

*A little girl asked her mother, “Where do people come from?”*

*Her mother answered, “God made Adam and Eve and they had children and grandchildren, and so on, and so on – that’s how all mankind was made.”*

*A couple of days later the little girl asked her father the same question.*

*The father answered, “Many years ago there were monkeys from which the human race evolved from.”*

*The confused little girl returned to her mother and said, “Mommy, how is it that you told me we were made by God, and Daddy said we came from monkeys?”*

*The mother answered, “Well, dear, it’s very simple. I told you about my side of the family and your father told you about his.”*

People have a lot of different opinions and beliefs about a lot of different things. Even in this room this morning, people have differing opinions and beliefs on a variety of topics, to include views on Christianity, the church, the Bible, and even Jesus – but that’s nothing new.

When Jesus walked among people during His earthly ministry, people had a lot of different opinions and beliefs about Him.

There were those who absolutely loved Jesus and couldn’t get enough of Him. To them, Jesus was a powerful leader, a healer and a miracle worker, a wise teacher, a wonderful counselor, a defender of the weak, and many thought He was their long-awaited Messiah and Savior. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and once found, people followed Him wherever He went.

And then – there were those people who quite frankly hated Jesus. The self-righteous Jewish religious leaders wanted Jesus gone. Jesus did and said a lot of things that threatened their power and their prestige – He threatened their legalistic stranglehold on the people, and so they conspired to take Jesus out of the picture once and for all. They wanted Him dead.

And so, it was in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus was arrested. He was illegally tried by the religious leaders in the middle of the night in violation of their own laws and found guilty of blasphemy because He claimed to be the Christ – the Son of God. The religious leaders wanted Jesus dead and so they pressured the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate to carry out their dirty work. Jesus was beaten to a pulp, mocked for claiming to be a king, and then sentenced to die by crucifixion. Jesus was forced to carry His cross to a hill called Golgotha, and there He was crucified – and there He died.

As I previously said, people had differing opinions and beliefs about Jesus – some loved Him and followed Him, while others hated His guts and wanted Him gone, but there was one belief that they all had in common. They all believed that when Jesus died – that was it – He would stay dead.

So, with all that said, if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 28:1**. We are told,

**Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave.**

Usually, a person who had been crucified by the Romans was taken to the town dump and the body was disposed of there; however, Joseph of Arimathea had connections and he, with the help of Nicodemus, were able to take the body of Jesus and quickly bury Him in a cave used as a tomb. It was a rush job because the Sabbath was quickly approaching, but they got it done in time.

The Sabbath was over around 6:00pm on Saturday evening. So, early Sunday morning, just before sunrise, Mary Magdalene, another Mary, and maybe others as well, walked to the tomb and according to both **Mark** and **Luke** they bought spices so that they might properly anoint the body of Jesus for burial. Remember, when Joseph and Nicodemus did it, it was a rush job, so the women probably felt they had to go back to the tomb, take their time, and do it right.

Now, obviously these women loved Jesus, so much so, that they were willing to go to the tomb, unwrap His body, and prepare Him properly. These women believed they would find His lifeless body in the tomb – they believed Jesus was dead – and so did everybody else.

Even though Jesus had told His followers on several occasions that He would rise again – no one really believed it. No one was hanging around the tomb waiting for Jesus to walk out. No one was camping or sitting in lawn chairs or lying on beach towels near the tomb waiting for the resurrection. No one was waiting for Him. Just like these women, everyone believed that when Jesus died – that was it – He would remain dead.

So, these women are making their way to the tomb, and according to **Mark**, they are discussing how they are going to move that stone blocking the entrance. The stone would be very difficult for them to move because of its weight and size. They knew about the stone – it was a real concern for them, but what they did not know was that guards were posted there and the tomb had been officially sealed. They did not know that, for if they had known that, they wouldn't have come. So, they are concerned with that stone – wondering how they will move it, and

fortunately for them, before they get to the tomb, their concern is no longer a concern.

Matthew tells us beginning with **verse 2**,

**<sup>2</sup> And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. <sup>3</sup> And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.**

Upon arriving at the tomb, the women were greeted with a pleasant surprise – the stone has already been rolled away. They don't know why or how, but there it is.

Now, Matthew tells us an **angel**, whose appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow rolled the stone out of the way with an earthquake and then he sat upon it. Apparently, he's an angel with an attitude – and just so you know that stone was not rolled away so Jesus could get out – it was rolled away so others could get in. And as for the guards – Roman soldiers who were “guarding” the tomb so no one could get in – well these soldiers had passed out in fear – **and how do we know this?**

Well, here's something interesting. Only Matthew mentions these **soldiers** and if you recall, before Matthew became a disciple, he was a hated tax collector for Rome and he would have routinely been in the company of Roman soldiers when performing his duties. Because of his prior connections, I think Matthew apparently had “*insider information*” of what really happened at the tomb with the soldiers and that's why he includes it.

So, after recovering from their fainting spell, the soldiers get out of there and the women show up and find the stone had been rolled away. They enter the tomb and find two angels there, but Matthew only focuses on the one who speaks, and beginning with **verse 5**, we are told,

**<sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. <sup>7</sup> Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.” <sup>8</sup> And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.**

The women were understandably afraid and we know this because the angel attempted to calm them down by saying don't be **afraid**. The angel knew they

were looking for the crucified body of Jesus, and he let them know they had come to the right tomb. They were in the right place but Jesus was not there. In their minds, there could be several explanations for the missing body but the angel quickly narrows it down to only one – Jesus **has risen just as He said**.

The angel tells the women to **come** and **see** – see the empty tomb, and then to **go** and **tell** the disciples who were still in Jerusalem that Jesus will eventually meet them in Galilee. The women were trembling with both fear and great joy and they ran away to tell the disciples.

Well, according to **Luke 24:11**, here is the disciple’s reaction to this great news that Jesus has risen.

**But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.**

We have to remember that in those days, in the Jewish culture – a very male dominated culture, the witness of a women had no weight, it was discredited by law, and their crazy testimony about a missing body didn’t help.

The disciples **would not believe them** – but to see for themselves, Peter and John took off and raced to the tomb and they found it to be empty except for the burial cloths. We are told that Peter was left wondering about what he saw – it was a head-scratcher, but John believed. From what John saw, he was able put it all together and he believed that Jesus was alive – he just can’t figure out why – at least not yet, and maybe that’s why he does not appear to confess his belief to the others at the time.

Now, Mary Magdalene had followed Peter and John back to the tomb. The disciples eventually leave, but she lingers for a while. Mary was obviously devoted to Jesus, and very upset because she believed someone had taken away His dead body.

In **John 20**, beginning with **verse 15**, while Mary is at the tomb – distraught in disbelief, Jesus appears to her but she does not recognize Him.

<sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, **“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”** Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher).

At the tomb, Jesus appeared to Mary and Mary thought Jesus was the **gardener**, and thinking He was the gardener, she asked if He had removed the body. She still thought Jesus was dead, she wanted to give Him a dignified burial, but when Jesus said her name – “**Mary**” – everything changed. She then realized it was Jesus and He was alive.

Mary becomes the first to see Jesus risen from the dead, and sometime very soon after that, Jesus appears to the other women who had gone to the tomb and also to two men walking on the road to Emmaus.

**So, what happens next?** Well let’s go to **Mark 16** starting with **verse 10**.

**<sup>10</sup> She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. <sup>11</sup> When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. <sup>12</sup> After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. <sup>13</sup> They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either.**

Strangely enough, as a group, these disciples admitted they did not believe Jesus had risen. The tomb was empty – that was confirmed by Peter and John, Mary just reported she saw and talked to Jesus, as did the two men who on their way to Emmaus, but the disciples **refused to believe** – and need I remind you that these were the ones who lived with Jesus, they were His closest companions, several times they heard Jesus say He would rise again, and yet they would not believe.

We pick on “*doubting Thomas*” – but the truth is – as a group, the disciples did not believe Jesus had risen.

Now to be fair, they weren’t completely unbelieving – they did believe something – they believed they were the next targets of the Jewish religious leaders. We are told in **John 20:19**,

**“the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews”**

The disciples were in hiding – in a secret meeting place, maybe the upper room, for fear of their lives. The doors were shut and locked so they would not get hurt or suffer the same fate as Jesus. They saw Him beaten to a pulp. They saw Him crucified. They saw Him die, and even with all the reports, they believed He was still dead and nothing was going to change their minds.

Then a few weeks later, everything changed and these same unbelieving and fearful disciples come out of their hiding place and pour into the streets to preach.

Now, let's consider for the moment that we do not know the rest of the story. **What would cause this group of frightened and unbelieving disciples to suddenly come out of hiding and flood the streets of Jerusalem?** If you know anything about human behavior, it's only reasonable to conclude that something outrageous must have occurred – something so impactful, something so unimaginable had to have happened to cause that kind of change in their lives.

In **Acts 3:11-16**, Peter who was previously intimidated by a slave girl and denied Jesus three times, now speaks publicly to the same people who shouted for the crucifixion of Jesus. Listen to what Peter says to them.

**<sup>11</sup> While he (referring to a crippled man who was just healed) was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. <sup>12</sup> But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, “Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? <sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. <sup>14</sup> But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup> And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man who you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.”**

These same unbelieving disciples, who were hiding in fear, poured out into the streets of Jerusalem. In this case, a miracle was just performed and a crowd gathered in amazement thinking Peter and John were responsible for it, but Peter redirected their focus and he said to the crowd – and I'm paraphrasing here,

*“You disowned and delivered Jesus who was completely innocent to be crucified. You asked Pilate for the release of Barabbas who was a convicted murderer. Jesus died on a cross, and we all know this to be true – it was very public. You thought the cross was to be last word, but there is an empty tomb that says the last word belongs to God. Jesus is not dead, He lives for we just saw and talked to Him, we saw His pierced hands and His feet, we touched Him, and the healing of this crippled man you just witnessed is attributed solely to Jesus.”*

This must have been a difficult thing for Peter to say, for he himself had disowned Jesus three times, but he had seen and heard the risen Savior for himself. He had

been forgiven of everything, and everything changed for him, and that went for the rest of the disciples as well.

The reason you and I know anything about Jesus at all is because of the dramatic change in these disciples. If there had been no resurrection, you would have never known about Jesus because these men would have simply returned to their old lives after it was safe to come out of hiding – but they didn't, in fact, they became fearless – unafraid of what would happen to them – willing to suffer and die because they knew the truth about the resurrected Jesus and they had to share it. Jesus was alive – they saw Him, and to these disciples He was worth dying for, and that's exactly what happened.

*Peter was crucified upside-down. James the brother of John was beheaded. Bartholomew was skinned alive and beheaded. Andrew, Philip, Jude, and Simon were crucified. The other James was thrown down a temple tower and clubbed to death. Matthew was axed to death, and Thomas were speared through and burned in an oven. John, who was tossed into boiling oil and lived, was the only disciple who died a natural death.*

And here's the thing – it's not so important how the disciples suffered and died. What is important is the fact, that without wavering, they were all willing to suffer and die – not for what they said they *believed*, but according to **John**, for what they said they *saw* and *heard*. That's different! People will die for all kinds of crazy beliefs, but these disciples – every single one of them – to their dying breaths, claimed to see and hear Jesus who had risen from the dead. Not a single one of them cracked under the pressure before their deaths. Not a single one of them made a deal with the authorities to save their own skin. Not a single one of them renounced their faith in Christ. Not a one.

When Jesus died, contrary to the belief of everyone – and I mean everyone – He did not stay dead, and the dramatic changes in the lives of the disciples proved it.

On the cross, Jesus paid for our sins in full, and the empty tomb is our receipt of payment – a receipt that explains many things. It confirmed that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, the Savior of the world. The empty tomb verified that what Jesus said was absolutely true – everything – so He can be trusted, but there is something else. The empty tomb answers a very old question. In **Job 14:14**, Job asks this question:

**“If a man dies, will he live again?”**

Even now, that is a question asked by a lot of people, people who may be running from death, people who may have lost a loved one – but from the empty tomb Jesus answers this question once and for all. His resurrection is proof that there is everlasting life beyond this life. For those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, for those who follow Him in this life – by God’s grace the hope of eternal life awaits you.

*D. L. Moody told of a 15-year-old girl who was suddenly hit with an illness that left her paralyzed on one side and almost blind. As she lay in bed one day, she heard the family doctor say to her parents, “She has seen her best days, poor child.” But she was a believer and she quickly responded, “No, doctor, my best days are yet to come, when I shall see the King in His beauty.”*

Her hope is your hope if your trust is in the risen Savior!

Source Material:

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