

It's Empty!

Text: Acts 17:30-31

Intro:

"It's empty!" An exclamation of disappointment.

Empty repeatedly spells disillusionment.

- An empty cookie jar,
- An empty bowl,
- An empty hand,
- An empty stomach,
- An empty tank,
- An empty house,
- An empty feeling.

"**Empty**" means that something that should be there, is *gone*.

When we consider the ***Resurrection of Jesus***, we're talking about emptiness. Actually, it's a celebration of *emptiness* which started way back in Mary's **womb** and culminated in Joseph's **tomb**.

What do I mean? In just a moment I'll tell you,

But,

First let me tell you this little story:

III.

A father took his young son to a pet store to buy him a puppy for his birthday. After petting one dog after another his dad finally told him he had to make up his mind which one he wanted.

Looking around at each one, finally he pointed at a cute little dog just anxiously wagging its tail, and said:

"I want that one with a happy ending!"

Well today,
We definitely have a story with a happy ending!
So, how is Resurrection Sunday a **culmination** and **celebration** of emptiness?
Consider with me the following: Christmas is about *reduction*.

I. The Reduction of God

It's the apostle Paul who lets us in on how much the Almighty Son gave up to become our 'Life Guard' in the Sea of Sin.

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"
Philippians 2:5-8

Now,
The phrase...

"But made Himself nothing," literally reads: *"emptied Himself."*
The NASB actually translates it this way.

So,
If Christ emptied Himself, of **what** and **when** did He do this?
First of all, let me assure you, Jesus never ceased being God!
It's Paul who also said:

*"In Him dwells **all** the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form."*
Colossians 2:9

Hebrews confirms:

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being."
Hebrews 1:3

Therefore,

It can never mean that He gave up being God.

In fact, if He could have given up being God, He couldn't have ever been God in the first place, for God can **never** stop being Himself!

So,

What did He give up?

The Apostle tells as he finishes his sentence:

“But made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”
Philippians 2:7

Meaning, He let go of His right to be served, and instead came and served. He laid aside His prerogatives as Sovereign, and took *orders* from:

- Parents: “go to bed now” “fix this chair leg,”
- Teachers: “memorize this passage” “write out your answers”
- Roman soldiers: “pick up that cross” “stretch out your arms”

His greatest expression of being “stripped” of His authority comes at His execution:

“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”
Philippians 2:8

What pure humiliation!

- The Divine Spirit, putting on **restrictive**, flesh.
- The Omnipresent King, **confined** to one place at a time.
- The All-knowing Lord, **limited** to what the Father would tell Him.
- The Almighty Son, becoming **dependant** on the Spirit's strength.
- The Absolute Ethical Judge, **sentenced** in a kangaroo court.
- The Life-giving Creator, **bowing** His neck to death.

Have you ever seen such humility?

III.

One rainy day during the *American Revolutionary War*, George Washington rode up to a group of soldiers attempting to raise a wooded beam to a high position. The corporal in charge was shouting words of encouragement without lifting a finger to help, as a result, the soldiers couldn't get the beam in position.

After watching their lack of success, Washington asked the corporal why he didn't join in and help, to which the 'little Caesar' replied:

"Don't you realize that I am the corporal?"

The General politely replied, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Corporal, [Yes] I did [recognize that]." Washington dismounted his horse and went to work with the soldiers to get the oak beam in place.

Upon finishing, General Washington, wiping the sweat from his face, said: "If you should need help again, call on Washington, your commander-in-chief, and I will come."

No doubt,

That was a genuine display of humility—but what is this compared to the **Manger** and the **Cross**?!

More, here's the result of our Lord's willing downgrade:

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich."
2 Corinthians 8:9

Interesting!

Eternal riches, lasting wealth, never-ending luxury, and satisfying prosperity!
But how does this actually work?

Well,

In order to totally identify with our **weakness, trials and failure**, He had to accept such *constraints* and *privation* in order to become a legitimate replacement.

And how was He a substitute?

He took your place on **death row!**

“For Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”
1 Peter 3:18

III.

Back when England and India were at war, several English officers were taken prisoners; among them was a man named Baird who was severely wounded.

As an Indian brought shackles to put on them a gray-haired P.O.W said,
“Surely, you’re not going to put irons on that man are you?”

The Indian responded,
“I have as many shackles as prisoners, they all must be worn.”

“Well, then, put 2 pairs on me.”

Baird lived to gain his freedom; but the other man went down to his death doubly chained.

This is a picture of Christ.

We went free and He went down to the grave wearing our chains!
Which brings us to the next **empty**—an empty cross.

II. The Empty Cross

Now the fact that the cross is **bare**, is really good news!
It shouts that the ransom’s been paid!
The sentence has been served!

For,

As long as Christ is breathing, our judgment still hangs in the balance, for the Law clearly states: “*The wages of sin is death.*” Romans 6:23

The man had to **die** for us to **live**.

The Bible’s clear on this:

“*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.*” I Corinthians 15:3

- Not whipped.
- Not punished.
- Not crucified.

But dead!

- No pulse.
- No respiration.
- No brain waves.

Simply and actually—a *flat* line—a corpse.

Otherwise,

No death, no reconciliation:

“*When we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His son.*” Romans 5:10

A real, physical, lifeless corpse means:

- The criminal’s dead,
- The courts are satisfied,
- And you can now walk free as innocent man,

“*Now God has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusations.*” Colossians 1:22

However,
An empty Cross doesn't go far enough.
True, He's dead.
Yes, He needed to expire.

But if the grave's still got Him, He's just an ordinary man.

Apostle Paul makes no bones about it:

"If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. And if Christ has not been raised... you are still in your sins. Also those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost." I Corinthians 15:14, 17-18

Lost?

- Yes Lost!
- Unsaved,
- Destined for Hell.

Let's read what Romans said again:

"If when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life?" Romans 5:10

It takes a beating heart to save a lost soul!
The dead do nothing.

After all,
Two deaths never makes one life!

- Only living trees bear fruit.
- A dead sheep cannot give birth to a living lamb.

This is why we need one more **empty** thing—an empty tomb!

III. The Empty Tomb

To emphasis just how **big** a problem death presents, God has Mark call attention to the **size** of the rock at the mouth of the grave.

In his memoirs he notes:

“The stone was very large.” Mark 16:4

But then quickly adds it *“had been rolled away.”* Mark 16:4

Now,

Human hands didn’t move it.

Matthew supplies what Mark leaves out:

“An angel of the Lord came down from Heaven and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.”
Matthew 28:2

Friday—they crucified Him.

Saturday—He rested.

Sunday—He was back in business.

My, what difference a **day** makes!

The girls had come to the cemetery looking for a dead man.

Instead of finding His body, they found two empty things: *empty* grave clothes and an *empty* tomb! They weren’t prepared for this!

III

When Fagilyu Mukhametzyanov of Kazan, Russia, collapse at home following a heart attack in 2011, she was quickly rushed to the local hospital, but sadly was pronounced dead shortly after.

A few days later at her funeral as mourners stood around her coffin crying, she woke up! Realizing what was happening, she began yelling, scaring everyone out of their wits!

Fagilyu was hurriedly rushed to the hospital. However, according to her husband, she only survived for additional 12 minutes prior to dying once more, this time permanently.

As shocking as this was,

Nothing can hold a candle to the **emotional** and **psychological** upheaval of that little band of followers on Sunday following Good Friday!

There was something else those ladies weren't prepared for, tour guides.

“So they entered the tomb, and there on the right sat a young man clothed in a white robe. The women were startled, but the angel said, ‘Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He has risen! See, this is where they laid His body. Now go tell His disciples, and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Him there, just as He told you.’ Trembling and bewildered, the women fled from the tomb.”

Mark 16:5-7

Yes,

They sure got more than they bargained for!

But just think of the **forethought** of the Father who provided an explanation!

The tomb wasn't merely empty,

There could be more than one explanation for this:

- The owner could have moved the body.
- Grave robbers may have swiped it.
- Or it was possibly confiscated by the authorities.

So, God had His angels explained what had happened.

In fact, they invited the ladies to come investigate for themselves.

“See, this is where they laid Him.”

Let me add,
God still invites doubter to the grave.
Take a look for yourself.
You be the judge, does it appear He's still there, or is the place empty?
And if it's empty, what has happened to the body?

Only two possible explanations are available:

1. Somebody moved the body
2. It moved itself.

Even the Jewish authorities inadvertently **admitted** the tomb was empty:
"When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep'."
Matthew 28:12-13

So,
The **Jews** didn't remove the body.
The **disciples** were too cowardly to attempt it.
The **Romans** wouldn't have done so; they took precautions that it not happen.
For instance, a certified **Imperial Seal** was pressed on the tomb, acting as a strong deterrent against theft and tampering, on the pains of even death!

Meaning,
If neither His *friends* nor His *enemies* moved the body, it's a pretty solid indication the Body Moved Itself!

Then,
Here are a few additional factors which must be considered:

- All the apostles but one spilt their **blood** rather than deny what they knew—after all, would you knowingly die for *propaganda*?
- The aggressive Anti-Christian **turned** missionary-evangelist, young Rabbi Paul, *dared* to put in writing that on one occasion no less than 500 witnesses saw Jesus alive!
- Besides, why were grave clothes found in the tomb—not unwrapped, but looking more like an empty mommy-shell?
No holes, no slits, no exit points, just empty!

Well,

Just understand, the Resurrection wasn't a mere PR *stunt*!
Neither was it simply an *attention* getter or a *show* of power.

It was Heaven's **heads-up** that there's coming a cosmic Court Date when the resurrected Son of Man will judge the living and the dead!

Here's the official announcement:

*"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given **proof** of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead."* Acts 17:30-31

An:

- Empty womb
- Empty corpse
- Empty cross
- And Empty tomb

Guarantees a full Heaven—will you be there?