

Easter Sunday Sermon

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Easter Sunday: The empty tomb and the second chance

Mark 16:7

Mark's account of the Resurrection includes two small words that make all the difference. He begins by recounting the women who came to the tomb to anoint our Lord's body for burial. To their amazement they found the tomb empty and an angelic being at the tomb who announced the resurrection. The angel informs them that the Lord is not there, but He is risen. Then, he says, "But go, tell His disciples — and Peter — that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you" (Mark 16:7). Do you see those two words that make all the difference? Look carefully. Mark 16:7. "And Peter." There, in a sense, we have the Gospel in two words.

Why would we find this insertion — "and Peter" — in the midst of this angelic message. One might have expected that we would have found words of antagonism. That is, "Go and tell his disciples — and Pontius Pilate or Herod or Cephas" or any of the others who played a part in His indictment and

1 Easter Sunday

conviction. Or, perhaps one might have expected to find words of appreciation. In other words, “Go and tell the disciples and John.” After all, John had been there at the cross with the mother of Jesus when all the others had forsaken and fled. In this same vein of appreciation he could have added the names of Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea or Andrew or any number of others. But these were not words of antagonism nor appreciation, these were words of affection. Our Lord knew Peter’s heart. Peter had denied the Lord in his hour of testing and he was in dire need of a word of encouragement, a new beginning, a second chance.

Perhaps some of us on this Easter Sunday morning have blown it. What is the message of the empty tomb? It is the message of the second chance. Many of us are faced with setbacks or sorrows. Is there anyone on Easter morning who needs these two words — “and Peter”? Easter means hope, a new start, a new life, a new opportunity, a new beginning.

These two little words — “and Peter” — reveal that the second chance is possible, it is personal, it is private, and it is profitable.

The second chance is possible

How is this second chance possible? Because of the Resurrection. If there were no Resurrection of our Lord there would be no Gospel, no good news, no new beginning. Those two words — “and Peter” — came like water to a man dying of thirst. Peter thought the Lord would disown him. He had failed so miserably. Talk about good news, when Peter heard those words he knew that the second chance was possible.

The Bible is the story of men and women who received a second chance. When it came time to deliver a nation, who of us would have picked a murderer? But God did. Moses had blown it. Forty years on the backside of a desert prepared him to be the emancipator of his people. When the Lord spoke to him from a burning bush, he knew the second chance was possible. And what about the fellow that was so full of lust? Who of us would have ever said that a guy like that could have a heart after God's own heart? However, when we read King David's prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 we see that a second chance is possible. And what about Jonah? We all know his story well and remember how "the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time" (Jon. 3:1). He too found that a second chance was possible.

Some may read Mark 16:7 and say, "Oh, I'm okay." But remember, before Simon Peter heard these words he had gone out and "wept bitterly." When the rooster crowed the coming dawn after his denial, his heart was broken as he was reminded of his sin. How long were his sleepless nights thinking of his cowardice and failure? Simon Peter denied that he even knew the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, his heart was broken. Can you imagine what he must have felt when he heard the angelic message that they were to go and tell his disciples — and Peter — that he was going before them into the Galilee?

The second chance is possible. No one said it was automatic! Judas did not get it. He reformed but he did not repent. The rich young ruler didn't get it. He was remorseful and went away "sorrowful" but there's no record that he repented. Pontius Pilate regretted his evil deed but we know nothing of his

3 Easter Sunday

repentance. This verse is not for those who may think they can keep on in the same sin and come back time and time again. It is for men and women like Simon Peter who have repented, who have recognized their sin and wept bitterly over it.

The Lord Jesus did not have a private meeting with Simon Peter because he was a big sinner and guilty but because he was penitent and sorrowful. It was not his cursing and denial that brought him mercy, it was his tears. It was his tears of repentance. There's no hope for the second chance for one who's simply sorry he got caught but only for that one with a truly repentant and broken heart.

There are not many second chances that exist in the world. The good news is that with God there's always an opportunity for the second chance. Ask Simon Peter. Even the angels wanted Peter to know that the second chance was possible. The angels said to "be sure and tell Peter that he is not out, he gets to bat again!" They wanted Peter to know that one failure doesn't make a flop.

Easter means hope. It means a new life, a new start, a land of beginning again. Yes, the second chance is possible. "Go and tell the disciples — and Peter!"

The second chance is personal

The love of Christ singles us out by name. He loves us individually. He "calls his own sheep by name" (John 10:3). This was a personal message. I believe there's a lot involved in the fact that the angel used Simon Peter's new name. It is important that the angel did not say go and tell the disciples "and Simon." That was

his old name. The first time Jesus saw him He referred to him by his old name but said you will be called Petros, Peter, a rock! Jesus saw the potential that was in this Galilean fisherman. Some might have expected the message to be “Go and tell the disciples — and Simon.” After all, he had been living by his old nature. But our Lord used the new name He had given him. He said to go and tell “the rock” that He was risen. When Simon Peter heard that, he knew the Lord Jesus still believed in him. Put yourself in his place. He had failed. He had failed miserably. But our Lord still believed in him. He still had potential. What good news!

It is one thing for us to believe in Him, but to know He believes in us is quite an affirmation. When the employee knows the boss believes in him he gives his best. When the athlete knows the coach believes in him he strives to achieve more. When a son knows his father believes in him he goes the second mile. Perhaps some of you have failed and think you are as hopeless as Simon Peter. The empty tomb shows that the second chance is not only possible but it is personal.

Can we catch the tone of the angelic message? I like to think he said to the women, “Don’t hang around here. Go and tell the disciples.” And then, I like to think he paused, perhaps smiled, and then added, “And especially Our Lord wants Peter to know that he has gone before you into Galilee!” What is the message here? I believe it is that God still uses people to change our world. He doesn’t use super saints. He uses people like you and me. People like Simon Peter who understand that the second chance is possible and personal.

Peter’s fall had been so public. When we attend a school play and a child forgets his lines all of us in the audience pull

5 Easter Sunday

for him as though the lines were on our own lips. When we go to a little league baseball game and the young boy has two strikes on him, we begin to pull for him to get the bat on the ball. I think there was a sense in which all of heaven watched Peter fall and now it is as though they were all pulling for him to get back up. “Be sure and tell Peter that one failure doesn’t make a flop. He gets to bat again!”

Sin can do a lot of things. Sin can wreck hearts and homes and plans and people. But it cannot make God cease loving you. Easter means there’s hope, it means there’s new life and a new beginning. There are two words that make all the difference. “And Peter.” Yes, the second chance is possible and it is personal.

The second chance is private

There’s an amazing verse in I Corinthians chapter 15. It tells us that when our Lord arose from the grave He “was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve” (I Cor. 15:5). When our Lord came out of the tomb, one of the first things He did was to find Simon Peter. Some things are so personal and private that they’re not recorded in Scripture. Peter thought he was finished. But the Lord Jesus found him privately. We do not know what took place. It must have been quite a meeting.

What took place in that private meeting we will never know. But we can all imagine. I’m sure there were bitter tears. I’m sure there were broken words coming through quivering lips accompanied by deep sobs and long breaks of silence. I’m sure there were also many assurances of Simon

Peter's love. How do we know this is what must have happened? Most of us have been there and know that the second chance is private.

What tender consideration we see in our Lord. He meets Simon Peter alone before seeing him with the twelve. Can you imagine how painful it would have been for Simon Peter to have first seen the wounds of Christ publicly? Can we imagine how impossible with all the others around to pour out our love and remorse in a public setting? Even though Peter had denied Christ publicly, he was forgiven privately.

Do we know anything of this private encounter? It is not enough to simply hear the good news of the Resurrection and know that the second chance is possible and personal. It comes when we have a private encounter with the risen Lord.

The second chance is profitable

This meeting transformed Simon Peter's life. He went on to Pentecost and after that to become the undisputed and recognized leader of the early church. We see him over and over in the book of Acts saying that "He cannot help but speak the things he's seen and heard." We see him beaten and imprisoned and counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's name. And, all because of those two words — "and Peter."

Those two words — "and Peter" — speak volumes to us. We have a way of remembering one's failures and often forgetting their strong points. If some modern church members had been chosen to give this message they might have said, "Go and tell the disciples — but forget Peter. He failed. He

7 Easter Sunday

tried to walk on water and couldn't. He denied our Lord three times. Yes, go and tell the disciples but forget Peter." But listen to the message, "Go and tell the disciples — and Peter — that He has gone before you into Galilee." We can get up from our failures because the second chance is profitable.

Simon Peter remained faithful to death. Before he died he wrote these words, "Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me" (II Pet. 1:13-14). He was remembering an early breakfast on the shore where three times our Lord gave him opportunity to affirm his love and concluded the conversation by saying, "When you are old another will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish. This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God" (John 21:18-19). Simon Peter was restored in John 21. After those three affirmations of love our Lord said, "Follow me" (John 21:19). And Simon Peter did. All the way to his own death by crucifixion. But he was crucified upside down exclaiming he was not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Savior. It is not enough to know that the second chance is possible or personal or private or profitable. The real issue in the second chance is in obeying those words, "Follow me."

The Lord Jesus told the greatest story ever told about a second chance. We all know it well. It is the story of a young man for whom things had become too dull at home. The bright lights of the big city held a fascination for him so he took his inheritance and headed out. He thought he was going to find a good time but what he really found were hangovers and rip-

offs and unemployment lines. Out there in the pig pen he rehearsed his speech of how he would come home and simply apply for a job as one of his father's servants, but he never got to use that speech. When he returned home his father saw him coming. He ran off the porch to meet him, and didn't point a finger or clinch a fist or cross his arms. He didn't ask where have you been? He just ran off that porch with open arms. And never were those arms wider than when they were open on the cross of Calvary for us. What precious words — "and Peter."

What does all this say to us on this Easter morning? It reminds us that God is the God of the second chance. Look at Job. He's down now but he'll be back. He's hurting now. But he'll be back and restored again. Look at Abraham. He's lying about Sarah now but he'll be back and be referred to as a friend of God. Look at Jonah, he may be running now but he'll be back and he will head to Nineveh and see one of the greatest revivals in recorded history. Look at David, he's blown it now but read Psalm 51 and understand why he was called the man after God's own heart. Look at Thomas, he may be doubting now saying, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger in the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20: 25-26). But he'll be back and he'll end up in India meeting a martyr's death. Look at James and John. They may be jealous now in arguing over which of them would be greatest in the coming kingdom but they'll be back. One of them will die a martyr's death and the other will give us the Apocalypse. Look at John Mark. He may be quitting now and going home from that first missionary journey. But he'll be back, encouraged by Barn-

9 Easter Sunday

abas and received by Paul and he will leave us the Gospel of Mark. Look at Peter. He may be cursing now and denying he ever knew Christ now, but he'll be back. And he'll meet Christ for a second chance. He'll be back and become the undisputed leader of the early church. The second chance is profitable. Thank God He can use us even if we've messed up in the past. He is the God of the second chance.

Is there anyone who has failed? Listen to these words a final time, "Go and tell the disciples — and Peter — that He has risen and gone before you into Galilee." The Lord wants to put your name in this very verse. Perhaps Louisia Fletcher Tarkington said it best when she said,

*"I wish there were some wonderful place
called the land of beginning again
Where all of our mistakes and heartaches
and all of our selfish greed
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at
the door and never put on again."*

Thank God there is such a place. This second chance is possible. It is personal. It is private. And it is profitable! Yes, two words make all the difference — "and Peter"!