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THROUGH THEIR EYES

INSIGHTS FROM THE EASTER STORY

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INTRODUCTION

The Lenten season is here and Easter is soon approaching. As Christ followers, we are given the opportunity to focus on the true meaning of our faith by remembering and reflecting upon the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. We can learn a lot from the Easter story, not just from Jesus, but other individuals whose actions demonstrate to us as believers how to respond to the Good News of the Gospel.

When reflecting on the Easter story, we most likely remember the main people, but there are others not so often emphasized in the Easter story from whom we can learn a great deal. In this short series we'll examine both.

Lets dive-in together and ask God to renew our minds and prepare our hearts for Resurrection Sunday. May these final days of the Lenten season be a time of preparation and remembrance as we celebrate our Redeemer!





THE PHARISEES

Rules. Love ‘em or hate ‘em? Or believe they can be bent?

We all have a rationale about rules.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were best known as “rule followers.” Perhaps you know a few or would even classify yourself as a rule follower. I believe my husband would say (in love) that he is married to one, as I proudly wore the badge of “traffic safety monitor” in elementary school.

RULES, RULES, RULES

The Pharisees and other religious leaders in Jesus’ day would make any modern-day rule follower look rudimentary in comparison to their own rule following handbook. These men were extreme and abrasive to put it simply. They took their job very seriously; policing others to their standard and even writing their own set

of rules to make themselves look superior to the Law of the Old Testament.

The rules of the Old Testament referred to as the Mosaic Law, were commands God gave His people through Moses. All of those commands are good for they reflect the character of God and reveal the ways we fall short.

The extreme rule following of the Pharisees became problematic when these men began to interpret the Law by making even more rules. Rules upon rules was their M.O.

Let's look at the fourth commandment for example: "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy... on it you shall not do any work." (Exodus 20:8, 10, NKJV). This commandment in and of itself is very good. God has given us seven days in each week, but He asks us to take one day out of the week to rest, to reflect, to recover, and to worship Him.

When Christ followers in the New Testament tried to follow the fourth commandment, they hit a bump in the road. There was no classification for work.

Could they help their neighbor?

Could they build a fire on a cold day?

Could they plant a garden or would all this be considered work?

I bet you can guess the Pharisees' response.... more rules. The legalistic Pharisees were too wise in their own eyes. Many of them claimed that walking more than three-quarters of a mile on the Sabbath constituted work. This too was their mindset when they saw the disciples walking through a field on the Sabbath picking heads of grain. (Mark 2:23)

The Pharisees were appalled.

Through their legalistic lenses, this was a form of threshing, which was work, therefore forbidden. Indignantly, the Pharisees scolded Jesus, saying, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" (vs. 24)

Jesus modeled God's heart by responding that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27)

Jesus came so we wouldn't have to work ourselves into a religious frenzy. His obedience and sacrifice on the cross ultimately allows us to return to the rest and freedom God always intended for His people. (Hebrews 4:9-11)

SABBATH REST

When was the last time you looked at Sunday (our Sabbath) as a gift?

Our Sabbath should be a joyful time, a privileged

time to reconnect with God. It was never meant to be a time for rules and restrictions keeping us from what's really important: our relationship with Him.

If you are feeling spiritually parched, unsettled, or squeezed by traditions - it might be time to let go and focus on reconnecting with Jesus, who is Lord. Jesus, who invites us to eternal rest through faith in Him, recognized rest as a human need. He wired us so intricately that He knows our need for rest and reconnection through worship and holy assembly.

Set aside this Sabbath day and Easter week to give honor and glory to the Lord of the Sabbath who has given us everything!



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *When in your life have rules or legalism impacted your walk with God? What steps can you take to honor God with your actions while simultaneously living in the grace and freedom He offers through Jesus?*

2. *Do you take a Sabbath each week? How do you connect with God during your Sabbath? What would you like to change about how you conduct your Sabbath rest?*



PRAYER

Dear God,
during this Easter week help me find time
to get still and reflect on your sacrifice
and grace in my life.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

Jesus replied, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40, NLT)

When I was a young believer, my Bible study teacher introduced me to the autobiography of Corrie Ten Boom; The Hiding Place. As a lover of Jesus and history, I was engrossed with her courageous story of faith and forgiveness. Corrie and her family lived in the Netherlands when the Nazis invaded in 1940. As a beloved family of watchmakers, they helped many Jews escape the Holocaust during World War II by hiding them in a secret chamber – the physical 'hiding place' of the book – that housed six people behind a faux

wall in Corrie's bedroom. As believers in their small town, in a time where being a Christian meant death or torture, their bravery and heorism modeled God's greatest commandment to its core; "Love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matthew 22:39, NKJV)

As we continue in our series of characters in the Easter story, I couldn't help but see the strong correlation between Corrie and another secret disciple named Joseph of Arimathea. Both Corrie and Joseph knew the true power and identity of Jesus. They trusted in Him but, as His disciples, had to keep their love quiet for a time.

Let's take a closer look at Joseph of Arimathea.

WHERE THE KINGDOM IS FOUND

I find it significant that Joseph of Arimathea (a Pharisee) can be found in every gospel account of Jesus' death. The writers of each Gospel make it clear that Joseph was known for his resolve, integrity and also his wealth. He, alongside his peers, were in search of the Kingdom of God. But while the Pharisees found that "kingdom" in their mastery of the Law and personal holiness, Joseph saw in Jesus the fulfilment of every kingdom prophecy written in the Old Testament.

As Corrie had to keep her allegiance and devotion

to Jesus a secret from the Nazi occupation, Joseph had to keep his a secret from the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing body of the time.

Can we pause for a moment and ponder the wrestling and anguish that must have been taking place in Joseph's heart? He would have known the kingdom prophecies like the back of his hand. Yet having witnessed Jesus' miracles first hand; his conclusion was entirely different than that of his peers. He knew that Jesus was indeed the Son of God and that acknowledgement would have put him in opposition with his church, his family and community.

Sometime between Jesus' trial and crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea decided to take his faith public and made a grand gesture before Pontus Pilate. Let's read this scripture together:

"When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him." (Matthew 27:57-5, NIV)

This act on his part was astonishing. As a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph was part of an elite group of religious experts, elders and tribe leaders who were the ruling body for matters pertaining to religion and civilian life. Not only would this bold move likely precede his ejection

from that group but it stands to reason he might have feared retribution as well.

Although he kept his allegiance a secret for some time, Joseph had the courage to publicly stand before Pilate and honor Jesus when all the other disciples ran. He gave Jesus in His death what Israel refused to give him in His earthly ministry: acknowledgement and recognition as the true Son of God, The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This secret disciple was willing to risk it all - his reputation and standing within the religious elite to give Jesus a king's burial and beautifully model the first part of the Greatest commandment, to "love God with all your heart, soul and mind." And, in doing so, he took part in fulfilling one of the many prophecies about Christ.

"He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; ***he was put in a rich man's grave.***" (Isaiah 53:9, NLT)



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Although we do not face the same kind of oppression Corrie Ten Boom did, what unique challenges do we face today as we seek to honor Christ with our lives?*

2. *How can you boldly stand for Christ in our current culture as Joseph of Arimathea did in his?*



PRAYER

Dear God,
thank you for being patient with us when we are driven by fear and timidity. It is only you who can strengthen us and help us to stand firm in our faith in the face of adversity or contempt. Thank you for examples like Joseph of Arimethea and Corrie Ten Boom. Please give me the courage to stand for truth when you call me to.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



JESUS, THE LAMB OF GOD

When I first became a Christian, I'd hear Jesus called the "Lamb of God" and would casually repeat the words in Bible study circles without understanding the true meaning. I often would think, why not a lion or a bear? Why a lamb? Jesus, the Great I am, shouldn't He be called something more powerful? Thankfully my Bible study mentors saw the misalignment and often would say, "Rebecca, context is key." They used that opportunity to share with me the beautiful meaning behind this name. Now, as a mom and children's Bible study leader, I love to unpack this truth for others so they too can discover the richness in His name.

THE SPOTLESS LAMB

Throughout the Old Testament, a lamb was sacrificed on an altar as an act of worship and

means of atonement for one's sins. The word atonement means to "cover over." The sacrificial lamb was a substitute and the requirement was to choose a lamb without defect. Meaning the lamb should be as close to perfect as possible. Instead of a person dying for his or her sins, God provided the lamb to be their substitute, and the blood of the lamb paid the penalty for their sin. (You can read more about this in The Offering of Issac in Genesis 22:1-14)

The lamb plays another major role in the Old Testament, and that is during the Passover. For context, the Passover occurred during the time of Moses, the ten plagues and the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. The last and final plague was the death of the first-born son. God Himself was coming to Egypt, striking the final blow. Before this conclusive strike, God sent Moses specific instructions to give the Israelites to save them from this plague:

"Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door frames of the houses where they eat the lambs." (Exodus 12:7, NIV)

God promised to pass over each house covered by the blood of the lamb. The message of the Passover is that God delivers through the death of an innocent substitute. The Israelites' first born sons were spared by the blood that covered

their door frames.

Speaking of this event, Louie Giglio wrote "What a powerful moment in history and what a powerful example of spiritual foreshadowing. The Passover pointed forward thousands of years to the moment when Jesus - the Lamb of God - shed His blood on the cross to cover the sins of humanity." [1]

Now, let's go to the New Testament and see how Jesus fulfills both of these prophetic symbols of atonement.

CHRISTMAS TO THE CROSS

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, NKJV)

Now, I have to admit, this next part blew my mind as a new believer and honestly still does to this day! Never doubt that God is in every single detail! John the Baptist's words were perfect and precise. Jesus was born sinless and pure in a messy manger not in a pristine place. Oftentimes, we hear the Christmas story and skim through it, missing the small, yet very important details surrounding His birth.

Born in a stable

Wrapped in swaddling clothes

Worshipped by lowly shepherds

Coincidental? I think not.

“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:11-12, NKJV)

In this passage, we read of the angels’ appearance to the shepherds announcing the birth of Jesus. Historians teach us that flocks of sheep covered the fields of Bethlehem and these shepherds cared for the lambs destined for sacrifice in the temple (only spotless ones could be offered). Don’t miss one incredible truth: the angels specifically told the shepherds that Jesus would be wrapped in “swaddling clothes.” Why does that matter? It was many years ago on my first trip to Israel that our guide shared with us the powerful meaning behind the “swaddling clothes.”

Shepherds kept watch over their sheep and when they gave birth they marked the spotless ones for temple sacrifice. Each spotless lamb was caught in the hands of the shepherd before touching the ground and carefully wrapped in swaddling clothes as a sign of purity. Therefore, when the angels declared that Jesus would be found wrapped in “swaddling clothes,” this

was to designate Him as the sinless Lamb of God. How fitting that the shepherds, who ran to Bethlehem that first Christmas morning, were among the first to worship the Lamb of God.

Marian Jordan Ellis shares the interesting perspective of the connection between the Lamb of God and the Passover lamb.

"Falsely accused, but in full control, Jesus chose to lay down His life. Jewish tradition tells us that at the third hour (9:00 AM), Israel's High Priest tied the Passover lamb to the altar for sacrifice. At that exact moment, the Gospels tell us that outside the city walls of Jerusalem, Jesus was nailed to the cross. (Matthew 27:32-56) Then for six brutal hours both the Passover lamb and Jesus the Lamb of God, awaited death. While Jesus was tortured, mocked and forsaken, He endured the full penalty for sin. Finally, at the ninth hour (3:00 PM), the high priest ascended the altar in the temple and sacrificed the Passover lamb. The blood spilled out. The lamb slain. At that exact moment from the cross, Christ's words thundered out over the city of Jerusalem, "It is finished!" Jesus finished His work. He lived a sinless, perfect life—proving that He alone was qualified to stand as the ultimate sacrifice. Then He died the death we should have died so that death and judgment would Passover us." [2]

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Have you thanked God this Easter season for the ultimate sacrifice of His son, Jesus? How should remembering the Spotless Lamb's sacrifice, and the salvation we are offered as a result, change the way we live right now?*

2. *How can we share this eternity-altering truth with those around us? Is there a person that comes to mind who needs to hear this message of grace, love, forgiveness and hope? Pray for the Lord to make clear an opportunity to personally share with that person.*



PRAYER

Dear God,
help me to truly behold you are the sinless Lamb of God. Help me to grasp the truth of your death and resurrection, that I may find hope and purpose. Good Friday tells me that Jesus paid the atonement for my sins and declared me worthy of dying for! Help that truth permeate my heart and mind and give me the ability to share this Good News with others.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



[1] *Giglio, Louie. At the Table with Jesus: A Bible Study on the Life and Teachings of Jesus. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2021.*



MARY MAGDALENE

[2] *Ellis, Marian Jordan. Garden to Garden: Through the Bible from Eden to Eternal Paradise. New York: FaithWords, 2024.*

I love a good transformation story, don't you? Which is why I'm such a fan of both HGTV and Marvel movies. To see trash turned to treasure in a home makeover series or a young Peter Parker transformed into heroic Spiderman - I get hooked and can't stop watching till the credits roll. When I think about the Easter story, there is one character in particular who stands out amidst all of Jesus' disciples. Mary Magdalene.

Her transformation story is one that rivals any Marvel comic or home renovation project.

What do we know about Mary Magdalene?

Both scripture and Biblical scholars tell us that Mary Magdalene's "resume" was not flattering

to say the least. She was a woman in complete bondage before she encountered Jesus. Scripture tells us in Luke 8, that Mary Magdalene was terrorized by demons and afflictions - her distress was overpowering and her isolation unbearable. The prison bars that surrounded her were invisible, for her soul was locked in solitary confinement.

We can only speculate what it was like at the moment Jesus saw Mary in her state of desperation. Only Jesus could have seen who she really was regardless of her derailed state. This encounter with Jesus was a transformational moment for Mary. To go from complete enslavement to total deliverance - we can only imagine a fragment of her gratitude and relief.

This event made Mary one of Jesus' most devoted followers and disciples.

MARY MAGDALENE'S FIERCE DEVOTION TO JESUS

Scripture tells us that Mary Magdalene was standing at the cross where Jesus was crucified. She witnessed both Jesus' brutal death and burial. (John 19:25)

Can you take a moment and try to imagine the anguish in Mary's heart and inconsolable tears

as she watched Jesus' body being tortured? Her proximity to the cross would have meant that she saw his side pierced by the spear, heard his agonizing cries. It's hard to fathom the state of grief and defeat that she must have felt in those hours.

JESUS USES THE LEAST OF THESE

After Jesus' death, John's gospel tells us that Jesus' body was wrapped in strips of linen using a mixture of myrrh and aloes and then carried and placed in a garden tomb. What transpired next could only be orchestrated by the hands of God! Open up your Bible to John's Gospel and take a closer look at chapter 20, verses 1-18. This passage knits together some of the missing pieces of the other Gospels because the Apostle John wrote his gospel last. He begins the story of Jesus' resurrection with Mary Magdalene's early morning walk to the tomb... (John 20:1-8)

Can we just marvel at the fact that the first proclaimer of the resurrection was a woman! I love what the Bible Knowledge Commentary says about this:

"That a woman would be the first to see Him is an evidence of Jesus' love as well as a mark of the narrative's historicity. No Jewish author in the ancient world would have invented a story

with a woman as the first witness to this most important event." [1]

Jesus revealed himslef to the one who was the most afraid that the darkness had won and who also by society standards was second rate. Mary didn't need forensic evidence to know that Jesus was alive, his voice was enough. She knew at the exact moment when he called, "Mary" that it was Jesus, the Son of God. It was his words that healed her. There was no misplacing his voice.

On our darkness days, our souls can hope in the fact that darkness does not win. Allow Jesus to speak your name - a word of love, a word of healing, a word of hope over you.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Have you believed the lie that darkness has won? Are you having trouble believing that God can transform your life or heal your brokenness?*

2. *How can you place this lie of unbelief and doubt in his hands? Will you believe God for his ability to love, care and rescue you?*



PRAYER

Dear God,
thank you for reminding me, through Mary Magdalene's story, that you are in the business of rescuing your sons and daughters out of the domain of darkness. Thank you for giving us hope and a future through your son Jesus. Help us to remember that because you defeated the grave we can face tomorrow. Because you live, all fear can be washed away. Help us to be proclaimers of your resurrection and grace.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



[1] *John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1983), 342.*



THE APOSTLE PETER

As the mom of a toddler, I'm well-acquainted with the word "no." At dinnertime, my son often refuses something I offer him. He even turns the manners I've taught him against me by saying, "No, thank you!"

If we're not careful, our "nos" can become refined denials as we grow up. Although we don't argue with our parents over dinner anymore, we may tell God "no" when He asks us to share the gospel with a coworker—a silent disowning of our Savior. Or perhaps we don't trust God to answer our prayers, in essence denying that He knows better than we do. In these moments, we're denying God.

The Apostle Peter had such a moment, and it's a famous scene in the familiar Easter story. The same man who had boldly declared Jesus to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16, NKJV) denied even knowing the Lord.

Not once but three times.

OUR DENIALS DON'T SURPRISE GOD.

Did you know Jesus foretold Peter's denial? In fact, He warned Peter: "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Matthew 26:34).

Peter's response? Essentially, he told Jesus, "Absolutely not!" Ironically, he denied that he would deny Jesus.

I imagine Jesus' sad smile. He loved Peter, but He knew Peter would fail. Jesus' response to this knowledge wasn't anger or frustration but the opposite. "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren'" (Luke 22:31-32).

Did you catch that? Jesus prayed for Peter to endure his testing. Peter's denial had to pierce Jesus' heart, but Jesus didn't accuse Peter. Rather, he reinforced Peter's faith.

OUR DENIALS DON'T STOP GOD'S PLANS.

In the Bible, the number three often signifies

completion. Jonah was three days and nights in the whale's belly, and Jesus was in the tomb for three days (Jonah 1:17, Matthew 12:40). Peter denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:75).

Why is that number significant? Peter could not excuse his denial as a slip of the tongue. He emphatically, completely denied knowing Jesus.

And yet, Jesus emphatically and completely rose to life after three days in the tomb. Jesus' resurrection defeated sin and death and hell—and even the bitter despair Peter felt after denying His Lord.

Our denials and our mistakes don't prevent God's plans. Rather, the work of Jesus on the cross completely covered our sins and made our restoration possible. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

DESPITE OUR DENIALS, GOD LOVES AND RESTORES US.

After Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to Peter and the other disciples as they were fishing. When He had shared a meal with them, Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" (See John 21:15-17.)

Though Peter likely saw himself as a failure, Jesus saw him as raw material for gospel work. After his restoration, Peter went on to be greatly used by God—and eventually, to die for Him as Jesus predicted (John 21:19).

When my son turns up his nose at my pulled pork, I don't throw up my hands and say, "That's it. I'll never cook for you again." Of course not! I keep presenting him with new foods, and people tell me that eventually, he'll try them. (I guess that's where faith comes in!)

When we tell God "no" or deny Him in some way, He remains patient with us. He is ready and waiting to restore us—and blessed thought, He still wants to use us, mistakes and all.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Is there something in your past or present you think is too big of a failure for God to redeem? What lesson can you apply from Peter's story to your circumstances?*

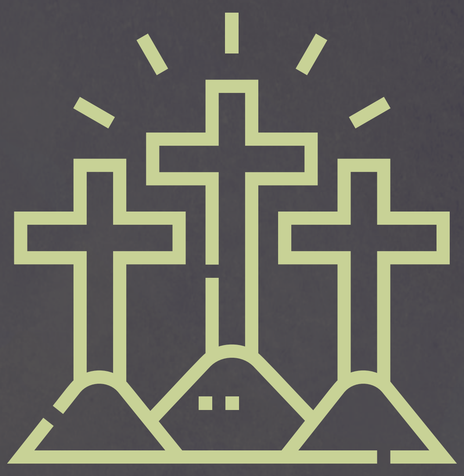
2. *Maybe someone has offended or denied you in a way that seems unforgivable. How can you take steps to forgive as the Lord forgave you (Colossians 3:13)?*



PRAYER

Dear God,
please forgive me for the ways in which I have failed and denied You. Thank You for dying on the cross to pay the price for my sins and make my restoration with God possible. I accept Your forgiveness and ask You to use me. May my flawed story be one that brings You glory and points others to You.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



THE APOSTLE JOHN

What comes to mind when you hear the word "legacy"? Perhaps you think of your children, whom Scripture calls "a heritage from the Lord" (Psalm 127:3, NKJV) or the material inheritance you want to give them, also a good thing according to Proverbs 13:22. Most important of all is our spiritual heritage, and that is what the Apostle John wanted his readers to understand. John wrote, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (I John 3:1).

The Father's love lavished on us, through the atoning work of His Son Jesus, is an "indescribable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15). The best legacy we can leave behind is sharing that gift with others.

As a first-hand witness to the Easter story, the Apostle John understood this truth. He understood the gift of being beloved, despite his brokenness.

THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

Five times in the book of John, the author refers to himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20). Wait, didn't Jesus love the other disciples too?

Of course, He did. This phrasing signifies John's close relationship with Jesus. John was one of three disciples in Jesus' inner circle, along with Peter and James, who witnessed special events like Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17).

During the Last Supper, John sat next to Jesus, again indicating this close connection. After Jesus said that one of His disciples would betray Him, John asked who would do such a thing. "Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, 'Lord, who is it?'" (John 13:25).

Jesus stated that it was the one to whom He would give a piece of bread, after having dipped it (John 13:26), but even then, John and the other disciples didn't understand what was about to happen.

A BROKEN VESSEL USED BY GOD

At first glance, John seems like the perfect disciple. After all, he didn't deny Jesus like Peter or doubt like Thomas. However, John was nonetheless broken and in need of His Savior.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, John, one of

Zebedee's sons, let Jesus down. "And He [Jesus] took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me'" (Matthew 26:37-38).

When we go through dark places in life, we need a few close friends to weep and watch with us. I think of Job's three friends who came to lament his calamity. But those friends did Job little good, and Jesus' closest disciples failed as well. All three, including John, fell asleep. Not once, but twice. (See Matthew 26:40-46.)

Then, when the Jewish leaders arrested Jesus, did John bravely remain by his side? No, even the beloved disciple abandoned His Master. "Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled" (Matthew 26:56b).

JOHN'S RETURN AND RESPONSIBILITY

Unlike the other disciples, John returned. Both he and Peter followed Jesus to the high priest's courtyard to see what would happen to Jesus (John 18:15). This setting served as the scene for Peter's denial, which led to him leaving and weeping bitterly (Matthew 26:75).

But where was John? He followed Jesus to the cross. "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He

said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:26-27). Jesus entrusted His mother's care to John, and this time, John did exactly what Jesus asked.

WE ARE GOD'S BELOVED CHILDREN.

I think it's significant that in his epistles, John used the same title "beloved" that he gave himself to address his readers. For example, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (I John 4:11). John understood that "beloved" wasn't reserved for only one disciple but applied to all of God's children.

Like John, we're flawed, but our failures and mistakes don't define us. Our identity as God's beloved children does.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Have you believed the lie that God wants to use only perfect people? How can recognizing that even Jesus' closest disciple made mistakes help set you free?*

2. *Who or what is God entrusting to your care today? Will you accept what God asks of you?*



PRAYER

Dear God,
thank You for the blessing of being Your beloved child. Thank You that my identity doesn't come from my goodness or failures, but from my relationship with You. Thank You for dying on the cross and rising again three days later to make such a relationship possible. I love you, Lord.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



PONTIUS PILATE

“What is truth?” The question could headline any mainstream media outlet. If we’re honest, it could headline in our Christian churches and communities as well.

Not by choice, I was single into my early thirties. Our culture’s advice to singles like me was to “test the waters” and “live it up,” but I believed God’s Word. So, I waited for my husband.

Is truth what is convenient? Is truth what makes us happy? Is truth what ensures our good standing with others? Or is truth what God says it is?

These aren’t new questions. Our next character in the Easter story confronted them. A Roman governor, Pontius Pilate would rather have been in Caesarea enjoying the seaside than in crowded Jerusalem. But he had the responsibility of keeping the peace for the Jewish Passover feast, so like it or not, he entered the most important drama of all time.

The day of preparation before Passover, the Jewish leaders "led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning …" (John 18:28, NKJV). The Praetorium was the name for Roman headquarters. For Jewish people, entering it would make them ceremonially unclean, so they remained outside.

The Jewish leaders wanted the death penalty for Jesus but did not have the authority to issue it. They wanted the Roman governor to do their dirty work for them.

UNCOVER THE TRUTH

Pilate called for Jesus to clarify the charge against Him. "Are You the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33). Jesus' response puzzled Pilate. "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37b).

Then Pilate voiced the question the world has grappled with ever since: "What is truth?" (John 18:38).

At least one truth was clear to Pilate: Jesus did not deserve to die. He knew that the Jewish leaders "had handed Him over because of envy" (Matthew 27:18) and directly stated, "I have found no reason for death in Him" (Luke 23:22).

THE TIME FOR A CHOICE

Pilate even trembled when the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of making Himself "the Son of God" (John 19:8) and demanded of Jesus if such a claim were true (John 19:9). A message from his wife while he was on his judgment seat must have compounded Pilate's anxiety. "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him" (Matthew 27:19).

Whether from his own conscience or his wife's persuasion or both, the Bible tells us that Pilate tried to release Jesus (John 19:12 and Acts 3:13). But the Jewish leaders finally found Pilate's Achilles' heel. They shouted, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar" (John 19:12).

WOULD PILATE BETRAY THE TRUTH OR CAESAR?

"When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it'" (Matthew 27:24). Pilate prioritized keeping the peace. He feared losing his job more than he feared God.

WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THE TRUTH?

Before we judge Pilate, we must ask, "What do we prioritize more than God's truth?" Is it keeping the peace with our friends who have unbiblical lifestyles? Is it fearing retaliation if we share our faith at work? Is it unfulfilled longings that we determine to meet no matter what God's Word says?

Six years into my marriage, I am grateful for my wonderful husband. Sometimes, marriage isn't easy though. God designed marriage to make us holy, and that refining process can be messy. But my husband and I choose to believe God and His plan for marriage, not what the world says about it.

Truth is not what is convenient, what makes us happy, or what ensures our standing with others. Truth is what God says it is.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What might you knowingly or unknowingly elevate above God's truth?*

2. *Where might God be asking you to stand for Him? How can you speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)?*



PRAYER

Dear God,
please forgive me when I have prioritized my own desires above Your truth. Please give me the boldness to stand for You in an increasingly ungodly culture and not compromise Your Word for my convenience or comfort.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



CONCLUSION

As we reflect on the many voices and perspectives from the Easter story, we're reminded that the message of the cross is deeply personal and powerfully universal. Each individual—flawed yet chosen—points us to the unmatched grace of our Savior. From Mary Magdalene's devotion to Peter's restoration, from the courage of Joseph of Arimathea to the quiet legacy of John, we see the heart of Jesus on full display. The empty tomb is not just the end of the story—it's the beginning of ours. May the truths we've discovered not fade with the close of these devotionals, but instead deepen our faith, renew our hope, and embolden us to live lives worthy of the resurrection. Jesus is alive—and because of that, everything has changed!





CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God,

Thank You for walking with me through each page of this journey. Thank You for the cross, the tomb, and the triumph of Jesus' resurrection. Help me to carry the hope of Easter into every ordinary moment of my life

In Jesus' name, Amen.

