

Easter Sunday 2021

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, April 4, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us this Easter Sunday! Whether you are here in person or watching via the livestream, you are most welcome. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. We have much to cover in a short amount of time.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

KEY – This morning we gather to celebrate, consider and commemorate the reality that Jesus Christ has risen! This day I proclaim “good news” that should bring great joy to all in the sound of my hearing: Jesus is alive and well and reigns at the right hand of God our Father forevermore! Scripture declares that...

Acts 2:24 (NIV)

24 . . . God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

QUOTE – In the words of Philip Brooks (1835–1893): “Tomb, you shall not hold him; death is strong, but life is stronger; stronger than the dark is the light; stronger than the wrong is the right; Faith and Hope triumphant say, ‘Christ has risen on Easter day!’”

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

FYI 1 – Yet each year I am burdened by how many live apart from such “good news” and the life-changing power of the risen Christ! I am stricken by the “emptiness” that I see and hear in a great many—many who are seeking for hope, fulfillment, purpose, peace and security outside of the One who can truly provide...

FYI 2 – Countless souls are given to the “empty” promises of this world and engaged in “empty” pursuits that bring about only “empty” results. When will we realize that we cannot find what we are looking for in earthly elements like wealth, power, prestige, security, substance, relationships, etc.—but only in the heavenly Christ?

KEY – The individual who does not find life (i.e., both eternal and abundant) in Him will find it nowhere else.

QUOTE – Mark Twain perceived this sense of “emptiness” and penned the following before his passing...

“A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other; age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; those they love are taken from them, and the joy of life is turned to aching grief. Death comes at last—the only un-poisoned gift earth ever had for them—and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence; a world which will lament them a day and forget them forever.”

FYI 3 – His words evidence the “trail of emptiness” that runs through the human condition from birth to death.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 3

Thus said, there is something worth noting this Easter—something we have not touched upon in a great many years! Namely, God’s means to remedy the “emptiness” of this world was an “empty” cross, an “empty” tomb and some “empty” strips of linen (REPEAT).

KEY – In the same way that a “trail of emptiness” runs through the human condition, a “trail of emptiness” runs through the entirety of the Easter story. Please give this servant of the Lord the best of your attention as I identify and address this “trail of emptiness.” Let us delve in...

THE “EMPTY” CROSS PT. 1

To begin, allow me to note that by the time Easter Sunday arrived nearly 2,000-years ago, the cross upon which Christ was crucified had been “empty” for many hours. Consider that Jesus’ body was removed from the cross on Good Friday. His body was then prepared and placed in a tomb, remaining there Friday night, the whole of Saturday, and the early hours of Sunday. Consider...

Mark 15:43–46

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.

NOTE 1 – In my heart I can see the “empty” cross affixed at Calvary (still-stained with the blood of Christ).

NOTE 2 – This brings to my remembrance the beautiful hymn, “The Old Rugged Cross” (which states)...

On a hill far away stood an old, rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain

In the old, rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, such a wonderful beauty I see;
For ‘twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died to pardon and sanctify me

So I’ll cherish the old, rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old, rugged cross, and exchange it someday for a crown

Q1. Why mention the “empty” and blood-stained cross of Christ?

Q2. Why touch upon the elements of Good Friday on Easter Sunday?

A. For the simple and undeniable reason that Easter Sunday only makes sense in the context of the happenings of Good Friday. You see, before we can celebrate, consider and commemorate the reality of the Resurrected Christ, we must first recognize the reality of His death.

FYI – The “empty” cross still speaks—standing as a reminder that the greatest of us all was sacrificed for us all!

THE “EMPTY” CROSS PT. 2

It frightens me how little the truth of Jesus’ death impacts us these days...

Q. Have we become too comfortable with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ?

Q. Has the cross become such an icon or symbol that we are apathetic to it?

FYI – We forget that this method of execution was one of the most torturous forms of execution ever devised!

NOTE – I have mentioned this in years past, but I can still recall watching “The Passion” in theaters back in ‘04. I can still see the faces of men and women who—for the first time in their lives—witnessed the un-sanitized brutality of Roman crucifixion. Many left the theater sickened and in tears...

Q. I wonder how many never looked at the cross around their necks in the same way?

KEY – For a moment we re-discovered the horror and shame of Jesus’ death. Let us not forget why Jesus died...

1 John 4:9–10

9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

In a world of emptiness, the empty cross reminds us that Jesus gave His life for us so that we could live in Him.

THE “EMPTY” TOMB PT. 1

Not only did Jesus leave behind an “empty” cross—He also left behind an “empty” tomb...

NOTE – It is interesting to note that the figures featured in the Gospel accounts believed the death of Jesus to be the end of Jesus. For instance, Christ’s disciples thought His death was the end of the story (e.g., it didn’t take long for Simon Peter to go back to fishing)! Certainly, the religious leaders most responsible for Jesus’ death thought He was a goner. I am fairly certain that Satan and his band of un-merry demons rejoiced over the death of the Son of God—for a brief moment...

After all...

- He was crucified and killed
- He was wrapped in burial linens
- He was placed in a “sealed” tomb

KEY – No one comes back from such a circumstance! And then the unthinkable—the impossible—happened...

THE “EMPTY” TOMB PT. 2

Luke 24:1–8

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” 8 Then they remembered his words.

KEY – It is impossible to overstate the significance of Jesus’ Resurrection (i.e., the “empty” tomb matters)...

QUOTE – “Modern men and women ask with great sincerity, ‘How can I know which religion is the right one?’ This is a legitimate question. The average person today faces a veritable supermarket of religions from which to choose. He or she sees the well-stocked shelves and wonders, ‘Which should I choose?’ It is also a crucial question because on the surface there seems to be no great difference between Christianity and the religions of the world. They have written scriptures and so do we. They have miracle stories and so do we. They have ethical standards and so do we. They have long and rich histories, as do we. It is easy for the casual shopper to doubt, confused as to which religion is the correct one. They can even—wrongly—assume that all religions are the same! But there is one fundamental difference, one fact that sets Christianity apart from every other faith: Jesus is alive and rose from death as He promised. I can take you all over the world and show you the tomb of long-dead leaders. Yet there is no place on earth where I can point to a dead Jesus. The only thing I can point you to is an empty tomb.”

THE “EMPTY” TOMB PT. 3

KEY 1 – I believe that people long for a life to come (i.e., assurance of eternal life)...

ILL – “As Vice President, George Bush the elder represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev’s widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev’s wife performed an act of courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: she reached down and made the sign of the Cross on her husband’s chest. There, in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the Cross, and that this same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.”

KEY 2 – I also believe that many feel a pervading sense of emptiness because they live with no genuine assurance of a life to come. Do you realize that the fear of death is still the number one fear each year in our great nation? This is tragic since Jesus came to grant such life and promise nearly twenty centuries ago...

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

NOTE – Those in Christ need not fear the powers of death for they are connected to the One who has conquered it (cf. Rev. 1:18)! His resurrection from the grave ensures that death will not be the end for those who look to and trust in Him...

John 5:24–25

24 “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. 25 Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.”

In a world of emptiness, the empty tomb reminds us that Christ Jesus still holds the keys to both death and life.

THE “EMPTY” LINENS PT. 1

Lastly, not only did Jesus leave behind an “empty” cross and tomb—Jesus also left behind His “empty” linens...

NOTE – Scripture goes into some detail concerning the burial of Jesus and the wrapping of His body with linen.

John 19:38–42 (Emphasis Mine)

38 . . . Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. 39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. 40 Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them **wrapped** it, with the spices, **in strips of linen**. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

John 20:1–9 (ESV) (Emphasis Mine)

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” 3 So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. 4 Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 And stooping to look in, he saw the **linen** cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the **linen** cloths lying there, 7 and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Q. What do we see herein?

A. “Empty” burial linens evidenced the resurrected body of Christ!

THE “EMPTY” LINENS PT. 2

As I move to a close, I would like to take a closer look at verses 6–7...

John 20:6–7 (Emphasis Mine)

6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the **linen** cloths lying there, 7 and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, **not lying with the linen cloths but folded up** in a place by itself.

FYI – John records that Jesus had apparently “folded” the cloth that had been part of His burial garments...

Q. Why? Why record so “trivial” a fact?

A. This text touches upon something of incredible cultural significance...

QUOTE – “The folded napkin had to do with the Master and Servant relationship in ancient Israel, and every Jewish person knew this tradition. When the servant set the dinner table for the master, he made sure that it was exactly the way the master wanted it. The table was furnished perfectly, and then the servant would wait, just out of sight, until the master had finished eating. The servant would not dare touch that table until the master was finished. Now if the master was done eating, he would rise from the table, wipe his fingers, his mouth, clean his beard, and would wad up that napkin and toss it onto the table. The servant would then know to clear the table, for in those days the wadded-up napkin meant, ‘I’m done.’ But if the master got up from the table, folded his napkin, and laid it beside his plate, the servant would not dare touch the table for the folded napkin meant, ‘I’m not finished yet!’”

KEY – Thus, the emptied and folded cloth conveyed the idea, “I am not done yet—I am coming back!”

NOTE – Not only did Christ rise from the dead and ascend back to His heavenly Father—He promised He would return to complete His work. The day is coming—it draws nearer every moment—when the Christ shall return and what a day it shall be!

Hebrews 9:28 (NIV)

28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14

9 “As I looked,

“thrones were set in place,

and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow;
the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire,

and its wheels were all ablaze. 10 A river of fire was flowing,
coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him;

ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated,
and the books were opened.

13 “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

SUMMATIONS

The “trail of emptiness” that pervades the Easter story addresses the “emptiness” of the human condition...

- 1) His “Empty” Cross Reminds Us of the Price He Paid for Each of Us
- 2) His “Empty” Tomb Reminds Us of His Victory Over Death and Promise of Life
- 3) His “Empty” Burial Linens Remind Us His Purposes Are Not Yet Complete – He is Coming

Q. What manner of person ought you be in light of these timeless and timely truths?

A1. Christian, these truths should inform and impact how you live each and every day...

A2. Non-Christian, may these truths drive you to the Living One who gives life abundant and eternal...

CONCLUSION PT. 1

Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Happy Easter! Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church website (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may place your donation in one of our offering boxes.

CONCLUSION PT. 2

NOTE – Before we part ways...

Our Dear Miss Pat had a lovely idea! She purchased four Easter lilies in memory of four dear men and women who went home to be with the Lord in recent days: **a)** Scott Long; **b)** Michael Watson; **c)** Rita Sutherland; and **d)** Lorrie (i.e., Lorraine) Dahlstrom. We would like a member from each family to take one of these Easter lilies home with you, serving as a reminder of the hope we share in the Risen Christ!

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.