

WHEN JESUS SHOWS UP... DESPAIR BECOMES WITNESS

INTRO: Church, we are standing in a unique moment today. Last Sunday, we celebrated the resurrection. We gathered, we worshiped, we proclaimed—He is risen. But today is the Sunday after Easter. And if we're not careful, Easter can become a moment we celebrate... instead of a reality we live in.

Because the question is not just: *Do we believe Jesus rose?*

The question is: What does the resurrection actually do in us... and through us... now?

Because for the first followers of Jesus... the resurrection was not a one-day celebration. It was a life-altering encounter that changed everything.

And here's where the story begins: Not with bold faith... but with quiet grief.

Because the first people to arrive at the empty tomb... did not come expecting resurrection. They came expecting death. And I just want to pastor us for a moment— Some of us walked in today... and if we're honest, we're not standing in celebration.

We're standing in something that feels unresolved. Something that feels heavy. Something that feels like it didn't turn out the way we hoped.

And here's the good news of the Gospel:

Jesus does not wait for you to get out of your despair before He meets you. He meets you right in it.

BIG IDEA: The risen Jesus doesn't just comfort your despair—He transforms it.

Church, hear me—because this is where we have to let the Gospel go deeper than just inspiration. The resurrection is not just God sitting with you in your pain... it is God acting in power to redeem it. The same Jesus who was crucified, who truly suffered, who truly died, was raised by the power of God. As Romans 6:4 tells us, He was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father. That means the resurrection is not just something we celebrate once a year—it is a power that is still at work right now.

He does not just come to ease your sorrow. He comes to break the power of sin and death that produced it. He does not simply sit with you in what feels broken. He comes to make all things new. As Revelation 21:5 declares, "Behold, I am making all things new." Not just emotionally, not just temporarily, but deeply, completely, transformationally—down to the level of your heart, your identity, your future.

Because in the life of a believer, grace is not only forgiving—it is transforming. The same grace that justifies you is the grace that sanctifies you. And the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in you. As Romans 8:11 says, the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you.

So what feels like the end is not the end. It becomes the beginning of a testimony. What looks buried, God has the power to raise. What grief tried to silence, grace turns into witness. Because when the risen Jesus steps into your story, He doesn't just change your circumstances—He

transforms your life. And when resurrection power enters your despair, despair does not get the final word.

TRANSITION

Now before we read this passage together, I want you to place yourself in the story.

Don't read this like you already know the ending. Don't rush past it because you've heard it before. I want you to step into the moment as it actually happened.

It's early in the morning. It's quiet. The Sabbath has just ended. And two women are walking toward a tomb carrying spices, because as far as they know, Jesus is still dead.

There is no expectation of resurrection in them yet. There is no anticipation of victory. There is only grief, confusion, and the weight of what they just witnessed a few days earlier on the cross.

And I want you to feel that, because this is where the resurrection meets real people—not in celebration first, but in sorrow.

So as we read Gospel of Matthew 28:1–10, don't just listen for what happened. Listen for where you are in the story. Listen for what the Spirit of God wants to reveal to you. Listen with expectation—not just to understand the text, but to encounter the risen Jesus in it.

MAIN SCRIPTURE READING

Let's go to the Word together— Gospel of Matthew 28:1–10.

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There 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. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. **4** The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. **5** The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. **6** He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. **7** Then 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.” **8** So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

TRANSITION

Now as we walk through this passage, I want to show you what happens when Jesus steps into a place of despair. Because this is not just their story—this is the pattern of how God works in our lives.

And I want you to watch the movement of the text—not as a formula, but as a transformation.

From grief... to revelation.

From confusion... to clarity.

From silence... to witness.

Because what we’re about to see is this: when Jesus shows up, nothing stays the same.

And the first thing we see is this...

MAIN POINTS

1. They came with spices, not expectation

They came with spices, not expectation. Matthew tells us that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb, and the other Gospel accounts help us see the fuller posture in which they came. They came carrying spices, and those spices were meant for death and burial. They were not meant for celebration. They were not meant for reunion. They were not meant for resurrection. They were meant to honor the body of someone they believed was gone. They were not coming with faith for a miracle. They were coming prepared for what they thought was the end.

They brought spices for burial, but God had already written resurrection into the story.

They had seen the cross. They had watched Jesus suffer. They had watched Him die. They had seen the stone rolled over the tomb. From their perspective, the story was over. Their love for Jesus was real, but their hope had been crushed by what they had seen. And that is important for us to understand, because you can love Jesus deeply and still walk through moments where hope feels buried. You can be faithful and still feel like you are standing in front of something final. You can know who He is and still struggle to see what He is doing. But this is where the mercy of God meets us. Before they understood what God was doing, God was already moving toward them. Before they could name resurrection, resurrection had already happened. This is the beauty of prevenient grace. God does not wait for your understanding to become complete before He begins to work. Before you figure it out, before you feel it, before your faith catches up, God is already moving.

2. Heaven was moving while they were still mourning

Matthew tells us that as they approached the tomb, “there 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.” Before the women ever arrived, heaven had already moved. Before they could process what God was doing, God had already acted. The stone was already rolled away. The tomb was already empty. The victory had already been won. In other words, while they were still grieving what they thought was the end, God was already establishing a new beginning. **Heaven was not waiting on their faith—heaven was already moving in power.**

And this is so important for us to see, because sometimes we assume that God begins to work when we finally believe enough, pray enough, or get our hearts right. But the resurrection reminds us that God’s action always precedes our awareness. Before they could arrive at understanding, God had already completed the work. Before they could see it, it was already true. This is the beauty of grace. God does not begin moving when we catch up—He invites us to discover what He has already done.

And don’t miss this detail: the stone was not rolled away so Jesus could get out. The risen Christ was not confined by a sealed tomb. The stone was rolled away so they could see in. What God had already accomplished in power, He now reveals in mercy. The empty tomb is not God making something happen in that moment—it is God unveiling what has already happened.

And I just want to pastor us here, because this speaks directly into how many of us experience our lives. Some of you feel like you are walking toward something dead. You are walking toward a situation that feels final, a prayer that feels unanswered, a season that feels closed. But

what if, while you are still walking in grief, heaven is already in motion? What if the thing you are bracing yourself to mourn is the very place God is about to reveal His power?

This is why we can say with confidence: **while you are still mourning, God is already moving.** You may not see it yet. You may not feel it yet. You may not understand it yet. But the resurrection reminds us that God's work is not limited by our awareness. Before you arrive at the moment, God has already been there. Before you see the answer, God has already begun to move.

Because that is who He is. He is the God who goes before you. He is the God who works ahead of you. He is the God who brings resurrection where you only see endings.

3. What grief forgot, Jesus had already promised

The angel speaks to the women and says, "Do not be afraid... He is not here; He has risen, just as He said." That phrase matters more than we often realize—just as He said. Because this was not a new idea. This was not heaven improvising. Jesus had already told them that He would suffer, that He would die, and that on the third day He would rise again. The problem was not that Jesus had failed to speak. The problem was that grief had made it hard to remember what He said.

And if we're honest, we know exactly what that feels like. Pain has a way of narrowing our vision. Sorrow has a way of clouding our memory. When we are standing in the middle of something heavy, it becomes difficult to hold onto what God has already spoken. Not because it isn't true, but because it feels distant in the moment. And that is where these women are. They are not faithless—they are overwhelmed. They

are not rejecting Jesus' words—they are struggling to hold onto them in the face of what they have seen.

But the resurrection brings them back to the Word. “Just as He said.” In other words, what you are seeing now is not a contradiction of what Jesus promised—it is the fulfillment of it. What felt like the end was always part of the plan. What looked like defeat was always moving toward victory.

And this is where theologically, this moment runs deep. Because the resurrection does not just reveal God's power—it reveals God's faithfulness. Jesus is not only risen—He is trustworthy. He keeps His Word. Every promise He makes stands, even when circumstances seem to say otherwise.

This is why the resurrection doesn't just change what happened to Jesus—it changes how we interpret everything in our lives. Because if He kept His Word there, then He will keep His Word here. If He was faithful then, He is faithful now.

And this is part of how grace works in us. God does not just forgive our sin—He renews our minds. He brings us back again and again to what is true. He teaches us to trust His Word, even when our emotions are still catching up. He restores what grief tried to distort.

So hear this clearly: what grief forgot, Jesus had already promised. The resurrection is not God changing His mind—it is God fulfilling His Word.

4. He meets us on the way, not at the finish line

Matthew tells us that as the women left the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, running to tell the disciples, “suddenly Jesus met them.” Don’t miss how unexpected and ordinary that moment feels. There is no buildup. No warning. No dramatic entrance. Just—*suddenly Jesus met them*. Not at the tomb. Not when they had fully processed everything. Not when their theology was complete or their emotions had settled. He met them on the way.

And that matters, because it reveals something about how Jesus works in our lives. He does not wait for you to have it all figured out before He reveals Himself. He does not wait for your faith to feel strong or your understanding to be complete. He meets you in motion. He meets you in obedience. He meets you as you take the next step in front of you, even if your heart is still catching up to what God is doing.

Think about it—these women are still holding tension. The text says they are afraid, and yet filled with joy at the same time. They are moving forward, but they don’t fully understand what has just happened. And it is in that very space—between confusion and clarity, between fear and faith—that Jesus shows up. **He does not wait for perfect faith—He meets honest obedience.**

And this is where this connects deeply to the life of holiness. Because transformation does not happen after we arrive. It happens as we walk with Him. We are not changed because we finally got everything right. We are changed because we stayed with Jesus as He revealed Himself to us step by step. Holiness is not about reaching a finish line of perfection on your own—it is about walking in relationship with the risen Christ, who meets you again and again along the way and forms you as you follow Him.

And look at their response. They come to Him, they take hold of His feet, and they worship Him. This is not distant belief. This is encounter. The same feet that were pierced are now standing in victory, and they are holding onto the reality that death has been defeated. This is not an idea—it is a Person. The resurrection is not just something to understand. It is Someone to encounter.

And I just want to say this to someone here today: you may feel like you are not where you should be. You may feel like your faith is not strong enough, your understanding is not deep enough, your life is not put together enough. But Jesus is not waiting for you at some distant finish line, hoping you will eventually get there. He is meeting you right now, in the middle of your journey. In your questions. In your obedience. In your next step.

So hear this clearly: **He meets us on the way, not at the finish line.** He is not waiting for a perfected version of you. He is present with you right now, ready to reveal Himself as you walk with Him.

5. Those who came grieving left proclaiming

Matthew tells us that after they encounter Jesus, He says to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers...” In other words, the encounter immediately becomes a commission. What they have seen, they are now sent to share. What they experienced personally is now meant to be proclaimed publicly. They came to the tomb carrying grief, but they leave carrying a message.

And this is not a small detail—it is the climax of the transformation. Because the resurrection does not just change their emotions, it changes their identity. They are no longer just mourners. They are now

witnesses. They are no longer standing at the edge of loss. They are now stepping into the mission of God. **What they encountered in private, they are now called to declare in public.**

And what makes this even more powerful is who they are. In the first-century world, women were not considered reliable witnesses in legal settings. Their testimony was often dismissed. And yet God chooses them—intentionally, purposefully—to be the first carriers of the greatest news in human history. This is not accidental. This is the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God. God does not choose based on cultural credibility. He chooses based on availability and encounter.

Which means this: the qualification for witness is not perfection—it is encounter. They did not have everything figured out. They did not have a fully formed theology of the resurrection. But they had seen Jesus. And that was enough.

And this is where this presses into us. Because many of us disqualify ourselves from being a witness. We think we need more knowledge, more time, more growth, more confidence. We tell ourselves, “I’m not ready yet.” But the pattern of the resurrection says otherwise. If you have encountered the risen Jesus, you have something to say. If He has met you, transformed you, and revealed Himself to you, then your story is already becoming a testimony.

This is how the Gospel spreads. Not through perfect people with polished answers, but through transformed people who have encountered a living Savior. The same grace that met you is the grace that now sends you.

So what we see in this moment is not just a historical detail—it is a calling. The resurrection turns recipients into messengers. It turns observers into participants. It turns those who came grieving into those who go proclaiming.

So hear this clearly: **those who came grieving left proclaiming.** That is what happens when Jesus shows up. He does not just meet you where you are—He sends you with what you have seen.

CHALLENGE: If Jesus is alive, then your despair is not final—and if your despair is not final, then your story is not over.

The same Jesus who walked out of the tomb is standing in your story right now, ready to turn your despair into a testimony.

So stop standing at the tomb... and step into your witness.

RESPONSE

1st — If you're carrying despair... you need to encounter the risen Jesus. Not just know about Him... encounter Him.

2nd — If you've encountered Him... it's time to become a witness.

The same command given to the women is given to us: Go and tell.

And now the question is not whether Jesus is alive. The question is what you are going to do with the fact that He is alive. Because nobody in this story leaves the same way they came. The women came to the tomb carrying grief, but they did not leave there unchanged. They encountered the risen Christ, and that encounter demanded a response.

So let me ask you very plainly today: what are you carrying that still feels like a tomb? What grief are you still holding? What disappointment, what fear, what loss, what unanswered prayer, what private pain have you wrapped in burial cloths and quietly decided, “This part of my story is over”? Because if that is you, then today your response is not to try harder, perform better, or pretend you are fine. Your response is to encounter the risen Jesus. Not just to know about Him. Not just to agree with resurrection as a doctrine. But to open your heart and let the living Christ meet you in the place you thought was final. Because Jesus does not just comfort your despair—He transforms it.

But for others of you, the Spirit is pressing on something different. You are not just carrying despair. You are carrying a testimony you have not told. You have seen the faithfulness of God. You have known His mercy. You have experienced His forgiveness, His healing, His restoring grace, and yet you have stayed silent. And the word of the Lord to you today is the same word spoken to those women: go and tell. Stop standing at the tomb of what used to be, and step into the witness you have been called to become. The resurrection is too good, too powerful, too world-changing to keep to yourself.

So here is the call today: if you need to meet Jesus in your despair, come to Him. If Jesus has already met you in His grace, go with Him into your witness. But do not leave this room unchanged. Do not leave still standing at the tomb. Do not leave treating resurrection like a memory when it is meant to be a reality. The risen Jesus is here, and He is still doing what He did then. He is still meeting the broken. He is still calling the willing. He is still turning mourners into messengers.

And this is the line I want to leave in your spirit today: Jesus doesn't just comfort your despair—He transforms it.

If you want to make it hit even harder in the room, you could follow that with a very short closing appeal like this:

So if you are carrying despair, come and meet Him. If you have encountered Him, go and tell. But either way, do not stay at the tomb.

BLESSING PRAYER

"Jesus, we thank You that You are alive. Not distant. Not absent. But present and at work. Meet us in our grief. Meet us in the places that feel final. Open our eyes to where You are already moving.

Transform our despair into testimony.

Transform our fear into faith.

Transform our silence into witness.

Fill us with Your Spirit... and send us as Your people. We declare that You are alive... and because You are alive, our story is not over. In Jesus' name, amen."