



## How Could This Possibly Happen?

*Matthew 28:1-10*

### A Holiday Weekend?

Easter is, for many of us, a time to catch up with family and friends. It is a time for fun and laughter with those we love, making memories that will last a lifetime. The first Easter, however, did not start out that way.

When that first Easter Sunday morning dawned, the disciples were not looking forward to a day filled with family, friends, laughter, and fond memories. The past few days had been full of debilitating sadness and mind-numbing grief.

On Sunday morning they were still reeling from shock, emotionally wounded and struggling to get their minds around all that had happened. They were feeling vulnerable, overwhelmed, angry, and confused. In their minds they kept coming back to the same question: How could this possibly happen? To Jesus, of all people!

The horror of Friday was complicated by the questions of Saturday: Why did this happen? Did it have to be this way? Was there nothing that could have been done? After all Jesus said and did, how could it possibly end this way?

Then the most complex and difficult question followed: If God is truly a God of love, why would He do this to us? Surely God could not possibly be in this! They were bereft, heartbroken, and empty.

**“Do not be afraid...”** (Matthew 28:5)

Matthew tells us that by the time the two women arrived at the tomb, a great deal had happened. An earthquake had occurred, an angel had appeared, and the stone had been rolled back from the entrance. The guards who were there to make sure no one tampered with the tomb were obviously in shock.

Now imagine what was going on in the minds of the women when they arrived. The empty tomb they experienced only made matters worse. The gospel accounts make clear that the early hours of Easter morning held a great deal of confusion and uncertainty, hence the angel seeks to reassure the women by saying, “Do not be afraid.”

When a person begins to take their faith seriously and wrestle with the questions involved, it can be an unsettling experience as they hunger for answers and certainty.

Occasionally someone will ask me, “If God is truly God, why bother with a Good Friday and an Easter Sunday? Why not simply forgive everyone who has sinned and move on?”

The answer is clear. Because God truly is God, which means He is perfect in every way, He cannot simply bypass the cross and move on. Let me explain.

The cross lies at the center of the gospel because at the cross, Jesus deals with sin in all its horror. Sin is not simply a mistake, a social faux pas, an inappropriate action. It is much more serious than that. At its heart, sin is utter rebellion against God.

Sin not only entices us away from an intimate relationship with God, it also has a tranquilizing, addictive effect on the heart and soul. It lies at the heart of domestic violence, alcohol and drug addiction, and human trafficking. It is so debilitating that it can tear families apart and cripple the lives of those it comes into contact with.

Throughout human history, sin has left countless millions of people broken, destitute, and distraught, living lives filled with despair and emptiness. It has become so powerful, pernicious, and insidious that it has resulted in ethnic cleansing in central Africa and the holocaust in Europe. It is seen in the horrific, senseless loss of life in Ukraine.

Sin begins with selfishness and an attitude of “I know best and no one will tell me what I can and can’t do.” It ends in crimes against humanity. God cannot be God and pretend that the devastating and crippling nature of sin does

not matter. Spiritual and moral values matter. Justice matters. Being held responsible for our sin matters.

Yet rather than punish us for our own sins, God’s infinite love punished Christ in our place. “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). All the horror and destructive, toxic wickedness of sin was laid upon Him. There is no explaining it away; there is no minimizing it; there is no getting away from it.

That is why Jesus was able to say at Calvary, “It is finished” (John 19:30). The salvation of humanity was accomplished at the cross. Christ became sin for us and faced the unbridled force of His Father’s judgment and justice—and He did so with an infinite, incomprehensible love.

Please understand that the Easter narrative is not simply an inspiring, uplifting story. It is truly a story of hope and a new beginning, representing light after darkness.

It is not accurate to say, “I believe the early Christians had a wonderful experience of the spirit of Christ living on in His teaching, and over the years the stories eventually morphed into a physical resurrection.” It was not a metaphor who said to Thomas, “put your hand in my side, look at the wounds in my hands” (John 20:27). It was not a parable that quietly appeared to the women at the tomb and reassured them by saying, “Do not be afraid.”

Let us not mock God with metaphor. Let us not sidestep the transcendent, reducing the supernatural to a parable. Resist the temptation to make Easter less incredible than it is. It is too important for that.

I trust you as you enjoy Easter with family, friends, and those you love, you will remember to give thanks for the wonder of the Resurrection and eternal nature of the love of God for you.

*Watch Dr. Gibbons’ messages online at [FirstPresGreenville.org](http://FirstPresGreenville.org) (click the Media tab) and on Fox Carolina, Sunday mornings at 10:30.*