

“Visiting Joseph’s Borrowed Tomb”

Pastor Sam Richards

31 March 2024—Easter Sunday

Texts: Matthew 28:1-15

Let’s allow the text to serve as our tour guide that Easter morning and let’s follow Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (the mother of James and John as she has been identified) as **they came to look at the tomb**, the physical place where the body of Jesus had been hurriedly interred, and partially prepared for final internment. The text does not say they came to view the body, but to visit the sepulcher. They did so perhaps to grieve the loss of their beloved Lord and the large stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb of Joseph forbade them the possibility of viewing the body. Besides there would be the temple guard to contend with—they had been posted to insure that the authorities would have plausible deniability with regard to the resurrection claims of the deceased Jesus. These are very sparse expectations. Prior to their arrival at the tomb, a severe earthquake had occurred, **an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled away the stone**. We are not told that this was to assist in Jesus’ exit from the tomb, as subsequent appearances of Jesus would demonstrate his ability to appear how and where and when he wished without any impediments such as walls, or doors, or large stones. The risen Lord was simply not bound to geography as we are because of his divinity. Therefore the stone was removed for the benefit of the guard, and for the women visiting the tomb—all could see openly **where he had been lying**. Or, to the larger point, **He is not here, for he has risen, just as he said**.

It is my position that all these details are evidentiary: the guards, probably all Jewish, witnessed the whole proceeding although it overwhelmed them to where *they became immobilized (i.e. frozen in place as would dead men be!)* The inference of verse 11 is that they saw it all, and reported it all to the chief priests—they went into emergency session because the tomb was empty, and the best, truest explanation would be that the resurrection Jesus had prophesied had indeed occurred. As a result they concocted a false narrative (as reported **to this day**—the disciples who were terrified, and in hiding somehow plucked up their courage, rolled back the stone and absconded with the body, **while they slept**). Sleeping on nightly watch was a capital offense for Roman soldiers but the influential Jewish leaders would bribe the governor and hopefully this Jesus thing would simply blow over. Of course it didn’t. Now there are three doctrinal takeaways (at least) from this trip of respect. The proof of Jesus’ divinity, the sign of the empty tomb as our acquittal and the reality of resurrection as the destiny/future hope of all believers. We will cover all three this morning.

It appears that timidity buried Jesus, a greater hope and firmer faith would have given Jesus no funeral at all. At least there was not a funeral procession, and no period of public driving by professional mourners because that would be to double down on the error. The burial of Jesus was futile—if he were to rise what would be the point. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea acted as they did out of fear of the Jews in part, and in part to prevent further desecration of the body of Jesus by man or beast. The Romans would have been fine with that; they did not allow criminals to be buried. Dogs and vultures would devour the corpses. Waving off carrion eaters would have been adequate as they awaited resurrection. This did not happen because what actually transpired was prophetically ordered years prior to the actual events. God did what only God could do: he rose from the dead.

Also the empty tomb is the sign of our acquittal or, our full discharge from the sins that Christ atoned for! He paid the debt, he cancelled the whole debt of sin as he satisfied the wrath of God, or the eternal vengeance God has sworn against both sin and sinners. The empty tomb signifies the finished business of Christ's redemption. Jesus bore the sins of all God's elect on his shoulders so that we might actually be set free—as so we truly are. Acquitted and released forever. Jesus died the death we deserved, freed us from the fowler's snare. He rose victorious over the grave, forgave our sin and defeated our accuser all in one fell swoop. The angel rolled away the stone that covered the opening of our prison house and ushered us out in Him. In Jesus' going free, we see our own discharge. Yes, we are discharged from this present world into the realms of glory, our future and eternal home at the resurrection of the dead!

"Here's pardon for transgressions past,
 It matter not how black their cast,
 And O my soul, with wonder view,
 For sins to come, here's pardon too.
 Fully discharged by Christ I am,
 From Christ's tremendous curse and blame."

Because we are justified in him, we can exclaim. "There is not a single sin written against me in God's book. Every debt of ours sin is receipted and cancelled—marked paid in full. The empty tomb signifies our acquittal.

There remains the doctrine of the resurrection. As Jesus rose, so must we! It is determined that we must die. Our bodies shall become feasts for worms—unless we are alive when he returns! And all the particles of our physical being shall be dispersed through that dissolution—scattered abroad. But at the last trumpet a great reversal shall occur—and all the bits and particples of our physical body wheresoever relocated shall be summoned back in our restoration. This "re-gathering" will be most miraculous-it might even be called the final miracle. It will be the final chapter of this present world order as the new heaven and new earth come into being. It will replicate the first, original formation of my being! All vapor, gas and decomposition aside, we shall reoccupy our bodies, which have started up from the grave as it were, and we shall live again—only put back better than ever, glorified, made like unto even Christ's glorified body! **We shall be like him.** Death brings a temporary parting and then a new body. The grave will appear as a bath and our body like clothes are put through the wash cycle. Death will be as a waiting room where we wait to be robed in immortality—and beautified from what lies ahead, forever as his bride!

"Shudder not to pass the stream;
 Venture all thy care on him;
 Him whose dying love and power
 Stilled its tossing, hushed its roar,
 Safe in the expanded wave;

Gentle as a summer's eve.

Not one object of his care

Ever suffered shipwreck there.

Amen