

Sermon Title: **How Does the Empty Tomb Change You?**

Easter 2017

Written: April 15, 2017

Preached: April 16, 2017 at Waterville FBC

Vessel: Russ LaFlamme

Scripture Reference: **John 20:1-18**

Thesis: **When facing the empty tomb of Christ, each of us must decide how the Empty Tomb changes us;**

Purpose: **Today, we explore different ways the empty tomb can impact us.**

Key Word: "Change"

I) Introduction:

Scripture Reading is: **John 20:1-18**

A) The Setting:

- 1) **Today we are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the Grave.**
 - (a) We celebrate the victory over our greatest enemy . . . DEATH.
 - (b) That is the meaning behind the Empty tomb.
- 2) **For if Christ did not rise from the dead, then we have nothing to celebrate.**
 - (a) Nothing in which to place our hope.
 - (b) Nothing that calls us to gather together as a body of believers!
- 3) **Lee Strobel authored a book call "A Case for Christ"**
 - (a) He was the Legal editor for the Chicago Tribune and a self-described ANGRY Atheist.
 - (b) He was the life of the party, a drunk, married to a woman who was also not a believer and they had one daughter.
- 4) **His wife, Leslie had a friend who was a Christian who could see just how miserable and dissatisfied with her life her neighbor was.**
 - (a) Through this friendship and inviting her to come to church, Lee's wife,
 - (b) Leslie, became a Christian.
- 5) **When she told her husband, what had happened,**
 - (a) Lee said that the first word that came to mind for him was DIVORCE!
 - (b) He said, I didn't sign up for this and he even didn't want her to go to church.
- 6) **So, in an effort to save his marriage and his wife from this cult called Christianity,**
 - (a) Lee decided to turn all of his investigative journalism training into disproving the resurrection.
 - (b) That decision took Lee on a 2-year journey to try and discredit all faith believing organizations by attacking the core of their faith . . . the resurrection.
- 7) **Lee looked at evidence for the truth of the Gospel**
 - (a) Evidence of the Roman execution by crucifixion.
 - (b) Early accounts of the events in both religious and secular writings.
 - (c) He examined the claims of an Empty Tomb.
 - (d) Researched reports of eye witness statements.
- 8) **When he had completed his investigation, and laid out the evidence he was faced with a decision of what to do with what it told him.**
 - (a) Lee found more factual evidence existed to believe in Jesus, than speculation to disbelieve.
 - (b) Faced with the evidence Lee Strobel gave his life to Christ and became a Christian and today is serving a church as a teaching pastor of the Woodlands Church in Texas and speaks many times a year around the world.
- 9) **They have made a movie depicting his life story that is in theaters now;**
 - (a) just not in Maine.
 - (b) I would recommend if you get a chance to see it or read his books, you do it.
- 10) **When it comes right down to being a Christian it all hinges on the empty tomb and our belief in the resurrection.**
 - (a) John's Gospel gives an account of the events that depicts how the resurrection effected several people,
 - (b) And that is what I want us to focus on for the next few minutes.

11) **Let us see the story for ourselves if you will turn with me to our scripture reading for today in John 20:1-18.**

B) *Sermon Prayer*

C) (The Hook)

- 1) **Taking first that the death of Christ is not in dispute.**
 - (a) There has never been a recorded case of someone surviving a Roman crucifixion.
 - (b) There have been multiple sources, both Biblical and secular, which wrote about the death of Christ.
 - (c) **If the story had been made up; they would not have said a woman was the first discover the body.**
 - (i) Sorry ladies; however, a first century woman was not considered a reliable witness.
 - (ii) So, if it were made up, they would have said a man discovered the body and not a woman.
- 2) **The tomb was sealed and guarded by Roman guards who were at threat of losing their life if someone were able to steal the body.**
 - (a) Secular writing show than an effort was made to find the body searching Jerusalem.
 - (b) If the tomb were not empty why would they look for the body?
- 3) **It was in Jerusalem at the height of the Passover celebration; not in some remote location where there was not a lot of witnesses.**
 - (a) There were over 515 recorded witnesses who saw Jesus in his resurrected body.
 - (b) There is no such things as mass hallucination.
- 4) **Finally, ALL the disciples were all willing to suffer and die for their faith and proclamation of the resurrection.**
 - (a) IF it were a lie; do you think they would willingly suffer and die for a lie?
 - (b) Bottom line, it takes more faith NOT to BELIEVE based on the evidence.
- 5) **The empty tomb changed the lives of all those who placed their Faith in Jesus.**
 - (a) It strengthened their resolve to live for Christ,
 - (b) It gave them hope of a life beyond this life.
- 6) **For Jesus is the First Fruit of the Resurrection meaning that there will be more to follow.**
 - (a) This is the gift of God who offers eternal life to those who put their faith in Jesus and invite Him to take control of their lives.
 - (b) But it all starts with a belief that the Tomb is empty.
- 7) **So, when we get right down to it, how does the empty tomb change you?**

TS: Let's look briefly at a few of those who were affected by the empty tomb to see if you relate to any of these; first there is . . .

II) Body: (Key Points)

A) Key Point #1: **John, the Believer**

- 1) **John was the youngest of the disciples.**
 - (a) Probably why he could outrun Peter.
 - (b) Jesus obviously took John under his wing.
 - (c) John himself referred to himself "the disciple that Jesus loved."
- 2) **John was the first Apostle to arrive at the tomb.**
 - (a) When John heard the news, he jumped up and ran as fast as he could to get to there.
 - (i) He wanted to believe.
 - (ii) He loved Jesus.
 - (b) **Of all the Apostles, he had been the most faithful.**
 - (i) He had been in the courtyard when Jesus was interrogated and sentenced to die.

- (ii) He had been at the foot of the cross when Jesus hung there dying.
 - (iii) He had willingly taken Jesus' mother into his home to care for her.
 - (c) **But when he got to the tomb, John did not go in.**
 - (i) He looked inside and saw some of what Mary had said was there,
 - (ii) but he stayed outside.
 - (d) **Maybe he stayed outside because he had to catch his breath after the long run.**
 - (i) Maybe he stayed outside because he was afraid.
 - (ii) What if Mary was wrong and Jesus' body had been moved to another part of the grave?
- 2) **John 20:8b-9 tells us that John saw and believed.**
- (a) The empty grave was enough evidence for him that what the women had said was true.
 - (b) Jesus really had risen from the dead!
 - (c) John didn't need to see Jesus to know that Jesus was alive.
 - (d) He had heard Jesus' prophecies about His coming death and resurrection,
 - (e) **and now, here was the empty tomb.**
 - (f) That was enough proof for him.
- 3) **There are many people like John.**
- (a) They believe because there is an empty tomb, and because there is the testimony of Christians through the centuries to the fact that Jesus is alive.
 - (b) They don't need to see to believe.
 - (c) They join with John in being the ones whom Jesus spoke of only a few verses later in this same chapter when He said, "**Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed**" (**John 20:29**)

TS: **John reacted to the empty tomb with belief; but then there was. . . .**

B) Key Point #2: **PETER, THE SKEPTIC**

- 1) **Peter was a little slower than John to arrive at the tomb.**
 - (a) Maybe it was because John was younger than Peter.
 - (b) Or maybe it was because all those years of fishing had given Peter arthritis of the knee and back.
- 2) **Peter wasn't afraid of soldiers so much.**
 - (a) He had whacked off the ear of one of them when they tried to take Jesus.
 - (b) Peter wanted to see Jesus, but there was a part of him that also dreaded the idea.
- 3) **The last time that he had looked into the eyes of Jesus was just after Peter had denied Him.**
 - (a) If Peter saw Jesus, he knew he was going to be confronted with his sin and guilt.
 - (b) Was he sure that he could handle that?
- 4) **Peter's vision was clouded by the pain that he felt over his past.**
 - (a) He wanted Jesus to be alive,
 - (b) But he didn't know how he was going to be able to face Him.
- 5) **Maybe there are people here like that today.**
 - (a) You want to believe, but there's just too much history.
 - (b) You've got too much pain
 - (c) You find it is just too difficult to believe that Jesus' resurrection could wipe away all that pain.
- 6) **Well, let me tell you something.**
 - (a) Jesus came to forgive,
 - (b) And Jesus came to heal.
- 7) **Peter went in and examined the evidence for himself.**
 - (a) He saw the linen that wrapped the body of Jesus and the piece of cloth that had been around His head folded and laid aside.
 - (b) It was enough to prove that SOMETHING had happened there.
 - (c) But that wasn't enough to prove that Jesus was alive.

- 8) **Another account of this event in the book of Luke says that Peter was "wondering to himself what had happened". (Luke 24:12)**
- He was a skeptic.
 - He needed more evidence.
- 9) **Then Peter did one of the most foolish things of his whole life.**
- Verse 10 says "**Then the disciple went back to their homes,**"
 - Something as important as this, and Peter left without even coming to a conclusion as to what had happened.
- 10) **Maybe Peter wanted to go home and just try and understand what it all meant?**
- Maybe Peter just wanted to retreat to the comfort of his own family?
 - This had been an extremely traumatic event in the life of Peter and he just needed time to let it sink in?
- 11) **The sad part is that if . . . Peter had hung around just a little while longer,**
- He would have gotten to experience the same miracle that Mary sees.
 - There wasn't enough evidence for Peter; so, he didn't hang around.
- 12) **Too many people don't have enough evidence to place their faith in Jesus because of the simple reason that they don't hang around long enough.**
- They don't read God's Word enough.
 - They don't spend enough time around God's people.
 - They don't spend enough time in prayer.
 - They get up off their knees, or they walk out of the door of the church just before experiencing the miracle, and so they miss it.
 - They aren't present to see the miracle of God's changing power in the lives of those committed to HIM.
- 13) **Don't leave until you experience a miracle!**
- Expect it! ... Look for it!
 - God can do a miracle in your life when you are ready to let him.

TS: Well Peter walked away from that empty tomb with his heart still heavy and pondering its meaning; the last person we are going to look at is . . .

C) Key Point #3: **MARY, THE BROKEN-HEARTED**

- When Peter and John left, she stayed.**
 - Mary stayed by the tomb and began to weep.
 - Then an angel came to her asking a good question: "**Why are you crying?**"
- You see Mary was depressed:**
 - Psychologists will tell you that depression comes when you have lost something of value to you.
 - The more valuable the person or thing that you lose, the deeper the depression.
 - Mary had lost that which was more valuable to her than anything else – she had lost Jesus.
- To her, ...**
 - **Jesus meant Release** – When she had met Jesus, she was enslaved by 7 demons; Jesus had cast the demons out and freed her.
 - **Jesus meant Peace** –When Jesus released her, Mary found a peace that she had never known.
 - **Jesus meant Forgiveness** – Not only had Jesus released her from her demons, he had released her from her sin; Jesus forgave her for all those choices that led to her demons.
 - **Jesus meant Someone to believe in** – When Jesus was alive, Mary believed in what He was doing; everyone needs SOMEONE to believe in.
 - **Jesus meant Leadership** – Mary was lost without Jesus having given her life to Jesus; His life had given hers meaning; **now that He was gone**, she did know what to do or what to believe in.
- Believing all that was now gone; Mary cried...she just sat there weeping.**

- (a) And that is when a miracle happened; Jesus appeared to Mary.
 - (b) Seeing the Lord – that’s what Mary wanted more than anything else, and she wanted it more than anyone else did.
 - (c) Mary was at the crucifixion, there His death, at His Burial, and now was waiting at the tomb.
- 5) **The only thing that pulled her away was the Sabbath.**
- (a) But as soon as the Sabbath was over, she was back at Jesus’ side again.
 - (b) Mary wanted to see Jesus.
 - (c) And so, Mary got her desire as she testified, **“I have seen the Lord.”**

TS: **But how has the empty tomb changed you?**

II) Conclusion (Life Application)

A) **All of these three witnesses here experienced the empty tomb.**

- 1) All three of them were told what happened that day – Mary had been told by the angels, and Peter and John had been told by the other women.
- 2) All three saw the same tomb and examined the same evidence, and all three had different reactions.
- 3) **If you are like John, you see the empty tomb and believe.**
 - (a) Jesus says that you are blessed for you rejoice that Jesus is alive.
 - (b) It means that you will live with Him for all eternity.
- 4) **If you are like Peter.**
 - (a) You see the empty tomb and you don’t know what to believe.
 - (b) There’s something going on, but you don’t know what.
 - (c) You say, *“I don’t understand all this religion stuff. I don’t understand why people would willingly get up every Sunday morning, give up their sleep and free time and come to church.”*
 - (d) **There is only one way that you will ever understand.**
 - (i) Stick around.
 - (ii) Come back again and again until you experience the miracle of your own changed life.
- 5) **And If you are like Mary.**
 - (a) You see the empty tomb, you see the change in people’s lives and you think that there has got to be some practical explanation of what has happened.
 - (b) Mary didn’t believe either for she thought the guards or the caretaker had taken the body of Jesus.
 - (c) BUT . . . she hung around long enough to have her questions answered and her faith grown.

B) **Maybe that’s you.**

- 1) Either you’re not quite sure about what happened on that day, or more likely, you’re not sure **HOW** what happened on that day impacts your life on this day.
- 2) You ask, *“What does it all mean? Or, what does it all mean to me?”*
- 3) **Since Jesus is alive, Jesus can be to you all those things that Mary thought she had lost – release, peace, forgiveness, a sense of purpose and leadership.**
- 4) Maybe you are already a believer in Jesus today.
- 5) Maybe you have had your prayers answered, and today, like Mary, you have seen Jesus.
- 6) Or maybe you want to meet Jesus and become a believer yourself?
- 7) If that’s you, then before you leave here today come and let me pray with you.
- 8) **But if you’re not ready to believe today, at least do this....hang around.**
 - (a) Come back next Sunday, and the next, and the next.
 - (b) Come back until you experience Jesus.
 - (c) Investigate Jesus like Lee Strobel who came to experience Jesus for himself.
 - (d) But remember, it started when he said I believe the tomb is empty and Jesus is real and gave his life to the Master.

III) Invitation: **Let us Pray!**