

The Empty Tomb

*He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.
(Matthew 28:6)*

We are fast approaching the time of the year in which we celebrate Easter. For some this is perhaps as far as it goes; just another holiday with bunnies, easter egg hunts, and pastel colors; for others it is mixed with unbelief and of no value. On the other hand, for a Christian, this is the central theme of the whole salvation story. Without the death and resurrection of our Lord, we would be doomed in sin, and bound for everlasting punishment. Because of inherent sin, man must have an advocate, someone to pay for the debt of sin he owes. It is not only because man sins that he needs a Savior, but because he is born into a sinful state, out of which he cannot redeem himself. There is nothing that can purge sin: not man himself, not the law, not a priest or any other earthly religious figure. The only way man can be redeemed, is by someone who does not possess the same earthly sinful flesh as himself. God, because he loved mankind, gave the gift of his own son to be that payment for our sins. Free for anyone who repents and accepts it. It really is amazing!

God could have discarded his human creation when they fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. He could have shut the plan down then and there, end of story, but he chose not to. He valued what he had created and knew that he himself had given them the power of choice; the option to choose to serve him or not, knowing that it may come at a price. Surely God in his wisdom, knew that man would choose his own way and disobey him, eating of the fruit which he forbade them to eat. He could have prevented it, but instead, he allowed man to exercise his own power of choice.

God allowed the practice of sacrificing innocent animals as a substitute for sin until the Messiah would come. Throughout the Old Testament, we see hints of that promise. How that was to happen was veiled from their view, so much so, that to this day, there are those who do not accept Christ as the Messiah. He was against the religious hypocrisy of the day but revealed himself to the humble and downtrodden of mankind, who had faith.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. (Matthew 11:25)

What we are interested in today is the significance of the empty tomb. All Christians, thank the Lord over and over for dying for their sins. Without his death, there would have been no resurrection. One cannot come back from the dead if they have not first died. Neither could we be free from sin, if he had not died in our place. The New Testament has many references to dying to self, being crucified, etc., all in reference to the death of Jesus. This is all very important, however, what if he had not risen from the dead? What if the tomb had not been empty when the women went to see it that first day of the week?

Some may think that evil prevailed and put Jesus to death. While it is true that evil men captured him and eventually put him to death, yet the only reason they could do that was because God allowed them to. Jesus told Pilate that he had no power except what was given him from above. In other words, Pilate or the people could not have arrested and sentenced him to death, without his heavenly father allowing it to happen. *Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. (John 19:10-11)* This makes his death a voluntary choice, rather than a power of evil over him. He allowed himself to be put to death. When he was on the cross, it says he voluntarily died; he yielded up the ghost. *And when Jesus had*

cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. (Luke 23:46) Even in death, he chose to die. It says he could have called more than seventy two thousand angels to deliver him, but he chose not to, because he knew that it was only through his death that the price for sin could be paid. *Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? (Matthew 26:52-54)* By his dying, his Father's wrath on sin was satisfied; through his only son, a way was made for man to be redeemed and set free from sin. Man can either choose this redemption or reject it, it is their choice. However, God's wrath and judgment on sin still remains for those who have not repented of their sins and accepted the sacrifice.

The significance of the empty tomb means that Christ had power over death. On the third day, he arose from the dead, just as he said he would. He showed himself to a few of his closest companions and opened their eyes of understanding to the fullness of his plan of redemption.

He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, (Luke 24:6) And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? (Luke 24:32)

Let us look at what it would be like if Jesus had not risen from the dead. The salvation plan would be incomplete, lacking power over sin. When Satan caused man to fall in the Garden of Eden, he thought he had gained a victory over God. Man was now in his domain, and servant of sin. This estranged all mankind from God and would have continued to do so, except for God's plan of redemption. His plan began with promising a redeemer who would free them from the yoke of bondage of sin. It included using the blood of innocent animals as a covering for man's sins, until the promised redeemer would come. With the coming of Jesus, the prophecy was fulfilled, and animal sacrifices were no longer needed and thereby abolished. Unlike animal sacrifices, Jesus as the son of God, was a living being, fully understanding of what he was doing when he laid down his life. And then, unlike the former sacrifices, he came back to life, rose from the dead, thereby conquering spiritual death for all of mankind. He conquered death in his physical body that we could resurrect from spiritual death. There are still some things about how this all happened which are unclear to us earthly beings. However, one day when we meet Jesus face to face, it will all be clear.

Without the resurrection, there would be no Holy Spirit comforter. After his resurrection, Jesus promised his followers that the Holy Spirit would come to guide them. It was part of him that remains to this day and is proof of his resurrection and life.

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (John 14:26)

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. (Luke 24:49)

If Jesus had not resurrected from the dead, then sin and evil would reign. Satan would have finally been able to be victorious in his war against God. It would mean that God was not able to overcome what Satan thought was his victory. His ultimate revenge against God would have been to kill his son forever.

There would be no promises of an afterlife of peace and bliss. No heaven, no reward for the faithful. All mankind would have been plunged into eternal darkness forever.

We could have no peace in our hearts; no power to overcome sin. We would not know what it was like to have our sins forgiven and our heart clean and free. There would be no joy, only endless fighting and misery. There would be no faith and no hope. In essence we would die spiritually, and never be able to live spiritually again.

Today if we lack power to overcome sin in our lives, it is likely because our flesh has not been fully crucified with Christ. The power of the resurrection only comes about after our selfish desires have been put to death. Only then, can we be partakers of the resurrection, and rise to newness of life; victorious and triumphant over the sin that once lived and directed our lives. We will still be human and full of mistakes, but God's grace allows us to make corrections and return to full fellowship with him.

Living for Christ has been depicted as a seed which we plant in the soil so it can sprout and grow. Only after that has happened, with the proper amount of warmth and rain, the green shoot peeps through the ground. The seed dies in the soil, but in the process a new plant springs forth. Eventually that plant becomes mature and yields a bountiful harvest.

We are like that seed. As long as we refuse to yield ourselves to God, we will be like that seed, dry, alone, and without purpose. When we give our lives over to God, confessing our pride, selfishness, lust, and whatever else is sinful, we become buried with him in his death, and then our new life springs forth, and our lives will bear the fruit of the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. (Galatians 5:22-24)

By following the steps of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we will see that it mirrors our own journey from death to life.

As the time drew closer to the Passover, Jesus's heart became heavy with the work he knew he must do. He had his disciples prepare the Passover meal, which he said would be the last one he would eat with them until in paradise. This time is like the time in our lives when we come to the realization that we have sinned. Our hearts become troubled knowing that we are guilty and deserve judgment.

After Jesus observed the Passover meal with his disciples, and Judas had left. He and the remaining eleven went to the Garden of Gethsemane so he could pray. There in the garden, Jesus left his disciples and prayed all alone to his father. The Bible says his sweat was as great drops of blood from the agony he faced. Was it the thought of dying, or the burden of sin, or that he knew his father would turn his back on him? Probably all of that and more. Most of all he was surrendering his will to the will of his father. This is a necessary part of our spiritual journey; the surrendering of our will to our heavenly father, accepting his conditions, and repenting of our sins. We cannot experience living for the Lord unless we go through this step. No one else can do it for us. It is personally owning our guilt, and before God, giving him everything. Our heart, life, wishes, desires, past, and future; the whole package. It says that afterwards the angels came and ministered unto him. In our repentance experience, the Lord comes to us and gives us his comfort.

During the trial, Jesus was accused of many things falsely. Pilate eventually caved in to the Jews, and condemned Jesus to die. Here again when we stand before God with our sins, we deserve to die for them. This part of putting our flesh to death means that we crucify our earthly wishes and desires and put them to death on the cross. With God's help, we place judgment on those things that are not a part of living for God. Here is the final part where the wishes and desires of our flesh die. We have nothing left to offer the Lord; our whole heart and life are fully yielded to his will.

Then here we come to the best part, the resurrection. After Jesus died and was buried, he arose again from the dead. This is the most important part of our Christian experience. After our Gethsemane experience, and

the death of our flesh on the cross, we are ready to rise to newness of life in Christ. The Bible tells us that we are buried with him, and to take up our cross and follow him.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: (Romans 6:4-5)

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. (Luke 9:23-24)

When we experience all these steps, we are then a new creature in Christ, and the work of redemption is full and complete. May we surrender our lives to him and walk in the newness of his resurrected life.

All of us need an empty tomb in our lives. No longer are we locked in eternal death, but risen in newness of life in Christ.

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3/5/2024