

EMPTY THINGS OF EASTER,

Jn.19:38-20:18

- **Intro:** An elderly couple passed away and found themselves at the pearly gates. Peter was there to welcome them. First he showed them their mansion. The man overwhelmed by the sheer luxury of it all asked, "How much does this place cost per night?" Peter replied, "Sir, this is Heaven, it doesn't cost anything." Then Peter took them to the dining room where table upon table was piled high with the most delicious foods you could imagine. Again overwhelmed by the glory of it all the man asked, "How much for the meals?" Peter said, "You forget, this is Heaven, it's free." Peter then took them out back where they saw a fantastically beautiful golf course. As the man stood there open-mouthed Peter said, "Now before you ask, there are no greens fees, this is Heaven, everything is free." The man looked at his wife and said, "You and your confounded bran muffins, I could have been here 10 years ago!"

- You don't have to live long to get discouraged with empty promises.
- Steven Kellet has pointed out that instead of promises full of emptiness, on Easter, God gave us emptiness that is full of promise. So I would like to look at the empty things of Easter and what promises they give us. There are three:

- **1. The empty cross.**

- All through Lent leading up to Easter we had images on the cross to give us visuals of scriptural truths:

- Steadfast Face; reminding us of Jesus determined choice to accomplish our salvation.
- Bent Knee: showing Jesus humble example and call to serve others.
- Vine: showing Christ as our source of life.
- Saving Snake: reminding us that the death of God's son was the killer of death itself, hanging the sin-snake on a pole.
- Hands of God: showing our security in his tender power.
- Tear: showing God's compassion and love for our well-being.

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- Wounded Head: Showing the amazing depth of this love.

But today the cross is empty.

- **A.** When we set up a cross or wear a cross around our necks, and especially in the protestant realm of Christianity, the cross is an empty cross. Now and again there may be one depicting Jesus on it as a reminder of what he did for us. But for the most part we leave our crosses empty. That the cross is empty means that the sacrifice is over. It means that sin has been paid up, paid for, paid off. The empty cross holds the promise that we are forgiven.

- There's a beautiful text about this in the book of Hebrews:

- *“For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” Hebrews 9:24-28, NIV.*

- **B.** To fully understand the empty cross, you and I need to reflect on what the cross represents. The cross is the killing place of sin, so it's our sin, or debts, what we owe that is being killed off on the cross.

- How much do you owe?

- I ran some numbers and figure I've spent about \$100,000 on just education for each of my sons by the time they've finished Christian grade school, high school and college. That's not counting raising them, food,

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clothes, medicine when they got infections, emergency room bills when they had accidents. Bicycles, roller-blades, skate boards, soccer cleats, CDs, nintendo games, haircuts, shoe replacements, birthday presents, turning the heat up because “why is it so cold in here?” cries a winter teen in shorts and a tee shirt.

- Sandi and I have given them literally more than they could ever pay us. And that's nothing compared to what God has given each of us.
- People, no matter where you find them, seem to have an innate sense of fairness. If you give me something, I should give you something. If you take something, you should give me something.
- Well, the Bible asks us “What do you have that you have not been given?” (1Cor.4:7). God has given each day, each sunrise, each mouthful, every sight, every beauty, the sounds, the tastes, the thoughts, the marvels of Planet Earth.
- On top of merely receiving it, we do not even return what he asks: that we love, and live like and with him. That we be thankful. That we do right to others on his behalf. That we don't hoard and do share, and care. And it is that unfairness, the injustice of it/us all that we pile up on a daily basis, more than we could hope to ever balance off if we lived a million years – that he nails to the cross. That he crossed out.
- **C.** Have you ever been to traffic court? Know how they call your name and you go stand in the front of the hushed on-lookers and talk out-loud about your errors while everyone watches? “How do you plea?” the judge asks. And you say “not-guilty.” And do you remember how the judge says something like, “Ok then, you're now on trial. Well, were you exceeding the posted speed limit, or not?” And you know how you go, “Yes your Honor, but I have a good *reason* and...” Bang goes the gavel. “Guilty! Pay the clerk \$200 bucks. Next.” Speaking purely hypothetically, of course...you know?
- Well that's how each one of us is before the Creator.

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- *“For no one can ever be made right in God’s sight by doing what his law commands. For the more we know God’s law, the clearer it becomes that we aren’t obeying it. But now God has shown us a different way of being right in his sight--not by obeying the law but by the way promised in the Scriptures long ago. We are made right in God’s sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done. For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins.” Romans 3:20-24, NLT.*
- Now listen and celebrate. The cross wasn't for you to see how it's done so that you could do it. It wasn't for you to be inspired. It wasn't for you to get a jump-start on your spiritual journey so now you can work the rest of your debt off by being a nice guy or gal in this life or some other place. It was *for you*, period. FOR you. The empty cross means you are *forgiven*. Case dismissed, all charges are dismissed. (sing “Jesus paid it all”)
- The next empty thing of Easter is...
- **2. The Empty Tomb**
- **A.** What does it mean that the tomb was empty? Now, right off the bat we know what some people say. They say the empty tomb means somebody stole Jesus' body. They say his death was faked so as to start a new religion. These are such nonsense we almost don't need to waste the time on them.
 - Take for example the swoon theory: it says that Jesus just passed out cold and that the cool temps of the tomb revived him. He never really died. For real? First of all it's a matter of historical record that when the Romans crucified someone, they died. If they didn't die, then the soldiers on duty would die. If a Roman fell asleep on the job he was lit on fire in a pile of his own belongings. (Kinda kills another theory about the soldiers falling asleep

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while the fishermen from Galilee stole his body.)

- If that were not enough, note verse 39. Do you know how much 75lbs of spices is? If Jesus wasn't dead on the cross, suffocating him like a mummy under nearly half his body weight of chemicals would.
 - A woman wrote J. Vernon McGee: "Our preacher said that on Easter Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed him back to health. What do you think?" McGee replied, "Dear Sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip for thirty-nine heavy strokes. Nail him to a cross. Hang him in the sun for six hours. Run a spear through his heart. Embalm him. Put him in an airless tomb for three days. Then see what happens."
- **B.** No, the empty tomb didn't mean Jesus never died, or that someone stole the body. Probably one Roman soldier could have kept all 12 of the disciples at bay. The empty tomb meant that Jesus was resurrected, that is, he came back from the dead and is alive. What does that mean for you and me today? I'm glad you asked.
 - 1) First of all, if you can beat death you can beat anything. Death is the last enemy. The one thing everyone faces rich or poor, young or old.
 - *"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."* 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, NIV.
- 2) Now notice the term "firstfruits"? Firstfruit means there is second fruit

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coming! That's us! We're the more fruit. The empty tomb means Jesus is alive right now, and that means you and I can be alive right now through him. We're talking more than existing. We're talking really living. Living unhampered by sinful habits. Living unburdened by guilt. Living without animosity between you and people you know but "aren't talking to" or getting along with.

- See, the "sting of death is sin". The empty tomb means sin has been beaten!
 - *"When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, NIV.*
- Now, in Jesus, you CAN! It's like St. Augustine said so long ago.
 - At Creation men were able to sin.
 - At the Fall, we became unable to not sin.
 - At the Cross and Resurrection we become able to not sin.
 - At the Restoration on the Last Day, we will be unable to sin.
- **C.** So, eyes to heaven people! We don't have to be ruled by death and sin. We don't have to live with our demons. We can overpower Satan at Jesus' side. We can do the right thing with his power. Pray. Pray in Jesus name and in his power. Fight the evils and the sins in his name.
- And the final empty thing of Easter...
- **3. The Empty Clothes**
 - A. What do Jesus' empty clothes mean? That he was naked? Oh so much more than that! The empty grave clothes mean Jesus, the real human person, is more than flesh and bone. The empty clothes mean a greater human life is ours

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when we belong to him.

- Lets back up. Jesus wasn't the first person ever to come back to life. His body wasn't the first body to die and resurrect. He himself raised several death people: Lazarus, the son of the widow from Nain, Jairus' daughter. But these people lived again only earthly life. They lived to die again. They had to put their pants on one leg at a time just like us. They got hungry, and sick, and had headaches all again as normal human beings. They were bound by laws of gravity, and limited by average human ability, not able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.
- *But the empty clothes...! The empty clothes tells us there is greater life, spirit life. Greater human life.*
 - The stone wasn't rolled away for Jesus to get out. Stone doesn't stop him. It was rolled away to let the disciples in to see the empty clothes, neatly laying there, clearly taken off or passed through, but certainly no longer needed. No hurried pile of someone stripping a body, and clearly left there which robbers wouldn't have done.
 - Later Jesus appeared in the upper room though the doors were locked! Clearly he didn't need doors anymore. Still, he wasn't a ghost as they thought. He ate fish right there with them to prove it.
- There is spiritual human life. Oh we think we are so knowledgable, we got science, we know what can be and can't be. No we don't. Science only knows what it can observe. It has no power to comment on what it can not observe and measure.
- **B.** So, there is a Jesus, in a body. Not a mere ghost. Not a mere part of a starry Force. Not a mere voice of an ancestor in a collective sacred tree named Eywa. Not a reincarnation as a dog or bird. But a man who clearly neatly left his burial clothes behind.
- That my friends made the apostle John a believer. John actually believed

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before the others who had to see Jesus standing in front of them first.

- Jesus would later appear to more than 500 people. The 12. Mary in the Garden here. But he was more than before. And this person can appear to you too. He is more than we are, but you can know him. You can talk with him. You can become his brother or sister.
- *“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”*
Revelation 3:19, 20, NIV.
- Bruce Larson said, “The events of Easter cannot be reduced to a creed or philosophy. We are not asked to believe the doctrine of the resurrection. We are asked to meet this person raised from the dead. In faith, we move from belief in a doctrine to a knowledge of a person. Ultimate truth is a person. We met him. He is alive-“
- **Conclusion:**
 - I read about a 42-year-old woman from South Bend, Indiana. She called the police after being sold what she thought was a flat-screen TV. She was approached by a man who offered her a great deal on the TV, a new flat-screen TV for only \$500 dollars. She admitted it was a great deal but did not have the money. So he lowered the price to \$300 dollars. She gave him the money. The set was bubble-wrapped, had Wal-Mart stickers on it, and came with a remote control--but when she unwrapped it, she discovered it was an oven door!
- Turn with me to the Heidelberg Catechism, because it offers a beautiful summary of what we've been reflecting on so far. Question 45 asks, How does Christ's resurrection benefit us? And the answer is:
 - First, by his resurrection he has overcome death. So that he might make

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us share in the righteousness he won for us by his death. (The empty cross means forgiveness, righteousness.)

- Second, by his power we too are already now resurrected to a new life. (the empty tomb means power over sin and death for us!)
- Third, Christ's resurrection is a guarantee of our glorious resurrection. (the empty clothes tell us of a greater life that awaits us too because of Jesus.)
- No empty promises here people. Fullness we've never fully comprehended. I urge every human being in the room to acknowledge this man as God who walked our earth, and savior from sin. I urge you to pray even now to accept his forgiveness and place your hope for heaven in him. For he is the center of the universe. Your reason for living. And everything you always wanted, plus more.

A Muslim in Africa became a Christian and some of his friends asked him, "Why have you done such a thing?" He answered, "Well, its like this: Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly the road forked in two directions. You didn't know which way to go; and there at the fork were two men—one dead, and one alive—which one would you ask to show you the way?" (from a sermon by Bruce Howell, The Gospel Vs. Religion.)