



# The Empty Tomb

*Why Jesus Matters*

Patrick J. Griffiths



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## **An Introduction**

Christianity is bound by two non-negotiable truths, both of which are miraculous in nature. First, that God would become man and die through an incarnation and secondly, that this same God would arise from the dead in a powerful and public resurrection. Miracles override finite explanation. They are non-repeatable acts of God whereby He makes Himself known.

Resurrection truth is not exclusively Christian, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ, its founder, is. No other world religion makes such claim about their founder.

Despite our efforts to keep him out, God intrudes. The life of Jesus is bracketed by two impossibilities: a virgin's womb and an empty tomb. Jesus entered our world through a door marked "No Entrance" and left through a door marked "No Exit."<sup>1</sup>

The last act and final triumph of the Son is seen in His resurrection from the dead on the third day.

Resurrection . . . one word and everything changes. In this one word, God reinstates hope. There can be no doubt as to the overwhelming sense of bewilderment and confusion present at the empty, EMPTY tomb. There is absolutely no way of explaining it away or dismissing it as the outcome of some radical fringe. Without each element within the *Story*, its “Good News” is sterile. It is the resurrection, HIS RESURRECTION, which punctuates the atonement with an exclamation point.

Here is the zenith of God’s *Story*. It is the summit, the pinnacle, the peak, the apex of God’s promises and pictures. All that would capture our souls and rob from us breathe pale in comparison to this moment in time. Whatever sits in second place limps against this crowning moment in the

greatest *Story* ever told. Everything in the *Story* is from Him, through Him and for Him. This is it.

Our problem is in the failure to remember. We simply forget to remember THE STORY. God intentionally weaves every aspect of the *Story* into the woof and fabric so that He alone receives all the glory and praise. O, how wonderful our God is who so wisely and carefully places each of the pieces into the whole.

What you are about to read is the *Story* of God's victory over sin and death. The beauty of His victory is His willingness to do what was necessary to win joy for you.

There are two fundamental questions each of the four Gospels confront us with, "**Is Jesus who He claimed to be**" and "**Did Jesus do what He said would be done?**" He promised much. Did He deliver? His physical resurrection from the grave validates His voluntary and substitutionary death. What began on Palm Sunday, He

finished on Resurrection Sunday. The cosmic and crucified King is now conquering.

**Have you ever tried to make a bad cup of coffee better?** I can drink my coffee black, but for the most part I use cream and Stevia in my coffee. Recently I was at a fast food restaurant and I put in my cream and Stevia, but it was not working for me at all. I tried to fix it, and it did not get any better. In fact, I only made it worse. At some point in the process, I simply had to give up and start over.

This idea is as old as the Garden with Adam and Eve. When they sinned against God, they sought to “fix” the relationship by the work of their own hands. All they did was make it worse. It was not until God confronted them and they accepted His provision for their brokenness that the only acceptable solution to the problem surfaced.

This is how many of us have found



ourselves and perhaps you find yourself. You know something is wrong and you try to fix it. You go to church, you attempt to be kind to people, you believe in God, but everything still seems broken.

The resurrection of Jesus from the grave is God's response to humanity's brokenness. His resurrection tells us to give up and accept God's provision. In His resurrection from the grave, Jesus began to reverse the effects of Garden curse. Our desire is to note how the Gospel of Luke lays out for us the power of the gospel to fix what is broken.

## Part 1 - The Tomb

### JESUS reigns over sin and death

Read Luke 23:50-24:6

Our text makes it clear Jesus died and was buried. **It also makes it clear He is no longer in the tomb.** There are several elements moving the *Story* forward.

First, our text speaks of a Pharisee named **Joseph**. Joseph is from Arimathea (vv. 50, 51). He is noted as a righteous ruler (A member of the Council – He is part of the Sanhedrin). He is a believing Jew and he is waiting for the kingdom of God. He makes an emboldened appeal (v. 52). His love for Jesus and the purpose of God would not be denied. He offered his own burial site. It was an unsoiled tomb (v. 53).

Joseph of Arimathea was a man of means and used his resources to address the body of Jesus.

Secondly, through the account there are **time markers** (vv. 54, 55 [cf. 22:1, 7, 14-20, 34, 66]) that enable us to place the crucifixion and resurrection in proper sequence. Jesus was crucified and then rose again on the third day.

The third, and dominate idea is the **Empty Tomb** (24:1-9). Just as the author goes to great lengths to assure us of a death and burial, so also the same author goes to great lengths to assure us of an empty tomb. The empty tomb makes two statements. Jesus is alive (vv. 5, 6a) and Jesus keeps His Word (vv. 6b-7).

Jesus has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. Let us for a moment consider our own brokenness.

If we are familiar with the biblical *Story*, we know something is irrevocably broken.

- We have a debt we cannot pay.
- We have a transgression we cannot conquer.
- We have a verdict we cannot satisfy.
- We have an accusation we cannot answer.
- We have a burden we cannot carry.
- We have a stain we cannot clean.
- We have a chasm we cannot cross.
- We have a record we cannot expunge.
- We have a past we cannot shake.

Then we encounter the living, conquering King. Jesus has lifted the curse.

- Jesus paid our debt [Redemption].
- Jesus conquered our transgressions [Forgiveness].
- Jesus satisfied the verdict against us [Propitiation].
- Jesus answered our accuser [Justification].
- Jesus carries our burden [Blamelessness].
- Jesus cleanses us of all our unrighteousness [Imputation].
- Jesus brings peace to our warring soul [Reconciliation].
- Jesus pardons us of all our criminal records [Identity].
- Jesus brings us into His family and makes us His fellow heir [Adoption].

Friend, there is an empty tomb in Jerusalem.  
Jesus has lifted the curse.

However, our text has an inclusion that is  
unique and is to catch our attention.

## **Part 2 - The Women**

### **JESUS redeems Men AND Women**

Read Luke 23:55-24:10, 21-24

Their hearts were crushed at the brutality of the previous days. Yet they came out of full devotion to care for His broken body.

The shock of the moment cannot be overestimated. Here is one of *The Story's* unexpected surprises. We expect the worse but find hope and grace. The stone is removed, the tomb empty, and a divine messenger invites us with words of comfort and expectancy. From this deliberately placed shaft of divine light, comes the message.

“The women in the Gospel narratives are the first people to find the tomb of Jesus empty. Moreover, they are the only witnesses to the empty tomb who had seen Jesus buried and therefore could vouch for the fact that the

empty tomb really was the tomb in which Jesus' body had been laid two days before. According to two of the Gospels, the women were also the first to meet the risen Lord. The argument you will have heard is that, since women's testimony in the ancient world, including especially Jewish Palestine, was widely regarded as unreliable and untrustworthy, this role of the women in the Easter events is unlikely to have been invented."<sup>2</sup>

“Luke is living in a Greco-Roman cultural world, where there are plenty of debates about whether women even have the capacity to learn at all and whether they can properly hold a job like, say, philosopher. It's pretty easy to see which side Luke seems to have come down on. But let's not get ahead of ourselves; this isn't the stuff of Women's Lib. Luke is not re-writing the cultural expectations men hold about women or the cultural roles men assign to women. The trick is to tease out just how far Luke goes without losing sight of the fact

that he's still working within the confines of a very male-centered world."<sup>3</sup>

Thirteen times Luke speaks of the women in the life of Jesus and at His death and resurrection (Luke 23:27, 49, 55; 24:5, 10, 22, 24).

- <sup>1</sup> Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, <sup>2</sup> **and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses**: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, <sup>3</sup> and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means. (Luke 8:1-3)
- And following Him was a large crowd of the people, **and of women** who were mourning and lamenting Him. (Luke 23:27)
- And all His acquaintances and **the women** who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things. (Luke 23:49)



- Now **the women** who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. (Luke 23:55)
- and as **the women** were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead?” (Luke 24:5)
- Now **they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles.** (Luke 24:10)
- <sup>22</sup> “**But also some women among us amazed us.** When they were at the tomb early in the morning, <sup>23</sup> and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. <sup>24</sup> Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and **found it just exactly as the women also had said;** but Him they did not see.” (Luke 24:22-24)

We see this same emphasis in . . .

- Luke 1:7 where a barren and childless Elizabeth gives birth to the Messiah’s forerunner, John the Baptizer.

- Luke 1:26 where a Virgin Mary becomes the honored vessel in which the Messiah would come forth.
- Luke 2:36 where the prophetess Anna declares to her listeners the birth of the Christ child.
- Luke 7:11-17 where Jesus raises a widow's dead son.
- Luke 7:36-50 where a woman who is a sinner anoints Jesus' feet with oil.
- Luke 8:40-56 where Jesus heals the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus.
- Luke 8:43-48 where Jesus heals the woman who was hemorrhaging for twelve years.
- Luke 10:38-42 where Mary sits at the feet of Jesus as a student would sit at the feet of a Rabbi.
- Luke 21:1-4 where Jesus highlights the widow's sacrificial offering.

Genesis 1 and 2 establishes the equality of male and female without abdicating the role of each in the relationship.

- <sup>27</sup> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. <sup>28</sup> God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Gen. 1:27, 28)

Sin, however, will destroy the relational harmony once enjoyed. Sin will further complicate and exploit the dynamic between the genders as the years, decades, centuries, and millennia pass. Jesus redeems both men and women.

Everyone accepts the fact that Luke elevates the status of women. The intent of God in this inclusion is to show that **WHAT SIN DESTROYS GOD RESTORES**. God redeems men and women so that all will know that in the church there is “neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, male nor female, but that we are all one IN CHRIST JESUS.”

“The theme of the women of Luke’s Gospel is the grand theme of the whole of the Scriptures: that through the seed born of a woman, after many years of ‘barrenness’ for Israel and the world, eventually would come the conquering of sin and death, and the possibility of miraculous rebirth from the barren womb of the grave to glorious immortality in the Kingdom of God. This is the mercy and grace promised to the fathers; this is the subject of the oath sworn to Abraham.”<sup>4</sup>

The woman’s seed of Genesis 3:15 triumphs over the serpent’s seed. Jesus has lifted the curse. Jesus wins.

Notice the central character in this moving account of His resurrection. It is Mary Magdalene. Both Mark (16:9) and Luke (8:2) describe her as the one from whom seven demons had been cast. Some would seek to argue that she was a woman of ill-repute. I believe it is appropriate and intentional that one who was unclean and separated from

man and God now sits as a devoted attendant to the resurrected Christ.

No matter whom you are or what you have done, Jesus stands ready to embrace you with forgiveness.

## **Part 3 - The Disciples**

### **JESUS Removes Guilt and Shame**

Read Luke 24:11, 12

It is interesting to read the contrast between verses 11 and 12. Why did Peter get up and run to the tomb? Peter's denial of Jesus conquered him (22:54-62). Our text says Peter "wept bitterly" when Jesus "turned and looked at Peter" (v. 61). The idea is that of a violent wailing. His grief bound him. His guilt and shame consumed him. He sat apart from and hid in the darkest recesses of that gathered assembly. His shame was so great; he could not look into the eyes of anyone. He wanted a redo, a second chance. He wanted to prove he was able.

When Jesus joined the two disciples walking to Emmaus and He revealed Himself to them, remember what they said.

- <sup>33</sup> And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered

together the eleven and those who were with them, <sup>34</sup> saying, **“The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.”** (Luke 24:33, 34)

Then he hears something that is too good to be true. Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus conquered Peter’s guilt and shame. **For those of us who think this whole thing is too good to be true, well, it has to be or all is lost.** Our sin is so egregious that we cannot look another individual in the eyes without feeling the weight of our own guilt and shame. What is that sin that is so dark that it bows your head, causes you to avoid eye contact, and makes you think God can never love you? Friend, Jesus removes all of your guilt and shame. The Scripture tells us there is one who will forgive us of all our transgressions. We are told, not just in part but the whole is nailed to His cross and we bear it no more.

**While others consider such thinking as nonsense, we get up and run to the empty tomb. Jesus has conquered our guilt and**

**shame once for all. He has placed on us His righteousness, so that we can now stand before the Father without guilt and shame.**

We can come to the Father with full confidence of being received and welcomed. O friends, Jesus' resurrection from the dead assures us we are forgiven and we have a great mediating High Priest who stands before the Father in our behalf and guarantees our reception is warm and inviting.

Jesus has lifted the curse. Jesus wins.

The message we share is succinct and powerful, "He is risen; He is not here; Go and tell" (Mark 16:5-7). After two millennium of development, the Christian church blathers much and muddles greatly when it comes to the pristine simplicity of *The Story's* message; "He is risen; He is not here; Go and tell."

Where else might we find such a message? If we search the world over and expose all



thinking fabricated by the fallen mind of man, where might we find such a message? "He is risen; He is not here." What critic can stand against the resilient strength of *The Story*? Deny its veracity, reject its simplicity, rebel against its authority, shun its beauty, but the integrity of its woof and fiber holds against the onslaught of the rebel's heart. They came to kill life and to extinguish light. Yet from death comes life, and in the darkness, light.

Everything He said would happen has happened. God keeps His word.

In His resurrection from the grave, the Father vindicates His Son and vanquishes His enemies. The fulfillment of God's promises has begun. The end has been achieved, the victory won, the race finished, the structure built, the meal prepared. Now we can sit and dine! His kingdom has come; His will has been done on earth even as it is in heaven. And yet . . . there is more. What we see in shadow still awaits the final and

fullest installment. Even in the dimmest of the moments, shrouded by the veil of shadow, we can declare, glory to the King of kings and Lord of lords! There is a bursting forth of light pushing back the darkness that must be felt and not simply seen or heard. All of our sensory capacities need to feel the pounding and pushing out of glory in this spectacular moment, "He is not here, for He is Risen!"

The death and dying of the previous day are beaten back and swallowed up by the majesty and mystery of this moment. There is an anxiousness felt in the approach of the woman named Mary. The earth "gets it." She trembles (Matt. 27:52; 28:2) at the magnitude of this moment where heaven and earth meet and in wrath mercy is remembered (Hab. 3:2) and the justice of God and the peace of God embrace and exchange the "kiss" of reconciliation (Ps. 85:10).<sup>5</sup>

The pieces of this moment are significant in themselves, but when laid against the larger *Story* of redemption, reconciliation and adoption the force is knee bending and mind blowing. This is where the body quivers and the mind lies in ecstatic ecstasy. There is a shaking taking place, "He is not here, for He is Risen!"

It is impossible for the fear and joy to be contained. Fear, for it is too stupendous to be true, BUT IT IS! "He is not here, for He is Risen!" Like the earth, we tremble at the magnitude and mystery of the *Story's* climax. There is a wrenching, a convulsion of emotion as fear and joy crash together and explode as waves beating against the shores of our life. Can we not feel the cooling mist of God's ocean of activity? It is breathtaking. Sigh deeply. Go limp, let yourself be carried away at the vastness of His mercy and grace. Step back and see the panorama of God.

Oh friend, there is nothing left for us to do but meet Him and receive His embrace (v. 9). Here we are once more in the Garden with God as He walks with us in the cool of the day. It is here. Look no further. Is He not enough? We no longer have to measure up or work to gain favor. We can gladly go about the business. He is arresting. He grabs us and never lets us go. Exhale and breathe the “ah” of relief. This is the Garden, this is the gospel, this is the resurrection from the dead, and this is life in God; come and dine!

Friend, are you weary and heavy laden (Matt. 11:28)? Do you find yourself groping in the darkness and confusion of the moment? Do you feel socially ostracized? Is the entire world shrouded in the white noise of anxious moments? Is every taste one of metallic bland? Is the residue of leftover relationships more bitter than sweet? Is the hole in which you exist crumbling and you find no foothold or hand grab through which you might pull yourself up and out?

Listen carefully to the angelic words, "Come and See." Come . . . and . . . See.

Let this simple invitation be the faint light at the end of a dark tunnel. See that light, hear the whisper and come. Feel the cool water drip onto the parched lips of your soul. Feel the comforting hand take your feeble hand. Feel His cradling arm encircling your limp head. Come . . . and . . . See. Friend, "He is not here, for He is Risen!" God has secured for you a place where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. It is no secret. You need not linger at death's dusty door. Cannonball into the pool of God's delights. This place where you might plunge with childlike joy has a name and His name is Jesus.

As you feel the infusion of life, the staying of thirst's persistent assault, and the satisfying of hunger's call, continue to come and see. Don't stop, worry not about stumbling, just come and see. As you take up your mat and walk, now "go and tell." Friend, you are not

alone in your fallen condition. There is solidarity in the emptiness of life. Tragically, we look to the good for the best, but the good can only point, it can never provide. Many, like us, have fashioned a solution of our own making when we must come to the singular provision of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Let your joy and peace and rest and ease be the message of your life. Cease from your self-effort and striving and rest in the fullness and finality of His. Now, go . . . and . . . tell.

Each year the National Football League culminates with an event called, *The Superbowl*. The winning team receives rings commemorating the win. The NFL pays for the cost of 150 rings to the winning team, at roughly \$5,000 apiece, depending upon the fluctuating cost of gold and diamonds.<sup>6</sup>

Every member of the active roster and the coaching staff get rings. The

entire front office and ownership get rings. Injured Reserve and practice squad get rings if their team decides to give them out to them, most do.<sup>7</sup>

Friend, God won the Super Bowl and even though you might be on the injured reserve or think you're only on the practice squad, you are going to get the ring. His victory is your victory even if it would appear you never played a lick of football.

Others are waiting for this same cool cup of God's joy. Many lie outside groping about in a dark, soundless room. Reach out and speak, "He is not here, for He is Risen!" Let the word of deliverance do its work. He has spoken and it is so.

This is where I found myself almost forty years ago. I thought I was doing everything right, but it was still broke and I finally realized I could not fix it. In fact, I finally gave up. Moreover, in that moment of giving up, I accepted the only solution to my problem. I came before God and accepted

His record of my condition and His solution to my problem.

I knew my problem was my sin and I knew I had sinned against God. I knew I could not fix my problem no matter how good I thought I was. In that moment, I gave up trying to be good and took the gift God extended to me in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

There is a high probability that you have read this short document because you recognize something unique happened at Christmas, on Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. However, perhaps you have never connected the relationship between your brokenness and God's provision. Those two conditions are inseparably linked. You are broken. Moreover, you will remain broken unless and until you accept your brokenness and God's solution to your brokenness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

There are only two questions to ask yourself:



Do you recognize you are a sinner, broken in sin, and completely undone before God? Furthermore, do you recognize Jesus is your only hope in this life and in the life to come?

If today you recognize your own sin and brokenness, and if today you see Jesus as your Savior from sin and death, then we invite you to begin your relationship with Him today. We invite you to talk to God right now. It is never complicated to come. God has made the way easy. Perhaps you can pray the following prayer:

Dear Jesus,

Up to this point, I have lived my life without you. I have tried to fix my own brokenness and instead of getting better, I have made it worse. I know you came to save sinners, to fix my brokenness. I know you died on Good Friday to save me from my sin. I know you rose on the third day to secure the victory for me from my sin and death. Today, I come in faith, believing the

promises. Today, I accept your record, your *Story* as it is written in the Bible. Thank you for saving my soul this day. Thank you for forgiving me of all my transgressions. Thank you for giving me life with you. Amen.

If you have prayed this prayer, then we welcome you into God's family. I would encourage you to make your desires known. Consider writing us a short note telling us of your decision to begin your relationship with God. We can be reached at [office@waukeshabile.org](mailto:office@waukeshabile.org).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Peter Larson in *Prism*, Jan/Feb 2001

<sup>2</sup> <http://richardbauckham.co.uk/uploads/Accessible/The%20Women%20&%20the%20Resurrection.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.shmoop.com/luke-gospel/women-femininity-theme.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.testimony-magazine.org/back/aug2007/benson1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> "This is a remarkable text, and much has been said on it: but there is a beauty in it which, I think, has not been noticed. Mercy and peace are on one side; truth and righteousness on the other. Truth requires righteousness; mercy calls for peace. They meet together on the way; one going to make inquisition for sin, the other to plead for reconciliation. Having met, their differences on certain considerations, not here particularly mentioned, are adjusted; and their mutual claims are blended together in one common interest; on which peace and righteousness immediately embrace. Thus, righteousness is given

to truth, and peace is given to mercy. Now, Where did these meet? In Christ Jesus. When were they reconciled? When he poured out his life on Calvary.”

*Adam Clarke's Commentary* on Psalm 85:10.

<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super\\_Bowl\\_ring](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super_Bowl_ring)

<sup>7</sup> <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20070206065035AAOkfhY>







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