

# “Death Has Been Defeated”

*Unshakable Hope* Chapter 10

November 1, 2020

Matthew 28: 2-7

Pastor Heather

God’s Promise: Death has been swallowed up in victory. I Corinthians 15: 54

My Promise: I will entrust my death to the Lord of Life.

Since my arrival July 1, 2017, here at Calvary UMC, I have officiated at 23 funerals or memorial services of friends and members here and several more of my family members or close acquaintances. In addition, I’ve attended many of your family members services if they were nearby. As I was preparing for this All Saints Day, I looked back through my files and said a short blessing over each name. So many memories, so many stories, so many friendships, so many tears.

Max Lucado shares in the study guide he wrote for this series: “The Christian hope depends entirely upon the assumption that Jesus Christ died a physical death, vacated an actual grave, and ascended into heaven where He - at this moment - reigns as head of the church. The resurrection changed *everything*. If we embrace this promise, it changes our own eternity. There will come a moment where we pass from this life to the next. No more struggle with the earth. No more shame before God. No more tension between people. No more death. This is our hope for tomorrow - but it can bring strength to us today. Our finest moment will be our final moment! We have a promise from the living God that our death will be swallowed up in victory! Jesus Christ rose from the dead not just to show us His power but also to reveal our path. He will lead us through the valley of death.”

In our text today, the two Mary’s alone (not the other followers of Jesus) saw the burial and knew where the tomb was. They now came on the first day of the week, probably to give Jesus’ body the proper rite of burial. It happened at dawn - this locates the event in time. It also has theological significance, this day was truly to be the dawn of a new age.

Matthew quotes the angel “He isn’t here because He’s been raised from the dead, just as He said.” (vs 6) In all 4 Gospels the women verify the empty tomb (Mark 16: 6, Luke 24: 3 and John 20:12). That the women found the tomb empty is central to the various Resurrection narratives.

Central also in the several traditions is the role the women carried out. “Go and tell His disciples”. They become the link between the living Jesus and the disciples in hiding, who presumably knew nothing about the earthshaking event taking place where Jesus had been buried. No doubt if God had willed it so, the risen Christ could have come to the disciples wherever they were . . .but that’s not what happened first. The women were the first evangelists

of the Resurrection.

We can anticipate our own resurrection by viewing the resurrection of Christ. What will happen when you die? asks Max. Scripture reveals some intriguing assurances, he continues. From my perspective, after 40+ years in ministry, he has the best description that I have ever read in any seminary textbook or grief support resource. He talks about a 2 step process when you die.

“Your spirit will immediately enter into the presence of God. You will enjoy conscious fellowship with the Father and those who have gone before. Your body will join you later. We believe this to be true because of verses like this one. ‘We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord’ (2 Cor. 5: 8)”

Know that your loved ones, and my loved ones are “away from their bodies and at home with the Lord”. Max continues “the soul of the believer journeys home, while the body of the believer awaits resurrection”. What comfort and peace that brings to me and I pray to you also on this All Saints Day as we remember and celebrate our loved ones. For me, this is one of the most positive, uplifting promises of God. Your loved ones are home with the Lord.

My tears of sorrow change to tears of joy, surprise, gratitude and wonder as I ponder this promise from the living God. “Death has been swallowed up in Victory” (I Cor. 15: 54). Jesus Christ rose from the dead, not just to show you His power, but also to reveal your path. He will lead you through the valley of death.

Close your eyes now

Listen to these words from the familiar 23rd Psalm in the King James Version. You may want to softly whisper it with me.

(A Psalm of David.) 1. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Try to imagine a body with no pain, a mind with no wandering thoughts. Envision yourself asks Max, as you were meant to be completely whole.

This is God's promise. He will lead you through the valley of death. Your death will be swallowed up in victory.

Amen