

The Messy Middle

Easter - Bumper Video

Happy Resurrection Sunday! Thank you to everyone joining us on this Easter. To everyone joining us in-person; “The stone has been rolled away.” To everyone joining us online, “He is not here he is risen, just as He said.” (Matthew 28:6)

There is a long Christian tradition that goes as far back as 300 A.D. It is called the “paschal greeting” and it is a call and response. I’d love for us to stand and celebrate this together.

Call: He is Risen

Response: He is Risen indeed

Today we are celebrating what many call,
“The greatest story ever told.”

The greatest story ever told

If you think the story of Jesus is the greatest story ever told, you are not alone. There is even a 1965 movie entitled “The greatest story ever told.”

As great as the writings of J.R. Tolkien are, when you say, “the greatest story ever told” no one thinks of “the Lord of the Rings.”

As successful as the writings of J.K. Rowling, no one here thought of “Harry Potter” when I said the greatest story ever told.

As fantastic as George Lucas’ offering that took us to a galaxy far, far away, no one

thought of Star Wars as the greatest story ever told.

West Side Story is an example of a great and diverse musical. As great as Leonard Bernstein's music is, no one would ever say it is the greatest story ever told.

Shakespeare told some great stories... but they fall short of this story.

Homer's Iliad and Odyssey are noteworthy... but they can't compare.

.;The story of Jesus is the greatest story ever told, and I want to talk about it today.

Let's talk about the beginning.

The beginning

Think about the beginning of this story.

The story could be as early as Genesis 3:15 where God gives a prophecy & promise. God says the child (seed) would crush our enemy. This story starts with a prophecy and promise for your victory over death.

The beginning of this story was so compelling that Adam, Eve, Abraham, Isaac, David... everyone else in the Bible was looking for the arrival of Jesus.

And when Jesus comes to fulfill all promise, His story proves both powerful and beautiful.

A bright shining Angel named Gabriel came and commanded, "Name the child Jesus for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

A host of Angels filled the night sky and sang to shepherds, “Glory to God in the Highest.”

A supernatural star shone in the night and guided kings to worship the child.

The beginning of the story is filled with prophesy and promise, power, and beauty. The beginning of the story also reveals a glorious message.

Do you know the message? The message is this: God really loves us!

God really loves us

From the beginning of the story, it becomes clear: God loves us. Even though we are sinners, God has sent His son to save us. From the beginning it is made clear; God did not leave Adam, Eve, and

the rest of humanity alone to die. No, God planned to come to Earth Himself. God would come not to scold us or throw lightning bolts at us, but He came to show us He really loves us.

The beginning

That is the beginning of the story.

Now let's jump to the end of the story.

The End

Many stories start out promising but fall apart at the end. Some stories end so badly that you wish you had never started watching ABC Networks, "Lost."

The greatest story ever told must have a good ending. And it does!

Jesus resurrects! Jesus becomes alive and leaves no trace of death behind. When they walk into his empty tomb they see only His politely folded linen grave clothes. His story is perfect and complete.

People who had lost all hope, at the end of this story have found a more complete hope. All the promises prophesied from the beginning proved true. The promises were true – God really does love us.

Jump ahead to the very end of your Bible and behold this same Jesus wipes tears from our eyes. This story ends with no death, no sickness, no hatred, no fear, no shame... only enduring love.

The greatest story ever told

This is the greatest story ever told, and we often like to think about the beginning and ending of this story, but there emerges a middle part of this story tantamount, as well.

Today I want to talk to you about the messy middle.

The Messy Middle

The middle of this story is so messy.

The beginning of the story had prophecy and promise... but this middle is so messy it causes everyone to second-guess the original promise. Jesus was prophesied to be a king, but he was born in a manger to a lower-class family that lived in a backwater area called Nazareth.

There is no glory in this messy middle. In the middle of the story Jesus does not ascend to a throne and hobnob with the rich and powerful religious leaders, but instead Jesus is found standing with sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, and widows. Jesus is betrayed by one of his own disciples named Judas, and because of this betrayal Jesus' crown is not golden, rather a crown of thorns. How could that have happened in the middle of the greatest story ever told?

The beginning promised power. Jesus was prophesied to defeat the enemy and set us free from death, but Jesus did not look powerful in the middle. Jesus was arrested, falsely accused, and sentenced to die with criminals. All the while Jesus looked pitiful and powerless to stop it.

The beginning was beautiful. All the beauty of the beginning of the story is impossible to remember when you stand at Calvary and see Jesus, bleeding on the cross. There was nothing beautiful about Jesus on the cross.

*Isaiah 53:2-3 ...He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Jesus was brutally and slowly murdered.

The Messy Middle

It was so messy that those who were closest to Jesus, most of them did not even show up and to stand by him.

They hid themselves as Jesus was beaten with a whip called the cat-of-nine tails. Jesus' back was beaten, and the skin was ripped so badly that some internal organs were likely visible.

Jesus was then handed a large wooden cross made of timber beams and made to carry it through the streets of Jerusalem. They paraded him in front of crowds that spit on him, mocked him, and cursed him.

When he reached the place called Golgotha, the place of the skull, now known as Calvary, they took his hands

and his feet and drove large metal spikes through his flesh and into the cross.

The cross was lifted up, planted in the rocky soil and Jesus was hung high for all to see. His full weight held up by the spikes driven into hands and feet. What agony and pain He must have felt?

The middle of this story is a mess. God, if this story is really your story, then why is the middle such a mess? God you could have written your story any way you wanted; why did you choose for your story to be an awful mess in the middle.

The greatest story ever told

The messy middle is what makes this the greatest story ever told.

The story of Jesus is not an account of foretold royalty coming from heaven to earth, being received and celebrated as the All-Powerful Sovereign and ascending His earthly throne as King Jesus.

The story is: the King of Heaven is willing to come to earth and be a messy carpenter.

The story is: the King of Heaven coming to earth to tell messy people they are loved.

The story is: the King of Heaven will not turn away thieves, prostitutes, the poor, the hurting, the lost or the confused...

The story is: the King of Heaven will come right down to the middle of your mess and indwell with you.

Are you in the middle of a mess?

Is your story messy? Maybe your story started off beautifully but now you stand in the middle of a mess.

Uncertainty

Disappointment

Loss

Sickness

Anger

...There are all kinds of messes.

This greatest story ever told reveals to us that we are not alone in our mess. Jesus knows all about your mess. He has not turned away from you in shame because of your mess. Jesus came to the messy middle of your life.

Isaiah 53: 4-5 (NIV) Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Your messy pain and suffering, your punishment and affliction, the piercing, the crushing, the wounds... He received it all. You feel like no one can understand you, but Jesus can understand you. The Son of God has stood in the middle of your mess.

God's promises are messy in the middle.

The beginning and end are filled with God's promises, and they are beautiful... but things become messy in the middle. The middle takes...

Faith...

Grace...

Love...

Tears...

The revelatory truth remains even in the middle of the mess; you are still in the middle of the greatest story ever told. Today you stand somewhere between the beginning and the end, and that is a great place to be.

Revelations 22: 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Jesus is the beginning... the first.... the Alpha. The beginning of the story is Jesus.

Jesus is the End... the last... the Omega. The ending of the story is Jesus.

If Jesus stretches all the way from the beginning to the ending... who do you think we will find in the middle. Jesus is not just at the end and the beginning... He is the messy middle.

Jesus gets his hands dirty all throughout your Bible.

He had rough carpenters hands that knew a hard days work.

His hands held children.

His hands motioned people to come.

His hands broke bread and gave it.

His hands reached down into ground to write for a woman who had sinned.

His reached down into mud to bring healing to a blind man.

His hands reached out a grabbed a fisherman who was drowning.

His hands touched lepers and cleansed them.

In Revelation 1, John saw Jesus and John fell to the ground like a dead man... Here is what Jesus did.

Revelation 1:17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying,

“Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,

This Jesus surrendered his hands to violence. His hands received spikes through them and were stained with blood. When some who doubt see his hands, people like Thomas declare “My Lord and My God.”

In the beginning you find Jesus. In the End you find Jesus. In the messy middle you find Jesus.

There Are 3 Crosses on mount calvary... look to the cross in the middle.

musician

So, what should we do on this Easter Sunday?

Surrender Your Mess

Don't hide your mess. Confess your mess.
Don't try to clean it up yourself. That has
never worked.

Surrender Your mess to the one who was
willing to come into our messy world.

No matter what your mess is today, Jesus
can cleanse it. Jesus cleanses us with
what? His Blood.

Do you know what His blood can cleanse
today?

Sin

Shame

Regret

Disappointment

Doubt

Fear

Every mess...

Hebrews 10:10(NIV) ¹⁰ Our sins are washed away and we are made clean because Christ gave His own body as a gift to God. He did this once for all time.

Jesus is alive. Jesus is here. He is not ashamed of your mess. Bring your mess.

Pray today.

Acknowledge your mess. Surrender your mess.

We have these slips of paper... why not write down your mess, repent of it, and plunge it in the blood of Jesus.

It is time for us to talk to God. Jesus is here. He is right in the middle of it all.

