

Easter: The Empty Tomb

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- [0 : 0 0] Let's begin with a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for giving us your word. Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.
- Open our eyes to see wonderful things in your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Last year, I planned to travel to West Malaysia to see my granddaughter.
- I've yet to carry her in my arms. I also planned to visit new places. But the pandemic came.
- And all these plans were interrupted. I'm sure many of you experienced the same thing. Many of your plans last year did not materialize.
- On the first Easter morning, some people had great plans. Plans to do something to the dead body of Jesus.
- [1 : 1 7] Today, we want to see what happened to their plans. Matthew 28 verse 1 says that after the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, that is Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.
- These two women planned to visit the tomb of Jesus. Luke 24 verse 1, describing the same incident, tells us that the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.
- They brought along spices to visit the tomb. Why bring along spices? Because they wanted to finish anointing Jesus' body for burial.
- The burial process was hastily done. It was not properly done on Friday afternoon. So, these women wanted to complete the burial process on Sunday morning.
- They wanted to perform one last labor of love for Jesus. They wanted to serve Him one last time. As they were walking to the tomb, their hearts were full of grief and full of despair.
- [2 : 5 2] The man who has given them so much hope, the man who has changed their lives, is now dead in a tomb. They were going to the tomb, not just to anoint the body of Jesus, but also to mourn, to cry, and to grieve.
- Their hopes were dashed. Their dreams had crashed. What was these two women's plan? They planned to go to the tomb to perform the last burial rites for Jesus.
- While these women had plans to visit the tomb, the Jewish leaders also had their plans. Matthew 27, verses 62 to 66, says that on the day before Easter Sunday, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.
- Sir, they said, we remember that while He was still alive, that deceiver said, they called Jesus a deceiver. They called Jesus a liar.
- That deceiver said, after three days, I will rise again. So, give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, His disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that He has been raised from the dead.
- [4 : 2 6] This last deception will be worse than the first. Take a guard. Pilate answered, go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.

So, they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. The Jewish leaders, with the permission of Pilate, posted some guards at the tomb to keep the tomb locked and secure.

The tomb was sealed to keep Jesus locked inside. The guards were there to make sure that no one broke in to take the body away.

What was the Jewish leaders' plan? Their plan was to make sure that Jesus remained in the tomb. What happened next?

What happened next? Verses 2-4. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

[5 : 40] His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of Him that they shook and became like dead men.

God interrupted their plans. He sent an angel to shake up the plans of the strong and the weak. God interrupted the plans of the powerful and the not so powerful.

Look, what happened to the soldiers of Rome? They were so afraid of the angel that they shook and became like dead men.

They became like dead men. Meanwhile, the dead body they were guarding is now alive. The Jewish leaders wanted to keep Jesus buried in the tomb.

But an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled back the stone and sat on it. The stone was sealed. The tomb was guarded by Pilate's soldiers to break the seal and to move the stone was to challenge the authority of Caesar and Rome.

[6 : 59] No one, absolutely no one had permission to do that. Yet, the angel violated Pilate's order. And by sitting on the stone, the angel was showing that he had triumphed over Pilate.

The resurrection power of God has triumphed over the Roman power. We see that the plans of the Jewish leaders were interrupted.

What about the women's plans? Verses 5 to 7. The angel said to the women, Do not be afraid for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here. He has risen just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then, go quickly and tell his disciples he has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.

There, you will see him. the plans of the women were also interrupted. They went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body.

[8 : 15] They went to the tomb to moan, to cry and to grieve. Instead, they met an angel who told them, Jesus is not here.

Jesus has risen just as he said. Jesus has risen just as he said. The women were full of grief and despair because they forgot what Jesus had said.

They forgot Jesus has told them repeatedly that he would be killed and on the third day he would be raised to life. On the third day he would be raised to life and they forgot about this.

Jesus' death and Jesus' resurrection are like two sides of a coin. Jesus died and Jesus arose. Jesus was crucified and Jesus was resurrected.

A bloody cross and an empty tomb. They go together. Why? Why? Because without the cross there is no atonement for our sin.

[9 : 28] And without the resurrection we are not sure whether this atonement is effective or not. But praise God Jesus has died.

Jesus is risen. With the cross our past is washed clean. With the resurrection our future is filled with unshakable hope.

here is a reminder that we don't focus just on the cross. The gospel is more than what happened on Good Friday.

The gospel is the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. Jesus has died. Yes Jesus is risen. The women's plan to anoint Jesus did not materialize because Jesus is alive.

Jesus is not dead. No need to anoint the body. No need to moan. No need to cry. No need to grieve. The tomb is empty. The angel said come come and see the place where Jesus lay.

[10 : 44] The stone is not rolled away to allow Jesus to come out. Jesus has a resurrected body. He can come out even if the stone is not rolled away.

The stone is rolled away so that the women can go into the tomb. The stone is rolled away so that people can see for themselves that the tomb is empty, that Jesus is risen.

How did the women respond to this experience? Verses 8 to 10. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples, suddenly Jesus met them.

Greetings, he said. They came to him, clapped his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid.

Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. there they will see me. Notice the emotion of these women as they rush back to tell the disciples the good news.

[11 : 58] They were afraid, yet filled with joy. Their feelings are mixed. On one hand, they are frightened.

On the other hand, they are so filled with joy. They never had such experiences before. they are overwhelmed by these supernatural experiences.

As they were on their way to relay the message to the disciples, suddenly, Jesus appeared to them and said, Hello, Mary Magdalene.

Hello, the other Mary. But they were still fearful. So Jesus repeated the message of the angel.

don't be afraid. Go and tell my disciples to meet me in Galilee. Here, in verse 9, Matthew adds a very important detail.

[13 : 00] This resurrection is not a purely spiritual one. Notice that the women physically collapsed the feet of Jesus.

They held on to the feet of Jesus they could touch the resurrected body of Jesus. Jesus is physically risen. And that means the gospel is not simply about saving souls.

The gospel is about raising our physical bodies back to life. Verse 9 again says, the women came to Jesus, clap his feet and worship him.

Worship him. The women were planning on a funeral. Instead, it turned into a time of worship.

The same thing happened with some of the disciples. Listen to what we are told in verses 16 to 17. The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

[14 : 15] When they saw him, they worshiped him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. When the eleven disciples met Jesus, they also worshiped him.

They worshiped Jesus because Jesus is risen. he must really be the king and they worshiped this king. But some doubted.

Now, this doubt was probably more about hesitation rather than skepticism. This doubt was more about hesitation rather than skepticism.

Some are having doubts because they are trying to make sense of the momentous event that happened the last few days. The crucified Jesus has risen from the dead.

Just the other day, they saw a helpless man crucified on the cross and now they see a victorious risen Christ. So, they hesitated.

[15 : 22] They have to work on overcoming this hesitation. one thing is clear. The right response to the resurrected Jesus is worship.

Worship. But not everyone is overjoyed with the news of the resurrection. How did the gods and the Jewish leaders respond to this supernatural experience?

Verses 11 to 15. Some of the gods went into the city and reported to the chief priest everything that had happened. When the chief priest had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, you are to say his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were sleeping.

If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed and this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

Some of these soldiers went to tell the chief priest everything that had happened. The earthquake, the angel, the rolling of the stone, and the empty tomb.

[16 : 50] The chief priest and the elders were among the first people in the history of the world to hear the good news of the Easter.

However, they did not receive this good news with joy. To them, it was the worst news. To them, it was a nightmare. They had taken all the necessary measures to make sure that the body of Jesus remained in the tomb.

But now, the tomb is empty. What they tried to prevent from happening has happened. If Jesus was really alive from the dead, then the Jewish leaders had a real problem.

It meant that Jesus was right all along and they were wrong. So these Jewish leaders had to protect their self-interest.

They refused to recognize the truth. They were blinded by their own sin. They didn't think they could be wrong. So no matter what happened at the tomb, Jesus could not be right.

[18 : 04] Jesus could not have resurrected. God cannot exist. This reminds me of a famous atheist who said that no amount of evidence will ever convince him that God exists.

No amount of evidence will ever convince him that God exists. His mind is already made up. God cannot exist.

Miracles cannot happen. Resurrection cannot happen. His mind is already made up. The Jewish leaders' minds were also already made up.

The resurrection of Jesus could never happen. Perhaps today there are some listening to this sermon who won't call yourself a Christian but the question is are you open?

If you receive clear evidence today that all this is true, all the resurrection story is true, will you worship Jesus?

[19 : 21] If not, why not? Be honest with yourself. Be honest with yourself about your motives. Ask yourself if those are really good reasons to reject Jesus.

Let's return to the story. What were the Jewish leaders going to do next? As soon as the Jewish leaders received the news from the soldiers, they knew their plan A had failed.

So they decided to hedge out plan B by bribing the soldiers with money to tell a lie. In Matthew chapter 27, the Jewish leaders call Jesus a liar.

They call Jesus a deceiver. Yet now they themselves are lying to cover up the truth. So who is the real liar here? Who is the real deceiver here?

The lie. The lie is the very thing they try to prevent. Remember the guard was posted at the tomb to prevent the disciples from stealing the body.

[20 : 36] Now the tomb is empty and they have to say it's the disciples that stole the body while they were sleeping. This implies that Jesus did not rise from the dead.

The body is missing because it was stolen. Many people today do not want to believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

They want Jesus to remain dead in the tomb. They want Jesus to be on the same level as other religious leaders. All of them are still in their respective tombs.

Since all religious leaders are the same, they can pick and choose. I can choose to follow this religious leader or I can choose to follow that religious leader. No one is better than the other.

No one is more special than the other. All are the same. But God God God is true different.

[21 : 42] He has risen from the dead to prove that what he says is true. We can trust the teachings of Jesus because he indeed has risen from the dead.

His tomb is empty. Remember what the soldiers claimed about the empty tomb?

they said that it was the disciples who stole the body of Jesus. How does Matthew argue against these claims of the soldiers?

Matthew says that the soldiers were bribed. They were given money. They were given money to tell a lie. actually in Matthew chapter 28 the writer gives us at least five more arguments five pieces of evidence to show that the resurrection of Jesus has really taken place.

These five pieces of evidence are the female witnesses the empty tomb the resurrection appearances the transformed lives of the disciples and the plan for world mission.

[23 : 00] Let's begin with evidence number one. Female witnesses. Do you notice that Matthew mentioned that the women were the first eyewitnesses of the empty tomb?

And these women were also the first eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. in that culture at that time the testimony of the women was not readily accepted.

There is no possible advantage to say that all the first witnesses are women. Their testimony would have seriously weakened the story.

If Matthew was trying to make up the story of the resurrection, he would have said that the first eyewitnesses were men. The first eyewitnesses were men, such as Peter, James, and John.

This would give the story more credibility. The only possible explanation for the women to be the first eyewitnesses is that it really happened that way.

[24 : 17] They were there at the scene. That is the way it was. Evidence number two, the empty tomb.

Matthew mentioned that the tomb is empty. The empty tomb is a critical part of the resurrection account. The tomb, if the tomb wasn't empty, the Jewish leaders could have stopped the spread of Christianity.

just by producing the body. Here, look, here is the body of Jesus and that is the end of Christianity. Notice, the Jewish authorities and the soldiers also claim that the tomb was empty, but for a different reason.

Evidence number three, the resurrection appearances. Matthew recorded two appearances of Jesus, one to the women and the other time to the eleven disciples in Galilee.

The empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus make a very strong case for the resurrection when they are taken together. The empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus taken together make a very strong case for the resurrection.

[25 : 45] If there was only an empty tomb and no appearance of Jesus, we cannot conclude it was a resurrection.

The body could have been stolen. If there were only appearances of Jesus and no empty tomb, we also cannot conclude it was a resurrection because of hallucination.

people imagine that they see their departed loved ones, they miss their loved ones so much that they imagine seeing them alive.

This is hallucination. All the appearances of Jesus could just be hallucination if the tomb is not empty. But when the tomb is truly empty and Jesus truly appears, then we can conclude that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

Evidence number four, the transformed lives of the disciples. The transformation of Jesus' followers is one of the strongest evidence for the resurrection.

[27 : 07] The two Marys went to the tomb full of grief and full of despair, but the return full of joy to tell the others that Jesus is alive.

The New Testament also describes a remarkable transformation of the eleven disciples of Jesus. These eleven disciples were once covered.

They were chickens. When Jesus was crucified, they were so afraid they went into hiding. they were so frightened of being arrested by the authorities because of their association with Jesus.

Something happened and they turned around and courageously proclaimed the good news even in the face of torture and martyrdom. What's the reason?

What's the reason? The disciples claimed to have a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus in Jesus Christ's resurrection the disciples found their reason to live and to die.

[28 : 17] The skeptics may say what is so special about this? Other people are also willing to die for their religious beliefs. Yes, people are willing to die for their religious beliefs because they believe that all their religion is true.

The disciples are willing to die for Jesus because they truly believe that Jesus has risen from the dead. Nobody will really die for what they know is a lie.

Lies make people into cowards. Lies do not make people into heroes. People tell lies. Why people tell lies? People tell lies to get out of their difficult situations.

People don't tell lies purposely to get themselves into trouble. The disciples met the risen Jesus and they willingly die for that belief.

The disciples really believe wholeheartedly that Jesus has risen from the dead. Personally, they have made this Jesus alive from the dead and they tell others to believe in this resurrected Jesus even at the cost of their lives.

[29 : 42] Evidence number five. Plan for will detail Siem 17.

24. 25. You see, when Jesus rose again, when Jesus came back to life, he had a plan for the world.

What was Jesus' plan? It was a plan for his disciples to go on a mission. A mission that will eventually reach to the ends of the world.

To launch a rocket, to launch a rocket, you need a launch pad. And to launch the worldwide mission, there is also a launch pad.

And the resurrection of Jesus is a launch pad for this worldwide mission. All our plans, all our plans can be interrupted.

- [30 : 44] But Jesus' plan for the world can never be interrupted. Why? Why? Verses 18 to 20 tells us the reason why.

Jesus came to the disciples and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely, and surely, I am with you always. I am with you always to the very end of the age. Notice the claim of Jesus in verse 18.

Jesus' plan for the world can never fail because he has all authority in heaven and on earth.

Many people object. Many people object to Christians evangelizing. They say we have no right.

- [32 : 04] We have no right to invite others to change their religion. They say we have no right to preach the gospel to non-believers. And if you are a non-Christian and you're listening in today, you might be right.

We have no authority on our own. But Jesus, however, has the right. Jesus has the authority. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave.

And now, he's exalted at the Father's right hand as the Lord of all creation. The resurrection proves that Jesus is the rightful king.

He is the rightful king of the whole world. This king of kings has all authority. He has authority over every creature in heaven and on earth.

He has authority over every single man, woman, and child. Since he exercises all authority, he has the right to be worshipped by every single person.

- [33 : 15] One day, one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. The question now is, will you confess Jesus as Lord now?

Or will you confess him as Lord when it is too late? Everyone has to confess that Jesus is Lord. It is either now or later, which might be too late.

Notice the command of Jesus in verse 19. The command is to make disciples of all nations. Jesus' great command consists of four activities we should be involved in.

Going, making, baptizing, and teaching. Going, making, baptizing, and teaching. There is just one command here.

The command to make disciples. The rest of the verse explains the where and the how of disciple-making.

- [34 : 27] As we go out into the world, whether near or far, we are to evangelize to people and teach them to become mature disciples. Notice the promise of Jesus in verse 20.

I am with you always to the very end of the age. Matthew chapter 1 tells us that Jesus is called Emmanuel.

Emmanuel, God with us. Now this Emmanuel promises to be with every believer in every generation to the end of time.

If Jesus is not with us, if Jesus does not come with us, it will be impossible to fulfill His command. It will be impossible to reach the world for Jesus.

His presence, Jesus' presence will empower us to fulfill His command. Today, we have heard the Lord's command.

[35 : 39] Some of us will leave the comforts of home and go where Christ is not known. Most of us will make disciples where we live.

But having heard the good news of the risen Savior, we must now make Him known to the world. The tomb is empty.

Jesus Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us so much that you gave us your Son, Jesus, who died on the cross for our sin and who was raised from the dead to make us righteous.

Thank you that our future is filled with unshakable hope. As we spread this good news of Easter, may more and more people come to experience this unshakable hope in the resurrected Jesus.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. Amen. And now, we'll sing a song of... ..