

“More Than Just An Empty Tomb”
John 20:1-33

3/22-23/08 Easter Weekend
6 p.m.; 9 & 10:45 a.m.

Series: Final Days

INTRODUCTION

“In the mid 1950s, British pastor W. E. Sangster, began to notice some uneasiness in his throat and a dragging in his leg. When he went to the doctor, he found that he had an incurable disease that caused progressive muscular atrophy. His muscles would gradually waste away, his voice would fail, his throat would soon become unable to swallow.

“Sangster threw himself into his work, figuring he could still write and he would have even more time for prayer. He wrote articles and books, and helped organize prayer groups throughout England.

“Gradually Sangster’s legs became useless. He lost his voice completely. But he could still write with a pen, although shakily.

“On Easter morning, just a few weeks before he died, he wrote a letter to his daughter. In it, he said, ‘It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, “He is risen!” - but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout.’”

Are you ready to shout? I’m going to shout “He is risen!” and you respond, “Christ is risen!”

Ready? Go! “He is risen!”

OPEN to John 20:1 (**PAGE** 1685)

If you went to the cemetery to visit the grave of a loved one, and you found the ground all dug up and piled to the side, and the casket to the other side of the hole, open, and no body there, what would you think?

You’d likely think a grave robber had been there and done his ugly work! And that would be a reasonable assumption.

As we read this morning, we’re going to see Mary Magdalene’s, Peter’s and John’s initial responses are the same.

As we read - and the facts unfold, their take on the situation changes, it progresses.

Take 1: The Empty Tomb = Jesus’ Body was Stolen (John 20:1-9)

READ John 20:1-9

At first, Mary thought that Jesus’ body was taken by someone; likely stolen. Resurrection never entered her mind and that’s understandable ... dead bodies, especially bodies dead for three days, don’t become alive again!

But who moved it?

Did Joseph of Arimathea, the tomb's owner? Pharisees? Pilate? Soldiers? Common grave robbers? *Nobody knew.*

So, that's take 1: the body is missing; someone has taken Jesus' body. Confusion.

So, Mary ran and told the disciples. Peter and John run to the tomb. Sure enough, the stone is rolled away from the entrance and Jesus' body is gone.

But, once Peter and John actually go into the tomb and examine what's there, they see evidence that makes them think that something else has happened.

Let's take a closer look at a few verses:

Peter and John run to the tomb and ...

v. 6-7: **"Then Simon Peter, who was behind him [John], arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen."**

Peter is carefully observing the details, taking it all in ...

1. **the strips of linen**, in which Jesus' body had been wrapped (mummy style).
2. Also, there is **"the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head."** So, the head was not wrapped in the same manner as the body.

And notice the details that Peter was taking in regarding the cloth that had been around Jesus' head: **"The cloth was folded up by itself ..."**

Someone had taken the time to fold the head cloth and lay it down. It wasn't just thrown to the side, as you might expect a grave robber to do.

And, as Peter is taking in these details, John walks in the tomb, and he sees the same things

v. 8b: **He saw** (*eiden*, perceived) **and believed.**

He saw not only the details of what was before his eyes, but he *perceived* what this *meant* ... he **believed.**

What did he believe?

What John sees *does not* lead him to **believe** that someone has taken the body of Jesus. It is highly unlikely that they would have taken the time to unwrap the body or to carefully fold up the head cloth and lay it on the slab.

John **believes** that Jesus has risen from death. His body passed through the strips of cloth that wrapped it and He took the cloth that was around His head, folded it, and laid it aside.

Maybe John remembered one of the times Jesus told them that He would rise from death after being crucified. But you'll notice in v. 9 that, **“They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.”**

“**Scripture**” here refers to OT prophecies that the Messiah would rise from death.

So, their first take is that someone has taken Jesus' body, *but* the evidence leads them to believe something else has happened, and John comes to the conclusion that Jesus has risen from death.

Next, we see that the situation comes to absolute clarity:

Take 2: The Empty Tomb = Jesus is Alive! (John 20:10-20, 24-29)

READ John 20:10-20, 24-29

Take 2: The Empty Tomb = Jesus is Alive!

Now, Peter and John have gone back to their homes, but Mary Magdalene remains behind. She decides to look into the tomb, and she sees something astonishing ... two angels!

They ask why she is crying, she replies that Jesus' body has been taken.

Then, she turns and, it appears in a glancing sort of way, sees who she thinks is the gardener, the one who tends the tomb area, and he asks,

v. 15-16: **“Woman ... why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” ... she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get Him.’**

16 Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher).

So, Mary is the first one to see Jesus alive again!

It's interesting ... scholars have been careful to point out that if the early church was fabricating the resurrection, as some have accused them of doing, they never would have invented a story with a woman as the first witness to this most important event.

Women were not held in high esteem in the Jewish culture, and this would not have helped them to convince others that the story was true.

Jesus and Christianity elevated women far above the culture of their day.

So, after appearing to Mary, Jesus sends her to the disciples to announce His resurrection, and she runs to them and declares, **“I have seen the Lord!”** and told them what had happened.

“...but according to Luke, they did not believe her or the other women **‘because their words seemed to them like nonsense.’**” (Luke 24:11; cf. Luke 24:23).

BUT, Jesus' appearance to Mary begins a series of resurrection appearances ... and ultimately, more than 500 people saw Him and were *convinced*.

Appearances on the day of His resurrection:

1. Mary Magdalene (and the other women) (Matthew 28)

2. Peter (Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:5) We don't have any of the details of this appearance, but it is mentioned twice ... Luke 24 and 1 Cor. 15.

3. Two Disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13ff)

and later that night,

4. 10 of the 12 Apostles (Luke 24:36ff). Thomas was missing, as was Judas.

Appearances after the first day:

5. Thomas (John 20:24-28) One week after Jesus appeared to the other apostles.

Then, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul continues with this chronology ...

6. 500+ believers at the same time (1 Corinthians 15:6)

7. James (1 Corinthians 15:7a) His half-brother, and later the writer of the letter of James and the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

8. All the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:7b) In addition to the 12 original apostles.

9. Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15:8) Possibly on the road to Damascus, where he first heard Jesus.

10. Seven disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (John 22) Unknown as to chronology of appearances.

The resurrection of Jesus was not done off in a quiet little corner somewhere,

His appearances were not limited to a select few, and all the historical evidence and eye witnesses of the time agree in their testimony.

Jesus was dead, He was placed in a tomb, and three days later He rose to life, and appeared to more than 500 people over a period of 40 days before ascending into Heaven.

So, what does all this mean for you and me?

Take 3: The Empty Tomb = a Personal Invitation to Meet Jesus (John 20:30-31)

READ John 20:30-31 “**Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book.**

31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

John says that he recorded all that is contained in the 21 chapters of his book so that you and I “**...may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”**

1. **Jesus is the Christ**, God’s Promised One
2. **Jesus is... the Son of God**
3. Receive **life** from Him *by believing*

1. Jesus is the Christ, God’s Promised King

- a. OT prophecies regarding the **resurrection** of the Christ were fulfilled in Jesus (Psalms 16:10-11; 110:1, 4; Isaiah 53:11-12)
- b. Jesus’ five predictions that He would be raised from death were fulfilled. (Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34; John 2:19)

Jesus was raised from death, the Christ was to be raised from death. Jesus is the Christ.

2. Jesus is the Son of God

Romans 1:4b: **Jesus “... was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead ...”**

Jesus had already claimed to be the Son of God with His words. Through His **resurrection** He **was declared with power to be the Son of God.**

- a. This means He is more powerful than physical death.
- b. He is more powerful than spiritual death.
- c. He is more powerful than sin, the root cause of both physical and spiritual death.

3. Receive **life** through Him *by believing*

- a. **Life**: *abundant* life now (**quote** John 10:10)
- b. **Life**: *eternal* life now and forever (**quote** 1 John 5:13)

- He gives us **life** by forgiving our sins so our slate is clean and there is no longer any basis for an accusation against us.

- He gives us **life** by granting us power over sin ... real, tangible, experienced power in our lives that was not there before!

- He gives us a **life** where we are **fully accepted** by God! God accepts Jesus' sacrifice as payment for our sins and adopts us into His family as His very own sons and daughters!
He accepts us!

- He gives us a **life** full of **significance**! He reveals to us the plan He has had for our lives from the beginning of time ... He gives us **significance** ... a real reason for living!

- He gives us a **life** of **security**!
He then promises to take care of us in this life and in the life to come ... no need to worry about anything at all! That's **security**!

And, it's all a gift, given when we say to Jesus, *"I believe You. I accept You. I need You. I entrust my life to You."*

"The angel opened the tomb of Jesus, not to let Jesus out, but to let the world see that He rose!"
(BKC)

And now, this same risen Jesus invites you into a relationship with Himself.

CONCLUSION

What will you say to Jesus' invitation?

Will you receive Christ? Do you need more information? Do you need to talk to someone?

How will you respond to Jesus' invitation?

"Lord Jesus Christ, I surrender my life to You. I believe that You died for my sins and came to life again. Please come into my life; I entrust myself to You! Thank You! Amen."