

“‘Empty’ Promises of God”

March 31, 2024

Mark 16:1-8

I. Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single greatest event in the history of the world. We measure the years and centuries backwards and forwards from the date of the traditional birth of Jesus Christ.

Although, instead of BC and AD, the “woke” generation wants to use BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) to indicate a particular date, they still use the birth of Jesus as the starting point. More importantly, without the resurrection, there is no Christian faith, no salvation, and no hope. Turn to

1 Corinthians 15:3-6. Later, in **1 Cor. 15:14** Paul wrote, “**And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.**” A person who believes in a Christ who was not raised believes in a powerless Christ, a dead Christ. If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, then no redemption was accomplished at the cross—as **1 Corinthians 15:17** says, “**And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.**”

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—Resurrection Sunday, God gave emptiness that is full of promise.

This morning, I would like to consider 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. 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 1st Easter Morning. It is early—Matthew 28:1 says, “**At dawn on the first day of the week,**” a few of Jesus’ followers – all women, by the way—are on their way to the tomb—the tomb where Jesus was buried. They knew where it was—Mark 15:47 says that “**Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.**” On their way, the conversation would have been subdued. The task before them was a sad one. They were going to finish anointing the body of Jesus. Perhaps 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 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 that we call “Good Friday.”

If one were to get closer and look at the middle cross, he would be reminded of what Jesus had gone through. At the top would be bloodstains from the crown of thorns that was crushed into Jesus’ skull; there would be stains on the ends of the crossbar – they came from the nails that were driven into His hands; the main beam would be soaked in blood – blood from His back – blood that was shed when the Roman soldiers beat Him. There also would have stains from the blood that poured from His side when another Roman soldier ran a spear through Him to make sure 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. John’s report of seeing “**one of the soldiers pierce Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water**” (John 19:19) indicates that Jesus’ heart had been punctured. He was dead. The soldiers knew it. The Romans knew it. The Jews knew it. But together, they made up a lie—Matthew 28:12 says that the chief priests and elders “**gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, ‘You are to say, ‘His disciple came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’”**” Can you imagine 11 distraught disciples of Jesus overpowering a company of Roman soldiers, moving a large stone,

and stealing the body of Jesus – just so they could claim He had come back to life----and then in the coming years to 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." In [John 1:29](#), John the Baptist called Him, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Turn to [1 Peter 2:22-24](#). The promise of the empty cross is that you and I can be forgiven of our sin.

The word "sin" isn't popular. It's a word that isn't "*politically correct*." 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. We 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. The only person who has ever lived a sinless life is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. [2 Cor. 5:21](#) says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

So, here is the problem, as the first part of [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, the empty cross 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!" Or as the second part of [Romans 6:23](#) says, "But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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 the salvation of the world. 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 was . . .

B. The Empty Tomb After pausing briefly to view the crosses, “**Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome**” continued on their way down the path to the tomb. As they went, “**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, the Romans had put a seal on the stone, so no one was allowed to move it without their permission. Perhaps planning on “*crossing that bridge when they came to it,*” the women continued their journey.

[Matthew 28:2](#) says, “**There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.**” Perhaps frightened by the earthquake, the women 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 lightening,**” 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, “**Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.**” 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 everyone that believes that he or she can also be raised to eternal life. [Turn to 1 Peter 1:3-4.](#) To those who make Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior, death has lost its sting. It is no longer something to be feared. [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. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.**” The second “empty” promise of Easter is that the empty tomb promises eternal life. Finally, there were . . .

C. 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 strips of linen that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had wrapped Jesus’ body in before burying Him—[turn to John 19:38-40.](#) When Peter and John “**saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth ...folded by itself.**” They 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. They would have taken the cloth and the linen to later remove the spices. With the empty burial clothes still in the tomb, this could only mean 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, as we read earlier from [1 Corinthians 15:6](#), eventually to “**more than 500 of the brothers at the same time.**” 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 have 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 you, just as He did with His disciples 2000 years ago. In [Revelation 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 Jesus Christ.

III. Conclusion

It has been nearly 2000 years since Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected. On that 1st 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 so many years ago, anyone can have today. Every person can know the freedom of forgiven sins. They can look forward to 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.**” [Romans 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 loves you with an amazing agape love.

HE IS RISEN!! HE IS RISEN INDEED!!