

I invite you to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the book of Luke 24:1-12. This can be found on page ____ in your pew Bibles.

The Word of God

24 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" 8 Then they remembered his words.

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

NIV

A young man from a wealthy family was about to graduate from high school. It was common in his affluent neighborhood for the parents to give the graduate an automobile. “Bill” and his father had spent months looking at cars, and the week before graduation, they found the perfect car. On the eve of his graduation, his father handed him a gift-wrapped Bible. Bill was so angry that he threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house. He and his father never saw each other again.

It was the news of his father’s death that brought Bill home again. As he sat going through his father’s possessions that he was to inherit, he came across the Bible his father had given him. He brushed away the dust and opened it to find a cashier’s check dated the day of his graduation—in the exact amount of the car they had chosen together.

In thinking about this story, I couldn’t help but wonder how many people in this world have done the same thing to God. They literally tossed aside a wonderful promise, because they didn’t understand it, or they didn’t believe that it was possible, or they were just too impatient. In our world, we are taught that, “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.”

I would guess that many of us have been taken in by so many “empty promises,” that we are leery of anyone that tells us we can have something for nothing. The world simply doesn’t work that way! But, you know what, God does! God never made a promise that was too good to be true.

The truth of the matter is – the world is full of empty promises. The advertisements of today tell us that we can be happy, rich, and beautiful, if we only purchase a certain product. But, God is different. Instead of promises full of emptiness, on Easter, He gave us *emptiness* that is full of *promise*.

I would like us to think about three of the promises of Easter. Each one is marked by something empty – an empty cross, an empty tomb, and empty grave clothes. TODAY – EASTER – we celebrate the emptiness. Jesus is alive and no longer on the cross! It's EMPTY! Jesus is alive and no longer in the tomb! It's EMPTY! Jesus is alive and His grave clothes were left behind and folded! They are EMPTY!

There was a Good Friday. Jesus was on the cross. Following that, Jesus was placed in a borrowed tomb and then wrapped in grave clothes. Wherein Friday WAS here, Easter IS here! It is the very fact that each of these is empty that assures us that *God's promises are real*.

The Empty Cross. Because the cross was empty, we have the *promise of forgiven sins*. Let's go to that first Easter morning. The sun has not yet risen and a few of Jesus' followers—women—are on their way to the tomb where Jesus was buried. They have been walking now for about half an hour. The conversation is subdued. The task before them is a sad one. They are going to anoint the body of Jesus.

As they come to the top of a rise in the path, they all stop. They stare off in the distance. Just outside the city stands a gruesome reminder of the events of just a few days ago. Silhouetted by the glow of the sky, on top of the hill is what the locals call Golgotha. "The Skull." There are three crosses. Yesterday was the Sabbath, so nobody had removed them yet.

So, there they stand, an empty reminder of the horror of Friday. The one in the middle is the one I want you to focus on. That's the one Jesus was nailed to. The top had bloodstains from the crown of thorns that was pushed into Jesus' skull. Stains are on the ends of the crossbar from the nails driven into His hands.

The main beam was soaked in blood from the wounds on His back. It also had stains from the blood that poured from His side when a Roman soldier ran a spear through His side to see if He was dead. HE WAS! Don't ever believe anyone who tells you He was just faking it. There was no question—Jesus was dead. The soldiers knew it. The Romans knew it. The Jews knew it. Together they made up a lie that the disciples stole the body of Jesus.

Can you imagine eleven fishermen overpowering a company of Roman soldiers, moving a two-ton stone and stealing the body of Jesus – just so they could claim Jesus had come back to life – and then willingly die to protect that lie? You see, Jesus really did die –that is what I want you to see in the cross. It is the place where He died—but today, it is empty. EMPTY of Jesus' body, but full –FULL of God's promises. Full of hope—for you and me. On the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for our sins.

“SIN” – now there is a word that's not so popular anymore. Some say it's a word that isn't “politically correct.” But, the simple fact of the matter is –we have ALL sinned. The only person who has ever lived a sinless life is the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone else has failed. So, here's the problem. According to God's law, “the wages of sin is death.” He says, “The soul that sins will surely die.” Because we have sinned, we deserve God's just punishment – eternal death in Hell. However, when you look at that empty cross, it is a reminder of God's promise that we have been forgiven.

God's Word tells us that “God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, CHRIST DIED FOR US!” It was on that cross that Jesus Christ offered His perfect, sinless life on behalf of each one of us.

No one else –not Moses or Abraham, not David or Isaiah, not Muhammad or Buddha – no one else has ever lived perfectly and then offered his perfect life for our salvation. That’s why the Bible tells us that “there is no other name given under heaven by which we can be saved.” When Jesus Christ breathed His last breath, He cried out, “It is finished.” It’s three words in English, but ONE word in Greek–teleo. It means goal accomplished, mission fulfilled, hitting the target you were aiming at, to discharge your duty. It means you did what you came to do. Teleo is a financial term.

In Matthew 17:24 we read, “After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two drachma tax came to Peter and asked, ‘Doesn’t your teacher PAY the temple tax?’” The word “PAY” is the word TELEO. It means to pay a debt completely. It refers to the final installment on a debt.

The penalty was paid. On that cross – that empty cross – it was there, that His blood was spilt for our salvation. When Jesus went to the cross, God literally transferred our accounts to His name. On that day, He wrote –in Jesus’ blood– FORGIVEN! Because of the work that Jesus did on that cross, you and I can now stand forgiven.

The Empty Tomb. Let’s get back to the ladies. After pausing briefly to view the cross, they continue on their way down the path to the tomb. As they go, I would imagine that at least one of them wonders aloud – “Who will move the stone for us?” There’s good reason to be concerned – the stone that was placed in front of the tomb was a large boulder –probably weighing upwards of two tons. Not only that, but the Romans had sealed it. So, no one was allowed to move it without their permission. Moving it without their permission brought the penalty of death.

However, the ladies continue walking when, suddenly they feel the earth move! As they approach the burial site, they are wondering what had happened when they come upon something even more remarkable. The soldiers are all unconscious.

The stone has been moved and an angel – glowing like lightening – is sitting on it. Listen to the Angel’s words – “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here. He has risen!” Jesus had risen! He was alive! The tomb was EMPTY! And what a tremendous promise that holds.

Let me tell you about Philip. Philip never felt like he belonged. He was pleasant enough but he looked different and sometimes seemed unusual to his eight-year-old classmates. Philip was born with Downs Syndrome. In his Sunday School class several weeks before Easter, Philip’s teacher introduced a special project. He gave every member a plastic “egg” –the kind pantyhose used to come in. He explained that each child was to go outside, find a symbol for new life and put it into the egg. Enthusiastically, the class responded.

Back in the classroom on Easter Sunday, the eggs were opened one at a time with each child explaining the meaning of his symbol. In the first egg was a pretty flower, in the next a beautiful butterfly, while green grass was in a third. The children “oohed” and “aahed”. In another was a rock, which prompted laughter. Finally, the last egg was opened–there was nothing in it.

“That’s stupid,” said one child. Another grumbled, “Someone didn’t do it right!” The teacher felt a tug on his shirt. It was Philip, who said, “That’s mine, and I did do it right! It’s empty ‘cause the tomb was empty.” There was an unusual, thoughtful silence.

And strangely, from that time on, Philip was accepted as part of the group. Philip continued to struggle with many physical problems. That summer he picked up an infection which most children would easily have shaken off, but Philip's weak body couldn't and a few weeks later, he died. At his funeral, nine eight-year-olds with their teacher brought their symbol of remembrance and placed it near his casket. Their unusual gift of love to Philip wasn't flowers. It was an empty egg – now a symbol to them of new life and hope. It was Philip, the “different” child, who had helped his friends see the wonderful hope in the message of Easter (story taken from Preaching Today).

In the empty tomb we see the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise - to every one of us - of eternal life. To those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, death has lost its sting. It is no longer something to be feared. What fear is there when we have the promise that one day we will live forever with Jesus in Heaven?

ILLUSTRATION: A father and son were traveling down a country road when suddenly a bee flew in the window. Being deathly allergic to bee stings, the boy began to panic as the bee buzzed all around inside the car. Seeing the horror on his child's face, the father reached out and caught the bee in his hand. Soon, he opened his hand and the bee began to buzz around once again. Again, the boy began to panic. The father reached over to his son and opened his hand, showing him the stinger in his palm. “Relax, son,” the father said, “I took the sting. The bee can't hurt you anymore.”

The empty tomb is God's way of saying to us, "Relax, my child, I took the sting, death can't hurt you anymore." Why was the tomb empty? Because Jesus was alive. The Angel said, "He is risen." The promise to us is that we too can live, even if we die. John 14:19b says, "...because I live, ye shall live also."

The Empty Grave Clothes. Back to our story. After the Angel had spoken to the women, they immediately went back to the Apostles and reported what had happened. With this incredible news, Peter and John immediately raced back to the tomb to see for themselves. When they got there, John stopped just outside the tomb, but Peter ran right in.

It didn't take them long to discover that the tomb was just the way the women had said it was – empty. But, that's not all. Inside, Peter found the clothes that Jesus had been buried in. They too were empty. This could only mean one thing – Jesus WAS alive! If someone had stolen the body of Jesus, it is highly unlikely that they would have removed the grave clothes and folded them up neatly and left them where they lay. Truly, Jesus was resurrected!

It wouldn't be long before Jesus Himself would appear to Mary Magdalene, to all of the Apostles, and eventually to over 500 people. He sat down with them, walked with them, talked with them, and ate with them. Once again, they were able to fellowship with their Lord.

You see, that is the promise of the empty grave clothes – Jesus is alive and wants to fellowship with you. We can have a personal relationship with Jesus! He is a LIVING Savior, and He desires to have a personal relationship with each one of us, just as He did with His disciples 2000 years ago.

Think about it – the cross couldn't hold Him, the tomb couldn't contain Him, the grave clothes were unnecessary –because JESUS IS ALIVE! He has skin and bones and a face that was recognizable. He talked, and touched, and loved, and healed. He did it the day of His resurrection, and He does it still today. And–most importantly–He wants to have a relationship with you!

Conclusion. I want to ask you a very important question. Do you know Jesus Christ? I don't mean, do you know about Him. Do you truly know Jesus Christ? You see, we can know ABOUT someone, and not truly know them– President Trump, Brad Pitt, Taylor Swift, Michael Jordan, George Washington -these are people that we know something about, but do any of us really know them?

You CAN know Jesus Christ. You can know His love, His care, His healing, and His forgiveness. He says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”

It has been nearly 2000 years since Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected. That first Easter Sunday, as the women went to the grave, they had no idea what was about to happen to them. The promises that they discovered that day, you too can have – the freedom of forgiven sins, the promise of eternal life in heaven, and you too can know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Wouldn't it be nice to turn back time right after saying or doing something you wish you hadn't? The problem, of course, is that the arrow of time points in one direction. What's done is done. Some things in life are irreversible. You can't unbake cookies, uncut hair, or unrun a red light. Sometimes we learn those lessons the hard way. Sometimes we laugh off our mistakes after a little embarrassment.

Then there are those irreversible moments that leave a hole in your heart forever – like standing at the foot of a casket – being on the receiving end of divorce papers – answering a frantic call in the middle of the night – getting lab results from your doctor that confirmed your worst fears – you know that feeling all too well. It feels like life is over. But it's not over until God says it's over!

When Jesus walked out of the tomb, the word IMPOSSIBLE disappeared from the believer's dictionary. Jesus' boldest claim is "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). It's that claim that sets Jesus apart and puts Him in a category all by Himself – the Son of God – the ONLY begotten Son.

The foundation of our faith is one fundamental fact: the EMPTY tomb! Jesus walked out of His own tomb under His own power! Most people have no issue accepting Jesus as a compassionate healer or wise teacher or even a great prophet, but that isn't who He alleged to be. He claimed to be the Son of God.

C.S. Lewis said it this way: "Jesus is either a liar, lunatic, or, in fact, who He claimed to be – Lord." There's no middle ground. Either Jesus is Lord OF all, or He's not Lord AT all. So, which is it? That one decision will determine your eternal destiny. It makes the impossible possible!

After Jesus asserted His identity as the resurrection and the life, Jesus asked Martha, Lazarus' sister, a point-blank question: "Do you believe this?" (John 11:26). Remember Lazarus hadn't walked out of his tomb yet. Yet Martha responded with her simple profession of faith: "Yes, Lord – I believe you are the resurrection and the life." One little "YES" can change your life. One little "YES" can change your eternity. If you will give Jesus a chance, He'll give you a second chance. The test is the same now as it was then.

Basically, the only question on God's final exam is: "DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?" It's not multiple choice. It's true or false. It's the most important question you will EVER answer. That one decision will determine your eternal destiny!

The good news is that it's an open book exam, and God reveals the right answer in Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." I think at Easter, more than any other time of the year, we realize that God has made all sorts of outlandish promises. So outlandish, that some of us cannot bring ourselves to believe. Or, can we? My question to you is this: Will you take Him as His word?

One final promise –Romans 10:13: "...for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." If you have never accepted God's promises for your life, He is waiting, probably wondering, "For heaven's sake, what is taking you so long?" Don't wait another day! Do it today and know the joy of eternal life in Jesus Christ. Now, we are to live as if Jesus died yesterday, rose from the dead today, and is coming back tomorrow!

Heavenly Father,

Thank you Lord, for your Love, for your Grace, for your presence

In each and every moment of our lives through the Holy Spirit.

Thank you for your forgiveness of our sins through your Son,

Our Lord, Jesus Christ and his amazing sacrifice upon the cross.

Help us to remember that empty tomb, symbolizing your gift of eternal life,

with you in heaven because Christ is Risen, and in his life,

we too have Risen with him conquering death.

Help us to remember the empty grave clothes, revealing that Christ is

Alive, living, and truly resurrected! Seeking a living relationship with

each and everyone of us, His children, living in the kingdom of God.

Reveal your great love through us, for the rest of those seeking you,

So that they will be drawn into a relationship with you,

as their Lord and Savior.

Above all, may we bring you all the Glory, all the praise, and all the honor.

Now, and forever.

Amen.