

What the Tomb Tells Us

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[0 : 00] What does the tomb tell us about Jesus? We've just sung a hymn that has the line, the empty tomb still speaks.

! That's what we've just sung. And so what does it say? All of the action here in this evening's passage revolves around events at a tomb. Jesus is buried, the tomb is sealed and guarded, the tomb is empty, and in the kind of final scene lies are told about the events of what happened at the tomb. So what does all this, what does the tomb tell us about Jesus? We're almost at the end of Matthew's gospel. We've been working through this gospel, haven't we, in the evenings for some time, and all the way through we've met the Lord Jesus in different places that have spoken, have told us, have pointed to who he is and what he's done for us. The setting of Jesus' ministry and life and death and resurrection, the setting, the scenes, the places that Jesus has been, the people that he's met, almost working kind of like characters that tell the gospel story, tell us about Christ. Think about what we just sung there from the squirrel of a borrowed stable. The manger, the stable, speaks of

God becoming man in the incarnation. Earlier in Matthew 2, we meant the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. It speaks of Jesus' future glory. The palm branches, the donkey upon which Jesus rode into Jerusalem, speak of Jesus' kingship. The cross speaks of his blood shed, body broken for our sins, and God's wrath being poured out upon him. So what does the tomb tell us? What is the tomb saying?

Well, we see it here in kind of two different scenes. We have the sealed tomb, and we have the empty tomb. And it isn't just the empty tomb that speaks. No, the sealed tomb first spoke as well. And so we're going to look at these two scenes here, the sealed tomb and the empty tomb, and hear what they have to say. So firstly, our first point this evening, what does the sealed tomb tell us? It tells us that Jesus died and was buried. Just look down again at verse 57. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus, who was on the cross. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock.

And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. The sealed tomb tells us that Jesus, after he was crucified, was taken and placed in the tomb, and that he died and was buried.

[3 : 15] Now, why died and buried? Seems like something of a kind of tautology, doesn't it? It's kind of repeating the same thing, but actually there is something in both of them. So first, let's take Jesus died. The tomb tells us Jesus died. Well, why is this important? Why is this significant?

A number of reasons. First, we're about to come to the first great lie about Jesus' resurrection, namely the lie of the guards that his body was stolen. But other great lies have risen up over the centuries, too. And another one is that Jesus didn't really die. Perhaps you've heard that before, heard something known as swoon theory, it's sometimes called, that on the cross, Jesus just sort of fainted, fainted, and he kind of revived in the tomb and somehow managed to push the stone away and get himself out, even though he'd been on a cross. Now, this is just so obviously ridiculous on a number of levels. Here, Matthew wants to show us that Jesus really died. Well, how can we see this? Number one, Pilate gave Joseph the body. If Jesus wasn't dead, Pilate would not have given Jesus' body to Joseph.

It's commonly said the Romans were the best at executions. They're kind of top of the league, top of the charts, if you like, the number one spot, and they couldn't ever be taken off it. If the Romans crucify you, you die. If the Romans want you dead, you die. Jesus was put there by Pilate and crucified by the guards to die. Second, Joseph takes the body, as we've seen, and wraps it in a

shroud.

You think Joseph, if he had any doubts, he would say, I tell you what, let's double check with a doctor. Perhaps we should blue light him up to A&E.; Or maybe I should just go to a local undertaker and just double check. No, he buries him. He's dead. C.S. Lewis writes that after the death of Aslan on the stone table, Susan and Lucy could see the shape of the lion lying dead in his bonds. The tomb speaks, telling us, telling us of Joseph, who wrapped Jesus' body in the shroud. He was dead. Dead.

So why is this important? Because if Jesus does not die, our sins are not forgiven. There is no substitute for our sin. A good number of us would have been here a few weeks ago on Sunday morning as we're working through our series in Exodus, and we were looking at Exodus chapter 12, and God giving the Passover lamb for his people. The Passover lamb was to be killed, and the blood was to be put on the door. The tenth plague, the judgment on the firstborn, that would pass over the house, and God's people could be saved from slavery. Do you remember back to then? What did God tell Moses?

[6 : 32] Moses. The lamb was to be killed. A meal was to be had. The blood on the doors. God didn't just say to take a little bit of blood from the side of the animal. I'm sure they would have known how to do that. Just take a little pinprick from its side or its hand or somewhere like that. A few drops of blood from the side of the animal, put it on the door, and the animal runs off to the fields to enjoy the rest of the day. Right? Easy. But no, no, why not that? Because we need someone to die in our place.

Because that was a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus, who is the Passover lamb, a substitute to die in our place. If Jesus didn't die for our sin, then we are still in our sin. We are still in it, and still, oh God, the price of our sin. We'll die with a massive I owe you to God, a sum that we cannot pay. So no, Matthew is at pains to tell us and to show us by what's going on here in verses 57, 8, 9, that Jesus died. So dear friends, let us have great assurance. Let us have great joy this evening. The Lord Jesus died. Our sins are paid for. We have a substitute, a lamb who died in our place. Now, there are kind of a thousand avenues of application from this, right? But let me give you one. Not only the reassurance and the assurance that our sins are paid for in Christ's death, that for all who belong to the Lord Jesus, he is our substitute, but also that Jesus not only defeated sin, but in his death he defeated death. John Owen, the Puritan pastor of the 17th century, wrote a brilliant book, one of these books. It's kind of in a league of its own, called *The Death of Death and the Death of Christ*. *The Death of Death and the Death of Christ*.

[8 : 40] And even just from the title there, right, you can see the significance of Christ's death. The death of death and the death of Christ. Friends, had Christ not died, and not only our sins are not paid for, our enemy death still has the upper hand. Our enemy death would still have all the ammunition, if you like, loaded in the bullets of the gun, and death could still hold us. But because of the death of Christ, all death can do is, if you like, fire a blank. But what does Paul sing later in that passage in 1 Corinthians 15? Oh, death, where is your sting? In the death of Christ, in the tomb, the sealed tomb, is where death goes to die. Did you know that? Some people say school is where education goes to die. Now, as a former teacher, I take some quibbles with that, okay, but some people say that. You can decide what you make of it. But this is true. This is the glory of Christ's death.

That in the death of Jesus is where death goes to die for all who believe in him. Is there any ache that's greater than that in this life than death? Well, Jesus came to put an end to death and to be the firstfruits of a new world where death is no more and has no hold over us. The tomb speaks. The sealed tomb speaks. Jesus dead in the tomb speaks. Sins are paid for. Death is dead for all who are in Jesus.

Now, what about buried? Why not just died? Well, it isn't just confirmation of Christ's death, which it is. It is also to show, though, that Christ received what humanity and their sins deserved. That if we can put it this way, he had gone to the grave, gone to shale, gone to the pit. In other words, what happens is Jesus is sealed in the tomb. It is part of his humiliation, his being made low for us. Imagine this great ladder of which Christ continues to descend through his earthly ministry. Christ is born and made low. Then he comes further down the ladder under the law. Then he comes further down the ladder. He suffered on the cross. Then further down, he died. Then further down still, he is buried.

One theologian says this, he who prior to this had been mocked and despised of men was now removed from their view as one unfit to be viewed by them. He who is preeminent in all creation is taken from view and hidden from all this world as he's made low for us. And so does all this matter? Well, yes, the tomb tells us he was died and buried, and this is a core part of our confession. That's what was read earlier for us in 1 Corinthians 15. What does Paul write? For what I received, I pass on to you as of, not second, not third, first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. The king of creation humiliated before his creation. And what's the response then to all this? Well, we see in our passage two responses, devotion and opposition. And they both mirror each other in that they center on a question to Pilate. Joseph asks for the body of Jesus, and he buries it with tender care and devotion.

We're told he's a disciple, aren't we? And it's not just him. Verse 61, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb. But we also see opposition. The chief priests and Pharisees come, verses 61 to 66.

[12:50] And they ask a question to Pilate as well, and that is to guard Jesus' body. And I think we're to contrast here, kind of verses 61 and verse 66. The woman sitting at the tomb and the guards watching the tomb. So let's take these two responses one at a time. Firstly, look at the devotion of Joseph, and especially here of these women. In Christ's humiliation, at the lowest he gets, if we can put it that way, here, these women are what? Sitting by Jesus. Jesus, dead, buried. They are sitting there, loving him to the very end. I can't help but think that, again, Lewis had them in mind when he wrote of Susan and Lucy with Aslan. Do you remember? What do they do? They come to Aslan. After he dies on the stone table, they weep. They take off the muzzle. Lucy and Susan are there when no one else is.

They love him. They stay with him there at the very end. I can't help but think that Lewis had these women there in his mind, because there they are with Christ, watching, waiting. Friends, may their example encourage us to have the same devotion as we think of all that Christ did for us in his humiliation, in his suffering and death and burial. Now, there's more to the story, right? The tomb doesn't stay sealed. That is the whole glorious point of where we're heading, but just to pause here and note that they are not ashamed of Christ's humiliation, and we are not to be either. Now, let me just give us one application for this, just one, and it's in how we might want to reach out, or how we can reach out to Muslims. That's something that maybe many of us are doing, something we're going to need to do more and more. In Islam, it teaches that Jesus didn't die. Most Muslims believe that Jesus was kind of swapped out before he went to the cross. Why? Because they believe God wouldn't allow his prophet or messenger to be humiliated, to be defeated. The cross would represent a failure of

God to protect Jesus. Now, there's lots going on there, but part of what we will need to do is to deal with all of that, and to help show them and show all of our friends, whether Muslim or secular or whoever, that this lies right at the heart of God's plan, and right at the heart of God that he would come and suffer and die and be buried for us. We are to praise God that he would go so low for us, and part of our outreach to Muslims or to anyone will be to show that quite the opposite of God failing, or God being so somehow distant or far off that he couldn't do this for us. No, it's quite the opposite.

The suffering, death, burial is the lengths and indeed the depths that God would go to to save us. It is there we see the heart of God for sinners. Now, contrast then the devotion of these women who sit by Jesus to in these moments while he lies there. Contrast that devotion with the Pharisees and the chief priests. They don't come out of devotion, but out of fear that Jesus' disciples will what? Steal his body in opposition to Jesus' disciples. And it's kind of ironic, verse 63, they seem to remember Jesus' words better than the disciples. Where were the disciples at this moment? Well, the last we've heard of them in Matthew, they're kind of scattered. They're gone. But it is the chief priests here.

[16:58] They remember what Jesus said. And so they come to Pilate and ask a question. Let us set a guard. And Pilate says, yes, take a guard, seal the tomb, and set a watch. And so what do we have here? We have continued opposition. Even for the three days that Jesus lay dead, the religious leaders still oppose him and want to do all they can to keep him in the grave. But they can't. They can't. The guards that are set at Jesus' tomb would have a better chance of success had they set a guard against the daylight to stop the sun rising that first day of the sun rising that

first day of the week, or as a guard that day at the beach to stop the tide coming into shore. Yes, friends, it would have been easier for these men on guard to change the axis upon which the earth spins or change the place of the moon in the sky which controls the tide than to stop Jesus rising from the dead. Nothing was more sure than this. Chapter 28, after the

Sabbath, towards the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him, the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the woman, do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen. And the world was never the same again. And that brings us to our second point, the empty tomb. Yes, the sealed tomb speaks, but gloriously the empty tomb speaks. Our second point, the empty tomb, Jesus rose from the grave. The tomb tells us that Jesus is alive. Once covered, now open. A doorway once sealed, now gaping wide. The tomb, Jesus' home for three days, now empty. The tomb speaks. Jesus is alive. And this isn't a ghost or an apparition or some kind of group hallucination.

This is a physical raising from death. This is death here working backwards. And I think Matthew is at pains to show us the historical nature of all this. Did you notice the sea language? 28 verse 1, they're going to see the tomb. Verse 3, the appearance of the angels. Verse 6, the angels tell the women, come and see. Verse 7, tell the disciples to go to Galilee. There you will see him. Verse 9, they touch his feet. And verse 10, repeated about Galilee from the Lord Jesus, there they will see me. This is the Lord Jesus physically, historically, in time and space. He got up from the grave, he folded his grave clothes, and he walked out alive, alive. And at this point here, now normally the minister looks to illustrate somehow, and I was trying to reach for an illustration, but you can't really illustrate this. This moment in all of history, think of the great inventions or discoveries of the last century, that the internet, the car splitting the atom, they did in all their own way kind of change the world. We were having a conversation today about electric vehicles. I'm sure our kids in like 20 years were like, oh, our parents were there and there wasn't electric vehicles, right? Just these things come along and they kind of change things, right? All centuries and all nations have their kind of turning points, but not like this, not on this scale. Why? Because of who Jesus is. The sinless, spotless Lamb of God who died in our place was raised for our justification. Because of who Jesus is in his life and sufferings and death and burial and his resurrection means that all our sins are paid for for all who know him. All our transgressions are covered. All our filth and sin is washed away. He is the firstfruits of a whole new world. This is the, to quote Lewis for the umpteenth time, this is the deeper magic from before the dawn of time, the plan of Father, Son, and Spirit to save a people. And this is the Lord Jesus, the firstfruits of a whole new world. So what did we sing earlier? There is one gospel where hope is found. The empty tomb still speaks. For death could not keep my savior down. He lives and I am free. The tomb speaks and it tells us Jesus is alive and if we belong to him then we are free. And we see two responses again here to the empty tomb. Joy and worship and opposition. But note how they both come from fear and then different responses to that fear. Verse 4, the angel appears, the tomb bursts open and the guards for fear tremble and become like dead men. And then verse 8, it speaks of the women. They depart from the tomb and what does it say? With fear and great joy. Both fear but leading to very different responses.

And so let's look at both these responses again. Firstly, the joy and worship of the women. The women, well, they come to the tomb. They find it opened. The stone is rolled away. The angel's there.

And in fear and great joy, they listen to the angel and they run to tell the disciples that Jesus will meet them in Galilee as he said. But then Jesus appears to them and they worship. It is the right response, isn't it? The king the world crucified, the king who was dead, the king who was buried, is now the king who is alive. And he is the king the world is to bow to. And these women get to be the first to fall at the feet of the risen Lord Jesus and worship him. It's glorious, is it not?

[23 : 51] These women there at the tomb, at Jesus' feet, alive, alive. Friends, does the one who has defeated sin not deserve all our praise? Does the one who has defeated and washed away all our sin and wrongdoing not deserve all our worship? Does the one who is making all things new not worthy of all our praise and glory? Yes, he is. Yes, he is. But do also notice here that the tenderness of Jesus' heart, look at Jesus' heart here for his disciples. They left him, they were

scattered, they abandoned him there at the end. But what does Jesus say to the women to say to them? That they are not to be afraid. And to tell my brothers to go ahead to Galilee and there I'll see them. Do you see Christ's compassion and love?

The risen Christ saying to those who they were at the end had left him, go and I will meet them. Friends, come to this Lord Jesus. Whoever you are, you will find grace and compassion. Fall at his feet in worship. He is the risen king for us to glorify and praise. But note, there is another response. Again, there is opposition. Jesus not only opposed to be crucified and in the tomb, but continuing to be opposed even though he is alive. Verses 11 to 15, the guards go and tell the chief priest what happens and do the chief priest fall down in worship? Oh, it is all true. No, they lie. They bribe the guards to tell a lie that the disciples came and stole the body. It is an amazing thing. What a bad day at work for these soldiers, right? You had one job. They cannot do it. But rather than falling at Jesus' feet, they lie and deceive. The first great lie about the resurrection. I've also heard this guard's kind of lie about this tomb called the kind of anti-great commission. Next week, we're going to come to the great commission in Matthew 28, 16 to 20, where Jesus says, go and tell the nations about Jesus.

Why? Off the back of what? The resurrection. Because he's alive. But if you like, this is kind of the anti-great commission, the devil's version. We all spread rumors that he's not alive. Rumors which, verse 15, circulated till Matthew's day. And indeed, even down to this day, we might, people would say these things. But stolen body? Really? No, the empty tomb tells us it's a lie. Jesus is alive. His body was not stolen. He rose again from the dead. To believe that this dejected, dispersed group of disciples could pull off stealing Jesus' body from this group of soldiers is unbelievable. Indeed, it is way more unbelievable than the truth and the good news that Jesus rose again from the dead. But this is the best the devil's got left. Even the defeated devil is still letting out a hiss. So no, the empty tomb preaches. Jesus is alive. Death is dead. Love has won. Christ has conquered. So just two brief applications as we close. We've seen them as we've gone through already, but two brief applications.

Number one, I think we are, as we continue out with this gospel, this gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, as we continue to preach Christ crucified, dead, buried, raised, risen, ascended, as we continue to preach that, we can expect opposition. As we live for the risen Jesus, as we speak of the risen Lord Jesus, we must expect opposition. In Jesus' life, he was opposed. In his trial, he was opposed. On the cross, in his tomb, and now in his resurrection, people will lie and falsify the news to stop it spreading.

[28 : 24] I read this past week that Canada are looking to pass legislation, making even kind of reading parts of the Bible illegal. Shocking, but not surprising. Jesus was opposed in life, in the grave, in his resurrection, and will continue to be till he comes. But here's the thing. The cross disarmed the rulers and authorities that robbed them of their power. The devil is defeated. He is a retreating enemy who holds no power over Christ's people. For what can separate us from the love of God? Right? Nothing.

Because Jesus rose from the dead. So, dear friends, as you go out and share this message at school, and at work, and in university, in your homes, on your streets, wherever it is, we can expect opposition.

But we do know the victory is Christ's. And so, we fix our eyes on him and keep standing in the gospel of Christ. But second, and we've seen this already, our great response to all this is to worship the risen Lord Jesus. The first readers of Matthew, I think, would read this, and it would fill them with steel, but also hope and comfort. The Messiah has come. The King has come. He is alive. And it is him that we worship. Dear friends, the King has come. He is risen, and he is making all things new.

And surely then, our only fitting response is to praise and exalt and rejoice and bow to this King. May it be true of us now, and indeed always. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you so much that the empty tomb speaks, that you are alive, and that if we are united to you, we are free. You are the great high priest who offered up your life for us, and now lives to ever intercede for us in glory. And so, we pray that ever before our eyes and in our hearts and in our minds, we would rejoice and exalt in you and in you alone. For salvation and life is only found in you, the resurrection and the life. So, help us, we ask, by your Holy Spirit in all our days, in days of joy and great fruitfulness, in days of opposition and when it's hard, give us boldness to stand in, to trust in, to proclaim, and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ as our only hope in life and

death, knowing that one day he will return. We will see him face to face, face to face, and he will make all things new. We worship you, and we praise you, our great Savior. Amen.
[31 : 21] Well, we turn now to this meal set before us, to this table of the Lord Jesus, in which the gospel