

From Saturday Shadows to Sunday Glory: The Transformative Power of the Empty Tomb

Sermon · Not stated (file created 13 April 2025, shortly before that year's Easter)

For centuries, many of the world's esteemed philosophers have criticised Christianity as being irrational, superstitious, and absurd. I cannot even begin to fathom the implications for all of humanity—those who have passed away, those who are currently alive, and those who are yet to be born—had Mary Magdalene discovered the tomb to be 'not empty' on that Sunday morning. It would have meant that an innocent person died a needless death, and His blood would be on our hands as well. We would have continued to exist in sin with death looming over us, and all hope of forgiveness, redemption, and salvation would have been lost. It would have also implied a Heaven that remained empty while God occupied Himself with creating additional spaces in Hell to accommodate all of us.

I have always been struck by how swiftly life can change. Circumstances can be one way one day, and completely different the next. One day, an individual you know may be present, and the following day they may be absent. One moment, you may think that you are healthy, and the next you may find that you are gravely ill. One day, it might seem that there is no hope for your situation, and the next day your problem may be resolved. It is indeed true that many changes can take place within the span of a single day. This is the theme I wish to explore today.

This has never been truer than on the day Jesus rose from the dead. When Jesus' body was laid in the tomb on the day of His crucifixion, it was a dark and dreadful day. As the sun set that night, so too did the hopes and dreams of all His disciples and followers. The Gospel of Mark describes a lifeless Sabbath that lingered between the day Jesus died and the day He rose in resurrection. I am certain it was a long, miserable Saturday for all those who had placed their hopes in Jesus. However, Mark guides us beyond that tragic Saturday to a glorious Sunday, the day when the world changed forever.

The three women referenced in these passages experienced the lengthy, sorrowful Sabbath day, with the events of the previous day still fresh in their minds. They had witnessed the unimaginable suffering that Jesus endured, culminating in His horrific death on the cross. They watched as His body was placed in a tomb, and a large stone was rolled over the entrance to seal Him inside, as recorded in Mark 15:46-47. With that act, their hope for redemption and a glorious life in the Kingdom of God appeared to be forever extinguished, signalling an end that seemed final. That stone seemed to cry out, "It is all over! Hope is gone! There is no future! There is no salvation! There is no kingdom! Jesus is dead! It is all over!"

I would not hesitate to speculate on what may have occupied their thoughts on that Saturday. Where was the Kingdom that Jesus frequently spoke of? Indeed, where was the King Himself? All the hopes and aspirations they held in their hearts lay shattered. Fear gripped their minds as they recalled the events that unfolded after the Last Supper. These women, along with all of Jesus' followers, had placed their complete faith in Him. In a state of confusion and uncertainty, they believed that He would fulfil all the ancient prophecies. They believed He would be the King of Israel, that He would establish God's Kingdom on Earth. Their hopes for life and eternity rested upon their beliefs about Jesus, but all of that crumbled, transforming their faith into grief and their grief into utter hopelessness.

However, life must continue, albeit not in the manner they had hoped. Some of them, like Peter, may have begun contemplating how to implement their alternative plans. I empathise with them; we all do this. When circumstances go awry or do not unfold as we expect, do we not often think in these terms? We attempt to take control of the situation, and when that fails and we hit an insurmountable obstacle, some individuals sink into depression, while others distance themselves from Jesus.

As the Sabbath concluded on Saturday at sunset, they emerged from their homes, ventured into town, and purchased "sweet spices" to "anoint" the body of Jesus, expressing their final act of love and reverence for their departed Master. Their intention was to visit the tomb early on Sunday morning to carry out this final act of love. For them, it represented a means of achieving closure regarding His death. Heartbroken, they made the two-mile journey from Bethany to the tomb located just outside the city of Jerusalem.

As they walked, they discussed the stone covering the entrance to the tomb. It must have dawned on them that they could encounter difficulties accessing the body of the Lord. These women could never have moved that stone by themselves, and they were fully aware of this. Their fear was intensified by the knowledge that the tomb was not only sealed, but also guarded by Roman soldiers.

Despite their overwhelming feelings of desperation, hopelessness, fear, doubt, and wavering faith, do you know what their true problem was? Their problem was that they were trapped in Saturday!

And that is precisely where many of us find ourselves today. We are still living in Saturday, often unaware that Sunday has already arrived. People navigate through this world ensnared by their sins, as described in Ephesians 2:1-3. They progress through life oblivious to the God who exists to save them, as noted in Romans 1:18-21. They traverse this world without joy, peace, or hope, entombed in their sins and heading towards Hell. The reality for the majority of people is that they are fascinated by Saturday. They exist in the darkness of their depravity, unaware that unspeakable glory and joy could be theirs if only they understood that the tomb is empty, that Jesus has risen, and that they could be liberated from the bondage and obscurity of their sins.

When these women reached the tomb, their fear transformed into amazement. As they raised their downcast eyes, they noticed that the enormous stone had been rolled away from the entrance and that the entry to the tomb was wide open. Yet even this revelation did not bring them joy, as they feared the worst. They were concerned that the enemies of the Lord had removed His body. Consequently, they hurried the rest of the way to the tomb to investigate. An angel began to speak to the women. **He carried a message for them, one intended to help them cease living in Saturday and begin experiencing the power of Sunday in their lives.** He instructed them, “Be not affrighted.” Things are not as they may seem on the surface. They rarely are! Nothing is ever as dire as our minds, our hearts, and Satan lead us to believe!

The angel wants them to understand that our Lord’s cry of “It is finished!” on the cross did not signify His conclusion. The joyous proclamation on that Sunday is, “he is risen!” The angel aims to convey that the power of death has been vanquished by the far greater power of life. The empty tomb of the Lord is not a symbol of despair and defeat, but rather a testament to glory, power, and hope. Jesus is alive, just as the angel proclaimed! **This was a message those women needed to hear that Sunday morning, and it is the message that you and I need to hear once again today.**

What they witnessed was a scene of utter tranquillity and order. It was not the kind of scene they would have encountered had people taken or moved the body. For two thousand years, sceptics have tried to disprove the resurrection. They have devised every imaginable theory to explain the empty tomb. Yet every theory they present crumbles in the face of the evidence provided by that empty grave!

If the Jews had possession of the body, they would have presented it when the disciples began proclaiming the resurrection. If the disciples had stolen the body, they would not have risked their lives for a fabricated story. The absence of His body has consistently posed a challenge for critics. **His body was missing because He was alive! Jesus emerged from that tomb that morning, achieving eternal victory over Satan, sin, and death!**

Science can only detect events that are reproducible and, even then, runs the risk of being dismissed if they do not align with existing theories. Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus cannot be examined scientifically, as it has never claimed to be a replicable event. Jesus is unique; He is both man and God, and His resurrection will not be replicated until the end of history.

The angel instructs them to depart from the tomb and share the message with the disciples of the Lord, who were filled with fear and in hiding, as recorded in John 20:19. God desires for them to know that Jesus is alive. There is no reason to fear! There is joy. There is hope. Even Peter, the one who had recently denied the Lord, is specifically mentioned. The Lord wants Peter to know that he is loved as well. What an extraordinary occurrence! The three women had come to the tomb that morning concerned about rolling away a single stone. **What they did not realise was that God intended to use them to remove countless stones from the hearts of millions.** They realised they were now part of a great miracle, and they ran to share the news of their risen Lord with others!

This news also impacted the disciples. Many of them rushed to the tomb. It is recorded that John looked in and saw the evidence, which is when he first encountered and believed in the resurrection. When one embraces the Lord’s resurrection through faith, it leads to transformation in the life of the individual who accepts this truth. When one accepts the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is the Gospel, a new birth occurs. A sinner becomes a saint. A child of the devil becomes a child of God. A new creation is born, as stated in John 3:3 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. While this new life may not be perfect, it is a life through which Christ lives. It is a life that seeks to know God and the power of the resurrected Christ. It is a life that cannot contain the good news within itself. It must share it with others because it desires that others experience the same joy it enjoys. \\ Death looms at the end of the pathway of every human life—unyielding, inevitable, and final. Regardless of whether one is rich or poor, sick or healthy, everyone must confront it someday. For most people, death brings fear and anxiety. How many individuals are genuinely prepared to discuss their own death in a casual manner, just as we might talk about birthdays or wedding anniversaries?

However, for those who believe in Jesus Christ, there is a distinct difference. They need not fear death because they have placed their trust in the One who is the Resurrection and the Life. The religions of the world may attempt to help individuals cope with their mortality, but they offer virtually nothing of substance. All their founders remain dead and buried to this day. Christianity is completely different! In the face of the undeniable reality of death, it boldly proclaims an even greater truth: Jesus Christ is a living God, and because He lives, we too shall live. Amen