

THE EMPTY TOMB

John 20:1-18

INTRODUCTION

- Throughout history, rich and powerful men have built grand and exquisite monuments as tombs for their mortal bodies
 - ✓ The Great Pyramid of Giza, Egypt
 - ✓ The Taj Mahal, India
 - ✓ The tomb of Qin Shi Huang, China
- All these were constructed at immense cost, over many years, and serve to glorify those men who are buried there
- But there is another tomb, a simple rock tomb – not grand or elaborate – at the city of Jerusalem, that is of greater importance that all other tombs or graves in the world combined
- There was an event that took place at this tomb 2000 years ago that brought to mankind the greatest gift that was ever given
- This world is full of graves. Every town has its cemetery – but have you ever considered that in the original creation there was no such thing as a grave or tomb, nor was there need for any
- Were it not for the fall of man, the grave would not exist
- Graves, tombs, mausoleums, cemeteries are all a witness to the fact that this world is under the curse of sin and the bondage of death

- Our text is in John 20, and in the preceding chapter, the central focus was on the cross, as the Lord Jesus hung there, crucified, with the soldiers and the Jews beholding him there
- And as the Lord gave up the ghost he uttered that cry of victory, “It is finished!” (John 19:30)
- His side was then pieced by a soldier, drawing out blood and water (John 19:34)
- Then a certain Joseph of Arimathaea besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and so he and Nicodemus took Jesus’ body to bury him (John 19:38-42)
- As the focus in John 19 is upon the *cross*, so the focus in John 20 is upon the *sepulchre*
- In John 20:1-11, the word “sepulchre” is used 9 times
- The Holy Spirit is drawing our attention to the Lord’s tomb
- Mary Magdalene comes first to the tomb, accompanied by Salome, and Mary mother of James very early, while it was yet dark on the first day of the week, to anoint Christ’s body with sweet spices
- This Mary Magdalene had been radically converted to Christ, who had cast seven devils out of her, and she became a loyal disciple of the Lord, ministering unto him of her substance
- Finding the stone taken away from the tomb, she quickly alerted Peter and John who went in and, seeing the tomb empty, believed (v.8)
- Subsequently, two angels appeared to Mary, then the Lord Jesus himself appeared to her and showed himself alive

- All these events are centred around the empty tomb, and it is this empty tomb I'd like us to meditate upon today
- The great symbol of Christianity that everyone recognises is the cross – it represents to us the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the behalf of sinners, the essence of the gospel and the only means of salvation
- But an equally fitting symbol of Christianity is the empty tomb
- Remember that the gospel is not only that “Christ died for our sins,” but also “that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
- And while the cross only represents his death, the tomb represents *both* his death *and* his resurrection

Let us consider then three truths concerning the Lord's tomb:

I. IT WAS ORDAINED BY THE PROPHECY OF CHRIST

A. Christ's suffering and death had been foreordained of God

1. “By the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23)
2. “For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27-28)
3. “But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.” (Acts 3:18)
4. Nothing takes God by surprise – he “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11)

- B. The nature of Christ's tomb was specified 600 years before Christ's birth
1. There were over 300 Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Christ's life, and over 30 of them in the day of His crucifixion
 2. The probability of fulfilling just 8 of those prophecies is about 1 in 10^{28}
 3. Fulfilled prophecy is a clear proof of the inspiration of Scripture, and should be employed in our evangelism of the lost
 - a. Like the apostles, we should persuade "both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets" (Acts 28:23)
 - b. Prophecy speaks to the intellect, producing faith in the Scriptures
 - c. The law speaks to the conscience, bringing the knowledge of sin
 4. "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death" (Isaiah 53:9)
 5. To die as a wicked malefactor would normally mean to be also buried as one – in dishonour
 6. Yet though the Messiah would die with the wicked, he would be buried with the rich

II. IT WAS OCCUPIED BY THE PERSON OF CHRIST

- A. Joseph's tomb became Christ's tomb (Matthew 27:59-60)
1. This is another reminder of our Lord's material poverty in the days of his flesh

- a. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20)
 - b. He had no personal wealth of his own, but relied on the financial ministering of others
 - c. All his goods he used were borrowed from others apart from the clothes he wore
2. He endured such humiliation for our sakes (2 Corinthians 8:9)
 3. *In life, no house, no home
my Lord on earth might have;
in death, no friendly tomb
but what a stranger gave.
What may I say? Heav'n was His home;
but mine the tomb wherein He lay.*
(Samuel Crossman)
 4. But in Joseph's case, his tomb was only needed temporarily – a mere three days
- B. Christ's mortal body was laid to rest, while his divine nature remained unchanged
1. Some argue that Christ could not be God because "God cannot die"
 2. They fail to understand that Christ is the God-Man, both fully God and fully Man, and that it was not his divine nature that died but his human body
 3. Between his death and resurrection, Christ's soul went to paradise, as he promised the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43)

4. He did not suffer in hell as a further payment for sin as some falsely teach
5. His atonement for sin was completed at his death when he cried, "It is finished!" (John 19:30)
6. It was not until after his resurrection that he ascended to the Father (John 20:17)

III. IT WAS OVERCOME BY THE POWER OF CHRIST

- A. The resurrection of Christ is an undeniable historical fact
 1. Lee Strobel, an atheist and journalist whose wife became a Christian, set out to debunk Christianity, particularly the resurrection of Christ
 2. He posed four questions, then set about to answer them:
 - a. Was Jesus really dead? – his answer, "Yes"
 - b. Did believers invent this story? – his answer, "No"
 - c. Was the tomb actually empty? – his answer, "Yes"
 - d. Did people actually see Jesus alive? – his answer, "Yes"
 3. His conclusion: "The case for the resurrection of Jesus is powerful and persuasive. That evidence led me to my own faith in Christ."
- B. The empty tomb becomes a divine witness to all creation of Christ's glory and victory
 1. It testifies of Christ's deity (Romans 1:4)

2. It testifies of Christ's glorification (Romans 6:4)
3. It testifies of Christ's High Priesthood (Hebrews 7:16,25)
4. It testifies of Christ's victory over the forces of wickedness (Colossians 2:15)
5. It testifies of Christ's victory over Satan (Hebrews 2:14)
6. It testifies of Christ's victory over death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Revelation 1:18)
7. It testifies of Christ's finished work of redemption (Romans 4:25)
8. It testifies of the believer's resurrection (Romans 8:11)
9. It testifies of the certainty of Christ's future judgement (Acts 17:31)
10. The empty tomb is the one irrefutable argument that destroys the lies and errors of the infidels and heretics

CONCLUSION

1. The world mocks and ridicules the resurrection of Christ, calling it a myth and turning this day into a pagan fertility festival
2. US President has proclaimed that today is to be known as "Transgender Day of Visibility"
3. In due time, those who mock and ridicule the resurrected Christ will be slain by the sword from his mouth (Psalm 2)
4. The empty tomb is the answer to all our doubts, fears, disappointments, griefs

5. So when your soul is overwhelmed by these enemies, send them scurrying with the word, “the tomb is empty!”
6. The eternal benefits of Christ’s resurrection are available to all, but will not be enjoyed by all
7. If we are to live in Christ’s resurrection, there must be a death and burial of ourselves – of our sin, flesh, pride, self-love, self-will, self-righteousness, idolatry
8. What did Christ mean when he commanded all those who would follow him to “take up the cross”? He meant *we must die if we would live*
9. *“We want to be saved, but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of Mansoul and wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of a Caesar; but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility.”* (A W Tozer)
10. In Romans 6, Paul parallels Christ’s death and resurrection with the believer’s death to sin and raising up to newness of life
11. Many claim to be Christians who have never yielded themselves unto Christ, and who remain under the dominion of sin
12. Can you say with the apostle, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)