

**+ Luke 24:1-12 + Discover Hope in the Empty Tomb! +**  
**+ The Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Day + 4 April 2010 +**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

When you think of Easter, what comes to mind? Eggs? Lilies? Baskets? Spring? Soaring hymns and songs of praise? Alleluias? Joy? Victory? Life? Salvation? Hope? A tomb? Jesus? Of all the things that come to mind when you think of Easter, I'm guessing one thing that doesn't come to mind is the word "empty". Easter is usually one of the fullest days of the year with fanfares, flowers, food, and family, but yet when you take a closer look at Luke's account of the first Easter, there's a lot of "empty" there. Hearts empty with grief over the empty spot at the Passover table and with the emptiness of broken dreams. Minds empty of hope and trust and empty with fear and cynicism. Seeing all that emptiness only reminds us of the emptiness we have in our own lives, whether at the loss of a loved one, because of promises broken, or hopelessness in our lives.

Still in the midst of all that emptiness, you can't miss the BIG "empty". You see, amidst the empty hearts and hopes, there's a tomb left "empty" of its Occupant, Christ Jesus our Lord, who by that emptiness fills empty hearts then and now with hope unlike any other. Friends, let us consider the words of Luke 24 and **DISCOVER HOPE IN THE EMPTY TOMB!**

It was very early on that chilly spring morning. By firelight, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women who had followed Jesus quietly packed up the large packages of spices and jars of perfumes they had prepared hours earlier. On Friday, the Teacher had given up his life after brutal beatings and a bloody crucifixion. The women had watched two of Jesus' followers take down his body from the cross, hurriedly prepare the body with as many spices and linen cloths as they could, and place it within a newly cut tomb before the special Passover Sabbath.

The women had watched the two men roll a heavy stone in front of the entrance. The job would have to be finished after the Sabbath ended on Saturday night, and the women intended to do just that as one last act of love for their dead Lord. Jesus' death had left them empty with grief and empty of hope. They expected to find a tomb empty of life in a beautiful garden empty of life. They pulled their robes tightly around them and began the long, dark walk out to the cemetery. Dawn began to break.

On their way to the tomb, they felt the ground tremble, but nothing prepared them for what they found in the cemetery. ***"They found the stone rolled away from the tomb..."*** Shock covered their faces. They tried to recount to themselves what they had seen—the body placed in the tomb and the heavy stone rolled in front of the entrance. They had expected to find the body of their Lord, but the stone had been discarded like a pebble.

"What happened here?", they wondered. Swallowing their growing fear, the women entered the tomb. ***"When they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."*** Jesus' body should've been there, but only his grave clothes remained. Their eyes did not deceive them. Jesus' lifeless body had occupied this tomb. Someone must've done taken his body! How quickly they had forgotten who Jesus really was! How they had forgotten his very real promise that he would leave his tomb empty three days after his death! Their hearts remained empty with grief and hopelessness.

***"While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them."*** First it was the shock of finding the stone rolled away. Then it was the shock of finding the tomb empty...and then two angels appeared. Suddenly this empty tomb wasn't so empty anymore! The women in shock and fear immediately fell to the ground, but the angels had a message that changed everything. ***"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"*** ***"Then they remembered his words."*** Suddenly the emptiness in their hearts disappeared. The grief, the hopelessness, the fear, all were gone with the realization that Jesus had fulfilled his promises! Their hearts were now empty of grief and filled with joy and hope because of an empty tomb.

The women ran from that place to tell the fearful disciples, ***"but they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."*** The apostles' hearts and minds were still empty with grief and hopelessness and cynicism. They didn't believe the women, but even so, Peter ***"ran to the tomb"*** with the younger disciple, John. Peter rushed into the tomb and ***"bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves...He went away, wondering to himself what had happened."*** Soon the risen Christ would make even their emptiness disappear, when he would appear to them that night behind locked doors.

How often aren't you and I like those grieving women or the cynical disciples? Every one of us has some kind of emptiness in our lives. Maybe it's the emptiness of grief for the one who won't be at the Easter dinner table. Maybe it's the emptiness of a lifetime of guilt for some act of selfishness that still cuts to the core, for broken promises and hurtful actions, for foolish words and indecent thoughts. Maybe it's the emptiness of hopelessness or worry or fear over your health or the health of a loved one, over your job or your financial situation, over the reality of your own death or simply the uncertainty of the future. Maybe it's the emptiness of cynicism about life in general or even about your Lord because he hasn't done what you expected him to do. Maybe it's simply the emptiness of not having Christ and his promises in your life.

There was a time when there was no emptiness in our world and no need for an empty tomb. Our first parents, Adam and Eve had a perfect, full-of-love relationship with their gracious God, but they chose to disobey him. They not only brought the emptiness of sin, but also the ultimate emptiness of death into our world—that terrifying enemy that robs us of loved ones and robs us of life, as Paul once wrote to the Romans (5:12), ***“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men because all sinned...”*** Since then, tombs have filled and emptiness has remained behind until Jesus emptied his tomb.

There in Christ's empty tomb we discover hope, not empty promises, not empty dreams, not empty actions. We discover hope because that empty tomb is our Savior's guarantee that all his promises are fulfilled. There in that empty tomb we find hope provided by the Son of God, who willingly and lovingly left his heavenly throne to take our place in life and in death. The sinless Son of God never deserved God's wrath and punishment, because he was holy through and through. Still he knew how guilt and hopelessness, worry and fear and shame leave us empty and how death leaves us empty of life. With indescribable love, Jesus faced them all head on and made the ultimate sacrifice as our Substitute on the cross filling the grave we deserved with his own holy body. Now the tomb stands empty, because Jesus lives!

Yes, Jesus lives! Let me say it again! Jesus lives! Earlier we sang, ***“Christ Jesus, God's own Son, came down, his people to deliver; Destroying sin, he took the crown from death's pale brow forever. Stripped of pow'r, no more it reigns; an empty form alone remains; its sting is lost forever.”*** (*Christian Worship Supplement #720:3*) Christ conquered death by leaving his tomb empty. He left sin and death empty of all their power over us. That good news of victory wipes away all that sin and death to fill you with the one thing you can't find anywhere else—hope in a living Savior. ***“He is not here; he has risen!”***

The good news of Jesus' empty tomb gives us hope in a cynical, hopeless world. Peer into that empty tomb and find the answer for the emptiness of your grief as the Savior provides you with the comfort of a blessed reunion with your loved ones in the Lord and the hope of your own resurrection. Peer into that tomb and find the answer to the emptiness of your guilt as the Savior provides you with the sure hope of forgiveness for every single sin, paid by his blood on a cross and guaranteed in his empty tomb. Peer into that tomb and find the answer to the emptiness of your hopelessness, your fear, your worry, your uncertainty. After all, if Christ fulfilled his greatest promise, will he not also keep all the others for you? Peer into that tomb and find the answer to the empty cynicism that comes so easy in a hopeless world as the risen Christ gives you every reason to rejoice in his grace in this life and with the hope of eternal life. Peer into the tomb and find what's missing in your life—a living Savior who himself fills the emptiness inside.

Dear friends, rejoice in the “empty” of Easter! The tomb is empty and will nevermore be full. The victory is yours through your Lord Jesus Christ! Because he lives, you will too. Someday your tomb will be empty and your lifeless body will be filled with new life. Someday the risen Christ will come in glory to bring you and all believers to join him in the perfect fullness of the glories of heaven. Oh, how that good news fills our hearts with hope now and always! Christ is risen from the dead just as he promised. Let me say it again. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.