

Title: Easter's Emptiness and Fullness  
Date: April 17, 2022  
Subject: Easter  
Scripture: Luke 24:1 - 12

The women were the first to go to the tomb where Jesus' body had been placed. They intended to put spices on Jesus' body in keeping with the burial procedure at the time. This would be the second time as two men had done so when they buried the body. Maybe the women didn't think the men had done it the proper way.

The women were shocked by what they saw and what they didn't see. They saw the massive stone had been rolled away from the tomb's entrance. They didn't see the body of Jesus. They were snapped out of their dazed confusion when they saw angels who told them Jesus was alive. "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!" The women excitedly ran back to the disciples to share their discovery.

Read more of the story. [READ Luke 24:9 – 12](#). More details are given in other historical accounts.

The disciples weren't convinced by the women's words. This wasn't the kind of thing to be taken at face value from hysterical women. Plus, there was no logical reason to expect Jesus would rise from the dead. They all knew he had died though only one of Jesus' twelve closest followers was present at the crucifixion. They'd heard the details of what took place and what Jesus said. They knew his corpse had been placed in a tomb. They made zero preparations for him to return from the dead. Plus, they were afraid for their lives.

Yet, something inside them compelled them to check out the women's story. Peter, mentioned here, and John, mentioned in another Scripture, ran to the tomb. They saw the linen strips Jesus' body had been wrapped in were still there, flat, with no body inside. The cloth that covered Jesus' head was neatly folded. No one steals a body and takes the time to carefully fold grave clothes or, for that matter, take the time to take off the strips.

John saw and believed. Peter was skeptical and wondered to himself, not aloud. Maybe he didn't want to get their hopes up or put a damper on them. Soon, all of them would get first person proof Jesus had risen. Jesus showed himself to the disciples numerous times. He invited them to touch him and give him something to eat to show he wasn't a ghost.

For a moment, let's think about the emptiness of Easter. That might sound strange, but let me explain. We begin with Jesus leaving the comforts of heaven to come to earth. We celebrate this at Christmas when we think about how Jesus, the Son of God, became a human baby. To do that, he emptied Himself of his equality with God the Father. He temporarily gave up the outward expression of God and didn't demand to be treated with the dignity and respect due him. As one poet has written, he "emptied himself of all but love."

On the cross, he demonstrated his love when he emptied the cup of God's wrath on himself. He did this by bearing the punishment for our rebellion against God caused by our sin and moral crimes we committed against him.

Song by Sidewalk Prophets portrays our sin in the torture experienced by Jesus: "I am the thorn in your crown...I am the sweat from Your brow...I am the nail in Your wrist...I am the man who yelled out from the crowd for Your blood to be spilled on this earth-shaking ground...But You love me anyway."

The cross became empty after Jesus had completely provided the only payment acceptable. God the Father accepted the payment for all people's sins and offers forgiveness to people. There's nothing more that can be done or added to what the Son of God did. If more were necessary, he should still be on the cross to pay more.

Jesus spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11). He said God the Father loved him because he was going to lay down his life of his own accord (John 10:17, 18). No one could take it from him. No one had the power to kill him. He willingly chose to die.

And most importantly, the tomb became empty. Jesus also taught he had the power and authority to take up his life again (John 10:17, 18). He was placed in an empty tomb, but after three days the tomb became empty as Jesus emptied the tomb of himself. He returned to life. He rose from the dead to show he was physically alive and could grant eternal life with God.

Jesus did what he did because people -- full of sin, selfishness and rebellion against God -- were empty. People have a hole in their lives only God could fill. Some people try to fill that void with money, pleasure, drugs, stuff...but it doesn't work.

God's offer is available to those who empty themselves of their self-confidence in their own ability to get to heaven or feel some other belief system will allow them to get there or think God will take everyone because God is such a loving God. Although everyone was created by God. Not everyone is a child of God.

We can't trust in ourselves, our own goodness because we can never measure up to the perfection God demands. Nor can we add to what Jesus has done.

The good news is Jesus measures up to God's requirements. We place our trust in what Jesus has accomplished as complete and sufficient. We turn from what we had been trusting in and turn to God.

Jesus often referred to the history of the people of Israel. Just prior to speaking the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life," he mentioned Moses lifting up a snake in the desert (Numbers 21:8).

It wasn't to kill the snake. It was because snakes were killing people. The Israelites had rebelled against the Lord, so he sent venomous snakes as a punishment. The people confessed they'd done wrong. The solution was for Moses to make a bronze snake, place it on a pole so when someone was bitten, all they had to do was look at the snake and they wouldn't die. Pretty simple, huh? Look and live.

Can you imagine someone choosing to not look at the snake? They knew friends, family and neighbors had died from snake bites before the snake on the pole was raised, yet chose to try another way. Maybe they thought they wouldn't be impacted the same way. Died. Maybe if they rubbed a little sand in it. Died. Maybe if they sucked out the venom. Died. Maybe if they pretended it didn't happen. Died. No other method worked.

Jesus used what Moses did to indicate he is the only way. He'd be lifted up on the cross as the only method which gives life to people. All people have to do look to Jesus and what he has done so they can live.

There's another story from the Old Testament about the people of Israel rebelling (Numbers 16:42 – 50). This time the Lord sent a plague. Moses told his brother Aaron to take a tool used for worship and run into the middle of the people. He did and the plague stopped. Aaron stood between the dead and the living. He stopped the dying in its tracks.

Reminds me of Gandalf from Lord of the Rings - The Fellowship of the Ring when he battles the hideous Balrog on a narrow bridge. Gandalf stands between the monster and the members of the Fellowship. He stabs his staff into the bridge and screams, "You shall not pass...Go back to the shadow."

The cross of Jesus is his staff that proclaims to sin and the devil, "You shall not pass." Sin and the devil are stopped in their tracks. They no longer need to be the ruling element of our lives. Jesus stands between the living and those who will suffer spiritual death which is eternal separation from God.

People try other approaches. Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg was interviewed days before his 50th college reunion. He expressed surprise at how many classmates had died. The reporter recounted, "But if he senses that he may not have as much time left as he would like, he has little doubt about what would await him at a Judgment Day. Pointing to his work on gun safety, obesity and smoking cessation, he said with a grin: "I am telling you, if there is a God, when I get to heaven, I'm not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It's not even close"" (New York Times, 4/16/14, p. A12).

That's his opinion, but his isn't the one that matters. Bloomberg can line up his good deeds till they reach the moon and offer them to the Lord, but the Lord doesn't use the barter system. There's no amount of good deeds a person can do to take one step into heaven. There's no amount of money a person could offer to buy a single second in heaven.

In ancient times ships couldn't make it into the harbor when the tide was low. Sailors used a small boat called a forerunner to carry an anchor connected by long rope to the ship. They dropped the anchor in a secure place in the harbor and waited for the tide to come in. Then they could enter the harbor safely. Jesus is the forerunner who has gone ahead to heaven and allows us to gain entrance. A person has to depend on him.

The principal benefits we gain from Jesus' death and resurrection are a right relationship with God, forgiveness of sins and a guarantee of a place in heaven with him. He also desires to work in our lives while we're on earth to give full, purposeful, meaningful, fulfilling, happy lives. The problem is many people look for deep and lasting happiness in the wrong places -- bank account, human relationships, good health, or various

forms of things that give pleasure. Those things may be able to give some temporary bliss, but God says he has a better way of providing true happiness. Over the next few weeks, the sermons are going to explore what God has to say about how we can be truly happy during our time on earth.

“Christ (died) for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit...It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 3:18, 21).

Some of us may feel like a woman named Leah. She called a pastor saying she needed to talk to someone. They met at church. Leah barely entered the building but wouldn't go in any farther. She said “I can't. I don't feel worthy to get closer.” She felt she didn't belong, God hated her and was just waiting to judge her.

It took time for her to understand God loved her and she could approach him. She shared some of her story, “Judgment belongs to God, and, in Christ, he has declared you and me not guilty. Before you tell anyone about the love of God, before you proclaim to the world what you have learned about Jesus, tell yourself that he has forgiven you - of all your sins. There is a huge difference between knowing and feeling. I don't always feel forgiven, but I trust his Word and his Word tells me it is so.”

Sin, guilt and shame can make us feel like we can't get any closer to God or close to him at all. We may feel like there's a barrier between God and us. The devil wants us to think we don't belong, we're not worthy, we should just crawl in a hole, that there's no hope.

I hate to say it, but the devil is partly right. We don't belong. We're not worthy to approach God... in and of ourselves. Jesus took care of the problem through his death for us and his resurrection to life. Through him we can be rightly related to God.

Some of you may have come this morning because you wanted to hear again the glorious familiar story of Jesus rising from the dead and revel in it. Some may have come with a sense of need, almost a burning desire, even a sense of desperation because you know you need something, something outside yourself.

Jesus came to earth, died and rose again so he could deliver us, you, from death and give life. It comes when we admit we're sinners who don't deserve anything God has. But because of Jesus and our personal trust in him, God allows us to experience forgiveness and receive eternal life with him. We change our allegiance from ourselves to God. We desire to make God's values our values and his priorities our priorities. He has the power over what binds and holds us down. I'm not saying we won't experience difficulty, but we can know God is with us.

A man tells his story: “Growing up, I used to be so afraid of dying. Then, one Easter, I heard my pastor read these words from 1 Corinthians 15: 55-57: *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* At that moment, the chains of fear fell away. Years later, when my father died, I went to the grave ahead of the funeral. Standing there over the empty grave, I spit into it and said, “You hold nothing over my dad. You could not hold on to Jesus, and you cannot hold on to anyone in Jesus!”

Most of Jesus' family didn't believe he was the Son of God who came to rescue people. The Good Friday Focus on the Family broadcast featured author and pastor Andy Stanley who spoke about this: "I ask this every Easter. What would your brother have to do to convince you that he was the Son of God? And there's only one thing, magic tricks would not do it. Miracles would not do it. The only thing that could possibly convince you that your brother is the Son of God, was for you to attend his funeral, and then a few days later for him to show back up. And it's like, "Okay, you're the Son of God." And here's the amazing thing. James, the brother of Jesus is invisible in the Gospels when Jesus is doing all of his stuff. And suddenly at the end, when it is most dangerous to be a Jesus follower, James shows back up in the story in the city of Jerusalem as a leader in the first century church. Why? Because his brother rose from the dead. That's why we believe it."

If Jesus Christ didn't rise, nothing else matters. But if Christ has risen, and he has, nothing else matters. We can experience our own personal resurrection as it were.