

An Empty Tomb

Last week we saw darkness overcome the world as Jesus died on the cross. We are told in Luke 23:44-45 that *"darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining"*. From noon until three in the afternoon darkness reigned. God had withdrawn his presence in the world as his son took on the sins of all mankind, the perfect and final atonement sacrifice. The earth shook as Jesus breathed his last breath and uttered his final words, *"It is finished"* (Jn 19:30). He gave up his spirit and the curtain in the temple tore from top to bottom. It should not be missed that upon Jesus' death light began to break the darkness. God accepted the eternal sacrifice of his Son, light entered the world again, darkness receded. As Jesus died, his promise to the criminal on the cross next to him was fulfilled. Paradise was opened for him and all who would believe that Jesus truly is the son of God.

This week's lesson will focus on the miraculous events of the Resurrection. Where last week we were in the dark hours of the crucifixion where death reigned in temporary victory, this week we will bask in the light of the dawning of the new age. Christ is risen, our hopes in him are fulfilled. There will be no death for those who love and serve the Lord.

Guards are Posted at the Tomb

"Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." (Matt 27:65)

Last week we saw Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, along with a number of women, take Jesus' body down from the cross. Because it was quickly approaching sunset and the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread¹, they needed to bury Jesus' body with haste. Should the sun set before they placed him in the tomb, they would have to leave him until after the Sabbath ended. Gently, yet hurriedly, they prepared Jesus' body for burial with the intention to return after the Sabbath to finish the burial process. It is important to note that Joseph and Nicodemus, both members of the Sanhedrin, and the women observed the Sabbath's requirements of remaining ceremonially clean. Their actions will stand in stark contrast to the movements and actions of those we will study about today. Take a few minutes to prepare yourself before the Lord for today's scripture study.



Read Matthew 27:62-66 and answer the following questions.

Who is it that went to Pilate on the day after Preparation Day?

¹ The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins the day after Passover and last for seven days.
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What is the irony of their approaching Pilate with their request the day after Preparation Day?
What day is it?

What did they ask of Pilate?

What was their concern?

How did they secure the tomb?

✕ What would their actions actually come to prove?

It is the Sabbath when the chief priests and the Pharisees sought Pilate. Instead of focusing on keeping the Sabbath and Passover (or more accurately the week long Feast of Unleavened Bread which commenced with the Passover) sacred, these men were concerned that Jesus' followers, who were too fearful to make an appearance at Jesus death, would come and steal the body of Jesus. It is also interesting to note that these men remembered Jesus' prediction of his rising on the third day. They were concerned that Jesus' followers would steal Jesus' body and claim that he had risen from the dead, and thus fabricating a resurrection and proving (by deception) to the people of Israel that Jesus was the messiah. This would put the religious leaders in a worse situation than before Jesus' arrest. Jesus' fake resurrection would be a greater deception than all the false teachings and false miracles Jesus had performed in life, at least this is what the religious leaders believed. Little did they grasp that Jesus would truly rise and reveal to the world their devious and evil work.

When Pilate gives permission for the tomb to be sealed and guarded, there is no mention of Jesus' body not being in the tomb. Had it not been there, the guard would not be necessary and the religious leaders could claim that Jesus' followers had already stolen the body. But since they sealed and guarded the tomb, we can assume that when the guards and the religious leaders arrived Jesus' body was in the tomb. Surely they would have checked beforehand since their whole errand focused on preventing the stealing of Jesus' body. The Roman guards alone would likely have been enough to prevent anyone from tampering with the tomb. The seal likely would have been wax or clay impressed with a Roman imperial stamp. Tampering with it would be clearly evident and made grave robbing an illegal and punishable offense.

If by the actions of sealing and guarding the tomb we can make the assumption that the religious leaders and the guard themselves have proven that Jesus was in the tomb, then it is by these men that we know that Jesus' body could not have been stolen and the worst deception perpetrated. The religious leaders themselves make it impossible for Jesus' body to be stolen. Jesus' resurrection cannot be fabricated; therefore it must be a true resurrection. While their actions prevented human interference, it did not prevent God from fulfilling his plan and ultimately revealing the evil ways of Israel's religious leaders.

Resurrection

*“Why do you look for the living among the dead?
He is not here; he has risen!” (Luke 24:5-6)*

Today we arrive at the most wondrous event of Christian history. The story of Jesus' resurrection is so powerful. Through his resurrection Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that he would rise again in three days, the import of which is living proof of his divinity. Death could not restrain him. His resurrection also gives us our first glimpse of our own resurrection one day. Because he rose again, and said that he would raise us up on the last day, we can know that his promise is true!

In our homework for today we will study both Luke's and John's versions of the resurrection. The Bible Knowledge Commentary very succinctly points out the truth of the empty tomb: "The tomb was open not to let Jesus' body out but to let the disciples and the world see that He rose." Take a few minutes to come to Jesus in preparation for today's scripture passages. What joy they bring!



Read Luke 24:1-12 and answer the following questions.

When did the women go to the tomb?

What were they planning to do there?

According to verse 10, who were the women that went to the tomb?

Upon arriving at the tomb, who did the women see? What were the women told?

When they left the tomb, what did they do?

What do you think the women told the disciples?



Matthew records a couple of incidents at this point in the story that Luke doesn't include. Read Matthew 28: 1-10.

How was the tomb opened?

What happened to the guards?

Who do the women encounter before they reach the disciples and what are they told?

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Why do you think the Eleven disciples didn't believe the women?



Why do you think Jesus appeared first to the women?



Read John 20:1-9 and answer the following questions.

According to John's account what is the concern of the women when they find the disciples?
(See v. 2-3)

When Peter and John reach the tomb, what state do they find the tomb and the grave clothes?
(v. 6-7)



What do you think might be going through Peter's mind as he's looking at the grave clothes?

Even if the women and the disciples had recalled Jesus' prophecies of his death and resurrection, they all were unable to consider the veracity of such an event. The women went to the tomb equipped to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial. They did not go planning to welcome the risen Lord. The fact that Jesus might truly rise from the dead was beyond their ability to comprehend. Their hopes had been lost and disappointed through the death of their beloved messiah. Perhaps it was more than they could bear to believe in the prophecy and possibly be disappointed again. After all, no man before had ever made such claims *and* fulfilled them. Is it any surprise they were not in an emotional or spiritual place to believe it could happen?

The disciples too had heard Jesus' prophecies but they could not conceive of the possibility. Peter and John (we presume) even ran to the tomb, but Peter's response is one of perplexity, not belief. John 20:8 tells us that "*he* (John) *believed*", but what did he believe? He is standing in the empty tomb observing the neatly set aside grave clothes. Is he starting to believe that yes indeed Jesus has risen just as he said, or is that too much to believe? Isn't it more likely that he believed that Jesus' body was gone upon seeing the empty tomb, rather than believing the resurrection? What exactly John believed in that moment is hard to

reconcile, but tradition holds that he is the first disciple to believe in the resurrection prior to seeing the resurrected Jesus.

Reading slightly ahead in John's gospel, we see that Mary Magdalene remains at the tomb weeping because *"they have taken away my Lord"* (John 20:13). Only the unmistakable appearance and presence of the risen Jesus brings them to accept that he has risen to new life as he had foretold. It is difficult to figure exactly how these accounts come together. Matthew clearly has the story of Jesus appearing to the women (including Mary Magdalene) before they reach the disciples. According to John, Mary Magdalene doesn't see Jesus until after the women have told the disciples that the tomb is empty and Peter and John have seen the empty tomb.

One last thing for us to consider, in Matthew what does Jesus call his disciples? brothers. This is so beautiful! Despite the failure to pray with Jesus in the garden; then their abandoning him when the authorities came to arrest him; and their fleeing and hiding in fear when Jesus faces his trials and execution, Jesus calls them *"brothers"*. Jesus' love and acceptance of the disciples has not changed despite their actions and failings. They are his beloved family, they share in the work of the Father for the kingdom, with that comes an equality, a close, familial relationship. This does not elevate the disciples to a deified position, rather it points to the brotherhood that is to exist in the church.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

"I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

(John 20:18)

This passage has to be one of my very favorites! I identify so well with Mary, she is traumatized and in despair having seen her beloved Jesus crucified. She came to the tomb early in the morning, the soonest she could come after the Sabbath has ended, in order to finish the job of preparing Jesus' body for burial. This is an act of devotion, the only thing left that she can do to serve her Lord. Certainly all her hopes have been dashed. And to pour salt into a deep wound, she has found Jesus' tomb open and his body taken away. Take a few minutes to ask the Lord to speak to your heart in the same tender way he did to Mary Magdalene.



Read John 20:10-18 and answer the following questions.

Who did Mary first see in the tomb?

Why was she weeping?

In verse 14 who is standing with her?

Why doesn't she recognize him?

Read John 10:3-4. What does the Good Shepherd do and how do his sheep respond?

How do you think she comes to recognize him?

✂ When Jesus insists that Mary must let him go, Jesus says, "*Go instead to my _____ and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and _____ Father, to my God and _____ God.'*" What is the significance of the words you have filled in?

What is it that Jesus sends Mary to do?

Why does Jesus appear to Mary Magdalene first? Why not Peter or John, the other disciples? Or even Caiaphas or Pilate? Peter and John had departed the garden tomb. Mary remained weeping in grief. She had been one of his most ardent followers. She had been with him since he healed her of the demons (Luke 8:2). She stood by as he died on the cross. She was there when he was placed in the tomb. She had come first thing Sunday morning to attend to his body. She was a devoted and faithful disciple, and she was in *agony*. She was so lost in her grief she didn't recognize the one she mourned standing before her. But when he spoke her name, she knew him and clung to him. Of course she didn't want to let him go, she was devastated by losing him the first time! But he insisted and she faithfully obeyed. Mary is given the responsibility of testifying to the disciples of Jesus' resurrection. In this moment in the garden at the tomb, Mary receives four special graces from the Lord in reward for her steadfast devotion: she saw two angels; she was the first to see Jesus alive; she is an eye witness to the resurrection of Jesus; and she is given the privilege of being the first to share the good news with the other disciples. Mary's devotion and obedience is recognized and rewarded by the Good Shepherd who knew her name.

Report of the Guard

While Jesus had sought out his disciples, restoring and strengthening their faith, the enemies of God attempted to cover up the scandal of Jesus' missing body. We already saw their concern that Jesus' followers would steal Jesus' body and falsely claim that he had resurrected from the dead according to Jesus' own prophecies. The religious leaders feared that such a manufactured "resurrection" would lead the am-ha-aretz into a rebellion and bring down the wrath of Rome upon all of them. Our passage today is the sequel to our first passage this week. Take a few minutes to prepare in prayer for our study today.



Read Matthew 28:1-7, and 11-15. Answer the following questions.

In verse 4 what happened to the guards?

Paraphrase what you think the guards told the chief priests.

What did the religious leaders do?



What is the lasting effect of the actions of the chief priests?

What do we learn from Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 regarding the resurrection that would refute the actions of the Sanhedrin?

Upon hearing the report of the guards, the chief priests and elders come up with a plan to counter act the truth of the resurrection. Even the guards' report did not give the religious leaders pause concerning the events of the crucifixion and subsequent supernatural events surrounding the tomb. The plan of the religious leaders does have some considerable flaws. It required the guards to admit they had fallen asleep while keeping watch. This not only reflects badly on the duty and honor of the Roman guards, it is also a capital offense. (See Acts 12:19 recounting the fate of the soldiers who were on duty when Peter escaped prison.) To protect the guards the religious leaders said they would act to keep them out of trouble with the governor, likely another large sum of money changed hands.

The story created by the religious leaders not only required the guards to incriminate themselves, but it also does not follow logic. If the guards were asleep when the disciples came to steal the body, how did they know it was the disciples? Why also would the disciples take the risk to steal Jesus' body from a guarded tomb when they didn't even have the courage to stand by their leader or attempt to rescue him at this arrest, or defend him at his trials? The disciples were too fearful to be seen publicly with their captured messiah.

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These actions of the religious leadership are consistent with their previous lies and bribes when they paid off Judas to hand over Jesus, when they charged Jesus with crimes of blasphemy, and then sedition before the Roman authorities. They used their power, wealth, and authority to meet whatever ends required to retain their positions of power, wealth, and authority. There was no truth in them, only lies, deceit and corruption to the very end.

The Road to Emmaus

*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,
he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.* (Luke 24:27)

Our next passage of scripture focuses on the story of Jesus appearing to two disciples heading out of Jerusalem. Jesus' followers fail to recognize him even as Jesus explains to them how God had written his salvation plan into the Books of Moses and the prophets. As we prepare ourselves to study God's word today, take a few minutes to ask the Lord to open your heart and mind to receiving his teaching.



Read Luke 24:13-35 and answer the following questions

What does Cleopas' remark signify concerning the extent of Jesus' ministry? (v. 18)

Why were they so disappointed by Jesus death? What kind of Messiah had Cleopas and his companion expect Jesus to be? Someone like Moses, he performed miracles and spoke of a kingdom of God, but also a

Why were their faces still downcast even upon hearing reports of Jesus' resurrection?

What did the unrecognized traveler explain to the two disciples?

Why did the Messiah have to suffer before entering his glory? How do the following verses explain the necessity of the suffering of the Messiah?

- Mark 10:45

- Romans 3:25-26
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Galatians 3:10-14

At what point do the two disciples recognize Jesus as the one travelling with them?

What does Luke tell us at the beginning of his Gospel as being the purpose of writing his Gospel? (Luke 1:4)

What two elements of our passage today will give us *“the certainty of the things we have been taught”*?

Where do the two disciples go upon Jesus’ departure?

Upon hearing the account of the two disciples, how many accounts of Jesus’ resurrection have the Eleven heard (including scripture passages we studied this week)?

Despite reports of Jesus resurrection, the disciples were still grieving over his death. Even though Jesus had prophesied his resurrection, they could not believe it as a possibility. They were so tied to the idea of a temporal/political Messiah, thinking victory could only come through military might against Rome, that they could not understand why God would allow the Messiah to die on a cross. How could salvation come to Israel if they were still oppressed by Rome? The idea of a spiritual Messiah was a foreign concept despite the prophecies throughout Hebrew scripture. Jesus points out to them that if they really knew and understood what the Hebrew scriptures said, they would not have been sad or confused by his death. The Messiah’s death was prophesied long before it was fulfilled, and Jesus’ death fits the prophecies of the scriptures.

Jesus takes much time to explain the prophecies to them, and how Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled them, yet the travelers were still unable to recognize him. Verse 16 tells us *“but they were **kept** from recognizing him.”* The Greek work *krateo*, translated here as “kept”, means to

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use strength, i.e. *seize* or *retain* ². Their ability to recognize Jesus is held back with power or strength. What or who is holding back that ability to recognize Jesus? Is it Jesus himself? Or more likely, is it their lack of understanding and faith that is holding back their ability to recognize Jesus? Even after Jesus explains these things to them, they still can't clearly see the Messiah. Not until Jesus breaks the bread and blesses it do they finally see the resurrected Jesus.

At the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, Luke tells us that his purpose in writing down the events of Jesus life is *“so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught”* (Luke 1:4). Luke who is usually very attentive to detail, makes no mention of what caused these two disciples to finally recognize Jesus, only that it was in connection with breaking the bread. He makes no mention of Jesus hands being marred with the crucifixion scars, or a miraculous healing of the disciples' vision. I think the intended meaning of this event is that through participation and coming to fully understand the meaning behind the “breaking of the bread” or “Lord's Supper” we come to see Jesus more clearly as the spiritual Messiah he is. This whole scripture passage focuses on understanding scripture and knowing Jesus through receiving communion. In fact the term “recognized [*epegnōsan*]” is the same word Luke used in 1:4 with respect to “knowing [*epignōs*]” the certainty of the things they had been taught.³ We know that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah because he fulfills scripture and fulfills the required atonement sacrifice commemorated in the Lord's Supper.

Personal Reflection:

This week we have seen several instances of Jesus' disciples not being able to recognize their risen Lord. Have there been times in your life when you have been blind to the presence of Jesus because his reality conflicts with your idea of who he is or what he should do? How was your vision of him corrected? What is necessary to keeping our eyes on Jesus?

² Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

³ New American Commentary