

An Empty Tomb

The Jewish Passover was observed on the fifteenth day of the first Hebrew month of Nisan, Leviticus 23:6. But on one particular Friday, Jesus stood in trial before Caiaphas, Ananias, Pilate, and Herod Antipas. All four Gospels give us details on each of these events. Jesus was condemned to die on the cross. By the end of the day His lifeless body was taken down, prepared for burial, and laid in a tomb. Those opposed to Jesus went before Pilate, "And on the next day, which was after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered to Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was living, After three days I will rise again. Then command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away and say to the people, He has risen from the dead. So, the last error will be worse than the first." (Matthew 27:62-64). A stone was also rolled at the entrance of the tomb, Matthew 27:60.

All four Gospels give a record of what was and was not found three days later, Sunday morning. We want to notice what the disciples did not find.

They did not find the stone in front of the grave. Mary Magdalena, Mary the mother of James, and Salome walked to the tomb in order to complete the burial process, and wondered who they could get to roll away the stone, Mark 16:3. Arriving they found the stone was already moved. Let us understand Jesus did not need to roll away the stone in order to leave the tomb. He was able to appear inside of rooms with locked doors, at various places, He could have left the tomb with the stone still in place. But the stone rolled away allowing others to see.

They found the soldiers but they were frightened. "And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.", Matthew 28:4. The Roman army was considered the greatest military unit of that time. They conquered the whole known world. But they were powerless to prevent the events of that morning. It did not matter how many soldiers; there could have been a thousand men there that day but they were "useless as guards."

They did not find a lifeless body inside the tomb. Jesus' body had been beaten, nailed to a cross, and pierced with a spear. No one knows the number of people who were crucified before this time or afterward but none ever lived through such an ordeal. The Roman guards who pierced His side with a spear understood Him to be dead. Those who took His body to prepare it with oils and spices, knew Him to be dead. Those entering that tomb expected to see a dead, brutally beaten body. But

the body was gone! "Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."
Luke 24:3.

They did find His grave clothes inside the tomb. "Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself." (John 20:6-7) Grave clothes are for the dead, not for the living. Jesus did not get up and hurry away but took the time to fold the clothes and put them by themselves. His leaving was with a purpose.

The disciples did find Jesus outside the tomb. "Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." 14 Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher)." John 20:13-16. Wonder and amazement can be seen in the responses and words. Later Peter would say, "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it." (Acts 2:24)

Eventually they would understand the importance of the empty tomb. The Law of Moses was had been completed, nailed to the cross, and taken away. Never more would they have to offer animal sacrifices for their sins.

One empty tomb changed the fate of mankind. It is because He lives, we have hope. As the song "Because He Lives" says,

How sweet to hold a newborn baby
And feel the pride and the joy that he gives
Oh but greater still, the calm assurance
We can face uncertain days because He lives
And because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth a living just because He lives

And then one day, I'll cross that river
I'll fight life's final war with pain
And then as death gives way to victory
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He reigns

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth a living just because He lives.

– Dennis Tucker