

IT IS EMPTY!

Little Philip, born with Down's syndrome, attended a third-grade Sunday School class with several eight-year-old boys and girls. Typical of that age, the children did not readily accept Philip with his differences. But because of a creative teacher, they began to care about Philip and accept him as part of the group, though not fully.

The Sunday after Easter the teacher brought Leggs pantyhose containers, the kind that look like large eggs. Each receiving one, the children were told to go outside on that lovely spring day, find some symbol for new life, and put it in the egg-like container. After running about the church property in wild confusion, the students returned to the classroom and placed the containers on the table.

Surrounded by the children, the teacher began to open them one by one. After each one, whether a flower, butterfly, or leaf, the class would say, "Ooh" and "Ahh." Then one was opened, revealing nothing inside. The children exclaimed, "That's stupid. That's not fair. Somebody didn't do their assignment."

Philip spoke up, "That's mine." "Philip, you never do things right!" the student retorted. "There's nothing there!"

"I did so do it," Philip insisted. "I did do it. It's empty. The tomb was empty!"

Silence followed. From then on Philip became a full member of the class. He died not long afterward from an infection most normal children would have shrugged off. At the funeral service, this class of eight-year-olds marched up to the altar not with flowers, but with their Sunday school teacher, to lay on the top of the casket an empty pantyhose egg.

Philip understood that the tomb of Jesus was empty because of the Risen Savior and he, too, could have hope of eternal life in God through Jesus' resurrection.

We need to look into several things about the facts of resurrection of Jesus.

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Romans 6:8-9 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is among the most important of all biblical truths. It is foundational. It is bedrock. Many other aspects of the Christian faith depend and rest on the fact of the Resurrection. Let me share with you just three essential Christian truths that depend on the Resurrection.

1) Life beyond the death depends on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 15:21-22 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Jesus' victory over death promises us that we, too, will overcome death. When we overcome death, we get to have eternal life in heaven instead of eternal death in hell.

2) God's future judgment of the world rests upon the Resurrection.

Acts 17:31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

This promise reminds us that God will judge the world of the non believers one day. To those who are born-again will receive the rewards according to what they have done.

3) The resurrection of Christ gives us power to live the Christian life.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The Resurrection, therefore, promise us that God will not only give us life beyond the grave, but He will give us power to live the Christian life on earth.

B. THE OPPOSITIONS AGAINST THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

1) The stolen body

Matthew 28:12–15 A meeting of all the religious leaders was called, and they decided to bribe the soldiers. They told the soldiers, "You must say, 'Jesus' disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body." Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today.

The devil hates the Resurrection, because he was defeated by it. For two thousand years he has developed lies and excuses to lead people from believing in the Risen Christ. The first one of satan's oldest lies concerning the Resurrection is that the body of Christ was stolen.

The guards of Christ's tomb first told this lie after He rose from the dead. Scripture tells us that the religious leaders bribed the soldiers and commanded them to say, "'Jesus' disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body'". But this particular lie actually proves the resurrection of the Lord. It is unlikely the apostles would have counterfeited a resurrection. They did not even believe in it themselves. Remember when the women reported Jesus' resurrection? The Scripture tells us even the disciples thought their report "sounded like nonsense, so they didn't believe it" according to Luke 24:11. Instead of waiting with great anticipation for the Risen Christ, the disciples initially rejected it.

It is also unlikely that Christ's enemies would have stolen His body. They yearned for nothing more than to prevent another Jesus movement. The religious leaders took extreme measures to protect Christ's body and prove that the resurrection was a lie. And stealing Christ's body would have accomplished everything they were against. Even if they had stolen the body, they undoubtedly would have produced it once that fledgling group of believers began to win people to Christ. But Jesus' enemies never produced His body, because they had no body to produce.

The fact of the matter is that Christ's tomb was empty because He rose again from the dead. Nothing, not satan or the lies of this world can ever change the truth that Christ is risen.

2) The swoon theory

John 19:33–35 But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was dead already, so they didn't break his legs. One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear, and blood and water flowed out. This report is from an

eyewitness giving an accurate account; it is presented so that you also can believe.

The swoon theory is the second of satan's oldest lies concerning the Resurrection. This theory proposes that Jesus did not rise from the dead, because He never really died. Instead, Jesus went into a deep coma or "swoon" from the severe pain and trauma of the Crucifixion. Then, in the cool atmosphere of the tomb, Christ revived, somehow escaped the strips of cloths that were wrapped tightly upon Him, and then appeared to His disciples.

The swoon theory cannot fly in the face of the facts. You see, the Roman guards were experts at execution and would be put to death if they allowed a condemned man, like Christ, to escape death. The guards were certain Jesus was dead, because when they thrust a spear into His side, it brought forth blood and water. This was their final proof of His death, because this occurs when the heart stops beating.

A humorous letter to the editor of a Christian magazine accurately evaluated the "Swoon Theory":

Dear Editor: Our preacher said, on Easter, that Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?

Sincerely, Bewildered

Dear Bewildered: Beat your preacher with a cat-of-nine-tails with 39 heavy lashes, nail him to a cross; hang him in the sun for 6 hours; run a spear through his heart; embalm him; put him in an airless tomb for 50 hours and see what happens.

Sincerely, Editor

According to this Swoon theory, Jesus woke up and all by Himself rolled away the one ton stone with His pierced hands from the inside where there was nothing to get hold of. Then with His beaten up body, He jumped on a squad of trained Roman soldiers who had spears and swords. He knocked them all out and ran away with His pierced feet. If you believe that pathetic 'Swoon Theory', you have more faith than I do. There is a perfect theme music to go with that stupid 'Swoon' theory.

The editor's response points to the ridiculousness of the swoon theory. Amazingly enough, people still believe to this theory. Not because it's believable. Not because it's logical, but because it's something they'd rather believe than the truth of God. The truth of the matter is that Jesus Christ has risen!

3) The mass hallucination theory

1 Corinthians 15:3-6 Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time. . . .

Another of satan's lies about the Resurrection is the mass hallucination theory. This theory proposes that everyone who claimed to see the Risen Lord was actually hallucinating out of an earnest desire to see Him alive again.

The fact of the matter is that hallucinations typically can occur with people who, in one way or another, are expecting them. But biblical evidence reveals that when Jesus was crucified, His disciples were devastated and destroyed. Their faith was to a large degree shattered. They had absolutely no hopes of ever seeing Jesus alive again.

Once more, hallucinations, once started, are continual. But the disciples only saw Jesus for a very limited time. Then they ceased to see Him again.

Scripture also records that Jesus not only appeared to the disciples on a number of occasions, but that He appeared to more than five hundred people at one time. That's pretty unbelievable for five hundred people to hallucinate the same thing at the same time. If this evidence against the Resurrection were ever brought forth in a court of law, it certainly would not hold water. Even the freshman of a law school can defeat their lies.

Satan's lies about the Resurrection never hold up because Jesus is alive. He fulfilled the Scriptures by rising again, conquering sin and death. He appeared over and over again to a multitude of eyewitnesses. And each appearance of Christ is a tender demonstration of Him meeting the needs and hurts of His children.

C. GOD SAYS, "BELIEVE AND I'LL SHOW YOU."

John 20:29 You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who haven't seen me and believe anyway.

If the resurrection of Christ is a lie, why would every one of the apostles go to an early grave for a mere lie? Experience tells us that whenever there is a conspiracy, someone always breaks. This is especially the case when the indictments start flying and someone knows they are going to do time in the joint. Someone will break. They always do. And when the first person does come clean, others will follow because everyone is trying to save their own hide.

Similarly, if the apostles had stolen Christ's body, why wouldn't they have broken the code of silence and told the truth as they faced death for their belief in Christ? "We stole the body," or "It's all a lie," they could have said. All they had to say was, "I'll tell you where Christ's body is!" But this didn't happen. The apostles not only held to their testimonies, they died for them. As we look over church history and tradition, every single apostle (with the exception of John) died gruesome and painful tortures deaths because they confessed the truth of the resurrected Christ.

But the fact of the matter is that belief in Christ is not a case of stacking up the evidence. Many people saw Christ after the Resurrection and still did not believe. Belief in Jesus is founded upon faith. You might say, "Show me and I will believe. For all practical purposes, God says, "Believe and I will show you." Just take a step of faith and God will more than meet you half way.

Jesus had to die to take away our sins. There is no one who sinned too much that God cannot forgive, and there is no one who hasn't sinned against that he doesn't need God's salvation through Jesus Christ.

D. INVITATION

The Word of God says that all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Because the wage of our sins is eternal death in hell, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. God knew that we couldn't come to Him with our sinful nature. But He loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Jesus clearly tells us that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and there is no other way to get to heaven except through Him.

You no longer have to live in turmoil, unrest and uncertainty of future. God will give you hope and peace on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ our Messiah. It is available

for you right now. You don't have to do something good or special before you get saved. Just come to Him as you are. He will change you from inside out.

Let's stand up and pray.

The invitation from Jesus has been given. It is up to you to take that invitation of eternal life. Everybody close your eyes and bow your head, please.

If you want to accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord and follow Him to have eternal life in Christ Jesus, raise your hand, please. Raise your hands high so that I can see you and make an eye contact with me.

Including those people, I want all of you to repeat this prayer after me:

"Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I am sorry for my sin. I know that my sins have separated me from you. I repent of it and I turn to You by faith right now. I thank You for dying on the cross for me and paying the price for all of my sins. I ask You to come into my life right now and be my Savior, my Lord, and my Friend. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Help me to be Your disciple from this moment forward. Thank You, Lord. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen."

If you said that prayer from your heart, then I am going to ask you to come on down to the front.