

are near-sighted. So we need to put on God's glasses to really see. Brothers and sisters, life is better in heaven. Say that with me: "Life is better in heaven." When you say your prayers tonight, ask God to help you believe that. Ask God to help you believe that what is coming is better than what you see now.

Because—let's face it—our world today doesn't look much different than the world the women saw. Their world looked pretty messed up. I mean, Jesus had just died! Yet, in the middle of the mess, God still expected them to believe that Jesus would rise again. And as messed up as your life might look today, God still wants you to believe that everything is going according to his plan for you. When you feel like giving up, remember "He is risen!" When you are afraid, "He is risen!" When nothing in your life goes the way you've planned, "He is risen!" When the doctor says there is nothing more he can do, "He is risen!" When you get that phone call, "He is risen!"

And those are not empty words, because you also will rise. There's a song by a man named Chris Tomlin that goes like this: "Jesus has overcome and the grave is overwhelmed. The victory is won. He is risen from the dead. And I will rise when He calls my name, no more sorrow, no more pain. I will rise on eagles' wings before my God, fall on my knees, and rise." You can go through life with this thought weighing you down every day: "I will die." Or you can go through life with this thought freeing you every day: "I will rise." "I will rise when he calls my name, no more sorrow, no more pain. I will rise on eagles' wings before my God, fall on my knees, and rise. I will rise."

Because when you have Jesus, who rose from the dead, you are part of something bigger than this life. You are part of something bigger than this world. The goal of your life is not a length of time. It's not an accomplishment. It's not a number. It's a place. The goal of your life is to end up in heaven. After 8 years or 28 years or 98 years. A full life is not a life that includes as many anniversaries and birthdays as possible. A full life is a life that ends in the arms of Jesus in heaven. When my friend Ryan passed away at 28 years, it was not a shame. It was not a failure. It was not too soon. It was a success. Because he rose and sat down at Jesus' feet in heaven. That's the goal! Make that your goal, and then this will be your joy every day: Because he is risen—I will rise!

Prayer: *"Lord Jesus, you have done great things for me. May I thank you by believing your promise that because you rose I also will rise. Amen."*

Matthew 28:1-10
Rev. Nathan Nass

Easter Sunday
April 20, 2014

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." ⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

He Is Risen!

A few weeks ago I got a call from my mother-in-law. It was a nice surprise, until I heard what she had to tell me. She asked, "Have you heard about Ryan?" Ryan was my seminary classmate who was a young pastor in a town just down the road from my in-laws. Ryan, like me, was 28-years-old with a wife and a little child. "No," I said. "What about Ryan?" "He died." "Really? How? Was there an accident?" "No. He went to the doctor four weeks ago and found out he had cancer. And he died last night." There are moments in life when death hits home. That was one for me. A 28-year-old pastor with a wife and a child. Dead. Just like that. It could have been me.

So who's your Ryan? Who is the person whose death has made death hit home for you? They've made your heart ache. There used to be a time that when somebody died, all that was left of them was a little tombstone in a cemetery. But today there are painful reminders all around us. Their number is still in your phone. Their Facebook page is still open. Their birthday reminders still pop up on your computer. Their picture still hangs on your wall. But none of that changes that they're dead. And a part of you aches. Who's your Ryan? A mother? Brother? Grandpa? Friend?

People say that death is part of the "circle of life." It's the natural conclusion to a life well-lived. But that's a lie, and everybody knows it! Death is the most unnatural thing there is. God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to live forever, not to die. You were made to live forever! And you know that. That's why you're not looking forward to dying. That's why it's so hard to watch other people go. Death is the ripping of body from soul in a way that was never meant to happen. God did not create people to die. Not when you're

young, and not when you're old.

But yet every single person dies. Do you know why? Because every person sins. Remember God's words to Adam after he sinned? "*For dust you are and to dust you will return*" (Genesis 3:19). Oh, we like to think we're pretty important people. But drive past a cemetery, and you'll see lots of pretty important people six feet under. Deep down you know the truth: We are sinful people, and we will die. And that makes death our enemy. From the moment that first grandparent passed away years ago you learned to fear death. You don't want to let go of the loved ones in your life. But in the back of your mind you know you can't win. Death is coming for you. It's coming for them. And in case you forget, each year brings another shock like Ryan.

The women who showed up at Jesus' tomb on Easter morning had just had their shock. It wasn't a 28-year-old pastor. But close! It was a 33-year-old pastor. Jesus. They had heard the crowd chant, "Crucify him! Crucify him!," but they still had hoped for the best. They had seen the blood drip as Jesus hung on the cross, but they still had hoped for a miracle. Until they heard Jesus yell, "It is finished!" as he bowed his head and die. They knew it was over. They watched the stone shut on Jesus' tomb. They had thought Jesus was different, but Jesus was dead. Yet like the widow who keeps going back to her husband's grave, they were not willing to let go yet.

So they got up early on Sunday morning and trudged to the tomb. Can you imagine the burden that they carried? It wasn't just the spices in their hands. Death had taken their loved one away from them way too soon. But they weren't willing to let go. So they went to the tomb, and there sat an angel, sitting on the stone. And he said, "Ladies, I know this is tough, but try to hang in there." No he didn't! What good would that have done? To women who were inconsolable, he said the only words that could change anything: "He is risen!" "*Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.*"

He says it so matter of factly, like it shouldn't be a surprise at all. "*He has risen, just as he said.*" Because it shouldn't have been a surprise. Over and over again, Jesus himself had said, "*The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life*" (Matthew 17:22). But did Jesus really expect them to believe his crazy promise? Should they really have expected a man they saw tortured to death to walk out of his tomb? Yes! They should have expected that. Because that's what God promised, and God always keeps his promises, even his biggest promises. Easter proves that! "*He has risen, just as he said.*"

What a morning! We're told, "*the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.*" "*Afraid yet filled with joy.*" I can understand that. Over and over in their heads they must have repeated those beautiful words, "He is risen! He is risen! He is risen!" But that joy was still mixed with fear, "Can it be true? Is he alive?

Am I going to be hurt again?" When, suddenly, there was Jesus. Jesus never wants there to be any fear in the hearts of his followers. He wants there to be perfect peace. So that first Easter morning wasn't complete until Jesus himself appeared to say, "*Don't be afraid.*" I've really risen! "*Go and tell my brothers...*"

It's a great story, isn't it? No it's not! A great story is the Twins winning the 1991 World Series. A great story is a fireman rescuing a child from a burning building. This is not a great story. This is the truth that your life is built on. It is not enough to know the story that Jesus died on a cross and rose from the dead. Even Satan and any number of unbelieving people know that. For it to do you any good, you need to understand how this true story impacts your life right now.

Brothers and sisters, these three words—he is risen!—are the most important words in the world. When Jesus died on the cross he took away your sin. He forgave you for everything you've ever done. But there was still one enemy left—death. Until Easter. When Jesus rose, he defeated death too. And Jesus didn't just squeak by on a last-second shot. On Easter morning, Jesus walked out of his tomb. He shook the earth. Sent his angel. Threw down that stone. Every breath Jesus took was a punch to Satan's face. "*He is not here; he is risen. Just as he said!*"

And that means that every other thing Jesus says to you is true too. The Man who rose from the dead is a Man of his Word. So what else has Jesus promised? "*In my father's house are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you*" (John 14:2). True. "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies*" (John 11:25). True. "*Surely I am with you always...*" (Matthew 28:20). True! Easter is proof that God keeps his promises—even his most unbelievable ones. Even at our toughest times. Even in the face of death. "*Because I live, you also will live*" (John 14:19). These are the three greatest words: "He is risen!"

Now I can't force you to believe all that. Many people don't. I met a man like that this past week. He said he didn't believe in God, and when I asked what would happen when he died, he said: "Nobody's ever come back to tell me." That's just plain wrong. Someone did come back to tell him. Jesus did. He came back to tell us: "There is life after death. Just look at me!" I can't force you to believe that, but I'd like to remind you of Paul's words: "*If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*" Don't envy those who live their lives without Jesus. Because you know what, their loved ones die too. They die too. And what comfort do they have? None. There is no comfort in the face of death for a person without Jesus.

So you need to put your glasses on. Okay, maybe you don't have glasses. I do. I'm one of the 41% of Americans who are near-sighted. But I'd like to argue with that statistic. 100% of us are near-sighted. Every single one of us sees our daily troubles clearer than God's promises. Every single one of us sees life in this world clearer than life in heaven. We