

An Empty Tomb Fills Us With Faith and Hope

John 20:1-10, Easter Sunday

April 8, 2007

Beloved of the Lord....He's risen, He's risen, Christ Jesus the Lord! That was our opening hymn this morning and what a glorious hymn it is! We are gathered together on this blessed Easter Day as a Christian congregation, who has finished the sad season of Lent, and now our voices triumphantly sing the praises of our Crucified yet Risen Savior, Christ Jesus the Lord! His empty tomb fills our hearts with faith and hope! And this hope we are not ashamed of, for the God of Hope fills us with all joy and peace and believing. We have hope, joy, and peace for Jesus has plainly told us, "Because I live, ye shall live also." And He does live....He lives and reigns through all eternity! "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live!"

But in this world, our world, the majority of people do not have the same joy and hope that we have. Millions upon millions of souls do not believe in the resurrection of Christ at all! Many couldn't care less! In the empty minds and hearts of millions, the tomb which held Christ is still full! And because they do not believe in the resurrection of Christ, God is a great mystery to them. They do not know the Lord by faith. And truly wherever you find a heart that does not believe in the resurrection of Christ, there you will also find a heart that is empty, without hope, without faith. There can be no spiritual joy in the heart that does not know Christ.

And so today let us learn the difference between two kinds of people: those who believe the tomb of Christ is empty because He lives, and those who believe the tomb of Christ is still full.

I. The world that loves sin teaches all that His tomb is still full. It was Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus who took the body of Jesus down from the cross. Lovingly they wrapped His lifeless body in fine linen with spices. Joseph took the body of Jesus and "laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone" covering the entrance. It wasn't long after this that the Pharisees appeared before Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again! Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away." These Pharisees called Jesus a deceiver! They knew well that Jesus had said He would rise again on the third day. And they didn't want anybody to believe that Jesus rose from the dead! Guards were then placed at the tomb, and they even sealed the tomb with wax and the governors stamp. If anyone tried to break in, they would know!

These Pharisees represent all those today who believe the tomb of Jesus is still full. Every year near Easter, if you watch the news, you'll notice "new and startling

evidence" that is supposed to prove that Jesus is still buried. Last year there was the Davinci Code. This year a movie director has done a documentary with "DNA evidence". Like the Pharisees in Jesus day, they don't want anyone to believe that Jesus rose from the dead! Often people believe these lies and even fall from faith trusting "science falsely so called" rather than God's Word! What will happen to such blasphemous people who utter Satan's old lies every Easter season? God says in Revelation 21:8 "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, AND ALL LIARS, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." The Pharisees of the past and present will suffer damnation if they do not repent and receive Christ into the heart by faith. Believing that the tomb of Christ is still full, their hearts are still empty.

But how is it that Christ is kept out of such hearts? In Matthew six Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other." It is the love of sin which keeps Christ out of the heart. We either serve Christ or we serve sin. If we love sin more than Christ, we do not love Christ at all. Consider the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They had no problem despising the sins of other people. They once caught a woman in the act of adultery and they had no trouble casting her down at the feet of Jesus. They could see her sin and they were anxious to stone her. But what the Pharisees could not see, what they were completely blind to, was their own sin. They thought themselves righteous, good, very worthy of heaven. Yet Jesus said to them, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." Jesus then said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

Brethren, who is the Pharisee of our modern day? Is it only those who deny the resurrection of Christ? Is it only those who don't go to church on Sunday? Is it only those who commit adultery, or fornication, or theft? Isn't the Pharisee which Jesus condemns the person which we see in the mirror every morning? Isn't the Pharisee the old man living in our heart? The Bible says, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." Christ, the Living Word, cannot live in any heart which refuses to admit its own sin! Christ, the Living Word, can not nor will not live in the proud heart which refuses to confess that it is a proud heart! Though Christ earnestly desired to save the Pharisees from hellfire, though He pointed out that they were no better than the adulterous woman, their pride, their love for sin kept God out of their heart. Jesus therefore said to them, "I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins:

whither I go, ye cannot come." The Pharisees were so filled with love for themselves and their own sins, that there was no room for Christ to enter. Anyone who loves their sins refusing to repent, such people will die in their sins.

II. His empty tomb gives us hope! But beloved of the Lord, I trust that we have come to know and repent of our sins...I trust that we realize we too are Pharisees at heart, the Old Adam within us is indeed a Pharisee. Oh how we can thank God that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness". God is able to cleanse us from all sin because "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." On that glorious Easter morning Christ was quickened, made alive, His soul returning to His uncorrupted body. That dead body rose up with life, in triumph over sin and death and the power of the devil! He left that tomb empty, passing through the rock wall in His glorified body! "Behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it." The guards fainted for fear, later telling the Pharisees of the angels and the empty tomb. But the Pharisees still did not repent! They told the guards to lie and say the disciples came and stole the body!

Back at the tomb, after the guards ran off to the city, "when it was yet dark", Mary Magdalene arrives. Seeing the stone rolled away, she assumes someone has stolen the body of her Lord. She runs and tells Peter and John, who then race to the tomb. As all this transpires, the other women arrive and an angel says to them, "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here! for he is risen! as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." After seeing the angels and hearing their words, the hearts of the women are filled with joy and fear at the same time! On their way to see the disciples Jesus appears saying, "All Hail! Fear not!" There is the Living Son of God before their eyes! They fall down at His feet and worship Him!

Not long after these women leave the tomb, Peter and John reach the tomb. Though John is first, Peter enters the tomb first, finding the linens which once wrapped Jesus, now neatly folded. This is proof that the body of Jesus was not stolen. What grave-robber would unwrap and fold linen neatly? The Bible says when John entered the tomb, "He saw, and believed." John believed in the resurrection of Christ before seeing Christ, unlike the others. After all this Mary Magdalene returns to the empty tomb, and Jesus appears calling her "Mary". Mary sees and believes. Jesus is stronger than death! Because He lives, Mary will live also. Jesus knows our names just as He knew Mary's. He knows our sorrows too. And He will comfort us just as He did Mary.

All of these people were witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. Many men, women, and even soldiers knew of His resurrection. After these events, Jesus repeatedly appeared to hundreds of believers. The Bible says "he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once!" I Cor. 15 They were all eye witnesses that He who was dead had not arisen! Though they saw with their eyes, they were His disciples because of His Word. Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed. And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Have you been made free by God's Word? Have you been made free by the Gospel? Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to Me." Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Jesus said, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Jesus said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

Can our Lord Jesus Christ make it any clearer? Is there something more that He must say to convince you that He is your salvation, your Savior from sin? Indeed He is not a god of the dead, but of the living. He is the Living God the Breathing God, the Lord of lords who is far stronger than any rock or grave or tomb! He is the God of the living because He rose again the third day, giving life to all who follow Him! He freely gives His life to us, who were once dead in trespasses and sin. Even now His tomb is empty and one day our tomb will be empty too! That deep and dark and dreadful death that we all fear need not be feared! The power of death can claim no power over the soul that Christ has claimed power over! Our Lord Jesus Christ triumphantly went into that grave by way of the cross and He came out alive and strong and victorious on the other side saying, "O death where is Thy sting, O grave where is Thy victory!"

Beloved of the Lord, because He lives, you will live also! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. His resurrection proves to the world that the Father has accepted the sacrifice of the Son. And when Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life" He means it! When Jesus says, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" He means it. Because He lives, we shall live also. May the knowledge that His tomb is indeed empty, fill our hearts with hope and faith this Easter season! Because He lives, we shall live also. Amen.