

“For He Has Risen!”

April 24, 2011

Text: Matthew 28:5-9

The world has never really embraced the Easter holiday.

It's not like Christmas, on which you can at least make a profit, if you'll downplay its religious theme, & dress it up in all sorts of secular holiday traditions.

It's not even like Thanksgiving, which gives us a good excuse for overeating and taking the day off work.

Easter always occurs on a Sunday, & most people get Sundays off anyway.

Most significantly, Easter is an intrinsically religious holiday, so if you're not a religious Xn, you can't do much with it. Bunnies and Easter eggs don't have nearly the appeal of Christmas presents.

It celebrates a uniquely religious miracle—Jesus' resurrection.

Easter demonstrates to the rest of the world what peculiar people we Xns are (from a secular point of view).

We actually believe what seems impossible=> that God raised Jesus back to life, 3 days after He died.

Because we believe Jesus is alive, we actually pray to Him.

In fact, we trust Him to save our souls, & we worship Him, believing He is pleased with our worship.

“Moderate Xns”, who dread being labeled fanatics and fundamentalists at any time of year, but try especially hard to avoid such labels at Easter, in a variety of ways=>

- * Some carefully avoid saying anything that sounds too religious, so nonbelievers won't view them as ignorant radicals/crackpots.
- * Double-minded Xns form a comfortable compromise w/ the world, adopting many/most of its views/values. Easter may call for them to add a few more Xn-sounding words than usual (in moderation).
- * Openly hypocritical “Xns” simply go along with the Xn crowd at Easter, then dismiss/mock Xns/Xnity the minute they leave church.

Today we will meet some of the original Easter Xns, who wholeheartedly/unapologetically embraced the Xn faith and its Xn Savior.

We will discover 5 characteristics of Xns like them who really enjoy their faith, because of their total commitment to it...

***1. They are the kind of people who truly seek the Lord.**

They are like the women who followed Jesus to the cross on Good Friday, then went looking for His crucified/brutalized body on Resurrection Morning in order to do what they could to care for it.

In Mt 28 (our text) we find two such women who went to Jesus' tomb that morning, & arriving there, encountered an angel.

[**Matthew 28:5**]=> “*And the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; for I know that you are **looking for Jesus** who has been crucified.’”*

Two women—Mary Magdalene & another woman also named Mary—got up early on the Sunday morning after Jesus’ crucifixion, & went to the tomb where He was buried.

For all they knew, the soldiers guarding the tomb were still there. They might try to frighten/intimidate/mock the women. That didn’t stop these ladies, in their search for their Lord’s remains.

To their surprise, when they arrived at Jesus’ tomb, the soldiers were gone, but an angel who had rolled back the round stone that served to block the door, was still there. His face shined as brightly as lightning, and his garments were as white as snow.

His appearance was so awesome the soldiers had run away in fear.

But as this same angel introduced himself to the 2 Marys, his first words were “*Do not be afraid.*”

He said he knew they had been “***looking for Jesus***” (*zeteo*—earnestly seeking Him, fervently desiring to find Him).

He understood that these women loved Jesus, and that they had suffered a great loss when He died.

People who really enjoy Easter—people like these 2 Marys—do so because they seek, & have come to love, Jesus X.

They have come to understand their soul's desperate need for X,
who alone can pardon their sins and reconcile them to God.

Scripture repeatedly tells man to seek the Lord, for that reason=>

E.g. * Hosea 10:12=> *"It is time to seek the LORD Until
He comes to rain righteousness on you."*

* For believers, God is the ultimate good, for whom their
souls long, as David says in Psa 63:1=> *"O God,
Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly; My
soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee."*

* Psa 119:2 says those who seek the Lord with all their
hearts, will be *"blessed"* (truly happy).

Scripture also says that God will judge those who refuse to seek
Him:

* Amos 5:6=> *"Seek the LORD that you may live, Lest He
break forth like a fire."*

**The fact that true believers seek the Lord separates them
from the rest of mankind, which doesn't seek Him.**

Rom 3=> *"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN
ONE; / THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD"*
(Rom 3:10-11).

Unrighteous people don't seek God because they don't
understand their need to do so.

Sin has left them so spiritually impaired, that they're
incapable of recognizing their own soul's true
neediness.

And they are also incapable of recognizing Jesus as the
only One who can meet that spiritual need.

So the gospel has no value/importance to them at all.

2 Cor 4:4 says the god of this world (Satan) has
blinded their minds, *“that they might **not** see
the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”*

**Mary Magdalene sought Jesus because she’d come to realize
who He was, & how urgently her soul needed Him.**

* Lk 8:2 says Jesus had healed her of an illness caused by
demons, so she knew that He could wield the
awesome power of God on her behalf, for her benefit.

* In Lk 24:6-7, Mary also realized that X had divine
knowledge, when the angel at the tomb told her=>
*“He is not here, but He has risen. **Remember** how
He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, /
saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the
hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third
day rise again?”*

Mary knew Jesus had prophesied that, but now she realized
that His prophecies were accurate & detailed
predictions of future events that could be known only
to God.

Most people don’t seek Jesus because they don’t understand who
He is, or how much they are in need of His deliverance.

They are like the prodigal son who, until he came to his senses, just sought enough money to acquire a few worldly possessions/pleasures for himself.

He was even willing to forfeit his father's love, for them.

Only when the prodigal son came to his senses did he seek out his father, to restore his relationship w/ him.

And only when sinners come to their senses spiritually, do they seek the Lord, to become reconciled to Him.

God often uses tragedy/hardship to bring them to that point.

The prodigal had ended up penniless, in a pig sty, which finally convinced him to seek out his father.

But a person who sincerely seeks the Lord will receive the greatest of all blessings=> God's forgiveness of his sins.

Isa 55:6-7=> *"Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. / Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon."*

In Matthew 28, the angel whom Mary Magdalene found at Jesus' tomb explained why our Lord was no longer in the tomb=> He had risen from the dead.

[Verse 6] (angel)=> "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying."

"Has risen" lit. means to rouse someone from sleep, but it is used in Scripture of raising a dead person back to life.

The Gospels record 10 occasions on which Jesus appeared bodily to His disciples, after His resurrection.

The angel reminded the women that Jesus had risen “*just as He said*”—i.e., in accordance with His own prophecies.

He added=> “*Come, see the place where He was lying.*”

They looked at the niche in the tomb where X’s body had been lain, & saw for themselves that it was gone.

Comparing this text with Jn 20:6-7, we discover that Jesus had folded up His grave-clothes, organized them like someone straightening up His room, & then departed the tomb w/ the door still closed/blocked (remaining closed until the angel opened it later, to let X’s disciples in).

The faith of these 2 women had been rewarded with great joy, as they literally sought their Lord.

Those who seek Him will always be rewarded with joy, because Jesus never disappoints the kind of people who sincerely seek Him.

***2. People who really enjoy their Xnity serve the Lord.**

Now the angel gave the 2 women an assignment=> to take the good news of X’s resurrection to the rest of His disciples.

I.e., he called on them to serve the Lord, by performing a very special service for Him.

[Verses 7-8] (angel)=> “*And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I*

have told you.’ / And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.”

Like these women, the people who are often most satisfied with their Xnity, are those who are busy serving X.

They may be Sunday School teachers who are diligent to pray for their students’ souls, & to set X before them each Sunday.

* They may be Xns (like Mary) who bear the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection—but in their case, to the unsaved, rather than His followers.

* They may minister to others in the church, visiting them in the hospital, praying with them over the phone, taking food to them when they’re sick, or helping them move into a new house/apartment.

Active Xns like this will inevitably be made happier in their faith by their doing what their Lord/Master has told them to do.

He has saved us to serve, & do good works;

And they are doing exactly that.

Jesus said (Mt 6:24)=> *“No one can **serve** two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot **serve** God and mammon [wealth].”*

The assumption here is that everyone has a master (either God or wealth) and everyone is serving whoever that master is.

I.e., no one is serving no master.

In Lk 17:7, Jesus asked, “*Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'?*”

The answer was, “That wouldn’t happen, because a slave is supposed to serve his master.”

Then X added this (17:10)=> “*So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy **slaves**; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'*”

Jesus came to earth to serve, not to be served.

Now His true servants have joined Him in serving others.

As they serve alongside Him/others in Xn service, a beautiful spirit of camaraderie develops among them.

They are far happier Xns than those who simply show up, waiting for others to serve them.

People who really enjoy their Xnity actively serve their Lord.

***3. People who really enjoy their Xnity have had a personal encounter with Jesus.**

They aren’t “institutional Xns”, who simply affiliate with some church, or merely adopt a Xn philosophy/ethic;

They have a personal relationship w/ the living X Himself, based on a personal encounter they’ve had with Him at some point in their lives.

The ladies in our text were about to encounter X themselves again.

There was a bewildering mix of turbulent emotions surging up in their hearts.

- * They had come to the tomb a short while earlier, totally depressed, having lost Someone they loved dearly.
- * When confronted by the angel, their sadness/depression had suddenly turned to shock/fear, being in the presence of such a powerful/awesome creature.
- * Now their fear was mixed with great joy, at learning that their Lord had actually conquered death, & was alive once again.

Mk 16:8=> *“They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”*

The angel had said X was actually going to meet with them and all the other disciples in Galilee, and the 2 Marys must have looked forward to that meeting with immense joy/anticipation.

But as they hurried back into the city to tell the other disciples about it, Jesus Himself suddenly appeared to them.

[Verse 9]=> *“And behold, Jesus met them and **greeted** them.”*

“Greeted” (chairete) refers to a very pleasant word of greeting.

It expresses a warmth/kindness/affection that wishes only the best for the person greeted.

But coming from Jesus’ lips, this word becomes very significant.

It basically means “Rejoice!” & when God’s Son says it, the implication is=> “Rejoice, your sins are forgiven & there is nothing between Me/you, but love/peace.”

The only people who really enjoy their Xn faith are those who have a personal relationship with Jesus, because He has manifested Himself to them.

Not a physical manifestation, such as the women in our text saw;
Not even a visionary encounter such as the one the apostle Paul experienced on the road to Damascus.

Instead, it happens personally/privately w/i their hearts, on a spiritual level.

This is what Jesus promised in Jn 14:21=> *“He who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will **disclose Myself** to him [emphanizo—make Myself known, reveal Myself to him].”*

* We encounter our Lord at the time of our conversion and regeneration, and our hearts recognize Him as the One whom we were seeking.

In Jn 10, Jesus said=> *“My sheep **hear** My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; / and I give **eternal life** to them”* (27-28).

* But we also encounter Him during those lonely/frightening times in our lives when we feel desperate to sense our Shepherd’s presence/help.

And we can say with David=> *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for **Thou art with me**; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me”* (Psa 23:4).

At moments like this there is no treasure on earth that we would trade for the assurance that our Lord never

abandons us, but that He leads us with His staff,
granting us peace that passes all comprehension.

We can say with David (Psa 63:7)=> *“Thou hast been my
help, And in the shadow of Thy wings I sing for joy.”*

***4. Those who really enjoy their Xnity seek to get as close to
their Lord as possible.**

Their comfort/joy is found in nearness to their
Savior/Shepherd.

We see that too, in the reaction of the 2 women.

They were so delighted to see their risen Lord, they drew
close enough to reach out and grasp Him.

There was blessing to be had in such closeness, just as there was
for Jacob when he took hold of the angel, wrestling w/ him.
Jacob had refused to let go until he had received a blessing, but
these 2 women were blessed even as they touched Jesus.

[Verse 9b]=> *“And they came up and took hold of His feet and
worshiped Him.”*

**Having recognized Jesus, these ladies prostrated themselves
on the ground before Him, taking hold of His feet.**

That might seem a bit strange, if not downright unladylike.

But dignity/decorum weren't priorities for them at that moment.

They just wanted to make contact with this One they had
thought they'd lost, to get as close to Him as
possible, and to keep Him from leaving them again.

So they took hold of those feet which had been nailed to a cross, 3 days before.

X's resurrection had brought a great change in His body, but the scars in His hands/feet were still visible.

The women also wanted to express their love for Him, with all the warmth of human contact, that was appropriate under these circumstances.

The Bride of X longs to get close to her Bridegroom.

So individual believers long to commune w/ X just as the Shulammitte woman longed for Solomon, her husband.

The Church says of X what she said of her bridegroom=>
"I found him whom my soul loves; I held on to him and would not let him go" (SoS 3:4).

I believe it's a mistake to view salvation merely as a one time decision, rather than an ongoing love-relationship.

Although we do tell people *"Believe [once/for-all] in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved,"* (Acts 16:31), that's not the end of it.

We then need to urge them to continue in the faith, and to keep seeking the Lord—to get closer/closer to Him.

We encourage them to continually seek an ever closer, ever humbler, relationship w/ their Savior.

That is absolutely essential to making our Xnity everything God wants it to be, and the kind of faith that will be most gratifying for our own souls as well.

Xns need to jealously guard the closeness of their relationship w/ X from anything/everything that might interfere w/ its joy.

- * They need to guard against worldliness that causes them to set their minds on the things of earth, not on things above—distracting them from prayer & the Word, subverting/diluting their love for their Lord.
- * They also need to guard their hearts against the temptations of the flesh, which lead to sin/guilt, creating a sense of alienation between them/X, spoiling the joy of their communion with X, & replacing it w/ anxiety/coldness.
- * They need to guard against the kind of Satanic idolatry, by which Eve was deceived, & her spirit was so severely wounded.

We must guard against doing anything that grieves our Lord.

Review

Those who enjoy their Xn faith seek Jesus, serve Jesus, have had a personal encounter with Jesus, and get close to Jesus.

***5. Those who really enjoy their Xnity worship the Lord from sincere hearts.**

That's what the 2 Marys were doing when they prostrated themselves before Jesus.

If they'd had any doubts about His being the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel, His resurrection had settled those doubts.

They would never have bowed before Him, if they hadn't become convinced that it was true.

If He weren't God incarnate, it would have been idolatrous for them to worship Him.

But they knew without a doubt that He was God incarnate.

And they were thrilled to cast themselves to the ground before Him, in a humble act of worship.

As Xns, we find ourselves in the same enigmatic position as the 2 Marys--holding onto X's feet, but worshipping Him as we do so.

We hold onto Him because we love Him so much for who He is, and for what He has done to save our souls.

It's a touching picture of intimacy, akin to John's leaning on Jesus' breast, as "the disciple Jesus loved."

He is our familiar Friend, to whom we can pour out our hearts in prayer.

And Jesus encouraged that sort of warmth/familiarity when He washed His disciples' feet in the Upper Room.

But we must never allow familiarity to deteriorate into contempt, forgetting that it was, after all, the Creator's feet that Mary Magdalene was holding—the feet of Incarnate God.

* These were the same feet that a sinful women in Lk 7:38 had anointed with perfume, wiping them with her hair, & kissing them w/ tears of repentance that fell from her eyes onto His feet.

* These were the same feet whose sandals John the Baptist hadn't felt worthy to untie (Jn 1:27).

* These are the same nail-scarred feet about which the Apostle John wrote in Rev 1:17-18=>

*“When I saw Him, I fell at His **feet** as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, / and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.’”*

* And these are the feet before which we will someday cast our crowns in heaven, as an ultimate act of worship.

Jesus called us His friends.

He is the best Friend we will ever have, because, as He said

(Jn 15:13-14)=> *“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his **friends**. / You are My **friends**...”*

But then He added=> *“...if you do what I command you.”*

Someone: “That is conditional friendship, not real friendship!”

No, that's the nature of friendship with God.

We do what Jesus has commanded for the same reason we worship Him in sincerity of heart=>

He's not only our Friend—He is our God.

As theologians like to say, “He is very God, of very God.”

So the ground where His feet stand is holy, demanding not only our love, but humble worship/obedience as well.

We hold Him in the grip of our love, but we reverently
bow before Him in worship, as we do so.

Just like those 2 joy-filled women holding Jesus' feet.

May we, like they, truly find delight in our risen Savior, on this
Resurrection Morning, as we too worship Him.

“For He Has Risen!”

April 24, 2011

Text: Matthew 28:5-9

1. Easter demonstrates to the rest of the world that we Christians actually believe what seems impossible: God [14 raised] Jesus back to life.

Today we will discover 5 characteristics of Christians who really enjoy their faith because of their total commitment to it...

1) They are the kind of people who truly seek the Lord.

Matthew 28:5—*“And the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; for I know that you are **looking for** Jesus who has been crucified.’”*

2. People who really enjoy Easter—like these 2 Marys—do so because they seek, and have come to [10 love], Jesus Christ.

Hos 10:12; Psa 63:1; 119:2; Amos 5:6; Rom 3:10-11; II Cor 4:4

3. Mary Magdalene sought Jesus because she had come to realize who He was and how urgently her soul [14 needed] Him.

Lk 8:2; 24:6-7

4. A person who sincerely seeks the Lord will receive the greatest of all blessings—God's [24 forgiveness] of his sins.

Isa 55:6-7

Verse 6—“*He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.*”

Jn 20:6-7

2) People who really enjoy their Christianity serve the Lord.

Verses 7-8—“*And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.*’ / *And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.*”

5. Christians like this will inevitably be made happier in their faith by their [12 doing] what their Lord and Master has told them to do.

Mt 6:24; Lk 17:7, 10

6. Jesus came to earth to serve, not to be served; now His true servants have joined Him in [16 serving] others.

3) People who really enjoy their Christianity have had a personal encounter with Jesus.

Mt 16:8

Verse 9—“*And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them.*”

7. The only people who really enjoy their Christian faith are those who have a personal [26 relationship] with Jesus, because He has manifested Himself to them.

Jn 14:21; 10:27-28; Psa 24:4; 63:7

4) Those who really enjoy their Christianity seek to get as close to their Lord as possible.

Verse 9b—“*And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.*”

8. These ladies just wanted to make contact with this One they had thought they’d lost, to get as [12 close] to Him as possible.

SoS 3:4; Acts 16:31

9. Christians need to jealously guard the closeness of their relationship with Christ from anything and everything that might [22 interfere] with its joy.

5) **Those who really enjoy their Christianity worship the Lord from sincere hearts.**

10. As Christians, we find ourselves in the same enigmatic position as the 2 Marys—holding onto Christ’s [10 feet] but worshipping Him.

Lk 7:38; Jn 1:27; Rev 1:17-18; Jn 15:13-14

11. We hold Him in the grip of our love, but we reverently bow before Him in [16 worship] as we do so.