

## The Stone Has Been Rolled Away

Easter. Even the *word* is controversial. In most languages, the word used for the celebration is the word for Passover. As best, the term “Easter” is a little suspect, being apparently derived from the name of a pagan goddess. But whatever the celebration is called, we understand that it’s a celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And yet, like Christmas, it has been commercialised and adapted, so that for some, Easter is about presents, chocolate and the Easter Bunny! The association with chocolate is because Easter Eggs are often made of chocolate. And why *eggs*? Simply because an egg looks like the stone that closed the tomb of Jesus, and was found to be rolled away — and eggs can be rolled in imitation.

Cutting through the confusion to the reality, we have the following:

*<sup>42</sup>It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, <sup>43</sup>Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. <sup>44</sup>Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. <sup>45</sup>When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. <sup>46</sup>So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. <sup>47</sup>Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.*

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

*<sup>4</sup>But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.*

*<sup>6</sup>"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. <sup>7</sup>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.'" <sup>8</sup>Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

Mark 15:42-16:8

On the way to the tomb, the women asked each other who would roll away the stone. Actually the answer to their question was “an angel”, but in a sense we don’t need to know. The important thing, as in verse 4, was that *the stone had been rolled away*. And that pictures for us the message of Easter. Resurrection had swallowed the Cross; the tomb was open, but empty — at least empty of

dead bodies — the bondage was broken, the victory complete. God incarnate couldn't be held. He has risen!

The stone symbolises restrictedness, bondage, and the limitation of freedom. In the proclamation of the Easter message, we can see several "stones" rolled away in our own lives.

### **The Stone of Doubt**

Our faith is not frivolous or airy-fairy. It's not mysterious or esoteric. It's clear and reasonable. And it's soundly based on historical facts. That Jesus lived and died on a cross is not open to serious question. The historical basis for His life is irrefutable. The divergence comes over the resurrection. But even here, when the facts are looked at and examined by the principles of logic and legal evidence, the cogency of the argument in favour of resurrection renders it unreasonable *not* to accept that Jesus rose from the dead. And if we accept that He did, then the basis of faith is complete.

The facts of the *death* of Jesus, though very significant, don't by themselves prove His claims. It's the fact of His resurrection that does that. (See for instance Romans 1:4; 14:9; Acts 17:31; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.) And our faith is based on *fact* — fact that *has happened* in history, and fact that stands up to all honest critical enquiry. As the well-known hymn puts it, "*No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of life.*"

Thomas is often referred to as "Doubting Thomas" because he refused to believe that Jesus had risen unless he saw for himself. But the following week, when he *did* see for himself, he believed. He was Doubting Thomas no longer! The stone of doubt had been rolled away.

Paul wrote, "...everything that does not come from faith is sin." (Romans 14:23) As He took our sin, Jesus took our *doubt* on the cross.

The stone of doubt is removed, and the open and empty tomb testifies to *faith*.

### **The Stone of Despair**

For Jesus' followers, all their hopes and plans had come to nothing. They had witnessed His miracles and been stirred by His teachings. They had dared to believe that here was the promised Deliverer, who would release them from their shame and lift their heads again. He'd been captured, and tried — but surely He would make His move. He'd been hung on a cross — yet maybe Elijah would save Him. But then He'd died, and been entombed. And all the expectation had apparently come to nothing. It was the end, and all that left was disappointment, hopelessness, and despair.

On that first Easter Sunday, the Risen Jesus had an ironic conversation with two followers on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13-35). Their faces were downcast and their hearts disappointed. Their hope had come to nothing. They were kept from recognising the identity of the one talking to them, but they heard His words! As Jesus opened the Scriptures to them, their hearts burned. And as He opened their eyes, their despair was gone, and gone forever. It was the time for rejoicing.

The stone of despair is removed, and the open and empty tomb testifies to *joy*.

## **The Stone of Defeat**

As Jesus hung on the cross, the on-lookers wondered if He would yet turn the situation around. Their language sounded as if they were goading Him to do so. Could He snatch victory from the jaws of defeat? They would have liked to have seen something unusual happen. But, no, apparently it was defeat after all.

And unseen by the on-lookers, it would appear that Satan for a brief time thought he'd won, because Jesus had died "in sin". But Satan had nothing in Jesus (see John 14:30) and He couldn't be held. The cross may have looked like defeat, but when coupled with and completed by the resurrection, victory is revealed.

The once-popular Diane Fung song says:

*Victory is on our lips and in our lives  
For Jesus has surely been raised from the dead.*

The stone of defeat is removed, and the open and empty tomb testifies to *victory*.

## **The Stone of Death**

Death is the last enemy, the culmination of Satan's corruption of God's creation. The finality of death is indicated in that when death occurs, we say things like, "That's it", or, "It's all over".

Had Lazarus still been alive when Jesus arrived, the sisters would have sought His immediate help. But in the event, they did not say, "Lord, now that You are here you can help", but rather, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Death having occurred we think means that it's "too late."

Not so for Jesus. He actually died, yet it wasn't the end. On the third day He crashed through death, shattering its gates, and was raised to life! Death could not hold Him, and it can no more hold *us* who are in Him!

The stone of death is removed, and the open and empty tomb testifies to *life*.

The refrain is so familiar to Handel's rousing tune:

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won!*

In the resurrection, *doubt* becomes faith, *despair* becomes joy, *defeat* becomes victory, and *death* becomes life, for truly "He has risen!"

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Note: All Bible quotations are NIV unless otherwise stated.