

SERMON

Sermon: Easter and the Empty Tomb

Full Easter sermon manuscript on Luke 24:1-12 and 1 Corinthians 15 -- the resurrection as historical event, cosmic claim, and personal transformation

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Equipping pastors and leaders to serve with excellence, integrity, and lasting Kingdom impact.

Sermon Overview and Context

Primary Texts: Luke 24:1-12 | 1 Corinthians 15:12-22, 54-57 | John 20:11-18

Preaching Hook

Everything in Christianity depends on whether a dead man got up. If the tomb was empty on Sunday morning because of a historical resurrection, then everything Jesus claimed about himself is true, everything he promised about life after death is reliable, and everything the New Testament says about sin and forgiveness and new creation is grounded in actual reality. But if the tomb was not empty -- if the resurrection is a spiritual metaphor, a subjective experience, a way of saying that Jesus's influence continued after his death -- then the apostle Paul was right: "we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19). Easter is not a religious holiday overlaid on a spring festival. It is the hinge of all history, the event on which everything else turns.

The Empty Tomb -- Evidence, Witnesses, and the Historical Case

Luke 24:1-12 records the first witnesses to the empty tomb with striking historical specificity. The women who came at dawn with spices found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Two men in dazzling apparel appeared and asked the question that echoes through the entire resurrection narrative: "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (Luke 24:5-6). The evidence is historical: the tomb was empty. The earliest enemies of Christianity never denied the empty tomb -- they attempted to explain it (the guards were bribed to say the disciples stole the body, Matthew 28:12-15). The claim was not fabricated by disciples who knew it was false. They died for it. And the combination of an empty tomb, multiple post-resurrection appearances to groups of hundreds (1 Corinthians 15:6), and the transformation of frightened followers into people who turned the ancient world upside down -- these are historical data that require explanation.

"Luke 24:1-12"

-- Primary Text

1 Corinthians 15 -- If Christ Has Not Been Raised

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15 is the most sustained apologetic for the resurrection in the New Testament. He begins with the apostolic tradition he received and delivered -- a creedal statement so early that scholars date it to within 5 years of the crucifixion (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). He then constructs a series of "if Christ has not been raised" consequences that reveal what is actually at stake: our preaching is in vain, your faith is in vain, we are false witnesses about God, you are still in your sins, those who have died in Christ have perished, and we are of all people most to be pitied (vv. 14-19). The resurrection is not one Christian doctrine among many. It is the foundation of the entire structure. Remove it and everything collapses.

"1 Corinthians 15:12-22, 54-57"

-- Secondary Text

The Implications -- Death Has Lost, and Everything Changes

Paul's climactic declaration in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 is not a quiet theological observation. It is a victory shout addressed to the last enemy: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The resurrection of Jesus is not just his personal victory over death -- it is the beginning of the defeat of death for everyone who is in him. This has immediate, practical, daily implications. The person who genuinely believes in the resurrection does not live the same way as the person who does not. The resurrection changes how you grieve, how you give, how you serve, how you take risks, how you face your own mortality. It changes everything -- because it means that the worst thing that can happen to you is not actually the worst thing that can happen to you.

"John 20:11-18"

-- Third Text

Application and Invitation

For an Easter congregation that includes many non-regular attenders: Make the historical case with confidence. Invite honest engagement with the evidence. Then proclaim the personal implication: this resurrection is for you, not just for Jesus. He rose so that you could rise with him -- from the death of sin, from the fear of mortality, from the smallness of a life lived for yourself. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). Invite response.

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. What did this sermon say to you personally -- not in general, but specifically? Where did it land?
2. Was there anything in the message that challenged or confused you? How did you engage with it?
3. What specific application is this text calling you to? Name it as concretely as possible.
4. Who in your life needs to hear what you heard today? How might you share it?

Preacher's Preparation Checklist

- Have I allowed this text to preach to me personally before I prepared to preach it to others?
- Do I have a specific illustration that makes the central theological claim concrete and immediately recognizable?
- Is my introduction creating genuine need for what the text provides -- curiosity, tension, a felt question?
- Is my conclusion specific, clear, and calling for a concrete response rather than general inspiration?
- Have I prayed specifically for the individuals who will be in the room when I preach this?

The sermon is not yours. You are the herald -- the one who delivers the message on behalf of the One who sent you. Prepare with everything you have, and then step behind the text and let it do what only it can do.

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