

# SUNDAY'S CHILDREN

## JOHN 20:1-2

John 20:1 Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

20:2 Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."

As a boy, I recall watching ABC's Wide World of Sports, and **the cliff-diving championships from Acapulco, Mexico**. Brave men dove headfirst, from a ledge 136 feet above a slender inlet of ocean. The water depth below them varied from 6 feet to 16 feet depending on the tide and waves. Timing was crucial.

Even after the diver pierced the water no one took a breath. Every eye focused on the bubbles that marked his entrance... Not until he surfaced and waved to the crowd did everyone know he'd survived! He was okay.

But spectators at the cliff-diving championships **all looked!...** They expected the diver to still be alive...

*Not so with the disciples!* When Jesus dove into the icy waters of death, everyone assumed he'd never rise.

They'd seen the torture, the blood, His last breath. They'd held His lifeless body and even wrapped it in strips of linen cloth. No one expected Jesus to surface.

For of all death's characteristics none is more ominous than its **irreversibleness**. Lose a loved one and it doesn't really hit you until the first Christmas afterward - or the Easter get-together - *he or she is conspicuously missing*. He's never coming home. She won't be returning. The departure was permanent.

As many of you know my Dad died in November 2021. Mom died April 19, a year ago. This past Friday my brother and I sold their house of fifty years. I'm sure we've both known it for some time, but the sale made it more of a reality - *our parents are not coming home*.

The truth is, when you die, you're dead. Life is a one-way journey, not a round-trip. **Death is irreversible.**

*And this is what the disciples assumed about the Master.* When the women came to the Garden Tomb to finish spicing up the corpse no one had any inkling of expectation that they would ever see Jesus alive again.

The days following Jesus' crucifixion Roman soldiers guarded His tomb *not because they anticipated a spark of life.* They were on duty to prevent a conspirator from stealing the corpse. *No one dared imagine a miracle.*

John 20:1 tells us, <sup>John 20:1</sup> "On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark." Matthew says they came as the day <sup>Matthew 28:1</sup> "began to dawn." Luke reports, it was <sup>Luke 24:1</sup> "very early in the morning."

Of course, these diverse descriptions are easily reconciled. The ladies left the upper room pre-dawn; then the sun rose on their way to the Garden Tomb.

But I always like to start the story of the Resurrection with John 20:1, *because* <sup>John 20:1</sup> "it was still dark" in more ways than one. Even though Jesus taught His disciples that He'd be crucified and rise the third day - the possibility of a literal resurrection had never crossed their minds. They were confined by the **irreversiblence** of death.

Author Kent Hughes calls these disciples at this point, "Saturday's Children." Saturday's Kids are *deflated folk*. They feel cheated by life. Their dreams never panned out. Any optimism they once had has faded. Disappointment now colors their mindset. Life is not what they'd hoped. Defeat seems **irreversible**.

But one event transformed "Saturday's Children" into "**Sunday's Children.**" With the resurrection of Jesus sadness, and evil, and disappointment, and defeat became **reversible**. Hope, joy, and faith became the new realities. A triumphant approach to life was born.

In the future, the disciples will be *persecuted and plundered*, but nothing will get them down. They'll recall the empty tomb and the power of Jesus, and they'll trust in His ability to turn sorrow into gladness.

And today, I'd like to take you through that first Sunday, and show you the difference a day can make. I want to recount **Day One** of a new era. How that day shook out and how it has transformed every day since.

Well... *Was it dark? Had the day begun to dawn? How early was it?...* You'll find other examples of ambiguity in the Gospel record of the resurrection...

*Was it one angel or two? Who exactly made up the band of women who came to the tomb?* I bring up these details because it's obvious the four Gospel writers didn't get together to make sure they had their story straight. If the resurrection had been a hoax

they would've had a pow-wow to work out the apparent loose ends. **Obviously, they didn't.** The first disciples were too surprised, too stunned by the event itself!

Don't misunderstand, none of the details mentioned by the Gospel writers contradict each other. All four Gospel accounts can be easily reconciled, but I don't think coordinating details were the author's top priority. The writers were too overwhelmed by the elephant in the room! They were trying to get their heads around a miracle of unmatched proportion. **What they always assumed was irreversible had now been reversed.**

For the first time in history a man who was dead had come back to life, never too die again. If you asked the biblical authors today, they'd probably say, *"The Son of God had just defeated death, hell, and the grave - the position of the sun in the sky wasn't our primary focus."*

Mark 16:3 tells us as the women walked to the tomb, Mark 16:3 **"they said among themselves, 'Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?'"** A huge stone, weighing maybe two ton, sealed the tomb shut. The girls were discussing how they could remove the stone.

But their concern was *needless fretting*. In fact, the followers of a risen Lord are going to discover **that a lot of their worries are now nothing but needless fretting!**

Here's the first Sunday reversal, since Jesus is alive and well **many of the problems we thought were problems are not really problems at all.** A risen Christ opens up possibilities previously unconsidered.

Matthew 28:2 tells us what happened as the ladies approached the tomb. Matthew 28:2 **"There was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. 28:3 His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow."** I'm sure that millions of angels had come to gawk. They were on hand for the resurrection. But only two made themselves visible.

On my first trip to Israel I visited a place called **"The King's Tomb."** It's an out-of-the-way site - not on most tour itineraries. I went because it features a tomb with an example of how a stone was rolled over its opening.

A channel gets cut in the rock in front of the grave. A stone is then placed at the top of the gutter, and a wedge driven under the rock. When it's time to roll the stone, you kick out the wedge, and gravity pulls the stone in place. This is how it *rolled* at the garden tomb.

When Mark writes, **Mark 16:4** “**the stone had been rolled away,**” he uses a term that means, “**roll up a slope or incline.**” The *angel induced earthquake* didn’t just push the stone backward, but upward... John states **John 20:1** “**the stone had been taken away.**” He uses the Greek word, “**airo,**” which means, “**pick up and carry.**” The stone caught air! A 4000 pound rock blew off the mouth of the grave!

A few years ago an underground fire in downtown Atlanta blew a half-dozen manhole covers several feet into the air. Thankfully, no one was injured. But it takes quite a force to throw upwards 300 pounds of cast iron.

But that was nothing compared to the resurrection power of Jesus. It blasted the stone right off the grave.

*And the reason wasn’t to let Jesus out.* We’ll see later, the resurrected body of Jesus had supernatural capacities. The risen Lord could walk through stone walls, and travel distances instantaneously. Apparently, an immortal body isn’t bound by mortal laws and limits.

Realize the stone was moved not to let Jesus out, but to let us in - so *the world could see He’s not there!*

Apparently, the Roman garrison guarding the tomb had front row seats for the miracle. Matthew 28:4 states, **Matthew 28:4** “**The guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.**” Notice the reversal here, these were special-ops, battle-tested soldiers - yet they quivered in fear before the angel. At first they played dead; then ran like rabbits. **The resurrection of Jesus made brave Romans cower, and cowering disciples grow brave.**

Matthew tells us the soldiers also feared Pilate. His orders were to guard the tomb. That’s why they went to the chief priests. Since they failed they paid the Jews to smooth things over with Pilate - the soldiers would tell everyone the disciples had come at night and stolen the body while they slept. Ironically, to save their skin, they agreed to the lie they were sent to prevent.

But the Romans weren’t the only people who ran from the tomb. John tells us Mary Magdalene left the other women who came to prepare the body of Jesus. When she saw the tomb was empty, in her excitement she raced to the Upper Room to fetch Peter and John.

Yet while Mary is gone, Luke 24:5 tells us two angels appear, in shining garments, to the other women at the tomb. One of the angels asks, **Luke 24:5** “**Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!**”

And these are the words carved into the door of the Garden Tomb today, **Luke 24:5** “**He**

*is not here, but is risen!"*

**There are famous tombs all around the world...**

*Hadrian's Tomb in Rome... Lenin's Tomb in Red Square... the Taj Mahal in India... Westminster Abbey in London.. Pharaoh's Tomb, the Pyramid of Giza... the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, in Washington DC...* But it's ironic, that the world's most famous tomb, the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, is empty! Jesus is risen!

You can dance on Mohammed's remains, or the Buddha's body, or Confucius' corpse, *but not on Jesus!*

His body is risen! I've been inside the tomb where Jesus was buried, and He's no longer there! He's risen! **Thus, the world's most famous tomb is an empty tomb!**

But the empty grave isn't all I've noticed at the Garden Tomb. Look at the top of the wall, and you'll see security fencing surrounding the compound. Sharp, glass shards are embedded in the concrete. It's a sign of the conflict that exists just outside the gates.

Surely, folks who live near the tomb are familiar with the facts. They know Christ is risen. They live next door to the evidence - but the perpetual violence and turmoil is a sign they've yet to experience the risen Lord.

And I wonder how many folks here are in the same boat! Intellectually, we believe Jesus lives, but we don't know Him personally. We're unfamiliar with His power and presence. We've never experienced His love.

Notice again the question the angel asked the women, **Luke 24:5 "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"**

In other words, why are you looking in a graveyard for a man who's alive? Why treat a living, breathing human being as if He were dead? Yet Christians and churches are guilty of this crime every single Sunday.

They read His words and apply His teachings... They recall His past accomplishments, and learn from His example... They sing songs about Him, but there they stop! **Why not press further and seek to know Him?**

Don't just sing songs *about Him*, express your heart *to Him*. Make prayer *a dialogue*, not *a monologue*. And don't just work *for the Lord*, seek to work *with Him*. For Sunday's children, church isn't a *eulogy for a dead man*, it's an *encounter with the living Lord Jesus!*



After speaking to the women, Mark tells us the angel instructed them to return to the rest of the disciples and let them know Jesus had risen! I love Mark 16:7, the angel says to these ladies, Mark 16:7 **“But go, tell His disciples - and Peter...”** Check out the special nod, Mark 16:7 **“And Peter!”**

Jesus plans to reach out especially to Peter, to assure him he's forgiven. Recall Peter's disaster. The night before the crucifixion Peter denied Jesus three times. *He proved chicken before the rooster crowed.* Peter was so defeated he went out and Luke 22:62 **“wept bitterly.”**

Yet here's proof that the love of Jesus never fails, *even when we do!* **Saturday's Children** are guilt ridden and buried under a mound of condemnation. Their shoulders droop under the heavy weight of remorse.

But **Sunday's Child** knows the joy of God's forgiveness. His pardon is always available to people who humble themselves and are willing to change.

Here's a possible play-by-play of how the events of the **Day One** unfolded... Early in the morning, Jesus is resurrected... an angel and an earthquake remove the stone... women arrive at the tomb and find it empty...

The Romans flee, while Mary Magdalene races off to tell Peter and John... The other women encounter the two angels, who inform them that Jesus has risen. They're told to tell the disciples - Mark 16:7 **“and Peter...”**

And as the girls leave, Matthew 28:9 tells us, Matthew 28:9 **“Jesus met them, saying “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him.”** And here's the operative word for Sunday's Children, Matthew 28:9 **“Rejoice!”** It means **“take joy!”** Even when hardships arise and life bites, we can always *take joy* in the victory of Jesus!

That's when Peter and John arrive at the tomb, along with Mary Magdalene. John 20:4, John 20:4 **“They both ran together, and the other disciple (which was John) outran Peter and came to the tomb first.”** It's interesting that John has to mention he outran Peter. Apparently, even at such a holy moment, *boys will be boys...*

It also indicates how much they wanted to believe! Imagine the conversation in route, **“Could it be He's alive? After all that's happened?...”** Or Peter, **“How will He ever forgive me, after my colossal failure?”**

After inspecting the empty tomb for himself, as Peter leaves the garden, Jesus appears to Him personally. *What a moment that must've been!* The first time, post-resurrection, *that grace is extended and grace is received.* **Sunday's children are all about grace!**

Mary had stayed behind at the tomb. At this point she didn't know what had happened to Jesus. John 20:11 reads, **John 20:11 "Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. John 20:12 And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. John 20:13 Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"** The Greek word means **"wailing."** She wasn't just *whimpering*, she was *crying profusely*.

**John 20:13 "She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."** I love Mary's preoccupation with Jesus. *She's talking to celestial beings - angels, no less - but hardly notices the angels.* She's in all-out pursuit of Jesus, the King of angels! All **Sunday's Children** seek Jesus supremely.

Verse 14 tells us, **John 20:14 "Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus..."** *Why didn't she know? We're not told.* It could've been *power of suggestion*. Mary had concluded death was **irreversible**. She never expected to see Jesus, so she failed to recognize Him.

That's a possibility, but I think there's a more likely explanation... **Recall His scars!** Later, Jesus will show Thomas the wounds in His hands and side. I believe Jesus' resurrected body still bore the marks of His suffering. It's said, **"The only man-made things we'll find in heaven will be the scars on our Lord Jesus."**

Jesus may've also bore the scars in His face (*where they plucked out His beard*) and in His brow (*where they screwed in the thorny crown*). I believe Jesus was severely disfigured by the brutal beating He endured.

We might be in for a shocker when we get to Heaven and first see Jesus. Initially we'll weep when we finally see for ourselves the damage our sin has caused. But then our tears will turn to joy! We'll rejoice in His scars! They'll be a testimony to His grace and mercy to us.

But it does seem that after His resurrection Jesus' appearance altered. This may be why Mary and the disciples didn't always recognize Jesus at first glance.

John 20:15 records Jesus' words to Mary, **John 20:15 "Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"** She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." **20:16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!"** At first she doesn't recognize Jesus, until *He spoke her name...* Then **20:16 "She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher)." And I'm sure it was the way Jesus spoke her**

name!

When Mary's **mom** addressed her it was to scold... When the **men** in her life spoke her name they wanted to seduce... When her **neighbors** whispered "**Mary**" their intent was to judge... But when **Jesus** called out "**Mary**" His voice conveyed peace and acceptance.

When Jesus said, [John 20:16](#) "**Mary,**" she knew she was loved. *Hey listen, this morning, Jesus is speaking your name!*

And when she knew it was Jesus, Mary fell on her face, and grabbed His feet. She loved Him so much. Before she met Jesus she was a prostitute - a woman used and abused. The Gospels say Mary was formerly a sleepover for seven demons. Jesus turned her whole world right-side up. He freed and forgave her. The carpenter from Nazareth, had built for Mary a new life.

This is why Mary clung to Jesus with all her might. She had seen Him crucified - now she'd never let Him go again. She wanted Jesus to stay with her forever.

But Jesus speaks cryptic words to her in [John 20:17](#), [John 20:17](#) "**Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father...**" I use to think His concern was the body she was squeezing - as if mortals can't touch glorified flesh. But in Matthew 28 the other women held on to Jesus' feet as they worshipped - *He didn't seem to mind...*

Here Jesus is reacting not to Mary's touch, but to *the intention of her grip*. She's holding on as if she'll never let Him go. But Jesus is about to ascend to His Father. She'll have to let go... She'll need to develop a new kind of attachment to Jesus. No longer through flesh and blood, but through the person of the Holy Spirit.

And perhaps this is the greatest difference between [Saturday's Children](#) and [Sunday's Children](#). In a sense, Mary is a prototype for you and me, and all disciples.

*Wouldn't we love to have the flesh and blood Jesus with us, all of the time?* Instead, we've been called to walk in His Spirit. Our attachment to Him is spiritual.

[Saturday's Children](#) want a physical affinity with Jesus. They look for Him to reveal Himself in primarily tangible ways. *Let's measure His involvement in our lives by the balance in our checkbook, or by a good doctor's report, or by whether our choice in politicians win office.* They tighten their grip on earthly stuff - on what can be nailed down and held onto in our hands.

But Jesus tells Mary she needs to strengthen her faith in what's spiritual... And the same is true for us! [Sunday's children](#) relate to Jesus spiritually - we live not by sight or by touch, but by faith in His Spirit!



Luke 24:11 provides us the skeptical reaction of the disciples when the women return to the Upper Room with news of Jesus' resurrection. Luke 24:11 **"Their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them."**

At first, not just Thomas, but all eleven disciples doubted. Often, it takes time for **Saturday's Children** to become **Sunday's Children**. Their faith has to grow.

Luke records another of Jesus' appearances later on Day One. It occurred on the Road to Emmaus. Two more of **Saturday's children** are headed home as a stranger approaches them and joins their conversation.

These two men were *former followers* of Jesus. But now they're dejected. In Luke 24:21 one guy states, Luke 24:21 **"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel."** Notice his wording, Luke 24:21 **"we were hoping..."**

Their hope had died. Apparently, these two men had wanted Jesus to take up arms and overthrow Rome. Build a physical kingdom, but Jesus had *given in without a fight*. They're now disillusioned and dejected.

They even mention the ladies' report from the tomb, but they dismiss it as the wishful thinking of emotional women. The flame of their faith had been *snuffed out!*

For a time these men had longed for life on a higher plane, but their brief flirtation with heaven had been shattered by the cruelty of the cross. Now they're taking a long walk back - *back home to hopelessness*.

And let me suggest the Road to Emmaus not only runs seven miles northwest of Jerusalem, but at some point, it cuts through the heart of every single person.

Have you ever felt *forsaken, or disappointed, or let down...* even by God? You thought He loved you, but now, after all that's happened, you're not so sure.

The Road to Emmaus is a lonely road. But guess who joins these jaded disciples? **It's Jesus!** They don't know it yet, but the risen Lord is with them - right beside them... And the same is true for every Emmaus traveler. Just because you don't see Him and His purposes doesn't mean He's not there. The problem is our own blind eyes. Yet He's about to reverse that too!

As they walk, Jesus quotes Scripture and shows them in the OT where God predicted all that occurred. Jesus was priming their faith with God's Word. *Then it happened, when He broke the bread, their eyes were opened...* And as soon as they realized it was Jesus, presto, He dematerializes into thin air... Jesus is gone!

They're left by themselves to trust Him by faith, and cultivate a new, spiritual relationship with a living Lord.

Yet this so excites these men they high-tail it back to Jerusalem to let the disciples know they've seen Him. *Two more of Saturday's kids now belong to Sunday.*

Imagine, back in Jerusalem, these two men join the scared and confused disciples behind locked doors. They're rehearsing their road trip when we're told in Luke 24:36, *Luke 24:36 "Now as they said these things Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you."* Without a knock on the door, Jesus just appears. He slips passed siding and sheetrock. The risen Lord crashes the *pouters' party* with hope!

Again, not only did Jesus reverse death, but His reversal included *blind eyes, doubting hearts - sorrow, and hopelessness, and fear, and bondage, and sin.* *Because of the resurrection what was for centuries seen as irreversible, suddenly became reversible.*

And to prove it, Jesus holds out His hands and feet, that still bore the scars, and invites the disciples to squelch all their doubt, *Luke 24:39 "Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."*

To prove His resurrection is real, *that He's not a ghost*, Jesus asks if they've got anything to eat. He munches on honeycomb and a piece of broiled fish. It's practical proof. *Sunday's children* trust that He lives.

What a difference *Day One* made. In less than twenty-four hours the disciples had gone from the ash heap of despair to the mountain top of hope and belief.

For there'd be just thirty-nine more days in God's plan to prepare the Church for Jesus' return to His heavenly home. For as soon as His lungs re-inflated, His heart kick-started, the amino acids rekindled - as soon as resurrection occurred - the clock began to tick. Now that redemption was paid, Jesus would ascend to His Father. He had only thirty-nine days left to prepare His disciples, and these ole boys had a lot to learn.

Author Philip Yancey calls the Ascension of Jesus the most troublesome of all Christian doctrines. *That Jesus would leave just six weeks after His resurrection!*

*What a risk to take!* Jesus took the Kingdom of God He'd worked so hard to plant - the Kingdom He died to redeem - and He turned it over to the men who had denied Him three days earlier. *How could He leave so soon?* The answer is that He didn't - *not completely* - Jesus continued what He started through His Spirit.

Take note of how *Day One* ends. In the Upper Room with His disciples, John 20:22 tells us, *John 20:22 "He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit."* The

joy, hope, love, power that came with the resurrection will be sustained through the person of His Holy Spirit.

Jesus told His disciples the night before He was crucified, [John 16:7](#) “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper (which is, the Holy Spirit) will not come to you...” Jesus knew the success of the Church in ages to come would hinge on our ability to relate to Him spiritually *by faith*. As He said to Mary, [rather than strengthen your grip, strengthen your faith](#).

This is the challenge for us today. **Do we have a Saturday mindset?** *Do we focus on our physical plight and status... are we trapped by hopelessness... have we conceded the possibility to better ourselves and reverse our lot in life... are we destined to despair and loneliness... have we given up on victory... will we be ruled forever by our own hurt, bitterness, doubt, fear?*

There are two ways to look at life... You can accept the cold, cruel world that crucified Jesus as the norm, and view sin, sorrow, and sadness as [irreversible](#).

Or you can **live your life in the light of Sunday!** You can see resurrection power as the new normal. The triumph of Jesus' was the first step to a new day, a new world, a new life. Hopelessness is now [reversible](#). The resurrection proves that through the risen Christ all that we thought was [irreversible](#) can now be [reversed](#).

Why sit and pout over a world gone bad - why not believe in the risen Jesus and help change that world? Make a spiritual connection with God today! Open up your heart to the risen Lord and His Holy Spirit. [Do you want to be a Saturday's child or Sunday's child?](#)