

There is a documentary concerning the death of Medgar Evers, a black civil rights worker who was shot to death in his own driveway in Mississippi in 1963. In the early 90's, at the request of his son, the body of Mr. Evers was exhumed. It was the hope of the family that a new autopsy might shed more light into his death. As they opened the casket that had been sealed for 30 years it revealed a body that was remarkably preserved. The body and the clothes it wore were in excellent condition.

I am sure that documentary might not appeal to most people. Maybe it would be a little too morbid or disturbing for you but as ironic as it might be you can't have Easter without talking about the opening of a grave.

There was a grave opened on Easter. It was a grave that was opened, not by the will of man, but by the will of God! In that grave, those who looked in saw the clothes the body wore, but they saw no body! Why? Because it was the body of Jesus Christ and He had risen from the dead and had walked out of that tomb. All that remained in that tomb, the only evidence that He had ever been there, was the presence of His grave clothes.

Now, there are many aspects of the resurrection that we could consider today. All of them are important and are a blessing and an encouragement to the people of God. But this morning, I want to look at the message that is contained in the grave clothes left in that tomb by Jesus. I want us to see today that Jesus left His grave clothes behind for a reason. He left them behind so that they could send a message to all those who saw them early on that Sunday morning. It is that message that I would like for us to try and grasp today.

That same message is good for us today if we will but consider it for a few moments.

### **1. It is a peaceful message**

After Jesus died on the cross, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus and prepared it for burial and placed it in a new tomb that belonged to Joseph. (John 19:38-42.) After they placed His body in the tomb, the Jewish leaders asked Pontius Pilate to seal the tomb and place a detachment of Roman soldiers at the tomb to prevent the Disciples from stealing the body.

The Bible tells us that early on the Sunday morning some strange things began to occur near that Garden tomb. A supernatural event happened. The stone that was used to seal the tomb, was rolled back by the angel of the Lord. The disciples were in their upper room hiding in fear, lest they too be arrested and crucified.

When Mary finds the tomb in this condition, she runs to tell the Disciples and Peter and John race to the tomb. Surely Mary went to the wrong tomb. Surely, there must be some mistake! Yet, when they arrive at the scene, it is the right tomb. But, the tomb is empty! All that they see when they look in are the grave clothes of Jesus either collapsed in a pile as if His body came right through them, or having been hardened by the chemicals used

by Joseph and Nicodemus, in the shape of His body, resembling a cocoon that He had merely exited. Either way, it paints quite a picture! Then they see, in a place by itself, the napkin Joseph and Nicodemus had used to wrap Christ's face and head.

*Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. John 20:3-7 NLT*

After the news of the resurrection became public knowledge, the Jewish leaders concocted a story to try and conceal the fact that Jesus was alive, however, the condition of the tomb proves their tale to be a lie. Consider:

A. If it was the Disciples that had removed the body of Jesus as the Jews claimed, how did they remove the body without disturbing the wrappings? Would they have taken the time to be so orderly? Would they have even attempted such a thing, after all, they had all forsook Jesus and fled away the night He was arrested.

B. If it was grave robbers as others have suggested, how did they remove the body? Would they have taken such pains? Of course not!

C. If it was the Jewish leaders that took His body for fear of what the Disciples might use His corpse for, or the Romans for that matter, they would not have taken the time to remove the body from its wrappings. In fact, they would have simply produced the corpse when the Disciples began to proclaim the resurrection and Christianity would have dissolved into oblivion.

The only logical conclusion to the matter is that the tomb was a scene of order and calm because Jesus had merely passed through His grave clothes. He had folded His own napkin and laid it aside. He left a scene of peace so that all those who look in and believe might have peace in their hearts that He is alive and well. That is the kind of peace that Jesus alone can give.

*"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. John 14:27*

Jesus has a message of peace

## **2. It is a powerful message**

That empty cocoon of grave clothes preached a powerful message early that Sunday morning. It told a vivid story of a risen Savior. Those garments lying there in that fashion proclaimed to the world that everything Jesus Christ had claimed, everything He had preached, everything He had promised was true!

Just three days before, the Disciples had watched their Lord be arrested, tried, convicted and crucified. Now, they had tangible proof that Jesus was alive and well!

The fact that Jesus lives gives power to His promises! It validates His claim to be the only way to God.

<sup>6</sup> *Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. John 14:6.*

It is powerful in that it gives hope to all those who come to Him for salvation. It gives confidence to those who are lost in sin! It tells them that they can run to Jesus and there find a living Lord Who is the Friend of sinners.

<sup>23</sup> *There were many priests under the old system, for death prevented them from remaining in office. <sup>24</sup> But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. <sup>25</sup> Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf. Heb. 7:25 NLT*

It is a powerful message because it tells us that the Father accepted the death of Jesus on the cross as the payment for the sin debt of man. ***The New Testament tells us some 35 times that Jesus was raised up from the dead by God the Father.*** If Jesus had been another man, His bones would have rotted where they placed His body. But, because He was the sinless Son of God, it was not possible that death could hold Him. (Acts 2:24) And, because He died a sinless death on the cross, God accepted His sacrifice in the place of ourselves and gives us the promise that we too shall rise from the dead.

*We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you. 2 Cor. 4:14*

Jesus has a message of power for us today.

### **3. It is a promising message**

John calls our attention to the fact that the napkin that was used to cover His blessed face in death was folded neatly and laid to one side. There is a message in this action that we do not want to miss.

<sup>6</sup> *Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. John 20:6-7 NLT*

The oriental custom of the napkin:

When a man with servants was eating a meal, he would often use his napkin to signal them during the course of the meal. If he left the table and wadded his napkin up, it meant that he was finished and would not be back. If, however, he neatly folded the napkin, it

told his servants that he was stepping away for a moment, but he would be back! Jesus was telling His disciples, "***I may be out of your sight right now, but I'll be right back!***" When Peter and John arrived at the tomb, they feared the worst. Perhaps they thought robbers had come, or that the Jews had taken His body away. Even Mary missed the napkin and supposed the gardener had moved the body of the Lord. Yet, John, who had been raised with servants probably knew this custom and quickly grasped the meaning.

*The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. John 20:7-8 NLT*

Today you and I are among those who accept the Gospel message of the resurrection by simple faith. We did not see Jesus live. We did not see Him die and we did not see the tomb. However, that folded napkin is still speaking today. It reminds each of us today that even though we do not see Him right now, He's coming right back and we'll see Him then. **Rev. 22:20.**

It is promising message of hope that we need to remember. There is a better day coming and it will last for eternity. That is the message of hope that Christianity

#### **4. It is a persuasive message**

*He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. John 20:5-8 NLT*

These verses tell us about what Peter and John did when they arrived at the tomb. It is interesting to dig into the words used here just a little. Note three thoughts:

1. **V. 5** - The word "***looked***" means "***to take a glance at something.***" It refers to a brief, fleeting glimpse. This is what John did when he got there. He took a quick glance in the tomb and saw that Jesus was gone, but that the grave clothes were still there.
2. **V. 6-7** The phrase "he ***saw***" means "***to scrutinize***" It carries the idea of looking around with a keen eye to catch all the facts. It brings to mind the eye of the investigator. This is what Peter did. He saw the grave clothes and the napkin lying by itself.
3. **V. 8** the phrase "***He saw and believed***" means "***to look with understanding.***" It carries the idea of grasping what you see. When John took the time to take a closer look, he saw the truth in the grave clothes and understood that Jesus was alive!

If a spiritually lost person looks at the empty tomb, he can come up with dozens of reasons why it cannot be true. After all, when men die, they are gone. They do not get up,

and even if they did, they would not pass through their grave clothes! But, when an honest heart takes the time to scrutinize the evidence they will come to the place John came to. The resurrection must be real. There is no other logical explanation. Have you ever been persuaded?

The Jews still believe to this day that the Disciples of Jesus took His body away. If they did, would someone please explain to me why every one of His Disciples, with the exception of John, died for preaching the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Men do not die for something they know to be a lie! The will to live is so strong that they would have confessed their lie to the authorities to save their lives. However, they all, without exception, went to their graves proclaiming the fact of a risen Lord!

### **5. It's a personal message**

As this chapter unfolds, each person who is confronted with the empty tomb and the grave clothes is forced to make a decision. For John, belief was instant but for Peter, the truth came a little more slowly. Mary Magdalene finds that her heart is still gripped by grief, yet, she is convinced when she sees the Lord Himself. The other Disciples are unsure of what is happening until Jesus appears in their room with a message of peace and assurance.

*<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! John 20:19-21 NLT*

Thomas, the perpetual doubter was not there and he refuses to hear a word they are saying. His doubts are also laid to rest by a personal appearance of the risen Savior. Obviously, this is a message that affects people in different ways.

*<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." <sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20:26-27 NLT*

Of course, there are really only two ways to respond to the message:

1. By Accepting It
2. By Rejecting It.

To their credit, all of these responded by accepting the message of the risen Jesus. The question we are left with this today is: what about you? Have you accepted the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross, shed His blood to pay for your sins and rose again from the dead three days later in a literal, physical body? Some are telling us today that it isn't

important to believe the resurrection is real. We need only accept it symbolically! Well, the Bible has a different idea. In fact, if you remove the linchpin of the resurrection from the doctrines of Christianity, then our faith falls apart like a house of cards.

*<sup>9</sup>If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.*  
Romans 10:9-10 NLT

Do you believe today in the risen Jesus?

One of the all-time greats in baseball was Babe Ruth. His bat had the power of a cannon, and his record of 714 home runs remained unbroken until Hank Aaron came along. The Babe was the idol of sports fans, but in time age took its toll, and his popularity began to wane. Finally the Yankees traded him to the Braves. In one of his last games in Cincinnati, Babe Ruth began to falter. He struck out and made several misplays that allowed the Reds to score five runs in one inning. As the Babe walked toward the dugout, chin down and dejected, there rose from the stands an enormous storm of boos and catcalls. Some fans actually shook their fists. Then a wonderful thing happened. A little boy jumped over the railing, and with tears streaming down his cheeks he ran out to the great athlete. Unashamedly, he flung his arms around the Babe's legs and held on tightly. Babe Ruth scooped him up, hugged him, and set him down again. Patting him gently on the head, he took his hand and the two of them walked off the field together.

Listen carefully. . . That's what Jesus did when He came to this earth. Mankind was in trouble and they needed a Savior; someone that would love them unconditionally. What does that mean? It means that He will love you out of your misery and failures. He doesn't just save you and leave you miserably in your sins. He gives you new life!! (Child learning to walk) He reaches out His hands to you today.

Picture of Grave: the tomb is empty.