



Crossroads
Traveling with Our Savior

To and From the Tomb

- † See how people come to the tomb.
- † See how people leave the empty tomb!

In the name of Christ-crucified and risen, dearly redeemed believers:

Some people say all religions are the same. We would have to agree – all, except one. That’s what I tried to tell an old Hindu man who wanted to convert me at a garage sale. His proselytizing insisted Hindus have eternal life in their religion too. He told about a man in the Himalayas who had never died. He admitted no one has ever seen him; they just know he’s there. But do you see the difference? According to the Bible, Jesus has many witnesses to prove that He did die in order to rise to life again. Muslims mock, “At least we have the tomb of Muhammad. You Christians have nothing!” That’s right. And that nothing is everything to us. Jesus not only did die, but now He lives again. And His empty tomb has life-changing power. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

† See how people come to the tomb.

Much has been said about Mary Magdalene, much more than the Bible says. Aside from romantic rumors and empty speculation, Jesus actually was her Healer. Jesus had driven seven demons out of her (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2). Naturally, she would cherish Jesus as her Lord and Savior. We don’t know that she was the sinful woman who poured perfume on Jesus’ feet, but there is no doubt that she stood with the other women, including Jesus’ mother Mary, to see Him die on the cross. She watched tearfully where they laid Him in the tomb. Mary Magdalene and the other women in what might be called the first “Women’s Missionary Society” planned to come back and finish the burial of Jesus with embalming spices according to Jewish custom. Her Friend, Healer, Pastor, dead, Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb in grief that only got worse. She saw the stone rolled away and ran to tell Peter and John.

Ever have days like that? Just when you think things couldn’t get any worse, the bottom drops out. Holiday times like Easter bring back memories of love lost and loved ones gone. Relationships broken, lives shattered by tragedy – sometimes of our own making, and sometimes totally unavoidable. Test results that show recurrence rather than remission. And if it seems God Himself might be dead, we can only have grief and sorrow like that which poured out of Mary Magdalene: ***“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”*** (20:2 NIV)

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Peter must have felt far, far worse than Mary Magdalene. He was grieving not only the loss of his Lord and Savior, but his own foolish failures to listen. Three times Jesus had told His disciples of His death and resurrection. But Peter had other plans and even swore he would stick with Jesus through thick and thin – all the way to the grave if necessary. And now Peter was approaching Jesus’ grave full of guilt and shame. Those three awful days – Friday, Saturday and now early Sunday – Peter must have felt worse than anyone else. He had seen the look of disappointment in Jesus’ eyes as the rooster crowed the second time at Peter’s third denial.

Can you feel Peter’s pain? Do you come to the tomb on Easter feeling guilty too? Maybe it’s been months since you worshiped the Lord. Maybe you’re looking back on promises you’ve made – at the marriage altar, at the Communion rail, on your Confirmation day – to be faithful even unto death. But about the time we think we’re standing firm, we fall, deep into the guilty shame of Peter. Who among us has been the steadfast friend, the helpful neighbor, the loyal servant of our God? Who has been the loving husband, respectful wife, honorable child? Who has been the perfectly faithful layman or pastor?

John got to the tomb first. He was younger than Peter and outran him. You might think John could at least feel better than Peter. John had stayed loyal through Jesus’ trials before the Jewish high priests, all the way to the cross. John had the kindness of Christ giving him a son’s responsibility to care for mother Mary. But John must have come with his own share of grief and sorrow, guilt and shame. He too had run away, leaving Jesus alone with the mob in the garden. With the rest of the Eleven, John had heard the report about the angels, **“but they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”** (Luke 24:11 NIV) John came to Jesus’ tomb with guarded skepticism.

How about you? Ever find yourself thinking something like this? “I want to believe, but I just don’t know if I can. There are so many questions. Did Jesus maybe swoon on the cross and wake up in the grave as some scholars think? Did his disciples steal the body and pretend he was alive? Can I believe in resurrection when I’ve never seen it myself?” Questions like these put you and me in the same category as **“the disciple Jesus loved.”** (20:2) The fact is that in spite of all the Old Testament prophecies and all Jesus’ personal predictions, none of His followers believed Him. But here’s a sweet morsel of comfort for you today. It’s not important how people come to the tomb...

† See how people leave the empty tomb!

Peter ran past. Then John entered too. What they saw was absolutely stunning. Behold the life-changing power of Jesus’ **empty tomb**. John’s guarded skepticism changed to guaranteed certainty. **“He saw and believed”** (20:8). There was no doubt Jesus had been dead. Professional Roman executioners saw to that. The “swoon theory” is less believable than some rumor that Abraham Lincoln was never assassinated. Jewish leaders and their bribed guards rumored a stolen body, but that too was impossible thanks to the Jews’ own insistence that Pilate officially seal and guard the tomb against grave robbers. What John saw inside changed his doubt to absolute certainty. Grave robbers could not have left the tomb like this. **“The strips of linen [were] lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.”** (20:6f NIV) **“Folded up”** like a napkin does not fit the original Greek New Testament. But *rolled up together into one place* (alla cwriw entetuligmenon eiv ena topon) is more literal. Grave robbers would have left the wrap around the head to hold in gross gastric juices from the corpse’s nose and mouth. But Jesus’ body wrapping collapsed with the soudarion where His head had been. John could see that Jesus passed through alive!

Later John would look back on hundreds of eyewitness appearances of the resurrected Christ. He and the other apostles finally understood the Old Testament Scriptures. After all Jesus had said and done leading to **the empty tomb**, John wrote how God wants us to leave it. **“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** (20:31 NIV) God wants the empty tomb to change our guarded skepticism to guaranteed certainty.

But that's not all. God wants us to see our guilt and shame right there with Peter's, buried with Christ. When Jesus turned and looked at Peter, he "*went out and wept bitterly*" (Matthew 26:75). We have good reason to grieve over our sin, but only long enough to marvel at our Savior's comfort. Jesus had His angel single Peter out for a special message: "*Go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee'*" (Mark 16:7). There on the shores of that lake, our merciful, risen Savior lovingly reinstated His disloyal disciple. Years later, Peter was still brimming over with grace and comfort: "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Peter 1:3 NIV).

Maybe you and I came today with Peter-like guilt and shame, but we have every reason to **leave the tomb** light as a feather. For our grace and comfort too the Bible says, "*He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification*" (Romans 4:25 NIV). The empty tomb declares all sinners innocent. The whole world can look at God's neon sign that says all our guilt is gone, that God is satisfied with Jesus' sacrifice, that He paid for the guilt of our sins. And God has promised He will remember them no more. Don't you realize that because Jesus' tomb is empty, God's justice is on our side? God will not dishonor the death of His one and only begotten Son, and all His promises which He attached to Christ's death and resurrection. These promises help us **leave the empty tomb** like Peter in grace and comfort.

But if still a few tears remain, then let's find Mary Magdalene and see how our risen Lord takes away her grief and sorrow. She was still thinking grave robbers as her tears flowed in rivers. She pleaded with some angels unawares and the one she thought was the gardener behind her: "*Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.*" (20:15 NIV) One word from Jesus is all it took. "*Mary,*" He said to her. "*Teacher!*" she cried out. Her grief turned to joy for Christ's resurrection. Powered by **the empty tomb**, Mary ran back to tell the disciples, "*I have seen the Lord!*"

So we too can run and tell with joy. In our rearview mirror from the cross to the tomb there is nothing but grief and sorrow, guilt and shame, guarded skepticism at best. If we had a tomb for our leader Jesus, we would be "*of all men most miserable*" (1 Corinthians 15:19 KJV). According to former skeptic, the Apostle Paul, "*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*" (1 Corinthians 15:17-20 NIV). And since Christ is the "*firstfruits,*" that means that we shall follow just as He said, "*Because I live, you also will live*" (John 14:19).

Because Jesus rose from the dead, we **leave the empty tomb** with guaranteed certainty that Jesus truly is the Son of God. Our heart and soul overflow with grace and comfort because Jesus absolutely is our Savior from sin. Our tears turn to gladness and celebration because He lives to bless us with His love now and forever. That's life-changing power! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia and Amen!