

CHAPTER 12

The Empty Grave

In our last chapter we studied the death of Christ. The **good news** (gospel) of the Bible is that Christ _____ for our _____ according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3). But the good news does not stop here. The death of Christ is only half the good news. What is the rest of the **good news** (1 Corinthians 15:4)? "...and that He was buried and that He _____ the third day according to the Scriptures."

Have you ever read a biography? A biography is the written story of a person's life. Perhaps you have read a biography about George Washington (our first president) or Babe Ruth (a great baseball player) or Helen Keller (a girl who was both deaf and blind) or about some other famous person. The first chapter in a biography usually tells about the person's birth. The last chapter in a biography usually tells about the person's death. There is not much more that can be said about the person after the person dies. The story of the person's life ends when the person's life ends. After death the person will do no more and say no more. George Washington did not serve as our President after he died! Babe Ruth did not hit any more home runs after he was put in the grave! Bach and Mozart and Beethoven did not write any more music after they died! Dead people do not do such things! Nothing more can be written about the life after the person dies because there is nothing more that the person will do or say. The man (or woman) has passed on and no other chapter can be written about the person's life. You can write about the funeral and the person's children and the person's lasting influence, but there is nothing more to say about the person. He (or she) is dead!

The biography of Jesus Christ is quite amazing. It is different from any other biography! ***The story of His death is not the last chapter!*** Here are some examples: Matthew 27 tells about Christ's death. Is this the last chapter? Mark 15 tells about Christ's death. Is this the last chapter? Luke 23 tells about Christ's death. Is this the last chapter? John 19 tells about Christ's death. Is this the last chapter? After the story of the death of Christ **we read more!** The story of His death is not the last chapter! We find this Man still doing certain things and saying certain things. There are new chapters because the One who had been dead now **lives again!** His biography continues on!

The death of Christ was not the end. In the book of Revelation (the last book of the New Testament) we find that the Lord Jesus Christ is still alive and is still speaking! For example, see Revelation 1:18. The Lord Jesus said, "I am He that _____ and was _____; and, behold, I am _____ for _____, Amen." **His story goes on and on!**

What Really Happened?

Did the Lord Jesus ever predict that He would come alive from the dead (Matthew 16:21)? _____ Before it ever happened He knew all about it! Read Mark 9:9-10 and Mark 9:31-32. Did the disciples understand these things? _____

The enemies of the Lord took this prediction very seriously (see Matthew 27:62,66). Were the

enemies of Christ aware that He had said that He would rise again (Matthew 27:63)?

_____ What terrible name did they call Jesus (Matthew 27:63)?

D _____ Did Christ deceive people or did He always tell them the truth?

What did these people do to make sure that Christ would not rise again as He said He would (Matthew 27:64–66)? Notice that they did three things:

1. **Rolled a huge stone across the opening of the tomb.**
2. **Sealed the stone.**
3. **Had men guard the tomb to make sure no one would come and steal the body (see Matthew 28:4).**

They did everything that they could to keep Christ in the grave!

Read Matthew 28:1–8. What happened? Why was the stone rolled away by the angels? Was this done so that Christ could come out? No, the tomb was already empty (see Matthew 28:6 – "He is _____"). The living, risen Christ had no problem getting out of the tomb, just as He had no problem getting into a room even though the doors were shut and locked (see John 20:19,26)! The angel rolled away the stone *so that all could see that the grave was empty!* (It would be hard to tell that the tomb was empty if the stone across the entrance was blocking the view!)

Usually when a Roman guard failed to do his job he was put to death. For example, if a soldier was told to guard a prisoner and the prisoner escaped, then very likely the guard would be put to death for allowing this to happen. In the case of the guards who watched Christ's tomb it is very interesting to see what happened to them (see Matthew 28:11–15). Were they put to death? _____ *Instead of being put to death they were paid money!* They were paid money (bribed) so that they would lie about what had happened! What was the false story that they were told to tell?

These enemies had called Christ a **deceiver** (Matthew 27:63). Who were the real deceivers?

Why is the Resurrection Important?

In order to see how very important the resurrection of Christ is, let's assume or pretend that it never truly happened (even though we know it really did). Let us suppose that Christ did not really come alive again from the dead. Let us suppose that Christ died and He remained dead. If this were true, what would this mean?

1) The Bible tells us again and again that Christ rose again from the dead. If Christ did not really rise again, then what would this mean? *This would mean that the Bible is not true!* This would mean that we cannot really believe the Bible. If the resurrection is false, then the Bible is false also. The resurrection is part of God's Word. It's part of God's plan. The truth of God's Word includes the truth of the resurrection. If God cannot be trusted in what He says about the resurrection, then can He be trusted in what He says about salvation, heaven, eternal life and

other subjects? But thankfully, everything God has said in His Word is absolutely true (John 17:17).

2) Jesus Christ clearly said that He would rise again (Matthew 16:21; 17:9; 17:22-23; etc.). Can we really believe His Word or was He a liar? Was He really a Deceiver as His enemies claimed? If Christ did not rise again, then His words and predictions would have been false. This would mean that the Lord Jesus did not speak the truth.

3) The gospel or good news (glad tidings) is that Christ rose again from the dead on the third day (1 Cor. 15:4). If this never really happened, then we do not really have good news at all! If good news is not true news, then it cannot be good news! You could say, "I've got good news. It is not raining! We can go to the beach!" Then I could look out the window and see heavy rain! This would mean that your good news is not good news at all because it is not true news! If Christ is still dead then there is no good news and there is no gospel!

4) People are told to believe in the resurrection! In fact, a person must believe this in order to be saved (see Romans 10:9)! Those who are true Christians are those who truly believe that Jesus Christ died for them and that **He arose from the dead**. Some even sing the hymn, "**He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today!**" If Jesus Christ does not live, then our faith is _____ (see 1 Cor. 15:17). Our faith is no good at all! We have put our faith in a dead Saviour who is not able to save anyone!

If a person believes in Santa Claus, then this person's faith is in vain because he is trusting someone who is not alive, is not even real and who does not even exist. If Jesus Christ is not alive, then believers are trusting in a Saviour who is dead and unable to help them. Faith is only as good as the object of that faith. If you put your faith in a broken chair that is unable to hold any weight, then you will fall to the ground when you try to sit on it. It is foolish to put your faith in a broken chair. How much better to put your faith in a strong chair that can even hold a 400 pound man when he sits on it! How foolish it would be to put your faith in a dead Saviour! How wise it is to put your faith in a strong Saviour who is alive and who is able to save even the worst sinner! See 1 Timothy 1:15.

5) If Christ did not rise again, then those who told us that He did are all liars. Think of the men who wrote the New Testament. Think of Matthew and John and Peter. All of these men wrote and said that Jesus Christ arose from the dead. Even the Apostle Paul, who wrote many New Testament books, said that Christ rose again and that **he himself saw Him!** If the resurrection of Christ never really happened, then these men were LIARS (see 1 Cor. 15:15 – "false witnesses"). They were either LIARS (those who knew Christ was dead but said that He was alive) or they were LUNATICS (deluded men who thought Christ was alive even though He really was not alive). The Bible would be of no value to us if it were written by men who were trying to deceive us (LIARS) or men who were themselves deceived and deluded (LUNATICS)! Read John 21:24. Are these the words of a **deceiver** or are these the words of a man who was an eyewitness and who was telling the truth?

6) Christians worship the Lord on Sunday (the first day of the week) because this is the day that the Lord Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. Every Sunday we remember His resurrection and we are reminded that we serve a living Saviour and Lord. If Christ did not rise again from the dead, then Christians would be coming together every Sunday to remember something that never really happened! We would gather together on the first day of the week to worship a dead Saviour. How foolish!

7) The resurrection had an important effect on man's standing before God. If Christ did not rise again, then we would still be in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17). There would be no hope of salvation. There would be no forgiveness of sins. A dead Saviour cannot save or forgive anyone. Only a **living Saviour** has power to save (Hebrews 7:25). The sacrifice that satisfies must not end in death, but in life. Christ died on the cross but He is not still on the cross. He is risen!

We may pretend that Jesus Christ did not really rise again. But pretending something does not change the facts! We know that the Lord Jesus rose again **just as He said He would** (see Matthew 28:6: "He is risen A _____ H _____ S _____"). It is helpful to think about what would have been different if Christ did not rise again. However, it is important to remember the fact that "*Now is Christ risen from the dead!*" --1 Cor. 15:20). It is a fact! It is true! It really happened! Over _____ (how many?) people saw the living Christ with their own eyes (1 Cor. 15:6)! Therefore, He is not dead, the Bible is true, we do have good news, our faith is not in vain, those who first told of His resurrection were not liars, and on Sunday we worship a living Saviour who is able to give life to every one who believes in Him. Most of all, the Lord Jesus Christ is not a liar or a deceiver, but He is "the way, the truth and **the life**" (John 14:6).

False Ideas

There are many people who try to prove that the Bible is false. They do not believe that Jesus Christ is living today and so they try to show that He never rose again from the dead. Let's think about some of these ideas and how foolish they are:

(Note: We should also remember that most people, because of their unbelief and indifference and hardness of heart, do not even give much thought to the resurrection of Christ. They don't even try to disprove it, and they could not do this even if they tried. They ignore the fact of the resurrection, just as they ignore the Bible and just as they ignore the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.)

There are some (though not many) who might try to disprove the resurrection. They might say something like this:

1) "The disciples stole the body of Jesus."

This was one of the first ways of trying to explain away the fact of the empty tomb (see Matthew 28:11-15). But how could this ever have happened if there were guards watching the tomb? Also, if this were true then the disciples would have known that Jesus was dead. Why then did they go everywhere preaching that He was alive? Why were they even willing to suffer and die for what they preached? Men usually do not give their lives for what they know is a lie!

Also the graveclothes (linen wrappings) were lying in a neat pile, perhaps in the very position in which the body had lain (see John 20:6-7). How could this be? If people had stolen the body, then what would you expect to find? They probably would have taken the whole body, graveclothes and all. Why would they take time to unwrap the body? If they did take time to unwrap the body, then we would expect to see the wrappings lying about in disarray or thrown in a heap in the corner. But this was **not** what the disciples found!

2) "The women and then everyone else went to the wrong tomb."

They got mixed up and went to the wrong tomb and found it to be empty. But did the women carefully observe where the tomb was (see Matthew 27:57-61)? _____ Also if such a mistake had been made it is certain that the enemies of Christ would have quickly pointed it out: "You Christians who believe that Jesus is alive are all wrong! You went to the wrong tomb. We will show you where Jesus is really buried and we will even show you His dead body if you want us to." It is interesting that the enemies of Christ were never able to bring forth the body of Christ to prove that He was dead. The body was gone and the tomb was empty.

3) "Jesus did not really die on the cross. He seemed to be dead but He was not truly dead. After they put His body in the grave He got stronger and was able to get up and come forth out of the tomb."

This is very silly! When the Roman soldiers came to the center cross, was the Lord dead or alive (John 19:33)? _____ What did one soldier do to make sure that He was really dead (John 19:34)? _____

_____ No one could recover from that kind of spear wound!

4) "People thought that they saw Christ but they really did not. Their minds were playing tricks on them."

It is true that sometimes people's minds can play tricks on them, and they might imagine that they saw something or heard something. Such a thing could happen to one person or perhaps even two or three people, but the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to more than _____ people at one time (1 Cor. 15:6)! He was also seen by several other groups of people at different times. It is impossible that so many people could all think that they saw Christ when they really did not. Such "mass hallucinations" and "mass visions" are impossible.

5) "Jesus does live today but this does not mean that His body was raised again from the dead. Jesus lives today because His influence lives on. He lives on in the memories and in the hearts of those whose lives He touched."

These people do not really believe in the resurrection. They do not believe that the body of Christ rose again from the grave. Instead they believe that "His spirit lives on" or "His influence lives on" or "His memory lives on" or "the good that He did lives on" etc. They do *not* believe that Jesus Christ lives today in a glorified, resurrection body.

This wrong idea drags the Lord down and makes Him like any other famous man of history. We would say that George Washington lives on or that the Apostle Paul lives on in the same way that Christ lives on. But what happened to Christ was unique and different and special.

Think again of the living Christ who appeared to over 500 people (1 Cor. 15:6). Was this Christ merely a "spirit" or "ghost" or "influence" or "memory" or was He a real person with a real body? _____ Could His body be touched or handled (Luke 24:39)? _____ Could He walk along a real road (Luke 24:15)? _____ Could His disciples see and feel that He had real flesh and real bones (Luke 24:39)? _____ Could He cook real food (John 21:9)? _____ Could He eat real food (Luke 24:42)? _____ Could the marks and scars of His sufferings be seen and felt (John 20:25,27)? _____

Also, if Jesus did not bodily come alive from the dead, then why was the body of Christ missing? Why was the tomb empty? Why were the enemies of Christ unable to find the body? Of course, the real reason the body could not be found is very simple: ***The body was gone! Christ had risen indeed!***

By the resurrection Jesus Christ proved that He was everything that He said He was. He was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. The Jewish people often asked Christ to give them a great sign or miracle which would prove that He was really the Messiah and that He was really the Son of God:

See John 2:18-22. What sign did Jesus give to them?

See Matthew 12:38- 40. What sign did Jesus give to them?

Yes, the resurrection is the great proof that Jesus Christ is God, that the Bible is true and that the cross is the only way to be saved. No one has ever disproved the resurrection. It is one of the great facts of history. The birth of Christ was a fact of history and our calendars are dated based on this fact. The death of Christ was a fact of history and reliable historians are all agreed that Jesus died on a Roman cross. The resurrection of Christ was just as much a fact of history. Some people deny this fact and say it never happened, but they do this for only one reason: **UNBELIEF!** There is plenty of solid evidence, and there are many eye-witness accounts, but they refuse to believe and they usually refuse to look at the evidence. They are blinded to the facts because of their unbelief.

The Miracle of Changed Lives

The resurrection of Christ was the greatest miracle of all time. This great miracle also resulted in many other miracles. Let's think about some of the lives that were changed because of the power of the living Saviour:

1) Cowardly Peter became courageous Peter.

Peter cowardly denied Christ _____ (how many?) times (see Luke 22:54-62). Only 53 days later he boldly proclaimed and confessed Christ before thousands of people (Acts 2:22,23,24,36,40,41)! Imprisonments and terrible threats by the Jewish leaders could not keep this fearless preacher silent (Acts 4:1-21; 5:27-32; 5:41-42)! **Something happened!** What do you think made the difference?

2) Doubting Thomas became convinced Thomas.

Thomas refused to believe in the resurrection unless he could actually see and touch the risen Christ (John 20:24-25). This man later became a great preacher who was convinced that Jesus Christ was alive. History tells us that Thomas had a great preaching ministry in India. **Something happened!** What do you think made the difference?

3) The Fearful Disciples became the fearless apostles.

At the time of the arrest of Christ the eleven disciples ran like scared rabbits (Matthew 26:56).

Weeks later these same men became powerful, bold preachers who were even willing to die for what they believed and for what they preached! **Something happened!** What do you think made the difference?

4) Unbelieving James becomes believing James.

James was the Lord's half-brother (the son of Joseph and Mary). According to John 7:5, was James a believer or an unbeliever? _____ Later this same man became a believer and a faithful servant of Jesus Christ and a leader of the great church in Jerusalem. **Something happened!** What do you think made the difference? See 1 Corinthians 15:7.

5) Enemy Saul became the Apostle Paul

Saul of Tarsus was a great enemy of the church of Christ. His life was devoted to destroying Christians (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:13). One day Saul journeyed to the city of Damascus, but before he arrived something happened which drastically changed his life (Acts 9:1-9; 1 Cor. 15:8). The Church's great persecutor and enemy became the Church's great apostle. Everywhere he went he preached about the Christ whom he had once persecuted and hated. **Something happened!** What do you think made the difference?

Has the living Christ made a difference in your life? Has **something happened** to you? Has your life been changed by the power of the living Christ?

Today there are hundreds and thousands of people who can gladly share that Christ has changed their lives. By the power of the living Christ they have turned from sin to the Saviour.

One day the great Bible teacher Harry A. Ironside was preaching in a certain place. Dr. Ironside noticed a man in the crowd writing a message on a card. Later this card was presented to him by one of the ushers. It was then that Ironside discovered that the man who penned it was none other than Arthur Lewis, a man who went around different places trying to prove that Christianity was not true. This man proposed a challenge and suggested that they debate whether Christianity was really true. He offered to pay all the expenses involved.

Dr. Ironsides read the card aloud to his audience and then he replied, "I will accept on these conditions: First, that you promise to bring with you to the platform one man who was once an outcast, a slave to sinful habits, but who heard you or some unbeliever like you speak, and was helped by it, and cast away his sins, and became a new man and is today a respected member of society--all because of your unbelief. Second, that you will agree to bring with you one woman who was lost to all purity and goodness, but who can now share that she heard your message and she now hates what is impure and she loves what is right--and all of these because of a disbelief in the Bible. Sir, if you will agree to do this, I promise to be there with **one hundred men and women**, once just such lost souls, who heard the Gospel of the grace of God, believed it, and have now found new life and joy in Jesus Christ our Saviour. Will you accept my terms?"

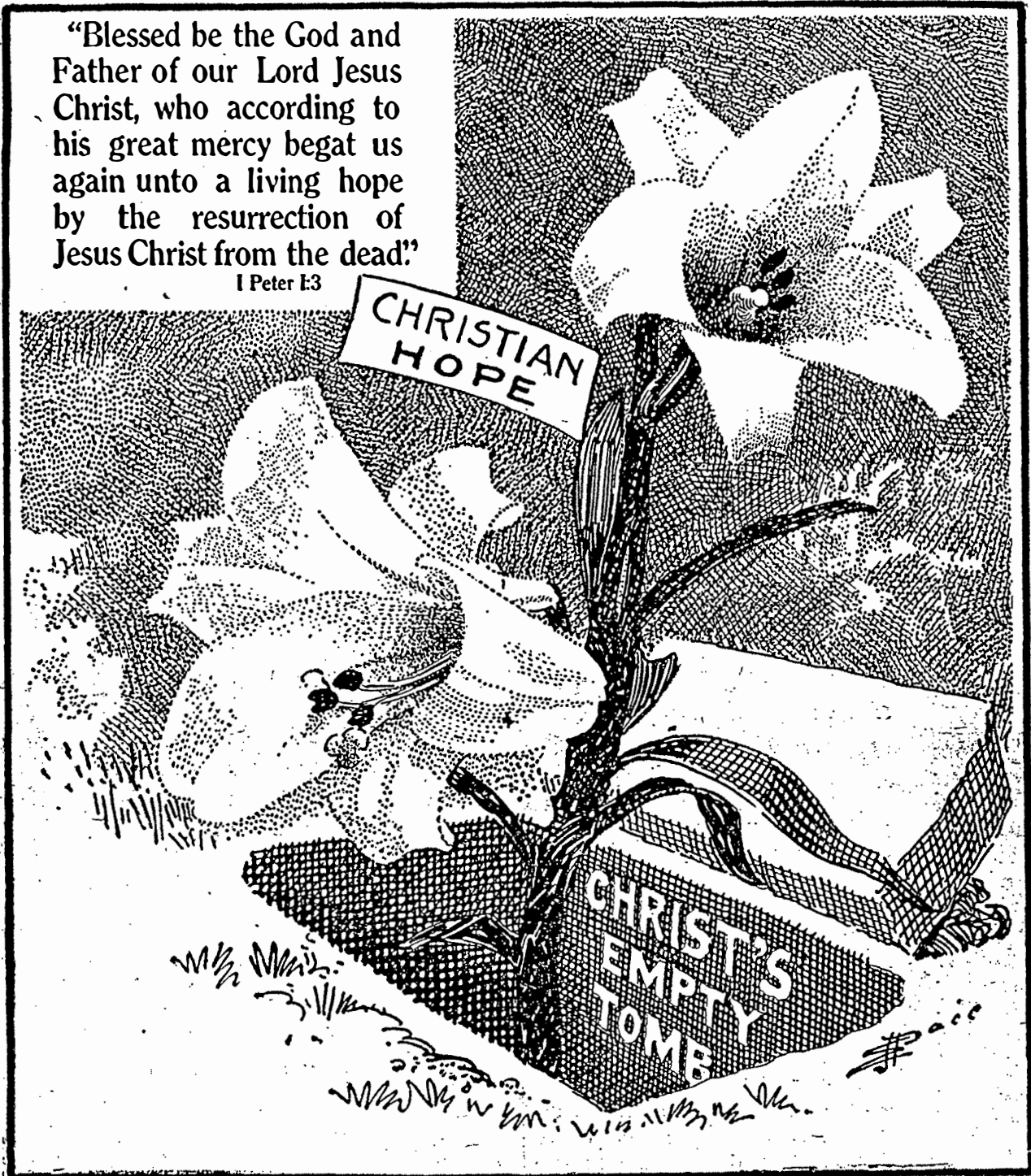
The man looked confused and silently left the room. Rejection of Christ and unbelief do not change lives.

Only the risen, living Christ can do that!

Jesus Christ is living today! Have you met Him? Do you know Him? What has He done for you?

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

1 Peter 1:3



Where the Easter lilies bloom