

THE EMPTY TOMB

Luke 24:3

"And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus."

A teacher asked her pupils -- who is the greatest living man? ^{World War II} Some wrote MacArthur, some wrote Eisenhower, and other prominent persons -- but one little boy wrote Jesus. Noting this last answer, the teacher replied, I said "living man". And of course, you recognize that this incident happened several years back. He is living teacher, the boy answered.

Too often, people regard Christ as just a historical character. Like Caesar, they think that he is just a popular symbol of Christian faith and that the cross and his death ended it all. If every steeple, every altar, could be decorated with an empty tomb - we would be reminded that he is living.

The combination of the cross and the empty tomb ideally portrays the Gospel. Mainly the death, the burial, the resurrection of Christ. This is the greatest event - it was the empty tomb.

A big jet lifted off a runway and soon the city of Dallas was spread out before two travelers. One traveler was a soldier, who happened to be traveling - seated next to John Ishee. Soon they began a conversation. And they began to talk about Vietnam and the destination of the soldier. What has the Army trained you to do, John asked him. He replied, I am a medic. They talked about the job of a medic in combat. After the battle he said, we go in and treat the wounded men. We try first to help the ones

that can recover. If a man is fatally wounded we leave him and move on to a person we can help. It must be hard to leave a dying man, John commented.

In medic training they tell us never to look into the eyes of a dying man. They say that if we do, we will never be able to leave him.

Just then the stewardess brought their meal and their conversation ended. But the words kept ringing in the ears of John - never look into the eyes of a dying man, or you will never be able to leave him.

Perhaps this is our problem today - we never look into the eyes of those who are dying without Christ. If we could see the helplessness, the loneliness, of those who need to find the meaning of life - we might tell them of Christ who could give life eternal.

Now these women, in this Bible story, had no doubt looked into the eyes of the dying Christ, on the cross. And on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the sepulchre, bringing spices which they had prepared. And certain others came with them.

And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.

And the story simply says, they entered in. They found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

Now these first disciples really had not entertained the thought of an empty tomb, despite the promises that the third day he would arise.

The women waited. The nightmare of Friday led into the blackness of Saturday. They had pinned their hope on Christ and now he is in a tomb.

They could think of the miracles - he healed the blind, made the deaf to hear, caused the lame to walk, the dead to rise, and then suddenly - because of the religious leaders and the Roman power, the one who had stilled the storms on Galilee and they had supposed would redeem Israel was now in the grave.

The suddenness of those final events left them crushed. They had reached the end of the line. And Saturday came to a close with despair.

The faithful women who had followed Jesus and had looked into his kind face were heart-broken. They watched him and looked into his eyes, after the cruel crucifixion. They knew about him being taken down hurriedly and laid in Joseph's unused tomb. And these women followed with determination to perform the proper administrations on the corpse.

They were denied the opportunity on Saturday, since it was the Sabbath - and they spent the day waiting for the first gleam of Sunday's sky.

Very early on Easter morning, while the due was still on the Palm branches, we follow these few women making their way to the tomb. The pre-dawn gloom matched their mood. But they had determined hearts and they had courage.

What love! They were last at the cross. And they were first at the tomb. What courage, we say. To hope to enter a tomb, sealed by Roman authority, and now guarded by Roman soldiers.

What faith they had. Who was going to roll away a huge heavy stone.

Now, the tombs that I saw were hollowed out of the rock, leaving a low doorway. And before this tomb, there was a large circular stone. Often over a ton in weight - rested at one side. After the body had been entered, the stone was rolled over the mouth of this tomb and became a barrier against vandals. Because of its weight, this stone could be moved only by the combined efforts of several muscular men.

In John 11:41 - we read about the stone that was rolled away from Lazarus' grave, taking more than one man to do it.

These women would have been unable to move that stone an inch. They found the stone rolled away.

They found an angel standing, guarding, who said - he is not here. He is risen, as he said. Come see the place where the Lord lay. Matt. 28:6.

They looked into the empty tomb. Then they hurried to tell the disciples. At first, their message sounded like an idle tale.

The disciples ran to investigate. Several perplexing hours followed. It ended by the Lord's appearance in The Upper Room - and finally the truth gripped their believing hearts. Their tears were turned into triumph. Their sorrow was changed into a song. The tomb was empty, and Christ Jesus, their Lord was alive.

Now the tomb can be interpreted as a prospect of a glorious future.

First, an amazing discovery. As bad as Friday had been - it ultimately gave way to Easter. The forces of evil must yield to good and must end and

truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, behind the dim unknown, standth God, within the shadow, watching over, and above his own. Now the tragedy made possible the triumph. Had not Jesus died, he could never have risen.

During the reign of Queen Mary I, a Christian was sentenced to die for his faith. Morning, noon, and night - the few days before his execution - he kept repeating the text, we know that all things work together for good to them that love God. Romans 8:28.

On his way to the scaffold, he fell and broke his leg. He was ordered back to prison. While moaning in pain, he was made fun of the jailer about his text. Ah, the good man replied, but it is true all the same. It is all working together for good. Within a week, Mary died. And Elizabeth ascended the throne. The Christian prisoner was soon set free. His Easter came a few days after black Friday.

When Lazarus was taken sick and died, his sisters were puzzled. But Jesus delayed his coming. But their dark days soon turned to victory. When Jesus raised their brother from the dead. Someone said if it weren't for the night, we would never see the stars.

Susan Coolidge, phrased it, lift up ye head, ye sorrowing ones, and be ye glad of heart for Calvary and Easter Day - earth's saddest day and gladdest day were just one day apart.

How marvelous to think and to make this amazing discovery in your life and

my life. But quite often the dark Saturday may be just a day away from the sunrise and the glorious life that God has for your life.

Many years ago a tornado struck the prairies of Minnesota - killing many and injuring many hundreds. It almost demolished the town of Rochester. An elderly Doctor and his two sons worked for days aiding the stricken - bandaging wounds, setting broken limbs. Their heroic work did not go unnoticed. Financial backing was offered for a large hospital, provided the Doctor and his sons took charge. They agreed opening in 1889, a clinic which soon attracted wide attention. For years, from 15-30 operations were performed daily in that clinic. People came from all walks of life, to the Mayo Brothers Clinic. It was after a dark Saturday that the light dawned, and the Mayo Brothers had the opportunity of using their talents in this way. The Lord brought blessing out of disaster.

William Cowper wrote - God moves in mysterious ways - his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the seas and rides upon the storm.

Joseph thought it was the end of the world the day his brothers sold him into bondage. Begging his brothers not to send him away from home and away from his father, he must have cried out - is God on the throne. Has he forgotten me. Years later when he was exalted the second ruler in Egypt - he was used to save many people's lives, including his father and brothers. He said to them, you thought it evil against me, but God meant it unto me for good. Gen. 50:20.

What it really meant was that a black Friday - God had brought an Easter out of it.

I believe that dark gloom must have developed in the early church. When the deacon Stephen was stoned to death. Yet, we find that that death flows throughout the rest of the book of Acts. The saints were scattered through Judea, Samaria - and they preached the Gospel. Paul was converted partically through the message of Stephen, and he proclaimed the word to the end of the Roman world.

Turning defeat into a victory is simply an amazing discovery.

Disappointment -- His disappointment. Change one letter, then I see. That the thwarting of my purpose is God's best choice for me. His disappointment must be blessing. Though it may come in disguise. For the end from the beginning. Open to his wisdom lies.

A missionary who fell into the hands of cannibals remarked, you going to eat me, I presume. The chief grunted, that he was. (Don't do it), said the missionary, you won't like me - I don't taste good. There upon the missionary took a knife from his pocket and sliced a piece from the calf of his leg. This he handed to the chief. The chief took one bite and choked. The missionary worked on the island for 50 years. He had a (cork leg). Little did he know that the tragedy which cost him his limb years before would be used by God to give him entrance among cannibals for half a century.

When we think of the one who was an orphan at the age of five, Immanuel Dannan, he was adopted by Samuel Norton and his wife, in a little Wisconsin town. At the age of 8, he witnessed the murder of a peddler by his step parents. The Norton's ordered him to lie to the police. The boy refused - for his honesty he was beaten fatally, hanging by his wrists from the rafters

of the crude log cabin. He sobbed, Papa, I will not lie. For killing ^{The Reckless} ~~Immanuel~~,
the Norton's served ~~seven years~~ in prison.

Sentiment ran high for the boy who would not lie. And citizens raised over \$1,000 for a monument to the boy. And a professional secretary was hired to travel the Eastern states to seek more funds. But his expenses totaled \$1,000. So for over a hundred years, Immanuel's grave remained unmarked. But the people nearby in Montello, Wisconsin, did not forget. May 2, 1954 the people assembled and dedicated a handsome 6 foot red granite monument, by the grave. And the inscription read, blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. And the people of that little town annually observe May 2nd as "Truth Day" in his honor.

There are countless cases that we might use to explain the black Fridays, that come across our lives. Easter may even be deferred until we reach Heaven.

William Cowper tells of a woman whose life was ebbing away in almost unbearable pain. Her son, bending over it, said Mother I can't understand why God would let you suffer so. Calmly she whispered - blind, unbelief is sure to error, and scan his work in vain. God is his own interpreter and he will make it plain.

This was an amazing discovery - that the tomb was empty. And as we listen to Rev. 1:18, Jesus said I am he that liveth and was dead. And behold I am alive forever more. Amen. And have the keys of Hell and death. Jesus, risen from the dead, is the sign unto the end of the world. To assure the church and

the world that not a jot or tiddle of what he has promised by the Scriptures, shall fail.

II. The Glorious Future Promised.

That brings us to this promise - the empty tomb proved Jesus everything he said to be. Because I live, ye shall live also. Great tribulations and persecutions, and even falling away in the midst of the church in times past. It may seem often even the church has gone almost to the grave. And they conspire - the evil ones conspire to keep the church in chains and in prison. But they shall not prevail because all authority now belongs to him. Rising from the dead proved his deity.

Romans 1:4 - He declared to be the son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. No one would expect an ordinary man to return from the dead. Washington is still in his tomb. The tombs in Westminster Abbey of the kings are still there. The dead in the cemeteries are still in their tombs. But Jesus was extra-ordinary -- in his birth, in his teaching, in his death, and in his resurrection. His rising fits his supernatural character.

Now other people who claim to come back from the dead to communicate with the living -- Houdini, the great magician, and exposé of spiritualism promised to contact his wife within seven years of his death. His wife acknowledged that he failed to get in touch with her.

Clarence Darrow, who also disavowed spiritualism, good naturedly promised

Claude Noble, a friend, that after death he would try to communicate with him. After Darrow, deceased in 1938, Noble twice tried to contact him. First, on the anniversary of his death - March 13, 1939 - in the Detroit Hotel Room where the pack had been made. Second, a year later when Noble stood on the ark over the lagoon over Jackson Park in Chicago into which Darrow's ashes had been strewn chanting, Clarence Darrow, I am here in the fulfillment of the promise we made each other. If you manifest your spirit to me - do it now. Both attempts failed.

Christ predicted that he would come back from the dead bodily. His failure to rise would have annulled every claim that he made as the son of God. When some years back reports spread that Buddha's bones had been discovered, the people of India lined the streets of Bombay to pay homage. A missionary, noting their reverence commented to a fellow Christian worker - if they could find one bone of Jesus Christ, Christianity would fall to pieces.

In the 8th century two men of acknowledged talents persuaded that the Bible was not true. Determined to expose the book as such. Their stragedy was to attack what they considered the true bulwarks of Christianity. One was the resurrection of Jesus - and the second was the conversion of Paul.

Lord Lyttelton, graduate of Eton and Oxford, and member of Parliament - who moved on intimate terms with Bolling Broke - Pope Chesterfield and Doctor Samuel Johnson - chose the conversion of Paul. His friend, Gilbert West took the resurrection of Christ.

Neither had read the New Testament. So each in fairness to his assignment

began to examine the evidences. Both sat down with their prospective task. But the result of their separate attempts - that they were both converted by their efforts to over throw the truth of Christianity. They came together not as they had expected to exhault over an imposture, exposed to ridicule - but to express to each other that their joint conviction was that the Bible was the word of God. Their able inquiries have furnished two of the most valuable treedies in favor of revelation. One entitled - Observations On The Conversion of St. Paul, by Lord Lyttelton.

And Observations and The Resurrection of Christ. This had been published by the American Tract Society.

The empty tomb declared to the disciples that Christ was victor over death. Death is a terrible name - it plays no favorites. It is a terrible enemy. It has a key to every secret chamber in every nation. And cares not about the plans - how young or old, strong or weak, there is an appointment that all must keep.

There was a hearse in Conn. that bore this license plate - U-2.

2 Timothy 1:10 - Christ through the Gospel abolished the power of death. Knowing it's full power - he personally confronted death. Determined to crush it. He permitted his body to become a corpse and to be buried in a tomb. But in every sense, he overcame. Death had counted him it's victim. As he suffered for the sins of mankind. But sin lost it's hold and power on him. And Satan failed. Christ sees from the Devil the keys of death.

The angel rolled back the stone and then sat on it to show that death had been subdued. And a new proclamation broke the air. He is risen.

He, who had re-inhabited his crucified body, for all to hear. I am he that liveth, and was dead. And behold, I am alive forever more. And the keys of Hell and death are mine. Rev. 1:18.

Though death may come to the believer, it's sting has been removed. Some day it's process will be reversed and believers will be raised.

The empty tomb gave the disciples boldness. In Gethsemane they had forsaken Jesus and fled. In the Upper Room they were behind closed doors. But now suddenly they have courage. A few weeks later, they will face ~~then~~ those and say we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Peter, who had denied the Lord, before a little maid - now would stand before thousands and say - ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Acts. 2:23.

Why the change? The next sentence gives the answer -- "Whom God hath raised up, whereof we are all witnesses."

Their conviction in the resurrection accounts cause them to be willing to suffer beatings, imprisonment, and even martyrdom. They have seen one who had conquered death. Though he had been placed in a tomb as a corpse, he had emerged alive. They knew that Christ lived. Because he possessed the keys of death, (they would live again.)

The empty tomb gives light to the Friday's tragedy. And it helps us to overcome Saturday's despair. And it provides for us a glorious prospect.

Remember these three things -- Friday's tragedy, when he was crucified.

Saturday's despair, when there was darkness and blackness. And then think,
of Easter Sunday - never let us forget the result in the believer, there will
come an Easter.

Marie Olson wrote a poem --

Before the blossoming of spring,
Lies winter - bleak and cold
There must be stormy clouds and rain
Before the buds unfold.

There must be showers in the sky
Before the rainbow's glow
There must be pruning of the vines
Before much fruit will grow.

Before the resurrection morn
There stood dark Calvary
Before the glory came -- the cross
With all it's agony
Through death comes life
Through loss comes gain
Then trust, rejoice, and sing.
And labor on ahead there lies
With Christ, eternal spring.

The resurrection changed a bad Friday into a good Sunday.

What I have tried to impress upon your heart this morning is that the tomb is empty. They entered in and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And that means that your dark Fridays and Saturdays are going to be turned into hope. It will not be like this closing illustration, that I read of a senior who was attending a Bible Institute. He was studying for the ministry. And Leslie Flynn said that he was called upon to conduct a funeral. It was the first funeral that he had ever conducted. He said, I went out to this funeral parlor in the heart of Chicago. The family was poor and without any church. He said a 24 year old mother had died. She was leaving 4 children - all too young to understand. And a husband in deep sorrow. But grieving far more, with demonstration was the girl's mother. He said, just as a funeral director was about to close the casket, the mother leaned over the daughter's face, and in unconsolable despair screamed in a loud voice - over and over again -- "never see her again, never see her again."

No one sees this more frequently than does a preacher. And we see the difference of a firm faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ - that he makes in the hour of sorrow. And what difference it has made that Christ has risen from the dead. And the tomb is empty. And because of this amazing discovery - we have the glorious future promised to us.

A little girl living in a certain place in the country used to skip and sing her way across the cemetery which was open by the roadside. Someone one day asked her if she was not afraid to go across the cemetery. And her little simple faith and reply said, no, I just go across it to reach home.

Now that's what it meant to the followers of Jesus that day. It meant the knowledge of joy. It was going to be their way home. And they went

everywhere to tell the brethren that he was alive. They looked at his hands. And they went on their way knowing that Easter Day had lifted the gloom. And they knew that it was a mistake to believe that at death we come to a full stop. Because I live - you shall live. There is the empty cross, the empty grave. The resurrection and happened to the disciples - and they themselves went forth from despair to transform the world.

AND this thing can happen again today in some person's heart here in this service. In men and women, boys and girls, this morning.

Now you have come to church today -- maybe it is a custom, maybe it is curiosity, maybe you understood before you come - but I hope this fact which I have shared with you - that the fetters of sin will be broken in your life and that you will know that God has been dealing with you. And redemption has been provided. And that he wants to bring you out of the darkness and disfiguring things of life - the truth that he is alive. Yes, as somebody has said, the cemetery is God's acre. It is going to be the place of the resurrection.

Teacher - Irish Living Man - McArthur - Jesus -

Big Tree - John deane - medic - head eyes of Reynolds man.

Woman at Tomb - Eyes of Jesus on Cross.

Jul. Dearham - Nightmare - Sat Bleedings - Sun. Results.

Amazing Discovery

Queen Mary I - Christie - born 8:28 all things work - Leg -
Elingsbeth -

Earth's saddest Day - Gladest Day one Day Apart!

Tornado - Rocheester, Minnesota - Dr. P. Som - Hosp. -
1884 - Mayo Bros -

Stephen - Deacon -

Missionary - don't talk good - slim leg - Earl
50 yrs -

Black Tide cross our way

Lyttellon - Paul's conversion) Both Sound
Willhet - Resurrection of Christ)

Heane - Home U-2