

Donkey – A Servant, Not a King

Easter is a joyful celebration of Jesus' completing His mission on Earth. The Bible tells us the amazing adventure Jesus and His friends had while He was here. Jesus had been teaching and preaching in Israel for three and a half years. He had healed many sick people; He had even raised dead people back to life!

Today's adventure begins the week before the very first Easter morning. Jesus knew that while the miracles He had done were important, they were only part of the mission He had been given to do. To complete His task, Jesus needed to get to the city of Jerusalem. Getting into Jerusalem would be difficult. There were thousands of people crowding into the city to celebrate the Jewish Holy Day of Passover!

In order to make it through the crowd, Jesus sent two of His friends to get an animal for Him to ride as He came into Jerusalem. When Jesus lived on the earth, people normally walked where they needed to go. Only special people, like kings and rich men, had beautiful horses to carry them. The Bible tells us in I Timothy 6:15 that Jesus is "the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords." But did he ride into Jerusalem on a proud horse? NO! He chose a humble little donkey instead! Why? Because hundreds of years before, Zechariah had given the people a hint or a sign to help them to recognize their true King. Zechariah 9:9 says,

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey."

When the crowds of people saw Jesus, who had shown them the power of God, ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, a cheer went up! Their King was here! The multitudes began to shout, "Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!" The promise of Zechariah had been fulfilled.

But was Jesus pleased? No, He was sad. As He looked at the crowds of people cheering and waving as He passed by, He knew that they did not understand His mission at all. They wanted freedom from their captors, they wanted riches and power. But that is not why Jesus had come. He had come to give them forgiveness of sin and eternal life in heaven. In just a few days, these same people would be shouting for Him to be put to death. His heart was heavy.

Did you ever think about why Jesus came to Earth? He left His palace and riches in heaven to come to die for you! He could have been proud and demanded worship, but He came humbly on a donkey. He came with love in His heart for the people who hated Him. And He came with love in His heart for you! I John 4:9 says, "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." As we get ready for our Easter celebration, celebrate Jesus' love for you!

Coins – Betrayed by a Friend

Just like we have friends that we play with or go to school with, Jesus had friends who traveled with Him. He had chosen twelve best friends to follow Him as He went through Israel teaching and serving the people He had come to save. One of His twelve friends was named Judas Iscariot. Even though Judas had been Jesus' friend for three whole years, Judas did not love Jesus. He wanted Jesus to use His power from God to make them rich and powerful. Did Jesus come to make people rich and powerful? NO! He came to forgive our sin and give us eternal life in heaven. Judas did not like Jesus' plan and schemed a way to end Jesus' ministry.

Jesus knows everything, and He knew Judas was planning to betray Him to the religious leaders of Israel who wanted to kill Jesus. In Psalm 41:9, the Bible gives us a clue about what Judas was planning. It says, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up *his* heel against me." Judas could not surprise Jesus, but it did make Jesus very sad to know that His friend would betray Him to His enemies.

On the night of the special feast of Passover, when Jesus had finished eating bread with his friends, Judas quietly left the room and found the religious leaders. Before this special feast, he had agreed to lead them to a place where they could capture Jesus! In exchange, the religious leaders paid Judas 30 pieces of silver. Judas sold Jesus to His enemies for just a little bit of money. Later that night, Judas led the religious leaders right to Jesus, and Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas had betrayed his friend.

Thinking about what Judas did to Jesus may make us angry. But all of us have betrayed Jesus in our own way. When we choose to disobey Him or to ignore Him, we are betraying Jesus for a little bit of fun just like Judas betrayed Him for a little bit of money. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We are all enemies of God! But Jesus didn't betray us! Romans 3 goes on to say, "in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed." This means that Jesus was patient with us and chose to forgive us for betraying Him! At Easter the coins remind us that Jesus, who was betrayed for a little bit of money, forgave our sins and paid our debt to God so that we may be forgiven! His love is Amazing!

Cup – A Special Meal

Does your family have a special meal that you eat on Easter Day? Eating special foods reminds us that the Day we are celebrating is unique. Jesus and His friends had come to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. Do you remember how Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a little donkey? The streets were crowded with people who had come to celebrate Passover.

The Holy Day of Passover had a very important meaning for the Jewish people. Hundreds of years earlier when the Jews were slaves in Egypt, God had sent ten horrible plagues to convince the Pharaoh of Egypt to set His people free. In the last plague, God would slay the firstborn of every family in Egypt. The only way to be saved from this was to sprinkle the blood from a spotless lamb onto the doorpost of the house. Exodus 12:13 says, "Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you..." When God's Angel swept through the city that night, he looked for the sign of the blood on the door. If it was there, he PASSED OVER that house and moved on to the next. If the blood was not on the door, the firstborn child of that family died. This is how the holiday got its name - PASSOVER. And this is the holiday that Jesus and His friends had gathered to celebrate.

One of the things that the Jews ate at Passover was special bread. This bread was special because it did not have any yeast in it. The bread was flat. This symbolized that the Lamb that was killed did not have any blemishes or spots. It was a perfect lamb. Jesus held up the bread and said, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." (Luke 22:19) Jesus was telling His friends that He was the spotless, perfect Lamb that would give His body to save them from their bondage to sin. Passover bread had a new meaning. Not only did it help them to remember their salvation from Egypt, but it would help them remember their salvation from their sin.

The second special item at the Passover feast was the cup. This red juice/wine represented the red blood of the lamb that was sprinkled on the door post. The blood was proof that the lamb had been slain so that the firstborn child did not have to die. Jesus took His cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." (I Corinthians 11:25) Jesus wanted His friends to understand that His mission was to die...to shed His blood so that they could be saved from death!

Passover was even more wonderful than it had ever been before. Why? Because Jesus was the perfect spotless Lamb who had come to be slain so that His blood would save those who would accept His gift. This year, the Passover would be complete. The sign would be fulfilled. Jesus, our Passover Lamb, would die. Do you understand Jesus' mission now? His friends didn't. They didn't want Jesus to die, but He had to! He had come to rescue us and this was the ONLY WAY! As you get ready to have Easter dinner with your family, take some time to thank Jesus for giving His life for you!

Praying Hands – In the Garden

Have you ever wanted something so badly that you prayed that God would give it to you? Maybe you wanted a new toy or maybe you were sick and wanted to feel better. Prayer is our way of talking to God. When we pray we tell God what we need and how much we love Him.

While Jesus was here on earth, He was separated from God, His Father. The Bible tells us that Jesus prayed to God often. He would climb a mountain to find a quiet place away from the crowds, and there He would talk with God the Father.

On the night of the Passover Celebration, after Jesus and His friends had eaten their special meal, Jesus took His friends to a beautiful, quiet garden called Gethsemane. He needed to pray because there was an important question He needed to ask God, His Father. While they were walking in the Garden, Jesus asked his three closest friends, Peter, James and John, to come further into the garden with Him to pray with Him.

Jesus was just about ready to save the world. He was just hours away from accomplishing His mission. But the hardest part was yet to come. Remember what Jesus' mission was? It was to die. This was the only way that the world could be rescued from their sin. Jesus was the only way. This mission would be hard, it would be painful and Jesus needed God's help to be our Hero.

Finally, Jesus told Peter, James and John to wait for Him while He went a little further to pray. They sat down by some trees to pray and wait for Jesus. With a heavy heart, Jesus fell on His face and began to cry out to God. He cried, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this **cup pass from Me**; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." (Matthew 26:39) He was asking God if there was any other way for the world to be saved. But He knew that God's way must be completed perfectly. In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I AM the way, the truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through ME."

After he had prayed for a while, Jesus got up to go check on Peter, James and John. But what should He see, but all three sleeping! He had needed their prayers for Him, but they couldn't stay awake to pray! Jesus woke them up and asked again. Then He went to pray once more. When He found His friends the second time, they were sound asleep! Jesus prayed a third time and then woke up His friends. He was so disappointed that they had slept when He needed their prayers! And now it was too late.

Why? It was too late, because Judas had kept his bargain with the religious leaders. He had betrayed Jesus, his friend, to them! When Jesus looked up, He saw an army of men following Judas to Him. Jesus' friends panicked and fled from the garden. But not Jesus! He was ready to complete His mission. His prayers had given Him strength to face what was going to happen in the next days. When they arrested Jesus, He did not struggle or resist. He knew that God's will would be done and His mission to save the world would be accomplished!

Next time you pray, thank Jesus for teaching us that prayer gives us strength to do the right thing even when it is hard!

Whip – Beaten For Us

What happens when someone breaks a law? There are punishments to suffer because of the wrong choice. What happens when you break a rule in your home? There are punishments to suffer because you disobeyed. Have you ever been punished when you haven't done anything wrong? How did you feel? We feel angry! No one wants to be punished for something they did not do.

Think about Jesus. He had never done anything wrong in His entire life. He had never cheated, or stolen. He had never disobeyed His parents or lied to His teachers. He had never sinned! Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Jesus is God and He is Holy. But He is also a man and is able to feel temptation to sin like we are. Even so, He never gave in. Sin's temptation could not defeat Him!

But wait! Jesus was arrested by the religious leaders! They wouldn't do that if He hadn't done anything wrong, would they? Oh yes, they would and they did. And that isn't all that Jesus had to suffer. Before that night was over, Jesus endured an unjust and illegal trial, He was mocked by His enemies, He was lied about by people He had helped, He was betrayed by His closest friends, He was slapped and spat upon. But that was only the beginning.

The next day, Jesus was led to the Roman ruler named Pilate. Pilate did not know what to do! He knew that Jesus was innocent. He didn't want to punish Jesus, but the religious leaders were very powerful and demanded that He sentence Jesus to death. In order to keep his job, Pilate sentenced Jesus to be beaten and then to be crucified.

Roman guards strapped Jesus to a whipping post and then beat him with a cruel whip 39 times until He was bleeding and His flesh was torn. Every stripe they gave Jesus was a punishment for something He DID NOT DO!! And Jesus could have gotten angry and made the guards stop. He was God! He didn't have to endure this punishment. But He didn't stop them.

Do you know who really deserved the punishment Jesus took? It was YOU and ME!! WE were the ones who had sinned! We were the ones who had disobeyed God! The punishment Jesus endured was ours. And He did it to be our Hero...to save us from spending eternity separated from God because of our sin. Isaiah 53:5 says, "But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, He *was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed."

At Easter, the whip reminds us that our punishment has been taken. Jesus, the God of the Universe, Who had never sinned, willingly suffered cruelty and horrible pain all because He loved us and wanted to be able to spend eternity with us. And the worst was yet to come. His mission was still not complete...He had to DIE. But even then, He did not get angry or quit. Thank God today that He was willing to take your punishment for you!

Crown of Thorns – Hurtful Words

Has anyone ever said hurtful things to you or about you? Sometimes those words can hurt even more than stubbing your toe or biting your tongue! Especially if the hurtful words come from someone you care about.

While Jesus was on earth, He spent years healing sick people, raising dead people back to life and loving sinners. But those same people who He had given His life to, would hurt Him more than the beating of the Roman guards. When Jesus was arrested, His friends ran away scared of what would happen to them. Later, Peter, who had been one of Jesus' closest friends, denied that he even knew Jesus! When Jesus was standing trial, people who He had served told lies about Him, trying to catch Him for a crime He was not guilty of. When He reached Pilate, the leaders of His own people demanded that He be crucified. You see, Jesus knows what it is like to have people say hurtful things about you. He experienced it over and over.

What crime did they accuse Jesus of? They said that Jesus had lied to them when He said that He was the Son of God and the King of the Jews. And Jesus had said these things! But they weren't lies! Jesus *was* the Son of God. Jesus *was* the King of kings. He had lived His entire life on earth to prove to them that He was! In Matthew 26:63-64 the religious Leaders asked: "Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" Jesus said to him, "*It is as you said.*" In Mark 15:2, Pilate asked Jesus, "'Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered and said to him, "*It is as you say.*" But they did not believe Him. Instead, they laughed at Him. They mocked His miracles and power from God. Then they demanded that Jesus die for these crimes.

But the mocking did not stop with the religious leaders and Pilate. When Jesus had taken the 39 stripes with the whip, the Roman guards decided it was their turn to mock Jesus. They found a purple robe and put it on His bleeding back. They fashioned a crown for Jesus to wear. This crown was not a beautiful golden crown with sparkling jewels like the one Jesus deserved to wear. This crown was made of thorns so long and thick that when the guards put it on Jesus' head it pierced his head and his skull. When the robe and crown were put on Jesus, the Roman guards laughed at Jesus! They laughed at the Son of God and the King of Kings.

And Jesus did not fight back. He did not retaliate. He did not get angry and hurt the religious leaders or Pilate or even the Roman guards. But He could have! He had the power from God to take life or give it. He had power to cause pain or to heal. But Jesus did not use His power to defend Himself. He couldn't! He was taking the punishment we deserved. He was taking the mocking that we deserved. This was His mission. He is our Hero!

Next time someone says something hurtful to you, remember the crown of thorns and the mocking Jesus endured for you! Remember that He loved those who had mocked Him and He loves you even though you have mocked Him, too.

Nails – It Is Finished!

A bleeding, beaten Jesus stood on Pilate's terrace wearing a tattered purple robe and an ugly crown of thorns. Beneath the terrace stood the mocking crowd screaming and yelling for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate stood and watched Jesus. Something in Jesus' eyes told Pilate that Jesus was telling the truth; that Jesus really was the Son of God and the King of the Jews. But the religious leaders were so powerful! How could he go against what they wanted? He might lose his position! In despair, Pilate called for a basin of water to be brought to him. Pouring the water over his hands, he loudly announced to the people that he was washing his hands of the matter: Jesus' blood would be on their hands. Then in a decision he would regret for eternity, he ordered Jesus to be crucified.

Once the order had been decreed, Jesus' robe was ripped off of his shoulders and in its place was put a heavy cross beam on which He would be crucified. Jesus would carry this beam through the street, outside the city and up the hill to the place of crucifixion. He had lost so much blood, He was so weak and tired and full of pain. As Jesus walked through the crowd, He saw people lining the streets mocking Him. These were the same people who had cried, "Hosanna" only a few days earlier when He had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey. On and on Jesus trudged, laboring beneath the weight of the cross.

Suddenly the weight became more than Jesus could bear. He fell crashing to the street, crushed underneath the beam. The Roman guards kicked Him to try to make Him get up, but He couldn't. One of the guards grabbed a man named Simon from the crowd. The guard ordered Simon to carry Jesus' cross up the hill for Him. Simon carried the cross all the way to the place of crucifixion.

Once there, Roman guards pushed Jesus over and laid Him down on the cross. Normally, prisoners struggled and fought the guards, but Jesus didn't! He didn't try to escape; He stretched out his hands and feet and said nothing. But He could have! He was God! He had formed the earth with the breath of His mouth! He had calmed storms and parted seas. He had raised dead men to life and healed the diseased. But the King of Kings, the Son of God, lay Himself down on the cross.

Most of the time during crucifixion, the prisoners were tied to their crosses, but there was so much hatred for Jesus that the Romans pounded nails through Jesus' wrists and through His feet to hold him there. But they didn't need the nails to hold Him, Jesus was willing to stay. He was willing to die. Why? Because He loved you! Because He was the only way to save you!

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, guards hoisted the cross up into the air and lowered it into the base of the hill. There, Jesus hung between heaven and earth in agony. Every breath was a struggle. Every bone in His body was out of place. Suddenly the sunny afternoon went black as midnight. Thunder rolled in the sky. And in that moment something even more painful than His physical suffering happened to Jesus.

In that terrible and wonderful moment, every sin that had ever been committed, every sin that would ever be committed was poured out on Jesus. The Perfect Lamb, Who had never sinned, became sin for us! And in that moment, God the Father could not bear to look at His Son. He could not fellowship with His Son; and so God turned His back on Jesus and Jesus was separated from God! In anguish, Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) God poured out His wrath and judgment on Jesus in that moment. Jesus took all of our punishment in Himself for crimes He never committed.

After the awful moment was done, when the payment for sin had been made, Jesus called out, "It is finished!" (John 19:30) The debt that we could never repay had been paid in full! In this assurance, Jesus bowed His head and laid down His life. Jesus died. No man killed Jesus, He gave Himself! What a wonderful Savior!

Dice – The People at The Cross

Imagine for a minute that you are standing at the foot of the cross where Jesus is being crucified. When you look above you, the sky is midnight black with no stars shining. You hear thunder crash as if a terrible storm is on its way. When you look up, you see Jesus; His body is so beaten that you cannot even recognize Him. Nails pierce His wrists and His feet. For a second it seems as if Jesus is the only Person there. But He isn't. Look around you! Who do you see?

Do you see a woman standing, weeping near the foot of the cross? Her shoulders are shaking with sobs. She can't look at Jesus, her pain is so great. This woman's name is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Long ago, when she was a young girl, angels had come bearing news that she would be the mother of the Savior of the world! Mary had known that He would have to die, but that didn't make it any easier to bear. Jesus was fulfilling the mission He was born for: He was dying for the sin of the world. Yes, even for His mother's sin. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Only Jesus was sinless because He was God. He was the only hope for the whole world. But Mary is not the only other person there.

Do you see a man standing next to Mary? His name is John. John had been Jesus' best friend while He had done His earthly ministry. John had loved Jesus more than any of the other eleven had. John always sat closely to Jesus when Jesus was teaching or even when they were eating meals. And now he stood by watching His best friend give His life to save the world. All of a sudden, John heard a voice! It was Jesus, speaking to him from the cross! "Behold, your mother!" (John 19:27) Jesus wanted to make sure His mother was taken care of when He was gone. From that day on, John guarded Mary like she was his mother.

Not everyone at the cross was sad about Jesus' death. The religious leaders were rejoicing that they had killed their enemy. They didn't realize that they had only done exactly what God had wanted. They hadn't conquered Jesus, Jesus had given Himself! Still, they rejoiced in their false victory. There was also a group of Roman guards. They had gathered right below the cross. They taunted Jesus, they mocked Him still, even as He was dying. One of them had some dice that they used to gamble for Jesus' beautiful robe. No sadness filled their hearts.

Two people there understood Jesus' mission. They understood Who Jesus was. And they believed. One of them was a Roman Centurion. He had been commanded to crucify Jesus. As he watched Jesus die, as he watched Jesus speak forgiveness to those people who had hated him, the Centurion knew that "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39) The second person was a thief who was also being crucified for his crimes. He knew that Jesus had not done anything wrong and yet Jesus did not fight back. The thief asked Jesus, "Lord, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom." (Luke 23:42) Jesus forgave the thief and welcomed him into heaven!

When you look at Jesus hanging the cross, what do you feel in your heart? Do you feel sad like Mary and John? They were sad because all they saw was Jesus' death. They forgot about His promise to save the world. Don't let your sadness that Jesus died make you forget that He accomplished His mission!

Do you feel doubt that Jesus is God and the King of Kings? Like the religious leaders, have you ignored Jesus' message? Look again at Jesus on the cross. See the love in His eyes for you even though you have turned your back on Him. He died for you! Let the truth of His life teach your heart to love Him.

Or maybe you feel peace? You understand for the first time that Jesus is the Son of God. Like the Centurion and the thief on the cross, you understand Jesus' mission. Ask Him today to forgive your sin! Ask Him to be King in your Heart! He will keep His promise! He has come, "to seek and to save that which was lost!" (Luke 19:10) Let Him find and save you!

Lamb – Once for All

Do you know how many people are alive on the earth at this very second? Almost 7 Billion! That is more than 7 hundred, more than 7 thousand and even more than 7 MILLION!! And that is just right now! Can you imagine the number of people who have lived since Adam and Eve were created at the beginning of the world? And the Bible tells us that ALL of them, all of us, are sinners! That is a lot of sin in the world.

Sin began with the very first two people that God ever created. Their names were Adam and Eve. God placed Adam and Eve in a beautiful, perfect Garden called Eden. In the Garden were trees filled with fruits of all shapes and sizes. Genesis 1 and 2 tell us that God asked Adam and Eve to care for the Garden and the animals He had placed there. But this wasn't the only reason God had created Adam and Eve. God had created them because He wanted to have fellowship with them! I Corinthians 1:9 says, "**God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son.**" Fellowship was God's idea and His perfect plan.

But sin corrupted the earth. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God's command to not eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And because they sinned, there were consequences. God had told them that the day they ate the forbidden fruit would be the day they died. But Adam and Eve kept living, didn't they? They lived for hundreds of years and had children! Why didn't they die like God had said they would? The answer is...they DID!

Their physical bodies stayed alive, but the spiritual part of them (the part that fellowshiped with God) died. Sin had separated them from God and there was nothing they could do to restore that fellowship. Adam and Eve were just the beginning. Romans 5:12 says, "...through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Adam's children and grandchildren and everyone who has ever been born were all born spiritually dead.

But God loved His people so much that He made a way for them to cover up their sin so that they could talk to God. He called this a sacrifice. God gave instructions to His people that every time they broke God's laws (sinned), they had to sacrifice an innocent lamb to Him. This lamb had to be perfect, without any bruises or blemishes. The blood from the lamb would cover the sin in their heart and allow them to pray to God. The lamb's death brought fellowship with God until they sinned again. This plan would continue until the perfect sacrifice could be made.

What was the perfect sacrifice and when would it come? Jesus is the perfect Lamb and He came when the time was just right. But how did Jesus' death cover the sin of the whole world? How could one man's death pay the punishment for 7 billion people? Romans 5:15 says, "But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many." Jesus was our perfect Lamb. He shed His blood so that our sin would be not just covered up, but completely forgiven! His death was once for all!

Curtain Ripping – No More Separation!

Let's take a trip back in time and visit God's people thousands of years ago before Jesus had come. God had just delivered His people from their slavery in Egypt and they were making their way across the wilderness to their new land that God had promised to them. As we walk through the dusty wilderness, tents can be seen for miles around. Look toward the middle of the tents. What do you see? It is a very large tent surrounded by a cloth fence. On top of the tent sits a great cloud of smoke.

This tent is called the "Tabernacle." God asked His people to build this as a place for them to worship Him and sacrifice their lambs. Do you remember why the lambs had to be sacrificed? That's right, they had to die so that the sin of the people would be covered and the people could talk to God. These lambs reminded the people that one day a perfect Lamb would come and be killed so that they would be forgiven! This perfect Lamb was Jesus! But Jesus had not come yet, so the people still waited and sacrificed their lambs.

Inside the tent were two rooms. The first room, called the Holy Place, held three special pieces of furniture for the priests to use in worship. Only priests were allowed to visit this room. The second room was called the Holy of Holies. This room held only one piece of furniture: a bench with two golden angels on top. The cloud that sat above the tabernacle filled this room and the glory of God dwelt on the seat of the bench. This room was so holy that it was off limits to everyone! God had to keep Himself separated from sinful people because He is perfectly holy and cannot even look at sin.

To separate the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place, the priests fashioned a thick curtain. This curtain was embroidered with beautiful blue and purple threads to symbolize God's royalty. It was 4 inches thick and woven so tightly that two horses could not even pull it apart! Once a year the people of God had a special holiday called the Day of Atonement. On this day only, the High Priest was allowed past the curtain into the Holy of Holies to bring the blood from a sacrifice to place on the seat of the bench for God. This sacrifice represented the covering of sin for all the people for the past year. God would accept the offering and cover the sins of the people.

Now let's travel forward to the moment that Jesus died on the cross. At the very minute that Jesus died, the thick curtain, that no man could tear, ripped in two! It was as if God had reached down from heaven and ripped the curtain from top to bottom! No longer were men separated from God by a curtain because of sin! Jesus has made a way for us all to have perfect fellowship with God! No more lambs had to be slain! Jesus' blood was the perfect sacrifice, and when we trust His sacrifice we are taking Jesus' blood to the altar and receiving forgiveness for our sin! "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16) If you are trusting in the blood of Jesus, you may talk to God whenever you need Him! Hallelujah! What a Savior we have!

Stone – The Tomb Is Sealed

When someone dies, usually their story is over. Their life has ended. But Jesus was no ordinary person! Jesus was God and He still had an eternity of things to accomplish after His death. You see, His mission wasn't finished yet! Yes, He had to die to take the punishment for our sin, but that wasn't the end. During His ministry on earth, Jesus had given His friends hints about what would happen after His death. In Mark 8:31 Jesus "began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." Jesus was telling them not to lose hope! He would die, but His story would go on! After three days in the grave, Jesus would rise again!

How is this possible? How can someone make Himself rise from the dead? Maybe Jesus wasn't really dead. Did He just faint? NO! Jesus died. Breathing on the cross was very difficult. If Jesus had just fainted, He would have died from suffocation in only 10 minutes. He was hanging on the cross for several hours. He was truly dead. Even the Roman guards knew this. When they walked by the cross to see if Jesus was dead yet, John 19:33-34 says they "saw that He was already dead...one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water." These guards were trained to know death, they knew that when a spear was thrust into a dead man's heart and lungs a mixture of blood and water would flow. If Jesus wasn't dead yet, this stab with the spear would have killed Him. There was no doubt in their minds. Jesus had laid down His life. And this was the key. Jesus, as God, had the power to give His life in death and the power to raise Himself back to life! And this is what Jesus had promised to do!

In their sadness, Jesus' friends had forgotten this promise, but Jesus' enemies had not forgotten. They had seen Jesus die. They had seen Jesus' body laid in the tomb, but they couldn't get His words out of their minds. What if Jesus did rise again? It would prove to the world that Jesus was truly the Son of God and truly the King of Kings and the evil plans of the religious leaders would be exposed. They could not let that happen. Several of the religious leaders went to Pilate. They said, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver [Jesus] said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first." (Matthew 27:63-64) They were desperate to cover up any proof that Jesus was really God.

Pilate agreed to their request. He ordered a massive stone to be rolled in front of the tomb entrance. This stone was so heavy it took several strong men to push it into place! Then Pilate put his official seal on the tomb so that no one would be able to steal the body without breaking the seal. And just for good measure, Pilate ordered a company of Roman guards to stand watch at the tomb to keep anyone from being able to get in. Even if Jesus' friends had wanted to steal His body, there was no way they could do it. Jesus was a prisoner even in His death. The religious leaders were satisfied. Jesus was dead and would never rise again. And even if Jesus did rise again, He couldn't get out of the tomb. His plan would fail! But while they remembered some of Jesus' words, they forgot one thing; Jesus had also said that He was God! If that were true, no nails could hold Him to a cross and no stone could hold Him in the grave. And so the night passed.

Empty Tomb – He Is Not Here!!

A beautiful sunrise split the sky! Birds chirped and the wind seemed to sing in the grass. The whole world knew a secret. Do you want to know what the secret was? Jesus was ALIVE!! Death had been conquered and the grave was overcome! The first Easter morning had dawned and the earth couldn't wait to celebrate. But no one else knew the secret. Jesus' friends still mourned as if Jesus were still dead!

Early that morning, a group of three women walked to the tomb where Jesus had been laid. They brought perfume and ointment to anoint the burial garments of Jesus to give the tomb a sweet smell. When they arrived at the tomb, the Roman guards were nowhere to be seen! The seal on the tomb was broken and the heavy stone was rolled away from the entrance! What had happened to Jesus? The women became very afraid! Just when they were beginning to despair, two men in shining clothes appeared, standing right next to them! The men asked them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!" (Luke 24:5-6) These messengers were the first to share the wonderful news. Jesus had risen! He was alive! When the three women heard this message, they turned and ran as fast as they could back to Jerusalem. They could hardly wait to share the message with Jesus' friends!

Huffing and puffing, Mary pounded on the door where the disciples of Jesus were hiding. Slowly, Peter opened the door to the room. Mary burst in and began to tell the men what she had heard! Before she could even finish her story, Peter and John raced out of the room toward the tomb. They had to see for themselves! John reached the tomb first and stopped at the entrance, but Peter ran right into the tomb! Instead of a body wrapped in burial cloths, Peter saw an empty tomb. The burial cloths were folded neatly and laid at the head of the tomb. Peter and John were amazed! The tomb was empty! The body was gone! Did they dare to hope that Jesus was alive?

Until they could be sure, Peter and John went back to the room with the rest of the disciples. Their faith was so small that they couldn't believe what the angels had said. Fear had blinded them from seeing the truth. And so they sat there huddled in the darkness while the rest of the world was drinking in the beautiful sunshine. But they wouldn't stay there forever! Jesus had things to tell them and work for them to do. And so He paid them a special visit.

While the disciples sat in the darkness, suddenly a man appeared in the middle of the group! How had He gotten in? The doors were locked and the windows were boarded shut! This guest had walked through the walls! This wasn't any ordinary visitor, this was Jesus Himself! Suddenly the light of truth flooded the darkness of their fear. The disciples knew that Jesus was indeed risen from the Dead! Joy and celebration followed as Jesus continued to reveal Himself to those who had truly loved Him. Easter celebration had begun!

And now we celebrate! Jesus is Risen! Sin is defeated! Death is conquered! This is what Easter is all about. Along our adventure we have collected souvenirs. A Donkey to remind us that Jesus was humble, Coins to remind us that we all have betrayed Him, a Cup from the Passover feast to remind us that Jesus came to fulfill the sacrifices, Praying Hands to remind us to pray for strength to obey when it is hard, a Whip to remind us that Jesus took our punishment for us, a Crown of Thorns to remind us that Jesus took our humiliation and mockery for us, Nails to remind us that Jesus gave His life willingly, Dice to remind us that Jesus truly is the Son of God, a Lamb to remind us that Jesus

(Cont.)

was the perfect Sacrifice, a Curtain ripping to remind us that we can boldly fellowship with God, a Rolling Stone to remind us that Jesus truly died, and an Empty Tomb to remind us that Jesus is Alive!

As you celebrate Easter today, take time to think about each item and what it means for you. Have you accepted Jesus' gift of life? Are you able to fellowship with God because Jesus has forgiven your sin? Do you believe that He died for you and rose to conquer your sin? If so, celebrate this gift! If not, why not? Are you blinded by fear and doubt? Let the light of Jesus show you the truth! Accept Him today!