

## The Tomb is Empty!

**Text:** Mark 15:37-16:16

### Introduction:

1. In our last message we looked at the death of Christ upon the cross which is the first part of the Gospel message - "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). In today's message our primary focus will be upon the burial and resurrection of Christ, the second and third parts of the Gospel message. 1 Corinthians 15:4 "And that **he was buried**, and that **he rose again the third day** according to the scriptures:"
2. The truth of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ has the power to totally transform your life. We will look at the sequence of events under four headings as time permits: 1. His Death 2. His Burial 3. His Resurrection. 2. His Commission.

### I. CHRIST'S DEATH (VS. 37-41)

#### A. The Will allowing His Death (Vs. 37)

1. Christ's death was no ordinary death. He Himself determined the moment of His death. John 10:17-18 "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. **No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.** This commandment have I received of my Father."
2. Romans 6:23 reveals that the "wages of sin is death". In order for Christ to provide the payment for sin's wages, He had to die a real death. 1 Cor. 15:3 "**Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...**"

#### B. The Wonders accompanying His Death (Vs. 38; Matt. 27:51-53)

Several miracles occurred the moment Jesus died:

1. There was the rending of the temple veil (Vs. 38). The time was 3pm in the afternoon right when the priests in the temple would have been busy with their activities for the evening sacrifice. The rent veil preaches a message that the way into God's immediate presence is now available through Christ (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19; 1 Tim. 2:5). The old system of approaching God was no longer required. The curtain was rent from the top to the bottom – it was Divine action from heaven!
2. There was the shaking of the earth. Matt. 27:51 "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; **and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;**" The earth shook as its Maker bowed his head in bodily death.
3. There was the rising of the saints. Matt. 27:52-53 "And the graves were opened; and **many bodies of the saints which slept arose,** And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many."

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### C. The Witnesses viewing His Death (Vs. 39-41)

1. The Centurion (Vs. 39)
  - a. A 'centurion' was a commander of 100 soldiers (Hiebert). He was the one in charge of the crucifixion and directly accountable to Pilate (See Vs. 45).
  - b. He was standing "over against him", meaning he was standing opposite Christ in full view of all that happened.
  - c. Whether his confession was a saving one or not we are not told but we do know that a confession of Christ from the heart is what God requires for salvation (Romans 10:9-10, 13).
2. The Soldiers (John 19:31-37)
  - a. The Legs of the two thieves were broken to hasten death.
  - b. Christ's legs not broken but spear driven into his side. This fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 34:20 that none of Messiah's bones would be broken. Christ also fulfilled the type of the Passover lamb whose bones were not to be broken (Ex. 12:46).
  - c. The blood and water were a sign of a ruptured heart. Jesus' heart was broken for us on the cross!
3. The Women (Vs. 40-41)

These women were:

  - a. Saved followers (Vs. 40) What all these women had in common was that their lives had been transformed by Christ.
    - i. Mary Magdalene – before she met Christ she was a demon possessed woman. Mark 16:9 "...Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils." (See also Luke 8:2)
    - ii. Mary –noted as the mother of "James the less and of Joses". John's Gospel mentions that she was the wife of Cleophas (Jn. 19:25). Cleopas appears to have been one of the two disciples who met Christ on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:18).
    - iii. Salome – the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John.
    - iv. Unnamed women – "and many other women" (Vs. 41b)
  - b. Serving followers (Vs. 41)
    - i. This verse specifically notes that these women had ministered to Christ during his great Galilean ministry.
    - ii. Luke 8:2-3 "And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which **ministered unto him of their substance.**"
    - iii. Challenge: Is your time, talents and treasure available for the service of the Master?

## II. CHRIST'S BURIAL (VS. 42-47)

Observe 4 truths about the burial of Christ revealed in these verses:

### A. The Period of the Burial (When?) (Vs. 42)

1. The hour of the burial (Vs. 42a) It says "when the even was come".

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This was the “first evening, from mid-afternoon to sunset. It was probably around 4pm when Joseph secured permission to remove the body.” (Hiebert)

2. The day of the burial (Vs. 42b) There are two specific statements that pinpoint the day Christ died and was buried:
  - a. “the preparation” – this was a technical name for Friday, the day of the preparation for the Sabbath. No work was allowed to take place on the Sabbath so Friday served as a day to prepare for it.
  - b. “that is, the day before the sabbath” = Mark explains very clearly what “the preparation” refers to. The day before the sabbath is Friday. Therefore, the concept of Easter Friday is NOT a pagan idea. The alleged difficulty in relation to 3 days and 3 nights can be explained by understanding the Jewish way of counting the days. This is explained in a helpful article by Jonathan Sarfati.<sup>1</sup>

### B. The Person organising the Burial (Who?) (Vs. 43-45)

1. Joseph’s Person (Vs. 43a)

He was...

  - a. An honourable man. Luke describes him as a “good man, and a just” (Luke 23:50).
  - b. A spiritual man – “which also waited for the kingdom of God”. John 19:38 reveals he was “a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews,”
  - c. A “rich man” (Matt. 27:57) This was significant prophetically. Isaiah 53:9 “And he made his grave with the wicked, and **with the rich in his death;**” Under normal circumstances, the bodies of those who were crucified as criminals were either left a prey to wild dogs and carrion eating birds or dumped in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. Christ’s body was given an honourable burial in a rich man’s tomb. The burial of Christ is also important as it confirms that He died a real death for our sin.
  - d. A member of the Sanhedrin who had “not consented to the counsel and deed of them” (Lk. 23:51).
  - e. A secret disciple due to fear of the Jews (John 19:38). Up until this point Joseph had been a timid and fearful follower of Christ. But now something changes! He goes in ‘**boldly**’ to Pilate (Vs. 43) to request the privilege of burying Christ’s body.
2. Joseph’s Partner (John 19:39)
  - a. “And there came also **Nicodemus**, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound *weight*.”
  - b. He was also a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin (John 7:50).
3. Joseph’s Plea (Vs. 43b) The word ‘craved’ means to ask or beg.
4. Pilate’s Permission (Vs. 44-45)
  - a. Pilate surprised to hear that Christ already dead and verifies the fact by speaking to the centurion.
  - b. John 19:31-37 – Steps taken to make sure of Christ’s death.
  - c. Note: These facts refute the foolish idea promoted by some that Christ didn’t really die but that he only appeared to die.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://creation.com/easter-and-good-friday-questions-and-answers>? Viewed 8/4/23

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### C. The Process of the Burial (How?) (Vs. 46a)

1. Fine linen – “And he bought fine linen”. The word ‘bought’ means “to buy, purchase.” Joseph used his financial means to serve His Christ.
2. Spices – John 19:40 “Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.”

### D. The Place of the Burial (Where?) (Vs. 46b-47)

1. “hewn out of a rock” = Edmond Hiebert explains the tomb “had been cut out horizontally into the side of a rock cliff. Such carefully hewn tombs were common around Jerusalem and generally belonged to well-to-do families.”
2. “rolled a stone” = this would have been “a large, circular, flat stone, fitted with a groove, which could be rolled back to open the tomb when necessary.” (Hiebert) The circular stone “fitted into a sloping groove, so arranged that it ran down an incline.” (John Phillips)
3. John’s Gospel reveals the sepulchre was close to the site of the crucifixion. John 19:41-42 “Now in the place where he was crucified there was **a garden**; and in the garden **a new sepulchre**, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews’ preparation *day*; for **the sepulchre was nigh at hand.**”  
Note: Consider the significant gardens in the Bible (e.g., the garden of Eden, Gethsemane & the garden of the burial & resurrection).
4. Verse 47 records that two of the women witnessed where Christ was buried.

## III. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST (VS. 1-14)

Observe 3 truths about the resurrection in these verses:

### A. The Arrival of the Women (Vs. 1-5)

In all four Gospels this is the first incident on resurrection morning. Luke adds the name of Joanna and “other women with them” (Lk. 24:10).

1. Their coming to the tomb (Vs. 1-2)
  - a. The time of their coming
    - i. After the Sabbath had passed.
    - ii. Very early in the morning.
    - iii. The first day of the week.
    - iv. At the rising of the sun.
  - b. The purpose for their coming
    - i. They had purchased sweet spices to anoint Christ’s body as an act of devotion and love.
    - ii. This was not the same as embalming. “The purpose apparently was to add externally their fragrant ointments as an expression of their love.” (Hiebert)
    - iii. Clearly these dear ladies had forgotten Christ’s promise concerning His resurrection and were coming in the full expectation that He was still dead in the tomb. Luke 24:5-6 “And as they were afraid, and bowed down *their* faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living

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among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: **remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,**"

2. Their problem at the tomb (Vs. 3)
  - a. The major point of discussion between these women was how they were going to roll away the stone from the door.
  - b. Evidently there were not aware of the sealing of the tomb and of the guards that were stationed there (Matt. 27:62-66).
3. Their entry into the tomb (Vs. 4-5)
  - a. They found the stone already rolled away! Matthew's Gospel explains how the stone was removed.
  - b. Matthew 28:1-4 "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. **And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.** His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead *men*."

### B. The Announcement of the Angel (Vs. 6-8)

1. His Declaration (Vs. 6)
  - a. "he is risen; he is not here" = what glorious words of victory! Luke's account expresses it this way, "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and **found not the body of the Lord Jesus**. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, **Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen...**" (Lk. 24:1-6)
  - b. "behold the place where they laid him" = the place where Christ was laid was on the right side of the tomb (Vs. 5). All that was left was the graveclothes and the napkin lying there as a silent witness to the truth that Christ had risen (John 20:5-7).
2. His Instruction (Vs. 7-8)
  - a. The instruction was to "go" and "tell".
  - b. Our mission is the same. We are to testify to the truth of the resurrection of Christ.
  - c. The preaching of the resurrection was a central theme in the preaching of the early church (refer Book of Acts).

### C. The Appearances of the Lord (Vs. 9-14)

Three of the post resurrection appearances are documented here. Acts 1:3 says, "To whom also he shewed himself **alive** after his passion by **many infallible proofs**, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:" A key theme is the initial response of unbelief on the part of the disciples.

1. The Revelation to Mary Magdalene (Vs. 9-11)

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- a. A woman was the first in the world to sin but it is of interest to note that women were the first to see the empty tomb and that Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Christ.
  - b. Mary goes to the disciples who were “mourning and weeping” and told them she had seen Christ but they “believed not”. Luke 24:9-11 “And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary *the mother* of James, and other *women that were* with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them **as idle tales, and they believed them not.**”
  - c. Unbelief was the first heart response of the disciples to the truth of the resurrection. This is the natural tendency of the human heart. Thankfully, for the disciples their issue was one of doubt, not a stubborn, unrepentant unbelief like the unsaved. They would soon be convinced of the truth of the resurrection and would proclaim it with great power to others.
2. The Revelation to the two disciples (Vs. 12-13)
    - a. This appearance of Christ is documented at length in Luke’s Gospel (Lk. 24:13-35).
    - b. Sadly, the disciple’s response to these two witnesses was also one of unbelief.
  3. The Revelation to the eleven (Vs. 14) Christ rebukes the disciples sternly for not believing the eye witness accounts. The eye witness accounts simply verified what Christ promised He would do all along.
  4. The Response of the Sceptics (Matt. 28:11-15)
    - a. The religious leaders were entrenched in stubborn unbelief. They knew the truth but sought to suppress it from others (Romans 1:18).
    - b. This represented the first false theory to seek to undermine the truth of the resurrection – the disciples stole the body while we were sleeping and we saw it all!
    - c. Other popular theories:
      - i. The Swoon Theory – “The Swoon Theory suggests that the cool, damp air of the tomb somehow revived Jesus after three days and He decided to exit. Despite not having access to desperately needed medical care and nourishment, Jesus supposedly managed to unwrap His dressings and then, in the total darkness of the tomb, locate and roll away the mammoth stone sealing the tomb entrance. And then, *still unnoticed by the guards*, Jesus supposedly walked away, on feet punctured by the cross nails, to re-join His disciples.”
      - ii. The Hallucination Theory – “The Hallucination Theory asserts that the many people who saw Jesus in His resurrected body just *imagined* doing so. If 500 people have the same hallucination, that’s a bigger miracle than the resurrection!”
      - iii. The Conspiracy Theory – “The Conspiracy Theory

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suggests that Christ's disciples simply stole His body and fabricated the resurrection story." In reality, the disciples were downcast and discouraged after the crucifixion of Christ. To suggest they would risk their lives for a lie with nothing to gain for themselves is preposterous! Liars don't make good martyrs! All of the disciples died a martyr's death except John.

- Mark was dragged by horses through the streets of Alexandria Egypt until he was dead.
  - Peter was crucified upside down on an x shaped cross.
  - James the Just was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a fuller's club.
  - *"Men will die for what they believe to be true, though it may actually be false. They do not, however, die for what they know is a lie."* (Paul Little)
  - Acts 4:33 *"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus:"*
- d. The truth of the resurrection is essential for salvation (**Rom. 4:25; 10:9-10**). The Apostle Paul confronts the Paul faces the implications of no resurrection head on in 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.
- i. No resurrection means Christ is dead! (Vs. 13, 16).
  - ii. No resurrection means Apostolic preaching empty (Vs. 14a).
  - iii. No resurrection means our faith is empty (14b).
  - iv. No resurrection makes the Apostle's liars (Vs. 15).
  - v. No resurrection means we are still in our sins (Vs. 16-17).
  - vi. No resurrection means departed Christians have perished (Vs. 18).
  - vii. No resurrection means a life of misery and hopelessness (Vs. 19).
  - viii. Paul forces us to stare this dreadful idea in the face that we might see it in all its blackness. Then he deals it a fateful blow with a powerful assertion of the truth. (Vs. 20)

## IV. THE COMMISSION OF CHRIST (VS. 15-16)

Christ speaks of:

### A. The Responsibility to the Gospel (Vs. 15)

Observe 2 key features of this command. We need to have:

#### 1. Gospel Feet – 'go'

- a. Romans 10:15 "...as it is written, **How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!**"

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- b. Song 7:1 “**How beautiful are thy feet with shoes**, O prince's daughter!”
  - c. The word ‘go’ is a small word, just two letters and yet it is one of the most disobeyed commands in God’s Word.
2. Gospel Speech – ‘preach’
- a. The word ‘preach’ means “to herald”. While this includes the formal proclamation of the Gospel (e.g., by a God-called man of God), it is not limited to this. At its heart, the command requires a verbal presentation of the Gospel and this can also be done one on one.
  - b. The example of Christ. He preached to the masses publicly but He was also the Master Personal Evangelist/Soul-winner (e.g., Nicodemus; Samaritan woman).
  - c. The example of the early church: Acts 5:42 “And daily **in the temple, and in every house**, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

### B. The Reach of the Gospel (Vs. 15)

- 1. It is for every place – “into all the world”
  - a. God loves the world. “For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16).
  - b. Christ died for the world. “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2).
- 2. It is for every person – “to every creature”
  - a. 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**”
  - b. 1 Tim. 2:4 “Who will have **all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”
  - c. Rev. 22:17 “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And **whosoever will**, let him take the water of life freely.”

### C. The Response to the Gospel (Vs. 16)

When the Gospel is presented, the sinner has a choice to make; a choice that will determine their eternal destiny. There will be those who...

- 1. Receive the Gospel – ‘saved’ (Vs. 16a)
  - a. Belief – the essential requirement for salvation. You must “repent...and believe the Gospel” (Mk. 1:15)
  - b. Baptism – the outward symbol of inner faith. The fact baptism is not required for salvation is made plain in the second half of the verse. Unbelief is what damns a person, not whether they were baptised or not.



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1. 1 Cor. 1:17 “For Christ sent me **not to baptize**, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”
  2. Acts 8:36-37 “And as they went on *their way*, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is water*; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, **If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest**. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”
  3. Illustration: The repentant thief (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).
2. Reject the Gospel – ‘damned’ (Vs. 16b)
- a. Unbelief is a sinful choice that results in damnation for all eternity.
  - b. Rev. 21:8 “But the fearful, and **unbelieving**, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

### Conclusion:

1. Will you repent and receive Christ as your Saviour today? He is alive and able to save you from your sin.
2. If you are already saved, will you serve your Risen Saviour with fervency and passion?