

Scandalous Part 2

The Missing Body

Matthew 27:57- 28:15

Memory Verses: 1 Peter 1:3

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

There are scandals all over the place. We live in very scandalous times. Just look at all the scandals that have sprung up since the Covid 19 quarantine has begun. 4 senators and congress people have been under investigation for insider trading because they sold all their stocks when they were briefed in a classified meeting about Covid. Some people on a certain side of the aisle feel that the Trump administration has been scandalous in their dealings with the epidemic. Those on the other side of the aisle feel that some in the media have caused a scandal by the way they have reported the situation. Scandalous times indeed.

Isn't it convenient then, that our current scandal is during this time, during Easter? Why you say? Because Easter is scandalous. Last week we begun by looking at the situation from the trial of Christ to his murder on the cross. He was plotted against, conspired against, falsely accused, beaten and abused mercilessly, declared innocent multiple times, and killed on a cross. Why was his trial in the middle of the night. Why was he taken to four different judges and convicted without one credible witness. Why was he beaten with no proof of guilt? Why was he held captive while Barabbas the murderer was set free? Why was Jesus, a man free of sin, crime, or malice... a man who healed people, forgave people's sins, who only helped people everyday... why was he sentenced do death? Now thats a scandal.

But the scandal doesn't end there! Soon after Jesus is killed things begin to get even stranger. Turn over to the book of **Matthew 27:57-66**. Jesus' body is given over to Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man who was also a secret disciple of Jesus and member of the Sanhedrin, most likely as a Pharisee. Joseph with the help of Nicodemus (another Pharisee who was also a secret disciple of Jesus) wraps his body and entombs him in a cave.

This shouldn't be a problem except that the Pharisees who had Jesus killed now remember some of the teachings of Christ, namely that he said if he was killed he would raise again in three days. So they have the Romans gather together some guards and seal the tomb so Jesus' pesky disciples can't come and steal him and claim that he has risen from the dead.

The Pharisees were right to defend the tomb from the theft of Jesus' body. They had two spies who had been operating within their

ranks now openly protecting the body of Jesus. The scene is ripe for scandal.

So what happens. Continue reading in **Matthew 28:1-10**. Two day's later the Mary's are going to the grave of Jesus to mourn him when there is an earthquake. This wasn't a natural earthquake though... it was caused by an angel of the Lord so that the tomb could be opened. The guards were so fear struck that they passed out. The angel then proceeds to tell the women that Jesus has risen from the dead and shows them the empty tomb. He then instructs them to go tell his disciples. On the way to tell the disciples they encounter Jesus who tells them the same thing.

This is interesting. We are expected to believe that Jesus actually did rise from the grave after three days just as he prophesied, and that his escape coincided with a supernatural earthquake caused by an alien being who is described as having the appearance of lightning and snow. This is a scandal straight out of the X-files. So what happens next.

Continue reading in **Matthew 28:11-15**. The guards who passed out from fear of the angel now run into town and tell the Pharisees about the angel and the missing body of Jesus. So what do they do? They pay the guards hush money and bribe them to say that the body was stolen by the disciples... just as they described might happen. They covered it up with Pilate as well and the story of the grave robbery was spread all through-out the area. Secret spies, geological phenomena, alien visitation, grave robbery, government coverup, and a missing body. So what are we to make of this conspiracy?

The missing body of Jesus begs us to ask two questions this morning. 1) Who's account do we believe? Do we believe the Bible's account that Jesus truly did rise from the dead, and that the government covered it up.... or 2) do we believe that the disciples stole his body as the Pharisees would have us believe? So that's question number 1.

Question number two is this... if Jesus did rise from the dead... so what? What does it have to do with me? What does it have to do with you?

This morning we are gathered together under very unique circumstances, to celebrate the scandal of Easter... the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. And so, it is very important that you understand why? In a world of scandal... having heard a very scandalous account... this morning I want you to leave this place knowing that... **The Tomb Is Empty So You Don't Have To Be .**

This morning with the time we have left I want to show you that it stands to reason that Jesus truly did rise from the grave, and secondly how you can escape an empty life and be transformed by the power of the empty grave.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing I want us to see is that... **The Historical Record Proves A Risen Christ**. Let's put this scandal to rest shall we. There is a plethora of evidence to go over in uncovering the truth.

First... notice in the passage that we just read that the empty tomb was discovered by women. This doesn't make much sense culturally if this was indeed a fabrication. You see, there was a phrase generated by the Pharisees in this day that said, "I would rather the entire law be burned than be delivered to a woman." It should be clear to you that culturally speaking, women were not too prominent or revered in the time of Jesus. So... for the Bible to use several women as the primary witnesses as to the empty tomb says that it must be credible. Otherwise if it were a legend they would have used men as the witnesses in the story. The fact that they tell the truth about these women as the ones who discovered the empty tomb gives tons of credibility to the fact this story is true.

Secondly, the false narrative of the Pharisees that the guards had fallen asleep doesn't hold up. These were most likely Roman soldiers, meaning that they were the best of the best. These men were trained to stay awake and could be killed if they fell asleep on the job. But we all get tired right. Listen, even if one or two fell asleep... are we expected to believe that a detachment of guards most likely numbering 4 or more, would all fall asleep at the same time? Also, are we to believe that even if they were all asleep, that they would not be awakened by the stone being moved from the opening of the tomb? This was a huge stone, and would have been quite noisy scrapping against the tomb. This just doesn't make sense. Also, how would these women be able to move the stone? It would've taken all 11 disciples to push that stone away from the entrance and 11 people would have made quite a stir. To anyone with half a brain... there is now way the body was stolen while the soldiers were sound asleep.

Thirdly, and most importantly... **How could the disciples create such a lie and live according to this lie, and then die for this lie?** They would have had to preach this lie as truth for decades, being imprisoned, and beaten for this lie all while knowing that every time they preached it, it was a fabrication. Talk about being fake. **John Stott calls this a "significant psychological consideration that is enough to pour cold water on the whole theory."** Listen, they all died still claiming the empty tomb. They would have taken their last breath with images of the grave robbery playing in their minds. Even for the most hardened of hypocrites... this doesn't hold up, and their testimonies prove it. Look, these men weren't lying, fake con-artists, they were transformed. Notice that when we last see the disciples before the resurrection they are cowards running and hiding in the dark scared that the last three years

have been a horrible waste. They are defeated. But, after the resurrection they become the boldest, most active missionaries and pastors the world has ever seen – what changed? They created the world's biggest hoax? No! They saw the resurrected Christ and it changed them forever.

Fourth, no one believed the false report of the Jews because over 500 people saw Christ alive. In **1 Corinthians 15:6** Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to over 500 people. Adding more weight, Paul says that most of these people are still alive. This means that at the time Paul wrote this he was saying you can go and ask these people and hear directly from them their eye witness account of seeing Jesus alive after he was dead. Why would Paul do this? Why write something people can fact check if it is a bold lie? Paul had no problem with this because he knew it was true. Add to this the fact that there are no contradictory historical accounts to this report. It should've been easy to find people who said... that's not true, "Jesus never was seen alive after his death," if it was a fabrication. But we don't see that do we? Instead, what we see in the New Testament is multiple eye-witness accounts of Jesus alive after his death which stand as convincing evidence. Notice that there are 6 primary authors in the New Testament who testify as eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Christ; Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter. Listen... if you had a story corroborated by 2 or 3 different people from 2 or 3 different perspectives and accounts you would not doubt the conclusion... we have 6.

There's so much more evidence but it's too much to go over here in our time this morning. The point is this... **Every piece of evidence provides an overwhelming case for the resurrection – the tomb is empty and Jesus is alive . The Tomb Is Empty So You Don't Have To Be.**

So that leaves one last question... why? Why did Christ need to rise from the tomb? Simple... **Christ is Risen To Raise You**. A missing body is no doubt a scandal. Jesus is not in the tomb and that can leave a lot of questions, hopefully we've answered those questions. But the body isn't just missing to be missing... the reason Jesus' body isn't in the tomb is because your faith wouldn't be complete otherwise. He died for us so that our sins would be paid for. He has raised for our faith to be unbreakable. Look at **1 Corinthians 15:12-19**. Jesus is raised from the dead to secure our faith and our resurrection. Practically speaking... if Jesus had never rose from the dead we would not have enough proof to believe that he was God, the Messiah, or a sufficient sacrifice. Only his resurrection could complete the work. We have faith in the work of Christ because he rose himself from the grave conquering death. Do you know what true emptiness is? It's not knowing what the meaning of life is? It's not having a reason to wake up in the morning or push yourself to achieve great things. The resurrection shows us that Christ is real, that his words are true, and that if we follow him

we can defeat our sins, fears, and failures. Look again at vs14, we have a hope in the risen Christ that gives us real hope – without that hope we are empty. Jesus takes the emptiness of this life away and fills you with so much meaning and purpose, love and peace. That's why he rose.

Christ has replaced your emptiness with an empty tomb filled with hope, and purpose. The Tomb Is Empty So You Don't Have To Be.

But that's not all. We also have faith in our own resurrection someday because Jesus has been resurrected. He rose again so our hope in eternal life could be secured. Look again at vs19. If our hope is only in this life then we are to be pitied. No matter how good a hope in Christ can make this life, it pales in comparison to what he has for us in heaven. **We have so much to look forward to beyond this world...**

and we can be sure of it because Christ has risen. The Tomb Is Empty So You Don't Have To Be innocent.

Application (Resolution, You)

There is enough evidence to make even the most adamant skeptic question his position. You don't need to doubt whether or not the tomb is empty, the body is missing, and Christ is risen – he is risen in deed!

And why did he die and rise again? Simple – he died so you could be set free from the grip of sin on your life and escape the punishment of hell. And he has risen so that you can have a hope in this life that is real. **The Tomb Is Empty So You Don't Have To Be.** You can have assurance that Jesus is real and these words are true... because he has not only died but he has risen again. Any one can die... but only God can be raised again by his own power. If Jesus has the power of life and death then you can be assured that living for him is not in vain. All your fears, all your failures, all of your doubts... all of it is conquered by the resurrection of Christ. Now the hope we have for a life beyond this life is realized... because Jesus did it for himself he can and he will do it for us. In a world of empty people living out empty lives... the empty tomb relieves us of all of that emptiness. Now we can be filled with purpose and meaning that lasts forever. Look at **1 Peter 1:3 - The Tomb Is Empty So You Don't Have To Be**

Conclusion

The Body is missing... and it is a scandal no doubt... but the real scandal is that Jesus would die and rise again for us. The real scandal is that we were the ones who sinned against him. The real scandal is that we turned our backs on him. The real scandal is that even while we were sinners... still the love of Christ kept loving us... all the way to the cross... all the way to the grave... and all the way to a rolled away stone. Now you know what's really missing? Meaninglessness...

Purposelessness, uncertainty, the fear of sin, the fear of death, the fear of hell, the sting of our iniquity, the devastation of our selfishness. Do you know what's really missing in the empty tomb now? Emptiness! You don't have to be empty any more! Surrender to the risen Christ and be filled with life, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, long-suffering, goodness, mercy, and grace... for all of eternity. **The Tomb Is Empty So You Don't Have To Be**