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'The Empty Tomb'

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"He is risen; He is not here; Behold the place where they laid Him" (Mark 16:6).

All religions run back to sepulchres. To only one is the door ajar—there is only one empty tomb. A Moslem once remarked to a Christian missionary: "We Moslems have one thing you Christians do not have: we have a tomb to which we can go and weep." "Exactly so," said the missionary. "We too have a tomb but it is empty; our Saviour is alive." That empty tomb makes all the difference between Christianity and all other religions. Christianity has a living Founder and Saviour; all other religions have dead founders and no Saviour.

We Christians are followers of a man. Isaiah speaks of this man: "And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind; and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa. 32:2). The same prophet speaks of all other men when he says, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils" (2:22). We have found faith and hope in a man—the man Christ Jesus. But He is more than man. He is the God-man; as much God as man, as much God as if He had never become man. He was God before He became man and remained God after He became man. Christ was put to death because He claimed to be God.

Jesus Christ was and is a unique person. No other person ever existed before birth, but

Jesus Christ was the eternal son of God. No other person was ever born as He was—born of a virgin without a human father; no other person ever lived as He lived, without sin; no other ever died as He did—laying down His life; no other ever came out of the grave as He did; and no other ever ascended to heaven as He did.

His goings forth were from everlasting, but as a man on earth, He traveled very little, hardly going beyond the borders of the land of Palestine. He never held any office by human suffrage, but He was God's anointed—God's Christ to save sinful man. He never wrote a book, but more books have been written about Him than about any other person. He never built any temple, but more houses of worship have been built for Him than for any other person. He did one thing that demanded the attention of the whole world—He arose from the dead. Without this one thing, all other things He did would have gone for naught and been forgotten. Without this one thing, Christianity would be nothing more than a dead relic of the past. And this one thing was that He arose from the dead—He took up the life He laid down at Calvary. The empty tomb was the blessed sequel to Calvary.

THE FACT OF THE EMPTY TOMB

"He is not here . . . Behold the place where they laid Him" were the words of the angel.

No event in history has been better authenti-

cated than the empty tomb of Christ. The empty tomb was not even denied by the enemies of our Lord. The issue has never been over the empty tomb, but over how it became empty. That the body of Jesus was placed in Joseph's tomb has never been questioned; neither has the fact that His body did not remain in the tomb.

The enemies of Christ were determined that the tomb of Christ should not become empty. They would take no chances, so the tomb was sealed with the Roman seal, and then a guard of soldiers was placed at the tomb to keep it from becoming empty. The disciples did not expect it to become empty, but His enemies remembered that He had said, "After three days I will rise again." And so they asked Pilate to make the tomb secure, lest His disciples steal the body and report that He arose from the dead. As much as Christ had talked about His death and resurrection, not a single disciple expected to find the tomb empty. The three women went to the tomb early in the morning to anoint His dead body, not to see and report an empty tomb. Mary Magdalene, the first to find it empty, hurried away to Peter and John and said to them, "They have taken away my Lord and we know not where they have laid him" (John 20:2). Peter and John ran to the tomb and found the napkin and clothes orderly arranged, but Jesus was not there. Mary lingered outside the sepulchre and two angels asked the cause of her weeping, and she repeats what she had said to the apostles: "Because they have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him" (John 20:13). It was then that Mary turned around and saw Jesus, but did not recognize Him for the moment, thinking it was the gardener. But when He called her by name, she knew Him and exclaimed, "Rabboni" which means Master. The fact of the empty tomb did not convince the disciples that He was risen. They had to see more than the empty tomb; they had to see Jesus Himself before they would believe He was alive.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE EMPTY TOMB

"He is not here; for he is risen" (Matt. 28:6). There was but two theories of the empty tomb in the early days; only two attempts to explain how it became empty. One was the testimony of angels, believed by the disciples when they had seen Him with their own eyes; the other was the testimony of His enemies that His disciples stole the body and concealed it. One was the testimony of eye witnesses; the other was the testimony of soldiers who were bribed to say that while they slept the disciples came and stole the body. The choice is between what the disciples saw while wide awake and what soldiers said they saw while asleep.

The obvious explanation of the empty tomb is

that Christ did what He said He would do; rise again the third day. He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs, being seen of His disciples during a period of 40 days, talking and eating with them, and being commissioned for their future work. Paul says that as many as 500 brethren saw Him at the same time. And Paul himself was convinced that He was alive when he saw Him as he journeyed to Damascus. The best witness is an eye witness.

Every disciple had to see Jesus alive for himself before he would believe. Thomas was not present with the other disciples when Christ appeared on that first Sunday. And when the others told him they had seen the Lord, he said he would have to put his fingers in the prints of the nails in His hand and thrust his hand into the spear wound in His side before he would believe such a thing. And so the next Sunday, Thomas was with the others when Christ came and said to Thomas, "Put your fingers in the print of the nails and put your hand in my side." But when Thomas saw Jesus, he exclaimed: "My Lord and my God!"

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

"And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (I Cor. 15:14). That empty tomb was the most revolutionary thing that ever happened in the history of this world. That empty tomb frightened His enemies and put new hope in His disciples. That empty tomb turned cowards into men of courage. That empty tomb caused the disciples to leave their boats and nets a second time to become fishers of men.

By His resurrection, Jesus Christ wrapped every date line about Himself. Because of the empty tomb, His name falls from millions of lips every day; some speak it in worship; others in profanity. But Jesus of Nazareth is not ignored. Day after day millions of letters will be dated as a witness to Him. Every legal document in the form of note, mortgage, or deed will bear silent testimony to Him. All history has been cut in two by His birth and all this because of the power of His resurrection. Christianity rests upon that empty tomb. If a certain tomb was not emptied and emptied in the right way, by the resurrection of Christ, the religion we hold is no better than any other religion. That empty tomb means:

1. A living Saviour. No other kind of Saviour is any good. He is able to save unto the uttermost all who come. Paul says, "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (I Cor. 15:14). Mere faith will save nobody; it must be faith in the right object. And the only right object of trust

is Christ who laid down His life and then took it up again. Christ is a mighty Saviour because He is a living Saviour. Strong faith in a dead person is vain faith, while weak faith in a living Saviour is saving faith. We are not saved by the strength of our faith, but by the strength of Him who is the object of our faith, even Jesus Christ. Paul says in I Cor. 15:18: "Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

2. Living Saints. "Because I live ye shall live also." The believer has everlasting life in Christ. There is no disease of the body that can affect the life one has in Christ. Everlasting life is not subject to heart failure or any other malady that affects the body. How could it be thought that everlasting life could die?

Our loved ones in Christ whose bodies lie out yonder in the cemeteries are not dead. They are as much alive as we are; they are in the personal presence of Him Who is life. All is life where Christ is for that is the land of the living. While we remain in these bodies, we are in the land of the dying.

3. A living hope. Hear Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." When Jesus died, the disciples despaired. Their hope went into eclipses. The cause He had founded was deserted, and they went back to their boats and nets. But when they were convinced that He was alive, their hope revived and they became new men—men of courage and activity.

The resurrection of Christ ought to keep our hope alive and throbbing with holy activity. We are not followers of a dead, impotent Saviour. We are not representatives of a doomed cause or a dead church. The gates of hades shall not prevail against the church of Christ.

4. A pledge and guarantee of other empty tombs. In His resurrection Christ became the first fruits of them that sleep. His resurrection was a pledge of our resurrection. Science can show us the difference between something planted and what it will be when it springs out of the ground. We plant a bulb and pluck a flower. We plant an acorn and sit under the shade of an oak. This is nature at work. But our resurrection will not be nature at work. It will be Christ at work. There is no life in the body when it is placed in the grave. Nothing but a miracle can bring our dead bodies out of the grave.

Science has a limited field in which it can operate. There are many things about which science is silent—as dumb as a post. Science cannot tell us what is right and wrong. Science cannot tell us the kind of Being God is. Science can dissect the body, but it cannot even tell us whether we have a soul or not. For things we

need to know most we are shut up to the Bible as Divine revelation. The Bible does not contradict true science; it enters a realm where science cannot walk and work.

The basic doctrine of Communism is called dialectical materialism. Nothing exists but matter. Man is nothing but matter—there is nothing about man that cannot be examined in a laboratory. The brain secretes thoughts just as the liver secretes bile. The only heart man has is the physical organ. But the Bible says man has a heart and a soul that cannot be placed in a grave. Jesus said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Paul said to Agrippa: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8). The believer faces up to the fact that there is nothing in the law of nature that can bring a dead body out of the grave, but he has the assurance that Christ came out of the tomb and that when He returns to this earth, His followers shall be caught up in their bodies to meet Him in the air. And all this is faith knowledge not scientific knowledge.



"For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." You will find this sentence like the tolling of a funeral bell repeated in the ninth and tenth chapters of Isaiah. It is a description of the repeated chastisements of Israel, because they pay no heed to chastisement. They go on sinning in spite of their affliction. And God will not let up on the punishment until they do return to him in genuine repentance. Calamities have come, but they said, "The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars." Man cannot defy God. A stiff neck only invites his lash. The world has been undergoing a chastising under the rod of God. And the end may not be in sight. Certainly it is not in sight unless we can learn the lessons of his judgment and come to him with confession and contrition. It is for us to recognize the righteous judgment of God, to confess our sins of obstinacy, self-sufficiency, pride, arrogance and the misuse of all his gifts to us. He is saying to us, "Why should ye be stricken any more? If ye be willing and obedient ye shall see the good of the land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken."