

# The Empty Tomb

## Personal Pre-Passover Study and Meditation

**Jesus Christ's resurrection from a rock sepulchre galvanised the faith of early Christians. The empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances of the risen Lord were the crowning proof that the Master they loved and served was not just another moral teacher. He was, as he claimed to be, God in the flesh.**

This conviction energised the early church.

**Acts 4:20** *"We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."*

The apostle Peter testified to the Jewish religious authorities, who could not quench the faith of those early believers.

**We who read the accounts almost 2,000 years later need to remember that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not, as Paul boldly declared before the elite of his nation, "done in a corner".**

**Acts 26:26** [NIV] *"The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner."*

Just the opposite was true. The disciples testified in the laboratory of public scrutiny and debate. People in their audiences could refute them at every point, if they were not telling the truth.

**To first-century Christians, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the pivotal event in history. Their dramatic encounters with Jesus after his escape from the rock tomb were vivid and unforgettable:**

**1 John 1:1-2** *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us."*

**John 20:30-31; 21:24-25** [NIV] *"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 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." ... "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."*

John, an apostle and disciple of Jesus Christ, wrote as an eyewitness to Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Luke, an educated man who wrote a detailed study of the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth, authenticated the report that went from tiny Judea into the world beyond:

**Luke 1:3-4** *"Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."*

Paul distilled the essence of the new faith he helped spread across the Roman Empire:

**1 Corinthians 15:3-4** *"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."*

## Full public scrutiny

The apostles faced the test of informed public opinion, a jury of their contemporaries. Some in their audiences already had Jesus' blood on their hands. The execution of one or two more fishermen from Galilee wouldn't make much difference.

Yet the disciples radiated unconquerable confidence. Their words still pulsate with moral fervour and authority. **The good news of the resurrection was big news on the streets of Jerusalem. It was hard-hitting. It was effective. It changed lives.**

**Acts 2:22** *“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know,”* Peter trumpeted. **Acts 2:36** *“God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*

**Acts 5:28** *“You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood,”* they lamely protested.

**This bold preaching threw the Jerusalem religious hierarchy completely on the defensive.**

**If the disciples had been perpetrating fraud or deceit, their testimony could have been easily overthrown. It wasn't. The willingness to risk all for the truth of the resurrection was convincing testimony from fallible human beings men who had earlier deserted Christ and fled.**

That willingness, and the powerful miracles being done in Christ's name, made the gospel compelling.

It rocked Jerusalem.

**Acts 5:13** [NIV] *“No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.”*

**No wonder Christ's newly regenerated disciples were highly regarded.**

And remember something else: Other popular movements had come and gone in first-century Judea. Sensational leaders had arisen before Jesus of Nazareth.

**Acts 5:35-39** [NIV] *“Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”*

People the world at large has forgotten.

One of them, Judas, was also a Galilean, who lived not far from where Jesus was reared. Around A.D. 6, Judas gathered a following and set himself against the Roman power. His movement failed and he was killed. But no one in the first century claimed that this Judas of Galilee was raised from the dead or that he and his followers had many prolonged talks after a resurrection. Still less did anyone risk life and limb for the Judas movement years afterward. Yet ordinary human beings risked their all for Jesus of Nazareth.

## History Not Dogma

The late F.F. Bruce, evangelical author, notes: *“The Christian gospel is not primarily a code of ethics or a metaphysical system; it is first and foremost good news, and as such it was proclaimed by its earliest preachers.... This good news is intimately bound up with the historical order, for it tells how for the world’s redemption God entered into history, the eternal came into time, the kingdom of heaven invaded the realm of earth, in the great events of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ”* (*The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, pages 7-8).

**The disciples were convicted by the empty tomb.** They believed in the power of the resurrection. Their testimony was believable because they believed.

How about us? Do we believe?

We should. The same Jesus Christ who walked the dusty trails of Galilee is alive today, alive and glorified. He intervenes for those of us who turn to him in faith and belief, just as he did for Peter, Andrew, James and John. The empty tomb could not hold him, and the evil powers of this world, natural and supernatural could not stamp out the truth of his resurrection.

**Philippians 3:10-11** [NIV] *“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

**To experience this transforming power for ourselves, we will also have to believe in the empty tomb and in the power of the resurrection.** Belief and the work of the Holy Spirit will lead us to repent. Repentance is toward God, an inner act of contrition for being sinful, broken human beings. We are all sinners; we have all broken God’s great moral and spiritual law. God provides for our need for forgiveness and helps us deal with our guilt through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

Following repentance, believers demonstrate their faith in God through the ceremony of baptism. The New Testament teaches that water baptism is an outward symbol of faith.

**Acts 10:45-48** [NIV] *“The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.”*

Believers who come to Christ in faith receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Ephesians 4:22-23** [NIV] *“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds;”*

**2 Corinthians 5:17** [NIV] *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*

The Holy Spirit lives in us, renewing our minds and sanctifying us until we are completed as new creations in Jesus Christ at the resurrection of the dead.

**We are not asked to make a commitment to Christ without evidence. The empty tomb stands as stark evidence that our Lord and Saviour is risen from the dead.**

Peter, pre-eminent preacher of the empty tomb, said it best: **Acts 3:19-20** *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you.”*

The decision is yours. Will you believe?