

“Inside the Tomb of Jesus”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 3/15/2020
Text: Mark 15:42-47 at FBC of Newport, NH

//42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.//

—Mark 15:42-47

Have you ever wondered about the inside of Jesus' tomb after that stone covered the entrance, leaving Jesus' body alone in the darkness? It was a new tomb, so there were no other bodies or bones besides that of Jesus himself. There were certainly no other people, no witnesses or mourners as would come in the following first day of the week, Sunday. This was Friday at just about the time it would turn into Saturday, the Sabbath day, come evening. This would further isolate and insure that there would be no one disturbing the inside of that tomb. Life would go on outside in the streets of Jerusalem while the followers of Jesus slipped into whispers and hiding. That is, except for Joseph of Arimathea who had uncharacteristically stepped into the limelight in order to give Jesus' body a proper place of burial. And now, inside that tomb, there was a profound vacancy and silence as the body lay in the presence of no one.

Jesus was dead. His body was lifeless. Therefore the world was now going to live on according to the verdict of the authorities, both Jewish and Gentile. These authorities were declaring by their words and their murderous actions that Jesus didn't matter any more. They assured everyone he was a false savior who couldn't save, a delusional king who couldn't rule. They would say this death proved them right, that Jesus was a nobody who would soon be forgotten by the relatively few people who knew him and who themselves were nobodies. In other words, these authorities were all set to carry on and leave Jesus like dust knocked off the souls of their feet. From dust he came and to dust he would return. That would be the natural course of history, the normal course of life dominated by death ... and by those who could make death do their bidding, or so it seems.

But while all that kind of posturing was going on outside the tomb, what do you suppose was going on inside that chamber?

I must admit, this is an odd question. The first impression of an answer would seem obvious: **nothing was going on**. It's a tomb, the epitome of a place where nothing of any interest goes on. There was plenty going on prior to this time. Jesus' crucifixion, his week of Passion, preceded by his years of ministry, his thirty years of earthly life, and prior to that ... an eternity of existence as the second Person of the trinity of God. On the other end, after this time in the tomb, there would also be plenty going on. There'd be the resurrection of this sacred body, as predicted by Jesus, coming on "the third day," counting very small portions of Friday and Sunday, but the entirety of the Sabbath day in between. Then there'd be the appearances proving him risen to all his disciples, then the Ascension, then Pentecost, then the proclamation of the church and anticipation of Jesus' return from his throne in heaven. Instead of this death proving the authorities right about Jesus being a nobody, a fraudulent king and false savior, it would prove to be a rock solid cornerstone upon which a whole new creation could be built. It would prove to be an unmovable stumbling stone upon which the world's kingdoms would trip and fall. All this and more would be played out in the history yet to take place on the other side of this quiet tomb where the body of Jesus lay.

So there was plenty going on *around* this tomb, both in the geographic space and historic time around it. But *inside* the tomb there was, at least at first, absolutely nothing going on behind that stone door.

Nothing. And nothing needed to go on. After all, had not Jesus completed his work of redemption through his perfect life and perfect sacrifice on the cross? Was not this the meaning of Jesus' final word shouted out in victory over sin and death? "Finished!" was his cry. Nothing more and nothing less was needed. And it's not as if God can't do amazing things with 'nothing'. (see next point)

Take into consideration, too, the fullness of the day in which Jesus' body lay in that tomb. **It was the Sabbath Day of Rest**, the first and most fundamental of all holy days. After starting with nothing and creating everything, God worked six days to form the earth, its creatures and mankind for himself. Then God established the seventh day. And on that seventh day he did no work. Nothing. For nothing needed to be done. Instead, God rested. This is not the picture of boredom and restlessness. This is the picture of fulfillment and joy, communion with that which has been completed. And we humans were supposed to be a part of it. Instead, we fell into sin and out of this joyous rest with God.

The very image of this rest is used in the book of Hebrews 4 regarding salvation, where the reader is urged to make every effort to enter into God's rest.

"9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience." —Hebrews 4:9-11

That 'effort' is satisfied by faith in Jesus Christ and following him faithfully brings us rest precisely because of what was *not* being done in that tomb. Nothing was done there because everything was already finished at the cross. All that was going on now was the beautiful and proverbial 'nothing' of God's resting in peace.

Do you remember Jesus' words to the repentant thief on the cross to his right? "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." —Luke 23:43 Jesus himself was not in that tomb. His body was, but he was not. He was in paradise and so was that man, no longer a thief but a child of God.

And the reality of this could even be reflected in that tomb and in what was not going on there in terms of there being any restlessness. Jesus was not anxious about getting himself resurrected. God was not fretting about the burial spices and arrangement being incomplete. There was no worry about what was going on outside and all around that tomb either, even though sin and death seemed to be carrying on as if they had had the last laugh. God was at perfect peace and rest within himself and within that tomb—because of what Jesus had done.

Is this kind of 'nothing' something people need to hear about?

In just the past few weeks, and last week around here, we have been witness to the power of a tiny, microscopic virus to bring our entire world's civilization to a paralyzing halt. The new Corona virus, COVID-19, starting in Wuhan, China, has spread rapidly throughout Asia, then Europe and parts of Africa, and now is in America. And with it has come a double infection. There is the infection of the disease itself, which is at least as serious as the flu, especially for people over 60. But there is also the infection of fear. Time will tell which infection proves to be the most destructive, but right now governments are struggling, businesses are suffering, markets are reacting and toilet paper is disappearing ... fear seems to have the upper hand.

This seems to be an illustration of the overall matter of sin and death. Between the two, one would think death would be the greater foe. And it is a very serious enemy. But the greater enemy is actually sin. Without sin, death has no sting. It's like a scary looking snake that has no venom, just a terrible, but temporary, bite. It can be shaken off and dropped into the fire.

But sin, if not dealt with, can make your life a living death and it can make your death an unquenchable lake of fire. It takes two deaths to finally make one's way to hell. It takes only one sin. Just ask Adam. Though I think he and Eve were forgiven, it was their one sin that put them in jeopardy in the first place. Or just consider the devil himself. He knows nothing of death. He knows everything about choosing sin over God.

We need to know and be reassured that God himself is at peace. God and man have been reconciled at the cross of Christ. The tomb of Jesus is

temporary, but what has gone on there—and not gone on there—is everlasting. And the key to it, the cornerstone, is God’s ability to be at rest (and seeming to do nothing) while doing everything to save us.

ILLUS: When staying home “flattens the curve” and fights the Corona virus. And of course there is one more thing that goes on in that tomb: **The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.** It’s not invisible and it’s not ‘nothing’ either. Although we don’t get to see it. The moment it happened there was no one around, except Jesus himself. We weren’t there. We weren’t even invited. It would seem God was perfectly contented to have raised his Son Jesus from the dead in complete privacy.

But don’t worry. This is hardly a problem. There’s nothing that says you have to see a resurrection in order to *believe* in a resurrection. Much the same as you don’t have to see someone born in order to know that they’ve been born. What you need to know is the person. And even there, seeing the person is sometimes itself optional. Though, of course, wonderful.

God knows what we need. And he’s provided the outline of it in an amazing package called the Gospel. But it’s an outline of Jesus himself. Who he is. What he’s done and not done—and how God rests in that. And what this means as a call upon our lives to believe in him, trust him and follow him.

We very much need to know this fearless faith and rest and peace which Jesus Christ has established—right in the middle of our fearful, faithless and restless world—right in the middle of that tomb!

But we don’t need to be in there. We don’t have to take a picture.

What we need is Jesus. He died for our sins. He rose for us to find him and follow his way of life.

There are a few more weeks before the Easter season, so I will be waiting for Easter to move on to chapter 16 and the resurrection stories.