

Proof: The Empty Tomb

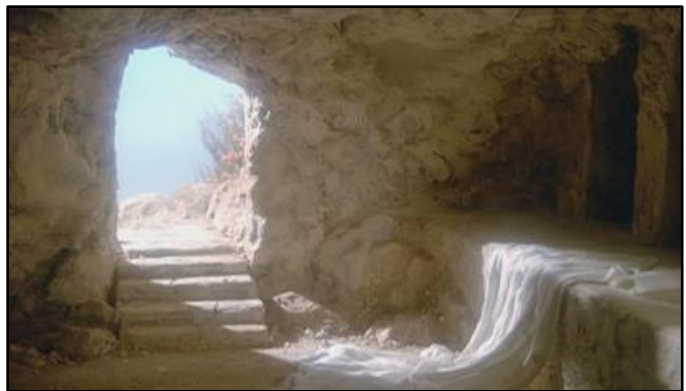
Loving Our Magnificent, Invincible Savior

This is a rare “argument from silence” that still speaks volumes to anyone giving it serious, open-minded attention. One of the most well attested facts of history is the unexpected disappearance of Jesus from His own tomb. It literally pushes doubt and unbelief into a corner where the only way out is to acknowledge resurrection as the only possible explanation.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Luke 24:1-3

The "Missing" Evidence

How can nothing be proof of something? Sounds unlikely, unless you consider the time you once left something special in the fridge for breakfast the next morning. When you woke up and checked the fridge it was gone! You just knew it could only have been your roommate who ate it—the empty fridge was proof. Or was it? Might your roommate have taken it, but not eaten it; or invited friends over while you slept? If all other possibilities wind up as dead ends, then the absence is indeed proof.



The evidence of the empty tomb is just like that. Close off other possible explanations and you are left with only one. But can the other explanations actually be closed off beyond a reasonable doubt?

An Oddly Unconvincing Proof

It is a curious fact that no one in the Bible believed in the resurrection of Jesus because of the "evidence" of the empty tomb with the possible exception of John (which we will look at in a moment). In every case it was the resurrection appearances that convinced the disciples and other followers that Jesus was indeed raised from the grave. Even Thomas who knew the tomb to be empty and had heard about the resurrection appearances, was only convinced when He saw Jesus for himself.

We too have “seen” Jesus for ourselves by the opening of our spiritual eyes which faith provides. The proclamation of the empty tomb is, therefore, of great faith-strengthening power to believers, since we know the inside story and are thrilled by the full significance of what it means. However, we should realize that proclaiming that the tomb was empty probably won’t mean much to non-believers in our day any more than it did in the beginning.



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This is strange, since the empty tomb is a great proof of the resurrection of Jesus. It may rarely convince anyone in itself, but it is an enormous stumbling stone for honest seekers after truth who might otherwise want to doubt the resurrection. Why? Because the empty tomb is one of the most well-attested facts in history.

The four gospels and the book of Acts all reveal that not only the believers knew the tomb to be empty, but the whole unbelieving world around them accepted it as an unarguable fact. All the people involved agreed that the tomb that had been guarded was empty, the stone that sealed it had been rolled away, and that the dead body that had been buried there was gone. The problem of course was that they couldn't agree on what had happened. They still can't.

Three Sets of Facts

1) The Women Got There First

No one even gave it a thought that the women could have rolled the stone away, least of all the women themselves. It weighed at least one and a half to two tons and was not even on its tracks. It was moved some distance away according to the description of John. If the male disciples had been the ones to steal the body, they had to keep that secret not only from unbelievers, but also from all the women who saw the empty tomb and heard the angel's explanation!

2) The Guards Went Unpunished

Once the guards recovered themselves, they went into the city and reported what they had seen. That something highly unusual happened is clear because ordinarily the guards would have been executed for losing the body they were commanded to guard, an outcome they rightly feared. Yet in this case they were bribed to silence and protected by the Temple authorities, who were then placed in a position where they could not claim the soldiers had failed in their duties! No one ever raised that charge. Very strange.

3) The Body Was Never Found

The Jewish leaders wanted to crush all speculation that Jesus might resurrect as He said He would. Unquestionably, the easiest way for the authorities to end those "rumors" was to produce the dead body. This they never did. Yet the resurrection began to be preached right away, right there in Jerusalem. This could never have happened if anyone—anyone at all—knew where the body was. Not only would the authorities have been vindicated, but the believers would have been thoroughly disabused of their belief, unable to proceed honestly and boldly with their witness.

The Case is Sealed

The absence of a dead body "re-seals" the tomb. No one in the historical record outside of the gospels ever produced a body or ever questioned that Jesus had been dead when He was placed in the tomb, though they had plenty of motivation to do so. No one in the gospels did

either. What happened to the body? According to the guards it was not stolen away. It was simply and stunningly gone!

What other possible explanation is there? Could He have revived and walked out? Impossible—no battered and bruised person could have rolled that stone away. In fact the resurrected Jesus didn't need to have the stone removed. He walked out through the walls! The rolling away of the stone didn't happen for His sake, but for ours. An angel revealed to the women (and guards) what had happened when he rolled the stone back: there was no body of Jesus inside. The tomb was already empty!

The women immediately assumed that someone had stolen the body. This shows that their entire expectation was to find, not a resurrected Lord (as He had prophesied), but a dead body. Their first thought was that Jesus' lifeless body had been removed somewhere else—what other explanation could there be? Yet, the seal on the stone and the continuous presence of the guards, as we have seen, completely contradicts that possibility.

When John and Peter heard the news, they raced to the tomb to see for themselves. The sight that greeted them was both the absence of Jesus and the presence of His grave cloths. Peter saw the linens "lying there," indicating the expected place for them on the tomb's burial shelf. Tellingly, the face cloth was in a separate location, "still rolled up" as it would have been around the deceased person's head. Peter "marveled" but we are not told he believed. John entered behind Peter, saw the same scene and "believed." It seems likely that it was the additional "evidence" of the grave cloths which convinced him, not solely the sight of the empty tomb itself.

"Entombed" with an Enigma

This examination of the evidence surrounding the empty tomb does not, of course, "force" a belief in the resurrection upon anyone. But what other explanation is there? When all other possibilities are eliminated, the rational thing to do is believe the only one that is left, no matter how "irrational" it may seem. This is the beauty of the empty tomb as a proof of the resurrection: it eliminates other explanations. It backs unbelief into a corner, where both logic and common sense bring one face to face with resurrection as something that has to be seriously considered. Faith in the resurrection is the only honest way out of the dilemma posed by the empty tomb!

Explore More about Jesus

Resurrection Proof: Visible Appearances In any court of law the testimony of eye witnesses is crucial to establishing the facts of the case. In this "case" we have a super-abundance of testimonies. What really compels faith in these accounts, however, is not the number of them, but their unexpected character. True to form, the resurrected Jesus didn't act in a way anyone could predict—even though He was the One who most frequently predicted it.

Resurrection Proof: The Empty Tomb The evidence keeps mounting up. You may already be one whose transformed life is evidence to your friends and family that something or Someone has powerfully been at work in your life. Let's hope that you've told them (in so many words) that Jesus is Alive—that's what's changing you! A changed life can be tremendously

convincing. The testimony of changed lives after the resurrection of Jesus is just as powerful a witness today as it was then.

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Scriptures on the Empty Tomb

See also Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12 and John 20:1-10

Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." Matthew 27:62-28:10 ESV

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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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