

Visiting the Empty Tomb

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Easter Sunday

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Mark 16:1-8 Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary *the mother of James*, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. ² Very early in the morning, on the first *day* of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. ³ And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" ⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away-- for it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. ⁷ "But go, tell His disciples-- and Peter-- that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you." ⁸ So they went out quickly¹ and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Last year I was reading a book and came across a quote that surprised me. It was a quote from a second century Roman general who referred to the Jewish nation and their "tribal god." It's not surprising that an ancient Roman would view the Lord God in such a way. Yet, it was one of those things that can be a little shocking when you're not expecting it. The important thing is not what they think but are they right?

Is the Lord God of Israel simply another tribal god?
Is the Bible just another text written by men?
Did the apostle really witness the resurrected Christ?

Thoughts and accusations like these may at first surprise us, then they may trouble us, but then we come to the feast of the resurrection. We leave our homes early with the women and we see an empty tomb.

This empty tomb is a resounding NO to all our doubts and all those opinions of men.
This empty tomb is a resounding YES to all the promises of God, to all that we have hoped for and waited for and trusted in. It is a resounding YES to the thing that is the very foundation of life.

The tomb is empty, and Jesus is risen from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 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

There are numerous books which lay out the evidence for the empty tomb and a risen Christ. Some of them are:

The Defense Never Rests by Craig A Parton

The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel
Mere Christianity by C S Lewis

These books are useful and well worth reading however we have in our text a suggestion which is much more suited to Easter morning, an angelic invitation. In order that we might have full assurance of our faith, and absolute confidence that Jesus is both God and Lord, the angels invite us to "see the place where he lay" and to go to galilee for there "you will see him."

Visiting the Empty Tomb

Of course we can't actually go to the empty tomb. We don't know for sure where it is, and the fact that it is empty now doesn't really mean much. You could go to Jerusalem. Guides there will tell you here is the empty tomb, but we don't know for sure that it actually is the empty tomb. Yet there are still many opportunities to see the empty tomb through the eyes of those who witnessed it.

One of my favorite historic figures is a second century pastor named Polycarp. This may seem like a strange name but in Greek it means "many fruits."

Here is a man who like many of us grew up going to church every Sunday. The only difference was that his pastor was the Apostle John. Imagine growing up hearing John himself speak about the time that Jesus stopped the storm, was transfigured on the mountain or the time that he ran with Peter to look in to the empty tomb. Polycarp writes about how John spoke often about seeing the risen the Lord.

When I went to Seminary, they had all these rules about what makes a good sermon. The apostle John didn't need rules. He simply told people the amazing things had seen and heard, above all the resurrection of Jesus.

We can't see the empty tomb with our own eyes, but we can see it through the eyes of the women and the apostles. Furthermore, we can clearly see how Jesus filled the lives of these men, and the power of his gospel, as his kingdom was preached unto the ends of the earth.

The tomb is indeed empty because Jesus is more certainly not there. He was with the apostles, and he is now with us. The tomb is empty. He is not there for he is risen as he said.

Visiting Galilee

Unlike the tomb, it's easy to find Galilee. You can go to Galilee, and some of you have, but I doubt any of you have seen Jesus while you were there. Once again, the angelic invitation to the women and the apostles was to literally go to Galilee, but we can still find Jesus in Galilee through the gospels.

How much time this year have we already spent in Galilee?

We were there when Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John to be fishers of men.

We were there when Jesus cast out the demon.

We were there when Peter's wife was sick.

We were there on the mount of transfiguration.
We were there when Peter confessed "You are the Christ."

We regular go to galilee in the scriptures and what do we find there? We find Jesus stilling the storm, cleansing the leper, healing the blind, raising the dead, and forgiving the sinners. The power of the risen Christ is clearly evident in these words.

Directing people to the word of God and the miracles of scripture is not going to impress the wise of this world and the unbelievers. But for us there is no greater proof than to visit again these precious accounts and see the power and love of Christ in action in the lives of his people.

2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

Come and see the empty tomb. Go to Galilee and see the power of the risen Christ. Know the truth of his resurrection.

We go to the empty tomb, and he is not there. He is the one who lives.

We go to Galilee, and we see him bearing the marks to display his love for us.

The empty tomb proclaims the truth. He is not a forgotten dead tribal god. He is the lamb who was slain for the sins of the world but now lives and fills the lives of his people with power and salvation.

Come and see, He is not here for He has risen as he said. Amen