

# “The Tomb is Empty. The Body is Somewhere Else”

Luke 24:13-35

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

Throughout this Easter season, we hear this recurring theme as Jesus interacts with His followers. No matter what they see, they do not believe or come to understand until God’s Word reveals the truth to them. On Easter morning, Mary Magdalene saw that the stone was rolled away. She saw that the tomb was empty. She saw angels and spoke to them. She saw Jesus, speaks with Him and thinks He is the gardener – until He calls her by name. He says, “Mary.” Then, there is this immediate and complete change.

Last week, we heard about Jesus appearing to the apostles in the Upper Room. Peter and John had seen the empty tomb. As we learn in our Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus has already appeared to Simon Peter. And they are filled with (not faith) but fear because of the Jews. Jesus comes into their midst and proclaims peace. “Peace be with you.” And He breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Then, there is a clear and immediate change.

This is not Pentecost yet, but the Holy Spirit is there doing His faith-creating work. Jesus says, “Peace be with you” and there is real peace. However, Thomas is missing. Thomas has seen Lazarus rise from the dead. Thomas has seen miracle upon miracle performed by Jesus. But Thomas has no faith, because Thomas has not “heard” the saving Word of God, even though Jesus has been

speaking it. Thomas has no peace until Jesus comes once again and says, "Peace be with you." And there is a clear and immediate change. Thomas says, "My Lord and my God."

This brings us to Emmaus. On Easter Sunday, the day of the Resurrection of our Lord, that very day, two of Jesus followers (not apostles, but disciples of Jesus) are walking along the road discussing the events of the day. Jesus joins them on their journey. And like Mary at the tomb, their eyes did not recognize Him.

And Jesus asks them what they are talking about. Cleopas is shocked and says, "Are you the only person in Jerusalem that doesn't know what has happened?" For me, this is one of those really convincing, yet overlooked, arguments for those looking for evidence of the resurrection. The tomb was empty. His body was somewhere else, and everybody was talking about it.

The tomb was empty. Either, ALL of the guards fell asleep, and the disciples boldly conducted a military style exercise and stole the body (those same disciples who are cowering in fear in the Upper Room); or Jesus rose from the dead. Those are the only two legitimate options.

I want to thank whoever left the National Geographic at my office door. It is a special edition solely devoted to the Tomb of Christ and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. I found some interesting historical nuggets and they did a good job explaining the evidence for why serious scholars (including our tour guide Johnny) believe that the traditional site is the actual site.

Back to the road to Emmaus. The tomb, that very tomb which is now covered over by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (the evidence suggests); that tomb was empty. His body was gone. And everybody was talking about it. And it was the sort thing that if a person were skeptical, they could go and look in. Yep, it's empty.

And everybody keeps talking about it. The claim of Jesus rising from the dead is the topic of conversation throughout the Mediterranean world in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. The Roman Emperor Claudius even issues a decree, most likely in 41 AD,

making it punishable by death if anyone takes a body out of a tomb. It is called the Nazareth decree.

Claudius comes to power in 41 AD and his long-time friend, Herod Agrippa I (they grew up together in Rome), it seems he asks him for some help in dealing with this Christian sect concerning the lack of a body in the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth.

This is one of my favorite arguments against those who want to blindly deny what the Bible says. The tomb was empty. The body was gone. Numerous eyewitnesses testify to this, and even suffer persecution and death for the sake of maintaining their story. This does not prove that the story is true, but it does prove that the story was being told by the people of that day. In addition, there are 10's of thousands of citations (quotes of the New Testament) in other literature from the early church time.

The Jewish rabbis wrote of Jesus in the Talmud, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. The Jewish historian Josephus writes about Jesus of Nazareth, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. Documents from Roman officials and a mountain of evidence all point to the fact that there was a man named Jesus of Nazareth. This man suffered and died on a cross. He was buried in a tomb. And now, the tomb is empty. The body is not there. Those are facts. How the tomb became empty? What happened to that body? That is a matter of faith – even though all the alternative theories are ridiculous.

Mary Magdalene only believed when Jesus called her by name. The empty tomb itself did not create faith. The apostles only believe when Jesus proclaims peace and says, "Peace be with you. . . Receive the Holy Spirit." Before this, the empty tomb had only created fear, so they locked themselves in the Upper Room and hid.

The disciples walking on the road to Emmaus were "amazed" at the story of the empty tomb and the vision of angels told by the women, but this did not create faith or understanding. Then Jesus, beginning with Moses and the Prophets, opens the Scriptures to them. They later recount how "their hearts

burned within them” while they walked and talked along the road. The Word of God brings real and complete change.

But it was not until Jesus “took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the disciples” that their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. And then He vanished from their sight.

Jesus’ body is able to do things that our bodies cannot do, because He is God. He has the authority to rise from the dead and walk out of His tomb. He can vanish from the presence of the disciples at Emmaus. He can appear in the midst of the disciples in the Upper Room, even though the doors are locked. And He was not just a vision. He was flesh and blood. He ate fish with them. You could put your finger into the mark of the nail in His hand, or the hole in His side.

His body can come to you as real flesh and blood under the form of bread and wine. Do not your hearts burn within you as He makes His body known to you in the breaking of the bread? Oh, how we long to once again receive the body of Jesus in the breaking of the bread. And I assure you it will be sooner rather than later.

Until then, and even after then, we take solace in the fact that there was an empty tomb in Jerusalem. There will come a day when all the tombs will be empty. Until that day, He speaks to us in His Word and He comes to us in the breaking of the bread. Amen.

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.