

**Scripture Reading: Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:1**

**“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”**

**John 20:1 “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” 3 Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. 4 So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. 5 And he, stooping down & looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.”**

## **"Chosen in Him: The Power of the Resurrection!"**

**We have begun to study the sublimity and majesty of the Epistle that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Saints at Ephesus and now we come to Easter or Resurrection Sunday for this year and as you can see I included texts for each subject!**

- **I trust the lessons we learn in both can have a greater impact on our lives as we consider them together.**

**So far, we have considered the grace and peace that the Father has bestowed on us through the work of His Son by the Power of the Holy Spirit. We considered the everlasting Covenant made among the Persons of the Trinity before the foundation of the world and how we are blessed in Christ in the Heavenly places!**

**This morning I want to touch again on what it means to be chosen in Him and in the weeks to come we will look at our standing before God & our adoption. We have before us two great truths to consider and I want to quickly look at what those truths are and how we should respond to each.**

**First, we see the Apostle declaring that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. And in our text from John we see that the tomb of Jesus is empty, confirming the power of His resurrection and sealing those chosen to be in Him.**

**BOTH are difficult from a human standpoint to comprehend and are not easy facts for us to accept or believe... The first goes against our prideful human nature that always want us up front and significant. IF we are chosen by the Father before the foundation of the world, then the reason we are in Christ is because of that choice and not any thing that we bring to the table!**

- **This is the ultimate statement of Grace, the unmerited favor that God extends to unworthy people.**
- **This is a hard truth, but an important truth we must embrace.**

**Now before I turn to that second truth of the empty tomb, I want to give a word of warning that Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones shared at this point:**

His thoughts reflect what the Apostle Paul covers in Romans chapter ten just after his powerful teaching about our gracious election in chapter nine.

He says, “But now take note that this aspect of truth [chosen in Him] has nothing to do with evangelism. People often argue that this doctrine of divine election and choice leaves no place for evangelism, for preaching the Gospel, for urging people to repent and to believe, and for the use of arguments and persuasions in doing so. But there is no contradiction here any more than there is in saying that since it is God that gives us the crops of corn in the autumn, therefore the farmer need not plough and farrow and sow; the answer to which is that God has ordained both. God has chosen to call out His people by means of evangelism and the preaching of the Word. He ordains the means as well as the end.”

And I would add, that this truth should give us a much greater confidence in both our evangelism and the raising of our covenant children.

- It is not our labors or knowledge or skill that will bring the ultimate fruit, but rather the power and purposes of God!

Now the second difficult truth for us to face is that empty tomb, which might seem a little strange here on Easter morning with all of our greetings of He is Risen – He is Risen indeed!

- It is a truth that should bring us great joy, just as being chosen in Him should as well!

But this truth is also something that challenges our pride and ability to “figure things out,” especially in our scientific world today. Obviously, the person who tells you that IF your God is real, then have him come down and show himself and I will believe: Is NOT likely to seriously ponder the evidence of the resurrection...

- Not without the help of God!

How do I know that? Well, you are looking at Exhibit A when it comes to skeptics being drug into the Kingdom because they were chosen in Him from before the foundation of the world. At bottom, this empty tomb troubles most because again we want to know what we can contribute... Think of Lazarus wanting to be part of his resurrection... The only part for him was to come out in the gravecloths and then have others remove them! This also troubles us because it does not fit our scientific frame of mind...

- Death is final in a materialistic world and our world today is certainly materialistic.

Of course all men are made in the image of God and really cannot live as though the material stuff of the universe is all there is... Just think about all the “alternatives” that Hollywood comes up with that people are happy to be entertained with: Ghosts, reincarnations, aliens, zombies and so much more!

- BUT come along wanting to speak about the importance of the resurrection and you will get some strange looks!

And yet, the foolishness of God is used to shame and challenge the wisdom of this world and that is why we should never back away from the bold proclamation that the Apostle Paul made to another skeptical world that had lots of alternatives as well: He challenged the great Greek thinkers of his days with these words given on Mars Hill so long ago, that are still used by the Spirit as the means to save God’s elect today... Ones like me!

Acts 17: 22 “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times & the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' 29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." 32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter."

➤ So as we would today, we see a variety of responses including some who believed and followed Paul.

As with ALL the truths that we have and will be studying in Ephesians, how we "look" at them is very important. This week Wade Trimmer posted some insightful comments about the text that I chose this morning from John's Gospel account... Peter and John visit the empty tomb and in just a few verses we see three ways of looking at things, whether simple things or very profound things.

Now you will often hear me ask from this pulpit, 'do we really believe' what ever it is that we are covering and reflecting on the reaction of Peter and John can help us with that question:

Mary goes with the other women early on the 1<sup>st</sup> Day and when they find the tomb empty she rushes back to tell the disciples and then Peter and John rush out to see for themselves. John, being faster arrives first as we read in verse 4: "So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first.

5 And he, stooping down & looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in."

Mr. Trimmer suggests this is the first way of looking at the empty tomb, calling it a curious glance. The use of the word 'saw' here is the common word for just looking at things as we do throughout our day.

Perhaps when thinking about Easter we could relate this to a time past when as the Christian consensus was fading in our nation, you still had packed out churches on Christmas and Easter.

➤ It was the fashionable thing to do, but those who attended were more like John giving a curious glance at the empty tomb and would quickly go back to their everyday lives without any real change.

Today, many faithful churches work hard to draw people in on these two popular Sundays with dramatic presentations, but sadly again most probably only glance at the empty tomb or even the wonder of the Incarnation at Christmas.

Peter soon catches up with John and so we read in verse 6: "Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself."

This is what Mr. Trimmer calls the critical look: We see Peter not just glancing at the empty tomb, but entering it and examining what he found inside. The body is not there, but it was not simply snatched by someone because the grave cloths in which Jesus was wrapped are still there and notice that John tells us that the head cloth was not with the other wrappings, but folded off by itself.

John uses a different Greek word in this verse for 'saw' from which we get our word theory, which would indicate that Peter was investigating the evidence, but he had not yet come to any firm conclusions.

What is important to note at this point is that investigating the evidence does not always led us to the truth.

- We are thankful that Peter would later encounter the risen Jesus and fully understand what he observed!

However, we know that people can deny the truth even when the evidence is stronger than what Peter investigated:

- We should remember that the tomb of Jesus was guarded earlier by Roman soldiers!

It is likely that they were the actual eye-witnesses of what happened on that first Easter morning! But they did nothing more than Peter did with his investigating and went to the Pharisees with a report of what had happened. Those religious leaders go even a step further and choose to lie about the facts, which sadly many have done down through the ages. Of course those soldiers go along with the lie, so the power of the resurrection became a judgment upon them rather than a blessing.

Finally, we come to John again in verse

8: “Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.”

John has before him the same evidence that Peter observed and yet we are told that John saw and believed. This time the Greek word used is one from which we get our English word idea, so to put it in more modern lingo, John got it!

Again, we have one set of facts or evidences and three different reactions from these two disciples:

At first John gives it only a curious glance.

Then Peter takes a closer look, but draws no real conclusions

And finally John goes in for a closer look and believes that what the evidence points to is true:

- Jesus has risen from the dead!

So, when we are challenged with that question about whether we truly believe, I trust this short passage from John will be helpful. When we consider the grand truths that we are learning in Ephesians or the empty tomb, it is not enough to see those things in the Bible, to know what chapter and verse to quote.

It is not enough to see the full context or even how all the pieces can fit together.

- No, we must be like John who saw and believed.

When we think about this with regard to the resurrection of Jesus, consider the importance that the Apostle Paul places on seeing AND believing:

I Corinthians 15: “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”

- Paul is not saying we can lose our salvation, but rather that we must do more than just causally consider or investigate the claims of Christ!
- John glancing into the tomb or even Peter’s theories about what happened would have in the end been such vanity!

And such is still the case today! We cannot just observe the Gospel or even just study the Gospel...

- We must believe the Gospel as John did on that first Easter morning!

**This is also true of the first truth that we considered as well: We are chosen in Him and we must believe this is true.**

- **We should be excited about it being true, just as the women were after Jesus appeared to them after He was risen.**

**Perhaps this truth about being chosen in Him means a bit more to me because I can relate it to the choosing of teams... As a very underweight asthmatic, I was often thrilled if I was just not the very last one to be chosen...**

- **But I can imagine the thrill it would have been to be chosen first!**
- **That is the child like excitement we should have when confronted with these great truths!**

**So, with that child-like excitement of being picked for the right team, we should see in the power of the resurrection just how good God's team really is in time and in eternity.**

**Our text tells us that John did not just see or even notice the empty tomb, but believed that it would impact everything in his life and the life of the world from that morning forward:**

**And that is just what the Apostle Paul goes on to proclaim in chapter 15 of First Corinthians:**

**“20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For “He has put all things under His feet.”**

**So this Easter Sunday, believe and celebrate the Empty Tomb and the right here, right now, benefits of the Resurrection that impacts our world!”**

**Communion Meditation: John 20**

**“24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.”**

**So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”**

**26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” 27 Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”**

**28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”**

**29 Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.””**