



Jesus: The Ultimate Early Riser

What is it that brings us out an *hour sooner* on *this* Sunday? Do we have a sunrise service to allow us to get to our individual family Easter gatherings later on? Or is it so that we have more time for our congregation's breakfast afterward? No. Christians have a tradition of celebrating Easter early in the day

because the main event of Easter, the resurrection of Christ from the dead, took place early in the morning.

Mention is made in each of the four Gospel accounts that although the sun was barely up, things had already started happening that first Easter. Mark says: "*Very early...just after sunrise, they [the women] were on their way to the tomb*" (16:2 NIV), Matthew says, "*At dawn*" (28:1), Luke says, "*very early in the morning*" (24:1), while John records that it was "*early, while it was still dark*" (20:1). This is first-thing-in-the-morning early when the black of night is just starting to turn dark purple.

Why so early, Jesus? You had all day, after all! The Bible does not give us the answer in so many words, but we know well enough that everything the Lord did was for us and for our salvation. He came, as He said, "*not to be served, but to serve*" (Matthew 20:28). Therefore, the timing of His resurrection—His early rising—was the right time for it to happen. It was in the best interests of those whom He had come to serve. That's why the Lord got up so early.

It was surely good for the women that the Lord had risen earlier than they had. What if He had not? They would have found the stone across the entrance, and they also would have to convince the guards to let them into the tomb. If they had been able to enter the burial chamber at all, they would have seen the body, emptied their spice jars, and cried—sorrowing all the more at the death of their Master, remembering the events of the previous Friday. They would have gone back with little hope in their hearts, having seen no angel to spur them on to remember Jesus' words that He would rise again the third day. Having seen what they expected, a corpse, would they have gone back later to see if He was alive? It would not have been likely.

But Jesus, the ultimate early riser, had awakened before they did! He rose early enough in the morning to give His people hope! Thanks be to God! After hearing the messenger of God, the ladies left the tomb trembling and bewildered, it is true, but they did not leave downcast. They ran. They ran to tell the news to the disciples. Already the Word was beginning to work in their hearts to comfort and to cheer them: He has risen!

What a morning! What a glorious, *early* morning! It makes us wish we had been there too. It makes us wish that our early mornings could be full of such stunning, heart-changing, earth-shattering excitement.

What are *your* early mornings like? Are you a "morning person," as they say? Do you get up and greet the first streaks of dawn? Do you like the thought of a brand new day just beginning? Sometimes we welcome the break of day, especially if day seems to hold good things in store for us. Other times, however, the early morning can have the opposite effect on our attitude.

The person who must leave for work every day at three in the morning might not think so much of those early hours. To awake early is no great thing either when the day promises to be hard, when you know there is something difficult you must do that you've been worrying about; or when you know that upon waking you must face some sadness that was blissfully not part of your consciousness during the hours of sleeping. There are days when we just do not want to see the early dawn come at all, when we click the snooze button and think, "No! It just can't be morning. I can't do it!"

But by rising early on *Easter* morning, Christ has changed our early mornings too! For as we come to the brink of each new day, as we rub the sleep from our eyes in the new light and think, "I can't face this day," we can recall those women starting out for the tomb while it was still dark and we can know this: Jesus my Savior is *already up!* He is risen. He goes with you—even ahead of you—into each day.

- "*Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,*" (Psalm 143:8 NIV), and it does, for He is risen.
- "*I have swept your sins away like the morning mist*" (Isaiah 44:22 NIV), and Jesus has, for He is risen.
- "*In the morning you hear my voice*" (Psalm 5:3 NIV), and He does, for He is risen.
- "*In the morning I will sing of your love*" (Psalm 59:16 NIV), and we do, for He is risen.
- "*Be our strength every morning*" (Isaiah 33:2 NIV), and He is, for He is risen.

Now each of your early mornings can become for you an opportunity to remember the early rising of Jesus, and to remember that no matter the hour or the day, He is already awake—for *you*.

Welcome happy morning! Praise be to Jesus, the ultimate Early Riser! Amen.

— Pastor David P. Schaller

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