

JESUS IS TOO MUCH 4-5-15 Easter

(John 10:18) We'll read it in a moment. There is in Hollywood, California a Christian ministry you likely have never heard of that goes by the name of *Master Media*. It is headed by a neat brother named, Larry Poland, and is a solid evangelical outreach to the leaders of the TV and movie industries. I mean, you talk about some people with influence – Hollywood leaders are big-time culture-shapers. *Master Media* is there as a witness for Jesus in that place, calling influencers to faith and to godly values. You might want to check it out online. Just google Master Media and read about what they are doing. I think you will find it interesting. And, speaking of Hollywood, did you watch the Oscars this year? I, as usual, did not. I don't watch those shows, partly because I am not wild about the people or the films that get honored at those things. But, it didn't used to be that way. The old history of Hollywood was to honor the really great films. And for a long time, the most honored film ever was Ben Hur. It was also the most expensive film of its times, costing around four million dollars in 1959. But get this -- Ben Hur was nominated for twelve Academy Awards including best picture and best actor and it won eleven. Ben Hur is a fabulous movie. It's written by a guy named Lew Wallace. It seems that Wallace was not a religious man until he found himself on a train with a notorious agnostic whose vehement arguments against the existence of God provoked Wallace to seriously think about the claims of Jesus Christ and, in the process of doing that, he became convinced, convicted, converted and committed to the gospel which Ben Hur is meant to promote. It is interesting how that happens, that when you just get someone out of their mental rut and start them to thinking there is new hope for their soul. Before you can become converted you must first become serious and most folks aren't there yet. In the first half of the 20th century a man named Frank Morrison, a lawyer and scholar, had come to the opinion that the resurrection Easter story was nothing but a fairy tale happy ending which spoiled the matchless story of Jesus. He regarded Jesus with the highest esteem, but as he saw it, Christ was a tragic hero, a victim of circumstances and prejudice. Morrison planned to write a book on the last tragic days of Jesus, allowing the full horror of the crime and the full heroism of Jesus to shine through. He would, of course, omit any suspicion of the miraculous, and would utterly discount the resurrection. But, after studying the facts, Morrison had to change his mind and the book he wrote was quite different than what he had planned. It's title: *Who Moved the Stone?* The first chapter is called, "The Book That Refused To Be Written." Through his research Morrison became a staunch defender of the resurrection of Jesus.

Now, I tell you that because I think it's interesting, but especially because I believe Morrison's view about the death of Jesus is not uncommon. Many in our land admire Jesus and would not dispute the well-documented fact of his crucifixion but they see the death of Jesus as a tragic thing and the resurrection as a myth. To many, maybe to most in our world, the term *Good Friday* is a mystery. How in the world can we call *good* a day when bigoted men violently murdered a fine teacher and leader like Jesus? Don't leave here today until you understand.

Maybe John 10:18 will help. Start at verse 17 where Jesus is speaking **17-18** *For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.* Do you see what Jesus is saying about his own death? What the evening news may report as a taking of a life Jesus calls a "laying down" of a life. This is strange language but it reflects the perspective of Christ. He went to the cross, not an unwilling victim but a sovereign sacrifice. **18a** *No one has taken it away from Me.* Not Judas, or Pilate, or the Jews **18a** *No one has taken it away from Me.* But still these people were all guilty. Judas freely and blamefully betrayed Christ. The Jews freely and blamefully slandered him and cried, "Crucify Him." Pilate freely and blamefully sentenced Him to die. Yes, all of these were conspirators in the most awful murder of all time. The fact that these deeds led to Good Friday and the salvation of my soul makes them no less guilty. In the first book in the Bible we read of 10 jealous brothers who sold the brother called Joseph into slavery. The eventual result of that evil act was the preservation of millions of lives through the dreams and wisdom of Joseph. Joseph later told his brothers, *You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.* Jesus could say the same thing. Judas, the priests, Pilate all meant it for evil but a sovereign Lord meant it for good.

Whatever your view of the crucifixion of Jesus you may want to adjust it to fit this verse **18ab** *No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative.* Now, who else in the world can say this? No one. If Jesus is not divine he's a head case, a flake, a psycho or possibly the most arrogant fool the world has ever seen. Jesus talks of death like it's his personal yo-yo to let down or pull up. Is He a fool or is he the son of God? The death of Christ, which we remember this week, was not a suicide. Jesus did not kill himself but He did plan, prepare and orchestrate all that took place at His death. Now that is quite a claim but the New Testament makes it clear. Long before his death Jesus says this **17b-18b** *I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative.* John 10:**11** *I am the good*

shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. Matthew 16:21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. In Luke 9:51 it says there came a day when Jesus set His face with resolve to go to Jerusalem. He set his face with determination to go to Jerusalem. Why was that hard? Why did that require determination? Because Jesus knew what was waiting on Him in Jerusalem. he clearly tells his disciples what will take place. Nothing surprised Jesus at all because Jesus was in control. So much so that his control encompassed the choices of all kinds of people. John 6:70-71 Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" 71 Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him. When Jesus picked the 12 he picked one to betray Him. Luke 22:21,22 But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table.:22 "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed! I am trying to show you that Jesus is no tragic victim of fate. He orchestrated the whole thing. When you read the stories of the assassinations of Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy it seems that there was some inexorable force drawing Lincoln to Ford's Theatre and Kennedy to Dallas. It's not there with Jesus. The death of Christ is like no other. Lincoln and Kennedy were oblivious to their fate. The great martyrs of God, John the Baptist, Stephen, Polycarp, John Hus, these were faithful to the death. They were not willing to deny Christ to save their lives but they were otherwise helpless before their killers. Jesus was never helpless. Look at Matthew 26:51. This is an astounding statement. Some of you will need to see it to believe it. The scene is at night. Judas has led to Jesus his captors, betrayed Him with a kiss and the Peter 51-53 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. 53 "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? Is this guy a fool or the Son of God? A statement like this leaves us with limited options here. Speaking of his life Jesus says John 10:18cd I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. Does He really? Was Jesus, as Frank Morrison once taught, a great man put to death by the envious or was He more than a man - who laid down willingly His life? The New Testament is clear. Jesus has said it himself 18ab No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative.

So, I trust you see that Jesus really did this. Let's see now why He did it. Why was there a Good Friday? The answer is that Jesus was too loving to stay alive (R) John.10:11 tells us why Jesus laid down his life 11 *I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.* He did it for the sheep. Who are the sheep? In verse 26 he speaks to his critics and he says to them. 26 *you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.* Believers are the sheep 27 *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.* Those who follow Jesus are the sheep. 28 *I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.* Now let's think for a while on our sheepness or is it sheephood? We often use animals to describe people. Some of you are pigs, some are turkeys, some are snakes or doves or hawks. These are figures of speech that communicate. God is fond of calling us sheep. Why? Well, sheep are dirty animals and people are sinners. Sheep are dumb animals and ... well, no comment is needed. Sheep cannot survive without a shepherd. Has anyone ever run across a herd of wild sheep? Think of all the National Geographic specials you have seen, did any of them feature wild sheep? Bighorn sheep maybe, but not your livestock type of sheep. Such herds don't exist. Sheep without a shepherd are headed for disaster. They are doomed. Now, how are people like that? Whether you know it or not you are utterly dependent on another. You've got to have a shepherd. Matthew 9:36 *Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.* And why no shepherd? The silly sheep ran away. We are those stray sheep. Isaiah 53:6ab *all of us like sheep have gone astray.* The point is that we just thumbed the 'ole nose at the shepherd and went off to do our own thing. But sheep aren't meant to do their own thing. Stray sheep don't last very long. They rank high on the menu of every wolf, cat and dog in the woods. Stray sheep die. Romans 6:23a *for the wages of sin is death.* Sinners die too. Stray sheep die, unless the Shepherd comes to get 'em.

You ready for good news? Jesus says John 10:11a *I am the good shepherd* 10d *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.* (R) This is the concern of Jesus for His sheep. Incredible isn't it, that the Great Shepherd has, as His chief concern, the prosperity of His sheep. 10b *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.* But the next verse tells us we can only have that if the Good Shepherd dies for us. Why is that? Why must He die to give life to his sheep? Romans 6:23a *the wages of sin is death* and that wage must be paid. The sheep deserved death. That is the penalty for straying. The good news is that Jesus paid it. Alive He could be a Teacher and a Healer but not a Savior and His very name, *Jesus*, means *Savior* so He died on behalf of, in place of His sheep.

Jesus said that He must die. Why? Because He was too loving to stay alive. That is the reason for Good Friday.

Besides calling us His sheep, Jesus also calls us His friends. You say, "What kind of sheep are also friends?" Haven't you ever heard of friendsheep? John 15:13-14 *Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*¹⁴ *"You are My friends if you do what I command you.*¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.* Jesus had such a love, such a beautiful, magnificent, well why try, it was a love of unspeakable glory. But let no one leave here confused on this. Why did Jesus die? Not because of some bad people who killed him. His life He laid down for the sake of His friends, His sheep. Jesus was too loving to stay alive. Remember that. That is good news.(R).

But I have more good news. For I have only explained Good Friday. What about Easter? Good Friday is only Good Friday in the light of Easter morning. John 10:18 *No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.* Jesus here hints at the resurrection which, elsewhere he taught explicitly. Jesus told his disciples he would rise again. He told his enemies he would rise again. His claim was so well known that when Jesus died His enemies asked for a Roman guard to watch His grave. But it did no good, for just as Jesus had authority to lay down His life He had authority to take it up again. In Acts 2, when Peter was preaching the gospel, he declared of Jesus 24 *God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.* Impossible? Why? The answer: Jesus was too great to remain dead. He was too loving to stay alive and too great to stay dead. When death got hold of Jesus Christ it bit off more than it could chew. Those of you who fish know what it's like to catch a fish that's too big for you or your line. If you keep hold of the line you will drown so you have to cut the line. Death had to do that with Jesus. Death had seen a lot of tough fish but had landed them all. Jesus was too much. (R) The language of verse 24 is interesting 24a *God raised Him up again* and then the Greek says literally, "*putting an end to the birth-pangs of death.*" 24c *since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.* The text shows us death as a pregnant woman carrying a child that has grown too large and death itself is hurting till God ends its agony by delivering Jesus unto life. 24c *since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.* Jesus was too great for death to hold Him. It managed for three days but then "kerpowwy!" death let him loose. A balloon can only hold so

much air and then it pops. Death could not contain Jesus 24c *since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power*. Now let's look at why. I say that Jesus was too great, but in what way?

First of all, death could not keep Jesus because He was too holy. Death is for sinners. Jesus was pure and perfect. If He were to die forever it would be the grossest injustice imaginable. We are born, most of us, with a sense of justice. We insist upon justice at least for ourselves if not for others. To see the Christ actually die forever would destroy any hope for justice and hope is all we have because often we do not see justice in this life do we? Often times the bad guys really do win and the good guys get pounded. This is why we like certain movies. Those Clint Eastwood and John Wayne films, even CSI, Rocky, and Batman affirm to us that *yes, the bad guys get their penalty and the white hats win out*. We need to believe that, and the resurrection is, to us, proof positive that the good guys will win. Evil cannot triumph over the good. God will not let it. So, His holy Son became Jesus- Victor over sin, over hell, over death.

Secondly, death could not keep Jesus because Jesus is life itself. John 14:6 *I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Me*. Is this man a fool or is He the Son of God? In some way Jesus Himself is life. John 1:4 *In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men*. And just as darkness loses in a battle with light so death falls before Life. All of we are dependent on another for life, but not Jesus. He is life; and death cannot keep him.

Thirdly, death won't keep Jesus because He is just too powerful. Why He is God Himself, the Creator of all things. Death is no match at all. When it wraps its strong cords around mere men we are helpless, but Jesus bursts forth. One of our hymns says *Alleluia now we cry to our King immortal, who triumphant burst the bars of the tomb's dark portal*. Some people would scoff at a resurrection and say, *It's impossible that Jesus rose from the dead*. Peter says in Acts 2 that it is impossible that He would not. You may have run across a list of the most influential persons in human history and Jesus usually gets a mention somewhere toward the top. Michael Hart in his book on the most influential persons in history puts Jesus in at #3 behind Mohammed and Isaac Newton. But listen, Jesus doesn't belong in that list at all. He falls into a category all His own. You listen to people describe the greatness of certain men and they grope for words. Some are stars. Some are superstars. Some are constellations, I guess. Some go beyond that. But only one man can be called, "*Greater Than Death*." They all lived; they all died. Only Jesus triumphed over death. We have Good Friday because Jesus was too loving to stay alive. We have Easter because Jesus was too great to stay dead.

Jesus was too loving to stay alive, too great to stay dead. I have a question for you. Are you too hard-hearted to care? (R) I'm not asking whether or not you have doubts. Doubting what Jesus did is understandable, but being indifferent to it is not. If one really had a love for sinners so deep that He laid down His life as a sacrifice for sin, and if one really is so great, holy and mighty that He could take up that life He laid down then every other fact you've ever learned pales into insignificance. And believe it or not, right here is a roomful of otherwise sane and intelligent people who believe those very amazing propositions. In fact, so many people really believe in Good Friday and in Easter that every store in America has some kind of Easter display or Easter sale. Who is this Jesus?! A fool, a deceiver or is He really the Son of God? Back when the Funny papers were really funny there was a Calvin and Hobbs cartoon in which Hobbs says to a swinging Calvin, "Aren't you supposed to be doing your homework?" Calvin responds, "I'm pretty sure the assignment was optional." Hobbs says, "Denial springs eternal." Now listen to Calvin's response. Little Calvin who represents the subtle decadence of our culture says, *It's not denial. I'm just very selective about the reality I accept* (R) Calvin there speaks what the fool will only think. When a resurrected Christ is a reality, only the fool will fail to accept Him. And only a fool will ignore the implications of His reality. How can you be so spiritually dull as not to care? Are you really so apathetic that you won't look into the story of Jesus? Are you really too busy playing games to read the Bible record of Christ's life? Say it's not so. But don't just say it, do something about it. Tell your Christian friend you want to know more. Let me know. Find out who this Man is. In Acts 17, the apostle Paul is preaching to a crowd in Athens, Greece when he says this about God **31,32a** *He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.*"³² *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer* These are like some of you. You'll sneer your way to judgment day. **32b** *but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."* Some of you are here and if you are don't squelch your interest. Pursue the truth. And I say that knowing that He who truly seeks truth finds the one who said, "I am the way, the truth, the life." Even Jesus the risen and reigning Lord.

If you are ready today I invite you to the Savior. Romans 10:**9** *if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.* You can be saved today from all the things that bind you, confess your sins, turning from them and

turning from self unto a living Christ who waits for your embrace and promises," He who comes to Me I will not cast out." Come to Him. Come to Jesus today and be saved. (prayer for unbelievers)

Lord, I have been living in sin. I have been living apart from the reality of Jesus the lord. Forgive me for where I have been, for I leave it all now to come to You, to come to Jesus. Risen Jesus, wash me from all my sin. Take up residence in my heart and make me your new and faithful disciple. Give me eternal life with You and let it begin now. Amen.