

THE HOUR OF TRIUMPH

John 20:1,2- *"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him."*

Surely you have noticed something different this morning. There was something different about the air when we woke up; it seemed so much lighter, fresher, and more invigorating. The people were different when they came to church. It seems everyone is smiling and wearing new clothes and hats. Flowers made their appearance among the worshipers going to church.

Even the church bells seemed to be pealing forth with more joyous and happy sound. Your organ was different too, with its happy and cheerful music. And the singing! Almost everyone has joined in the joyous singing with a new zest. We are somewhat like people who have come through a long, dark tunnel, and suddenly we see a beautiful scene laying before us. The sermon will be different also. We have been listening to sermons on "The Solemn Hours of Lent". We intend to drop the word "solemn" this morning. A new time, a new word, a new hour has arrived. It is the hour for which we have all been waiting. It is the time of triumph for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On this glorious Easter Day, let us consider then,

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I. A Dark Night

Mary Magdalene came early, "when it was yet dark." This just about expresses the condition of her heart also, for she brought with her a darkness of soul and mind. She was not the only one with the darkness of the night in her spirit. There were many others. Think a moment of the mother of Jesus. The last picture she had of her Son was to see Him hanging on a cross between two thieves. Mary was experiencing what old Simeon had foretold so long ago, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." How dark these hours work for Mary, the mother of Jesus. The apostle John, no doubt, was with Mary, for Jesus entrusted His mother to his care. He must have shared the blackness and gloom of Mary.

And poor Peter! All he could think of were his own words, "I know not the man." After someone dies, you invariably think of the unkind things you said and did when he was alive. What would Peter not have given just to be able to ask the Lord for forgiveness and to tell Him that he was sorry. "But it is all too late," thought Peter as he settled back into his gloomy and black outlook.

Then what about Mary and Martha and Lazarus? He raise Lazarus from the dead after He had made the claim, "I am the resurrection and the life." Where was all that now? How could He be the "life" when He Himself was dead? What a pall settled over the hearts and minds of so many people! "So the enemies finally one. All the promises of Jesus were just so many words. He had us all fooled." These thoughts must to run through the minds of many, and must have added more blackness to their dark night of grief and sorrow. Even if Jesus had not been the Messiah, but just a friend of the disciples, it would still have been a dark time for them. They all loved Him. A funeral is not a time of joy.

But what made their saw row so intense was not only the loss of a friend, but of the hope of Israel. They spent three important years of their lives following in believing in Him. Of course, they could not imagine such a thing happening. Hardly anyone believed that Jesus would rise again.

Look at Mary Magdalene, who brought darkness with her "when it was yet dark." She had been cured by Jesus when He casts seven devils out of her. From then on she served Him with full devotion and a heart full of

faith in Jesus as the promised Savior. She was numbered among the faithful women who served Jesus with her time and money. She stood by while Jesus was being crucified; she watched him being buried. Can you imagine the darkness which settled over her soul when they buried Jesus and, with Him, all her hopes? Worst than that, things became blacker! "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him," she reported to Peter and John. "Could they not even let His body lie and decency? Must they desecrate His grave? Won't they please let my lord alone?" Must have been her gloomy thoughts on this dark Easter morn. She would have been satisfied to find Jesus' dead body, to finish embalming Him, to perform a last act of love and devotion to Him. She was looking for a dead body and even that was now denied her. Her so must have been darker than the night in which she came.

Ah! Loyal women! We see you standing beside the cross during the Lord's bitter agony. You were the last ones at the cross and the first ones at the tomb on Easter morning "when it was yet dark."

II. A Gray Dawn

The darkness must yield, and if you will look closer, you'll be able to see a faint light coming from the east. The dawn is coming. Just a little gray at first, but darn nevertheless. With the dawn comes a little light. This is the first day of the week; the Sabbath is gone, and with it is gone the Old Testament forever. A new day is about to break. The first glimmer of light shows a stone rolled away from the tomb of our Lord.

Mary Magdalene new that the disciples never thought of the idea of stealing the body and then trying to bolster up their benighted soul with a lie that He rose from the dead. How could they ever expect anyone to except such a ridiculous statement! Mary was in the confidence of the disciples, and she knew they were all hiding somewhere "for fear of the Jews." So the disciples had nothing to do with the rolled away stone.

A little more reasoning which showed that the enemies did not take the body. This is the very thing they were trying to prevent with their watch. They were trying to keep that stone in front of the tomb so that there would be an end to all the claims of Jesus. Then all the Jews could settle back into religious peace once more. If any glimmer of light and hope was beginning to rise and some darkened souls. A later on there were rumors spread among the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. The women said they saw Jesus, but, of course all this was considered as old wives tales. "Rise from the dead? What a ridiculous statement to make," some of them must have thought. But then it was reported that Angels were at the tomb, and they had solemnly stated that He was not in the tomb anymore, but alive again. The Angels even invited them to inspect the place where the Lord had lain.

Certainly these things were not definitely believed, but the dawn of truth was coming into their minds. Although the minds of the disciples were very confused at this time and nothing was very clear, yet some light was beginning to shine through in the gray dawn of Easter morning.

III. The Glorious Light

The dawn does not last long. It is a short period between night and light. Soon the glorious sun appeared on that first Easter Day, and with it, all the glorious light of the truth. Mary said, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him." Do not believe her, dearly beloved. We do not mean to say that Mary is a liar, but she's speaking out of the dark night. A little later she came back and wept in front of the tomb and told the Angels the same story. When she turned slightly, she noticed a man standing near her. When He said to her, "Mary!" she turned in amazement and said, "Master!" Now believe her! Now trust her that she saw her dear Lord again. She had seen Him laid away in the tomb. She was not an error now, she knew her Lord. The full light of Easter had struck her darkened soul. With amazing suddenness, a weight was lifted from her spirit. All past sorrow was forgotten. Sorrow was turned into happiness, "O holy joy of Easter! My Savior lives! All my former darkened thoughts were wrong," cried out her enlighten soul. To Mary was given the honor of being the first human to see Jesus alive again.

We can almost see their eyes blinking as the glorious light of Easter shown on the others. Jesus appeared to the women, to Peter, to the Emmaus disciples, to the eleven, and even to more than five hundred brethren at once. The appearance of Jesus alone could make such a transformation among such a dejected group of people. Oh, how wonderful is the light and warmth of the Easter truth! Nearly all the disciples gave up their lives testifying to the truth that Jesus rose from the dead. Only if they were absolutely convinced of the Resurrection, would they have been able and willing to do such a thing.

The hour of triumph! It was a triumph for Jesus. He too, went through some very dark hours, but now the light is here. All the debts of sand were paid; all that the Father had given Him to do was done; the last enemy, death, has been conquered. By the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God has declared the world free from sin. God is at peace with man. So we share in Jesus' hour of triumph, Jesus' victory is our victory; Jesus' Resurrection is our Resurrection. Is there a life after death? All people and all religions believe it. Christ proved it by rising from the dead.

Are you happy today? If not, you are still in the dark night before Easter. All who believe that in Christ's sufferings and death and Resurrection they have eternal life and are very happy people. Smile, dear friends! A frown, along face, sad looks or poor advertisements for the joyous faith and hope that you are supposed to have and enjoy. Fifty-two times a year we celebrate this wonderful triumph. Every time we have church on the first day of the week, we do it in remembrance of this hour of triumph and light.

We need never again to worry about the future. No matter what happens to us in life, we are assured of eternal life in the glory by faith in Christ. Do not come in darkness to this tomb of Jesus, for the stone is rolled away, the Easter light is here. The Easter light will shine in the world long after our graves are forgotten in the grave stones worn away. As long as the world stands, the people of God will find their greatest joy and happiness in a wonderful Easter light of Him who is "the resurrection and the life."

Someday we shall all pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death. This is a dark interior world. The evening of death will come. Then, suddenly, we shall see the risen Savior and all His glorious light, and we shall dwell with Him in the Father in the Holy Ghost in all eternity. Face-to-face we shall then see the same Lord that Mary and the disciples saw. We shall see these women and disciples and all the other redeemed children of God. We too, shall then have our eternal hour of triumph. Hallelujah! Amen.

THE PRAYER

O victorious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Thou didst dispel the gloom of the grave and didst arise with the brightest of glories. To thee belongs the honor, glory, triumph and victory. May we also rise from the darkness of sin and despair, and rise to shine with Thee in glory and splendor. O Father, Son, and Spirit, to Thee alone do we give all the glory and honor. But especially today do we rejoice in the majestic triumph of our dear Savior over all our enemies. Holy Spirit, let us see our Savior's risen face by faith. May we reflect some of His light in our faces on this, His day of triumph. Made this victory and try and be proclaimed with power and might throughout the ends of the earth, that many more may accept Jesus' offering by faith, and be saved forever. Truly, thou art the Resurrection and Life may we serve Thee all our days and enter in with Thee into eternal triumph. Amen.