THE FIRST **FASTER**

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

JACOB ABSHIRE

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THE FIRST EASTER

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Preface

This small book was adapted from a series of blog posts written in 2014 for the Easter holiday. After a study of the events taking place after our Lord's resurrection, I worked to consolidate the four gospels (with the first chapter of Acts) into a chronological sequence. This helped me get a more precise context of the story.

Additionally, it caused me to focus on several questions asked throughout the Scriptures that resonated with my devotions. These questions made me further contemplate the importance of the resurrection in my daily life. I want to pass those contemplations on to you.

After Jesus was crucified, His disciples were distraught. You can feel their sadness leaking from the pages as if their tears were captured in the closing of the Bible. His death saddened them. This is where we begin our devotional journey. As the angels ask Mary, we will ask ourselves, "Why are you weeping?"

Then, we will follow the story looking for those questions and inquiring of ourselves, thinking more deeply about the resurrection and what it means for us today. We will join the disciples and seek in wonder, see in amazement, savor in understanding, satisfy in assurance, surrender in reverence, and finally, share in the excitement.

With the Holy Scriptures, we will go back in time, walk with the disciples, and personally reflect on the importance of the resurrection. In this devotional series, I aim to help you become more mindful of the resurrection through life lessons on faith.

The devotional is divided into seven consecutive chapters, one for each day. Additionally, you can have these devotionals emailed to you each day for seven days by visiting my website and subscribing to the devotional email list (www.jacobabshire.com/tfe).

Grace and peace be with you.

Jacob Abshire March 12, 2015

Why are you weeping?

JOHN 20:16

DAY 1

Sadness in Death

Matthew 28:1-4 · Mark 16:1-4, 9-11 · Luke 24:1-3 · John 20:1-18

As the sun arose that Sunday morning, a wave of deep mourning washed over the land of Judea. The people were still reeling from the brutal and unjust murder of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, on a cross just three days earlier. The symbol of his violent death had left a mark on the hearts and minds of many, and life would never be the same.

Among those who were most affected were Mary Magdalene and other women who had been following Jesus. Despite their sorrow, they knew they had to do something to pay their respects to the man who had forever changed their lives. And so, they arose early that fateful Sunday morning to visit the tomb where Jesus had been laid to rest.

As they made their way to the tomb, their hearts were heavy with grief, and their minds were filled with questions. But nothing could have prepared them for what they were about to discover. As they approached the tomb, they found the massive stone rolled aside and the tomb unguarded and open. Their confusion and disbelief were palpable as they rushed inside, only to find the tomb empty.

Their despair deepened as they realized that not only had they witnessed the unjust murder of their Lord, but now they had also witnessed the shameful robbery of his body. The women were beside themselves with grief, unable to comprehend why anyone would do such a thing.

Mary Magdalene, in particular, was desperate for answers. She needed to know who had taken Jesus' body and why. And so, she began searching outside the tomb, hoping to find some clue that would lead her to the thieves.

Then, she encountered two men who asked her, "Why are you weeping?" She told them what had happened and continued searching, still consumed by grief and confusion.

But then, while searching in the garden, she saw a figure that she initially thought was the gardener. The man asked her the same question as the others had, "Why are you weeping?" But then, something remarkable happened.

The man spoke her name, "Mary," and suddenly she realized it was not the gardener but the risen Lord himself. Despite Jesus' claim that he would rise from the dead, Mary had not believed it. She had been too overwhelmed by his brutal death and the mistreatment he had suffered to recall his promise.

But at that moment, as she heard his voice saying her name, everything changed. She believed and fell to his feet in worship, overwhelmed with a joy and a peace that surpassed all understanding.

Personal Reflection

The story of Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Lord reminds us that God is still present and working in our most profound sorrow and confusion. Like Mary, we may struggle to understand the difficult circumstances we face. Still, we can take comfort in that God is with us, guiding us through our struggles and leading us to a place of peace and joy. May we always remember to seek God's presence, even in our darkest moments, and may we be open to receiving the blessings of His love and grace.

Why do you seek the living among the dead?

LUKE 24:5

DAY 2

Seeking in Wonder

Matthew 28:5-10 · Mark 16:5-8 · Luke 24:4-8

Though the sun shone brightly in the sky, the day was dark and somber. The women who had come to anoint the decaying body of Jesus were now doubly saddened. Their grief was deep and profound, for they had witnessed His brutal beating and murder, and now they had come to pay their final respects, only to find convincing evidence that His body had been shamefully stolen.

As they went to the tomb, their hearts were heavy with sorrow. They had come to mourn, but instead, they were confronted with a mystery. The stone that blocked the tomb's entrance had been rolled away. (According to the biblical accounts, Mary Magdalene separated from the other women to rush and tell the disciples.)

Eager to know what was happening, they looked inside and saw two angels standing before them. Their appearance was dazzling and otherworldly. The women fell to their knees in fear and awe, their hearts pounding with anticipation.

The angels asked them a question that seemed strange and bewildering: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

At first, the women were confused, but then they began to understand the implication of what the angels were saying. Their sorrow was about to be transformed into joy. The angels spoke again, their voices ringing like a clarion call: "He is not here, but has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

At these words, great joy sprang up in the women's hearts. Their Lord had risen from the dead, just as He had said He would. The absence of His body now made sense, and they were filled with wonder and awe.

The angels instructed the women to run and tell the disciples what they had seen and heard. As they left the tomb, they heard a familiar voice behind them. "Greetings!" It was Jesus! The women were astonished and overjoyed. They fell to His feet and worshiped Him. Their sadness turned to joy. Their seeking resulted in wonder!

Personal Reflection

The story of the women who went to the tomb of Jesus is a powerful reminder of the transformative power of the resurrection. Amid deep sorrow and grief, the women were confronted with the reality of Christ's triumph over death. Their hearts were heavy with sadness, but the angels' message filled them with hope and joy.

Like the women at the tomb, we too can experience the transforming power of Christ's resurrection. When confronted with difficult circumstances, it is easy to become overwhelmed by sadness and despair. But the message of Easter reminds us that death and darkness do not have the

final word. Through Christ's victory over sin and death, we can find hope, joy, and new life. As we celebrate the resurrection, may we be reminded of the incredible power of Christ's love and the hope that it brings.

May I see the risen Lord?

1 CORINTHIANS 15:5

DAY 3

Seeing in Amazement

Matthew 28:11-15 · Mark 16:8-11 · Luke 24:9-11 · John 20:18

As news of the resurrection spread like wildfire throughout the land, the people were divided in emotions. Some were determined to keep it a secret, while others were bursting at the seams to share it with the world. And then there were those like Peter, desperate to see it for themselves.

The chief priests, notorious for their wickedness, were among those who wanted to keep the resurrection hidden from the masses. They went to great lengths to cover up the truth, even bribing the Roman guards stationed at Jesus' tomb. Their plan was simple: to spread the lie that the disciples had come by night and stolen the body while the guards were sleeping.

Meanwhile, Mary and the other women who had seen Jesus were too afraid to speak publicly, but they knew they had to tell someone. They hurried to find the disciples and relay the shocking news. "I have seen the Lord," Mary declared, her voice trembling with excitement. They were eager to spread the word far and wide.

However, the disciples were skeptical, even after hearing Mary's testimony. Despite His predictions, they couldn't believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. Peter, however, was determined to find out the truth. He raced back

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to the tomb, hoping against hope that he would witness the resurrection firsthand.

As he approached the tomb, Peter prayed fervently, "Please, God, let me see the risen Lord." He longed for the same opportunity that Mary and the other women received. But when he arrived, all he found were the discarded linens.

Feeling defeated and confused, Peter couldn't help but wonder if his entire journey had been in vain. But, he soon realized that God had been working behind the scenes, orchestrating subtle encounters of grace that he had overlooked.

Later in the biblical accounts, we discover that Jesus spent his late afternoon with two disciples walking to Emmaus. He stays with them until dinner. He Journeys back to Jerusalem, where he appears with the disciples gathered in a room. It is here that they admit, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Peter!" (Lk. 24:34). Furthermore, in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian believers, he said that Jesus appeared to Peter before the rest of the disciples (1 Cor. 15:5). Therefore, it is safe to say that Peter likely encountered Jesus around noon or the early afternoon time.

Today, many are convinced that when Peter visited the empty tomb the second time, he journeyed through the garden to find Jesus, who patiently awaited him. This garden was the same place Jesus met with the women earlier this day. Regardless of the details, we know that Peter's seeking paid off with seeing the risen Lord.

Personal Reflection

Peter's determination to see the risen Lord reminds us that we will find Him when we seek God with all our hearts. Even when we feel defeated and confused, God is always working behind the scenes, orchestrating subtle encounters of grace that we may overlook. Peter's journey teaches us never to give up on our pursuit of God's truth, even when it seems impossible. We can experience the joy of encountering the risen Lord through our faith and devotion, just as Peter did. Let us be like Peter, persistent in our pursuit of God and always seeking to grow closer to Him.

Did not our hearts burn within us?

LUKE 24:32

DAY 4

Savoring in Understanding

Mark 16:12-13 · Luke 24:13-32

The sun had risen on the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus, and though the bustle of the morning was beginning to quiet, the energy and excitement sparked by the news of His resurrection were far from over.

As the rays of sunlight danced on the road to Emmaus, two disciples, their hearts heavy with grief, made their way along the dusty path, deep in discussion about the empty tomb. The death of their Lord had left them with a profound sense of loss and confusion. The women's testimony of the empty tomb had left them with more questions than answers.

Lost in thought, a stranger joined them on the road as they walked. With a sympathetic ear, he listened as they recounted the past few days' events - the ministry of Jesus, His trial and brutal execution, and the bizarre news that the tomb was empty.

The stranger's response was unexpected. "Oh, foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" he exclaimed. The disciples were taken aback. Who was this stranger speaking to them so boldly? The man continued, "Wasn't all of this necessary so that Christ would suffer and enter His glory?" He then launched into an exposition of the Old Testament, explaining how the scriptures foretold the events that had taken place. The two disciples were entranced, hanging on his every word.

As they arrived at Emmaus, the stranger acted like he would continue his journey, but the disciples were unwilling to let him go. They invited him to stay and share a meal with them. He obliged. As they sat down to eat, the stranger broke the bread and blessed it, and suddenly the disciples' eyes were opened. They had been walking with the risen Lord, whose words had been a balm to their weary souls.

As they reflected on their journey with Jesus, the disciples marveled at the burning in their hearts that they had experienced as He opened the scriptures to them. The power and majesty of God had been revealed to them in a way they could never have imagined, and they knew that their lives would never be the same.

They rushed back to Jerusalem to share the good news with the other disciples, their hearts bursting with joy and gratitude at the miraculous encounter they had just experienced. They were savoring in understanding that their Lord was alive.

Personal Reflection

The story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is a powerful reminder of the transformative power of God's Word. As they walked with Jesus, the disciples were filled with confusion and despair, but as He opened the Scriptures to them, their hearts were set ablaze with hope and understanding.

In Psalm 1:1-2, the psalmist tells us that those who delight in God's Word are blessed. The Word of God can transform our hearts and minds, producing hope and joy in the Son of God. Just as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were filled with hope as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them, we, too, can experience the transforming power of God's Word in our lives. As we spend time in His Word, meditating on its truths and allowing it to shape our hearts, we will be blessed beyond measure.

May we be like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, hungering and thirsting for God's Word, allowing it to transform us and fill us with hope and joy in the Son of God? May we be blessed as we delight in His Word, and may it burn within our souls, producing an unshakable faith and an unwavering hope.

Why do doubts arise in your hearts?

LUKE 24:38

DAY 5

Satisfying in Assurance

Luke 24:36-43 · John 20:19-29

As evening fell on the Resurrection day, the disciples met in a secret room to discuss the extraordinary events that had taken place. They wanted to make sense of it all. The unexpected and inexplicable events that happened earlier changed their uncertainty into hope.

The appearances of Jesus throughout the day gave credence to the accounts of the women who had seen Him earlier, but it was all still shrouded in mystery. The tomb was reported empty. Mary and the other women met with Jesus in the garden. Peter encountered Jesus as well and the two disciples along the road. It was all too coincidental to ignore, and the disciples knew that something significant was happening.

During their discussion, Jesus suddenly appeared and stood among them in the room. His presence startled them. "Peace be with you!" He said. His voice was like a balm to their troubled souls.

However, despite the four appearances, the exposition of Scripture, the empty tomb, and the fact that Jesus had told them about all that would take place, they still doubted and assumed they saw a ghost. "Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts?" Jesus asked them, and they all looked at Him in wonder. Sin had caused them to doubt and be troubled. It had fed on their perception and misguided their meditations until they convinced themselves that what they knew was untrue. But God was pleased to rescue them from their doubt. He came to satisfy their wandering hearts.

Jesus extended His hands, revealing His feet and side, and assured them that He was the One who had been crucified just three days prior. Then, to prove that He was no ghost, He sat and ate with them. It was real food eaten by the living Jesus, and their minds were blown.

The disciples rejoiced in their renewed hope in Christ as the night wore on. They were satisfied with the assurance, and they knew that their lives would never be the same. Later, Jesus taught them a lesson on faith in God's Word. He said, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The Lord is kind to those who need to see and be satisfied. He did so with the disciples that night in the secret room. At the same time, He desires that all who believe will trust in the promises of His Word. For "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Personal Reflection

As believers, we can be prone to doubt and uncertainty. We may struggle to trust in the promises of God's Word, especially when we don't see them fulfilled in our lives. But like the disciples in the secret room, we must remember that God is kind to those who need to see and be satisfied. He understands our doubts and desires to rescue us from them. He comes to us in our doubt, and He proves Himself faithful time and time again.

Therefore, let us choose to believe in God's Word without doubting. Let us trust in His promises even when we don't see them fulfilled. As Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." May we be among those blessed by believing in God's Word without doubting, and may our lives be transformed by the power of His Word.

Do you love me more than these?

JOHN 21:15

DAY 6

Surrendering in Reverence

Matthew 28:16-17 · John 21:1-23

With the Festival of Unleavened Bread now over, the disciples of Jesus returned to their hometown of Galilee, as he had instructed them. We have no record of Christ appearing to them since they were in the secret room.

During their journeys home, doubt ensued again. They were likely wondering what would become of them now that their beloved teacher had seemingly moved on without them.

Life was feeling mundane and dull now. Their memories of Jesus were all they had. They were left to pick up the pieces of their lives again. It just seemed drab and pointless.

Most of the disciples were fishermen before Jesus called them to follow Him. For a fisherman, fish were their source of livelihood. It was their way of life and means of support. Without fish, they had little. However, over the last few years, Jesus taught them that He would be their livelihood and called them to be fishers of men.

Nevertheless, they returned to what they knew, fishing. But, the waters were not yielding them any fish. They cast the nets repeatedly, and drew them out void of fish. Life was pointless. Now, fishing was pointless. A voice interrupted their frustrating labor. "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." They were probably reluctant initially, but what did they have to lose? They threw the nets into the waters on the right side of the boat and were amazed. A multitude of fish swarmed their nets.

It was not the first time to experience such a miraculous catch by a man's word. They knew it was Jesus. They rowed the boat to the shore and dragged the fish to the fire that Jesus made. "Bring your catch," he said. And they ate together.

Jesus turned to Peter and asked, "Do you love me more than these?" pointing to the fish. It was a strange question, yet it struck deep into Peter's heart. Jesus was not asking about fish but about livelihood and sustenance.

Peter had given up everything to follow Jesus, including his fishing business. But now, as he looked at the overflowing net of fish, he realized this love for Jesus was being tested again. "Lord," said Peter, "you know I love you."

Jesus asked Peter the same question three times, reminding him that if he truly loved Jesus, he would feed His sheep, take care of His flock, and follow Him with all his heart. He needed to surrender completely, even their dependence on their livelihood.

Personal Reflection

Like the disciples, we are called to surrender our lives to God's will, even when it's difficult. It can be hard to let go of our own desires and plans, but when we surrender to God, we are saying that we trust Him completely. We are acknowledging that He is the source of our lives and that we can rely on Him in all things.

Therefore, let us follow the disciples' example, and surrender our lives to God's will, even when it's complicated. Let us trust in His provision, and let us dedicate our lives to serving Him and spreading His message to the world. When we surrender to God, we are saying that we love Him above all else and are willing to follow Him wherever He leads us, even if it means stretching out our hands and going where we do not want to go.

Why do you stand looking into heaven?

ACTS 1:11

DAY 7

Sharing in Excitement

Matthew 28:16-20 · Mark 16:14-20 · Luke 24:44-53 · Acts 1:2-11

The disciples made their way from the shore to the side of a mountain as Jesus led them. There, Jesus stood before them, opening their minds to the Scriptures. Doubt was no more. Courage filled them.

It was time for their Lord's departure and their commissioning. The disciples had come a long way from being ordinary fishermen to becoming apostles of God. They had been personally touched and intimately trained by the Creator of the cosmos, the Lord of heaven Himself. They had walked alongside the Son of God, eating and drinking with Him and observing the Living Word in action. Their journey had only lasted three years, but it had been a lifetime of experiences.

Fishermen from Galilee and a servant from Nazareth, eleven unlikely men were bound together by an unlikely Lord. God had gathered them from their ordinary lives and discipled them into extraordinary apostles. They were now His foundation builders, the keys of the gospel in their hands, entrusted with framing the truth and proclaiming the good news.

For over four thousand years, God's plan had been unfolding, reaching its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. The soon and coming King had finally arrived, but now it was time for Him to leave. He would rule from heaven as a spiritual King to a spiritual kingdom where His law would lead through their hearts by the divine power of His Spirit.

His work was complete, but His plan to build had just begun.

Stretching out His hands, Jesus blessed the disciples. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

As He spoke, Jesus was lifted into heaven, disappearing from their sight.

The disciples stood there, transfixed, looking upward in wonder. They had witnessed something miraculous, and it left them speechless. They were expecting something more, but Jesus had ascended to heaven. The only sounds that could be heard were the cry of the wind and the racket of the waves.

Then, two angels appeared before them. "Men of Galilee," they spoke, breaking the silence. The disciples turned to see them. Some were still looking upward. "Why do you stand looking into heaven?" the angels asked. "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way you saw Him go into heaven."

The disciples jolted out of their reverie and came to their senses, and responded joyfully. They returned to Jerusalem as instructed, no longer fishermen but fishers of men, mission-driven and courage-infused.

Personal Reflection

All followers of Christ are commissioned to be fishers of men in the world. We are all charged with proclaiming God's truth to make disciples. Yet, many of us still look up to the heavens, waiting for something more.

Friends, Jesus has finished the work. The sins of His elect have been paid in full, and now we are to go out, preach the gospel, and watch God make extraordinary disciples out of ordinary people. Let us not stand idly, looking into heaven, but instead, let us move forward with courage and purpose, spreading the good news to the ends of the earth.

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:8-10).

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.

2 TIMOTHY 2:8

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hi. My name is Jacob Abshire, and I am desperate for Jesus Christ. He is my way, truth, and life. My wife agrees—for herself, that is. She is equally desperate, and we love to call Him ours.

We also love to raise our four children to call on Jesus in the same way. We live in Houston—the most fantastic "country" in the United States, as we say. And together, we worship with our spiritual family at Cross Community Church.

My joy in life is bringing others closer to God's word to find the riches of God's truth for the glory of God's son. I do this by developing creative discipleship resources. These include writings on my website (jacobabshire.com) and books. Since 2009, I have published two commentaries, over five Bible studies, and several other books. In 2023, I started a channel to release videos similar to what you can read on my website (YouTube.com/@TheDiscipleShift).

You can stay connected with me by subscribing to my newsletter on my website. If you have any questions, message me on my contact page. I usually respond the same day and would love to hear from you.

For Christ and His church, Jacob Abshire

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