

Empty Tomb

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Luke 24:1-12. [Page 884-885](#)

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. We are continuing our series through the book of Luke.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Sometimes we must choose between two empty things. We want an empty laundry basket, but that would mean no children. So we choose between an empty basket or an empty child's bedroom. Similarly, those of us with mouths to feed have to choose between an empty refrigerator, because our loved ones are eating all the food, or an empty chair at the table- which can make us sad. Some of you have learned that unless you want your spouse's spot in bed to be empty you have to choose the empty liquor cabinet. Others want an empty schedule away from the grind of a job, but then they realize they must choose that because otherwise they will have an empty bank account. In the end, I think, whatever choices we make, are to try to avoid having empty hearts.

With the death and burial of Jesus, we can be certain that the hearts of Jesus' followers are empty. And still, there is a real sense in which Luke 24:1-12 requires us to choose between two empty things. And it demands the choice. And that choice has an eternal impact and it's the main idea of this sermon. To state it as concisely as possible here's our choice:

[Proposition] Empty heads or an empty tomb?

Were the first people to believe in Jesus' resurrection, and then all of us who have followed down the centuries, fools with empty heads? Or was there an empty tomb? So far as I can gauge it, we really have that choice. Empty heads or an empty tomb. If the first Christians had empty heads, we should not be like them. But if they encountered an empty tomb, then we must be like them. I aim to show us that we should choose the empty tomb by pointing out five things. I'll repeat them as we go through the text. Here's the first reason you should choose the empty tomb:

[Reason 1] Perplexed, not prepared.

The women we encounter in these verses are perplexed, not prepared.

Remember how chapter 23 ended. Jesus was buried. The end, it seems. Yet here we are in chapter 24 and what a word to start a chapter with... "But." Meaning, there's more information. Things are about to change. Let's read vv. 1-4a

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this...

These women behave like sensible women. They go to a tomb expecting to find a body there. They are not prepared for an empty tomb or a resurrected Jesus. They have spices that are needed to anoint the body for a proper burial. Perhaps, Joseph's earlier effort was sloppy because it was a hasty one. Maybe because he was a man. These perplexed women do this with seriousness. Remember Numbers 19, which gives us a glimpse into this Jewish culture. To touch a dead body was to make yourself unclean for 7 days. And if you didn't follow the proper practices afterward, you would be cut off from God's people. Effectively consigning yourself to Hell. These women are facing a serious task. And they were prepared for that- spices, ointments, multiple people to manipulate the body. If they were prepared to find a resurrected Savior we would not see them perplexed by a missing body.

They saw where Jesus was buried- we see that in Luke 23:55. If they had empty heads they wouldn't be perplexed, they'd just move on. You know one of the ladies was thinking, "I don't usually lose things. His body was right here." They are perplexed, not prepared. This points to an empty tomb not empty heads. What do you think? Empty heads or an empty tomb? That's the first reason. Now

[Reason 2] Frightening, not friendly.

The angels these women encounter are not the ones we imagine. They are not soft and cuddly Precious Moments figurines. They are powerful. Potentially deadly. Let's read vv. 4 to the beginning of v. 6

While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

People with empty heads rarely see danger correctly. Comedy movies play this up. Dumb people take dangerous risks because they are too ignorant and stupid to notice the danger in front of them. People with empty heads. Why did you open that cage? That's not a puppy, that's a Grizzly bear! Why did you push that button? That doesn't open the garage it launches a nuclear bomb. These are women who are sensible. So, when they see the angels (24:28) they find them frightening, not friendly. These are supernatural beings. Glowing brightly because they reflect God's glory. They know they had better bow down. They know not to act presumptuously.

And the angels don't come off as very tactful or patient. They tell these ladies that they've made a mistake. You don't find living people lying beside dead bodies. Investigating the empty tomb is not really the way you'll find Jesus. What's funny, is that the disciples are going to ignore the angels' words too. And come looking even though they're told they will find nothing.

These are honest first reactions. Aren't they. Frightened by the supernatural. Not assuming things are friendly. If you encountered someone like this, wouldn't you react the same way?

[Application] Do you ever feel like life is dull? Do you ever feel numb? Don't you want to experience something amazing? Don't you want to feel alive? Don't you want to be overcome in some way? To be shaken out of the humdrum, bland, existence? Isn't there a part of you that is longing to be overcome? Something to fill your heart? To experience awe! To experience just a touch of fear and adrenaline?

The Bible brings us a supernatural and real world with angels! Other religions would worship them as gods. And these angels are dust mites compared to the One true and Living God! And this Living God. He's at work. Changing hearts and lives every day. In this world. In this city. In this church. Working miracles.

The way we primarily experience this awe and wonder and excitement about Jesus is when things are beyond our control. When we follow our king into situations where we don't quite know what will happen. Or in crisis. Like when we confess a hidden sin or share the gospel with our neighbor or when we recognize we're morally bankrupt. Or when we're given the scary diagnosis or the letter letting us know we're being laid off. Miracles often occur when things are most desperate. When there are no other options- like when someone is dying. But that means making you uncomfortable. That means you don't just view God as a bit of added help, but God, in Jesus Christ, as your complete and total rescuer.

These women are terrified. But I bet they would tell you that they've never felt more alive. I bet this is one of the few days of their lives that didn't just blend together into others. In love for the One who loved them, they left the house. They were normal people. Sensible women. They didn't have empty heads.

An empty tomb or empty heads? It doesn't seem like these women have empty heads. They're perplexed, not prepared. They encounter supernatural beings and consider them frightening, not friendly. What do we choose today? We've looked at two reasons for an empty tomb. Now

[Reason 3] Words, not wishes.

Many people believe that Christians believe the resurrection because of some sort of misplaced wish fulfillment. We ultimately believe in the resurrection because of words, not wishes. We see the importance of words by reading the end of v. 5 through v. 8

"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words,

We would say that it's foolish for people to build their lives around mere wishes. That's empty-headed. But these angels are not here to grant wishes like a genie from a lamp. They don't do what the women ask them to do. The angels and the women don't use wishes as the reason the tomb is empty. They point out that this is all connected to what has been said. Luke mentions multiple women as following Jesus at the beginning of Luke 8. And in the next chapter Luke 9, on two

separate occasions vv. 22 and 44, he tells those who are around Him that He is going to die. And that on the third day the Son of Man will be raised.

For this to be true, these women must look like they have failed. And who wants to broadcast that? Yet here their mistake is for all to see.

[Application] Think about these words that make sense of Jesus. These words started with Jesus. But they were forgotten. So, He passed them without error to the angels, then to these women, then to the disciples, who passed them without error to Luke. Who passed them without error to us. Words...You're bound to believe words aren't you? Language is bound up in who we are. Even if you experience something, you need to interpret it through words. You see something and then you need to talk to yourself. Reason with yourself. We need words, we can't live without them.

But we must remember what is said. This is how we preach the gospel to ourselves. We are each meant to be giant, living sticky notes to ourselves and others that help us remember who Jesus is and what He has done. We remember that Jesus came from Heaven to us and this motivates us to move closer to other people rather than avoid them. We remember that Jesus has lived sinlessly for us. We remember His power to heal and defeat demons. We remember His powerful preaching. We remember His love toward the wounded and outcast. And we remember that He announced again and again that He came to die. To give His life as a ransom.

This is the good news of Jesus. And it's something we announce. It's not a social program. It's not about what we do. It's about what He has already done. Here's how it starts: You are completely unacceptable to God. You will not be received on the basis of your repeated defiance and ignorance of God. A change must happen or you will pay eternal consequences. Torment. Wrath. Fire. Endlessly. But someone opens the door and carries sinners through into God's favor. That person is Jesus. Who was lifted high on a cross and then laid low in a tomb. But the tomb is empty. This means that if you have placed your trust in Christ, you can be totally certain that the work has been done. Finished. And your empty heart can be filled with love and life forever. And you have good reason to believe it. The tomb was and is empty.

Empty heads or an empty tomb? If they had empty heads, these women wouldn't have been perplexed. They wouldn't have found the angels frightening. They wouldn't see the solution as bound up in words instead of wishes. The reasons for believing the tomb to be empty are mounting. Now

[Reason 4] Tall tale, not truth.

People with empty heads are likely to believe anything. Even far-fetched things. But that's not how the disciples seem to be portrayed. Let's look at vv. 9-11

...and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seem to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

The disciples call this a tall tale. If someone came up to you and told you that they had just seen angels, and that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb. You would say that this sounds like a tall tale. This does not sound like the truth. The disciples are perceived as doubters. So much so, that I learned something interesting in the Greek here. Where we read "told" in English is in what's called the iterative imperfect. What that means is that the event is in the past but it kept happening. This means that the women are telling the apostles again and again. And we would suspect empty headed people would be gullible and take anything as truth. But these men did not. They considered the whole thing a tall tale. Like Paul Bunyan or Pecos Bill lassoing a tornado. The Greek word *leros* for "idle tale" is used to mean folly. Or utter nonsense. Or to describe the delirious talk of people who are very sick.

[Apologetic] In the early days of Christianity, the church had many critics. But perhaps none were so openly hostile and hateful as a man named Celsus. Celsus lived in the mid- 100s AD. He was a Greek philosopher in the Roman empire. One of his strongest criticisms of Christianity was that it was so backward that only fools would convert to a religion so dependent on women. Women as witnesses. Frantic, uneducated women should never be trusted. Especially if they reject the pagan gods and claim a physical resurrection. But that's not what Luke says. Luke says that we listen to women. It's the truth that matters, not who the human it is that brings it to us. So Christians have always been counter-cultural in this way.

The people in these verses seem like reasonable people. They are perplexed not prepared. They find angels frightening, not friendly. They are building their confidence on words not wishes. They're not gullible- the first reports are considered more a tall tale than truth. Now, one final reason

[Reason 5] Investigated, not ignored.

Look with me at v. 12

But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Peter's back! Last we saw him, he had denied his master. He was weeping. He was a failure. But now here he is. And Peter is on the move. There were twelve, but now Luke says these women are telling the eleven- oh what a reminder- of Jesus' betrayal! But they are telling the eleven that the tomb is empty. Peter does not ignore it. He is reminded that Jesus predicted this. And Peter now has more reason to believe Jesus' words than anyone else. Jesus had predicted his three denials. At that time, Peter couldn't imagine anything further from the truth. And Peter felt he was in control of that. Now, here he remembers another prediction. Being raised. And Peter investigates. He does not ignore it. And he finds the linen cloths sitting in the tomb. Otherwise, the tomb is empty.

Those linen cloths are the only thing of value in the tomb. Clothes were hard to make, so they were valuable. If there was a graverobber, the linens are more valuable than the corpse. Yet here they are. Otherwise, the tomb is empty. So Peter is marveling- which could imply either unbelief or belief, but like I said, Peter has more reason to believe than anyone. He hasn't ignored the empty tomb. He's investigated it.

[Illustration] When my dad died suddenly 5 years ago I experienced a common phenomenon someone close to you dies. We're so shaken that we tend to live like that person is probably out there somewhere. A sort of empty heart. Your existence is so tied to the other person, that it seems like if you are still here, they must be too. We just need to find them. Maybe they're at work. Or at the store. Or on a trip. Maybe you'll bump into them again. But the reality sinks in, especially if you've seen the body. That person is not just elsewhere. They will not pick up the phone or respond to your text. They are gone. Dead. You will not see

them again in this world. And it's like the person has died again in a small way. But now you experience it multiple times a day. For days. For weeks. For years. All the plans and dreams with that person are gone. Done.

For two days, the disciples have lived that reality. Life has drained out of their hearts. They are empty. And they are experts at death compared to us. Many of the things that send us to the doctor, sent their loved ones to the grave. And now it's been Jesus. With Jesus they thought they were building a skyscraper but now they've only found a pile of dirt and debris. But Luke is telling us...maybe not.

Luke is slow-playing us. The other gospels give us direct sightings pretty quickly. But that's not Luke's way. Luke is having us live the tension. We've only seen the empty tomb, not the resurrected Jesus. And Luke is after something. He is seeking to prove something. He is seeking to prove that these events are as credible as possible. It's like we don't know that Jesus is alive. But we do know.

[Illustration] If death is the Big Bad Wolf. Then we've all lived the reality that it has swallowed grandma or great-grandma whole. And along comes Little Red Riding Hood and death has taken her as well. But here comes the lumberjack or hunter. And we get excited, but death swallows them too! And so throughout history the wolf-mouth of death seems ever-full. The philosophers. The scientists. The dictators. The saints. The friends. The prophets. The priests. The kings. And here comes Jesus, and He dives willingly into the mouth of death. And hearts are empty. And the grave seems full. But then, like some low-budget B- movie the sharp edge of the blade appears slicing open the wolf from the inside. And Jesus is the only One capable of tearing open the grave for His people to escape. The wolf of death is now put to death.

[Conclusion] I don't know why, but I always imagine Peter and John, who also visited the tomb, turning away with a specific look on their face. I can't help but picture them as having just a strange smirk on their face. They haven't seen Jesus yet. They haven't erupted into the laughter and joyful tears that will follow when they are undeniably convinced that Jesus is alive. But the smile has started. That there's something up. Like they are the object of some sort of wonderful, loving, practical joke. Like some evil object or event is being unmade. Like they are expecting something good to come.

[Application] We aren't laughing yet. Luke hasn't given us a full-fledge sighting. But that's coming. So it's like when you are reading a scary book and you wonder if the hero is going to make it. But you're a few years behind and you know there's a sequel. You KNOW he or she is going to make it through this. You can smirk, even under stress.

The same goes for you right now. You are under stress. You want your marriage to be a relationship of peace and affection and trust. Not bickering and fighting. But if the tomb is empty, there is hope isn't there? You are lonely and wish you could have a friend who would never leave you. But then a smirk starts to form on your face. Jesus is your friend, and not even death could keep Him away from His friends. You want your work or schooling to make a difference in the world. But even if it feels meaningless in the moment, you remember that the book of Revelation says that their deeds follow them. So your sandwich making, your math assignments, your email sending, can give you a smirk. You don't know exactly what's coming, but you can have a sense and idea that it will be good. You can talk to the funeral planner and let him know that the casket is for you. But as you do, you smirk knowing that you will be raised and that it will be empty like the empty tomb. You want to know if you can overcome your past. It feels so crushing to you. It seems to control everything about you. But then you think, if the tomb was empty- what could be a more controlling event than death? But it wasn't the end. So you can mourn over the pain, but the smile can begin to form at the same time. Your struggles in parenting are still efforts to put forth. You can be consistent. You can teach. You can pray. You can discipline. Your broken relationship may actually be able to be reconciled. You start to look at the local church as a group of people who are dear to you. Who are worth your time. Worth your sacrifice. It becomes a living body and lasting institution that you want to build. It's not easy, but the tomb is empty, and now your heart is not.