

He is Risen!

Matthew 28:1-10

It was still dark as 2 women rose that Sunday morning. They got up and put on their garments, gathered their spices and headed out on the dirt road that lead out of the city. Thoughts and sights of the last week must have been running through their minds.

For they had been there when Jesus rode in on the colt before thousands shouting his praises, what an incredible moment that was. Unfortunately, their memory of the events of last week didn't stop there.

They also saw Jesus tied down as a Roman whip filled with broken pieces of pottery, glass and bones ripped across His back. As they recalled the purple robe, the beatings, the cruel mocking and the crown of thorns, the tears began to flow once again.

They had been there through it all.

They had witnessed everything that Jesus, their teacher, their friend, their Lord, suffered through.

These 2 women, (*Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of James*) were also there at the Cross. They saw Jesus hanging there, they saw His body struggle and wince with pain with every breathe that He took. They were there when Jesus cried, "MY GOD, MY GOD WHY HAS THOUGH FORSAKEN ME" and they saw his head fall as he cried out, "IT IS FINISHED."

They were there when Jesus died... and when He died, they died too. Oh, they were still alive physically but their hope and joy died on that Cross with Jesus. On that dark day more than 2,000 years ago, their Lord was dead and their hope in life was gone.

So, what are they doing up so early on this Sunday morning? Why aren't they lying in bed wallowing in their misery? What was it that drove them from their homes before dawn, and put them on this dark, uphill climb?

What drove them, was their love and devotion to Jesus.

See someone had to prepare the body for burial and no one else had volunteered; Peter didn't, James didn't, neither did John. So it was up to these 2 faithful followers, 2 women who had never left the side of Jesus, who were with Him until the end. The task was left up to them to do.

The task they were going to perform was a somber task, a difficult task. They would be the ones, who would wipe and wash the blood from Jesus still swollen face, the dried matted blood from his beard. They would be the ones, to clean all the blood from the body of Jesus. They would be the last ones to touch his face and close His eyes.

Now on this early morning as they were nearing the tomb, suddenly a problem they hadn't thought of until now, chased everything else from their minds... *"WHO IS GOING TO REMOVE THE STONE? HOW CAN WE GET INSIDE TO JESUS IF THE STONE IS IN THE WAY?"*

Matthew 28:2-10 (NKJV)

There is something I had never really thought about before, *"WHY WAS THE STONE ROLLED AWAY?"*

It doesn't say the angel let Jesus out. Jesus was already gone.

It was rolled away for the women, so they could see that the tomb was empty. That's what I want to talk about today, about the empty tomb and what it meant for the Mary's and what it means for us today.

1. THE EMPTY TOMB MEANS THAT JESUS IS ALIVE!!

The resurrection of Jesus is the very foundation of Christianity. Listen to the Apostle Paul;

1 Corinthians 15:17 (NKJV)

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

The Resurrection of Jesus is so essential that it has been attacked from the very time it occurred.

Matthew 28:12-15 (NKJV)

The attacks on the validity of the resurrection still continue today, but the burden of proof is not on us but on the unbeliever to explain the empty tomb.

When people today consider the overwhelming evidence;

The Christian Church changed scheduled worship from Saturday to Sunday after the resurrection.

The change in the calendars adding a mark in time from B.C. to A.D.

The over 500 eyewitness testimonies of the resurrection.

The inability of anyone in the first century to produce the body of Jesus, which would have quenched the fire of this movement ...

We can search and search for the body of Jesus today and never find it because it can't be found but it will be seen when He comes back at the trumpet's sound.

Recently a court case was finally settled over an ossuary found in Jerusalem. An ossuary is a box of human bones.

For a short time in Jewish history, which also included the time of Christ, Jews would bury their dead in tombs and then a year or so later go and retrieve the bones and put them in the family ossuary. These would then be inscribed with whose bones were in them.

This court case was over one that was found that was inscribed, 'James, the son of Joseph and brother of Jesus'.

This inscription is so unique because a family member other than the father was rarely put on an ossuary unless that family member was of extreme importance. The New Testament tells us that James, the brother of Jesus was the leader of the New Testament church and was also the writer of the book of James.

This type of evidence is tremendous truth to validate the New Testament and so some groups sued to try and disprove the validity of the find. The judge, after hearing 5 years of testimony and taking another full year to study it, declared the ossuary was genuine.

When we consider the fact that the tomb is empty, there is no other conclusion that an individual in the pursuit of truth can make, other than Jesus Christ is Alive!

Both Mary's bent down and walked into the tomb, and they saw that it was empty. What do you think they were thinking at that moment?

Matthew goes on to tell us their actions, **(v.8-10)**

So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

The love and devotion that these 2 women showed to Jesus while he hung on the cross and as they arose early to tend to His body was greatly rewarded. What started out as a terrible day, had suddenly been changed into a day filled with inexpressible joy. The contrast between the sad journey to and the joyful journey from the tomb is overwhelming.

The steps they take now running to tell the good news are full of hope, something they didn't have when they had gotten up this morning. Can you imagine, what it would be like to be the first ones ever to tell the news that Jesus is Alive!

2. THE EMPTY TOMB MEANS THAT THERE IS FORGIVENESS

Now if anyone ever needed a dose of hope, if anyone ever needed to know that what Jesus said was true, it was a distraught, guilt ridden, fishermen turned follower named Peter.

Peter was standing with John when the Mary's came running into town. When they came in yelling, crying and laughing. Imagine when Peter and John saw them in this frenzied state they ran to them and they said, "slow down we can't understand you. The tomb is empty?! Jesus isn't in the tomb?! You SAW Jesus on the road?!"

And at that moment Peter and John headed to the tomb as fast as they could.

Peter was running, his heart pounding as he navigated up and down the winding paths of the dusty roads leading to the tomb. His friend John was running also.

Peter was in the lead, but then maybe he began to think to himself... *"What if Jesus doesn't want to see me? I betrayed and denied Him three times. I talked so tough to Jesus before but coward in fear to just an accusing girl... How can I face Him? I'm certainly not the Rock Jesus thought I was."*

Peter's thoughts possibly slowed him down and John was the first to make it to the tomb.

Yet John didn't go in, he just stood at the entrance, perhaps afraid that if he went in Jesus' lifeless body would still be there. Peter however, once he made it to the tomb, without hesitation went in, he had to go in, he had to see for himself. When Peter walked inside, he saw the strips of linen and the burial clothes that had been around Jesus' head folded lying on the stone slab. Peter's heart had to be racing and tears of joy flowing, *"He's ALIVE! JESUS is ALIVE!!!"*

And most amazingly somewhere, we don't know where, maybe on the shoreline overlooking the Jordan, Jesus came to see Peter first.

1 Corinthians 15:5-7 (NKJV)

While the Bible doesn't give us any details of that meeting between Jesus and Peter, I picture Peter alone, sitting with his head down, remembering Jesus' prediction of his denials.

Matthew 26:31-35 (NKJV)

Peter had set high standards for himself, standards that he could never have lived up to because he was just a man. And now because he couldn't forgive himself, he couldn't believe that Jesus would forgive him either. *"Not after what I have done ... I don't deserve your forgiveness Jesus. While you were being beaten, crucified I denied I ever knew you. I was only thinking of myself and not you."*

Then Peter felt a hand on his shoulder and he looked at the hand and he saw that it had been pierced through with a spike. His heart raced and as he turned to fall at Jesus feet. He heard the voice of the one he loved more than life itself say, *"PETER" "It's alright, I forgive you, PETER I love you."*

The empty tomb means there is forgiveness... For everyone, for everything.
 The empty tomb means that our sins can be washed away ... If we accept Jesus.
 The empty tomb means that Jesus Christ has won the battle over death and sin... that is what the gospel is... the good news of the forgiveness of sin.

Isaiah 53:4-5 (NKJV)

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

Healed from what? First and foremost, the eternal punishment for our sins...

We all need this forgiveness that can only come about through the blood of Christ shed on the Cross.

Romans 3:23 (NKJV)

If we want the forgiveness that Christ won and that the empty tomb is a monument of, we need to humble ourselves before Him and repent and ask for that forgiveness.

What is the song we sing? Have you been to Jesus for His cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?

What about you today?

Do we need to be reminded of Christ's cleansing power?

Do we ever fall short in our devotion to Jesus?

Do we ever feel that we have gone too far and that Christ won't forgive us this time?

Do we like Peter need to know that we can get another chance?

Do we ever need to know that He still loves and will forgive us?

1 John 1:7-10 (NKJV)

When a Christian needs forgiveness, and we all do, we must confess our sin before God.

Now confess does not mean to simply list our sins or to be sorry for the consequences. It doesn't mean to tell God we are sorry and then attempt to justify our actions by blaming other people or circumstances for what we in our own hearts, choose to do.

The word confess means literally "to say the same thing." We are to agree with God and acknowledge to Him that what we did was sin. We are guilty. And when we humbly come before Him, confessing our sin in true repentance, **then and only then** is there complete forgiveness.

Hebrews 7:25-27 (NKJV)

The empty tomb means JESUS IS ALIVE!

It means that there is FORGIVENESS

It means that GOD'S GRACE is GREATER than our sins.

3. THE EMPTY TOMB ALSO MEANS THAT WE CAN HAVE A NEW LIFE

Jesus died to give us new life. To start with a clean slate with the Lord.

When the apostles were in jail in Jerusalem --an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and told them,

Acts 5:20 (NKJV)

What is this new life? Why is it new and what is it about?

I am convinced that the reason we as Christians so many times are joyless in our lives is because we have not yet grasped the extreme benefits of this new life in Christ.

Listen to what Peter, who is now fully forgiven and right with Jesus again, teaches.

1 Peter 1:3-5 (ESV)

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS

1. BORN AGAIN - no longer under the Law which ruled by what you did but under Grace which says you already have achieved. Free from an empty life where you are never good enough.
2. A LIVING HOPE - A new life free from the despair of this world problems, looking forward to the promise of eternal life.

Lucy and Linus were sitting in front of the television set when Lucy said to Linus, "Go get me a glass of water."

Linus looked surprised, "Why should I do anything for you? You never do anything for me."

"On your 75th birthday," Lucy promised, "I'll bake you a cake."

Linus got up, headed to the kitchen and said, "Life is more pleasant when you have something to look forward to."

Linus is right. Life is more pleasant with hope.

The empty tomb means that there is hope! There is more to this life, than just today! In the midst of life's rain we know that the sun will shine again. As Christians, we know that we are headed to a better place, a perfect home with no more pain, suffering, heartache, death, disease or sadness.

3. WE RECEIVE AN INHERITANCE

Anyone dreamed about having a rich relative leave you their fortune as an inheritance? **(1 Peter 1:3-5)** says our is unfading being reserved for us in Heaven.

4. WE ARE SHIELDED BY GOD'S POWER

God is on our side. Working what the enemy means for bad, into something for our good.

5. WE CAN KNOW THAT THERE IS A REASON BEHIND THE TRIALS WE SUFFER

1 Peter 1:6-9 (NKJV)

6. AN INEXPRESSIBLE JOY -- A JOY THAT WORDS CAN'T DESCRIBE.... BECAUSE OF JESUS.

7. AND THE SALVATION OF OUR SOULS!

This new life sounds pretty good, doesn't it? I mean who really wouldn't want this?

Maybe when you got up today, like the Mary's you were facing life without hope and without Passion. You don't have to leave the same way.

The Stone is rolled away so you can see that Jesus is alive and His promise of a new life is true. Eternal life with Him in Heaven is waiting for you. Joy and Peace and Hope that never fades away is yours.

Do You need something to look forward to?

Do You need something to Believe in?

Look in the empty Tomb. Head down the path of life that leads to Jesus.

In Him is forgiveness from sin, a second chance just for you. A new life that Far exceeds the one without Him.

Don't let another Easter Celebration pass without accepting the gift Jesus purchased for you with his life.

If you ask if Jesus really loves you? The answer is he stretched out his arms and died so you can live.