

Then Peter tells them how he saw all Jesus' ministry from His baptism, through the healings and miracles in Galilee and then in Jerusalem, and finally stood by the cross on which Jesus died. But then, on the third day, Jesus was raised from the dead. He was seen by many witnesses including the disciples who ate and drank with Him. Now they were under His orders to tell all the people about Him, how He is the One appointed by God to judge the living and the dead, and that everybody who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through Him.

**APPLICATION** What we receive through entrusting our lives to Jesus, is what is our obligation to share – and the lesson here is about going beyond people who are like us.

Peter found himself well outside his comfort zone with a Roman centurion – a Roman execution squad had put his Lord on the Cross – and a house full of 'unclean' Gentiles that no good Jew would associate with. But Peter had received an impartation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and subsequently, had just received a vision that shocked him out of his blinkered Jewish view of who had favour with God. Now he found himself sharing freely with people who were not like him. His hearers were drawn to God and ready to believe, but they didn't tick a single one of the religious boxes. They were complete outsiders. And Peter tells them that it is about believing in and trusting Jesus – *everyone* who believes in Him will have their sins forgiven through Him.

That's our learning point: God is at work in people who may be quite different from us, but what we have been given, is for us to share with whoever God brings across our path – and gladly.

**QUESTION** *What is within your comfort zone? And what would be reaching outside it look like, for you?*

**PRAYER** Father God, You sent Your Son, empowered Him to show Your love to the world and then had to endure seeing Him die in indescribable pain and shame. Why?

Because You so loved the world that You gave Your Son, that whoever, of any race, background or record, that truly believes in Him, shall not perish but have eternal life through Him.

We are deeply grateful as we let those words sink in for us, once again. And we receive Your love and Your truth afresh on this Resurrection Day.

As the women went with that most exciting message that Jesus is alive – so show us people that we can share that good news with. To His eternal glory and honour, Amen.

# The Living Word

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Bible readings for Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for **April 4**  
*Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching*

Theme for Easter: **The message of the empty tomb for all who believe**

Isaiah 25:6-9 – Victory on the Lord's mount swallows death for ever

Mark 16:1-8 – The angel explains the empty tomb: "He has risen!"

Acts 10:34-43 – The good news of peace with God through Jesus

## Isaiah 25:6-9 – Victory on the Lord's mount swallows death for ever

*The heavenly banquet for all who trust the Lord and are joyful in His salvation*

**6 On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines.**

"On this mountain" – the mountain of the Lord. Jerusalem is taken as symbolic of Zion, the heavenly city. Isaiah 1:8, 1:27, 2:2, 24:23.

"Rich food... aged wine" – God's grand Messianic banquet at the end of time. "Rich food" is symbolic of great blessings and "the finest of wines" speaks of a spiritual outpouring.

**7-8 On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; God's salvation through Jesus is for all people. He will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; He will remove His people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.**

"He will destroy the shroud... swallow up death for ever" – the first of two remarkable promises by God. Death, the great swallower, Psalm 49:14 ESV, is itself swallowed up in victory, 1 Cor. 15:54.

• *For further study*, see Revelation 7:17, 21:4

"The sheet that covers all nations... the tears from all faces" – the second remarkable promise, not only will God destroy death but He will do it for *all* people (five-fold repetition of 'all'), not just the chosen people of Israel. This anticipates Christ's death and, now resurrected, being empowered to confer new life on *all* who come to Him in repentance and faith.

• *For further study*, read Romans 6:1-10.

**9 In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him, and He saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in Him; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."**

"They will say" – the new community of those belonging to God will respond in humility but also with exuberant joy.

**SUMMARY** The picture of the heavenly banquet contains two promises that must have been difficult for Isaiah and his original hearers to grasp. First promise is that death, which stalks everything living until it can devour it, would be itself devoured, and human sorrow and disgrace with it. The second promise, just as extraordinary to those first hearers, is that wiping away tears and removing disgrace will be for all. Not just for God's own, the nation of Israel, but all people of every nation – with much repetition of the "all".

**APPLICATION** The nature of religions is that they are exclusive. Apart from major world religions, the ordering of Christian faith into a great many strands of competing membership and practice is man's way of organising and holding on

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to God's free gift. Isaiah's words show us with great clarity that God's heart is to invite *all* who respond to His love to put their trust in Him and know His salvation.

**QUESTION** *Is Christian faith something we should be receiving, or giving away?*

### Mark 16:1-8 – The angel explains the empty tomb: "He has risen!"

*The women on a dawn visit to the tomb find the heavy stone rolled back*

**1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.**

"When the Sabbath was over" — no purchases could be made until sunset on Saturday evening.

"Anoint Jesus' body" — Jews did not practise embalming but this was an act of special devotion and love. They were not expecting resurrection.

**2-3 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"**

"Who will roll the stone away" — the heavy stone closure was shaped to roll and set in a groove for closure.

**4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.**

"Had been rolled away" — an act of God, not to let Jesus out, but to allow witnesses to see what had happened. There is no mention of the seal on the tomb or the guard. The women are unaware of the authorities having taken precautions, Matt. 27:62-66. Matthew reports that an angel moved the stone, Matt. 28:2-4 and an earthquake occurred.

**5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.**

**SUMMARY** Mark's account focuses on the the early morning visit by Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome. They set out at first light, on a mission of love and reverence, to reach the tomb where their Lord is laid out – or so they believed. These women are the first witnesses of the empty tomb, and of the angel's message: "He is risen! He is not here..."

**APPLICATION** Just as Isaiah's words emphasise God's heart that all are eligible to hear and believe for salvation in Jesus, Mark's account puts women first, not last. On the Cross, death was defeated. At the tomb, God opened a sealed place of death, to reveal unmistakable evidence of Jesus raised to new life. We have to

"As they entered" — a fore-chamber, with a smaller burial chamber leading off it.

"Young man...in a white robe... sitting" — the posture of authority, and in formal attire suggestive of a heavenly visitation. Matthew tells us he was an angel.

• *For further study, see Mark 9:35, 13:3, Luke 4:20 and Esther 8:15; Ecclesiastes 9:7-8; Mark 9:3; Matthew 28:2-3.*

**6 "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.**

"The Nazarene" — used by some as a slur. The angel may have been saying that the 'despised one' who was crucified, has now risen in glory.

"He has risen!" — one emphatic word in Greek. The angel emphasises the evidence of the Resurrection.

**7 "But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you.' "**

"Go, tell His disciples" — a woman's testimony was not allowed in court but Mark boldly cites the women as the first witnesses to the empty tomb and Christ's resurrection.

"Disciples and Peter" — this detail is only in Mark showing Peter was still very much included.

**8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.**

allow faith to rise above reason and trust in Jesus and His death and resurrection. Believing the Resurrection is a key to our receiving new life.

**QUESTION** *Why did the women set out for a tomb they couldn't open? What does this tell us about God's prompting, and His desire for them to be the first witnesses?*

### Acts 10:34-43 – The good news of peace with God through Jesus

*Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name*

**34-35 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right.**

"Peter began to speak" — at the house of Cornelius, a Gentile Roman in Caesarea.

"God accepts from every nation" but there is no suggestion that salvation is possible apart from the redemptive work of Christ.

• *For further study: that God does not show partiality in the OT and the NT, Deut. 10:17; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Job 34:19; Romans 2:11, 3:29, 30; James 2:1.*

**36 "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.**

"The message... to the people of Israel" — Jesus was the message, and the Jews were the first to hear it, but it was not exclusively for them because "Jesus Christ... is Lord of all".

**37-38 "You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him.**

"You know what has happened" — the life and death of Jesus was general knowledge, even to Romans living in Caesarea.

"After the baptism" — Peter's summary begins with Jesus' baptism and ends with the Resurrection, like Mark's gospel which is

based on Peter's preaching, but in Greek.

**39-40 "We are witnesses of everything He did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a cross, but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen.**

"Hanging Him on a cross" — literally, on a *xylon*, tree, the same word used in the Greek Septuagint OT to render Deut. 21:23 ESV "Cursed by God is everyone who is hanged on a tree."

**41 "He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.**

"Ate and drank with Him" — evidence of His bodily resurrection.

• *For further study, see Luke 24:42-43; John 21: 12-15.*

**42 "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the One whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.**

"The One whom God appointed as judge" — this seemed heretical to many Jews who believed that God the Father is judge of the world, John 5:22, 27.

**43 "All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."**

"All the prophets testify" — to the Messiah and that everyone who believes in Him will have their sins remitted.

• *For further study see Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; John 5:39.*

"Everyone who believes... receives" — to receive forgiveness of sins, we have to believe: nothing more, nothing less.

**SUMMARY** Peter, having just received a dramatic vision from God, finds himself in a household he would never have entered before, surrounded by God-fearing Gentiles waiting for him to give them a message from God. He begins by sharing his most recent lesson – as a Jew, he had to understand that God accepts worship from people of every nation and background, without favourites.