

Easter Sunday reflection

MORNING

HAVE YOU FOUND WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR?

Tony Reinke

Like children scattering around a yard for Easter eggs, you and I are on a hunt. We all hunt. Our thirsty souls rummage through every nook and cranny of this world, in search of shiny pleasures and saccharine delights. Every such joy seeker, in pursuit of treasures that will not fade or rust or break or be stolen, must pay careful attention to Easter—not with a nod-off-through-the-sermon kind of attention, but with a real, earnest, eager attention riveted on Christ. If we miss the significance of the resurrection, we scamper past the greatest joy in the universe.

The Joy of Jesus

As the dark shadows stalked the soon-to-be crucified Christ, he turned his attention to joy. Throughout this Holy Week of his crucifixion, Jesus had foreshadowed his death for his disciples who struggled to make sense of it all. He addressed their concerns directly in John 16:19–24.

Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’?”

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.

“When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

“In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

We rewind Holy Week to hear Jesus forecast the changes to come in his resurrection. He wanted his disciples to anticipate Easter Sunday as the cataclysmic dawning of true joy. And here’s what it all means for joy seekers.

A Blood-Bought Joy

Jesus spoke of this joy as he faced the torture of Good Friday. He faced denial, faced betrayal, faced beatings, faced splinters and nails and spears—he could not stop talking about joy! Only joy would keep him going. Joy was on his mind, joy was on his tongue, and joy was drawing him, not away from suffering, but *into* it (Heb. 12:2).

Jesus went to the cross for joy: to buy joy, create joy, and offer joy.

As the world celebrated the savage killing of God, out of this sea of foaming rebel hostility emerged a blood-bought, inextinguishable joy.

An Unbreakable Joy

If the killing of the Author of life could not extinguish this joy Jesus speaks about, nothing can—and nothing ever will. No opposition from the world, no opposition to the gospel, and no cultural despising of Christ will overcome the resurrection joy of Jesus.

As we have seen this week, the unquenchable joy of Easter was birthed in the greatest trauma and tragedy and evil the world has ever unleashed—the murder of the Son of God. Death, the Devil,

demons, and the coordinated rebellion of mankind all allied together cannot stymie this joy. Persecutors cannot steal this joy away. No power, no event, no enemy, can sequester the resurrection joy of Jesus Christ that burst out of the tomb with him.

Worldly joys are brittle in comparison. Sickness and poverty crumble joy, and the long process of aging and dying slowly strips life of all its worldly pleasures (Eccles. 12:1–8). Death recedes all our joys, save one. Only one joy cannot be thwarted by death, because only one joy was purchased by blood.

A Newborn Joy

The resurrection joy of Jesus escapes the clutches of death because it's the joy of the new creation, a joy broken free from the evil of this fallen world.

And this makes Easter breath-taking. As Jonathan Edwards boldly declared: "The resurrection of Christ is the most joyful event that ever came to pass."⁴ And rightly did Charles Spurgeon say: "No man shall ever take from me the joy that Christ rose from the dead."⁵ The resurrection is the most joy-filled divine event in biblical history worthy of our eternal adulation and awe and wonder. But it's more than a breath-taking historical spectacle.

Jesus employed a common birthing analogy to introduce a radical cosmic birth. His death was the birth pangs of a new creation; his resurrection was the arrival of a new creation into history. In his resurrection, Jesus set in motion an unstoppable chain reaction that will one day culminate in the resurrection of the dead and the renovation of all creation.

Here's the point. In the long history of joy in this fallen world, after ages of unsatisfied appetites and hunger pangs in the hearts of men and women and children, the resurrection of Christ marks a crescendo. Never has joy found greater expression on earth. In John 15:11, Jesus offered his disciples "full joy," an invitation only possible from *within* the final stage in cosmic history. Such a stage was born on Easter morning.

Jesus wants his disciples to thirst for a post-resurrection joy as the arrival of a newly amplified joy, a long-awaited and long-anticipated joy, a never before fully seen or experienced joy in human history. The resurrection of Christ will bring the most spectacularly joy-filled event *because* it ignites an eternally abiding and forever unconquerable joy.

The Old Testament foretold of this joy, the birth of Christ announced this joy, Holy Week seemed to extinguish this joy, but the resurrection of Christ is the point in history when the unassailable torch of God's joy emerged from the sea of foaming rebel hostility, rose up and lit the summit of an Olympic torch of joy that will burn for all eternity.

A Joy for the Asking

But as magnificently as this joy entered the world in this defining moment in cosmic history, this joy presses close to us. So Jesus taught his disciples to ask and seek for more of this joy. This is the open invitation of the Messianic age.

And this joy makes sense of the logic of St John's Gospel. Jesus said he must die and go to the Father, and would leave his joy with the disciples. Once he was with the Father, Jesus sent the Spirit to dwell in them (another unmistakable sign of the new creation). United to Christ, the disciples would now pray by the Spirit, to the Father, through the Son.

Easter reshapes prayer, spirituality, and joy. With this inauguration of a new creation, the disciples became adopted sons who could pray to a Father who is eager to pour out spiritual flourishing upon them in every way, leading to a full and satisfying joy which nobody can take away.

Which is great news for the disciples.

Inexpressible Joy for You

But Jesus's bold resurrection joy promised to the disciples in John 16:19–24 is now offered to you and me. We are promised the same "joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Pet. 1:8).

In Christ, God delights to pour out this resurrection joy into your life, a joy that fills, and a joy that cannot be stolen from you. What do we do? We simply ask our gracious Father for more of it!

The Easter joy Jesus foretold has arrived, and it's deeply personal. The resurrection is both a cosmic event, and it comes intimately close, reminding us of God's work in our lives. "The point of Easter is that God is in the process of clearing this world of all heartbreak" (John Piper). Therefore, "Christ's resurrection not only gives you hope for the future; it gives you hope to handle your scars right now" (Tim Keller).

Such a restoring and reviving joy was purchased for you and me in the resurrection of Christ.

Feast and Celebrate

Easter is for stark contradictions.

If Christ is still dead, death reigns, and all our joys are vain. So hoard every plastic Easter egg you find, because whatever you find inside is all the joy you have to grab. Or, as St Paul says, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Cor. 15:32).

But if death is dead, and if the dead are raised—if Christ is risen from the dead!—brothers and sisters, let us feast and celebrate, for the dawning light of our inextinguishable and inexhaustible eternal pleasures have broken into the darkness, offering us a life of joy in Christ that cannot fade or rust or be stolen away!

Today, delight in the resurrection joy of Christ, pray it bigger in your life, and treasure it for all eternity.

4 Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1: A History of the Work of Redemption* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 585.

5 Charles Spurgeon, "Joy in Place of Sorrow," preached 11 July 1897 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, England, available online at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols43-45/chs2525.pdf>.

CONCLUSION THE TRIUMPH OF JOY David Mathis

"Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him." (Mark 16:6)

The word on the street that Sunday in the Holy City was almost too good to be true. This was so unexpected, so stupendous, such a dramatic reversal of the heartbreak and devastation of the previous three days. This would take days to sink it. Weeks even.

In some ways, it would take his disciples the rest of their lives to grasp the impact of this news. *He has risen*. Indeed, for all eternity his people still will stand in awe of the love of God on display in Christ's death, and the power of God bursting forth in his resurrection.

The Sheep Had Scattered

No one truly saw this coming, except Jesus himself. He told his disciples plainly that he would be killed, then rise again (Mark 8:31; Matt. 17:22–23; Luke 9:22). He had hinted at it as early as the first temple cleaning (John 2:19). At his trial some testified against him that he'd made such an outlandish claim (Mark 14:58; Matt. 26:61; 27:63). Then there were his references to "the sign of Jonah" (Matt. 12:39; 16:4), and the rejected one becoming the cornerstone (Matt. 21:42).

But as much as he'd done to prepare his disciples for it, a literal crucifixion was so contrary to their paradigm that they had no meaningful way to bring it into their minds and hearts. It was "a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling" (Isa. 8:14) for the long-awaited Messiah to go out like this. His men had abandoned their master in his most critical hour, leaving him alone to carry the weight of the world's sin. And the greatest burden of all—being forsaken by his Father.

One of his own had betrayed him. The chief among his men had denied him three times. After his death, the disciples dispersed. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (Zech. 13:7).

Their doors were locked (John 20:19). Two even took to the road and were on their way out of Jerusalem (Luke 24:13).

When news came from the women, it seemed like sheer fantasy. "These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (Luke 24:11). It was beyond their imagination, but not beyond

God. Could such a dream become reality? Might there be, after all, some deep magic that could turn back time? Better, might there be a power magnanimous enough to bring in a whole new age—the age of resurrection—and triumph over the final enemy, death itself?

Seized with Astonishment

The initial report left them in shock. St Mark tells us the women “went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (Mark 16:8). *Astonishment seized them*. Had the news been less spectacular, perhaps they would have celebrated without hesitation. But this was far too big, and too surprising, to melt into immediate rejoicing. They were stunned. That’s what Easter does to the human soul when we own up to the reality of its message. That’s how explosive, how cataclysmic, how *world-shattering* it is that Jesus is alive.

It is a joy too great for instant gratification. First there is utter astonishment. Then comes the mingling of “fear with great joy,” and finally the freedom to rejoice and tell others (Matt. 28:8).

Sadness Comes Untrue

But what now of his passion? What of his excruciating agony at Golgotha? Yes, as C. S. Lewis says, the dawning of this resurrection age “will turn even that agony into a glory.”⁶ Now Joy has triumphed over sorrow. Day finally has dominion over night. Light has thrashed against the darkness. Christ, through death, has destroyed the one who had the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54).

Easter now has become our annual dress rehearsal for that great coming Day. When our perishable bodies will put on the imperishable. When the mortal finally puts on immortality. When we join in the triumph song with the prophets and the apostles,

“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (Hos. 13:14; 1 Cor. 15:55)

Just as rehearsing the details of Jesus’s final days leading up to the cross prepares us for the fiery trial coming on us, so also Easter readies us for the triumph that will follow. Easter is our foretaste of glory divine.

Christ has been raised. Day no longer is fading to black, but night is awakening to the brightness. Darkness is not suffocating the sun, but light is chasing away the shadows. Sin is not winning, but death is swallowed up in victory.

More Than Conquerors

Indeed, even agony will turn to glory, but Easter doesn’t suppress our pain. It doesn’t minimize our loss. It bids our burdens stand as they are, in all their weight, with all their threats. And this risen Christ, with the brilliance of indestructible life in his eyes, says, “These too I will claim in the victory. These too will serve your joy. These too, even these, I can make an occasion for rejoicing. I have overcome, and you will more than conquer.”

Easter is not an occasion to repress whatever ails you and put on a happy face. Rather, the joy of Easter speaks tenderly to the pains that plague you. Whatever loss you lament, whatever burden weighs you down, Easter says, “It will not always be this way for you. The new age has begun. Jesus has risen, and the kingdom of the Messiah is here. He has conquered death and sin and hell. He is alive and on his throne. And he is putting your enemies, all your enemies, under his feet.”

Not only will he remedy what’s wrong in your life and bring glorious order to the mess and vanquish your foe, but he will make your pain, your grief, your loss, your burden, through the deep magic of resurrection, to be a real ingredient in your everlasting joy. You will not only conquer this one day soon, but you will be more than a conqueror (Rom. 8:37).

When he wipes away every tear, our faces glisten more brilliantly than if we never would have cried. Such power is too great to simply return us to the Garden. He ushers us into a garden-city, the New Jerusalem. Easter announces, in the voice of the risen Christ, “Your sorrow will turn into joy” (John 16:20), and “no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22).

Easter declares, for all time, that the one who has conquered death has now made it the servant of our joy.

6 C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: HarperCollins, 1946), 69.