

## Mark 16:1-7

Easter, March 31, 2024  
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

***When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back-- it was very large. <sup>5</sup> And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."***

There's a Sherlock Holmes short story called "Silver Blaze" in which the famous detective is hired to find out who stole a valuable racehorse. The horse had vanished from its barn in the middle of the night, and the stable boy—who had been sleeping up in the loft—hadn't heard a thing. The only other creature in the building at the time of the burglary was the boy's dog. Scotland Yard was baffled, but, of course, Sherlock Holmes was on the case. The most compelling evidence to him was the dog. The stable boy hadn't heard a thing, because the dog hadn't made any noise. Of course, if a *stranger* had stolen the horse, the dog would have been loudly barking! But that the dog was silent proved to Holmes that the thief must have been someone quite familiar to him. And, using that piece of evidence, or lack of evidence, Holmes proves that the burglar was, in fact, the horse's own trainer.

It sometimes happens that the *absence* of evidence is more convincing than the presence of evidence. The fact that something one would expect to find is missing—that often serves as the strongest proof possible that certain events took place. The same thing could be said of Easter. Easter is the day we celebrate the amazing event of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. But how do we know it really happened? In part, we can know because of the absence from the tomb of one very important piece of evidence: the body of Jesus! So, let's follow the women as they journey to the garden tomb this Easter morning. The theme we'll be considering this morning is:

### **The Missing Evidence of Easter**

- I. The empty tomb proves Jesus' resurrection
- II. The empty tomb proves our salvation

A person named Jesus once walked this earth. That He lived and died is an historical fact; not even the most hardened atheist would deny that. The world will admit that Jesus was real—that He was a great teacher, that He lived an exemplary life, and that He died unjustly by crucifixion at the hands of the Romans. But His resurrection—*that's another story!* That Jesus came back from the dead on the third day is something the unbelieving world simply can't admit. And, sadly, in our day, there are even many so-called "Christians" who consider the resurrection account a myth! But the whole Christian faith stands or falls on the resurrection. Paul once told some doubters in Corinth, ***"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."*** (1 Corinthians 15:7-9) If the resurrection is a myth, then our faith is foolishness, and you and I are wasting our time here today. But it's not a myth! It's the truth! Jesus rising from the dead is an

historical fact, and our text for this morning provides part of the proof. After all, **the empty tomb proves Jesus' resurrection.**

A faint ribbon of light was just appearing on the eastern horizon as the women made their way to Jesus' tomb. In Palestine, the bodies of the dead were interred in caves hewn into rocky hillsides. These ladies were headed for the newly-carved tomb where Joseph of Arimathea had laid the body of Jesus. They were carrying a bulk supply of spices, with which they intended to embalm the body of Jesus, according to the custom of the Jews. No doubt they were still saddened and upset by the events of Good Friday. And to top it off, they had something else to worry about: the huge stone that blocked the door of the tomb. ***"And they were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?'"*** And think of how worried they'd have been if they'd known that Pilate had ordered the stone sealed shut with Roman guards placed at the doorway!

But they were in for a big surprise. When they arrived at the tomb, they didn't see the seal, and they didn't see any soldiers. The stone was already rolled to one side, and the door of the tomb stood open! They didn't know what to make of it. All the evidence that should have been there if Jesus was dead was gone! Above all, there was one very important missing piece of evidence: the body of Jesus! ***"And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.'"***

The impossible had happened. The resurrection that Jesus Himself had so often predicted had taken place. This event actually took place that first Easter Sunday, almost 2,000 years ago, and the empty tomb proves it. The words of the angel prove it. The testimony of Scripture proves it. And if there's anybody that's still not convinced, the Apostle Paul runs down the list of people who *actually* saw Jesus with their own eyes after His resurrection: ***"He appeared to Cephas (that is Peter), then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive."*** (1 Corinthians 15:5-6) What—did more than five hundred people have an optical illusion at the same time? Did the disciples all just *imagine* they saw Jesus in the flesh? Did they make it all up and then hang onto the lie even as they were later being killed for professing that Jesus rose from the dead? I don't think so! The resurrection of Jesus happened, and the empty tomb proves it.

Now, like those women, I'm afraid we might come to the tomb today feeling somewhat saddened and disheartened. After all, it was just a couple days ago that we saw Jesus on the cross—and it was a pretty gruesome sight. We witnessed the terrible results of sin, as the Lord laid the punishment for all our sins on the crucified Savior. But if Good Friday saddened you, then Easter Sunday should give you nothing but joy! Because the missing evidence of Easter—the empty tomb—not only *proves* Jesus' resurrection, **it also proves our salvation!**

In the first place, the fact of Jesus' resurrection proves that He was *exactly* who He said He was—not just "a good man," not just "a fine moral teacher," but the Son of God and Savior of the world. Paul writes, ***"Jesus Christ our Lord. . . was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."*** (Romans 1:3-4) Because that is true, the empty tomb of Easter means a great deal to us!

You know, I've always wondered what happened to all that stuff—all the spices that the women were bringing to embalm Jesus' body. Experts figure they must have had about 70 or 80 pounds of embalming spices. And I assume they probably just dropped it all outside the tomb somewhere in their rush to get back and tell the disciples. It would have been a heavy burden to carry, and one that they obviously didn't need anymore. Well, let me ask you a question: How much stuff are you carrying with *you* today? How many sins? How much nagging guilt over the mistakes you've made in life? Well, I'm happy to be able to tell you that you can drop that heavy burden. The empty tomb means you don't have to carry it anymore. Your sins are completely forgiven, and the empty tomb proves it!

Last year, Jess and I finally paid off our student loan debt. It took us about 8 years to pay it off, which isn't terrible, but I'll tell you what—it was a tremendous relief when we finally finished our payments and eliminated that debt. A couple weeks after I'd applied the final payment, I logged onto the lender website again just to make sure that we had actually put that debt behind us, because I was worried that maybe it didn't work or there was some sort of bank error. And, logging in, at the top of the page in bold letters were those beautiful words: **"Paid In Full."** Well, that first Easter Sunday, God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, and in so doing He has changed the status of *your* debt to **"Paid In Full."** All of your sins have been completely paid for. For Jesus' sake, you are justified—that is declared righteous and innocent in the eyes of God, as we can read in Paul's letter to the Romans, ***"Jesus our Lord. . . was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification."*** (Romans 4:24-25) The missing evidence of the empty tomb proves our justification once and for all.

And it proves something else, too. It proves that, like Jesus, we will one day rise to eternal life. You know, they say there are only two certainties in life: death and taxes. Well, with April 15<sup>th</sup> fast approaching, we're reminded that we still have to pay our taxes—but we no longer need to be afraid of death! In one of the sweetest verses of Scripture, Jesus said, ***"Because I live, you will live also."*** (John 14:19) His resurrection is our guarantee that we will live with Him in total happiness—not for ten years, not for a *thousand* years—but forever! With the threat of eternal death wiped out, with eternal life guaranteed to us in Christ—what's left for us to be afraid of? Nothing! With Paul, we may confidently say, ***"O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (1 Corinthians 15:55-57)

Yes, the empty tomb means a great deal to us. It shows us that our lives are not meaningless, and we're not alone to fight for ourselves in sin-hardened world. No, we're Christians: created by God, redeemed by our Savior, and headed for eternal life. How can we know that for sure? Because the empty tomb proves it! Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.