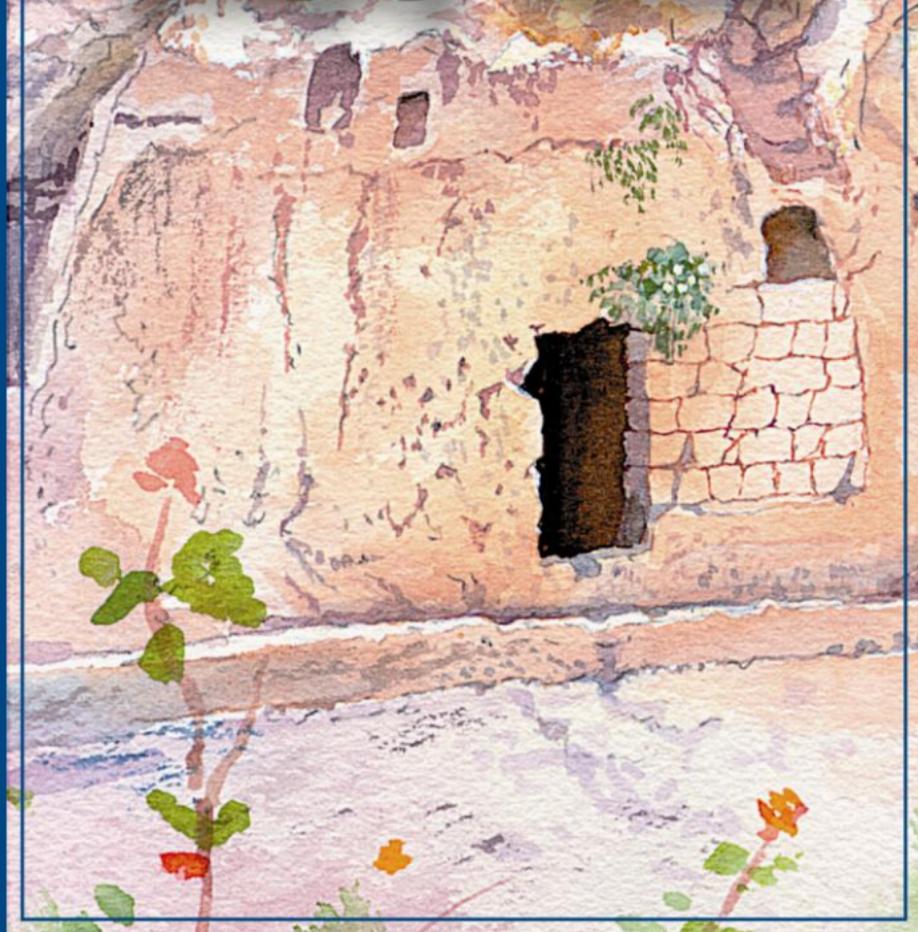


Impact of the Empty Tomb



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by

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The Impact of the Empty Tomb

There are “many infallible proofs” of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, but the testimony of the empty tomb is the most conclusive of all. Jesus had been buried, with the tomb sealed and guarded by a watch of Roman soldiers. Yet on the third day of His burial, on the morning of the first day of the week, the body was no longer there, and the empty tomb still stands today as an unanswerable proof that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead.

There are other proofs, of course—the ten or more recorded appearances of the resurrected Christ to His disciples, the amazing change of demeanor of the disciples from that of fearful hideaways to fearless evangelists, the worldwide spread of the Christian faith as founded on the resurrection, and so on. But the impact of the empty tomb was the foundation and bulwark of all the rest. As we consider its impact on the world, and on us today, it is instructively fascinating to consider first its impact on those who first encountered it.

Impact on the Soldiers

A watch (possibly a “quaternion” of four Roman soldiers—compare Acts 12:4) had been designated by the Roman Governor Pilate to guard the tomb after Jesus’ body had

been buried there by Nicodemus and Joseph. The account is in Matthew 27:62-66.

Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: So the last error shall be worse than the first.

Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.

So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

The “great stone” had already been “rolled . . . to the door of the sepulchre” by Joseph when he and Nicodemus buried Jesus (Matthew 27:60), but now the soldiers (as directed by the chief priests) sealed it in place with the official Roman seal, which could only be broken on penalty of death. Then they took their guard positions for the rest of the three-day period. Probably they took turns at sleeping, one sleeping while three remained awake on guard. Certainly none of the hiding disciples—or anyone else—would have dared to try to invade the tomb for any reason.

The soldiers had probably been selected from that “whole band of soldiers” (Matthew 27:27) that had

stripped Jesus in Pilate's hall and scourged Him and mocked Him and then taken Him out to crucify Him. They had watched Him suffer and die, but then they had also experienced the great darkness and the great earthquake (Matthew 27:45,51), and had heard their centurion cry out: *"Truly this man was the Son of God"* (Mark 15:39).

They had no reason to fear the disciples, but they must have had some concern about what God might do to them, if indeed, Jesus *was* the Son of God, as their centurion had cried. In any case, they certainly would not be lethargic and careless about their assignment, or about to fall asleep while on duty.

They were hardly prepared for what did happen! *And, 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 (Matthew 28:2-4).*

As soon as they recovered and were able to move, they scattered from the site, rightly deciding that the mighty angel was more to be feared than the priests or even Pilate.

But what to do next? They realized that the happening at the tomb would soon become known, including their flight, and they realized Pilate might well have them put to death for leaving their post. Their best hope would be the

priests, who seemed to have some kind of influence with the governor, and perhaps would be able to understand their plight. Therefore, some of them (what happened to the others is not recorded) headed for the temple, to tell Caiphas and the others that the tomb was empty, though it was not because of the disciples, who were still somewhere in hiding.

. . . behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept.

And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

So they took the money, and did as they were taught: And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Matthew 28:11-15).

Under other circumstances, the soldiers would have been afraid to say they all four had been sleeping on duty. But they were also greedy, and the “hush-money” convinced them. They were in mortal danger anyway, and they realized that Pilate might be amenable to bribery too, and they really had no other choice. Roman officials were indeed known to take bribes to render desired decisions (note the reputation of the governor Felix as implied in Acts 24:26).

The idea that the disciples had stolen the body while the soldiers slept circulated for a while, but it was so unreasonable that it could not survive very long. In the first place, if the soldiers really were all asleep (which is practically inconceivable), they could not have known what happened. Secondly, the work of moving the stone, stripping the grave clothes off the body, and carrying the body away, would surely have awakened at least some of the soldiers.

Finally, the disciples could never have persisted in preaching a lie about resurrection when it began to cost them all their possessions and finally their lives to do so. Thus the story circulated by the soldiers was basically unbelievable and could not convince people very long.

But it served the immediate purpose, presumably, of sparing the soldiers' lives for the time being. They did know that the tomb was empty, however, and we can at least wonder whether some of them also might have eventually come to believe that Jesus was really the Son of God, and to seek His forgiveness and salvation.

Impact on the Priests

When the priests and Pharisees heard the report of the soldiers, they could tell that these hardened and callous men were telling the truth, and that the tomb really was empty—not opened up by the disciples but by a mighty angel of God. If they had been skeptical, they would

surely have gone to the tomb themselves to investigate.

They did not do so, however, but instead bribed the soldiers (and possibly Pilate later) to lie about the matter. One would think that these respected religious leaders, now that they knew that Christ really *had risen* from the dead, would have been willing to confess their mistake and receive Christ gladly as their long-awaited Messiah.

Instead they became more determined than ever to oppose Him and His disciples, denying the almost undeniable truth of His victory over death and the grave. They had known about His miracles and His wonderful teachings for over three years, yet they still bitterly opposed Him and sought for some means to destroy Him, still deluding themselves and others with the notion that He was a “deceiver,” doing His mighty works by the power of the devil. Just three days earlier, before the assembled Sanhedrin Council, Jesus had acknowledged that He was indeed the very Son of God and that “. . . *ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven*” (Mark 14:62).

They should by all reason have fallen down to worship Him, but instead they accused Him of blasphemy and “. . . *they all condemned Him to be guilty of death*” (Mark 14:64), still convincing themselves that **He was a deceiver**.

When the soldiers came back to them with their amazing report of mighty angels and an empty tomb, thus

confirming that He was back from the dead as He had promised, they surely must have realized that He was all that He had claimed and could do all that He had promised. No one but God could defeat death, for it was God who had pronounced the judgment of death on all who sin. No one but the Creator could bring life out of death, for it was He who had created life in the beginning.

Jesus was, therefore, as He had claimed, “*the bread of life,*” “*the light of the world,*” “*the resurrection, and the life,*” “*the way, the truth, and the life*” (John 6:35; 8:12; 11:25; 14:6), and He could, indeed, “*give unto them eternal life*” (John 10:28) if they would only believe that He was Lord and had been raised from the dead. As the Apostle Paul said later: “*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*” (Romans 10:9). They surely must have realized all this by now, for He had risen from the tomb.

Instead—like old Pharaoh—they “*hardened their hearts*” (Exodus 8:15) yet again, and proceeded to do everything in their power to deny His resurrection and to prevent His followers from proclaiming it. They may once have thought Jesus was a deceiver, but now knew He was not. They themselves became conscious deceivers, bribing the soldiers also to deceive. The sad thing is that many Jews to this day still believe this impossible lie.

Impact on Pilate

Pilate had no sympathy or agreement with these Jewish elders when he gave them the watch they requested for the tomb, but (possibly through fear of their political influence with King Herod or other authorities) reluctantly agreed to do so. He knew that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God and his wife had—because of a dream—warned him not to have anything to do with “*that just man*” (Matthew 27:19). Yet he gave in to the Jews anyway, and consented to have Jesus executed.

Then, once he had delivered Jesus up to be crucified, his fears must have been increased by the supernatural darkness and the great earthquake. Next, Joseph of Arimathaea, known to Pilate as a rich and godly member of the Council, had come to request the body of Jesus, and Pilate knew that this would mean Joseph’s expulsion from the Council and ostracism and persecution by his colleagues there. This was bound to make a deep impression, and then here came his own centurion with his conviction that Jesus had been the Son of God after all.

Very soon after the soldiers’ report to the priests, the news must have reached Pilate also about the empty tomb. He could hardly believe the story that the disciples had stolen the body, nor would he have appreciated the part that his soldiers had played in its fabrication. It is doubtful that the soldiers escaped punishment after all, not because of sleeping on their watch, but because of the

obvious lie that they had done so, no matter how much money the priests may have offered Pilate.

He would surely have forced the truth out of his soldiers when he questioned them. That means that Pilate, as well as the soldiers and the priests, also realized that “*that just man*” whom he had sent to the cross, had risen from the dead. There is a rather doubtful tradition that Pilate, as well as some of the soldiers, eventually accepted Christ as Savior and Lord. If so, it was a remarkable testimony to the grace of God, and an answer to His prayer on the cross: “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34).

In any case, Pilate knew that the tomb was empty and there is no record that either he or the chief priests ever tried to find the body. Beyond any doubt, they would have tried diligently to find the body if they really thought there was any chance at all that it was somewhere on Earth. After the great conversion on the day of Pentecost, with the flame of Christianity rapidly spreading through Jerusalem and into other regions, the Jewish leaders did everything they could to stamp it out. Displaying the dead body of Jesus would have done this instantaneously, because the preaching of Peter and the others centered on the triumphant fact of the resurrection. This they could not do, however, and they knew they could not do it, because they knew the tomb was empty on that first Lord’s Day morning.

Impact on the Women

Other than the soldiers, the first ones to learn about the empty tomb were faithful women who had watched Joseph and Nicodemus bury Him there. Matthew and Mark both mention Mary Magdalene and “*the other Mary*” (evidently the “*mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome,*” and possibly also “*Mary the wife of Cleophas*”—Matthew 27:61; 28:1; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). Luke gives a more complete account in Luke 23:55-24:11 as follows:

And the women also, which came with Him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how His body was laid.

And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.

Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

*He is not here, but is risen: remember how He spake
unto you when He was yet in Galilee,
Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands
of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise
again.*

*And they remembered His words,
And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these
things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.*

*It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother
of James, and other women that were with them, which told
these things unto the apostles.*

*And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they
believed them not.*

These faithful women thus were privileged to see that the tomb was empty before any of the apostles did. In fact, when the women hurried back to tell the apostles, the latter did not believe them. However, Peter and John were not with the others at the time, and neither was Mary Magdalene, who had run back to tell Peter and John as soon as she noted the stone rolled away from the sepulchre (John 20:1).

The other women did see the emptied tomb and they heard the angels tell the glorious news that Christ had risen from the dead. Great must have been their dismay and disappointment when the disciples would not believe them.

These dear women, just a few hours before, had been as despondent as the disciples, sure that the Lord they had loved and served was gone forever. They also had forgotten His promise to rise again.

But at least they were not in hiding, as the disciples were. They were bold enough, and loving enough, to strike out very early that Sunday morning and head back to the garden tomb where they had watched Joseph and Nicodemus bury Jesus, determined to do what little they could to honor His dead body with their spices and ointments.

They worried as to how they could roll away the heavy stone from the door (Mark 16:3), but came on anyway. They knew nothing, of course, about the Roman seal and the soldiers, but one feels that, even if they had, they would have come and tried anyway.

When Mary Magdalene had first seen that the stone was rolled away, she jumped to the conclusion that some of His enemies had already removed His body, perhaps because they thought it was not fitting for Him to be buried in a garden tomb recently built by a previously respected member of the Council. Mary Magdalene immediately ran back to tell Peter and John, who were apparently at John's home, where John had taken Mary, the mother of Jesus, to give her whatever care and comfort he could after the terrible crucifixion (note John 19:26,27).

Mary Magdalene did not, at that time, enter the tomb itself, but the other women did, and they quickly found that Jesus was not there. It was only then that they saw the two men (or rather, angels who had assumed the form of men) who told them the wonderful, almost incredible, news that Christ was risen from the dead, as He had said He would do.

Mary Magdalene was not present at the time to hear this wonderful news. She had already rushed back to tell Peter and John what she thought was the disturbing news that someone had removed the body, perhaps hoping against hope that they could do something to bring it back.

But then, while weeping later at the empty tomb, Mary herself became the very first one to see, not the empty tomb where Jesus had lain in death, but the risen Christ Himself, alive forevermore! Her unique love had been rewarded with this very special privilege. The stirring account of this special meeting is given in John 20:11-19.

Impact on the Disciples

Most of the eleven disciples reacted with skepticism when the excited women came back to the place where they were secretly assembled (note John 20:19; Mark 16:11). They had not only seen that Jesus was not in the tomb and heard the angels say that He had risen, but had even seen Christ Himself; for according to Matthew 28:9, “. . . *as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him.*”

This particular appearance to the women was some little time after He had earlier met with Mary Magdalene. Mark 16:9 makes it clear that, “*He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils.*” The disciples were probably in the same “*large upper room*” (Luke 22:12) where

they had observed the last supper with Jesus and where they later assembled after Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:13). This was in the city of Jerusalem, whereas Joseph's garden tomb was well outside the city, and it evidently took the women longer to reach the disciples than it had taken Mary Magdalene to find Peter and John and then get back to the tomb with them.

As mentioned above, Peter and John were probably with Mary the mother of Jesus at John's home. The account does not say where that was, but it was probably not very far away, since the two disciples "*ran both together*" (John 20:4), with John running faster, to get to the sepulchre. Mary also had run (John 20:2) to get from the tomb to the two disciples. But now we should look directly at John's own account (John 20:1-10).

The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

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 sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him.

Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.

Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself

Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

The linen clothes that had been wrapped tightly around the body of Jesus obviously figure very importantly in John's record. They were lying there on the shelf where Jesus' body had been placed, in exactly the position where He had been, but the body was not in them. Even the separate little cloth, which had been wound around His head was collapsed inward where the head had lain. The words "*wrapped together in*" are one word in the original—same as "*wrapped in*" in the parallel account in Matthew 27:59. It was clear that someone had not simply removed the clothes from the body, and then taken the body away. The only possible explanation of what John saw was that the body had simply passed through the clothes, leaving them just where they had been, except that they had collapsed inward by themselves.

And *that* could only mean that Jesus was alive again, except that His body was now a resurrection body, physical and real, yet able to pass through the linen clothes and—

later—even through closed doors.

When the women first saw this unique sight, they were just “*perplexed*” (Luke 24:4). Apparently even Peter, who entered the tomb before John did, failed to understand their significance at first.

But when John came in, “*he saw, and believed!*” He it was who—before any of the other disciples—really understood what had happened and “*believed*” that Jesus Christ had defeated man’s ancient enemy, death, and was risen from the dead. The scene and its thrilling significance to John have been movingly memorialized in a poem entitled, “*John the Beloved*,” written many years ago by Ruth Margaret Gibbs.

I run with Simon Peter to the tomb, Feel, as a dream,
the racing wind go by, The muttered doubts, the chilling
blight of gloom; And still there rings within my
ears a cry Born of a whisper that the women
made: “The place is empty where our Lord was laid.”
Was not His death upon a cross enough? The
gaping crowds that waited on the crest, The
sneering, mocking soldiers and their rough And hooting
blasphemy . . . ? Can He not rest, Can He not sleep,
forget the world of men . . . ? What mean these strange
and idle tales, then?
My feet have outrun Simon; here before The sepulcher I
stand on blessed earth That holds the kingdom and the
King, and more—The promises of our Messiah’s birth!

Oh, heart that labors, if I could but place My
head upon His bosom, see His face.

Now Simon's shadow darkens all the tomb; He
enters weeping; I can share his tears. . . . To find the
linens lying in the room as they were wrapped will
put away my fears. Stoop, burdened shoulders, I
must look and prove; Bow down, my soul, in grief
before His love.

My eyes run rivers down; they cannot see.

My sandals move beyond the arch of stone. . . . But,
lo, the Master is not . . . can it be we stand within the
sepulcher alone. . . ? Or do I dream, or am I one gone
mad with fancies like the whispering women had?

He is not here! And yet the linens line the place He lay
as though they hold Him fast. He is not here! What
miracle, what sign Is this that tells of death and terror
past . . . ? Look up my soul, and faith take root and
grow: My Lord and Savior lives! I know . . . I know.

The disciple whom Jesus loved thus immediately
believed in the resurrection when he saw the linen clothes
lying still as they had been, yet in a now-empty tomb,
though he and the others had all apparently forgotten His
promise to rise after three days (e.g., Matthew 20:17-19).
Neither had they understood the prophecies in the Old
Testament that He would rise again (Psalm 16:10; Isaiah

53:10; etc.). But very soon they would all understand and go forth into all the world as Spirit-filled proclaimers of the great truth of Christ's substitutionary death and bodily resurrection.

It took the personal appearance of Christ Himself to convince the other disciples, however. They would not even believe the testimony of Mary Magdalene that she had seen Jesus nor the testimony of the two who talked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:9-13), nor apparently the testimony from John of the significance of the empty tomb (Luke 24:24).

Finally, “. . . *the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst*” (John 20:19).

Even *then* they were slow to believe in the bodily resurrection. Rather, “. . . *they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit*” (Luke 24:37). One of them, Thomas, was not there at the time, and he would not even believe *their* account (John 20:25) until he could see for himself.

All of this goes to show that any theory about some kind of “*Passover plot*” by the disciples is absurd. They had to be convinced that He was alive by “*many infallible proofs*” (Acts 1:3) before they would even venture out of hiding! The idea of pretending Christ had risen in order to advance some bold and nefarious plot of their own could never have even entered their minds. If they had stolen

the body, or (as some have thought) if Jesus had never actually died on the cross, and also considering the fact that they were already fearful that they were about to meet a fate similar to His, it is inconceivable that they could suddenly have gone forth preaching the resurrection as they did with such power that multitudes were soon converted.

The body of Jesus was certainly no longer in the tomb, nor could it be produced anywhere else. If perchance, the women had gone to the wrong tomb (as some have imagined), or the Jews or the Romans had moved the body to another tomb (as others have supposed), the authorities could quickly have stopped the spreading flame of Christianity merely by exhibiting the dead body of the Lord. They could not do this, however, though they tried all manner of persecution and other means to stop the spread of Christianity, for the good reason that Christ had risen from the dead and later ascended back to heaven.

Many skeptics have tried to avoid the truth of the resurrection by saying that Jesus did not actually die on the cross. The tomb was empty, they say, because Jesus recovered from his wounds in the cool of the tomb and then went back to be with His disciples and friends.

This “*swoon theory*,” as it has been called, is even more incredible than the other anti-resurrection ideas, though it has been advocated by many. An ultra-liberal theologian of the nineteenth century,

David Strauss, though he did not believe in the bodily resurrection himself, nor in the inspiration of the Bible, pilloried the swoon theory in the following incisive words:

It is impossible that one who had just come forth from the grave half dead, who crept about weak and ill, who stood in need of medical treatment, of bandaging, strengthening, and tender care, and who at last succumbed to suffering, could ever have given to the disciples that impression that he was a conqueror over death and the grave, that he was the Prince of life,—which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resurrection could only have weakened the impression which he had made upon them in life and in death,—or at the most could have given it an elegiac voice,—but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, or elevated their reverence into worship (*The Life of Jesus for the People*, London, 1879, p. 412).

Strauss, the first great rationalistic interpreter of the Bible in modern times, while not believing in either the deity or the Resurrection of Christ himself; nevertheless (in an 1865 book, *New Life of Jesus Christ*, London, 1865 p. 397) admitted that the Resurrection was “the Touchstone not of lives of Jesus

only, but of Christianity itself, . . . decisive for the whole view of Christianity.”

These two quotations from Strauss were taken from a great little book, *The Supernaturalness of Christ*, by Dr. Wilbur M. Smith (published in 1940 and now out of print) which provided much further evidence in support of its subject.

Once the disciples had been firmly convinced of the reality of the Resurrection, they went forth and practically “*turned the world upside down*” (Acts 17:6) with their proclamation of its reality. As Luke testified: “. . . *with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all*” (Acts 4:33).

Impact on the World and Us Today

It is profoundly significant that two thousand years of the worldwide spread of Christianity have been accompanied by two thousand years of strident unbelief. Not only have the Jews opposed the Resurrection, but so have the Muslims, the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Marxists, and every conceivable form of anti-Christian thought. Even more deplorable has been the rationalism of so-called “Christian” modernists, liberals, and cultists of every variety of compromising pseudo-Christianity.

Yet with all this opposition, no scholar or anyone else has ever yet been satisfactorily able to explain away the empty tomb of Christ. The unbreakable historic record that Jesus Christ died on the cross, was buried in a specific

sepulchre, and was out of that tomb three days later, can be explained only by His Resurrection. Every other proffered theory has failed miserably.

His tomb is empty! The tombs of Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Karl Marx, and every other religious founder and philosophical genius still hold and will hold the remains of their occupants until they go back to the dust.

But not that of the Lord Jesus Christ. His body was there for only three days, and then, having been resurrected, glorified, and immortalized, He appeared to His disciples, showing Himself to be “. . . *alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3). Then He ascended back to heaven and ever since has been “*at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*” (Romans 8:34).

One day, *all* the graves will be emptied! Jesus said to those who are His followers: “*Because I live, ye shall live also*” (John 14:19). He has promised to return some day (perhaps today!), and “. . . *if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord*” (I Thessalonians **4:14,16,17**).

In that great day—all made possible by the Resurrection of Christ—the graves of every believer in Christ of every age and place will be emptied, and we shall all receive glorified bodies like that of Christ Himself. *“We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is”* (I John 3:2; note also Philippians 3:20,21). *“. . . then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”* (I Corinthians 15:54,55).

But it is not only the graves of Christian believers that will be emptied. In the new earth where true Christians will live forever with the Lord, there will be no place at all for graves and tombs and sepulchers, for there will be no *“more death”* (Revelation 21:4), and, of course, no more sin whose wage is death. Even the great fossil graveyards in the sedimentary rocks surrounding the earth will be obliterated, for *“. . . the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up”* (II Peter 3:10) and God will then build *“a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”* (II Peter 3:13).

At that time, all the graves of the lost will also be emptied of their contents. Even those whose bodies were buried in the earth’s waters—especially those who died in the great Flood on the wicked antediluvian world—will be brought before God. *“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead*

which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works” (Revelation 20:13).

Of course, the works of no man in any age have ever been spotless and fruitful enough to permit him to remain forever in the presence of our all-holy Creator, “*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). Therefore, “. . . *whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*” (Revelation 20:15).

Since every person who ever lived was created in the image and likeness of the eternal God (Genesis 1:26; James 3:9), every person will continue to exist forever, either in heaven with the Lord Jesus or in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

The difference is in their acceptance or rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ as He is—omnipotent Creator, redeeming Savior, and risen Lord.

And, lest anyone think that the doctrine of hell and everlasting punishment is anachronistic in this enlightened age, he should realize that the claims and teachings of Christ (which surely emphasize this doctrine) have been verified by His resurrection. Only the Creator of life could overcome death, which had been imposed by Him as the wages of sin in the first place. He knows whereof He speaks!

And lest anyone think this punishment to be too harsh and unloving, he should awake to the great revelation that, “. . . *God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have*

everlasting life” (John 3:16). For a man or woman created in the image of God to reject or ignore such infinite love surely is the greatest of all sins—the one unforgivable sin. Such a one must spend eternity somewhere, and Christ—who knows!—says it must be far away from God. As a matter-of-fact, it will be less miserable for that person to spend eternity in hell than to be forced to be forever in the presence of the God and Savior whose sacrificial love he had spurned all his life.

Each person should never forget that the empty tomb has proved beyond reasonable doubt that Christ rose from the dead after suffering and dying for his or her personal sins and for the sins of all the world. His resurrection in turn proves that He is the God of all creation, for only God can conquer death.

And *that* proves that all His promises and all His warnings are true and will be totally fulfilled when He comes again. Therefore, one great promise is especially fitting in conclusion. “*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus [that is, openly acknowledge Jesus as your Lord], and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead [that is, that He died for all your sins and completely satisfied the terrible debt you incurred before God and thereby demonstrated the sin-debt to be completely settled by His glorious victory over death], thou shalt be saved [that is, saved from your deserved destiny in hell and given everlasting life with Him in the new earth]*” (Romans 10:9). “*Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him*” (Psalm 2:12).

Other Easter Booklets of Interest

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