

WD April 1, 2024

## “The Tomb is Empty”

Empty things are usually discarded. Ever notice that. When the paint can runs out of paint what do we do with it? (Throw it away.) When tube of toothpaste has been squeezed and flattened until no more can be gotten out what do we do with the empty tube? (Throw it away).

We are not normally keen on empty things. If we were to get an empty box all for our birthday it probably wouldn't mean much. “Yes, but look how pretty it is wrapped. I wrapped it really pretty just for you.” Yea, no. If the outside is really pretty but nothing is inside of it what's the point? Right?

We are not really fond of things being empty. If our gas tank is empty we fill it. It's either filled up again or the car won't run—for most of us. If we use the expression, “my tank is empty” we may need to fill our stomachs or get an energy drink to “fill our tanks” because we may be tired. Most of us like things that are full. We fill our garages. We fill our closets. We fill our stomachs and our schedules. Let's face it. Empty things are usually thrown out or refilled.

On Easter Sunday the Tomb that Jesus was laid in was empty. Matt 28 tells us that an angel came down from heaven and rolled away the stone. His appearance was like lightening, and his clothes as white as snow. It was so overwhelming that the guards of the tomb shook and became like dead men.

When the tomb was sealed Pilate put a Roman seal on it which meant that anyone who opened did so under penalty of death. However, the angel was of a higher authority than Rome and opened the tomb for the women to see what was inside. It was empty. It was a tomb without a dead body. Oh, the grave clothes were there but no Jesus.

Maybe they got the wrong tomb. How many of us who have buried a mother, or father, or a child would ever forget where their grave was. Come on! Matthew 27:61 tell us that Mary Magdalene was watching as Joseph and Nicodemus placed Jesus in the tomb. And something tells me that the view of the angel also gave it away. John 19 mentions that all that was left when Peter and John looked inside later on was Jesus' burial clothes. His resurrected body passed right through them but the head clothe was folded up by itself. The tomb is empty. No dead body. Jesus was not there.

Maybe Jesus wasn't dead and just walked out on his own. Come on! Even the chief priests saw how beaten and bruised Jesus was. They watched Jesus die. They insisted on his death. Can anyone seriously believe that those men who hated Jesus so much would let him slip away. Besides the Roman soldiers did this for a living. They had crucified many. The callous way that they cast lots for Jesus' clothes right at the foot of the cross illustrates how routine this was for them. Besides all of this they made sure Jesus was dead when one of them thrust the spear into Jesus' side—blood and water flowed. Jesus didn't flinch or move. He was dead. Even Mary Magdalene, goes looking for a dead body for a bit in order to put Jesus back into the grave. Everyone knew Jesus was actually dead. And even if he did survive how would he have the strength to move the large stone? Not dead. Come on! It would take a lot more faith to even consider such things as possible. Anything but the Gospel truth is an empty story.

The angel's words say it all. “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup>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.’ Now I have told you.”

The tomb is empty because Jesus isn't in it anymore. He is risen! He is risen indeed! If He didn't our faith would be futile. The empty tomb became the loudest place on the planet. It may be empty but it is full of meaning for us. Isn't it cool! The cross which was a symbol of death becomes the symbol of life. The tomb which is a place of death becomes the place for life.

What's amazing is how the chief priests react to the guards' report. Somewhere they had heard Jesus' prophecy that he would rise on the third day. They were hell-bent on keeping Jesus in the grave; posting the guards and getting Pilate to seal the tomb.

The tomb is empty. The guards undoubtedly went looking for a body when they woke up. If Jesus body were to be found they would have gladly paraded it back to the tomb. But there wasn't a body. To be fair I guess even Mary Magdalene went looking for Jesus' body.

The guards were definitely shaken by this and reported everything to the chief priests. And what was their reaction. "Praise God! Looks like we were wrong after all. Let's go and worship at the empty tomb!" Not even close. Nope. They devised a plan. More plotting and scheming behind closed doors. They came up with their own story. Here is what you are to say.... "Tell everyone you are really terrible soldiers who slept on the job. Then somehow while you were sleeping and not aware of anything, you saw the disciples come and steal the body." These religious leaders filled the empty tomb with a false narrative, fake news, anything but the truth. Because the truth for these religious leaders is having to face a resurrected Jesus on judgement day. No. They were too full of themselves to allow that.

And why would the guards even go along with a plan that would ruin their careers and make them look like fools? For the same reason we all distrust politicians today—Large sums of money; bribes from lobbyists trying to get their agendas passed into law. Large sums of money were offered to the guards. And if the news reaches Pilate, which it would, Large sums of money will make him happy too no doubt. "No one will go away empty...as long as you stick to our story. Forget what you saw." And yes, by the way those large sums of money would come from the same coffers as those thirty silver pieces came from—the temple treasury.

I wonder if at least one of those guards would at some point share with someone what he actually saw and regretted taking the money. After all who could forget the sight of an angel in all of its brilliance. I wonder if those guards second guessed themselves when they started hearing rumors of a resurrected Jesus appearing to over 500 people at one time. I wonder if any of them went to listen to Peter on Pentecost who spoke of Jesus resurrection. And then stood in wonder as thousands of pilgrims became believers and were baptized. I wonder if one of them noted Peter and John's bravery as they spoke out in the Temple and went to prison for it-- in direct opposition to the religious leaders who threatened them with the same end as Jesus. I would like to imagine at least one of those guards come to faith because the tomb they once guarded for three days was empty. I could imagine that soldier perhaps following pilgrims who went to the tomb to see for themselves. To watch their reactions and listen to some who may have spoke about seeing Jesus. The story of the religious leaders had to be bought with large sum of money and would seem so void of life while the Gospel story blesses people so freely and is full of life. The question then becomes which story will he follow? Which do we follow?

The message we know and love and believe is that the tomb is empty. What does this mean? We all know that that means. So, I think we should answer this question together because the answer applies to all of us who believe in Jesus.

It means... the Word of God is truth. The Bible is completely true.

It means... that my death has been swallowed up in victory.

It means... I am going to heaven.

It means... I am going to live in the Father's House.

It means... no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain.

It means... that the old things have passed away and the new has come.

It means... I will be reunited with loved ones and never have to say good-bye to them again.

It means... I will see Jesus face to face.

It means... He will wipe every tear from my eyes.

The empty tomb means a lot. The cross of Jesus is where Jesus emptied Himself and took upon Himself our sin and died. Now, the tomb is empty and full of life. The empty tomb is actually very full of meaning for us. It means that Jesus' promises are never empty. It means that our lives are full of purpose as representatives of the Gospel. It means eternal life is real and we have reason to hope. Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Pastor Matt Woods  
John 3:30