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Grace Bible Church, NY
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An Empty Cross; An Empty Tomb Selected Scriptures

The Sorrow of the Empty Cross

Friday night we held a "Good Friday" service that commemorated on the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross. We call that day *Good Friday* in recognition of the great good that was accomplished by Jesus' death as the atoning sacrifice for man's sin, but for those that had gathered back then on top of Golgotha's hill to watch Jesus be crucified, the day did not give any appearance of being good. The various groups there had different reactions, but even for those that desired Jesus to die, it was not a good day. It was disturbing.

Some of the soldiers were indifferent as they accomplished their gruesome job. For them it began as just another crucifixion of those that had violated the laws of Rome. But the events that occurred while they were waiting for the man hanging on each of the three crosses to die proved this was anything but ordinary. The centurion in command was both astonished and afraid of what he observed. He recognized that Jesus was very different and could not have been just a mortal. He proclaimed about Jesus, "*Truly this was the Son of God.*" Between Jesus' unusual death, the darkness and the earthquake, he was scared.

The religious and political leaders who had longed opposed Jesus were happy to see Jesus die. They considered Jesus to have been a trouble maker for He did not follow their traditions, He contradicted their teaching, He interfered with their exploitation of the people, and if the people really started following Him, they were afraid Rome would become jealous and send their military might against them. They were happy thinking that Jesus would no longer bother and interfere with their schemes now that He was dead. But the darkness, the earthquake and then finding that the veil in the temple had been ripped in two from top to bottom made it a very disturbing day for them even if they were successful in their immoral and illegal efforts in having Jesus' executed.

Most of Jesus' disciples were also scared, so much so that they were not even present. They were confused for their dreams had been dashed, their hope was gone, and their future was uncertain. They were in hiding because they were afraid they could be next.

Then there were the four women and John who were standing by the cross of Jesus. These included Mary, the mother of Jesus, Salome, (Jesus' aunt), Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. They saw all that went on. They heard all that was said. They watched Jesus die. They were filled with sorrow and grief. They did not understand what this meant. They only understood that this man that they loved was now dead. Most of you have experienced that pain when some loved one of yours has died.

After Jesus died, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, along with Salome, John's mother, are watching at a distance for Jesus' body to be taken down from the cross. Joseph of Arimathea gained Pilate's permission to take Jesus' away, then he and Nicodemus took Jesus' body and prepared it quickly for burial in Joseph's own tomb with Mary Madalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph watching.

The empty cross is the focal point of Christianity. Without Jesus' death there would have been no atonement for our sins. We would all still stand before God condemned and destined for eternity in Hell. But when Jesus cried out, "*It is finished,*" it was finished. The price had been paid. The sacrificial lamb had been slaughtered. The sins of mankind had been transferred to Him. "*He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The empty cross became the hope of all mankind.

The Beauty of the Empty Cross

Only God could take something as horribly cruel and condemning as a Roman cross - their instrument of execution - and make it into a symbol of beauty and hope. The beauty is not in Jesus' death. That can never be beautiful. What Jesus said and how He faced death is a great example to all, but His death itself? No, it was a horrible thing that was repulsive, appalling, and as ugly as anything could possibly be. Even Jesus' physical appearance had been so marred by the beatings and physical strain of it all that there was nothing left to be attractive. His body was battered, bruised and bleeding. Isaiah 52:14 had prophesied of this, *"Just as many were astonished at you, My People, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men."*

The cause of Jesus' death was not beautiful either. He died because of our sin. Jesus did not die for worthy men or for a good man, for no man is worthy, good or valuable in himself. Jesus died for wicked man, for sinful man. The depth of man's depravity is seen in the fact that such a high price had to be paid because of it.

But this is where the beauty begins to shine forth. That empty cross is the supreme symbol of God's love. Jesus was not forced to die, for no one could force that. Jesus said He was the good shepherd that would lay down His life for His sheep and that *"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"* (John 10:14-18). He laid down His life willingly as an act of His love. This was not a love for something He found attractive. This was not a love born of friendship or common bond or duty. This was a love for His very enemies, even for the very people who put Him on the cross. That is why Paul said in Romans 5:8 that *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in the while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* That is why Jesus could say while hanging on the cross, *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."*

Some Christian traditions use a crucifix, a representation of Christ on the cross, to adorn their churches, carry as a symbol or even use as jewelry. That flows directly out of their theology of penance in which suffering pays for sin and so Jesus is presented in His state of suffering on the cross as the symbol of redemption. However, it was Jesus' death on the cross, not His suffering prior to His self sacrifice of His life to atone for man's sin and bring redemption. 1 Peter 1:18-19 points out that our redemption was *"with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."* 1 Peter 3:18 stresses the same point, *"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."* As Galatians 3:13 points out, the cross was necessary for *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."* Jesus bore man's sins and cried out *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* He was then given sour wine in fulfillment of Psalm 69:11. Jesus then cried out, *"It is finished!"* And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit (John 19:30).

We use an empty cross to symbolize that Jesus' work of atonement is finished. His body is not still on a cross suffering for us. He is currently in heaven preparing a place for all who believe in Him. The cross has become a beautiful symbol of Jesus' supreme love by which mankind could be redeemed, forgiven and restored to a proper relationship with God. Jesus' death on the cross broke the bondage of sin so that man no longer has to remain under God's condemnation. There was now a purpose to our lives and a hope for eternity.

The empty cross is now a wonderful symbol and an appropriate design for decorations and jewelry. But the empty cross would not be beautiful if something else had not happened three days later. The cross is beautiful because Jesus rose from the dead and left the tomb empty. If the tomb was not empty, then the cross would have remained a symbol of execution - like the guillotine, the electric chair, the firing squad, or hangman's nose. If the tomb was not empty, we would have, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, a vain faith and remain in our sins. If the tomb were not empty, the cross would

have been the supreme symbol of cruelty and despair and not love and hope. It is the empty tomb and makes the empty cross a thing of beauty. Henry H. Barstow expressed this in the following poem. Please note that throughout this poem the term, "Easter," is used as a direct reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

If Easter be not true,
Then all the lilies low must lie;
The Flanders poppies fade and die;
The spring must lose her fairest bloom
For Christ were still within the tomb
If Easter be not true.

If Easter be not true,
Then faith must mount on broken wing;
Then hope no more immortal spring;
Then hope must lose her mighty urge;
Life prove a phantom, death a dirge,
If Easter be not true.

If Easter be not true,
'Twas foolishness the cross to bear;
He died in vain who suffered there;
What matter though we laugh or cry,
Be good or evil, live or die,
If Easter be not true,

If Easter is not true-
But it is true, and Christ is risen!
And mortal spirit from its prison
Of sin and death with Him may rise!
Worthwhile the struggle, sure the prize,
Since Easter, aye, is true!

Henry H. Barstow

We are gathered here this morning because Easter is true, Jesus has risen from the dead and His tomb is empty! AMEN! What a difference three days make!

The Necessity of An Empty Tomb

Some might question that saying, "*I thought when Jesus said, 'It is finished,' that it was finished. Sin was paid for, atonement had been achieved, so what difference then does it make whether Jesus was raised from the dead or not?*" A good question, but it makes all the difference in the world whether the tomb is empty or not. It is the difference between whether what Jesus had said and taught and promised was true, or whether Jesus was just an eccentric man who could do marvelous tricks. It makes the difference between Jesus being the Lord, a liar or a lunatic.

You must remember this truth. People can say anything they want and can claim anything they want, but that does not make their claim true. When Diane was going through her nurses training she was required to do a rotation through the locked in unit of the psychiatric ward. The first day she arrived for the job she was let into the unit and she immediately met a gentleman that started to show her around the unit and explain how the unit operated and where everything she would need was located. Diane assumed that it was one of the staff because he was so knowledgeable, articulate, and friendly. She finally introduced herself and was shocked when the man introduced himself as Jesus Christ. People can claim anything they want, but that does not make it true.

If a person states or claims something to be true which they know to be false, that is deception and we correctly call them liars. A great evidence of mankind's sinfulness is his propensity to lie. People lie for all sorts of reasons but usually the truth is avoided or distorted in order to either gain something they want or avoid something painful or uncomfortable. However, a lie is a lie. It is a lie to tell a falsehood in effort to avoid a punishment. It is a lie to exaggerate the capabilities of a product in order to sell it. It is a lie to "*bend the truth*" to put yourself in a better light. It is a lie to withhold the truth for those same reasons. All of these things are lying. If Jesus knew that what He was saying was not true and He said it anyway, then He was a liar and neither He or His claims can be believed or trusted.

If a person states or claims something to be true because they believe it to be true, but it is actually false, then such a person is deluded. It could be that the person made a false claim because he was deceived and sincerely believed a lie that was told to him. Or it could be worse and it is his own false claim he believes in which case he is a lunatic. In either case, such people cannot be trusted. If Jesus sincerely believed lies told to Him, then He was deluded, and if He sincerely believed His own false claims, then He was a lunatic. It would be utter foolishness to believe and follow either a deluded man or a lunatic.

We come back again to this truth that a person can say or claim anything they want, but that does not make it true. They could be telling the truth, but they also could also be either a liar, deluded or a lunatic. Without evidence to prove their statements and claims, you cannot know the character of the person making the claims. Jesus claimed to be the son of God. He acknowledged that Mary was his mother, but said that God Himself was His Father (John 10:29). He claimed to be the Messiah, the promised one that would make possible man's reconciliation with God (John 4:24-25). Jesus taught many things including forgiving sin and granting eternal life saying, *"he who hears MY word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgement, but has passed out of death into life"* (John 5:24). Jesus taught that *"God so loved the world that He have His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"* (John 3:16-18). Jesus made statements offering hope to those who repent from their sins and trust Him. He made other statements that those who refused Him would remain condemned in their sins. He said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father except by Me"* (John 14:6).

The question is are these statements and claims true? Is Jesus really who He claims to be? Or was He a liar, or perhaps deceived into making false claims, or maybe a benevolent lunatic? The evidence for who and what He really is can only be seen in whether He has kept the promises He made. Among Jesus' promises is that He would be killed by the elders, chief priest and scribes and then raised from the dead on the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:9,23). If Jesus remained in the tomb past the third day, it would prove His claims were false that He was either a liar, deceived or a lunatic. He could not be who He claimed to be. The truth would not be in Him and His credibility would be destroyed. Everything else He ever said would now be suspect as falsehoods. However, if Jesus did rise from the dead, it would prove His claims and promises, establish His credibility, and certify that the truth dwelled in Him. He would prove that He is indeed the Lord.

Do you see now the importance of the resurrection? The empty cross showed that atonement for our sins had been made, but it took an empty tomb to establish our hope. Without the resurrection we could not know that the substitute sacrifice had been sufficient and accepted. We would not have an assurance that we could be forgiven of our sins and that our future destination would be heaven.

What a tragedy that so many in the world are still ignorant of what Jesus has done for them. They have never heard a clear presentation of this story of God's love and His triumph over sin and the grave. Many have never heard of Jesus at all. Many more have only heard bits and pieces of it along with distortions and so that their denial of Jesus' resurrection is based in ignorance.

Then there are some who have heard, but because of the sinfulness of their own hearts in which they have yielded themselves to the god of this age who has blinded their minds to the truth, they deny Jesus' resurrection in spite of the evidence.

The Evidence of An Empty Tomb

What evidence? Lets quickly consider some of the proofs that the tomb is indeed empty because Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus Physically Died.

We will start with the evidence that Jesus physically died because there are those that claim that He did not die that day on the cross.

First, the Soldiers, Joseph & Nicodemus all judged that Jesus was indeed dead. The Centurion, a man certainly most familiar with death said he was dead (Mark 15:39), and testified to that fact when questioned by Pilate (Mark 15:44). The soldier that was charged to break his legs did not do so because "*He was already dead*" (John 19:33). Joseph & Nicodemus received Jesus' body from the cross and would have know whether Jesus was dead or not just by the temperature of the body. They believed He was dead or they would not have put a cloth on Jesus' face and then wrapped His body in burial clothes, covering it with spices and set Him in the tomb.

Second, the soldier sent to break the legs of those being crucified so they would die faster was surprised that Jesus was already dead, so he tested to make sure of the fact by piercing His side with a spear. The result was blood and water coming out. Medically, this speaks of a ruptured heart and that He had already been dead long enough for the serum, the clear fluid, to separate from the rest of the blood.

Third, those that were very close to Jesus watched Him die on the cross. This included His mother, His aunt, the apostle John and many women that had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him (Matthew 27:55; John 19:25-26). This removes the possibility as claimed in the Qur'an that it was someone else that died in Jesus' place.

Jesus Physically Rose from the Dead

Matthew 28 informs us that the elders of the Jews spread the story that Jesus' body was stolen, but that lie is easily exposed by the very fact that they themselves had asked Pilate to place armed guards at the tomb to prevent that from happening (Matthew 27:62-66). The guards were well disciplined and were subject to severe punishment if they failed in their assignment. In addition, their story of what happened and seeing the angel was accepted without question. Finally, the lie itself is ludicrous. If they were asleep, how did they know who stole Jesus' body? And if they were awake, why did they let the disciples steal the body?

Throughout the Bible it is made clear that truth is established on the evidence of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:10; Hebrews 10:28). Jesus made multiple physical appearances to many different people after His resurrection.

Jesus first appeared to the Mary Magdalene in the Garden that morning and she physically took hold of His feet (John 20:11-18). Next, He appeared to the other women that had gone to His grave that morning (Matthew 28:9-10). That afternoon Jesus walked with Peter and another disciple as they were going to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). That evening Jesus appeared to ten of the remaining apostles in the Upper Room showing them His hands and His side (John 20:19-25). Eight days later all the remaining apostles were in the Upper Room again when Jesus appeared to them though the door had been shut, and Jesus invited Thomas to touch His hands and side (John 20:26-31). Sometime later, Jesus appeared to six of the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This time Jesus cooked fish for them and ate with them. This again is positive proof of a physical resurrection and not just a spiritual one (John 21:1-25). Jesus appeared again to all eleven of the apostles in Galilee where He gave them the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). Paul states it was about this time that Jesus appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). Paul also mentions that Jesus appeared to His brother, James (1 Corinthians 15:7). Jesus appeared over a period of forty days following His resurrection presenting many convincing proofs and peaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). At the end of this time He was with His disciples in Bethany on the Eastern slope of the Mount of Olives when He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-12).

Further proof of a physical resurrection comes from the consequences of it. First, not even the enemies of Jesus were ever able to give a refutation of the claim of Jesus' disciples that He had risen from the dead. Second, the disciples were changed from living in fear and trepidation after the crucifixion into being bold and fearless men after the resurrection. They even confronted the same men of the Sanhedrin that had condemned Jesus to death (Acts 2-5). None of these men ever wavered again in their belief that Jesus was the Christ and that He had been raised from the dead though it caused them to suffer great persecution and all but John were martyred. Men will not suffer and die for what they know is a lie.

Then there is the fact that Jesus' Church exists and functions as it does. Without the resurrection of Jesus, it would have been just one more historic Messianic sect within Judaism and would have followed Mosaic law. Instead, it continues in the present with traditions and rituals separate from Judaism because it focuses on Jesus' resurrection. This includes meeting on first day of the week instead of the Sabbath in honor of Jesus' resurrection, and its two ordinances of baptism and communion both proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection.

The evidence is overwhelming that the account of the Scriptures is true. The tomb was empty because Jesus walked out alive. It was as the angels said to Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James who had come with the spices to finish the preparation of Jesus body, *"Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again"* (Luke 24:5-7). The tomb was empty because Jesus was alive!

Conclusions

The empty cross and the empty tomb are the central symbols of Christianity. The cross was empty because Jesus had died in our place. We no longer have to remain in our sins. The tomb was empty because Jesus had conquered sin and death. Paul's triumph cry is now ours - *"O death, where is thy victory? O grave, where is thy sting?"* Peter's praise is now ours - *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (1 Peter 1:3).

Light's glittering morn bedecks the sky;
Heaven thunders forth its victor-cry;
The glad earth shouts her triumph high,
And groaning hell makes wild reply;

His tomb of late the threefold guard
Of watch and stone and seal had barr'd;
Yet in triumph and mystery,
He comes from death to victory.

While he, the King, the mighty King,
Despoiling death of all its sting,
And, trampling down the powers of night,
Brings forth his ransom'd saints to light.

The pains of hell are loosed at last'
The days of mourning now are past;
An angel robed in light hath said,
"The Lord is risen from the dead."

-- John Mason Neale

If you do not share this hope, my prayer is that it would be yours today. Talk with me or any of our church leaders after the service. Don't leave today without having peace with God.

If you do have this hope - shout it out and tell someone else - The tomb is empty! The resurrection is true!

He is Risen!

Sermon Notes - 3/31/2013
An Empty Tomb - Selected Scriptures

The Sorrow of the Empty Cross

Most of the soldiers were indifferent, but the Centurion was both _____ and afraid

The religious and political leaders were _____ thinking they would no longer be bothered by Jesus

Most of the disciples were _____ and in hiding

All of the disciples were filled with sorrow and _____

A _____ watched Jesus be crucified, and Joseph, Nicodemus, Mary & Mary put Him in the tomb

The empty cross is the focal point of Christianity because it was the _____ of atoning for man's sin

The Beauty of the Empty Cross

The beauty of the cross is not in Jesus' _____, for that was repulsive, appalling and ugly

Jesus _____ for wicked, sinful man

The empty cross is beautiful because it is the symbol of God's sacrificial ____ - John 10:14-18, Rom. 5:8

It is Jesus' _____, not His suffering that atoned for man's sin (1 Peter 1:18-19; 3:18; Gal. 3:13)

The empty cross symbolizes that the work of atonement is finished

If the tomb was not empty, then the cross would have remained a symbol of _____

The Necessity of An Empty Tomb

An empty tomb determines whether Jesus' claim to be Lord is _____

A person who knows the truth but tells a falsehood is a _____

A person who believes a false claim to be true is _____

A person who believes his own false claims is delusional - a _____

Without evidence to prove or disprove a person's claims, you cannot _____ if you should believe them

Jesus' claims include: Being the Son of _____; Being the promised _____;

The ability to _____ sins and grant eternal life; Being the _____ to the Father

Jesus said He would be killed, but would rise from the dead on the _____.

If Jesus remained in the _____ past the third day, He was either a liar, deluded or a lunatic

If Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, it would prove He is indeed _____

An empty cross symbolized the payment for sin, An empty tomb proves the promises and gives _____

Evidence Jesus Physically Died

1) Those present testified He was _____ - the soldier, the Centurion, Joseph & Nicodemus

2) The soldier pierced His side with his _____ and blood and water came out - a sign of being dead

3) An imposter could not have fooled so many of Jesus' close friends and _____

Evidence Jesus Physically Rose from the Dead

The tomb was _____ by disciplined soldiers who could suffer severely for dereliction of duty

The _____ of the soldiers was not questioned and they were told to lie

The lie was _____ - If asleep, they could not know. If awake, they could stop the theft

Jesus made multiple appearances to many people

That morning to _____ and the other women in the garden - John 20:11-18; Matthew 28:9-10

That afternoon to the two disciples on the road to _____ - Luke 24:13-32

That evening to ten of the _____ in the Upper Room - John 20:19-25

Eight days later, to the eleven disciples showing _____ His hands and side - John 20:26-31

At the sea of Tiberias, He cooked and _____ with five of His apostles - John 21:1-25

In Galilee to all eleven apostles and to over _____ brethren at one time - Matt. 28:16-20; 1 Cor. 15:6

At the Mount of Olives, to all eleven _____ as He ascended into Heaven - Acts 1:9-12

No one has _____ the claim that He has risen from the dead

The disciples changed from fearful men in hiding to _____ men who turned the world upside down

The church is not a notable Jewish Messianic sect of _____, but is alive in the present

The church has traditions & rituals that are distinct from Judaism and point to Jesus death & _____

Mary, Joanna and the other Mary found the tomb empty, and the angel told them Jesus was _____ (Lk 24)

Conclusions

The cross was empty because Jesus died for our sins - we have been _____ and can be forgiven

The tomb was empty because Jesus conquered sin and death - we have hope of _____ with Him

KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help.

Young Children - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. Older Children - Do one or more of the following: 1) Write down all the verses mentioned in the sermon and look them up later. 2) Count how many times the word "Jesus" is mentioned. Talk with your parents about how Joseph, Mary, the Shepherds, Simeon and Anna responded to His birth.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. What were the reactions of the different people present at Jesus' crucifixion? How would you have reacted if you had been there? What was the purpose of a Roman cross? Why was Jesus' death on a cross the most repulsive, appalling and ugly thing that has ever happened? What was the cause of Jesus' death? How did God change the symbolism of the cross from something ugly into something beautiful? What does an empty cross symbolize within Christianity? Can an empty cross be beautiful without an empty tomb? Explain. How can you know that someone is trustworthy and is telling you the truth? Can you trust a liar? Can you trust someone who is easily deceived? Can you trust a lunatic? What are some of the claims that Jesus made about Himself? Could you trust those claims if Jesus was still in the tomb after the third day? Explain. Do you believe the claims made in the Bible that Jesus did rise from the dead on the third day? Explain. How do we know that it was Jesus on the cross and not an imposter? How do we know that Jesus physically died and did not just become unconscious? The elders of the Jews spread the story that Jesus' body was stolen by His disciples - how do we know that is a lie and not the truth? List out who the resurrected Jesus appeared to on the day He rose from the dead? How did Jesus prove to Thomas that He had physically rose from the dead and was not an apparition or hallucination? List out who Jesus appeared to in Galilee? What is the significance of Him cooking and eating fish with His disciples? What was the largest group that saw the resurrected Jesus? Who was with Jesus when He ascended into Heaven? Why is the change in the eleven disciples proof that Jesus rose from the dead? Could the church and its particular traditions and rituals including meeting on Sunday, baptism and communion exist if Jesus did not rise from the dead? Explain. Do you believe Jesus' claims about Himself and that He rose from the dead? Why or why not? What is your hope for eternity?