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*"Preaching The Same Truth We Preached Before Kentucky Was A State"*

### THE EMPTY TOMB

By Dr. C. D. COLF

*"He is risen; He is not here: Behold the place where they laid Him"—Mk. 16:6.*

ALL RELIGIONS run back to sepulchres, but 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 may go and weep." "Exactly so," replied the Christian, "We, too, have a tomb, but it is empty." That empty tomb makes all the difference between Christianity and all other religions. Christianity has a living Saviour and Founder, while all others have dead founders and no saviour. A dead saviour is a contradiction of terms.

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 prophet speaks of all other men when he says, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils" (Isa. 2:22). We have found faith and hope in a man—the man Christ Jesus. But He is more than a man; He is the God-man; as much God as man—as much God as if He were not man. He was God before He became man, nor did He cease to

be God when He became man. He was put to death because He claimed to be God. He claimed to have power to lay down His life and take it up again, and the empty tomb justifies His claim.

Jesus Christ was and is a unique man. No other man was ever born as He was, no other man ever lived as He lived, no other man ever died as He died, no other man ever came out the grave as He did, and no other man ever ascended back to heaven as He did.

His goings forth were from everlasting, but here on earth as a man, He travelled little, hardly going beyond the borders of the small land of Palestine. He never held any office by human suffrage, but He was God's anointed, "Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil; for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). He never wrote a book, but more books have been written about Him than any other person. He never built a temple, and yet 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. Without this one thing all other things He did would have gone for naught and been

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forgotten. Without this one thing Christianity would be nothing more than a dead relic of the past. This one thing was that He rose from the dead—He took up the life He laid down at Calvary. The empty tomb was the blessed sequel to Calvary.

## I. THE FACT OF THE EMPTY TOMB

*"He is not here: . . . Behold the place where they laid Him"*—Mk. 16:6.

No event in history is better authenticated 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 His body 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 seal of the Roman government, and a guard of soldiers was placed at the tomb to keep it from becoming empty. His disciples had no hope that it would become empty; however, His enemies remembered that He had said, "After three days I will rise again." And so they ask Pilate to make the tomb secure, lest His disciples steal the body and report that He arose from the dead.

The disciples of Christ did not expect 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 unto them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him" (Jno. 20:2.) Peter and John literally ran to the tomb and found the napkin and linen clothes orderly arranged, but Christ was not there. Mary lingers outside the sepulchre; two angels inquire the cause of her weeping, and she repeats what she had just said to the disciples: "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him" (Jno. 20:13). It was then that Mary turned around and saw Jesus, but did not recognize Him, thinking Him to be 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 must see more than the empty tomb; they must see Jesus Himself before they would believe He had risen.

## II. THE EXPLANATION OF THE EMPTY TOMB

*"He is not here; for He is risen"*—Matt. 28:6.

There were only two theories of the empty tomb in the early days; only two ways to attempt an explanation. 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. In later times other attempts were made to account for the empty tomb. One theory was that Christ did not really die, but only swooned or fainted, then revived and escaped from the tomb. This is absurd for at least two reasons; He was officially declared to be dead before He was taken down from the cross, and the soldiers would have discovered the attempt and prevented it. The claim of Renan that "the passion of a hallucinated woman (Mary) gives to the world a resurrected

God," is too puerile for serious notice.

The obvious explanation of the empty tomb is that Christ did what He said He would do: rise from the dead on the third day. He shewed Himself alive after His death by many infallible proofs, being seen of the disciples during a period of forty days, talking and eating with Him, and being commissioned by Him for their future work. Paul says that as many as five hundred brethren saw Him at the same time. And Paul himself was convinced that He was alive when He met Him face to face and heard Him speak on the Damascus road.

The Bible says that an angel from heaven came and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it. The soldiers shook with fright and became as dead men at the sight of the angel. While the disciples were discovering that the tomb was empty, the soldiers reported to the chief priests what had happened. The chief priests and elders hold a council and decide to bribe the soldiers to testify that "His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if the governor hears about it, we will persuade him, and secure you." Matthew tells us that they took the money, told the lie, and that this was the only explanation given by the Lord's enemies up until the

time he wrote his gospel. We have the perjured testimony of what men saw in their sleep over against the testimony of disciples who were eye witnesses to His resurrection. Christ appeared in His resurrection body only to His disciples, and every disciple had to see Him for himself before he would believe. Thomas was not present the first time Christ appeared to the other ten. He would not take the word of others but insisted that he would not believe Jesus was alive unless he could see the prints of the nails in His hands, and put his finger into those prints, and then thrust his hand to His side. Jesus accepts this challenge and after eight days He again appears to all eleven and tells Thomas to do the very thing he had said. At the very sight of Jesus Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God."

## III. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

*"If Christ be not risen"*—1 Cor. 15:14.

That empty tomb was the most revolutionary thing that ever happened in the history of the world. That empty tomb frightened His enemies and put new hope in the disciples. That empty tomb turned cowards into men of courage. That empty tomb caused His 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 an empty tomb. If a certain tomb was not emptied—and emptied the right way—by the resurrection of Christ—the religion we hold is no better than other religions. That empty tomb means:

1. *A Living Saviour.* No other kind of Saviour is

any good. He is able to save completely all who come unto God by Him, because He ever liveth to make intercession for us. If Christ be not risen our preaching is vain, our faith is vain, and we are still in our sins. 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 took it up again. Christ is a mighty Saviour because He is a living Saviour. Strong faith in a dead saviour is vain faith—it is vain to trust someone who is dead. We are not saved by the strength of our faith, but by the strength of Him Who is the object of our faith, even Christ Jesus, the Son of God. If Christ be not risen, those who have fallen asleep in Him are perished.

2. *Living saints.* "Because I live ye shall live also," said Jesus. And again, He said, "God is not the God of the dead but of the living." That statement was made concerning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their bodies had died centuries before, but they were still living. The body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of Christ. The body is all that can or does die, so far as the child of God is concerned. The saint is not dead when his body dies. The believer has everlasting life in Christ, and there is no disease of the body that can in the least affect the life one has in Christ. There can be nothing fatal to everlasting life. This life is not subject to the hazards of physical life. This life is not a victim to any heart failure or any other disease. 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 presence of Him Who is life. All is life where Christ is. There are no cemeteries where Christ is, for that is the land of the living. William Jennings Bryan has well said that "Christ, by His resurrection, has made immortality sure; He has transformed death into a narrow, star-lit strip between the companionship of yesterday and the reunion of tomorrow."

A pagan philosopher, on hearing that his son was dead, coldly remarked, "Well, I did not think that I had begotten an immortal." An ancient Christian, when told that his father was dead, exclaimed, "Cease your blasphemy; my father is immortal." Christ has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

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 to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

When Jesus died the disciples despaired. Their hope went into eclipse. The cause He had founded was deserted and they went back to their boats and nets. In a sad, reminiscent mood, two of them on their way to Emmaus, said "We were hoping that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel"

(Lk. 24:21). The verb here is in the imperfect tense, denoting continuous action in the past. While He lived they hoped, but when He died their hope died and went into the tomb with Him. But when they were convinced beyond any doubt 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 activity. We are not followers of a dead, impotent Jesus; we are not

representatives of a doomed cause or a dead church. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against the church of Christ. Everything else goes down through those gates of death—gates of the unseen realm. The church as an institution founded by the Lord Jesus lives on because He lives as its Head and Life.

4. *A saving gospel.* A dead Christ invalidates the Gospel. "If Christ be not risen our preaching is vain." What we preach is not the Gospel if Christ is not risen. The facts of the Gospel, according to Paul, are the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And all these were done for our sins. The resurrection of Christ certifies to the blessed truth that His death on the cross was accepted and was sufficient as the payment of our sin-debt. He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification. His resurrection is our receipt for His payment for our redemption. If anything had been lacking in the price He paid for our salvation, He would still be in the tomb. Jesus paid it all—He nailed the law that was against us to His cross. His blood cancelled our sin-guilt, and we go free.

"Free from the law, O happy condition,  
Jesus has died and there is remission."

5. *A pledge and guarantee of other empty tombs.* In His resurrection Christ became the firstfruits 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 in our resurrection it 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 their 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 cannot tell us where we go from here when we leave our bodies. Science can dissect the body but it cannot even tell us whether we have a soul or not. For things we need to know the most we are shut up to the Bible as the written revelation of God and about God. This Bible does not contradict true science; it enters a realm where science cannot walk and work.

The basic doctrine of Communism is that all that exists is matter. There is nothing about man that cannot be taken into the laboratory and examined. Man is not a moral being responsible to God as the Supreme Being; man is a material being responsible to the Communist party. The brain secretes thoughts just as the liver secretes bile. The only heart man has is the physical organ. But over against this Godless system, the Bible says that man has a soul and a heart that cannot be dissected and placed in a grave. Jesus tells us not to fear them that are able to kill the body, but to fear God Who is able to cast both soul and body into Gehenna.

Paul said to king Agrippa, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 20:28). The believer faces up to the fact that there is nothing in the law of nature that can bring his dead body out of

the grave, but, he is happy in the assurance that Christ came out of the tomb, and that when He returns to this earth, His followers shall be caught up together to meet Him in the air, and to be forever with Him in that new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Hallelujah! what a hope!

The eighteenth century was the darkest period religiously in the history of England since the time of the Reformation. It was the age of deists, atheists, agnostics, and rationalists. Every man of much rank was thought to be an infidel. Two of the skeptics were Lord Lyttleton and Gilbert West. Fully persuaded in their own minds that the Bible was an imposture, they conspired to expose the cheat. They would investigate its claims and expose its falsity. Lord Lyttleton chose the conversion of Paul and Mr. West the resurrection of Christ for study and for hostile criticism. They sat down, separated from each other, to their respective tasks full of prejudice; but when they had done their work they were both believers in the Bible as the revealed word of God and in Christ Jesus as the Divine Saviour. They came together, not as they had planned and expected, to congratulate each other and to exult over their victorious overthrow of Christianity, but to lament their own folly and to praise God for their joint conversion to faith in Christ.

“Lift up your heads, ye sorrowing ones,  
And be ye glad of heart;  
For Calvary Day and Easter Day,  
Earth’s saddest Day and gladdest Day,  
Were just three days apart.”