

# An Empty Grave

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] it's Easter Sunday as we all know and the day we remember especially that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive is alive we remember today that he was crucified on the Friday he remained in the grave on the Saturday and he rose on the Sunday morning they buried him in a tomb now what's a tomb I think everybody knows what a tomb is anybody prepared to tell me from the back row there what's a tomb Arthur hmm yeah it's a cave a cave as opposed to a grave a cave and that's where Jesus was buried wasn't he he was buried in a cave and the entrance was closed with a big stone and that was on Friday that was on Friday which we call today

Good Friday because that's when our Saviour died to save us and then came Saturday and that was the Jewish Sabbath now we heard about this last week the Sunday and the Sabbath that was a Jewish Sabbath when they all rested and didn't do any work and then came Sunday now to their great to their great surprise that Sunday Jesus wasn't in the tomb anymore he had risen and during that day they they were they came to understand what had happened they didn't understand at the beginning but they came we're going to come to understand as the day went on and we're going to be thinking about that later on in the service but when they did understand that Jesus had come back to life on the Sunday the first Christians began to meet together on the Sunday again we saw this last week and they met together and they called it the Lord's Day which we still do and that's the day when we meet to worship him and as we're doing today now as I said we're going to be thinking about

Jesus' resurrection later on and I'm going to be speaking all about it and if you're staying in we will we will be speaking to you at times perhaps could we have the oh they're up the points to follow an empty grave that was the that's today's message isn't it the grave was empty and then we're going to look at the tomb was cold Jesus was dead that's the way it was on the Saturday Jesus broke the chains of death tomb was empty Jesus defeated the devil and then the challenge to us how will we respond how will we respond it's not just an old story that doesn't mean anything it's a challenge to us there's a modern hymn that says see what a morning gloriously bright with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem folded the grave clothes tomb filled with light as the angels announce

Christ is risen see God's salvation plan wrought in love born in pain paid in sacrifice fulfilled in Christ the man for he lives Christ is risen from the dead that's the message of Easter but before we go on to that let's remind ourselves what it was like for the first believers that first Easter morning they went to the tomb they thought the tomb was cold and Jesus was dead so we're going to read something first of all of what happened on the Saturday the Jewish special day of rest and worship the day between the crucifixion and the resurrection I've asked George to read first so George is going to do the first reading and he's going to read

Matthew 27 verses 62 to 66 Jesus was dead they'd all seen him die they'd seen his body put in that tomb and his friends the disciples rested that day and normally the Jewish leaders who were very strict about following the law wouldn't have done anything that day except go to the temple and worship they wouldn't have gone to see a Gentile because that would make them unclean under their thinking but that day they were no longer concerned with keeping the Sabbath or remaining ceremonially clean that day they were concerned to make sure that Jesus stayed in the grave so they go and they see Pilate and they say look that imposter that's what they call

[ 5 : 5 5 ] Jesus that imposter said he was going to rise well we don't want him to rise how they thought they would ever stop it if he really was going to rise so they go to Pilate and they persuade him to seal the tomb some way put ropes over it put wax around the stone with special marks in it that showed that it was Pilate who had done that so it couldn't be opened without anybody knowing and they put a guard on the tomb a group of soldiers who were going to watch over the tomb and make sure nobody opens it it was as tight as the enemies of Jesus could make it the tomb was cold

that Saturday Jesus was dead God is love and God and love himself died on the cross we continue this story how hope returned

I'm going to sing again at this point we're going to sing a psalm of great confidence in God it's Psalm 16 and it's a psalm that looked forward to the resurrection I'll praise the Lord my God whose counsel guides my choice verse 7 and even in the night my heart recalls instruction's voice in verse 10 for you will not allow my soul in death to stay nor will you leave your holy one to see the tombs decay 7 to 11 of Psalm 16 the tomb was empty Jesus had broken the chains of death and that Sunday morning the women the friends of Jesus walked to the tomb hoping to put some sweet smelling ointment on the body of Jesus as they usually did after a death now they hadn't had time to do it on Friday and they rested on Saturday so they came early on the Sunday morning as early as they could and they expected to find a cold empty tomb and as they walked along Mark tells us that they were talking among themselves saying how are we going to move the stone it was a big stone that blocked the entrance to the tomb you see they didn't expect a resurrection they were going to anoint a dead body the leaders of the Jews had got Pilate to seal the stone and put a guard on the tomb in case the disciples came to steal him away but the disciples weren't in any condition to do a spot of grave robbing they were disillusioned depressed without hope and frightened hiding from the authorities in case they got arrested too but the women had the courage to go to the tomb it's interesting challenge to us men it's the women that had the courage to go to the tomb but the stone was there blocking it who would roll it away would the soldiers let them in anyway when I read this

I wonder if the women didn't know that the soldiers were there because the soldiers had been put there on the Saturday and perhaps they didn't know they were there but would they let them in we don't know they had hoped that Jesus would be the the savior of men but he was dead they had hoped he would be the king of Israel he was dead he had died in weakness and disgrace and under the curse of the cross they had hoped they had hoped but all hope was gone but but the tomb was empty the tomb was empty for the women and for later on in the day for the rest of the disciples despair turned to joy what an extraordinary morning that was for them there was first of all the angel well first of all the empty tomb but thus was the angel and he he speaks to them he's white as snow and he speaks to them and he says don't be afraid

I know you seek Jesus who was crucified he's not here he has risen he has risen you see that day began with an earthquake and the prophet Nahum wrote about God in Nahum 1 verse 5 he said the mountains quaked before him and the hills melt away the earth trembles at his presence well that day God's presence was there at Jesus' tomb that day God moved in power and the earth trembled at his presence have you ever felt an earthquake I think I felt one once a very small one that happened in the Liverpool area and I didn't even know it was an earthquake until I heard about it on the radio it was so small but big earthquakes are frightening but this earthquake didn't bring death it marked life life after death life that would never end now the earthquake wasn't to roll the stone away the angels did that the earthquake was simply announcing that God was there and God was working and the resurrection of Jesus the the angel rolled the stone away he didn't roll the stone away to let

[ 12 : 11 ] Jesus out Jesus didn't need to be let out in that sense walls and stones were no barrier to him now the risen Jesus the angel rolled the stone away to let the disciples in and the women in so they could see that the tomb was empty and they were wondering how we were going to get rid of that stone anyway and he rolled it away for them and God had it all organized he sent the angel for the guards this was something they hadn't expected the guards had been standing around the tomb and the angel appeared he was like lightning his clothing white as snow and for fear of him the guards trembled like dead men now this they had not expected had they they didn't expect an angel to appear as they stood around that tomb in the night they couldn't fight an angel and so they trembled and fell to the ground as fear with fear the women hadn't expected an angel either and they were afraid too you don't meet an angel every day do you they had gone to the tomb to anoint a dead body and they found instead an empty tomb and an angel an angel who appeared and who spoke to them and in verse 9 we read afterwards

Jesus spoke to them too Jesus met them when they were there and he said greetings they came up to him and took hold of his feet and worshipped him and Jesus said don't be afraid go and tell my disciples to go to Galilee and there they will see me so that day turned from a day of tremendous sorrow a day when you're going to go and anoint a dead body to a day of great joy Jesus is risen

see what a morning gloriously bright the dawning of hope in Jerusalem don't be afraid don't be afraid he is not here he is risen that day God moved in a new way something that had never happened before happened that day a dead man lived again well the women they run back to where the disciples are and they say

Jesus is risen and the disciples said what Jesus is risen and they said no no no can't be true you must be dreaming you must be out of your minds ladies the disciples didn't believe him didn't believe him we read Matthew doesn't tell us that in detail but the other gospels do he is risen it would be later in the day before they came to realize that Jesus really was risen and even then some doubted you know some people think that the resurrection story is an invention invention by men to give a foundation for a new religion but think about it if you were going to dream up a story to give a foundation for your new religion you wouldn't have dreamt up this one as the disciples for the disciples don't come out covered in glory do they the first the chief disciple

Peter he denies that he knew Jesus at all with curses on the Friday or the Thursday night he denies that he knew Jesus at all the rest of them ran away and left him to his feet on the day of the resurrection they were hiding behind closed doors paralyzed with fear and they didn't believe the women who came and told them that Jesus is alive and to cap it all the first witnesses of Jesus resurrection were women and in that day women were regarded as unreliable witnesses unreliable witnesses if you were inventing a story I think you would have done it better than that shown yourself in a better light and you would have hidden the fact that you were frightened that you had run away but it's a true story and the disciples told

Matthew he told it as it was and all the gospel writers tell it as it was the world had changed that Easter day by his death and resurrection Jesus broke the chains of death the Easter hymn says vain the stone the watch the seal Christ has burst the gates of hell death could not hold him he was the prince of life we read in John a few weeks ago the beginning of John in him was life the chains of death could not hold the prince of life Jesus burst the gates the chains of death and Jesus defeated the devil let's think a wee bit more about that

[18:22] Hebrews 2:14 reads since the children have flesh and blood he too shared in their humanity that is Jesus shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death that is the devil and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death that's what Jesus did on the cross again you think how could those first disciples come to see the death of Jesus as a victory and not a defeat it had seemed like a defeat hadn't it it had seemed like a defeat but of course he rose again he rose again the apostle John tells us the reason the son of God came was to destroy the devil's work in 1 John 3 verse 8 well what is the devil's work what is the devil's work well he's a liar he lied to Adam and Eve right in the first in the garden of

Eden and deceived them and Jesus came as the way the truth and the life and by his words he proved that his word by his death his resurrection rather he proved that his words are true he's a deceiver in verse 63 that we read there the Pharisees said so remember we remember how that imposter said while he was still alive after three days I will arise well imposter is AESV deceiver was the NIV the Pharisees called Jesus an imposter or a deceiver but Jesus wasn't the deceiver it's the devil who is a deceiver he's a liar always a liar always a deceiver he blinds men's eyes so they cannot understand the gospel Jesus came to open our eyes the eyes of the blind he caused Adam and Eve to sin and so separated us from God Jesus came to bring us back he's a good shepherd who goes out into the wilderness to bring back the wandering sheep into the fold also the devil keeps people in fear of death and I just read to you that verse in Hebrews 2 Jesus in rising from the dead removed the fear of death for those who trust in him he conquered death now during the worst of the pandemic when every day we were told how many people had died of COVID we realized how we seen we saw rather how much people fear death every day with that grim total of how many people died that day and how many people had died with COVID well for those who believe this is the only world there is we must prolong life as much as possible we don't even mention death anymore when we many people when someone has died all they say is well he's passed he's passed but as believers as believers because Jesus has risen from the dead our reaction is different death is still the last enemy Jesus wept over Lazarus when he died and we weep also but we don't weep without hope we don't weep without hope when my father-in-law died Megan wrote to her friends dad has gone home to Jesus that's what is happening for us gone home to Jesus when we were in Africa we got a note from a young widow whose

husband had died suddenly although not unexpectedly but he had died suddenly at the back door when he came back from walking the dog one morning she found him dead at the back door and she wrote the Lord called

Robert home this morning she had hope and we have hope we rejoice in the truth of the word in 1 Corinthians 15 oh death where is your victory oh death where is your sting the devil was called in that verse the prince of death the prince of death he is the power of death and we might ask ourselves how come how could he have the prince the power of death because death is a sentence of God because of sin because of the devil's deception it's the result of men turning their backs on God and in favor of Satan's realm of death so it is in that sense that the devil is said to have the power of death because we turn to him and we put we're in his power but but

[ 24 : 12 ] Jesus defeated death it couldn't behold the prince of life and Jesus by his death and resurrection defeated the devil an old theologian wrote he hell in hell laid low made sin he sin or through brought to the grave destroyed it so and death death by dying slough death by dying slough for the Christian you see death is falling asleep in Jesus it is entering that new life that Jesus described to us as eye has not seen nor ear heard nor has it entered into the heart of man the things God has prepared for those who love him that Easter day though this Easter day we remember that Jesus by his death by dying slough by his death and resurrection paid the price for our sin purchased forgiveness for us and made a way back to God for rebellious sinners

Jesus defeated the devil on the cross completely and for all time we can say with confidence when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin his resurrection proved his victory today we serve a risen and exalted saviour Lord Jesus the world has changed the world changed that first Easter morning when Jesus rose again it was an earthquake a really big earthquake but has the world changed for you has the world changed for us what are we to do about this what effect on us has that resurrection of Jesus 2000 years ago well Easter morning brings us to the challenge of the risen

Jesus there are two groups of people Matthew records who were in the garden near the tomb that first Easter morning the women and the guards and there were two very different reactions the women they met Jesus and they fell at his feet and they worshipped him verse 9 Jesus met them and said greetings they came up and took all those feet and worshipped and he said to them don't be afraid go and tell go and tell for them for the women there was no doubt as to who he was and what had happened Jesus was the Lord he was risen and they worshipped him and this is the right reaction the only real right reaction to the risen Jesus to fall at his feet and worship fall at his feet and worship and then rise and live for him go and tell he said the right reaction for the risen Jesus is God who rightly demands our obedience and our love to bring us to himself he's died in our place and rose again and today we bow at his feet and worship we say thank you Jesus for dying for me thank you for rising to be my saviour and my king I'm yours I'm yours yours always yours totally used to be a hymn that some of us sung in children's meetings in Sunday school I have decided to follow Jesus no turning back no turning back yours to command yours forever God of love this is the reaction of faith is this the language of your heart this morning this is the reaction of faith but to the others the guards and the leaders of the Jews they refused to believe even in the face of an earthquake even in the face of the witness of the guards that there was an angel here when the tomb was empty they wouldn't believe they wouldn't believe you know sometimes you think oh if you saw a miracle we'd believe but this is a this is a warning to us of the hardness of the human heart you can hardly imagine that these these guards having seen what they seen having felt what they felt the earthquake and the angel and the stone moving and fearing and shaking and trembling and yet they go away and they invent a story with the leaders of the people tell them tell the people that his disciples came by night and stole him away while you were asleep how could they do that we ask ourselves how could they do it and yet they did they did the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked who can know it how can people today knowing that Jesus is risen and exalted live their lives as if it didn't matter and yet they do perhaps even there's someone here or online and you know the story you've heard it since you were this high and but you think it's an interesting story and maybe it's true it is true but you think oh well maybe it's true but you aren't trusting Jesus as your saviour you're still living your life as if Jesus and God did not matter perhaps you think one day I'll come to him but not yet one day you'll leave your life of sin but not yet my friends this Easter morning let these guards be a warning to you our hearts are naturally hard and deceitful even when we see a miracle it doesn't change our hearts but God knocks at our

hearts today do not refuse God's offered mercy do not deceive yourself you'll come to him later that's a devil's lie that's his lie it will keep you from coming forever today God is ready [ 31 : 17 ] Jesus is ready to work a miracle in your heart if you turn to him in faith he'll make you new he'll take away the stony heart and give you a heart of flesh forgive your sins give you his life and make you his child so don't delay don't delay come to him today and for us brothers and sisters in Christ we serve a risen saviour he has conquered death and sin he reigns in the power of an endless life and it's that resurrection power that is at work in us that's the amazing thing in Ephesians 1 17 Paul prays for the Ephesians and he said he prays that they may have the eyes of the hearts enlightened that they will have the eyes of the hearts enlightened that they might know what is the hope to which he had called them and what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards you who believe according to the workings of his great might that he worked in

Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places you see that power that is at work in us is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead that's the amazing thing that's the amazing thing that's of course the power that has brought us to Jesus in the first place but that is the power that is available to us that is at work in us in Christ and as our great high priest he continually prays for us so thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ therefore my beloved brothers be steadfast immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain may God bless his word to all our hearts this morning let's pray

Father we do thank you that Christ the Lord is risen today risen and seated at your right hand a prince and a saviour Father we thank you that you are at work in us through that same power that raised him from the dead and Lord we thank you that we can serve you we can be steadfast immovable because you are working in us and we praise you for that Lord Father bless your word to our hearts encourage us this Easter morning in the risen Lord Jesus and take us from this place today and tomorrow to live for you in the light of his resurrection salvation we pray Lord in Jesus name Amen Heaven to myawy Tony Holy