

Real Change you can believe in: Conquering the Grave: "Roll Away the Stone"
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Introduction:

A few weeks ago, I asked if you are looking for change. While our nation's election process goes on, maybe you have been waiting for someone to come along who can change how politics are done in Washington. It could be that you are hoping for a change in our culture or society. Possibly you are dreaming of a change that would radically affect how you view life itself.

Friends, if you are looking for REAL CHANGE YOU CAN BELIEVE IN, no politician or lawmaker or judge in America can bring about that kind of change. But for the last few weeks, we've been looking at the One who offers to change your life.

There was one event in human history that changed the whole world forever. Before we get to that ONE THING, think about how different events have changed the course of our lives and the course of history.

There are moments or events in life that alter the course of your life. Maybe you have had some of those moments.

1. When you get married. It changes your life. We have a couple that's going to experience that in a couple weeks here.
2. The birth of a child changes your life.
3. For others, a near-death experience or sickness for yourself or loved one, forever alters the way they live.
4. If you've ever gotten the notice that you no longer have a job, it probably changed your life.
5. For some, it was the day their Spouse said, "I don't love you anymore" – "I want a divorce." And your life has never been the same.

What about events that have changed history?

The History Channel did a series on 10 Days that Changed the World. Some of those were...
 February. 15, 1933: on that date Giuseppe Zangara, an anarchist, should have been easily able to fire five rounds from 25 feet, but instead he lost his balance atop a wobbly chair. So instead of assassinating President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt, he fatally wounded the mayor of Chicago, who was shaking hands with FDR.

September 18, 1957: Revolt of the Nerds

Fed up with their boss, eight lab workers walked off the job on this day in Mountain View, Calif. Their employer, William Shockley, had decided not to continue research into silicon-based semiconductors; frustrated, they decided to undertake the work on their own. The researchers — who would become known as "the traitorous eight" — went on to invent the microprocessor (and to found Intel, among other companies). "Sept. 18 was the birth date of Silicon Valley, of the electronics industry and of the entire digital age," (says Mr. Shockley's biographer, Joel Shurkin.)

You could name others:

(July 4th, 1776) Independence Day in America;
 (Oct. 12, 1492) Columbus' men see the new world for the first time,;
 Dec. 7th, 1941 (A day which will live in infamy – attack on Pearl Harbor);
 September 11, 2001 (Terrorist brought down the twin towers – Pentagon)

All of these moments in time have changed our world and our perspectives on life. But, there was one event in human history that has changed our perspective on life and death. This one event changes everything. It happened on a Sunday just like this one. In today's lesson, I want you to recognize what happened when Jesus Conquered the Grave.

Matthew 27:

45From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. **46**About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

47When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

48Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. **49**The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

50And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

51At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. **52**The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. **53**They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

54When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

55Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. **56**Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

The Burial of Jesus

57As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. **58**Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. **59**Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, **60**and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. **61**Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb. (Matthew 27:45-61, NIV)

Jesus died on a cross, taking the punishment for sin that belonged to us. God had to punish sin, but he loved us too much to let us all die in hell, so he became a man. And Jesus – God in the flesh – lived a sinless life. And yet he was punished. He suffered the punishment of a cruel death and being forsaken by God. That was our punishment, because we have all sinned.

His death changed the world forever, but the story isn't over, because Sunday was coming.

Let's read on.

Matthew 28:

1After 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. **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.

5The 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."

8So 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." (Matthew 28:1-10, NIV)

The cross changed the world, but the resurrection of Jesus was the greatest moment in history, and it changed not only the world, but all of eternity. If you're looking for real change in your life that you can believe in, you won't find it in politics or government, or a boyfriend or girlfriend, or a spouse, or your children, or a career, or money, or success, or anything else in this world.

Because the real change that we all desperately need in our lives is found nowhere else but the risen, living Jesus Christ.

Imagine what it would have been like for these women, the first ones to ever see the risen Jesus. Imagine what it would have looked like, and what they would have felt like.

I want you to keep your imagination going as we travel once again to Jerusalem, to see an empty tomb. Not the very tomb of this story, but one very much like it. And I want you consider that Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection not only changed the world and eternity, but it has the power to change you, too.

Show - Video – In this segment, Mr. Vander Laan shows an empty tomb in Jerusalem, similar to what Jesus' tomb must have been like. The video explains what a valuable sacrifice Joseph of Arimathea made by giving up his tomb for Jesus. It also suggests that the angels did not roll away the stone to let Jesus out, but to let the disciples in. The implication is, it is important for us to know and believe that Jesus is risen in order to live the way he would have us live.

Jesus went to the cross to die for our sins, but that's not the end of the story. Jesus conquered the grave! As we think about the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are observing THE moment in all of history that changed everything.

I want us to consider how these events changed his disciples, and how they change us.

1. Look at Joseph of Arimathea – Matthew 27:57-61

- He Spoke out for Jesus when it was unpopular.

Joseph was a rich, well-known man in Jerusalem. He had probably been a member of the Sanhedrin at one time. And right after Jesus dies, he is emboldened to ask Pilate for the body. Disregarding the potential threat to his own life and reputation, Joseph of Arimathea boldly went against the popular opinion. And he did it because he loved Jesus.

- And then he gave a Sacrificial gift to Jesus.

Did you catch from the video, that once Jesus was placed in this tomb, Joseph wouldn't be able to use it again. This was a family tomb, worth probably as much as we might pay for a home today. And It would have been meant for Joseph's whole family. But he saw a need, and he loved Jesus, so he gave.

Was it a sacrifice? You bet! But the Bible shows that he didn't give it a second thought. Was it risky? You bet, but Joseph was emboldened because he loved Jesus.

Let me ask you, have you ever had to speak out for Jesus, even when it was unpopular? It's easy to say we believe in Christ when we are in church, but speaking out for him elsewhere is a challenge. In what ways will you be willing to stand against the tide because of your faith? Will you share your beliefs with a skeptical friend, or a family member, or at work or school? Jesus is alive, and people need to know that.

And how can we demonstrate the same level of sacrifice Joseph showed by giving his tomb? I have to tell you this is a challenge to me, too. But our love for Jesus is not something we can just talk about, we need to demonstrate it. We need to say like Joseph did, "Lord, this is all I have to give, and it's yours."

What will it mean for you to give sacrificially to the one who gave his life sacrificially for you on the cross?

When Jesus conquered the grave, it changed the world forever. It changed the disciples, and it has the power to change your life, too.

2. When the stone was rolled away - Matthew 27:62-65

Did you catch that: "The stone wasn't rolled away for Jesus to come out, but for us to go in."

Jesus overcame every temptation in his life, he willingly died on a cross, and now he has risen from the dead. A few hours later he would walk through walls to appear before his disciples. A piece of rock wasn't going to hold him in. So why did the angel roll the stone away?

It was so that the disciples could go IN and SEE that Jesus wasn't there. And when they did, it changed them.

Consider how this changed the disciples.

- They were **No longer afraid to die**. They came to that day hiding out, scared to death that they would be killed like Jesus. But after they saw inside the empty tomb, and after they saw Jesus...
- **They became witnesses** even to their enemies.
- **They started the church** – they had a new purpose.
- **They were willing to die** as a result of their faith. Almost all the apostles were put to death for their faith. **Revelation 2:10, NIV, "If you will be faithful to the point of death, I will give you a crown of life."**
- **They had a sense that God was with them** and there was nothing they could not do.

If you and I could go back and see the empty tomb of Jesus, how might we live our lives differently? If you could have been there, and looked inside and seen that he was not there, and the linens he had been wrapped in were neatly folded in the place where he was, what would you do differently? Would you be more confident, or more grateful, or more bold about your faith?

In what specific ways would you live differently knowing that Jesus is risen? Or let me put it another way, what does it mean to live like Jesus is ALIVE?!

Consider how the empty tomb changes our lives.

- **Jesus has power over death** – Death is something every one of us will have to face one day. Do you have confidence that even if you die, you will be ok, you will rise from the dead?
- Because of the empty tomb **We no longer have to live in fear**. The Bible says that if God is for us, who can be against us. And if you know that the Lord of your life is alive, and everywhere you go, and everything you face, and every pressure and every fear you have that you're not alone, doesn't that make a difference?
- **We are free from guilt** because we know that Jesus lives again. He died for our sins, but we don't live in guilt because He rose from that grave.
- **We can now have direction and purpose in life**. Our purpose is to live for Jesus and tell others that he is alive.

And when does that change impact our lives?

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." Romans 6:3-5 (NIV)

If you have come to Him in faith, repented of your sins, confessed His name as Lord of your life, and been baptized or immersed into Him, you have the promise that you have not only been

united with Him in His death, but also that you will “certainly be untied with him in his resurrection.”

At that point in your life, everything changes. We live for the risen Lord, not for ourselves. We no longer have to live in weakness, but in the power of the risen Lord. We no longer live in fear of death but with faith that we have eternal life. We are free because Jesus is free. Don't you want to experience that kind of change? Don't you want to find that kind of peace with God?

Would you let me do something for you? If I had to summarize the purpose in my life and in my ministry, it would be this. Would you let me roll away the stone for you? Would you open the eyes of your heart to see inside the empty grave? I want you to be able to look in this Easter morning and see, and believe. I want a whole new world of faith to be opened to you. It's what I work for and what I pray for, and it's what keeps me up some nights.

Paul said it this way in Ephesians 1:18-20

“I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.” NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

Are you living like Jesus is alive? If the eyes of your heart will be opened to see that the tomb is empty, and that Jesus is alive, then you will begin to understand the incredible power of God.

That same power that raised Jesus from the dead can change your life.

It can free you from guilt.

It can overcome your pain and doubt.

It can give your life meaning and purpose.

It can heal your marriage.

It can help your children.

It can change your career.

It can deepen your relationships.

And it is found nowhere else but in Jesus Christ. He is what we need, he is everything we need. He has conquered the grave. He is real change we can believe in. He is the risen Lord.

So, is he the risen Lord of your life, as he is of mine? The tomb is empty. The stone has been rolled away. The power is available. The choice is yours.

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