

The Paschal Lamb Lives!

Sterling looked up from his cell phone and set it aside. What he heard in the voice of his 10-year-old son, Larice, was anger, but mostly fear.

“How do we know for sure that God will answer our prayers?” Larice asked.

Sterling had prostate cancer. But they had found it early, and the doctors were confident that he would make a full recovery. Larice had heard Sterling and his wife, Elesha, praying for healing from prostate cancer. Larice, or “Shadow” as his family called him, was a good kid who was fiercely loyal and loved his dad. They called Larice “Shadow,” because he was always up under or close behind Sterling.

“Come here, son,” Sterling said, and Larice came closer.

Sterling talked again about the wonderful, great and powerful God that they served. He spoke of the insurmountable love of the Father and the unerring obedience and agonizing death of Christ.

“Because of the Cross, death has been defeated,” said Sterling. “Because of Christ’s sacrifice, we can have salvation and live forever—even after we die. For those who trust Christ, we only fall asleep.”

“I’m going to be fine son, the doctors caught the cancer in time for treatment,” Sterling continued. “But I’m not afraid of death, because God has defeated hell and the grave. And one day, I will see Jesus face to face.”

1. *What are some characteristics of someone who is spiritually dead?*

2. *What are some characteristics of someone who is spiritually alive?*

3. *What is required to make someone who is spiritually dead come alive?*

An Empty Tomb

Matthew 28:1-4 KJV

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

Matthew 28:1-4, NIV

¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

²There 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. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary” (whom Mark noted was the mother of James, as well as another woman Mark identified as Salome, Mark 16:1-3) arrived at Jesus’ tomb early in the morning the day after the Sabbath that followed Jesus’ crucifixion. Matthew says nothing more than that they wanted to “look at the tomb” (vs. 1), but other Gospel writers revealed that the women hoped to anoint Jesus’ body (see Mark 16:1). This was a customary practice to mask the odor brought on by decay. It was also an act of devotion. So, the evening before, the women had bought spices to anoint Jesus’ body.

While they made their way to His tomb the next morning, the Gospel of Mark says they wondered who was going to roll away the stone so that they could enter Jesus’ tomb and complete His preparation for burial (Mark 16:3). God took care of this problem for them. Matthew noted that following a violent earthquake (a representation of

the power of God) that an angel from heaven rolled the stone away. The angel did not remove the stone to enable Jesus to leave the tomb; rather, he did it to permit others to enter the sepulcher and see for themselves that Jesus' body was gone. When the women arrived at the tomb, they saw that the stone had already been removed. They also saw "an angel of the Lord" (vs. 2) dressed in clothes "white as snow" (vs. 3) sitting on it.

The guards reacted to what they witnessed with fear. The actual Greek word translated "fear" in the KJV suggests that the guards reacted with deep dread when they saw the stone being rolled away by a divine being. They were in a state of terror; their whole bodies shook, not unlike someone in seizures. They were in a state of emotional and physical shock and looked like they were dead.

4. *What did the women who went to Jesus' tomb expect to find?*
5. *What did they actually discover?*
6. *How did the guards respond to what they witnessed?*

An Urgent Message

Matthew 28:5-7, KJV

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which 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, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

Matthew 28:5-7, NIV

⁵The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then 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."

The women's initial reaction was similar to how the guards responded. What they saw was unsettling and terrifying. The angel quickly assured them that they had nothing to fear, however, and reminded them of what Jesus told them earlier: He must be crucified but He would "be raised to life" (Matt. 16:21).

The angel told the women to look into the tomb to see for themselves that it was indeed empty. He then urged them to share what they had seen and heard with Jesus' disciples. Finally, he instructed them to tell the disciples where they too could find Him. Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee. If they headed in that direction, they too would encounter their risen Lord.

7. *How did the women initially respond to what they witnessed?*

8. *What did the angel tell them in order to calm their fears?*

9. *What did he instruct them to do?*

A Joyful Response

Matthew 28:8-10, KJV

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Matthew 28:8-10, NIV

⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

The women took the angel's words to heart and hurried

away from the tomb so they could share what they experienced. They were still afraid; but their fear was accompanied by joy. Although they didn't understand how it happened, they rightly concluded that Jesus was alive, and they couldn't wait to tell others about it.

"Suddenly" (vs. 9) Jesus met them and said, "Greetings." A better translation of this might be, "Rejoice." The empty tomb and the reality it confirmed—that Jesus had risen from the dead—was good news, something Jesus said should result in rejoicing, not fear.

The women responded to the recognition that the one walking with them was Jesus by clapping His feet and worshiping Him. They likely didn't want to let Him go. In John's dramatic account of Mary Magdalene mistaking Jesus for the gardener until He said her name, Jesus said to Mary, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17). They weren't to hold onto Jesus as if He was there for them alone, but tell His "brothers" that He had risen from the dead and was going before them to Galilee.

Like the angel who addressed the women earlier, Jesus emphasized the importance of not responding with fear. Some would undoubtedly respond to what they shared with doubt. Some would deny, in spite of the evidence, that Jesus' was no longer dead. Some would claim there was some other explanation for His empty tomb. But for the women who saw the empty tomb and for others who accepted the implication of it, there was no question Jesus was alive and once again dwelling with them. And that was something worthy of celebration and worth sharing. They had nothing to fear, for Jesus had defeated death and risen from the dead.

10. *How did the women eventually respond to what they witnessed?*

11. *What did Jesus instruct them to do?*

God Has Defeated Death

I fear many things in life. I fear that I may fall and not get up; I fear in these days of strange diseases that all the things I do to protect myself will be to no avail. I also fear I may get distracted while driving and miss seeing an errant vehicle careening in my direction, or that some tragic mishap may befall my household while I am asleep.

The one thing I do not fear is death. Although I do not look forward to the events that may precede it, I confidently believe in God's promise that what I will experience in the next life will be a world absent of death, pain, and sorrow.

What assures me of this is Jesus' empty tomb. The truth that Jesus has risen from the dead is not some vague concept in my mind or just wishful thinking. It is as much a reality as the rising and setting of the sun.

It helps me to read the stories of those who have attempted to discredit the accounts of this event by trying to prove that there are better explanations for Jesus' tomb being empty. It seems that many who have attempted to do so have concluded there is no reasonable explanation for why Jesus' tomb was empty that morning than the one Scripture presents—Jesus actually rose from the dead.

I know I don't worship a dead man who was sincere with His promises but who failed to live long enough to fulfill them. I worship a living Savior who defeated those intent on killing Him, who proved by rising from the dead that no grave can hold Him, and who showed that no human or supernatural forces can keep Him from fulfilling His mission to provide a path to eternal life.

12. *What are some things you are afraid of?*

13. *How can knowing that Jesus rose from the dead be of help as you consider how to respond to these?*

14. *What are some ways you can or perhaps ought to respond to your knowledge that Jesus is alive and that God has defeated death?*

Now What?

One of the biggest fears many people have is the fear of death and what follows. But because of Jesus' empty tomb, this is the last thing we should fear. Jesus has promised to lead us to a new world free of the pain, sorrows, and suffering of this one. He also promises to be with us as we travel the journey that will take us there.

Jesus has defeated death. He is alive! There is therefore nothing left to fear. And that is something worth celebrating.

► *Consider what Jesus' empty tomb means for you personally, then complete the following: Jesus is alive. I can therefore respond to _____ with _____ instead of _____ knowing that _____.*

KEY VERSE

Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

—Matthew 28:10, KJV

Then said Jesus to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

—Matthew 28:10, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 18 through April 24

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Deuteronomy 15:12-15—Remember You Were Slaves.
- Tue.** Galatians 4:21-31—Children of the Promise.
- Wed.** Isaiah 61:1-3—Anointed to Proclaim Good News.
- Thu.** John 8:12-20—The Light of the World.
- Fri.** John 8:21-30—Jesus Is from Above.
- Sat.** Psalm 119:41-56—I Delight in Your Commands.
- Sun.** John 8:31-38—Jesus Brings True Freedom.