

# ***Getting Past Saturday***

**John 19:38 - 20:10**

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It's one of the most difficult times a person can ever experience. The time just after a loved one has died. Perhaps they've been keeping a vigil during a lingering illness, and finally the inevitable arrives. Death comes. We'll sit with the body for a while - very sacred space and time, that is.

But then, the phone call has to be made. And the van from the funeral home pulls up in the driveway. The stretcher enters. And - no matter how gentle the workers are, there's a point where they leave with the body.

It is

oh

so

final!

Gone.

Empty.

The followers of Jesus didn't have the luxury of making any phone calls.

If there was to be a dignified end for the horror of Friday's execution saga, they would have to see to it.

And they do.

Joseph and Nicodemus - who had been so cautious before, bravely step forward and give a royal burial to Jesus.

100 pounds of spices - an amount generally used only for a king or other very important individual.

A new tomb carved from rock.

Linen cloth.

But then they leave.

It's over.

Finished.

Final.

Nothing more to do.

And Saturday begins.

What happens on Saturday?

None of the gospels say.

It's the time between Friday and Sunday -

Between death & resurrection.

Between sunset and sunrise.

Between darkness and light.

Saturday is the time of uncertainty.

What do the disciples do on Saturday?

Well, this much they **don't** do.

They don't scatter.

They hunker down.

They could well have left town right away before sundown on Friday - try to put as much distance between themselves and Jesus' enemies as possible that first night. And then, after the Sabbath was over, they could have resumed the journey, and headed back home to Galilee.

But they don't.

They stay put.

Linger behind.

At least - we read of Peter & John doing that.

And perhaps they convinced the others to do the same.

Why?

We're not really sure.

After all - we're given very clear signals that they didn't expect anything more after Friday.

It was over.

Period.

But - well,

it's like leaving the cemetery after the burial.

Those are very hard steps to take.

Each one makes your feet feel like lead.

No one wants to be the first to leave.

So often people linger behind.

Like John & Peter.

They linger - through the Saturday time.

The in-between time.

The "gray zone."

Have you ever been awake through the night? Perhaps you were going through a difficult time and couldn't sleep. Maybe the baby was acting up, or sick. Possibly you were camping and got stuck with night watch detail. Whatever the case, if you *have* been awake, you've gone through what I call the "gray zone", those moments after the darkest night, but before daylight really comes; the moments when you feel the most tired, the air seems the most damp and the coldest, and time moves the slowest. For those awake during the night, this "gray zone" is the most difficult time to deal with.

Life sometimes throws us into gray zones - difficult situations that just seem to drag on.

Many of you have gone through these times - when some initial catastrophe or tragedy happens, it seems that somehow the human body and mind musters the strength needed to deal with the situation. We collect all our emotional energy; the adrenalin begins

to flow and we can deal with things. That's in the initial stages, the really dark, dark moments, the one end of the scale.

Then there's the other end, when things start to get better and we can see visible improvement. It's like the light begins to dawn on a new day in our life. Things begin to warm up, feel better, look better. It's kind of like spring time, life begins again.

**But.....**

It's those in-between times.

You've been dealing with crisis for some time.

There's been a bit of change.... maybe.

But not much. Certainly not like you can say it will be over soon. You sure can't see that proverbial light at the end of the tunnel very clearly.

When crisis turns into a grind.

When the pain doesn't let up.

When the financial situation just doesn't get better.

When the loneliness seems permanent.

When the kids just don't phone home.

When it seems like no one will ever ask you out.

When you wonder if your body will ever function normally again.

That's the gray zone.

Been there?

Saturday - happens between the last verse of John 19 and the first verse of John 20.

He's dead.

It's over.

Hope gone.

But now what?

Can't think.

Not sure.

Till Mary comes bursting in with news of a grave robbery.

And the boys, John and Peter, high tale it to the grave.

John's the athlete. He gets there first.

Mind swirling.

He looks in and sees -

the linen wrappings lying there.

John hesitates.

Peter finally catches up, out of breath.

Now, Peter's never been the timid one - except for three times in the outer courtyard on Thursday evening.

He marches right into the death chamber.

And

also sees the linen wrappings lying there.

And the head covering.  
Rolled up and put aside.

The greek language used to describe the linens and head covering mean something to the effect of an orderly layout. They could have been re-rolled, that seems to be the case for the head covering -

OR -

and this seems to be the case for the linen body wrapping, they were still in the form of the body - laying there. Like the body had melted right through the cloth and left.

It certainly is NOT the description of a snatching, with wrapping ripped off and tossed to the side.

It is neat.

It is orderly.

It is deliberate.

It is IN CONTROL.

John sees it, and,

says verse 8

he believed.

What had seemed so final

so cruel

so hopeless

three days before - the cloth that wrapped Jesus -

the vision of tragedy and pain and despair

now becomes the launching point,

the catalyst

to belief.

John sees those cloths that had wrapped up and contained the body of Jesus, now laying quietly,

peacefully,

**empty.**

And believes.

He comes to believe that the power of God is greater than the power of evil.

That pain and death have been overcome by healing and life.

It was a new beginning.

And the end of Saturday.

The boys,

well they head home with a whole new view on life.

They knew

oh, yes, how they now knew that  
despite the worst of evil  
despite the flow of blood  
despite the desperate pain  
despite all the powers of darkness they had seen and experienced  
and  
despite all that time in Saturday

God  
remained  
in  
control.

God knew what he was doing.  
God hasn't wandered away,  
gotten distracted,  
forgotten about his people.  
God hasn't lost it.

In spite of the horrible mess that Satan so desperately tries to cause, the chaos he tries to inflict, and the destruction he tries to spread with his powerful forces of evil, and his legions of demons,

In spite of all that, God remains firmly in control of all history.  
Every step.  
Every moment.  
Every life.

The empty grave clothes tell that story.  
God's power of life is **greater** than Satan's death power.

John believed.  
It's what you and I can believe on Easter Sunday, too.  
No matter what the circumstances of our lives may show  
no matter how deep into Saturday-living we may be.

Hang onto the truth that God keeps the last word.

It's what the old testament figure of suffering, Job, had to believe that.  
If you've read the account of his tragedy-scarred life as the bible presents it, you'll get to read a long, agonizing speech of someone in the gray zone of life.

At the end of his account, Job is talked to by God.  
And -  
this part we need to catch -  
God **DOESN'T** explain all that has been going on.  
He never does.  
Job never finds out all the behind-the-scenes stuff.

God simply tells Job, "*You gotta trust me, Job.*"  
Which he ends up doing.  
Faith.  
That's all Job has.

Or -

there's a chapter in the New Testament that presents image after image of people caught in Saturday living.

Hebrews 11 is a whole chapter full of anecdotes about people who found themselves in the gray zone of life - really difficult situations that just **DIDN'T** make sense. But they kept going, spurred on, buoyed by, strengthened and encouraged by the faith knowledge that the little bit of reality they saw

wasn't  
the  
whole  
picture.

God, the Master Planner, could see the big picture,  
and that He **would**, one day, pull it all together.

Somehow.

Someway.

Someday.

That's a difficult thing to remember.  
A hard thing, sometimes, to believe.

That God will "*work all things together for the good of those who love Him.*" --  
Romans 8.

The Bible in those few words doesn't say that all things are good, or pretty, or enjoyable.

It says that God will take **all** things,  
even the painful, dark, smelly things of life and somehow  
-- somehow --  
work them towards good.

Twisting what Satan meant for evil, and turning it towards good.  
Taking us through Friday, and Saturday -  
and finally,  
to Sunday - to resurrection life.

Believe that, friends.  
That God is in the business of taking us from Saturday to Sunday.  
Believe that.

Only - well -

let me vent here on a tangent for just a minute.

I have heard far too many people sit back and evaluate the lives of others who are in the midst of a difficult experience, and then have the nerve to speculate on why this or that is happening, and what God has in mind with this all; what He's going to do about it.

I cringe when I hear that. Either from those who are themselves suffering, or from folks in the peanut gallery, well-meaning or otherwise.

I cringe because we're playing God when we do that. We're making like we can see the big picture. Which we can't.

So let's be sensitive and very humble and hesitant about what we say in this way, OK?

All right - back to the issue.

John and Peter head back home.  
Next time we see them is further down in chapter 20.  
Where they're huddled together with the other believers.  
Still not quite sure what to make of all of this.  
Still terrified of the enemies out there.  
Still trying to process the new reality from the grave site.

Some of them still in the process of moving from the gray Saturday zone to the new Sunday reality.

Sorting it out.

Trying to believe it.

They work on it together.  
Which is what we're all about as a church, too.

Sticking together as a community.

Supporting each other.

Encouraging each other.

Building the faith in each other that will get us through those deep gray Saturday moments, that will help us look with the eyes of faith beyond the dull place of today and know that beyond the limits of our often fogged-in present there is a better reality waiting.

Helping each other put together the pieces of the puzzle of life.

Knowing that the final piece - the key piece - the best piece  
is in God's hand.

Perhaps he'll put some new pieces in the puzzle in this life.  
So that we can smile again.

That the pain does leave.

That new friends do appear.

That relationships are restored.  
That a better job does come.

Perhaps it is so that in the middle of our struggles we become able to better help others limp along in their dark zones.

And perhaps stuff happens on a level so deep and mysterious that we won't ever see it this side of glory -

but when we get across to the other side  
when we are ushered into heaven by the One in whom we believe  
the One who stands as eternal Victor over death  
perhaps then it will all fall into proper perspective.

As we enter the final peace - the peace that the graves clothes symbolize.

The ultimate joy.  
Eternal Easter.  
With Jesus.