

EASTER SUNDAY INTERLUDE

God's Edifying Power For Us Seen In His Moving Of Christ's Gravestone

(Matthew 28:1-4 et al.)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

This Easter Sunday, we face an assortment of human weaknesses in various realms of our lives:

(1) We face it in the military realm: Kul B. Rai's piece, "Peace in Afghanistan is doubtful" (Republican-American, March 23, 2018, p. 6A) told how "Pakistan's promise to be a U. S. partner in the war against terror, albeit for a price" has proven to be a great disappointment since that nation "has been a consistent safe haven for terrorists."

(2) We face it in the realm of the government: two stories on the front page of The Hartford Courant, March 25, 2018, p. A1 (Neil Vigdor and Jenna Carlesso, "Mayors Blas Aid For Capital"; Josh Dawsey and Seung Min Kim, Washington Post, "Trump Pans, Signs Bill," Ibid.) told how the city of Hartford is getting a \$550 million debt pay off from the state and how President Donald Trump signed a \$1.3 trillion bill to prevent a government shutdown. Both payouts put big burdens on us taxpayers to the dismay of many who decry government mismanagement in both cases.

(3) We face it in the religious realm: Pope Francis last week told "youths in his homily that 'you have it in you to shout,' even if 'we older people and leaders, very often corrupt, keep quiet.'" (AP, "Pope urges youth to raise voices." Ibid., Republican-American, p. 4A). Scripture calls us to make it our ambition to live a quiet life (1 Thess. 4:11 NIV) and submit to those over us (Heb. 13:17; Rom. 13:1) opposite the pope's call, so many wonder how to live!

(4) We face it locally in terms of spiritual ignorance, doubt or a lack of spiritual power: an "In Memoriam" entry in the same paper (Ibid., p. 4B) was placed by a "Mom" who had lost a daughter and a son, and she added: "(T)his life has left me no means to heal, from the loss of my Daughter . . . and later . . . my Son . . ."

Need: *So, this Easter, we ask, "Where and how can we gain the power we need to overcome weaknesses we face?"*

- I. The Matthew 28:1-4 description of Christ's resurrection from the dead includes the event of an angel of the Lord descending from heaven to roll away the stone that covered the door opening of Jesus' tomb!**
- II. This event signifies God's Ephesians 1:16-23 edifying resurrection power for believers in practical ways:**
 - A. Ephesians 1:16-23 claims that Christ's resurrection power is directed toward believers in many, great ways.
 - B. The angel's removing of the stone from Christ's tomb signifies some of these ways in very practical terms:
 1. The stone's removal signified God's power over military foes for believers, Matthew 28:1-4:
 - a. The Roman guard placed at Christ's tomb was composed of men who were the most highly disciplined fighting force in the history of the Roman Empire, Josh McDowell, A Ready Defense, 1991, p. 228.
 - b. Each soldier was trained to protect six feet of ground, and the guard contained 16 men, so they could protect "36 yards against an entire battalion and hold it," Ibid. The group always had 12 men who were asleep in front of the object they were to guard while 4 men were awake and on guard at all times. Every four hours, they traded places in shifts so the group could protect their assigned area around the clock, Ibid.
 - c. Nevertheless, when the angel of the Lord with his face like lightening and his clothes white as snow appeared and rolled away the stone, all 16 guards trembled and became as dead men, Matt. 28:1-4 ESV.
 2. The stone's removal signified God's power over government foes for believers, Matt. 28:1-4; 27:65-66:
 - a. The stone was sealed, meaning a cord was stretched across the stone and secured on both sides to the tomb wall with sealing clay that was stamped with the Roman governor's official signet, Ibid., p. 230.
 - b. If anyone even slightly jarred the stone and thus broke the seal, he incurred the wrath of Rome, Ibid.
 - c. Nevertheless, the angel of the Lord in God's glory rolled the stone away from the tomb and sat on it, daring the most powerful government of the day with its laws and power to challenge him! (Matt. 28:1-4)
 3. The stone's removal signified God's power over religious foes for believers, Matthew 27:62-66:
 - a. Israel's religious leaders had initiated the move to seal and guard Jesus' tomb to squelch any chance of rumors rising that Jesus had risen from the dead via the disciples stealing His body, Matthew 27:62-66:
 - b. Nevertheless, the angel of the Lord defied the religious leaders' opposition, rolling the stone away from the tomb and then sitting upon it, daring Christ's religious foes to challenge him! (Matthew 28:1-4)
 4. The stone's removal signified God's power to compensate for believers' physical weaknesses, Mark 16:1-3:
 - a. When the women who believed in Jesus were coming to the tomb to anoint His body with aromatic oils, they realized they had not considered the need to roll the stone away to get to Jesus' body, Mark 16:1-3.
 - b. Such tombstones weighed from 1 1/2 to 2 tons (Ibid., p. 226), and the stones were set in a trough track that slanted uphill, requiring 20 men to roll such a stone uphill to reopen the tomb, Ibid.

- c. Yet, the angel rolled the stone **totally away from** the tomb for the women, the Greek term for "rolled" in Mark 16:4 being *apokulio*, "roll away," Arndt & Gingrich, *A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T.*, 1967, p. 93.
5. The stone's removal signified God's power to alleviate the financial burdens believers face, Mark 16:1-3:
 - a. The women had bought aromatic oils to anoint Jesus' body, Mark 16:1; *Bib. Know. Com., N. T.*, p. 192.
 - b. Nevertheless, when the angel rolled back the stone so the women could look into the tomb and see that Jesus had risen, they could save and not waste their oils, a significant financial savings for them!
 6. The stone's removal signified God's power to help believers offset their human ignorance, Mark 16:1-3:
 - a. The women who came to the tomb had not been aware that a Roman guard had been placed at the tomb and the tomb sealed to keep anyone from entering it or they would not have come there with their aromatic oils and asked each other who was going to roll the stone away, Mark 16:1-3. Their ignorance might have cost the women their lives had the soldiers realized they had come to open the tomb to anoint Jesus' body!
 - b. However, God's angel protected the women, rolling the stone away before they arrived so the soldiers had already left the tomb unguarded to report Jesus' resurrection to the rulers, Mk. 16:1-3; Matt. 28:1-4, 11.
 7. The stone's removal signified God's power to equip believers to overcome doubts of Christ's resurrection:
 - a. The stone's removal revealed Jesus' grave clothes were lying in the same position they were when His body was laid to rest -- only minus His body, John 20:6-7! The verb "wrapped together" (KJV) renders the Greek verb, *entulisso*, "wrap up; coil about" (Abbott-Smith, *A Man. Grk. Lex. of the N. T.*, 1968, p. 157), so Jesus' spice-laden, myrrh-sticky graveclothes were still coiled up where His body and His head separate from His body had been laid to rest, but absent any body inside! (Ibid., McDowell, p. 225, 235)
 - b. These sticky, coiled up but empty grave clothes left John believing that Jesus had risen though as yet he did not know about the Scriptures predicting His resurrection nor had he seen the risen Lord, John 20:8.
 8. The stone's removal signified God's power to save from sin and death, 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-58:
 - a. 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 with 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 reveal that sin is the cause of death in man, but that based on His own resurrection, Christ will raise believers' bodies at the rapture of the Church!
 - b. This resurrection life comes to those who believe in Christ for salvation of the soul, John 3:16.
 - c. The angel's removal of the stone at Christ's tomb thus signaled the hope of resurrection for believers!
 9. The stone's removal signified God's power that equips believers to live righteous lives, Phil. 3:10-11:
 - a. The Apostle Paul claimed that he aimed to see the power of Christ's resurrection in his Christian life over sin and its effects, and that through figuratively "dying" as it were to this world's sin and worldliness.
 - b. The angel's rolling away of the stone from the tomb to reveal Christ's resurrection also then signified Christ's resurrection power is available for believers to live spiritually powerful lives over sin in this life.
 10. The stone's removal signified God's power over nature as a foretaste of His gift of a new universe, Rev. 21:
 - a. For a single angel to roll a 1 1/2 to 2 ton stone away from a tomb and sit on it, terrifying 16 disciplined Roman soldiers, foreshadows God's massive physical power to be exerted when He makes the present universe pass away with intense heat (2 Pet. 3:10-12) and replaces it with a new one (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21)
 - b. Believers in Christ thus can anticipate a great eternity due to Christ's great physical resurrection power!

Lesson: *God's great Ephesians 1:16-23 resurrection power of Christ toward those who trust in Him as Savior is comprehensive and infinite, and the angel's rolling away of the stone of Christ's tomb signifies it in multiple ways.*

Application: *(1) May we believe in Christ for eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) If concerned about a problem we face in any realm of our lives, may we realize that God has directed His power seen in Christ's resurrection toward us who trust Him to fulfill His will in our lives, and live by faith in His Ephesians 1:16-23 aid.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

R. N. Collins of Plantsville, Connecticut, in a letter to the *Republican-American* (Ibid., p. 6A), mentioned many social ills we face in our nation today, and repeatedly referred to the "decline in religion" and a host of bad behaviors that the Bible calls "sins." The writer called for better parenting as the key to solving such problems.

However, if parents lack the motivation to be good parents, what then? Even R. N. Collins noted that many parents "fail to support teachers and police officers in disciplining" their children's bad behaviors, Ibid. Like the Pogo Possum cartoon character once said, "We have met the enemy, and he is us!" The **real** answer, then, is for we the people to trust in Christ as our personal Savior from sin to receive a new heart from God so we will **want** to do good!

May we believe in Christ Who bodily rose from the dead to be saved, and may we trust God to direct His great resurrection power toward us believers in any area of need we face that we might know His blessing!