

# Easter Sunday

## What Was That Story Again?

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When I was a young boy my mother, who was a voracious reader, would often take the time to sit down and read me a story. Many of you had parents who took the time to sit down and read you a story. Mom would read all sorts of stories to me, especially ones from the Bible. She had this big book called Hurlbut's Stories of the Bible --- and from it she would read all sorts of wild and amazing tales from the pages of scripture. But the favorite of all books she would read to me was Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. I can still see the book in my memory --- and I can imagine how exhausted I must have made her when time after time when she asked what story I wanted to hear, I would say, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." Children are like that you know; when they hear a good story they want to hear it over and over again. And I wanted to hear Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs over and over again. Who knows why? Was it the rag tag dwarfs that humored me? Was it the evil jealousy of the wicked stepmother? Was it the fair beauty of Snow White herself? Or maybe, just maybe, it was the ending? As sure as I was of how the story was going to end --- Snow White in her eternal sleep getting kissed by the handsome prince and as a result being brought to life (my apologies to any of you for having just ruined the ending for you) maybe that was the part I wanted to hear over and over again --- that in the end the wicked stepmother and her evil spell do not win the day --- love comes and brings the fair maiden back to life. It was an ending of which I never grew tired. It was an ending of which I never grew tired.

Most of us, I suspect, had that kind of story when we were young. A story we wanted read over and over again. That favorite little volume that when any adult offered to read we went directly to the bookshelf for. It didn't matter how sure we were of the ending ... we wanted to hear it again.

It didn't change though when we became adults. We still have our stories we want to hear or see over and over again. Some of you have DVD's in your closets or movies purchased in your Amazon account that get pulled out on a regular basis. Some of you are intrigued over the life of a certain historical figure and you have read every biography. Some have a novel that they admit to having read four or five times. Same story, same ending --- but you never grow tired of it. My copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is beyond repair from how many times I've read it. I used to read to my daughter *The Grinch who Stole Christmas* several times every Christmas --- until finally I realized that I was the one who wanted to hear the story, not her.

During the War of 1812 after the British had captured Washington, DC and made their way north to Baltimore --- a Washington lawyer who had traveled to Baltimore witnessed from a distance the great battle at Fort McHenry where the Americans bravely and successfully defended their fortification. The image of the 15-star flag furling through the night induced Francis Scott Key to write the story of the American's defiance and courage. He put the story to verse and later the verse was put to the tune of an old English song --- and we had the Star Spangled Banner. And for 200 years we have been singing it ... and we never grow tired of it. Same story, same ending ... frankly, a very difficult song to sing, few of us can hit all the notes -- - but we never grow tired of it.

Our Jewish friends spent this weekend re-enacting their story around their family table. The great story of Passover - the liberation from Egypt and slavery.

And so here we are on Easter Sunday. Amidst all the lilies and wicker baskets and the jelly beans and the plastic grass and the chocolate bunnies and the hint of spring --- we

gather, squeezed into padded pews with lunch plans to follow ---- what are we here for? To think of what we could be doing? Beach? Golf? Meet the Press? Bacon and eggs?

What are we here for? Well, we are here to hear the story, aren't we? We want to hear the story again.

It is a story that started for a lot of us back in December when we gathered amidst different flowers and in the shadows of candlelight. We squeezed as well into these pews to hear the story begin. And it began when the shepherds and wise men traveled to Bethlehem and found lying in a cattle trough the love of God. The love of God in flesh in the child named Jesus. And they wondered, could God love us this much to become one of us? And the angels sang and peace on earth was proclaimed when God's love came down and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. It is story that continued as we've read about how the love of God in Jesus walked this earth and how he traveled from town to town telling about God's love and demonstrating love's power. We remember the stories of how he laid his hands upon the children and blessed them. Of how he laid his hands upon the sick and healed them. Of how he laid his hands upon the eyes of the blind and gave them sight. Of how he laid his hands upon the dead and brought them back to life. And we wondered with all the people ... could God's love be this wonderful and this powerful?

But there is also evil in this story. The wicked one must cast his spell. And so we've read and heard of how this fair and beautiful love was unjustly condemned. We've watched the horror on his followers' faces as the evil one came and dragged him away --- we watched as love was ridiculed and mocked and eventually sent to death. We could see the shock and confusion and fear of those followers as they dragged love away and nailed him to a tree. And we could not believe our ears when love in his last breaths ... still loved them enough to say that he had forgiven them even this.

But even that is small consolation when in our story we hear him draw his last breath and we see them pierce his side and we watch them lay him in the tomb. Love, for as good

as it has lasted, has gone apparently the way of all flesh. And so on the Saturday after Good Friday --- this story turns out to be no greater than any other love story --- good while it lasted.

So why are we here? We're here because we know it's not the end of the story. We're here because we know that while those disciples of Jesus who had seen the love of God pouring through him day in and day out --- while those men are hiding away somewhere in the recesses of Jerusalem --- we know about those women who are stumbling their way through that cemetery --- coming to pay their last respects. We know what's going to happen. We know that they'll see the angel, we know that they will see the stone rolled away ... we know that they will be sent to tell the disciples that the Lord has risen, and we know that as they trip over themselves on the way out of that cemetery --- they will see Jesus. They will see the Son of God. They will see the love of God in the flesh. And they will fall down and worship him. And they will fall down and worship him because when they see Jesus, when that moment comes and standing before them is the risen Lord it is then that they know this is a story that is never going to end. God's life and love is never going to end.

And that, my friends, is an ending we never grow tired of. We can hear it over and over again. And the reason we never grow tired of it is that it's not really an ending. It's really just the beginning. You know how when you are reading a real good book you get this feeling that you really don't want it to end because it's that good. Well, I submit to you that this is a story that has an ending we want to get to because when we get to it we can see that it is only the beginning. When we see Jesus appear in that cemetery to those baffled followers --- we know that life is really just beginning for them. God's love and life for them is never going to end.

In that great story of C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle* the children who finally enter into the heavenly regions of the real Narnia -- and Lewis describes it this way, "For them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and title page; now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great

Story which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”

That’s an amazing story.

Any of us who have read the book or seen the movie *Unbroken* know that Louis Zamperini had an amazing story. Gifted with very fast legs, Louis qualified and competed in the 1936 Berlin Olympics dazzling the crowd including one Adolph Hitler whose hand he shook after the race. Just a few years later he found himself fighting Hitler as a bombardier in the U.S. Army Air Corp. Due to mechanical difficulty his plane went down in the Pacific and he and two other surviving crew members were left for dead floating in the sea. No one survives that kind of ordeal for more than a few days, but Luis and one of the other two survived for 33 days until they were captured by the Japanese. That’s when things got really bad and Louis Zamperini suffered terrible punishment by the guards who beat him to an inch of his life. But then came the end of the war and Louis’ return. But that’s when things got bad again. And PTSD led Louis into a pit of depression and drinking and thinking that this was it. This was how life was going to end – broken in every way. And when you are reading Laura Hillebrand’s great account you wonder – is this really how it’s going to end? But then enter one fiery evangelist at the Los Angeles Coliseum name Billy Graham and Louis, badgered by his wife, agrees to go. And that’s where he learns that the story isn’t over. There’s another chapter. An eternal chapter. And Luis gives his life to the risen Savior and he becomes an ambassador for forgiveness. Traveling back to Japan and forgiving his captors face to face. And speaking to tens of thousands about the power of God’s love.

You see, for the Easter people, the story never ends and every chapter is better than the one before.

So when the apostle says, “I am convinced ... I am convinced ... I am convinced ... that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor

powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – we can only imagine that he is thinking about that cemetery and he is thinking about those women and he is thinking about that empty tomb and the risen Jesus there to show that God’s life and love are never going to end for him.

And that’s why were here today, isn’t it? Because we know that no poisoned apple stands a chance against this prince’s kiss. No enemy will prevail against this fort. No sin, no evil, no death will ever have the last word. Because we know the end of the story. And it is an ending we will never grow tired of. Because for you and me it is just the beginning.

Because we're just on the cover! We're just on the title page! And every chapter from now on will be better than the one before.