

MORE THAN AN EMPTY TOMB
(Easter-Special Day Sermon)

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He is Risen...He is Risen Indeed!

Yes, that is a common thing that is done on Easter, for that is what we are celebrating today, the risen Savior. As what is described as being the gospel of Jesus Christ in a nutshell, Paul said in **I Corinthians 15:3-7**, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles."

Christ was crucified on a cross, He died, He was placed in a tomb (or cave) to which a huge stone was placed in front of the opening, on the third day the stone was rolled away from the opening, He was then witnessed to have been gone from the tomb. While that is a summation of the events leading to the realization that not only did Christ die on a cross for our sins but that He rose from the grave on the third day, conquering death which brings us to gather together today to celebrate that Victory! But wait! There's so much more to this story that can be unraveled, like the burial cloth that Jesus was wrapped in, and which reveals the true and whole meaning to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John 20:1-2 "Now 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. 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."

Mary makes an assumption that they (whoever they are) have taken Jesus' body and that she didn't know where they had taken Him. At this point Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved (that was John) only had heard then that the body of Jesus was missing. Did thieves come in to steal His body, did the Romans come and take His body for whatever reason, did someone come and take His body to place Him somewhere else? At this point it was not clear to the disciples what was going on. They were still grieving the loss of their Teacher and Lord. Some of them for sure had come to the realization that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, but they hadn't understood at this moment what was really happening.

John 20:3-10 "Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb;

and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes."

So now we have Peter and John running to the tomb. Funny how John included in his narrative that he won the footrace to the tomb. They were still human after all. Both of them now see that not only is Jesus' body missing but that His burial cloths were lying there and the handkerchief that was around His head had been folded and placed by itself away from the other cloth. Now they're starting to get a clearer picture of what had happened. Mary Magdalene had only reported that Jesus was missing according to this account.

John 20:11-18 "But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.' Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her."

So, for a recap of this story, Mary at first had said that Jesus' body was missing, then in the story we learn that Peter and John discover, not only Jesus' body was missing, but that His burial cloths had been left behind and the handkerchief that was wrapped around His head was neatly folded and placed away from the other cloths. Now we find that two angels were present and then that Jesus was alive and had therefore risen from the dead. John though had his own recap of what this all meant in verses 30-31, where he says, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

Ah Yes, the gospel of Jesus Christ! That we may believe on Jesus as the Christ and that we may have eternal life in Him. That sounds

like the perfect way to end this sermon, you may think, yet there's more and it gets even better. How can anything be better than the promise of eternal life in Christ, you may ask? Well, the story of Jesus and the disciples didn't end there and it doesn't end there with us either.

Further in the story, in Chapter 21, it says that Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, and John all went back to their jobs as fishermen. They were in their boats fishing, to which they weren't having any luck. Jesus appeared on land and told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat, to which they did, and then caught so many fish that they couldn't even pull up the net. Jesus then invited them to have a meal with Him as Jesus already had fish on the fire and some bread.

After their meal Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

A Lot can be said about that dialogue and much has been said about it in a multitude of sermons over the years but what we are going to be looking at in this story is that the gospel of Jesus Christ didn't end with the account of those who found the empty tomb or the empty tomb with the burial cloths. Jesus has risen indeed but He isn't just sitting on His throne just waiting for us to get there. Jesus had told Peter to feed His sheep and even told him that he was going to die by crucifixion as well. But wait! There's even more! The story continues. In the book of Matthew, in the 28th chapter, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were told by an angel that Jesus would meet them and the disciples in Galilee which we already read about Jesus and the disciples on the shore of Galilee. Once in Galilee, Jesus tells them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Simon Peter and some of the other disciples had been given their first lesson in learning that Jesus is with us, always, even to the end of the age. Jesus reinforced to them that He is the Bread of Life with His prepared meal for the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had told the disciples in verse 21 of John 20, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." But previously in John 15 Jesus said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." Verse 8, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." Verse 10, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Verse 12, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." And verse 16, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."

Sure, you may say, Jesus was talking to His disciples when He said that. Jesus also said in Matthew 10:37-38, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." Jesus said in John 14:12, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father."

Just after that Jesus explained in verses 14-17, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."

So then, Jesus said that if we don't take up our cross and follow Him we are not worthy of Him, that if we love Him that we would abide in His love and keep His commandments and that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, would guide us in His truth. Just as Paul said in Romans 8:9, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

When Jesus said, "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age," He meant exactly that. The abiding in Him isn't just a cute way of saying that we can rest assured in our salvation in Christ, which we can! When Jesus said that "he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me", He was not just saying that if we just suck it up and put up with this present life that we will eventually find eternal life in Christ. He was calling all who will believe in Him to follow Him, to be led by His Spirit, to obey His

commands, like loving God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind, to love our neighbor as ourself, and that we would bear much fruit for the glory of God! How exciting it is to know that we aren't just believing on Christ and then just sitting around waiting for Him to take us home. Perhaps if that were the case Jesus may have just met the women and all the disciples in the tomb and He might have just made a home of it where He could invite them over to His tomb and made them a snack of tea and cookies. No, Jesus left behind the tomb of death and burial cloth and went to tell His disciples to go and make more disciples and that by that all glory would go to God!

In the book of Acts Jesus tells the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit where He says, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Would they have received the power of the Holy Spirit had they just gone their own way, back to their old lives? Would they have received the power of the Holy Spirit had they been dividing into sects because of their disagreeing with one another about trivial matters? Would they have received the power of the Holy Spirit had they wanted to do ministry their own way? Jesus said that He is the Good Shepherd, He is the Light of the world, that He is the Bread of Life, that He is the Resurrection and the life, that He is the True Vine, that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life!

The whole story has not been told. But we know the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ is more than an empty tomb. We don't know what exactly we'll be doing in a million years from now but we do know what God wants us to do today. Jesus wants us to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name", plus He wants us to abide in Him and **His love**, that **His joy** may remain in us, He wants us to follow His commandments, that we can be His friends, He wants us to take up our cross and follow Him, and He wants us to bear much fruit all for the glory of God! And lo, **He is with us always, even to the end of the age!**