

## Jesus' Empty Tomb Shouts, "It Is Finished!"

✠ **Our sins have been paid for in full.**

✠ **Our eternity in heaven is guaranteed.**

In the name of Jesus our victorious Savior, dear fully redeemed believers:

Americans are not known as finishers. Neither are Minnesotans. Superbowls nearly won are just a reflection of our homes which sometimes show more projects begun than done. And in all this we're just looking in the mirror of American religion. Nothing is ever finished. One church teaches purgatory where you never know how much you owe or how long you'll be there. Even their leader who died recently had to spend at least five years unless he's canonized. Every year at this time Charlton Heston comes around as Moses in the movie classic the *Ten Commandments*. But there's never a lamb in that Passover in Egypt or any explanation of why they painted that blood on their doorposts. My brother Chris told of his missionary frustration in South America where Pentecostals in Colombia keep telling Christians they have to maintain the own faith and finish what Christ began. But have you ever noticed that sometimes we get so used to loud noises we can't hear them anymore? "White noise" is not good for our souls. Stop and listen. Can you hear it? **Jesus' Empty Tomb Shouts, "It Is Finished!"**

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Sad as it may seem, even on a joyous day like this we have to stop and ask, "What if the story of Jesus had ended on Good Friday?" Hollywood has turned out movies of a confused Christ dying on the cross – and that's it. How depressing what a dud. It's like sports fans coming out of the Metrodome with no explanation points: "We won.... Isn't that grand...." For every soul alive it's even worse. So many nagging questions would remain. "Did the Father accept Jesus' payment for sin?" Oh, that's easy to ignore if you're still young and healthy. When I went to see one of our members recently, he wasn't in the room I had been told. But in the bed lay a man in his thirties eyes open and blank. A stroke? Yet his mind may be very aware that sickness and death have come knocking. If the end of this story is still Christ in the grave, each of us has to ask, "Do I have a living Savior who can come back and take me home to heaven?" Granted, some people want their heaven on earth, and some think they are suffering hell here! But if the tomb is not empty, they're right.

Then the God of the Bible is like all the rest who cannot keep their promises. All the world's religions have graves containing the moldering remains of their dead leaders. Only Christianity claims otherwise. But if Christ's grave is not empty then God's promise to "*justify many*" (Isaiah 53:10f), what is it but a prophet's pipe dream? And the prediction that God's Holy One "*would not see decay*" (Psalm 16:8-10) is just another scared prophet whistling in the dark. You can't even trust Jesus then or even admire Him as a great teacher or moral example. Anyone who claims as He did that He would raise Himself from the dead (John 2:19) is just a raving lunatic. Sometimes we act as if that's all we think of Jesus when jokes about Him at work and school go unanswered by us. And everything He told His disciples about how He would die and rise again (Mark 9:31) is like parents lying to make their children feel good. Is that all we have to say about Jesus to our children?

If there is no empty tomb for Jesus, we are lost. The Holy Spirit does not want us to run from this. He inspired the Apostle St. Paul to lay out the "what if" scenario just before our Second Lesson: "***And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.***" (1 Corinthians 15:14,17) Then the Christian faith is as solid as a house of cards. Anyone want to play? You don't even need a storm to knock over your hopes and dreams then, just a pesky little brother to shake the table. Is that how our faith rocks?

Without the empty tomb there is no exclamation mark, just a tiny whimper from the cross: “I’m finished.” And a sad echo across the ages: “You’re all finished.” And a raging downpour of depression: “You’re pitiful beyond words!” Do we want to play the victim in our sins?

No, Jesus’ tomb is empty tomb. And **Jesus’ Empty Tomb Shouts, “It Is Finished!”** Coming out of the stadium where heaven met hell and won, we have is God’s exclamation point on Easter! You can see it in the agony of defeat on the faces of unwilling, unbelieving witnesses who had to be convinced in spite of their doubts, fears and deafness to God’s Word. All over the place the signs abound in the earthquake, the angels, even the guards paid to cover up the fact that they ran from an angel rolling away the stone, then lied that they were asleep. Never before in history have so many had so much reason to find the body of a dead man. But in spite of 2,000 years of looking and crying out in unbelief still today the empty tomb shouts that the carpenter’s son is God’s Son. (Romans 1:4) On Good Friday, Jesus said, “Tetelestai” – “It is finished.” On Easter morning the heavenly Father gave us a receipt on Jesus’ work: “Paid in Full!” From a world of hurt we find an eternity of blessing. What a debt of relief!

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We all know that two things in life are inevitable: death and taxes. Pay your taxes, but don’t ever forget this. Death has been defeated forever by the victorious resurrection of the Lord’s Christ! In fact, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:26 NIV) The empty tomb shouts to us along with Paul, formerly a Christian persecutor whom God made into the major missionary for all the sons of Adam. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22) Still shouting are John and his fellow disciples. John died by old age still trusting in Christ-crucified and risen; the rest suffered as martyrs whose death proclaims the living in Christ who said, “*Because I live, you also will live.*” (John 14:19 NIV) From the oldest book of the Bible we still have the triumphant shouts of Job sufferer extraordinaire who looks forward to seeing Christ standing on the earth long after worms destroy his body. (Job 19:25-27) What confidence the empty tomb gives to sing, “I know that my Redeemer lives!” What comfort in the face of death. At the funeral home, every casket whispers: “Lost and gone.” Left there we would be like Mary Magdalene weeping at the tomb of Jesus. But He lives. And He calls each of us by name. And when we turn around and see our own Lord and Savior alive, His empty tomb shouts: “Reunion coming soon!” – with all our believing loved ones who have gone before, following the living Christ by faith. (1 Thessalonians 4:14,17,18)

“It is finished!” is the shout of our Christian faith. The angels still shouting: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee?” (Luke 24:5f NIV) More shouting from the believers raised on Good Friday. Remember how the earthquake as Jesus gave up His life shook the grave open. Those resurrected souls and bodies came back into Jerusalem after Jesus’ resurrection and “appeared to many people.” (Matthew 27:53)

What an exclamation point that was on our Savior’s work! Jesus’ work of saving us from our sins was finished, but He was not ready to stop writing more exclamation points. Easter evening and a week later He appeared to His disciples locked up in their fear and said, “*Peace be with you.*” (John 20:21,26) He says the same to us in all our doubts and fears. He still speaks through the life and death of each apostle – more exclamation points as “*with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.*” (Acts 4:33 NIV) The first Christian martyr Stephen could die with grace on his lips even for those who stoned him! (Acts 7:59-60) Paul ready to die in prison trusted his soul to His Savior for whom he gladly lost everything! (2 Timothy 4:7f) John in Revelation paints the Holy Spirit’s glorious pictures of heaven! And countless Christians have passed this way knowing this life is just the porch into God’s eternal mansions.

Now it’s our turn to shout, “It is finished!” Now it’s our turn to live in the joy of Jesus’ work completed, but with all the blessed results still remaining. Our debt to God is “Paid in full!” All that remains is a debt of love looking forward to an eternity of bliss with God in heaven. Let the whole world hear it! **Jesus’ Empty Tomb Shouts, “It Is Finished!”** Amen.