

UNDENIABLE ENCOUNTERS

In Matthew 28:1-8, we commemorate the pivotal events of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, which stand as the most consequential occurrences in the annals of human history. The passage begins with the dawn of the first day of the week, following the Sabbath, when Mary Magdalene and another Mary approached the tomb. At that moment, a significant earthquake transpired as an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, rolling back the stone that sealed the tomb and taking a seat upon it. The angel's appearance was striking, with a countenance resembling lightning and garments as white as snow, instilling such fear in the guards that they became incapacitated, akin to dead men. The angel then addressed the women, reassuring them not to fear, for he knew they were seeking Jesus, who had been crucified. He proclaimed that Jesus was no longer present, affirming His resurrection as foretold, and invited them to witness the empty tomb.

The angel instructed the women to inform the disciples of Jesus' resurrection, emphasizing that He would precede them into Galilee, where they would encounter Him. Filled with a mixture of fear and great joy, the women hurried away from the tomb to deliver the momentous news to the disciples. This scripture encapsulates an undeniable experience that some may still question, pondering whether Jesus truly died and, if so, whether He indeed rose from the dead. Throughout the scriptures, Jesus had foretold His resurrection, stating that if the temple were destroyed, He would raise it in three days, a concept that many struggled to comprehend. Additionally, He spoke of the necessity of His death, likening it to a grain of wheat that must fall to the ground to bear fruit, as noted in John 12:24. The Bible is replete with references to His impending death and resurrection, underscoring the significance of these events in the Christian faith.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, specifically in verse 29, John the Baptist proclaims the significance of Jesus by exclaiming, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." This declaration, inspired by the Holy Spirit, encapsulates the essence of Jesus' mission on Earth. John identifies Jesus not merely as a figure of historical importance but as the sacrificial Lamb, a title that carries profound theological implications. The reference to Jesus as the Lamb of God draws a parallel to the sacrificial practices of the Jewish tradition, where lambs were offered as sacrifices to atone for sins. This imagery is deeply rooted in the Jewish Passover, as outlined in Exodus chapter 12, where God commanded the Israelites to sacrifice lambs and mark their doorposts with the blood to protect themselves from the impending judgment upon Egypt.

The significance of this act is underscored in Exodus 12:12-13, where God declares His intention to pass through Egypt and execute judgment, emphasizing His authority as the Lord. The blood of the lamb served as a protective sign, ensuring that the households marked by it would be spared from destruction. This historical event established the Passover, a pivotal moment in Jewish history, symbolizing deliverance and divine protection. John the Baptist, in his spiritual vision, recognizes that just as the Israelites were saved from death through the blood of the lamb, so too would humanity be redeemed from sin through the sacrifice of Jesus, the ultimate Lamb of God. This profound connection highlights the continuity of God's

redemptive plan throughout scripture, illustrating the depth of Jesus' role in salvation history.

The notion that if the Lamb of God has indeed taken away the sins of the world, then, akin to the plagues that afflicted Egypt, we too may experience similar trials from time to time is a profound reflection on the nature of human existence. It is essential to recognize that the most pressing issue facing humanity is not the COVID-19 pandemic, as many might believe. Throughout history, various plagues have emerged and receded, and when compared to the catastrophic events of the past, such as those experienced in Egypt, COVID-19 pales in comparison in terms of lethality. Even when juxtaposed with more recent outbreaks like Ebola, which had devastating effects primarily in Africa, the current situation may not be as dire as it seems. While it may feel unprecedented due to its global impact, the true challenge lies in humanity's inherent sinful nature, which Jesus addressed through His sacrifice on the cross, providing a pathway to transcend sin and its consequences.

Moreover, the scriptures are replete with undeniable demonstrations of God's power, which served to fortify the faith of the disciples to the extent that they were willing to sacrifice their lives for their beliefs. The plagues in Egypt stand as a testament to this divine authority. If one were to engage with Pharaoh, whether in the afterlife or in a spiritual realm, and inquire about the might of God, he would undoubtedly recount the unparalleled torment he faced. This historical narrative serves to redefine our understanding of true power; while Pharaoh represented the pinnacle of authority in his time, the events that unfolded under God's command illustrated a power far beyond human comprehension. Such reflections compel us to reconsider our perceptions of strength and authority in the context of divine sovereignty.

Currently, numerous nations are experiencing significant turmoil. Despite possessing advanced military capabilities, such as firearms and jet fighters, the emergence of a seemingly minor threat like COVID-19 has compelled these nations to pause and reflect. For the past couple of months, we have witnessed an unexpected period of peace, illustrating that there is a higher power at work. This situation serves as a reminder that God, the ultimate authority, often reveals His presence through profound and undeniable experiences. Historical accounts, such as the plagues that befell Pharaoh, demonstrate that divine intervention is not to be taken lightly; it underscores the seriousness of God's sovereignty.

In the New Testament, specifically in the Acts of the Apostles, we find compelling evidence of God's power. The boldness exhibited by Peter and John, despite their lack of formal education, was a testament to their time spent with Christ. The miraculous healing of a man, who stood alongside them, left their adversaries speechless, as they could not refute the evident miracle that had taken place. This theme recurs throughout scripture, where God's manifestations are so extraordinary that even skeptics cannot dismiss them. As we celebrate Easter this year, particularly in the context of the ongoing pandemic, it is essential to recognize the enduring power of God that resurrected Jesus. This season invites us to seek transformative encounters with the divine, affirming that God remains a God of possibilities, eager to reveal His greatness in our lives.

Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the disciples of Jesus, famously declared

that he would not believe unless he could see and touch the wounds of Christ. This assertion is recorded in the Gospel of John, specifically in chapter 20, where Jesus, in a moment of profound compassion, appeared to Thomas. In verses 24 and onward, Jesus acknowledged the varying degrees of faith among individuals, proclaiming a blessing upon those who believe without having seen. He invited Thomas to touch His hands and side, providing tangible evidence of His resurrection. Upon witnessing this, Thomas responded with a heartfelt declaration in verse 28, exclaiming, "My Lord and my God." Although the scripture may not explicitly state that he fell to his knees, such a profound acknowledgment of divinity would naturally evoke a posture of reverence and humility.

In this context, it is essential to recognize that God desires to grant each of us undeniable experiences that will lead us to a similar recognition of His sovereignty in our lives. Whether in our marriages, businesses, or in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, these experiences can bring us to our knees in worship, affirming that the extraordinary works in our lives are solely the result of the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. This power transcends human wisdom, strength, or connections, reminding us that it is through divine intervention that we witness transformative changes. As articulated in 1 John 1:1, the author emphasizes the tangible nature of their experiences with Christ, stating that they have heard, seen, and touched the Word of Life. This testimony serves as a powerful reminder of the reality of faith and the profound impact of personal encounters with the divine.

The undeniable reality of the encounters experienced by those who have lost their lives, the martyrs, is profound. Many had moments where escape was possible; Steven, for instance, could have chosen to flee. However, he remained steadfast, much like the apostles described in Acts chapter 4. As one delves deeper into the narrative, it becomes clear that the apostles were confronted with threats, instructed not to speak in the name of Jesus. Yet, they boldly declared their inability to deny the truth of what they had witnessed. This conviction is echoed in their testimony about the tangible experiences they had with the Word of Life, which they felt compelled to share. It is a call for individuals today to forge a covenant with God, affirming that throughout their lives, they will be able to declare, as stated in 1 John 1:1, the profound truths they have encountered and will pass on to future generations.

As we reflect on the challenges posed by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, one must consider the narratives we will share in the years to come. Will we recount tales of despair, loss, and devastation, or will we testify to the goodness of God, who, despite the trials, intervened on our behalf? It is essential to recognize that our faith can lead to transformative experiences, allowing us to proclaim the glory of Jesus. As I conclude, I urge those present to seek out these significant encounters during these tumultuous times. It is crucial to trust in God for undeniable experiences that will fortify our faith and provide hope, and I will briefly outline a few of these transformative encounters that can be sought after in quick succession.

In this season, it is essential for us to place our trust in God, particularly in seeking undeniable divine direction for the fulfillment of our destinies. This concept is vividly illustrated through the transformative experience of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, as recounted in Acts chapter 9. Initially, Saul was fervently pursuing the disciples of Jesus, intent on imprisoning them for their beliefs. The scripture

describes how he sought authorization from the high priest to apprehend those who followed "The Way," a term used to refer to the early followers of Christ. His journey took a dramatic turn when, as he approached Damascus, a brilliant light enveloped him from heaven, leading to a profound encounter with Jesus. This moment marked a pivotal shift in his life, as he was confronted with the reality of his actions and the divine purpose that awaited him.

As Saul lay on the ground, he heard a voice asking, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" This question prompted a moment of deep reflection, leading him to inquire, "Who are you, Lord?" The response he received was life-altering: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." This undeniable encounter not only revealed the truth of his actions but also set him on a path toward a new destiny. Trembling and astonished, Saul sought guidance, asking, "What do you want me to do?" This marked the beginning of his transformation into Paul, a figure whose life would significantly impact the early Christian church. From that moment forward, Saul's destiny was irrevocably changed, illustrating the power of divine direction in fulfilling one's purpose.

It is difficult to ascertain your circumstances prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent events that unfolded. However, my heartfelt prayer for you today is that if you find yourself misaligned, expending your passion, knowledge, and resources on pursuits that do not serve your true purpose, may the God who resurrected Jesus from the dead guide you onto the correct path. I pray that a transformative change will begin in your life, akin to the profound changes experienced by the Apostle Paul. In the name of the Lord Jesus, may you receive undeniable divine direction that leads to the fulfillment of your destiny.

We express our gratitude to the Lord, acknowledging His name and the undeniable light that Jesus brings into our lives. The Scriptures affirm that this light shines in darkness, and darkness cannot overcome it, as stated in John 1:3-5. May the illuminating presence of Jesus shine upon your heart, guiding you toward clarity and understanding. Furthermore, it is imperative that we place our trust in God for profound wisdom and divine strategies, similar to those that Joseph received in Egypt. As recorded in Genesis 41, Pharaoh recognized Joseph's exceptional discernment and wisdom, declaring that there was no one like him. I want to encourage you today that there is a designated place for you, a territory prepared by God, along with positions of authority and resources that await your claim.

As we transition into this new season, I extend my heartfelt prayers that you will experience profound wisdom and strategic insight in the name of the Lord Jesus. Reflecting on the moment when Joseph stood before Pharaoh, it became evident that the wisdom he possessed was divinely inspired. Pharaoh recognized that such insight could only come from God, as Joseph not only interpreted the dreams but also provided a comprehensive strategy to address the impending famine. This moment serves as a powerful reminder that it is essential for the church to move beyond merely demonstrating spiritual gifts, such as interpretation, to actively offering tangible solutions that can transform circumstances. Joseph's ability to outline a plan for food security and economic stability left Pharaoh astonished, and I pray that you, too, will receive similar wisdom in your endeavors.

Furthermore, I urge you to trust in God for undeniable miracles and divine interventions that accompany such wisdom and strategy. The manifestation of divine insight often leads to extraordinary outcomes, including miracles and favor that defy human understanding. Joseph's rise to the position of Prime Minister, despite being a foreigner and a former slave, exemplifies the preferential treatment that comes from God's favor. This divine favor aligns with the wisdom imparted by God, resulting in remarkable breakthroughs. May you experience a fresh outpouring of God's favor in your life during this season, leading to undeniable miracles, divine interventions, and an increase reminiscent of the blessings bestowed upon Isaac.

In Genesis 26, the scripture illustrates the remarkable journey of Isaac, who, during a time of famine, sowed seeds in the land and experienced an extraordinary harvest, yielding a hundredfold return within the same year. This divine blessing led to his immense prosperity, which not only marked the beginning of his success but also continued to flourish until he became exceedingly wealthy. This narrative exemplifies the profound influence of God's hand and the manifestation of resurrection power in one's life. It is a testament to the potential for similar blessings in our own lives during this season and in the years to come, invoking the name of the Lord Jesus. Such divine favor can even transform adversaries into allies, as seen in the subsequent verses where Abimelech approaches Isaac, acknowledging the evident power of God in his life and seeking to establish a peaceful relationship.

Furthermore, the account highlights the undeniable favor that Isaac experienced, which elevated him to a position of prominence within his community. The transformation in his circumstances was so significant that those who once opposed him sought to reconcile and form an alliance with him. This theme of radical life transformation is echoed in the New Testament through the example of Peter. In Luke 22, Peter's denial of Jesus serves as a poignant reminder of human frailty. Despite his initial shortcomings, the power of resurrection ultimately leads to profound change in Peter's life, illustrating that true encounters with the divine can result in remarkable personal transformation. These narratives collectively underscore the potential for God's transformative power to effect change in our lives, encouraging us to seek and embrace such encounters.

Peter had experienced a multitude of events throughout his life, yet there remained a profound transformation that had yet to occur within his heart. Initially, he struggled with faith, but following the resurrection of Christ, a pivotal encounter on the day of Pentecost marked a significant change in him. This encounter catalyzed a metamorphosis, enabling Peter to emerge as a renewed individual. It is my hope that you too may experience a similar transformation in this season, through the grace of the Lord Jesus. In Acts chapter 2, after the resurrection, Peter boldly addressed the crowd, demonstrating a newfound confidence and authority.

In verse 14 of Acts chapter 2, Peter stood with the eleven apostles, raising his voice to proclaim a message of clarity and conviction to the men of Judea and all those residing in Jerusalem. He urged them to listen attentively to his words, asserting that the events they were witnessing were not the result of drunkenness, as some had speculated, but rather the fulfillment of prophetic words spoken long ago. Peter's declaration was rooted in a deep understanding of scripture, as he articulated the significance of the moment, referencing the prophecies of Joel. This transformation,

fueled by the resurrection power, empowered Peter to interpret and explain the scriptures, allowing him to convey the current workings of God in the world. His boldness and clarity exemplified the radical life change that can occur when one truly encounters the risen Christ.