

## “Empty’ Promises of God”

April 5, 2026

Matthew 28:1-15

### I. Introduction

I recently ran across this story, I don’t know if it is true or not, but it let me share it with you: *“A young man from a wealthy family was about to graduate from high school. It was the custom in that affluent neighborhood for the parents to give the graduate an automobile. “Bill” and his father had spent months looking at cars, and the week before graduation, they found the perfect car.*

*On the eve of his graduation, his father handed Bill a gift-wrapped Bible. Bill was so angry that he threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house. He and his father never saw each other again. It was the news of his father’s death that brought Bill back home.*

*As he sat one night going through his father’s possessions, Bill came across the Bible his father had given him. He brushed away the dust and opened it to find a cashier’s check dated the day of his graduation - in the exact amount of the car they had chosen together.”*

As I thought about this story, I couldn’t help but wonder how many people in this world have done the same thing to God. Literally tossing aside the wonderful promises inside His Book, the Bible, because they didn’t look in it or they didn’t understand it, or they didn’t believe that it was possible.

In our world, we soon learn that *“if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.”* Most of us have been taken in by enough *“empty promises,”* that we are skeptical of anything or anyone that tells us we can have something for nothing. The world simply doesn’t work that way! But God does—God never made a promise that was too good to be true. In [2 Corinthians 1:20](#) the Apostle Paul wrote, **“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.”** The *world* is full of empty promises. All around us, we see advertisements that tell us that we can be happy, sexy, rich, or famous, if we only purchase and use a particular product. But God is different. Instead of promises full of emptiness, on Easter God gave us emptiness that is full of promise.

This morning, I would like to think about three promises of Easter. Each promise is marked by something empty: an empty cross, an empty tomb, and empty burial clothes. It is the very fact that each of these is empty that assures us that God's promises are real. Because they couldn't hold Jesus and because He couldn't be contained by the cross, the tomb, or even His burial clothes, we can be sure of the fullness of God's promises in our lives. Let's look at the "Empty" promises of God beginning with the Empty Cross.

## II. "Empty" Promises of God

**A. The Empty Cross** Consider that 1<sup>st</sup> Easter Morning. It is early—Matthew wrote that it was "at dawn." A few of Jesus' followers – all women, by the way—are on their way to the tomb—the tomb where Jesus was buried. The conversation must have been subdued. The task before them was a sad one. They were going to anoint the body of Jesus—something they hadn't had time to do on Friday evening. As they came to the top of a rise in the path, they all stopped. Motionless and quiet, they stared off into the distance. There on top of the Hill, which the locals called, "The Skull" or "Golgotha," were 3 Crosses; a gruesome reminder of the events of just a few days before. Since the day before had been a Sabbath, no one had removed the crosses. So, there they stood, an empty reminder of the horror of that Friday we call "Good Friday."

If, in our imaginations, we were to get closer and look at the middle cross, we would be reminded of what Jesus had gone through for us. **1 Timothy 1:15** says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." At the top of the cross would be bloodstains from the crown of thorns that had been crushed into Jesus' skull. There would be stains on the ends of the crossbar – they came from the blood caused by the nails that had been driven into His hands. The main beam would be soaked in blood – blood from His back – blood that bled from where the Roman soldiers had beaten Him. There would be blood from where the nails had held His feet to the cross. There also would have stains from the blood that poured from His side when a Roman soldier ran a spear into Jesus' heart to make sure that Jesus was really dead.

There was no question – Jesus was dead. People who have studied the various accounts with an open mind, accept it as true. All the evidence proved that Jesus was dead. The soldiers knew it. The Romans

knew it. The Jewish leadership knew it. But together, they made up a lie, “the disciples stole the body.” Can you imagine 11 distraught fishermen overpowering a company of Roman soldiers, moving a 2-ton stone, and stealing the body of Jesus – just so they could claim He had come back to life----and then in the coming years willingly die horrific deaths to protect that lie? I don’t think so.

You see, Jesus really did die on that cross – that is why we consider the cross this morning. It is the place where He died. But, like the cross behind me, it was empty. It was empty of Jesus’ body, but full of God’s promises; full of hope for you and me. Because the cross was empty, we have the promise of forgiven sins. It was on that cross that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. In [Isaiah 53:6](#) the prophet Isaiah wrote, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Turn to [1 Peter 2:23-24](#). [Hebrews 9:22](#) says, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” The promise of the empty cross is that you and I can stand forgiven of our sin.

The word “sin” isn’t popular. It’s a word that isn’t “politically correct” or acceptable in this “woke world.” But the simple fact of the matter is—we have all sinned. [Romans 3:23](#) says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Have you ever told a lie? That’s a sin; it makes you a liar. Have you ever taken something—anything that didn’t belong to you—even something small like a pencil or a paperclip or time that belonged to someone else—like an employer? That’s a sin; it makes you a thief. I could go one, but I think you get my point. Every one of us – you, me, the person sitting next to you, behind you and in front of you—every one of us is a sinner. [1 John 1:8](#) adds, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” The only person who has ever lived a sinless life is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Peter, who had spent 3 years 24/7 with Jesus, wrote in [1 Peter 2:22](#): “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” Everyone else has failed. Everyone has sinned.

So, here is the problem, as [Romans 6:23](#) says, “The wages of sin is death.” Because, we have sinned, we deserve God’s just punishment. We deserve “eternal death,” i.e., an eternity in Hell. However, when we look at that empty cross, it is a reminder of God’s promise that we can be forgiven. On that cross Jesus paid

the penalty for our sins. **Romans 5:8** says that “**God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, CHRIST DIED FOR US!**”

It was on that cross that Jesus Christ offered His perfect, sinless life on behalf of each one of us. No one else – not Moses or Abraham, not Muhammad or Buddha – no one else has ever lived perfectly and then offered his perfect life for your salvation. That is why **Acts 4:12** says, “**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**” Just before Jesus Christ breathed His last, He cried out; “**It is finished**” (**John 19:30**). The penalty was paid. On that cross, on that empty cross, Jesus’ blood was shed for our salvation. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, you and I can now stand forgiven. The first “empty promise” of Easter is that the empty cross promises forgiveness of sin. Then there is the empty tomb.

**B. The Empty Tomb** After pausing briefly to view the crosses, **Mark 16:1** says, “**Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome**” continued on their way down the path to the tomb. As they went, **verse 3** adds that “**they asked each other, ‘Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?’**” They had good reason to be concerned – the stone that was placed in front of the tomb was a huge boulder. Not only that, but the Romans had also put a seal on it; no one was allowed to move it without their permission. Planning on “*crossing that bridge when they came to it,*” the women continued their journey.

Suddenly, “**there was a violent earthquake.**” Frightened, they must have looked at each other, not certain what to do. But after things seemed to settle down, they continued on their way. As they approached the burial site, they were probably still wondering about what had happened when they came upon something even more remarkable. The stone had been moved and an angel, glowing “**like lightning,**” was sitting on it. The stone was not rolled away to permit Jesus to come out, for He had already left the tomb. It was rolled back so that the people could see for themselves that the tomb was empty.

The angel said, “**Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.**” Jesus had risen. He was alive and the tomb was empty. That empty tomb held another tremendous promise.

The fact of the empty tomb is the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise to every one of us that we too can be raised to eternal life. **Turn to 1 Peter 1:3-4.** To those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, death has lost its sting. It is no longer something to be feared. As **2 Tim. 1:10** says, Jesus **“has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”**

Why was the tomb empty? Because Jesus was alive; the angel said; **“He is risen.”** And the promise to us is that we too can live even if we die. In **John 11:25** Jesus said, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”** **John 3:36** says, **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”** The second “empty” promise of Easter is that the empty tomb promises eternal life. .

**C. The Empty Burial Clothes** Finally, there are the empty burial clothes. While the angel was talking to the rest of the women, Mary Magdalene had run to the disciples. **Turn to John 20:1-8.** Peter and John not only found the empty tomb, but they also found the clothes that Jesus had been buried in. They too were empty. This could only mean one thing: Jesus was alive! If someone had stolen His body, they wouldn’t have taken the time to remove the burial clothes, fold them up neatly, and leave them there in the tomb. The spices that had been used were expensive and could be sold. Thieves would have taken the clothes as well as the body. The empty grave clothes shouted that Jesus was resurrected!

It wouldn’t be long, before Jesus Himself would appear to the women, then to Mary Magdalene, then to the Apostles, and eventually to over 500 people. He would walk with them, talk with them, sit down with them, and even eat with them. Once again, they would be able to fellowship with their Lord. This is the promise of the empty burial clothes – Jesus is alive and wants to fellowship with you. Jesus isn’t some ethereal “force” out in the universe influencing people. He is a living Savior, and He desires to have a personal relationship with each one of us, just as He did with His disciples 2000 years ago. In **Rev. 3:20** Jesus said, **“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”** **1 Thessalonians 4:17** says that when we leave this earth, **“we**

will be with the Lord forever.” The third “empty” promise of Easter is that the empty burial clothes promise an eternal, personal relationship with the One who died in our place—Jesus Christ.

### III. Conclusion

It has been nearly 2000 years since Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected. On that 1<sup>st</sup> Easter Sunday, as the women went to the tomb, they had no idea what was about to happen to them. They were not yet aware of the wonderful promises of that day: the empty cross filled with the promise that their sins could be forgiven; the empty tomb filled with the promise of their eternal life; the empty burial clothes filled with the promise that they would once again have a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ—their living Savior.

The promises that they discovered that day, anyone can have today. Every person can know the freedom of forgiven sins. They can know the promise of eternal life in heaven. They can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection, at Pentecost, Peter preached his first sermon and, in Acts 2:21, said, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Rom. 10:9 explains it this way, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

If you have made Jesus your Lord and Savior, today is a day of celebration; a day to thank God for His promises that never fail. Your sins are forgiven. When it comes time to leave this earth, you will spend eternity in heaven. You will be with the One who loved you with an amazing agape love that He gave His life for you. If you haven’t made that decision, it’s not too late. Make Jesus your Lord and Savior then these promises and all the other promises found in this Book will be yours. Then you can celebrate Jesus’ resurrection and your new life.

**HE IS RISEN!! HE IS RISEN INDEED!!**