

**"The Witness of the Empty Tomb"**

Matthew 28:1-8

In a unique way, Easter morning has always and will always bring us to a crisis of belief. We are introduced to one such occasion of a crisis of belief when upon the death of Lazarus, Jesus spoke some very prophetic words concerning his death and resurrection. Jesus turned to the sister of Lazarus and presented her with a crisis of faith by making a profound statement and asking a crucial question. *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. (26) And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* (John 11:25-26) This question is the core of the Gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Nothing is more important than what you believe about this.

This morning I want us to examine one of the Bible's eyewitness accounts of what happened on that first Easter – resurrection morning. Turn in your Bible if you would to Matthew chapter twenty-eight and verse one.

*"Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. (2) And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. (3) His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. (4) And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. (5) But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. (6) He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. (7) And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." (8) So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word."*

This morning I want to share with you a very simple outline: two Indisputable facts, two imperative commands and one inescapable conclusion.

**First, Two Indisputable Facts.**

As one examines what the eyewitnesses discovered on the first Easter morning, there are two facts that cannot be disputed.

- The first indisputable fact is that the Tomb is **Empty**.

The borrowed tomb in which that they had lay the body of Jesus on that Friday evening is now empty. The King of kings, who owns all the cattle on a thousand hills, had so little of this world's goods, if it were not for the goodness of Joseph of Arimathea, he would not have even had a place to be buried. But Nicodemus and Joseph had gone to Pontius Pilate and requested the body of Jesus be released into their care for burial. Surprised that Jesus was already dead, Pilate granted their request. I want you to note that the fact that tomb was empty seemed to surprise everyone.

➤ The tomb is empty contrary to the **Precautions** of His enemies (Matt. 27:62-66)  
“On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, (63) saying, “Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ (64) Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.” (65) Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.” (66) So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.” (Matthew 27:62-66)

His enemies at least seemed to remember that Jesus had say that would rise from the dead after the third day. So the enemies of Jesus went to Pilate and said, “**We are afraid that his disciples will come and steal the body of Jesus and then tell everyone that Jesus has risen from the grave. So we would like to post a guard to make sure that does not happen.**” I love the response of Pilate to these men, “**Go make the tomb as secure as you know how.**” I sure that Pilate did not realize how prophetic his words would be. Nevertheless guards were posted to make sure no one stole the body of Jesus.

➤ The tomb is empty contrary to the **Expectations** of His Friends.

There were a variety of reactions among the friends and followers of Jesus to the news of His death. Some such as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, and some of the women (Mark 16:1) made plans for and arrangements for his burial, apparently only concerned that His body be properly cared for. Others fled out of fear for their safety. Some gave themselves over to being depressed and sad (Luke 24:17). Some hid themselves and when they heard the news of His resurrection they refused to believe (Mark 16:9-13).

But then after a short period of time we see these same men abandon their occupations, and commit themselves to spread a very specific message – that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah, who had died on a cross, and was buried, but who had returned to life and had been seen by many.

- The second indisputable fact is that- **He Is Not Here, He is Risen!** (v. 6a)  
“...Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

(John 20:2-8)

The tomb really is empty. Even the critics do not deny that the tomb is empty, only why it is empty! But his enemies surely did not steal the body of Jesus, for they would have produced the body when the claims were made that He was risen. His disciples surely did not steal the body, for they would not have been willing to die a martyr's death for a lie. *"They were willing to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming (that he was risen), without any payoff from a human point of view. They faced a life of hardship. They often went without food, ... were ridiculed, beaten, imprisoned. And finally most of them were executed in torturous ways. For what? For good intentions? No because they were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had seen Jesus Christ alive from the dead."* [Lee Strobel. *"The Case For Easter."* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) p. 87]

**The facts are simple enough, the tomb is empty and He is not here for He has risen!**

### **Secondly, Two Imperative Commands.**

The women, who come to the tomb with the expectation of caring for the body of Jesus, are met by an angelic messenger with a very specific invitation!

- **"Come and See"** (v. 6b)

The women are given the invitation to **"Come, see the place where the Lord lay"** (v. 6b). There were perhaps many reasons why they would have been hesitant to follow the invitation to **"come and see."** After all they are in a cemetery just as dawn is break-ing. It was undoubtedly a kind of creepy place to be. They also had reason to fear the authorities; by the proclamation of Rome, the tomb had been sealed by Pontius Pilate and guarded by soldiers (Matthew 27:65-66). They could conceivably be in trouble for even being near the tomb of Jesus. And there is also the troubling thought that perhaps they were now treading on holy ground.

But the angel invites them to come and see - that they might compare what they have heard, **"He is not here; for He is risen, as He said,"** (v. 6) - with what they now saw with their own eyes. The angel told them to **"come see the place where the Lord lay"** (past tense) - He is not there any longer.

- **"Go and Tell"** (v. 7a)

**"And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead..."**

The temptation of course is having seen is to linger. Whenever we experience a spiritual high point we would like to remain there and continue to experience it. Peter had that experience in on the Mount of transfiguration recorded in Matthew 17:4, **"Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."**

We still experience that same temptation in our day when we enjoy a particularly moving worship service. One of my favorite preachers is Dr. Tony Evans in Dallas. Some years ago I heard him give the following description of the purpose of the church service. He said, "In football they have a huddle, the goal of the huddle is to give you thirty seconds to call the play that is why they give you a huddle. (At a professional football game there may be) Sixty thousand people watching you huddle, they don't mind you taking thirty seconds to call the play. They understand that you have to get organized, you have to know where you are going to go, the ends need to know where they are going to go, the quarterback needs to know where he is going to go, and the backs need to know where they are going to go. A huddle is a necessary part of the game. But let me inform you if you do not already know, sixty thousand people do not pay \$40 a ticket to watch you huddle. They want to see if their team can overcome the opposition who is daring them to snap the ball and move the down the field to score. What they want to know is does your practice work?

Now what Christians often do is get high on their huddles. We gather together on Sunday morning ... and we go nuts over the huddle! We say, **'Boy did we have a huddle!!! My quarterback can call plays better than your quarterback.'** And boy do we go off on the huddle. But what people don't seem to understand is; that the huddle is so that we can play the game. The effectiveness of your church cannot be measured by how well you do on Sunday morning.... The test of the church is what it does in the marketplace. What we need today is churches that are representative of Jesus Christ not only when gathered but when scattered. (disseminated)." [Dr Tony Evans. "The Power of God's People." (Sermon, 1987 – Church Growth Conference – Prestonwood Baptist Church, Dallas, TX)]

But just as those first witnesses were commissioned to **"Go and Tell"** we also are commissioned to **"Go and Tell"** of what we have experienced with Jesus. Later when Peter and John were commanded by the San-hedrin, the supreme religious court of the land, to speak no more in the name of Jesus they stated, **"... we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"** (Acts 4:20). When Paul was commissioned by God through Ananias he was told, **"you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard"** (Acts 22:15). We too are given a mandate to tell of what we have seen, heard and experienced of the power of God in our lives.

We are also promised His presence with us as we go. The disciples were told **"He is going before you into Galilee and there you will see Him."** (v. 7b) and indeed they did. Later in Matthew 28:19-20 were the Great Commission is given to the Lord's Disciples we find the promise, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

While Jesus has given all of His disciples an extra-ordinary task, taking the message of the Gospel to the world, He does so with the promise of His continual presence and comfort. Some translations of verse twenty use the words “**amen**” or “**surely**” in the place of “**lo.**” The Greek literally means “**See, behold, and remember - that I will be with you always.**” No matter how challenging and difficult the task may seem, remember that the Savior is with you. Jesus is with us continuously. Hebrews 13:5 promises that Jesus will never leave us or forsake us. **The Risen Savior is surely with us, and He will be with us to the very end of the age.** He is with us as His people when we gather together to celebrate His resurrection and He is with us when we scatter into the world as witness of what we have seen and heard.

**The commands are clear; “Come and See” but then “Go and Tell.”**

### **Third, One Inescapable Conclusion**

In the case of Jesus the issue is not just the absence of a body. An empty tomb does not in and of its self make a resurrection. It was not just that He was nowhere to be found. It is that He was seen, repeatedly by many people in many different places. The point I want to make is the disciples did not merely “**believe**” in the resurrection, they “**knew**” it as a historical fact because they had seen Him themselves.

Writing of the event many years later the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15: 3-7, “... Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (4) and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, (5) and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. (6) After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. (7) After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.” Paul either personally knew some of the people who had seen the resurrected Jesus or had spoken to some people who knew them and that they were still living and could verify that the resurrection was true. Paul’s statement virtually invites those who do not believe to check it out for themselves.

But because He is Risen - the resurrection does prove all that needs to be proven about the message of Christianity.

- **Jesus Is Who He Said He Was.**

He predicted that He would die, but that the grave would not be able to hold Him, this miraculous act proved Jesus was the indeed the Son of God. Jesus’ resurrection confirmed His identity. We can believe in Jesus. Jesus is the unique Son of God and He is fully divine.

- **Jesus’ Resurrection Bought Us Life.**

The Bible says sin earns us death (Rom. 6:23). On the cross, Jesus took the penalty of our sins on Himself. His death paid the debt our sins earned. But His Resurrection overcame

the power of death. If we accept Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf, Scripture says our debt is canceled, and we gain eternal life. Because Jesus rose from the grave we too shall rise victorious over the grave.

- **Such News Can't Be Contained.**

Mary immediately went and told the disciples. And in verse twenty-one, right after Jesus appeared to the disciples, He Said to them, **"As The Father Has sent me, I Am sending you."** The life-giving message of Jesus' identity and resurrection are a gift we are called to share with others. We can't keep it to ourselves.

### Conclusion

**We have faced two Indisputable Facts:** The Tomb is Empty and He was Not Here, Because He is Risen! Along with the disciples we have also received **two imperative commands**: **"Come and See" And "Go and tell."** Which leaves **one inescapable conclusion**. The resurrection proves all that needs to be proven about the message of Christianity.

As soon as we reach that verdict we must wrestle with the implications. Jesus overcame the grave, He is alive, and it possible for me to have a personal encounter with Him today. He did go to the cross and personally pay the penalty for my sin! He did conquer death, and so He can open the door for eternity for me.

John 1:12 promises **"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name."** It is possible for to become a child of God, but to become His child we must be willing to receive this gift.

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  - The tomb is empty contrary to the \_\_\_\_\_ of His Friends.
    - Some made plans for his \_\_\_\_\_. (Mark 16:1)
    - Some made preparation to \_\_\_\_\_.
    - Some gave themselves over to depression
    - Some hid themselves and refused to \_\_\_\_\_
    - (Mk 16:9-13)
- He Is Not Here, He is \_\_\_\_\_! (v. 6a) (John 20:2-8)

### **Secondly, Two Imperative \_\_\_\_\_**

- "\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_" (v. 6b)
  - "**Come, see** the place where the Lord lay."
    - The angel invites them to come and see that they might compare what they have heard - "He is not here, He is risen as He said." (v. 6) with what they now saw with their own eyes.
- "\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_" (v. 7a)
  - "And **go** quickly **and tell** His disciples that He is risen from the dead..." (Acts 4:20, 22:15, Matthew 28:20)

### **Third, One Inescapable \_\_\_\_\_**

The resurrection proves all that needs to be proven about the message of Christianity.

- Jesus Is Who He Said He Was.
- Jesus Resurrection Bought Us Life.
- Such News Can't Be \_\_\_\_\_.