

## Celebrating an Empty Tomb

*Presented by Mary Lowman*

Air Dates: April 14 - 18, 2025

### Day One

Which is the most important event for Christians to celebrate: Jesus' birth or Jesus' resurrection? There's no reason to choose between the two. Celebrating Christmas is joyful, and it causes us to remember Jesus chose to come to earth, as a babe taking on human flesh, in order to become our Savior.

However, there is no question the most important event for Christians to celebrate is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Apostle Paul made that clear to the doubting people of Corinth. He wrote:

*But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins (1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 17).*

Have you ever wondered why almost anybody will celebrate Christmas, the birth of the Christ child, but celebrating the resurrection is not so universally accepted? Let's face it: It does strain credulity and sound quite brazen to say you believe someone was raised from the dead.

Some time ago I was explaining to some international students from China what Christians believe. These young women had no religious background whatsoever. So, I told them we believe in the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus, and I explained why both are so vital to our faith. As I was speaking to them, I thought to myself how absolutely unreal—perhaps even absurd—it must have seemed to these young women. Did I actually believe Jesus was buried in a tomb, but after three days, he left that tomb empty on his own, alive forevermore?

No other religion in the world has a risen savior. No other religion claims their leader or their deity rose from the dead. They worship their graves, in some cases; they memorialize how and where they died. But they don't claim their savior became alive again.

As we come up to the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we need to think again of that empty tomb. Jesus is the only qualified Savior because he has conquered death. We need to celebrate this glorious truth and tell others about it.

### Day Two

Are you preparing to celebrate the empty tomb this Sunday? As Christians, all our hope is vested in the good news that we serve a risen Savior.

Have you ever thought how depressing it would be to worship a savior who was dead? Death is the enemy; death is the reason we need a savior, to make sure we're ready to die. But how can I be ready to die if the one I worship is dead? What can a dead savior do for me?

The Apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthians, *if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied* (1 Corinthians 15:19). He's saying if Jesus were just a good man who lived for 33 years and then died, why would we put our hope in him? Why would we trust him to bring us to eternal life? *But*, Paul continues, *Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep* (1 Corinthians 15:20).

How do we know Christ is risen from the dead? First, because the Bible makes it abundantly clear he rose bodily, and he now lives in his resurrection body at the right hand of the Father in heaven. But beyond that, there is much evidence for the resurrection.

For example, a scholar of Classics from Auckland University, E. M. Blaiklock, says, "I claim to be a historian. My approach to Classics is historical. And I tell you that the evidence for the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is better authenticated than most of the facts of ancient history."

Obviously, all ancient history we know and believe is based on eyewitnesses from the time who wrote about it. And all four Gospel writers have given us eyewitness accounts that are totally compatible and indisputable.

Another evidence is the disciples, those who saw the risen Christ, were willing to give their lives for him, and they did. They were depressed and defeated when Jesus was crucified; they thought it was over; they were frightened of the leaders. Only a risen Christ, whom they saw, to whom they talked, could invoke such devotion and commitment from them. They knew he was risen.

And personally, we who have been born from above know he is risen, because he has brought new life to us and only a risen Savior could do that! Celebrate the empty tomb! Jesus Christ is risen from the tomb!

### Day Three

For many years, I was privileged to lead groups on a visit to Israel, the Holy Land. The highlight of those days in Israel is the last day when we visit a site in Jerusalem that could well be the place where Jesus was crucified. Next to it, there is a garden with an ancient tomb, dating back to the time of Jesus. There is much evidence to believe this could be the garden where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus and placed it in that tomb.

Each of us goes into that tomb and comes back out, and the word on our lips is always, "It is empty; he is risen!" I always imagine what it must have been like for Mary Magdalene and Peter and John as they discovered the empty tomb. In John 20 we read that Simon Peter went into the tomb, where he saw the strips of linen lying there, *as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen* (John 20:7).

It's an interesting little detail John gives us, and you might wonder why he made sure it was recorded that the cloth was folded up by itself. In order to understand this, you have to understand a little bit about Hebrew tradition of that day. The folded napkin had to do with the master and servant, and every Jewish person knew this tradition. When the servant set the dinner table for the master, he made sure it was exactly the way the master wanted it. The table was furnished perfectly, and then the servant would wait just out of sight, until the master had finished eating. The servant would not dare touch that table, until the master was finished.

When he finished, he would rise from the table, wipe his fingers, his mouth, and his beard and would wad up that napkin and toss it onto the table. The servant would then know to clear the table, for in those days, the wadded napkin meant, "I'm done." But if the master got up from the table, and folded

his napkin, and laid it beside his plate, the servant would not dare touch the table, because the servant knew the folded napkin meant, “I’m not finished yet.” The folded napkin meant, “I’m coming back!”

John is careful to record the napkin was folded, because he knew it would be very meaningful to the disciples! He’s coming back! He’s not dead; he’s alive.

You and I need to be just as thrilled and excited as Peter and John and Mary Magdalene were the day they walked into that empty tomb.

## Day Four

There is no other religion that claims to have a risen savior; Jesus is the only qualified Savior because he conquered death. We worship a risen Savior who gives us victory over death.

I wonder if you could articulate why you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Josh McDowell’s book, *Evidence for the Resurrection*<sup>1</sup>, goes into this in great detail. Here are some of the facts that prove the resurrection:

### #1: The broken Roman seal

Because the religious leaders were afraid the disciples would steal the body and claim Jesus was risen, they asked Pilate to put the seal of the Roman Empire on the tomb. The consequences of breaking that seal would give pause to anyone who might try to steal the body, because that would have been a crime punishable by death. The disciples were not a courageous body of men at this time. They were hiding from authorities after fleeing from the Garden of Gethsemane. There’s no way they would have tried to steal Jesus’ body, and they certainly would have been too frightened to break the Roman seal.

### #2: The large stone was moved

All the Gospel writers mention the huge stone in front of the tomb had been moved. John said it was removed from the entrance. Luke and Mark say it was rolled away from the tomb; Matthew records an angel from heaven came down and rolled back the stone. This stone weighed one and a half to two tons, so it would take several very strong men to roll it even a few inches. McDowell writes, “Now, I ask you, if the disciples had wanted to come in, tiptoe around the sleeping guards, and then roll the stone over and steal Jesus’ body, how could they have done that without the guards’ awareness?”

### #3: The behavior of the disciples

Consider once the disciples knew Jesus was raised from the dead, and they were empowered by the Holy Spirit, they didn’t go to some faraway place to preach the gospel. They went right back to Jerusalem, where, if what they were teaching was false, it would be most evident. That would be the last place they’d want to go if they had not seen the risen Christ and knew the tomb was empty. They preached the gospel of the resurrected Christ in Jerusalem, and there was no doubt Jesus had risen.

I encourage you to meditate on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, see that empty tomb, and celebrate the risen Savior.

## Day Five

I wonder why we call it Good Friday? For those of us who have placed our trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior, celebrating his resurrection is of utmost importance to us. Our salvation rests on the fact that Christ is risen indeed. Yet, why we would call this Friday a “good” day?

---

<sup>1</sup> McDowell, J., & McDowell, S. (2008). *Evidence for the Resurrection: What it means for Your Relationship with God*. Baker Publishing Group.

That day is a good day if you have an eternal perspective. The day Jesus died is the Day of Atonement, when once and for all, Jesus became our sacrifice, shedding his blood, paying the debt we owe, so we could be forgiven of our sins and made righteous in Jesus.

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).*

That is what took place as Jesus was crucified. Therefore, he had to die in order to become a perfect sacrifice that would pay for our sins. As a result, we have the opportunity to become the righteousness of God, so that God sees us in Christ, redeemed and righteous before him.

It's a Good Friday for us because Jesus gave his all on that day. However, without Resurrection Sunday, this Friday would not be good. It is because of the resurrection we can call this Good Friday—the day Jesus paid it all for us. The price he paid—bearing all our sin and being separated from his Father—was far greater than the agony of the crucifixion, as terrible as that was. And he endured it for you, declaring as he died, *It is finished*. He did it all so you and I could be assured of eternity with him.