

The Beauty of Repent: Turn to Jesus¹ **for Resurrection and Life**

We're holding "The Crown Jewel of Christianity."² Welcome, fellow royalty of the risen Christ!

What kind of expectations do you have when you go to work? Imagine you are Frederick Wells walking underground in a mine around sunset. About 18' above you there's a flash of light. You climb up to find a glassy chunk which you remove with your pocket knife – nearly 4" inches across, quite heavy. "No way!" you're saying to yourself, "Must just be glass. But what if...?" After all, you work for the Premier Diamond Mine in South Africa.

You take the diamond topside to the mine manager's office, and the clerks throw it out the window. They can't believe it's real, twice as big as any diamond ever discovered, so it must just be a piece of worthless glass. Fortunately, further examination reveals the largest diamond ever discovered, 3106 carats with dazzling clarity. If everyone had accepted the logically expected, epic fail for sure!

Heading out to the tomb of Jesus early that morning, the women fully expected the worst day of their life, second only to last Friday which for them was anything but "Good." They had helped to bury the body of their best Friend Jesus, the one they thought was the long promised Messiah and Savior of their Jewish nation. But the burial was hurried because as the sun set on Friday, a very important Sabbath was beginning. They hurried to put their Lord Jesus underground and go home to rest.

At first glance that morning was everything we would expect. Grieving friends headed to Jesus' grave. These women had used their own money to supply Jesus with food and clothing. Possibly they were even mothers of some of His disciples. Love and loyalty took them to a dreadful grave, borrowed from a rich man, never before used. Flowers and manicured lawns with stone markers could not have helped their grief. We would expect this last bit of human dignity to finish the burial of their dear Friend with spices they had bought. Finally they could wash away the blood from the cross and gently wrap Jesus' body in more spices. (John 19:39) Dear friends, a dreadful grave, human dignity – all expected.

Even though it was early morning, these women could not know that the sun was actually setting on death itself. Its reign over fallen humanity from 4500 years back to Adam was about to end. Their hopeless morning was about to take an unexpected turn for the better, beyond wildest imagination.

First, ***"they found the stone rolled away from the tomb"*** – a first sparkle from their diamond. How was this possible with a guard of Roman bulldog soldiers who'd rather die than run from anything. Where were they? What was going on? The women were about to experience the first Easter. As they bent over and stepped inside the tomb, ***"they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'*"** (vv.3–7 NIV84) Instead of a linen shroud they saw the dazzling lightning attire of angels. The stone slab where the body of their Lord had been laid became the first Easter pulpit with the shortest, sweetest sermon ever preached: ***"He is not here; he has risen!"*** Could it be true, this unexpected, awesome message that a dead man literally came back to life?

¹ 2017 NPH Lenten Series: *Repent – Turn to Jesus!*, by Aaron L. Christie. NPH: 1-800-662-6022.

² Diamond details from a sermon by Jonathan E. Schroeder, 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, Easter 2017.

Jesus had been telling His disciples about this day since His ministry began three years before. (John 2:19-22; Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19) Sadly, Jesus' disciples forgot in their haste to hide from the Jewish authorities. But Jesus' enemies fortunately, did not forget. Roman governor Pontius Pilate made sure Jesus was dead. He gave the Jews the Roman guards they demanded to make sure the body was not stolen by disciples they thought would suddenly get brave and make up a story of resurrection. Some of the most unwitting witnesses of Easter are still the most powerful proof that God does not lie.

Isn't it shocking to think they almost threw away the biggest diamond ever found? Shipping it to England in 1905, was a major effort too. A replica was openly loaded onto a steamship and safely guarded in the captain's cabin. Meanwhile, the real diamond was shipped in a brown box by parcel post. The experienced diamond cutter studied it for months, made the first cut, then fainted in a pile up of nervous energy. It yielded many cut diamonds, the largest of which went into the crown jewels.

So what will you have if you toss "The Crown Jewel of Christianity"? First, your SIN. The Holy Spirit is graphically clear through the Apostle Paul: ***"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."*** (1 Corinthians 15:17 NIV84) If Jesus is still dead, then what He said on the cross cannot be true: ***"It is finished!"*** – must have been about something besides our eternal salvation. The big diamond of eternal life must still be buried somewhere and the heat that forms them can't compare to what awaits us sinners when we experience, ***"The wages of sin is death."*** (Romans 6:23a)

If you throw away this jewel, or if the soul thieves from hell succeed in snatching it from your mind and heart, you are left with no hope. ***"For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either....Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost."*** ***"Weeping and gnashing of teeth"*** should make everyone shudder. But if that warning can't be trusted any more than the promise, then you are left without hope for this life too. ***"And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."*** (1 Corinthians 15: 16,18,14 NIV84) Surely then sermons like this are foolish. You might as well spend your life playing *Trivial Pursuit* because the biggest diamond ever, lies in the sand, tossed from the window of your heart.

But don't worry. CIR HIRI Easter is true whether you believe it or not, as surely as that diamond was real even if some doubted. God left nothing to chance. Jesus actually rose from the dead on a special day of the Jewish calendar. It was called the First Fruits. For 1500 years since Moses, the Israelites had brought the first sheaf of grain as an offering to God. It was God's way of reminding them that the real harvest would follow. Jesus who rose on that day is called ***"the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."*** (1 Corinthians 15:20 NIV84) Forgiven souls are the real harvest. Jesus' resurrection guarantees that we too will physically rise with these same bodies, glorified like His! We shall live with Him eternally in paradise with God. Your debt of sin is fully paid by the blood of Jesus. Easter shouts God's justice is satisfied. This diamond is real. ***"The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (Romans 6:23b)

According to accounts, the Cullinan diamond was cut into 9 major gems and 91 brilliants. The largest clear cut diamond until very recently was called the Star of Africa, 530 carats. It's kept in the Tower of London, mounted on the royal scepter of the sovereign ruler of England, valued at over a billion dollars. Want to know how much the Crown had to pay for it? Nothing! It was free. Winston Churchill finally convinced King Edward to accept the gift for the House of Windsor.

If you refuse this gift from God, you'll have little reason to come and worship Him again anytime soon. But if your hand of faith grasps and holds this "Crown Jewel of Christianity" close to your heart, let me tell you what is most unexpected here. The more you cut this diamond and give it to your friends, the more it grows in clarity and value for you. Like seeds in a field of grain, these cut diamonds of Easter hope keep growing a greater and greater harvest of fruits that follow the First. Turn to Jesus. Repentance is beautiful – sorrow over sin, sweetened by faith in forgiveness shining in Christ alone. Turn to Jesus for Resurrection and Life. CIR HIRI. Alleluia! Amen.