

The Great Reversal

The events of Easter reveal God as the God of resurrection, miracles and extremities.

Dr Tan-Chow May Ling shares how Easter radically shakes up our everyday existence in the 21st century.



AS CHRISTIANS, we know that Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday are events pivotal to our faith. But what exactly happened on Easter week?

Good Friday was a day bloodied by murderous violence that shell-shocked and terrified the disciples. To the first disciples, the cross looked like the end of the story – the end of the road for Jesus. It was a day of numb despair. If God was defeated, what hope is there?

Holy Saturday was a time of frightening God-forsakenness. A time of hope lost forever, a total desolation. Jesus was dead and buried together with

their hope. The officially sealed tomb and the presence of a squad of Roman soldiers standing guard over it was a stark reminder of the finality of Jesus' death. An empty void and an anti-climax characterised this day. For the first disciples there was no remarkable tomorrow on the horizon. No reason to imagine an imminent triumph.

Easter Sunday – Just when abysmal darkness threatened to completely overwhelm human existence, something unimaginable happened. A miracle exploded into the desolation of Good Friday and Holy Saturday clearly showing that God is a God who holds the power of manoeuvre.

An earthquake and an angel rolled away the stone. Indeed, Easter was an event of seismic proportions where the greatest reversal took place. It was a God-sized event!

What did these events accomplish?

We could say that through these events, God accomplished "The Great Reversal".

Good Friday: The reversal of violence

With Jesus Christ on the cross, we have the reversal of violence. The violence of the crucifixion did not evoke divine retaliation but the outpouring of divine compassion and mercy expressed in the most hauntingly heart wrenching words, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

Here, love overcame hate. Instead of retaliation, Jesus submitted Himself to the murderous animosity and violence of His accusers. Here we see that God did not respond to human "power" with power but with weakness.

Jesus said, "No man takes My life...I lay it down." In every mission, we have a choice like Jesus.

The Cross is God's powerful weakness which appears to be such an oxymoron but was a reversal of all arrogant powers and a display of God's wisdom. By non-retaliation, God out-manoeuvred all human's arrogant attempts and ended up remaining firmly

and forever in human history. In the cross, violence was denied its finality.

The final act on Good Friday was not violence, but the outpouring of divine compassion and mercy.

When Jesus cried, "It is finished!" (Luke 19:30), it was not a cry of defeat and termination but a victorious affirmation of what was done, accomplished and achieved. As our Lord Jesus Christ died, He conquered.

Holy Saturday: The reversal of God-forsakenness

Death always brings total desolation, anticlimax and meaninglessness. But Jesus experienced it all on our behalf. **Christ's aloneness in the grave on Holy Saturday declares that in our deaths, we do not die alone – the Son of God keeps company with us.**

Holy Saturday declares the impossible – that Someone else could die in our place. God became our substitute. He is God *for* me and not against me. It was the reversal of the alienation and curse brought by death. This reversal was not a barren void but a pregnant emptiness that would burst forth the next day.

Easter Sunday: The reversal of destruction

Easter Sunday was the climax of the reversal where the tomb of death became the womb of life. Death was swallowed up in victory. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). It was a day where all that caused separation

and injury was overcome by that which could heal and create. For the first disciples their despair and desolation was dramatically reversed and transformed into bold declaration and praise – *“My Lord and God!”* *“He is risen!”*

Bonhoeffer said, “Socrates mastered the art of dying, but Christ overcame death as the last enemy.” The difference between Socrates and Christ is that Christ did what was beyond human possibility.

How does God’s Great Reversal affect us today?

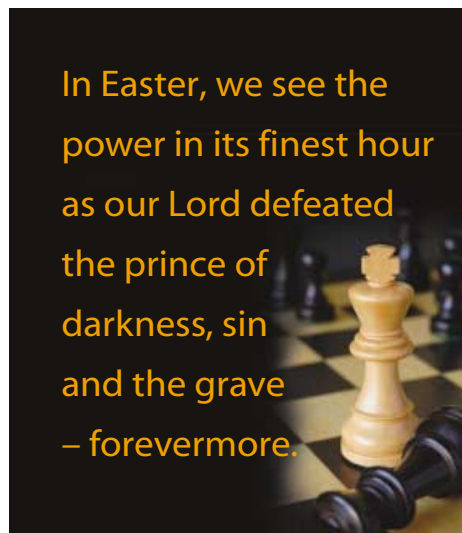
The Resurrection is an unmanageable mystery. We must never allow the Easter mystery to be disassociated from our life today. Easter proves that Jesus is a God who is for us and not against us.

Easter re-defines who we are

The Great Reversal of Easter re-creates and establishes our core identity. At our core, we are “Good Friday and Easter people.” Dying and rising characterise our life. Baptism has to do with the dying and rising again in Christ, being conformed to His death and then being conformed to His glory. This brings with it transformation at the deepest core of our being. The Christian life always has death in its beginning but glory in its ending.

Being “Easter and Good Friday people” makes us a self-giving people who are no longer just self-preserving. We exist to be agents of creative goodness. It requires character and strength to be a ‘people for others’. This must not be done stoically and with resignation but neither is it manipulative.

Just like “Jesus, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross...” (Hebrews 12:2b), joy is our inspiration and inscription.



The Resurrection is the genesis of Christian joy and living. This resurrection joy is irrepressible and not self-contained but rather, an overflowing joy. This joy is not mere optimism and logical positive thinking but it is joy that is attuned to God’s unmanageable grace. It is being alive to the God who does not change.

Easter re-orientates our life in this in-between time

Easter re-defines and empowers us to live in this in-between time where the effects of The Great Reversal have begun but have not yet culminated. We live in the already-and-not-yet, where suffering and death are a reality. The resurrection does not ignore this reality. We live only in the inauguration of God’s resurrection power. We have yet to experience its culmination. **It is a partial beginning rather than a total fulfillment.**

Resurrection power does not offer us immunity from the slings and arrows of life or immediate deliverance and solutions to life's problems. Neither is it a 'name it and claim it' power that can be managed by man. We face a problem when we have an 'either or' kind of thinking with regard to the cross and resurrection. **The Cross and the Resurrection are inseparable and must be held in tension.** Either extreme is wrong and disillusioning. Like Paul, our power exists with weakness but God's power is made perfect in our weakness.

Paul uses two metaphors to make this point, one from farming and one from finance. In this life we experience but the "first fruits" of the Spirit's power and presence, not the full harvest, and as a result, in much of life we can but only "groan inwardly" (Romans 8:23). Or again, to date we know only a partial down payment of God's full resurrection power, but this partial deposit guarantees our full redemption in the future (2 Corinthians 1:22, 55, Ephesians 1:13-14). And so, we can proclaim with him, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16). Resurrection power is not brute force, but the experience of an immense and life-transforming love.

For us, adversities are not a signal of defeat but they become the womb of unimaginable possibilities and power. You can laugh without joy when you laugh in resignation but you cannot be joyful without laughter. Laughter is our privilege and power – a sign of resurrection power that will not crack under pressure.

May our response to the Resurrection be the laughter of rejoicing. Resurrection is a Laughing Matter! The world will never know the truth of Easter unless we live "Easter lives"! May we describe this living as an *overflow*. And may this overflow be characterised by praise to God, love in the community, and mission to the world.

In short, it means to live in wonderment and joyful hope, not optimism or positive thinking. **It is being deeply aware of God's presence and being open to God's unmanageable grace.**

The Heart of the Easter message

In John 2:19, Jesus boldly said to the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." Paul exclaims in Philippians 3:10-11, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead."

In the cross and the empty tomb, we see power in its finest hour as our Lord defeated the prince of darkness, sin and the grave – forevermore.

The Resurrection is a miracle that makes a difference. Because Christ is alive, eternal life exists on both sides of the grave, and we are invited to enter the life and light and power of God *right now*.

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