



A STORY TO TELL

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, April 4, 2021

When Jesus drew His last breath from the cross, a great earthquake shook the city of Jerusalem, and the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Behind that curtain stood the Ark of God and the Mercy Seat, where God's presence could be encountered by the high Priest alone. When the curtain was torn in two, it was not to let God out, but to let humanity IN to the Mercy Seat of God.

The Old Rugged Cross

George Bennard

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On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross
The emblem of suffering and shame
And I love that old cross
where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross
Till my trophies at last I lay down
I will cling to the old rugged cross
And exchange it someday for a crown*

Oh that old rugged cross so despised by the world
Has a wondrous attraction for me
For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above
To bear it to dark Calvary

In the old rugged cross
stained with blood so divine
A wondrous beauty I see
For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died
To pardon and sanctify me

To the old rugged cross I will ever be true
It's shame and reproach gladly bear
Then He'll call me someday to my home far away
Where His glory forever I'll share

The Beginning

The story of Easter Sunday began on Good Friday.

It was a day of darkness and grief, as Jesus, the Messianic hope of thousands of Jews was nailed to a cross, like a common criminal, and hung until He died.

That cross, the emblem of suffering and shame, was stained with His precious blood.

But all that He suffered, He suffered willingly—in fact, lovingly—for He suffered to pardon me and extend His holiness to me—and to you, and to a world of lost sinners.

Look! the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

From the cross, Jesus cried out, *"It is finished!"* His mission was complete. The price had been paid in full. Every sinner could go free!

He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.
(Colossians 2:14)

Did you know that your sins were nailed to His cross?

But it won't do you a bit of good to have the prison gate torn from its hinges, if you won't walk out the door into the freedom you've been given. Turn to the Lord. Repent of your wrongs. Put your trust in this gracious act of Christ on your behalf.

Receive His mercy, once and for all, and come, follow Him, for He is our Living Hope.

Living Hope

Brian Johnson, Phil Wickham
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How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation, I turned to Heaven

And spoke Your name into the night
Then through the darkness
Your loving kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished, the end is written
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The King of kings calls me His own
Beautiful Savior, I'm Yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope

*Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope*

Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the roaring Lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me
Jesus, Yours is the victory!

Life on God's Terms

From the time humanity was created in the image of God, we humans have chosen to move away from that relationship, preferring to take life into our own hands, and live it on our own terms.

That is the essence of sin—that is the chasm that stands between us and God.

And Jesus is the name that liberates us from that darkness. He is the Light that brings us hope. The Savior has broken every chain—even those with which we are still entangled. Death has lost its grip, because Life has taken hold of me.

Christ's death purchased our pardon, and His resurrection sealed that promise. When He roared to life again, death's claim was forever broken.

Victory belongs to the Lord, *and* to those who follow Him faithfully. *Are you one of those?* If not, you can begin today. Today is the day of your salvation!

Victor's Crown

Darlene Zschech, Israel Houghton, Kari Jobe

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You are always fighting for us
Heaven's angels all around
My delight is found in knowing
That You wear the victor's crown
You're my Help and my Defender
You're my Savior and my Friend
By Your grace I live and breathe to worship You

At the mention of Your greatness
In Your name I will bow down
In Your presence fear is silent
For You wear the victor's crown
Let Your glory fill this temple
Let Your power overflow
By Your grace I live and breathe to worship You

Hallelujah! You have overcome! You have overcome!
Hallelujah! Jesus, You have overcome the world

You are ever interceding
As the lost become the found
You can never be defeated
For You wear the victor's crown
You are Jesus the Messiah
You're the hope of all the world
By Your grace I live and breathe to worship You

Every high thing must come down.
Every stronghold shall be broken.
You wear the victor's crown
You overcome! You overcome!

Hallelujah! You have overcome! You have overcome!
Hallelujah! Jesus, You have overcome the world

At the cross the work was finished
You were buried in the ground
But the grave could not contain You
For You wear the victor's crown

God With Us

Christ has risen from the dead. He's alive!

As Savior and King He intercedes for us. He is praying for you today. To make it through. To grow in faith. To remain strong in spirit. To be bold and do exploits in His name.

In every struggle you face, He is fighting for you—that you will prevail, and not be overcome.

For every decision you must make, He is praying that you will receive His wisdom and be led by His Spirit.

I know you think you can, or think you must, but you cannot do this without Him—you weren't made to. The fullness of life is life lived *with* God, not apart from Him.

All light and beauty come from Him, including the eyes by which to enjoy them. All sound and harmony come from Him, including the ears with which to hear them. All wisdom and understanding come from Him, as does the mind with which to grasp them, and the will with which to act.

In His presence, fear is silent and loses its power, for His *"complete love drives out all fear."* (1 John 4:18)

Every high thing must come down, every stronghold shall be broken—those that confront you from without, and those that confound you from within.

Jesus' victory is stronger than the grave. And that's why His followers will live forever. The grave could not contain Him, and no stronghold can keep you down. Believe it.

When the Temple's curtain was torn in two, it was not to let God out, but to let humanity IN to the Mercy Seat of God.

The tomb where Jesus body had been laid, was closed and sealed to ensure that closure. Three days later, the seal was broken and the stone was rolled away, not to let Christ out, but to let us IN to see the emptiness of death's boast.

"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55 NET)

What Is His Place?

People like to put God into boxes—theological boxes, religious ritual boxes, emotional comfort boxes, philosophical boxes. But God always manages to break out of the containers we prepare for Him.

They buried Jesus in a tomb, rolled a heavy stone across its entrance, sealed it in the name of the Emperor of Rome, and posted a four-man armed guard outside. But on the third day, just as He had said, He arose!

If we could just keep God in His place...

But we can't. You can't define Him. You can't control Him. You can't even understand Him. But you can know Him. As your Savior and your Friend.

He cannot be confined, because *all* the world *is* His place. He made it, He ordered it, and He sustains it. There is nowhere you can go where He is not, if you look for Him. If you look.

And when our world seems beyond our control, it is still under *His* control. If things look hopeless—they are not! Just let Jesus out of the box you have made for Him.

With God, all things are possible! (Matthew 19:26 NLT)

If God can turn a cemetery into a fountain of hope, what can He do with your life? For your marriage? For your circumstances? For your relationships?

Paul prayed (as I have also prayed for you):

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe Him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Now He is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. (Ephesians 1:19-21 NLT)

What can Christ's resurrection power do in your life?

My friend, Bret Allen, says, "To give your life to Christ, to turn over the control to Him, is not a gamble; it's a guarantee!" God is able to do all that He has promised, and more.

As Paul wrote: *"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."* (Ephesians 3:20-21 NIV)

What can Jesus turn around for you? What are you willing to put into His hands?

He's still rolling stones away today. He's still setting prisoners free.

Let Him out of your box. Let God be God in your life.

It's time to make things right with God; it's time to pray. It doesn't end there, but that's where it begins. I urge you to pray this prayer with me, from your heart:

*Lord Jesus Christ, You are God; I am not.
I put my trust, my hope, in You, Lord Jesus.
You died on my behalf to free me.
Now I am free from the power of sin and the fear of judgment.
Thank You.*

*Forgive me right now for the wrong things I have done, or thought to do.
Cleanse my conscience of shame and regret.
Your resurrection from the dead guarantees Your power to perform what You've promised.*

*I relinquish my claim to the control of my life.
You be my Lord, my Leader.
I will follow You. Today, and all my tomorrows.
When I stumble, pick me up.
Where I am weak, be my strength.
Every day, be the Source of my joy and peace.
Thank You.*

Still Rolling Stones

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Out of the shadows, bound for the gallows
A dead man walking, 'til love came calling
Rise up! Rise up!
Six feet under, I thought it was over
An answer to prayer, the voice of a Savior
Rise up! Rise up!

*All at once I came alive
This beating heart, these open eyes
The grave let go, the darkness should have known
You're still rolling stones! You're still rolling stones!*

Now that You saved me, I sing 'cause You gave me
A song of revival, I put it on vinyl
Rise up! Rise up!
I once was blinded, but now I see it
I've heard about the power, and now I believe it
Rise up! Rise up!

I thought that I was too far gone
For everything I've done wrong
Yeah, I'm the one who dug this grave
But You called my name, You called my name

*All at once I came alive
This beating heart, these open eyes
The grave let go, the darkness should have known
You're still rolling stones! You're still rolling stones!*