

# The Empty Tomb

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Date: 23 March 2023

[ 0 : 00 ] We shall sing to God's praise from Psalm 68, Psalm 68 at verse 16, singing down to verse 20.

Why do ye leap? Ye mountains high, this is the hill where God desires to dwell. Ye God in it for a will make a boat.

God's chariots, twenty thousand are, thousands of angels strong. In his holy place God is, as in Mount Sinai, them a mount. Thou hast, O Lord, most glorious, ascended up on high, and in triumph victorious led, captive captivity.

Thou hast received gifts for men, for such as did rebel. Yea, even for them, that God the Lord in midst of them might dwell. Blessed be the Lord, who is to us of our salvation God, who daily with his benefits so splentiously doth load.

He of salvation is the God, who is our God most strong. And unto God the Lord from death, the issues do belong.

[ 1 : 22 ] And so on. Let us sing these verses. Psalm 68 from verse 16. Why do ye leap? Ye mountains high, this is the hill where God.

Why do ye leap? Ye mountains high, this is the hill where God desires to dwell.

For ye mountains high, this is the hill where God desires to dwell.

God's child of square, this is the hill where God desires to dwell.

strong. Its holy grace thought is as in the Messiah in the Thou hast O Lord most glorious ascended upon high and lift Thou victorious led captive captive liberty thou hast received with gifts for men for such as it revel he for them that

[ 3 : 40 ] God the Lord in midst of them might dwell blessed be the Lord who is to us of our salvation God God who did with his benefits a pleasure sleep and load he of salvation is the God who is the

God most strong and that to God the Lord from death he is to belong I guess to turn to the passage read we can read again at the beginning of the gospel of John chapter 20 and the beginning of the chapter the first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early when it was yet dark and to the sepulcher and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved and saith unto them they have taken away the

Lord out of the sepulcher and we know not where they have laid him they have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher through this passage is familiar to us all a portion of scripture that describes to us the death and the sufferings before death of the Lord Jesus Christ reality of his death and his burial and the events that occurred subsequently ordinarily you would expect the story of a person's life to come to an end at the point of death so in this case verse 42 probably is the point where most of us would expect a person's story to conclude story in the sense of death being followed by burial there laid the

Jesus therefore because of the Jews preparation day for the sepulcher was nigh at hand there are many traditions surrounding the death of men and women in various parts of the world and these practices and traditions have to do with the body and the body is considered to be at that point there is no further activity on the part of the body any culture that speaks of death and what follows on from death usually then begin to speak of the spirit or the soul and the

Jewish culture was no different the body would return to the dust but here in the account that we have in the gospel we are brought face to face not only with the death of Jesus and the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ but also what follows on from that we have the cry coming from his mouth it is finished we have in Matthew's account that he cried with a loud voice and that he yielded up the ghost emphasis laid upon that by various theologians that it was a self-surrender to death and like most experiences of death it was not death that claimed him but he gave himself to death because of the role that he was fulfilling as the surety of his people paying their debt as sinners who were receiving the just reward for their sins no one present doubted that he was dead we know that

[ 9 : 40 ] Roman soldiers were present as witnesses to his death we know that one of them pierced his side with a spear and that water and blood flowed out they were satisfied that he was dead we are told that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were present and begged the body of Jesus for burial so they were persuaded that he was dead we know that Mary Magdalene along with others were present when he was buried so they were convinced of his death and just as surely as Joseph and Nicodemus prepared his body for burial and placed him in the garden tomb Mary and whoever the woman were that were with it the other

Mary we are told different names are recorded for us who were present at various times they were persuaded that he was dead Mary is mentioned alone here but in the other gospels we know that she had company and that they came prepared with spices to anoint the body of the dead Christ and the question that burdened them as they approached the tomb having been witnesses to his burial was a question we find recorded in one of the gospels who shall roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher they knew what to expect they were convinced of what was awaiting them but one thing they did not expect was to find an empty tomb and that is the marvel of the account that we have here that it is an empty tomb that was awaiting them and it's interesting from the point of view of the

Christian who is aware of the various teachings surrounding the death of Christ and the necessity of his resurrection how in the moments leading up to his death and consequently following on from his death how the different views merge and how the different expectations are presented to us without any embarrassment we have the advantage of having the scriptures and reading the scripture and reading the accounts of the death of the Lord and the death that was followed by burial and resurrection but those who were there at the point at which these events take place their feelings their thoughts their fears are presented to us as genuine fears and genuine experiences which remind us that for the church the church can never believe anything other than the fact that

Jesus died the death of the cross and that he did experience burial and that what follows on from that can only be understood as the greatest of all miracles for the church of Christ that their saviour is not a dead saviour but a living saviour that he is not buried there or anywhere else that he has risen from the dead and it's important for us to remember that and to realise it even from the proofs that we have in the scripture proofs that seem to be arguing against that very thing because this is what we would have expected this is how we would have expected them to behave in many respects spirits there are plenty who ally themselves to the

Christian church today who are pleased to dismiss the notion of the resurrection the physical resurrection from the dead of the Lord Jesus Christ may seem strange to you and strange to me that any person would consider themselves to be a Christian who are not persuaded that the Lord Jesus Christ lives today but they consider themselves Christian because they believe the teachings of the Lord Jesus or they believe that in his doctrines that the church of Christ lives on he doesn't have to live he doesn't have to be a living saviour in order for their beliefs to be met but that is not the teaching of the scripture that is not the teachings of God's word and what we are reminded of here is this definite line as it were that when they are presented with the fact of an empty tomb they struggle to comprehend what is behind that why is the tomb empty who emptied the tomb who as

[ 16 : 28 ] Mary asks here has taken the body of her Lord away and it is emphasized in verse 9 for as yet they knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead I think there is a mystery there which is difficult for us to comprehend how that can possibly be true that they knew not the scripture considering that more than on one occasion the Lord Jesus Christ testified to the truth concerning his death and also his resurrection there are many examples of that taking place but just for the sake of brevity one example we have in the gospel of Mark and chapter 10

Lord there speaks to the disciples they were in the way going up to Jerusalem and Jesus went before them and they were amazed and as they followed they were afraid and he took again the twelve and began to tell them what things should happen unto them saying behold we go up to Jerusalem and the son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and unto the scribes and they shall condemn him to death and shall deliver him to the Gentiles and they shall mock him and shall scourge him and shall spit upon him and shall kill him and the third day he shall rise again you couldn't have a clearer statement about the experience that awaited the Lord Jesus but also the same definiteness applies to the fact that having experienced death that he would rise from the dead if they were students of the

Bible they would have known that there were prophecies within the Old Testament that spoke of such an event even though they were incapable of understanding the full extent of the truth that they were presented with but we are told here the simple fact of the matter is that as yet they had not understood and we were presented with that and at the same time within the context of the story being told we are told of the preparations that Christ's enemies make when it comes to his being buried they go to Pilate and beg the body of Christ beg that the body of

Christ rather be sealed in the tomb and a guard be placed over it not sure which one of the commentators says that it was you could imagine that Pilate would be laughing under his breath as he gave permission for this tomb to be sealed and for the soldiers to be set over him at a watch because he could see the dilemma that they were in they were acting on the basis of what they heard Jesus to say and they understood what Jesus had said that he was going to rise again after three days they understood that even though they were his enemies and on the basis of what he said however much they believed that to be a truth that would be fulfilled they reacted to it by insisting that

Pilate give them permission to do that did they believe that he would rise I don't believe that they did but they remembered his words nevertheless we see then that the woman came fearless that's one word of describing it and again you have to take on board the context in which they came to visit the tomb it is it is not a time of neutrality it's a very dark time spiritually a very oppressive time there's a lot of enmity directed towards Jesus and also towards his followers and they disregard that and identify themselves with him not only that you can understand that in such a situation superstition might fill their heart with a measure of fear they are coming to the tomb coming to a place associated with the sufferings and the sorrows of those who were put to death most gruesomely because we're told where the tomb was it was in a garden close by to where he was crucified you can imagine the scenario that is there they're coming when the dawn is approaching but it is still in the grip of the night and there's a physical darkness and a spiritual darkness and yet such does not debar them from coming and they are compelled by love for the

[ 22 : 58 ] Lord and yet when they come which is something that they cannot fully comprehend it is too late he is not here they are told he is risen what had taken place no one saw it and it's it's very interesting if you want to carry out a study of each one of the gospels own record of the events they are not synchronized but there are bits of information that fit together to describe the events as they occurred only as far as we are privy to them we are not actually given any information about the resurrection itself how did it take place what took place

Marcus Lone has got a book on the resurrection and the spiritual significance of it and he says that no man and no angel was present to see Jesus rise or to tell the process by which that occurred when you read of the account that we have here all you're told is that when they arrived at the sepulcher the stone had already been taken away now it would be natural for you to conclude that from the account that we have in the other gospels that when Mary the two Marys came and Salome I think came they found the angel sitting on the stone and the stone rolled away that you would think that the angel was responsible for that and that was the angel of the

Lord that was the means by which Christ was released from the tomb but then in this account when Mary comes back she sees two angels in white one sitting at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus lay while the angels are present and performing whatever duty the duty seems to be one of testifying to the resurrection rather than being in any way involved in it why would the Lord need any power outside of his own to carry out the rising from the dead it seems from what we read here that he rose through the grave clothes physically rose through the grave clothes some Christian commentators believe that there is a significance in the way the gospels present the positioning of the clothes that the clothes lay the body clothes the covering the clothes that covered the body lay separate from the clothes that covered the head and some of the older commentators would say this was a spiritual indication of the work of the hedge being completed and that this was indicative of that but the

Bible the scripture doesn't really emphasize that but it seems from the way the clothes are laid out that he rose out of these graves in the same in these grave clothes and emerged out of the grave of the tomb without the stone being moved the stone was moved by the angel to allow access to this tomb to see the emptiness of it it wasn't to allow Jesus the opportunity to escape from the tomb and the Westminster Confession in its own statement on the resurrection he says he remained under the power of death yet he saw no corruption and that it was the same body with which he suffered with which he arose and that's as far as they prepared to go that the same body that was

Christ's that was crucified is the same body that was laid in the grave and the same body that rose from the grave but it seems and there's no scriptural evidence for that other than that there must have been some change to his physical body in order for it to happen like that and possibly the risen body of Jesus could have experienced some change that made him different so that the eyes of those who knew him did not recognize him we can't insist on that however radical the transformation was there had to be continuity and we know there was continuity because the risen

[ 29:10 ] Christ when we read of a meeting with the disciples in the upper room he presented himself to them physically they knew who he was but he also bore in his body the marks of the nails the imprints of the nails in his hands and feet and also he was willing to ask Thomas although we didn't read that to put his hand into his side where the spear had pierced there is continuity but there is clearly some kind of difference we can say that I wouldn't insist on it but I would be content to say that there is a difference between the resurrection body of Christ and the glorified body of Christ because he went up to heaven and there is a change wrought in him in his glorification which his church will experience when they are glorified with him they shall see him as he is and they shall be like him now whether that difference is meant to be understood in his resurrection body

I cannot with any degree of certainty insist upon him John tells us that Mary runs to tell to share the information with Peter and John and she does that now whether her desire to share that information is one of celebration and enjoyment or delight it seems unlikely she is just concerned that she cannot find him where she expects to find him if you read Matthew's account at the end of that chapter where Jesus where Mary speaks to Peter and John they come to see what she has seen and the angel is waiting in the end and again the significance of that may not be immediately apparent behold there was a great earthquake for the angel of the

Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it his countenance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow and for fear of him the keepers did shake and became as dead men and the angel answered and said unto the one fear not ye for I know that you seek Jesus which was crucified he is not here he is listen come see the place where Lord lay and they send he sends them away to tell the disciples and when they come it is to share that information that she herself has encountered and is finding so difficult to digest the risen saviour what does that mean that Christ is not where he expects to be found but the different responses again

I don't know we might make too much of it but we are told that once John and Peter come that they go into the grave and they see for themselves and John believes he believes the word some people say it's one particular scripture that comes to his mind or some say it's the whole of scripture concerning Christ it's as if at that moment his mind has been opened to the truth of the resurrection but the disciples we are told went home they went home and yet Mary stood without weeping the path that she was to follow was different to theirs I don't know why that is so perhaps if we were to write this gospel we might write it differently because when

Mary encounters Jesus again she has this experience of meeting the risen Lord and him dealing with her personally intimately and giving her a certainty that she did not have before and you would expect that those who were going to witness to the truth of God those who were going to testify as the preachers of the New Testament would be the ones would be best served by that experience and yet that's not what happened Mary is stimulated by her own grief to remain behind and to try and unravel what is presented to her sentence her grief is insurmountable you you you could you could argue for

[ 35 : 20 ] John why would John want to go away well was he not burdened with the care of the Lord's mother would he not have a burden for her to return home and to minister to her it wouldn't have been easy for Peter who had denied the Lord to remain where he was he would have that on his mind we could try and get into their mind but only so as far as the scripture allows us to but it is Mary who is allowed this personal encounter with the Lord and that itself is quite quite a mysterious encounter where rather than immediately reveal himself to her she has to go through this process of almost being put on the spot she didn't recognize whom seek as thou why we bestow why this third degree as it were why this invitation to give information concerning who he was and to give information as to why she was there but it is the

Lord's way of dealing with her grief and I think possibly also we can say it is the Lord's way of dealing with the situation we do not have the ability to answer but the information that it brings to us surely cements in our mind the certainty that there is a Christ who rose from the dead and the believer is justified in believing the truth concerning him and that he is the one who has fulfilled the scriptures concerning him to the to the smallest jolt and tittle it is a living saviour that you have that

I have that the church of Christ has a saviour who experienced death who experienced the grave who rose from the dead and who has now ascended to the right hand of the majesty on high and the experiences of the disciples after this were to confirm them in that truth because he tells us here that when he had said this he breathed on them and saith unto them receive ye the holy ghost the first breathings of the spirit which were going to be a precursor to the earth pouring of the spirit Pentecost but the disciples first of all they received it from the Christ who was a risen Christ and may God bless to us these few thoughts let us pray Lord help us to understand the many wonders that surround not only the sufferings of our

Lord and they are brought to our attention in great detail even as they meet the types of the Old Testament and how these types speak of the role that he was to fulfil as the sin bearer and as the one who was going to suffer inestimable pain on the cross as the one who was to meet the wrath of a holy God in the place of his people we give thanks for all the detail that is presented to us we seek forgiveness for the limited understanding that we have of how these details bring to our attention the wonder of all that took place and the significance of it even to our own faith in the present bless us we pray in the name of that Christ who is at your right hand and who pleads our cause even though forgive us in his name amen we we we we we are going to conclude our service singing from psalm 16 in gaelic we are going to sing the last three verses of psalm psalm 16 him my

H will you understand thank God God all Thank you.

[ 41 : 24 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[ 43 : 38 ] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[ 45 : 52 ] Amen.