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Pastor Jonathan Falwell

Easter: The Story of LIFE

Scripture: John 20

Summary: Expounding on John 20, Pastor Jonathan explains how Christ brings life to those who are searching.

He's alive! What started on that day on the cross, the agony that Jesus went through, the despair that He felt as the crowd that just a few days before had praise Him now cried out, "Crucify Him!" as the soldiers beat Him and mocked Him, as they took that crown of thorns and place it upon His brow, and then as they nailed Him to that tree, the cross was lifted up and placed into the ground, and there, for all the world to see, Jesus the self-proclaimed Son of God, hanging in agony, the blood flowing, the life leaving His body, gasping for air.

And for those who gathered around the foot of the cross that day, there was no hope to be found, the desperation, the emptiness, the sorrow that they felt, because you see what they saw that day was the one who claimed to be the King of kings and the Lord of lords; the one who claimed to be the Savior of the world, the one who had raised the dead and had healed the sick, and now here He is, dying a horrible death.

What began that day was a story, a story that did not end that day, and it's a story of life. Today what I want to do is spend some time telling you about that story, to allow you to get a glimpse of what that story of life is all about. A story that changed the lives of those who stood there at the foot of the cross, a story that has changed countless millions of lives, a story that has changed my life, and it's a story that is being told each and every day even still. You see, because when Jesus hung on that cross it wasn't just the pain that He had suffered. It wasn't just the nails that they had put into His wrist. It wasn't just the cries of the crowd that gathered in that place that He carried with Him. That wasn't the only burden He carried that day. He carried a far greater burden, a far greater sorrow, because you see what He had on His shoulders that day was your sins and mine, our lives that we've lived, the mistakes that we've made and the people that we've hurt, the brokenness that we've experienced, and the sorrow that we have brought to Him in the way that we've lived. And I will tell you that that pain and that sorrow that we have caused God is far greater than any sorrow or any pain that those soldiers could have inflicted that day.

And so today I want to share with you a story out of John 20. It's not a story that I've written. It's not a story that I've made up or come up with on my own. It's a story that comes directly from the heart of God through the Word of God, and it's a story that tells about broken lives. We've seen today on the screens the stories of lives that they found themselves in tragic

situations, they found themselves in emptiness and brokenness and I want to share with you some more stories just like that, just like ours.

In John 20:1 it says, “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.” Mary showed up there on that first Easter morning in order to come and to grieve and weep at the tomb. She showed up and things were different than what she expected because the stone was rolled away and Jesus was not there. And so it says here in verse 2 that she ran and came to Simon Peter, to the other disciple whom Jesus loved (that’s John) and said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

A cry of brokenness, of emptiness, a cry of grief of despair because the Jesus that she loved, the Jesus that she had watched heal and raise the dead, the Jesus that had meant everything to her, that had brought her out of her despair and brokenness in the days prior to this, that Jesus had already been killed and now His body stolen. You can imagine what was going through her mind as she was dealing with that despair, that pain that day.

It goes on to say in verse 3,

Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

Then it goes back to Mary, “But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping.” The tears were still flowing down her cheeks. The brokenness and the pain that she’d experienced just a couple of days ago as she watched Jesus being crucified, as she watched Him gasp for that last breath of air, as she heard Him cry out, “Into your hands I commit my spirit,” and then the life left Him, and those who loved Jesus, who were surrounding that place that day, they felt literally that their lives had no more meaning, that there was no hope to be found ever again because Jesus was now dead.

Now Mary stands at this tomb. She believes Jesus had been stolen, His body had been stolen, and tears began to flow again, weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb, and then verse 12 says she saw two angels. Now I don’t know about you, but I think I would have gotten excited at that point because I had seen Peter and John walk into the tomb and there was nothing there. Because as she stood there she watched Peter and John walk away and she knew no one else had gone in, and now here she is looking inside and she, for the first time, sees two miraculous beings, two angels that are there in that empty tomb. I, at that point, would have believed something miraculous had happened here, wouldn’t you?

But that is not what Mary believed. It goes on to say, “And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.’”

Again, the second plea or cry for help. Calling out to the angels, miraculous beings. “They have stolen my Lord. I don’t know where He is. What can I do? My life is over. My heart is grieving. I am broken. I am empty. I am lonely. What can I do? Where is Jesus?”

Look what the passage then says, “Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus.” Now if the angels didn’t do it for you, when you turned and you saw Jesus, that would have been a moment of celebration. That would have been a moment when you cry out to the heavens for the incredible miracle that you have just witnessed, that Jesus was now risen from the dead, that He is standing there in the flesh, right before me, even though I watched Him die just a few days before. But still this passage says that as she saw Jesus standing there, she did not know it was Him.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, ‘Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’” With one last, desperate plea she cries out to this gardener, “Listen, I’ll take it off your hands. This is not your problem. This is not your concern anymore. I will care for the body. I will take care of the body. Just tell me where He is. I’ll take care of it. I won’t even tell anyone,” and she kind of conveys, “If you would just tell me where you’ve laid Him.”

But then Jesus said to her, “Mary!” And in an instant, in a moment in a miraculous revelation, the one who stood before her she now recognized was the very Jesus that she mourned. The one who stood before her is the one that she had witnessed die three days earlier, the one that she had seen go and perform miracle after miracle, even in her own life, that had brought her out of a life of sin and out of a past that was dark and broken and had given her a new lease on life and victory and given her freedom from her sins, victory in her life. She now recognized that this is Jesus standing before her.

“She cried out to Him, ‘Rabboni!’ (which is to say, Teacher [Master, Chief, Prince]). And Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.”’” Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.”

Verse 19, “Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear.” Now here’s another group, a group of men who had been called by Christ as they were serving, some as fishermen and some as tax collectors, others doing different things, Jesus called them to follow after Him, to leave everything behind and to run after Him, and they had done just that, and they had heard Jesus say, “I will die. I will be crucified, but no fear because three days later I will rise again.” They

had heard Him say it over and over again, and not only say it, they had seen Jesus literally breathe life back into the lives of those who had died.

What do the disciples do in this situation? They lock themselves away, hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Thomas said, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Thomas needed to see Jesus. There are some people here today that need to see Jesus.

The story that we've read today of how Mary, in her brokenness, that revelation of God when Jesus showed up, how it changed everything, how with Thomas we see in verse 26, "And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" And Thomas would never be the same again.

"Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

The stories that we have read here today, the stories that we've seen on the screen today, men and women who have sat on this couch, who shared their stories of brokenness, shared their stories of lives that have been shattered, lives that had been torn apart because of decisions, because of choices, because they were looking for something that would bring them what they so desperately needed. I would suspect that most of us today could come sit on this couch and tell stories about what's happening inside you, about what's going on in your life, about the brokenness that you're going through and the pain that you are experiencing, feeling as if no one cares, as if God doesn't care.

I want to tell you today I've got good news: God loves you. He loves you so much that He doesn't care how you've lived to this point. He doesn't care the mistakes that you've made and the sins that you've committed. He doesn't care how many lives you've ripped apart, how many

people that you have broken, that you have stepped on. He doesn't care what you have done to this point. What He cares about is you, and He loves you with all of His life and all of His heart.

Romans 5 tells us that God demonstrates that love in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. He died for our sins. What's beautiful about this story, this story of life, is that even though we are all sinners—Romans 3 tells us that—this pastor, I'm a sinner; the person sitting next to you, a sinner; the person who shook your hand when you walked into this room today, a sinner; the guy out there in the parking lot who was helping you get parked in the rain today, a sinner. You? You're a sinner. We're all sinners. Romans 6 tells us that because of that, because of our sin, we all deserve to die. We all deserve death, separation from God, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It doesn't matter what the story is. We've seen God show up. We've heard stories about that today. We've seen God show up and Warren Scruggs is sitting here today after the doctor said there is no hope and yet he is here worshiping with us. We've seen God show up when I look over and see Matt Fleming sitting here today when a lot of people were praying for him, thinking, "This is awful. He's not going to make it." But he's here, worshiping today. We've seen it over and over and over again; God showing up. I can't help but think today that there's probably some people who desperately need for God to show up.

The Bible tells us that Satan is out there. He wants to steal and kill and destroy. That's what John 10:10 says. He's after you, gunning for you. He wants to rip your life apart. He wants to rip your marriage apart. He wants to destroy everything that you've built. He wants you to feel as if there is no hope whatever. Oh, but listen: Jesus said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." You see, that passage that I just read from John 20, "by believing that you might have life."

Do you need life today? Do you need hope today? Do you need peace in the midst of the storm today? The Bible says to believe in our hearts, to confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord, that He was raised from the dead, and you will be saved. That is a promise directly from the heart of God, and I'm just telling you this: God is the only one that you can count on that will never break His promise.

In a moment I'm going to pray a simple prayer. We've had dozens of people this morning that have prayed this prayer along with me. We've had 41 this past week at different events that Thomas Road has been involved with that have prayed this prayer, and I am just asking you today if you need a revelation of God in your life, if you need Jesus to show up in your life in this moment, if you want to ask Jesus to save you today and you believe that Jesus died and rose again, believe that He is the Son of God, pray this prayer along with me.

[Praying] Heavenly Father, I thank you for loving me. God, I know I don't deserve it. I know I don't deserve your love and I certainly don't deserve your sending your Son Jesus to die for me. God, I know that I'm a sinner and I know I need someone to save me, but I know and believe that you love me so much that you sent Jesus to die on the cross for me, that He died for my sins, and that He was buried and that on the third day He rose again. I believe Jesus is the Son of God. I believe Jesus is the Savior of the world, and today, God, I want Him to be my Savior. So God,

forgive me of my sins. Come into my heart Lord Jesus. Save me today. Help me to live for you the rest of my life. God, thank you for saving me. Thank you for the hope that you bring and the life that you give. Thank you, God, that you have saved me today and that you have given me the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ, my Lord. In Jesus' name I pray.

There was a day when Jesus came. He allowed Himself to be crucified and experienced a horrible death. The pain was overwhelming. But He did it to tell a story; a story that speaks life into our lives today, because on that day what Jesus did is He gave us the opportunity that in the midst of everything we face, in the midst of brokenness and lost-ness and pain and suffering and sorrow Jesus came to give us hope and give us life. You see, living, Jesus loved us. He walked among us and healed the sick and raised the dead. He did that because He loved us. Living He loved us; dying, He saved us; buried, He carried our sins far, far away; rising on that first Easter morning He justified us forever. But there is coming a day, one glorious day, when He will return and we will praise the King of kings and the Lord of lords on that glorious day.

(Singing: "Glorious Day")

[Praying] Lord, today we are humbled by your power, humbled by your grace, humbled that you allow us to witness what we just witnessed. God, we know, we admit not our words, not our songs, not this building, nothing that we did here today; not all the planning, nothing did what we just saw happen here. What we just saw happen here is what we prayed for last Sunday to happen here. What we just saw happen here is you inhabiting the prayer and praise of your people. When we asked you last week to show up today in a way that we have not seen before, God, I know this: for the scores of people that prayed that prayer and who are standing back stage and being prayed with and over right now, I know you showed up today in their lives like never before.

We are humbled. We thank you for loving us. We thank you for dying on the cross for us. We thank you for allowing yourself to be buried for us. Thank you that you rose again for us. God, we thank you that every single day that we have the privilege of your presence in our lives, that because that veil was ripped that day you opened up the windows of heaven for us not to look in but for us to climb in, to run to you. We are so grateful for what you have done.

We pray now, I know you've done an amazing work here today. You've changed the lives of many here today. We see that, we know that, we celebrate that, we worship that, but I also know there are a lot of people outside of this place, in this community and the counties around, in our city, our state, our nation that don't know you. They might be walking around like Mary did, outside of the tomb, saying, "Where is He?" God, I pray that you would show up in their lives, too, that you would call their name and that you will allow them to experience the salvation that we have witnessed here today, that we would see your resurrection power not 2,000 years ago, but that we would see your resurrection power every moment of every day for the rest of our lives, because of who you are, because of what you've done, and because of what you continue to do in our lives. We thank you, we praise you, we celebrate you, we worship you on this resurrection day. God, thank you. And that is all that we can say. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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