jesus Himself called her by name. Being overwhelmed, she could only say, *“Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).*¹³

The appearances of Jesus soon multiply. The other women, hurrying back to Jerusalem, had all doubts removed when Jesus met them, saying, *“Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.”*

After this He was seen by Peter, the two on their way to Emmaus, all the Apostles, the seven in Galilee, and, in the weeks that followed, by as many as five hundred brethren at once!

Christ's victory over death is central to the Christian's faith. Dr Martin Luther expressed his Easter faith in his drastic way, "*Jesus lives! and if He were not alive, I would not care to live one hour!*"

Robert Ingersoll, an unbeliever, was seeking to undermine all faith in Christ by discrediting the raising of Lazarus. He then challenged his audience: "Can anyone here tell me why Jesus said, '*Lazarus, come forth*'?" A elderly white-haired man arose and said, "*Yes, sir, I can tell you. If my Lord had not specified, 'Lazarus,' He would have had the whole graveyard of Bethany coming out to Him!*"

However, with the outer door to the tomb wide open, some people, unfortunately, prefer to keep the inner door of their hearts closed. They like to believe that when the earth has covered them, or the waves of the sea have closed over them — that ends it all.

But does it? What a poor hope for the martyrs of old who were faithful unto death! What sad comfort for the young people of our country who laid down their lives for us in the cause of freedom! That is the hopelessness, the Egyptian darkness, with which unbelief would blanket our future.

As the earth was darkened for three hours on Good Friday when Jesus died, at a time when an eclipse was impossible, it quaked again violently at the Lord's resurrection on Easter morning. We read in Matthew 27:52-53, ***and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.***

In the early part of the nineteenth century, a native of Hanover, Germany, to show his contempt for the Easter message, provided in his will that great slabs of marble be laid across his grave, bound together with iron bands, and covered with a granite boulder weighing nearly two tons, bearing the inscription: "*This grave is purchased for eternity; it shall never be opened.*" A poplar seed, however, began to sprout within the tomb and press its way up toward the light. Gathering strength with the years, it broke the bands and moved the boulder and opened the grave.

If nature can open a grave, and man can do it, shall not the God of nature and the Creator of man be able to do much more? Jesus who suspended the earth

in space, who made the mountains to spike the heavens and the seas to pound the shores, who gave life to all creatures since the beginning of time and even now, and as doctors tell us, renews our bodies every seven years, is certainly able to raise the dead whom He has created.

It was the power of God that opened the outer door of the Saviour's tomb, and, *"the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth."*¹⁴ As we read in Revelation 20:13, ¹³ *The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and [the grave] delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged.* This is nothing new to the children of God.

Job believed it when he wrote, *And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,* ²⁷ *Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*¹⁵ David believed it when he said, *As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.*¹⁶

Isaiah cried out, ¹⁹ *Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; ..., And the earth shall cast out the dead.*¹⁷ Martha exclaimed, *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."*¹⁸ John testified in Revelation 20:12, ¹² *And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God.*

Christ's victory over death, by His perfect atonement for our sins and His glorious resurrection, has opened to us the outer and the inner door of the tomb. That is the undying hope that is moving, swaying and exalting millions of hearts today, as it has moved, swayed and exalted them in good days and bad days throughout the centuries!

2. The Endless View Christ Has Opened to Us

What a broad and endless view opens before our wondering eyes, as we contemplate the soul-stirring, world-shaking events of Easter Day! It was not necessary for the angel of the Lord to descend from heaven and roll back the stone from the door of the tomb — to let the Saviour out. It was to let us in.

As the Lord of life and death, He at all times had an inner door through which He could look up and reach up to the realms of light and eternal day, to the glory and the fellowship of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

According to His divine nature, the crucified and buried Christ still had the keeping of the universe in His almighty hands. Shall He not be able to keep and guard His Church today?

He did not need to wait for the opening of the outer door, for any physical, mental, or external aid, to take again the life which He had laid down for the sins of the world. Being One with the Father, both statements of Him are true: He *“arose from the dead,”* and *“He was raised by the glory of the Father.”*

Yes, He became *“the First Fruits of those who have fallen asleep ... For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”*¹⁹ He was proclaiming an eternal truth when He said in John 10:18, ¹⁸ *“No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”*

When Jesus died as all men’s Substitute, His soul did not die, but was very much alive to God, as He had said to the Sadducees, *[God] is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him*²⁰ and to the penitent thief, *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”*²¹

This word “paradise” is used in the New Testament as a synonym for heaven, the celestial state or place of the blessed. By no stretch of the imagination can it be made to mean “purgatory,” or the gloomy abode of the dead.

Again, the moment the Saviour’s body was risen from the grave, He was a spiritual, glorified Being, also according to His human nature, and no longer subject to the former limitations of the body born of Mary.

He had, as it were, an inner door in the tomb, through which His body of flesh and bone was free to go, without waiting for any stones to be rolled away.

Without any miracle, He could stand in the midst of His disciples behind closed doors, or in the free hills of Galilee. He could appear and disappear, descend into hell, or ascend into heaven, as He wished.

Do these things challenge your imagination? Do they lend wings to your faith? What a deep, eternal significance Easter takes on! *“We know that when He is revealed [which refers Jesus appearing on the Last Day], we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”*²²

The resurrection of Jesus is conclusive evidence that Jesus is what He claimed to be, the Christ eternal, the Son of God, and that His doctrine is true. For no man ever promised anything more difficult to keep, than, that he would by his own will and power return from the dead.

And since Jesus kept this promise to the letter and the day, that other pledge of His will also stand. *“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”²³*

Thus we see by faith the inner door which Christ has opened in the tomb. Death is no more the narrow cell it used to be. It is a prison with the bars all broken, a dragon with the sting removed, a sleep for the body and a state of joyous anticipation for the soul, as Scripture says in Revelation 14:13, *‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’*

So Christ eternal, on Easter Day, has thrown wide open the outer and the inner door, transforming the grave into an open thoroughfare, a free way to the gates of heaven.

Whatever the problems of our country, our churches, or our homes may be, no plague of sin, or tears, or death can hide for long the view of our Father’s house, the mansions of the blest, if we believe what Jesus did for us and what He taught. *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”²⁴ Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hymn 92

² John 16:16

³ Luke 9:44

⁴ Mark 9:31

⁵ John 14:3

⁶ John 10:9

⁷ Luke 24:21

⁸ Mark 16:3

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- 9 Luke 24:5
 - 10 John 20:3-8
 - 11 Mark 16:9
 - 12 Mark 16:9
 - 13 John 20:16
 - 14 John 5:28
 - 15 Job 19:26-27
 - 16 Psa 17:15
 - 17 Isa 26:19
 - 18 John 11:24
 - 19 1 Cor. 15:20, 22
 - 20 Luke 20:38
 - 21 Luke 23:43
 - 22 1 John 3:2
 - 23 John 14:2-3
 - 24 John 11:25-26