

## The Stone Was Rolled Away!

By Mark Jarvinen

Luke 24 opens with a group of women arriving at the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid, early on the morning following His crucifixion, in order to anoint Jesus' body with spices. **Luke 24:2-3** says - ***“They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.”***

Consider this. Jesus certainly didn't need to have the stone rolled away in order for Him to come out of the tomb. Scripture tells us that in His post-resurrection body He could walk through walls. Why not tombs? **No, the stone was rolled away from the entrance of the tomb - not to let Jesus out - but to let us look in!** When the ladies looked in and saw that the tomb was empty, they knew something powerful and wonderful was happening. Jesus had risen from the dead and their lives would never be the same. Jesus was not there, He was alive. He had broken the bonds of death just as He said He would. Jesus rose from the dead and was alive!

Incredibly, some still doubt the resurrection. Let's look at some of the evidence that establishes the resurrection as historical fact:

**1) Why was Jesus' body missing?** If the Jews could have produced the body and stopped the preaching of Jesus' resurrection, don't you think they would have? But the fact is they couldn't.

**2) Is it likely that the body was stolen?** The Jews certainly had no motive to steal Jesus' body, nor did the Romans. Ah-ha, critics say, the disciples stole it. But what about the Roman guards on duty at the tomb? And how many men would it have required to move a two-ton stone - almost a foot thick? And what about the disciples' initial disbelief of the women's report? **Luke 24:10** says that these women told the apostles that Jesus' body was missing from the tomb, but v. 11 says, ***“But they (the apostles, except for Peter) did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”*** No, the facts just don't point to the disciples as those who would have stolen Jesus' crucified body.

**3)** Furthermore, even if the disciples had stolen the body, **why would they later risk their lives for a lie?** People don't die for what they know isn't true. The truth of the gospel was worth dying for, and many in the early church were in fact martyred and still are today.

**4)** Besides, **how do we explain the rapid growth of Christianity after Jesus' death?** Thousands believed these resurrection reports within weeks of the event itself. You can dupe an individual or a small group but it's pretty hard to dupe the masses.

**5)** Finally, even the **secular historians of that era refer to the resurrection in their writings:** Names like Thallus, Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny, all record references to the event. The Jewish historian, Josephus, also wrote about Jesus' death and resurrection.

**Of course, God gives us grace to believe, but even from an historical viewpoint, Jesus' miraculous bodily resurrection from**

**the dead is actually more plausible than any other explanation.**

That's why Christians make such a big deal about Easter. That's why we celebrate. Without the resurrection, all else loses its meaning. There would be no Christianity today without the resurrection. It proves that Jesus is who He said He was. It validates His divinity. It sets Him apart from all other great religious leaders who have ever lived. Think about it. **Gandhi** is gone. **Confucius** is gone. **Buddha** is gone. **Mohammed** is gone. All these leaders are gone, even though their graves are still with us today. But Jesus is alive! That makes Him alone the true Son of God, the way of salvation.

**The stone was rolled away ... Jesus is alive ... and that changes everything!** Jesus' resurrection means that death is not the end for those who put their trust in Him. Jesus says in **John 11:25-26** – ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die....”*** What does that mean for me? Though my body will one day perish, Jesus, whom the Father raised from the dead, gives me eternal life as I put my trust in Him.

Furthermore, as Christians, we believe that because of our faith union with Christ, we will receive new, recognizable bodies at the day of resurrection, just as Christ's natural body was both refashioned and recognizable when He was raised from the grave. We believe the truth of God's Word stated in **I John 3:2** – ***“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, (on the day of resurrection) we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”***

And since Jesus is not dead, **people can encounter him today.** You can know Him in **personal relationship**, through His Spirit that dwells within the hearts of all believers. There are lots of people who can testify today that through faith in Jesus Christ, they know they have eternal life. **I John 5:11-12** says, ***“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*** Eternal life is the result of receiving the gift of faith, to believe from the depths of our hearts that Jesus is God’s Son, who through His shed blood on the cross, paid the penalty for all our sins. Those who trust Christ as their Savior, receive by faith, the gift of eternal life, and can echo Paul’s words in **Philippians 1:21** - ***“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*** With Christ as our Savior, eternal life begins in the here and now, and extends into eternity. **Therefore, we need not fear death.** When we leave this earth, on the day of resurrection or through physical death, it is only a change of address. Our heavenly home awaits us. This means that knowing the power of Christ’s resurrection gives us a living hope for future glory. Yet, it’s not only a future hope, but also for victorious living today. **“Because He lives, we can face tomorrow,”** the song writer, Gloria Gaither, says. There are people here today, whose lives Jesus has touched, bringing them from the brink of disaster, and in many cases, through great tribulation - to live lives of peace, meaning, and joy. Jesus changes people’s lives for the good as they place their trust in Him.

The late **Elisabeth Elliot**, who died in 2015, was the wife of missionary martyr, **Jim Elliot**, who died in Ecuador at the hands of the Auca Indians in 1956. She became, in her own right, a well known Christian author, who tells the story of **Judy Squier**, a friend of hers who was born without legs. In spite of Judy's handicap, she was a cheerful, radiant, woman who loved the Lord. Elisabeth asked Judy to write **a letter of encouragement** to the family of young **Brandon Scott**, who was also born without legs. In the letter, Judy told the Scott family that in a wonderful way, they had been chosen to display God's unique handiwork. In closing her letter, Judy said, **"What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the Creator calls a butterfly. As I share this story, I'm reminded of I Peter 1:3 – `... In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ...."**

Because Jesus lives, Judy Squier could say with full confidence that in Christ, we receive not only new birth, which provides forgiveness for all our past wrongs, but also, **"a living hope."** What does hope mean? A number of years ago I asked my confirmation students **"What does hope mean?"** I'll never forget one student's answer. **"He said, `Hope means there's light at the end of the tunnel.'"** He was right! Because of Jesus' resurrection, there's not a tomorrow we can't face. The stone was rolled away! The tomb was empty! **Jesus is alive ... and that changes everything."**

**Jesus is alive, the stone has been rolled away! What might that mean for you, today?** Are you living under a load of guilt and shame? Is there something from your past that haunts you? Martha

and I saw the movie “**Unplanned**” a couple of weeks ago, based on a true story in which an administrator at a **Planned Parenthood clinic** was called away from her desk to assist a doctor with an abortion. Even though she had experienced an abortion in her own past, she had never witnessed an abortion from the perspective of the fetus. She was emotionally shattered as she saw, by means of an ultrasound, how the fetus literally fought for its life inside the mother’s womb, attempting to avoid the probing abortion instrument, before it finally succumbed and was evacuated from the mother’s uterus. This administrator became overwhelmed with guilt and sorrow as she in tears rushed from the patient’s bedside, thinking back on her own abortion, and the advice she had given to so many young girls and women to end their pregnancies through abortion. By God’s grace this clinic administrator was led to the experience of God’s forgiveness.

Perhaps, there are those here today that **carry a heavy burden of guilt** over some past life experience. You wonder how God could ever forgive you. If you are among that number, I have good news for you today. **By His resurrection, Jesus has the power to break these chains!** Addiction has been in the forefront of my mind in recent weeks. Do you feel powerless to break the power of some form of addiction in your life? Remember that the stone has been rolled away. **Is your family torn apart? Is your future unsure? Do you feel unloved or alone?** In Jesus we have a living hope. The stone was rolled away. The grave could not hold Him. Put your trust in the risen Savior today and let the power of His resurrection set you free. **A-men.**

