

# THE EMPTY TOMB

*John 20:1-31*

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Memory verse - *Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” – John 20:29*

What was meaningful to you from last week's lesson? Great question. For many of us, we need time to ruminate just a bit.

- Staring truth in the face and walking away!

Jesus said, *“For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” Pilate responds, “...What is truth?” John 18:37-38*

**See clip –1:03.**

Pilate walked away from the greatest authority on the greatest question and committed the greatest crime at that time.

The word *truth* appears on 52 occasions in the Gospel of John (NIV). The most common phrase, “I tell you the truth...”.

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth...For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” -John 1:14, 17.*

*“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth” - 1 John 3:18.*

## **John 19:30 – “It Is Finished” (6 min. 38 seconds)**

To get us started, and before we jump into an expositional study of the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter, I want to show you a clip from the series, “That The World May Know”. Ray Vander Laan is the teacher and he does a masterful job bridging the crucifixion and our topic of The Empty Tomb.

**Slide:** Golgotha and the Temple Mount

Build: circle Golgotha

Build: circle The Tomb

**Slide:** Golgotha and the Temple Mount – Closer view

It's just a tad over six minutes. I've provided an outline of the content below with some significant personal application questions. Let's take a look.

The timing of Jesus' death was precise and its meaning would not have been lost on his followers. "Behold the *Lamb of God*, who takes away the sin of the world!" – John 1:29. What specific difference does Jesus' sacrifice make in your life? How would you describe the challenge to "die to self" on a daily basis? (Romans 6:2; Gal. 2:20).

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Joseph of Arimathea, at great personal expense (the tomb would cost about a year's wages), placed the body of Jesus in his own new tomb. What would be a way for YOU to demonstrate a similar level of sacrificial devotion to Jesus?

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"*We, who with unveiled faces, all reflect the Lord's glory*" - 2 Cor. 3:18. For whom are you "rolling away the stone" so that someone might see Jesus?

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## **The Discovery Of The Empty Tomb**

If the narrative of John had ended with Ch. 19, it would not have been exceptional; all human biographies end with death. The picture of Jesus would have been that of a man of exceptional character, who made extraordinary claims, and whose sincerity could not be reasonably doubted. Nevertheless, the main narrative would have been closed with a sense of frustration. His claims would have been negated, his aspirations would have been unrealized, and his teaching would have seemed too lofty to be true. The major difference between the life and teachings of Jesus and those of any other great religious leader lies in the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and the others did not.

In presenting the evidence for Jesus' resurrection, John deals more with its **effect** on human personality than with the material proofs the Western mind would prefer. He assumes the fact and then shows how it influenced certain disciples in such a way that its reality becomes indisputable.

### **Peter and John(20:1-9)**

**Verse 1** - "The first day of the week" would be the day after the Sabbath. In the Jewish method of reckoning time, it would begin with sundown on Saturday and continue until sundown on Sunday. The text seems to indicate, however, that the visit of the women to the tomb occurred early on Sunday morning. Only Mary Magdalene is mentioned by name, but others are listed in the synoptic Gospels (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10). Quite likely Mary Magdalene, noticing that the stone had been rolled away from the door of the tomb, ran to warn the disciples while the others investigated further.

William Hendrickson writes,

Although it was still dark when the women started out, the sun had risen when they arrived at the tomb. As they trudged sorrowfully out of Jerusalem's gate, they were worried about the huge stone (Mark 16:3) which had been placed at the tomb's entrance. For the appearance and location of the tomb see on 19:41, 42. But suddenly they saw - probably at a turn in the Path - that the heavy slab had been turned away already; no, not merely turned away but actually removed (lifted out of its groove), so that it was lying flat on the ground. **SLIDE:** Nowhere is it stated that this stone had to be removed in order that Jesus might arise from the grave. Nevertheless, the stone had to be removed. This was necessary for two reasons:

1. In order to indicate that the grave had been conquered, that the **victory** had been achieved.
2. In order that Peter and John might be able to **enter** (20:6,8), and that everyone might be able to see that the tomb was empty!

Peter would later write, "*We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty*" - 2 Pet. 1:16.

**2** Mary ran to find Peter and John, the leaders of the Twelve, and announced that the body was missing from the tomb: "They have taken the Lord." No identification is given for "they." Most likely this is a reference to the Jewish hierarchy who had designed Jesus' death. Mary thought the body had been secretly removed by Jesus' enemies.

**3-4** The quick response of Peter and the other disciple shows that the disciples were not responsible for removing the body. Had they been aware of an official removal, or had some of their own number been involved in a conspiracy, they would not have been so concerned.

**20:4**, "*Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.*" Interesting. Reminds me of when Elijah outran Ahab to Jezreel. Elijah thought a revival was about to break out – lots of adrenaline. See 1 Kings 18:45-46.

**5** Why didn't John enter the tomb? Having seen that the graveclothes were still within, he probably concluded that the body was also there and so refrained from entering. Either he felt that he should not enter the tomb out of respect for the dead, or else he feared the ceremonial defilement of touching a corpse.

**6-7** Peter, who by this time had overtaken his partner, had no such inhibitions. He entered directly into the tomb. He also saw the graveclothes and observed that the headcloth was not lying with the other pieces but was rolled up in a place by itself. Peter must have been wondering why the graveclothes were left in this position if the body had been stolen. A robber would not have left them in good order. He would have stripped the body completely, leaving the clothing in a disorderly heap; or he would have taken the body, graveclothes and all.

**8** At this point, the "other disciple" summoned up courage to enter the tomb, perhaps wondering what had reduced Peter to silence. John saw the meaning of the empty graveclothes and "believed." The unique phenomenon of the graveclothes looking as if the body were in them when no body was there undoubtedly recalled Jesus' previous words (See John 2:22; 11:25; 16:22).

John 2:19, 22, Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

One commentator writes, "Only (SLIDE) three possible conclusions could have emptied the tomb.

1. First, Jesus could have left of His own account. But this would be impossible if He was still dead.
2. Second, the body could have been taken out by human hands, either those of His friends or of His enemies. If by enemies, what could their motive have been? And if that were true, why did they remain silent when the preaching of Christ's Resurrection hit the streets? They merely would have had to produce the body to nip that rumor in the bud. If the body was taken by friends, how would they have slipped by the guards? Furthermore, it's incomprehensible that those friends would die for the cause of Christ – as all of them, with the possible exception of John, were to do - if it were all a lie.
3. The third conclusion seems to be the only intelligent option: the body left by supernatural means... a miracle.

## **Mary Magdalene(20:10-18)**

**11** Mary Magdalene had returned to the tomb and stood outside, crying at the loss of Jesus. On looking into the tomb, she saw two figures in white seated on the shelf where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the foot and the other at the head.

**13** The question the angels asked Mary brought from her only an expression of grief and frustration. The death of Jesus, which she had witnessed, was in itself distressing and unnerving; the disappearance of the body from the place of burial would add apprehension and mystery to her grief. She had hoped for the sad consolation of completing the burial, and even that had been taken from her.

**16** Only one thing was necessary to establish Jesus' identity—his uttering her name. The way it is spoken often identifies the speaker. No gardener would ever know her name, and no one else would pronounce it the way Jesus did. Turning again for a second look, she addressed him in Aramaic as "Rabboni." Strictly it means "my dear lord," but John defines it in this instance as "Teacher." In this ecstatic moment of recognition, Mary must have prostrated herself before him and clasped his feet, as the other women did according to Matthew's report (Matt 28:9).

**18** Mary's announcement to the disciples that she had seen the Lord was an additional confirmation of the belief that rested on inference from material evidence. John had believed, but he had not yet personally seen the risen Lord Jesus. Mary brought the witness of her experience to corroborate his conclusion.

## **Jesus Appears To The Disciples (20:19-23)**

**19-20** This appearance came to the collective group for the purpose of allaying their fears. They had, narrowly escaped arrest with Jesus in Gethsemane; they realized that as the disciples of one who was regarded as a dangerous agitator they would be under suspicion; and they were probably holding a consultation on the best method of withdrawing from the city without attracting the notice of the temple police or the Roman authorities. The doors were locked for fear that the Jews would send an arresting detachment for them as they had for Jesus.

*John 18:7-9, (Jesus) asked them, “Who is it you want?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” “I told you that I am he,” Jesus answered. “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.”*

The appearance of Jesus in the room excited both amazement and fear. The implication is clear that Jesus was not impeded by locked doors.

Why show the disciples his hands and feet?

1. The person standing in their midst was really Jesus and not someone else. The marks identify Him.
2. This person has a real body. He is not a phantom. They were not seeing an hallucination.

Luke adds, (24:36-43) *While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.*

### **John's Great Commission (20:21-23)**

**22-23** For this ministry Jesus provided the Holy Spirit and the commission to proclaim the forgiveness of sins. These are linked together for a new ministry. This was the initial announcement of which Pentecost was the historic fulfillment. The descent of the Spirit on the church at Pentecost brought the proclamation by Peter to his hearers: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven” (Acts 2:38). The words of Jesus emphasize that the Holy Spirit is not bestowed on the church to empower an effective application of the work of Christ to all men.

*“If you forgive anyone his sins...”* Merrill Tenney, “God does not forgive men’s sins because we decide to do so nor withhold forgiveness because we will not grant it. We announce it; we do not create it. This is the essence of salvation. And all who proclaim the gospel are in effect forgiving or not forgiving sins, depending on whether the hearer accepts or rejects the Lord Jesus as the Sin-Bearer.”

### **Thomas' Confession (20:24-29)**

**24** Thomas is singled out for special treatment because his confession provides a climactic illustration of the triumph of belief. His name is the Aramaic term for “twin,” of which Didymus is the Greek equivalent (cf. John 11:16; 21:2).

John 11:16, *Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."*

John 14:5, *Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"*

**SLIDE: 25** In spite of the repeated assurances of his colleagues, Thomas was obstinate. He was so certain of the death of Jesus that he would not credit the report of his reappearance and insisted that he would not believe unless he could actually touch Jesus' body. Thomas would be satisfied by nothing less than material evidence.

**26** "A week later". The disciples had remained in Jerusalem during that time. What a long week it must have been for Thomas.

**27** Jesus' appeal to Thomas shows that he knew what Thomas had said to his colleagues when they told him of the first appearance. Since Jesus had not been visibly present to hear his reaction to their report, Thomas must have been startled to hear Jesus quote his very words. Jesus did not immediately chastise him for his doubts, but he challenged him to make the test that he had suggested. Jesus' words translated **SLIDE: "Stop doubting and believe."** This is Jesus' cry to all of humanity!

**28** For a Jew to call another human associate "my Lord and my God" would be almost incredible. The Jewish law was strictly monotheistic; so the deification of any man would be regarded as blasphemy (10:33). Thomas, in the light of the Resurrection, applied to Jesus the titles of Lord (*kyrios*) and God (*theos*), both of which were titles of deity.

**29** Thomas's declaration is the last assertion of personal faith recorded in this Gospel. It marks the climax of the book because it presents Christ as the risen Lord, victorious over sin, sorrow, doubt, and death. It also presents the faith that accepts not only the truth of what Jesus said but also the actuality of what he was—the Son of God. In the experience of Thomas, the writer has shown how belief comes to maturity and how it changes the entire direction of an individual life.

#### **John's Purpose Statement (20:30-31)**

With the confession of Thomas, "My Lord and my God," the author has achieved his purpose. One should compare this confession with the declaration in 1:1: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was face to face with God, and the Word was God.*" John's purpose has all along been this: to show that Jesus is really God (or, of the very essence of God) The resurrection and particularly the appearance to the disciples had the effect of eliciting this confession from the heart, "My Lord and my God."

The resurrection was the greatest sign of all. In addition to the great sign of the resurrection, the signs which are recorded in the Fourth Gospel are:

1. the changing of the water into wine,
2. the healing of the royal official's son,

3. the cure of the invalid man at the pool of Bethesda,
4. the miraculous feeding of the five thousand,
5. the opening of the eyes of the man born blind, and
6. the resurrection of Lazarus.

But that is by no means all.

John has been selective. He probably took for granted that the readers had already studied the earlier Gospels. So what was John's purpose in recording the signs which he did record? The answer is expressed in these words, "...*These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*"

Doing some reflecting on the final week of Jesus, which of course is appropriate this time of year. Karen pulls out Max Lucado's *And The Angels Were Silent (The Final Week of Jesus)* for thoughts from the Passion Week that only a master story teller like Max can pen. I want to close with this one...

From Max Lucado's *And The Angels Were Silent (The Final Week of Jesus)*

Pages 187-194

Chapter 27

*I Reckon I Will Always Remember That Walk*

So what should I do with Jesus?" Pilate asked it first, but we've all asked it since.

It's a fair question. A necessary question. What do you do with such a man? He called himself God, but wore the clothes of a man. He called himself the Messiah, but never marshaled an army. He was regarded as king, but his only crown was of thorns. People revered him as regal, yet his only robe was stitched with mockery.

Small wonder Pilate was puzzled. How do you explain such a man?

One way is to take a walk. His walk. His final walk. And that is what we have done. We have followed his steps and stood in his shadow. From Jericho to Jerusalem. From the temple to the garden. From the garden to the trial. From Pilate's palace to Golgotha's cross. We have watched him walk—angrily into the temple, wearily into Gethsemane, painfully up the Via Dolorosa. And powerfully out of the vacated tomb.

Hopefully, as you witnessed his walk, you have reflected on your own, for each of us have our own walk to Jerusalem. Our own path through hollow religion. Our own journey down the narrow path of rejection. And each of us, like Pilate, must cast a verdict on Jesus.

Pilate heard the voice of the people and left Jesus to walk the road alone.

Will we?

Can I tell you mine?

A Bible class in a small West Texas town. I don't know what was more remarkable, that a teacher was trying to teach the book of Romans to a group of ten-year-olds or that I remember what he said.

The classroom was mid-sized, one of a dozen or so in a small church. My desk had carving on it and gum under it. Twenty or so others were in the room, though only four or five were taken.

We all sat at the back, too sophisticated to appear interested. Starched jeans. High-topped tennis shoes. It was summer and the slow-setting sun cast the window in gold.

The teacher was an earnest man. I can still see his flattop, his belly bulging from beneath his coat that he doesn't even try to button. His tie stops midway down his chest. He has a black mole on his forehead, a soft voice, and a kind smile. Though he is hopelessly out of touch with the kids of 1965, he doesn't know it.

His notes are stacked on a podium underneath a heavy black Bible. His back is turned to us and his jacket goes up and down his **beltline** as he writes on the board. He speaks with genuine passion. He is not a dramatic man, but tonight he is fervent.

God only knows why I heard him that night. His text was Romans chapter six. The blackboard was littered with long words and diagrams. Somewhere in the process of describing how Jesus went into the tomb and came back out, it happened. The jewel of grace was lifted and turned so I could see it from a new angle...and it stole my breath.

I didn't see a moral code. I didn't see a church. I didn't see ten commandments or hellish demons. I saw my Father enter my dark night, awaken me from my slumber, and gently guide me—no, carry me—to freedom.

"I reckon I will always remember that walk."

I said nothing to my teacher. I said nothing to my friends. I'm not sure I even said anything to God. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to do. But for all I didn't know there was one fact of which I was absolutely sure, I wanted to be with him.

I told my father that I was ready to give my life to God. He thought I was too young to make the decision. He asked what I knew. I told him Jesus was in heaven and I wanted to be with him. And for my dad, that was enough.

To this day I wonder if my love has ever been as pure as it was that first hour. I long for the certainty of my adorning faith. Had you told me that Jesus was in hell, I would have agreed to go.

You see, when your Father comes to deliver you from bondage, you don't ask questions, you obey instructions. You take his hand. You walk the path. You leave bondage behind. And you never, never forget.

I pray you never forget your walk or his: Jesus' final walk from Jericho to Jerusalem. For it was this walk that promised you freedom.

His final walk through the temple of Jerusalem. For it was on this walk that he denounced hollow religion.

His final walk to the Mount of Olives. For it was there he promised to return and take you home.

And his final walk from Pilate's palace to Golgotha's cross. Bare, bloody feet struggling up a stony narrow path. But just as vivid as the pain of the beam against his raw back is his vision of you and him walking together.

He could see the hour he would come into your life, into your dark cabin to stir you out of your sleep and guide you to freedom.

But the walk isn't over. The journey isn't complete. There is one more walk that must be made.

"I will come back," he promised. And to prove it he ripped in two the temple curtain and split open the doors of death. He will come back.

He (Jesus) will come back for his followers. And we won't be able to control our joy. "The one who has redeemed us has returned!" we will cry. And the journey will end and we will take our seats at his Feast...forever.

See you at the table.

1 Peter 1:3-4, *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you."*

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#### **Additional Notes -**

Three main issues in the First letter of John which is a key to understanding The Gospel of John

1. A denial of the incarnation and Jesus as the Messiah – "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist...no one who denies the Son has the Father" – 2:22-23
2. A denial of sin – "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and we make God out to be a liar" – 1:8,10.
3. A denial of brotherly love – "whoever hates his brother is in the darkness" – 2:11.

1 John 2:3-6, *We know that we have come to know him if we obey (trust) his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word (trusts in God), God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.*

### **John's identification and authorship**

Merril F. Unger presents the *prima facie* case that the "Beloved Disciple" actually is John the author of the gospel, essentially by using a process of elimination. Unger writes:

[John's identification and authorship]...can be deduced in a general sense from the [following] facts. He indicates the precise hours when particular events took place (John 1:39; 4:6,52; 19:14). He records quotations of the disciple Philip (John 6:7; 14:8), Thomas (John 11:16, 14:5), Judas (John 14:22), and Andrew (John 6:8-9). He leaned on the breast of Jesus at supper on the night of the betrayal (John 13:23-25) and was among the three 'inner circle' apostles, Peter, James, and John. Peter is distinguished from this author by name in 1:41-42;13:6,8 and James had become a martyr very early, long before the Gospel was written (Acts 12:2). He has a particular way of introducing himself (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). These facts cumulatively make it difficult to come to any other conclusion, but that John was the author of the Gospel which bears his name."

The closing words of John's Gospel state explicitly concerning the Beloved Disciple that "It is this disciple who testifies to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true."<sup>[21:24]</sup>