

# **“Guess What? He’s Back!”**

Matthew 28:10

Easter Sunday, April 20, 2014

**Guess what? He’s back!** Of course there have been many famous “comebacks” in the history of the world; many of them fantasy, but others of them fact! Does anyone here remember that immensely popular television drama in the 1980’s -- “Dallas”?

And if you do, do you also remember that **great cliff-hanger** of a show that ended the 1986 season? This is when the character “**Bobby Ewing**,” played by Patrick Duffy, **who had been dead for the whole previous season, suddenly reappears alive once again in Pamela’s shower!** How could the **script writers explain it?** The whole previous season turned out to have been nothing more than a bad dream in Pamela’s mind! But this is certainly fantasy and not fact!

The movie **CASTAWAY** was released from Hollywood in the year **2000**, with Tom Hanks playing the part of a Federal Express Agent named Chuck Nolan, who became the victim of a terrible airplane crash. Somehow he turned out to be the **sole survivor, but no one knew he was alive, until several years later, when he was able to escape from a tropical island where he had been marooned**, and eventually finds his way back to civilization and his way back home. Sadly for Chuck Nolan, his wife who presumed him dead, was now remarried. This too is fantasy and not fact!

In **1884**, Grover Cleveland was elected president of the United States, only to lose his bid for re-election in **1888**, but then he “came back” to win the presidency for a second time in **1892**, with history remembering him now as both the **22<sup>nd</sup>** and the **24<sup>th</sup>** President of the United States. This certainly isn’t fantasy! This is fact!

In **1996**, after his re-election, Bill Clinton was referred to by many political analysts as the “Comeback Kid!”

**Yes, there have been many famous comebacks in the history of the world! Many of them are fantasy, though some of them are facts.** But of all the famous comebacks celebrated in the history of the world, there is not one of those that can even begin to hold a candle to the famous comeback that we are celebrating today! And isn’t a fantasy! It is a fact!

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, *“If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we of all people are most to be pitied. For then our faith is futile and we are still in our sins. But **IN FACT**, Christ has been raised from the dead and become the first fruits of them that have fallen asleep!”*

**It’s a celebration that has been going on now for over 2000 years!** Today the holy Christian Church appearing in an immense variety of forms, gives a common witness to her most central teaching all around the world, that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified on the cross for the sins of all people that first Good Friday has also been gloriously resurrected from the dead that first Easter Sunday.

**Friends, Jesus’ disciples believed in our Lord’s bodily resurrection from the dead—because they not only saw him alive in his risen and glorified body, they literally touched his body.** Why that first Easter evening, our Lord ate a piece of fish and bread in their presence! And one occasion he ate breakfast when them on the seashore.

And it was without a doubt **this deeply held personal conviction**, strengthened greatly within them by the Spirit’s outpouring upon them that first Pentecost that eventually launched them out from that obscure corner of the earth, to proclaim the good news throughout the Roman Empire.

**Friends, each of the Gospel writers has his own unique way of telling us about that resurrection morning; and Matthew is no exception!** Matthew is the only evangelist who tells us about a **GREAT EARTHQUAKE** that takes place when suddenly an angel of God descends and rolls away the stone. Only Matthew tells us about the soldiers Pilate had stationed there to guard the tomb of Jesus and how terribly frightened they became over what happened there that morning: *“For fear of the angel, whose appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow,”* Matthew writes, *“the guards trembled and become like dead men!”* (Vv. 3-4)

**St. Matthew tells us that there are two women** who made their way down to Jesus’ tomb that first Easter morning; these women are among that same courageous, loving group of women who were **stationed by the cross of our Savior until he died.** Both of them are named **Mary; Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and Mary Magdalene** (Matthew 27:55).

**They are the last to leave Calvary and the first to arrive at Jesus’ tomb that first Easter morning!** But let’s remember, brothers and sisters that these horribly, grief-stricken women--**still don’t know that this is the first Easter.**

They were not discussing what their first response would be when they would gratefully see their Lord Jesus alive and well again that blessed day! **THEY WERE GOING DOWN THERE WITH OIL AND SPICES TO HOPEFULLY ANOINT HIS DEAD BODY. THEY HAD ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA THAT OUR LORD’S GRAVE WOULD BE EMPTY!**

On reaching the tomb, they were astonished to find that **the stone had been moved from the entrance. AND GUESS WHAT? The stone had been removed, not so that Jesus could get out, but so that they could look for themselves, and see for themselves that his body no longer was there!** Can’t we just imagine them standing there at a distance, afraid to move closer, wondering what had happened and what they should then do next?

**Who moved the stone? Had the body of Jesus been stolen? Grave robbing was a common crime in the ancient world. Perhaps the robbers were still around.** Or had Pilate ordered the removal of Jesus’ body?

**NOT ONE OF THEM IMAGINED THAT JESUS HAD BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD.**

After a while it began to grow lighter and the women grew bolder. They decided to look into the tomb. There they saw the angels. The women were afraid, but an angel told them not to be afraid because Jesus was risen from the dead and that this is what they were to tell his disciples!

**So shortly after this, Mary Magdalene finds two of Jesus’ disciples—Peter and John, who upon receiving the news started out immediately to the tomb, running and leaving Mary Magdalene far behind.** John was the younger of the two; consequently, he arrived at the tomb first, so he stooped to look through the narrow opening. **St John tells us that he saw the grave clothes of Jesus all folded up, neatly lying there on a pile, even though the “napkin” that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head, was in a different spot entirely!** When John tells us he was the first to look into the tomb, he uses the Greek verb **blepo** which simply

means to see something with your physical eyes. He could see the tomb was empty! John could see the grave clothes lying there!

When Peter arrived there, John uses a different Greek verb to describe Peter's action. When Peter "looks" into the empty tomb, the word John uses is the Greek verb *theoreo*, which means, "to examine," and Peter tried to carefully examine what may have happened to the slain body of our Lord. It is from this Greek verb *theoreo* that we derive the English words "theory," or to "theorize."

John looks first but doesn't enter the tomb. Peter looks and enters the tomb. He is trying to make some sense of what has happened. Then John actually enters the tomb and looks around for a second time and the word he uses in his Gospel account to explain his experience then is the Greek verb *oraō*, which means to "see with understanding."

In **John 20, verse 8**, John is writing about himself when he says, "***Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed!***"

John must have believed something much greater than the fact that Jesus' dead body was no longer in the tomb. Perhaps John understood that the only proper explanation to the presence of those grave clothes was that **JESUS RESURRECTED BODY MUST HAVE PASSED RIGHT THROUGH THEM, JUST AS IT WOULD LATER THAT EVENING THROUGH THE WALLS** of that Upper Room, where the disciples were locked away behind closed doors, for fear that what had happened to Jesus, might very well happen to them next!

**Well, St. Matthew makes it plain to us that our Risen Lord was seen by the women first; those who had been the last at the cross and were now first at the empty tomb.** Jesus met them on their way home after they had gone to the tomb, seen the angels, and heard about Jesus' resurrection. **THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE CONTAINS FOUR IMPERATIVE'S, OR "COMMANDS"**—that are as important for us today as they were to those first visitors to our Lord's empty tomb!

*"Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he<sup>1</sup> lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you."*

**I. Come.** The first of the angel's commands was for the women to "come."

This was an important statement because much might have hindered the women from coming. The place itself might have hindered them. They were in a **graveyard** early in the morning. They might have said to each other, "Let us go back! It's not safe here! Let's come back when it is lighter and there are more people here!"

**Their fear of the Romans might have hindered them.** The stone had been sealed, but now the seal was broken and the stone had been rolled away. Rome had been defied. They might be implicated in a crime. They might have said, "We can't go any closer! It's too dangerous!"

**Their sin might have hindered them too.** Something mysterious, something holy had taken place here! They might have reasoned, "This is sacred ground. We can't go any closer!" But none of this stopped them, of course. The invitation to come was combined with the grace of God that would compel them to come, and they obeyed it!

**Have you come here today in faith to see what God alone longs to show you? Have you responded to this invitation?** There can be no real knowledge of God, no salvation, no growth in the Christian life until you do!

**II. See.** What should we see when we look into the empty tomb of Jesus? Among other things, I believe, we should see the horror of our sin, for it was our sin that put our Lord Jesus there! Paul says, ***“He was put to death for our transgressions, but raised again for our justification!”***

Death is the punishment for sin, but Jesus had no sin! He was sinless! Why then did Jesus die? The answer is clear: ***“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds, we are healed!” (Isaiah 53:5).***

**III. Go.** This is the third of the angel’s imperatives. It is a strong reminder that however tempting it may be to remain near the tomb to learn its lessons, there is nevertheless work that remains to be done and we must get on with it! This is the way the Gospel ends, of course, for the last words of Jesus to his disciples, reported just three paragraphs after this, are: ***“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Vv. 19-20).*** This is the greatest work any person can ever have, and it is for all Christians!

**IV. Tell.** The last of the angel’s imperatives was “tell.” It rightly came last, for if we have come to the tomb, have seen that it is empty, know that Jesus was raised, and then obeyed Jesus by going into the world, **clearly we must speak of what we know.** We must say to people: ***“He is not here! He has risen, just as he said he would!”*** This is some powerful and astonishing good news! But good news must be told. If we do not tell it, our actions can only be the result of unbelief, or that we do not understand what a great, powerful and astonishing gospel this is!

**OF COURSE THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO WILL TELL YOU AND ME THAT OUR EASTER HOPE IS NOTHING MORE THAN A COLLECTIVE WISH PRODUCTION ON OUR PART.**

Here’s how their argument goes: **“You Christians just can’t accept the fact that human creatures as wonderful as we are will one day die; that we will one die and that we will never be seen by or heard from by anyone ever again! That’s why you Christians like to fantasize,”** they tell us, **“about some inexplicable reversal of everything that we know to be true about life, namely that our lives are forever terminable!”**

**Critics say: “You Christians want to live forever, so you have projected this great wish off on to one another!”**

William Willimon is a pastor who served for years as the Dean of the Chapel at Duke University. In a sermon he preached there one Easter Sunday in Durham, NC, he labeled the misunderstanding that so many unbelievers have about the Christian, who are not Christians as their: **“Tinker Bell” theory.**

He asked everyone: **“Do you remember how in the stage version, of the story of Peter Pan, Tinker Bell for some reason or another fades away and can only be brought back to Never Land by all of the people present in the audience, closing their eyes and believing very hard in fairies?”** **“DO YOU BELIEVE IN FAIRIES, BOYS AND GIRLS? PLEASE SAY THAT YOU DO!”** pleads Peter Pan. **“BELIEVE IN FAIRIES AND THEY WILL BE TRUE!”**

**“Friends,”** Dr. Willimon continued, **“our belief as Christians is not in some impending generalized resurrection of all dead people someday and the eternal return**

**of the robin in spring, or in some such other pagan drivel! No Easter is about a dead Jesus—whom we helped to condemn, humiliate, whip, nail to a cross, and finally kill; this dead Jesus whom we then took down from the cross, wrapped in linen and entombed; this Jesus come back to us risen, risen from the dead! Many people refuse to believe what we are celebrating, because if this story is true, then this Jesus did not come back to us simply as some disembodied, ethereal soul but as Jesus, the living Son of God; the same one who had troubled many people before Good Friday and now comes back to us on Easter!”**

Have you ever stopped to think about it? One thing people might fear much more than the death of God, is a God who won't stay dead! For here is a God who keeps on searching for us, who keeps on challenging us, and who keeps on coming back to us!

**Jesus had some very challenging things to say while still among us in his earthly state of humiliation, that he still says to us as the resurrected Christ today! Such things, perhaps as: “Be on your guard—for a person’s life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions! Or: “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul? For what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” “Those who love father and mother more than me are not worthy of me, and those who love son or daughter more than me are not worthy of me!”**

Following Good Friday, the predominant question Jesus broken-hearted disciples must have asked themselves following our Lord’s crucifixion was: **“He’s dead, so now what’s to become of us?”** And the predominant question Jesus disciples must have asked themselves, once they were convinced he was alive was: **“He back, so now what’s to become of us?”**

**I imagine that one reason the question of “Guess what?” is such a popular question among so many people is because it’s an easy way for to start a conversation; maybe to even start a conversation with someone who isn’t a conversationalist at all!**

**It’s a question I have noticed that my 10 year old grandson loves to ask me most every Sunday after church: “Guess what, Grandpa?”** Maybe I should take the time to make a few guesses, but **guess what? I have fallen into the lazy practice of immediately responding to his question: “Guess what?” with the answer: “I don’t know, please tell me!”**

Friends, guess what? What? Did you hear that Bubba Watson, a 36 year old professional golfer won the Masters Tournament in Augusta, Georgia, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in three years this past Sunday on April 13<sup>th</sup>? Well, if you didn’t he did!

But guess what? What? I will never forget preparing my sermon for Easter Sunday back in 1993 when there was a special announcement that had come on the television that a man named Bernhard Langer won the Master’s Tournament that year!

As he stepped off the green to receive the green jacket—one of golf’s most coveted prizes—a reporter said, **“This must be the greatest day of your life!”**

Without missing a Bernhard Langer replied: **“It’s a wonderful to win the greatest tournament in the world on this Easter Sunday—but there is something that means much more to me than even winning this golf tournament and that is the opportunity to celebrate the resurrection of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!”**

Mr. Langer had an opportunity to boast about himself, but instead he turned the spotlight on Jesus Christ. It’s exactly what Paul was talking about when he said to those Colossians, **“If then you have been raised with Jesus Christ from the dead, seek those things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. And when Christ you is your life appears, you too, will appear with him in glory!”**

It’s easy to look for ways to draw attention to ourselves and our own accomplishments, making mental lists of things that are “cool” about ourselves. But if we really want something to boast about, let’s boast in our crucified and risen Savior and what he has done for you and me!

Let’s look for every opportunity we might have in our lives to turn the spotlight on him!

Guess what? What? He’s back! **“Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and has become but the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as in Adam all, so also in Christ shall all be made alive! Alleluia!”** Amen.