

## I. Introduction

- A. It's over.
- B. The dream is dead. The man who was supposed to be their leader, their Messiah, King, Rescuer... he is gone. Executed like a common criminal.
- C. For three days, a suffocating silence has fallen over Jerusalem. The small band of disciples is crushed. Scattered, hiding behind locked doors, their hope shattered into a million pieces. All that's left is the grim, final task of properly anointing the body.
- D. So in the pre-dawn darkness, a small group of women makes their way through the cold, silent streets. The Gospels name them: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna. They aren't going to the tomb expecting a miracle. They are going expecting a corpse. They are carrying spices for the dead, their hearts as heavy as the burial spices in their hands.
- E. They know what they're going to find. A rock-hewn tomb, carved into the side of a hill. And blocking its entrance, a massive, circular stone. Think of a stone the size of a car, weighing between one and two tons—that's the weight of a car—solid rock, wedged into a channel, sealing the grave shut.
- F. This stone wasn't just a door. It was a statement. It was the full stop at the end of the sentence. It was a declaration of finality. It said: "This is permanent. This is over. There is no coming back from this."
- G. As they get closer, their minds are racing with a practical, heartbreaking question: "Who will roll the stone away for us?" It would take a crew of strong men to budge it. How could they possibly get inside?
- H. But as the first hints of dawn break over the horizon, they see it. And they stop. Their blood runs cold. Everything inside of them freezes.
  - 1. Because the problem isn't that the stone is too big to move.
  - 2. The problem is... it's already gone.
- I. It hasn't been chipped away. It hasn't been cracked open. It's been... moved. Rolled away. Uphill. As if some cosmic giant just picked it up and shoved it away. The impossible has happened.
- J. And in that moment, standing before that gaping, open tomb, Mary is confronted with the first great mystery of the resurrection. Forget the body for a moment. Before we can even ask, "Where is Jesus?", we have to ask a more immediate, a more shocking question:
- K. Who moved the stone?

## II. Series Introduction

- A. Today, I'm launching a brand-new series. It's called The Mysteries of the Resurrection. From now through Easter we are going to become investigators. We are going to put on our detective hats and lean into the single most important event in human history: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- B. And here's the promise I want to make to you for this series: if you will honestly investigate the resurrection of Jesus with us, you will discover that His resurrection is a fact of history backed by many infallible proofs.
- C. But it doesn't stop there.
- D. You will also discover the resurrection of Jesus is not just historical fact, it's also personal enablement.
  - 1. It is a power you can rely on.
  - 2. It's Breakthrough Power. Because the same power that raised Jesus from the dead can raise hope, heal hurts, strengthen resolve, and give you a purpose that goes beyond anything this world can offer.
- E. So today, we begin with that first, staggering mystery: the mystery of the missing stone.

## III. Scripture

- A. *"Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near. And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment. Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb."* (Luke 23:50-24:2)

## IV. The Impossible Crime Scene

- A. Before you can solve a mystery, you have to understand the crime scene. And I want you to understand just how perplexing this scene was. The authorities in that day—both Roman and Jewish—took extreme measures to make sure that tomb stayed closed.
- B. There were three layers of security. Three obstacles to anybody opening the tomb:
- C. OBSTACLE 1: First, you had the stone itself. I already mentioned it was heavy—weighing up to 4,000 pounds.
  - 1. But it wasn't just heavy. It was strategic. These stones were often rolled down a slanted groove to seal the tomb's entrance. That means closing the tomb was easy—gravity did most of the work.
  - 2. But opening it? You would have to roll a two-ton stone uphill, out of its groove. This wasn't a job for one person. It wasn't a quiet job. It was a loud, difficult, multi-person job requiring immense, coordinated effort.
    - a) Obstacle number one: The sheer weight of the stone.
- D. OBSTACLE 2: Second, you had the Roman Guard. Now, I need you to get the image of a sleepy mall cop out of your head.
  - 1. This was a Roman military unit of 4 to 16 soldiers. These were disciplined, professional soldiers from the toughest army on the planet.
  - 2. Their job was simple: keep that tomb sealed. And for a Roman soldier, failure was not an option.
    - a) Falling asleep at your post? The punishment was death.
    - b) Letting a prisoner escape? The punishment was death.

3. They had one job, and their life depended on doing it.
  - a) Obstacle number two: A highly-trained, heavily-armed military detail.
- E. OBSTACLE 3: And third, you had the Roman Seal. Matthew tells us the authorities "made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone." What was that?
  1. That was a cord stretched across the stone and fastened to the tomb wall with wax, stamped with the official insignia of the Roman governor.
  2. This seal was a symbol of the full power and authority of the Roman Empire. To break that seal was not just vandalism; it was treason. It was like spitting in the face of Caesar. It was an act of rebellion against Rome itself.
    - a) Obstacle number three: The undisputed authority of an empire.
- F. So I want you to picture this. You have a two-ton stone, guarded by a squad of elite soldiers, backed by the full authority of Rome.
- G. This wasn't just a "No Trespassing" sign. It was a fortress. It was humanity's version of maximum security.
- H. And on Sunday morning, the stone was cast aside like a kid kicking a stone down a sidewalk. The guards were gone. The seal was broken.
- I. So, the question stands. Who did it?
- V. The Journalist
  - A. Let's keep investigating—because believe it or not, you're not the only one who's stared at the open tomb and wondered, "Who moved the stone?"
  - B. A little over a hundred years ago, a journalist named Frank Morison had the same question. He was a sharp-minded Englishman, trained in logic and evidence—not raised on Sunday school stories but trained to poke holes in them. Morison made a career out of getting to the bottom of things. He didn't set out to find faith; he set out to expose a fraud.
  - C. He thought, if Christianity is built on the claim that Jesus physically came out of that tomb, then all you'd have to do is show that no such thing could have happened—and the whole story would fall apart.
  - D. So, let's invite Morison to walk the crime scene with us. He put on his detective hat—his reporter's notebook in hand—and started examining the suspects.
- VI. The Suspects
  - A. Suspect #1: The Authorities
    1. Morison looked at the Romans and the religious leaders first. After all, they had control, power, even the means.
    2. But then he asked the hard question: Why would they move the stone—let alone the body?
    3. They were the very people who lobbied for the guards and the seal in the first place. If they'd taken the body, all they'd have to do is produce it when rumors of resurrection started swirling like wildfire. That would kill the story instantly.
      - a) Morison scribbled a note in his pad: "Motive, none. Means, yes. Opportunity, yes. But no reason—and every reason against." He crossed them off the suspect list.
  - B. Suspect #2: The Disciples
    1. Next, Morison turned his keen eye on Jesus' followers. Maybe they snuck past the guards and staged the whole thing?
    2. But here's what stumped him—and it stumps you, if you look closely: The disciples weren't heroes planning a heist. They were devastated. Hiding. Shaken. Their dreams were buried along with their teacher. Morison looked at what the Gospels actually say—these women and men had locked themselves away, grieving, confused, afraid. (Would you be any different with the world turned upside down?)
    3. And even if you could imagine these ordinary men getting bold, somehow overpowering Roman guards and rolling back a two-ton stone—what did they have to gain? Not money. Not fame. Almost all would end up tortured or killed, holding fast to the story about seeing Jesus alive. People don't die to protect a lie they made up, especially when it's this kind of lie.
    4. Morison's pen scratched another line: "Motive: weak. Means: weaker. They're not candidates for this."
    5. And in the process, you start seeing how relatable their plight really is. The disciples were feeling trapped—by grief, by fear, by hopelessness. Those women?
      - a) They just wanted someone, anyone, to help roll their stone away—just like you sometimes do with your own impossible obstacles. Maybe there's a stone in your life—addiction, doubt, failure, anxiety—that you feel powerless to move.
      - b) If you can't move it, and the professionals can't move it, who can?
    6. Morison was beginning to realize, just like you: If you rule out the authorities, and you rule out the disciples, you're left with a bigger mystery than when you started.
      - a) So you still want answers, don't you? You're not alone. Frank Morison wanted more. Maybe you do too.
  - C. Suspect #3: The Wrong Tomb
    1. Over the years, some have suggested that maybe the women simply went to the wrong place! Jerusalem by dawn, all those tombs, all that grief and confusion—maybe it was just a tragic mistake.
    2. But you know who would've loved that theory most? The authorities.
    3. If the wrong tomb rumor started, the solution was easy: walk down to the right tomb, drag out Jesus' body, and end the whole Christian movement on the spot.
    4. Nobody did. Not the Romans, not the religious leaders, not a soul.
    5. There were too many eyewitnesses at the burial—and let's face it, grief doesn't make you lose your memory altogether.
      - a) Even skeptical Frank Morison, in his journalist's heart, had to cross that one off.
    6. So again we have to ask, who moved the stone?
    7. There were other theories, which we will cover in future talks.
- VII. Transition
  - A. Do you feel what's happening?

- B. Every theory gets crossed off the list, one after another. The more you look for a way out of this, the more brick walls you hit.
- C. So... what if all these obstacles aren't just a problem for the theories—what if they're pointing you toward the answer? What if the stone was moved not just for Jesus to come out, but for you to look in and see that God does the impossible?
- D. What if the breakthrough you need—the stone in your life—isn't an illusion or a myth, but an invitation to trust the same God who still moves stones today?
  - 1. Let's really be logical and think hard.

## VIII. THE VERDICT

- A. You've looked at the evidence. You've walked the crime scene with Frank Morison. You've seen every feasible human explanation crumble under the weight of the facts. Nothing makes sense.
- B. All that's left is the same realization that hit Frank Morison like a freight train.
- C. Remember, he set out to write a book proving the resurrection was a myth. He planned to call it *Jesus—the Last Phase*.
- D. But as he stared at the evidence—and at more evidence which we will cover in future talks—his pen stopped. He couldn't write that book.
- E. The facts wouldn't let him. The evidence pointed him in another direction.
- F. Because another miracle happened: the skeptic became a believer. The critic became a convert.
- G. Frank Morison, that hard-nosed journalist found himself believing in and receiving Jesus Christ as his Savior. He threw away his old manuscript and wrote a different book—the very book that inspired my sermon today—*Who Moved the Stone?*
  - 1. Morison wrote, "This study is in some ways so unusual and provocative that the writer thinks it desirable to state at the outset that he approached it with a very definite feeling of hostility."
  - 2. He said, "The book as it was originally planned was left high and dry; the writer discovered one day that not only could he no longer write it, but that he would not if he could."
- H. Even Sherlock Holmes said, "When you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains must be the truth." And I would add, however miraculous, however terrifying, however life-changing it may be.
  - 1. Morison concluded, "The fact of the empty tomb is one of the certainties of history."
- I. So, who moved the stone?
  - 1. It wasn't the disciples. It wasn't the Romans. It wasn't a mistake.
- J. The Gospel of Matthew tells us exactly what happened. He says there was a violent earthquake. Heaven tore open. An angel of the Lord blasted down down like lightning—blinding, terrifying, radiant power. The power of God moved the stone.
- K. The guards? Those elite Roman soldiers? They didn't fight. They shook and became like dead men.
  - 1. **Humanity's maximum security collapsed in a millisecond in the face God's everyday power.**
- L. The angel didn't struggle with the stone. He didn't need a lever. He didn't need a team. He rolled it back and sat on it. He didn't just move the stone. He owned it.
  - 1. And listen to me closely, because this changes everything for you:
- M. The stone was not moved to let Jesus out.
  - 1. The resurrected Christ didn't need an open door. The Gospels later tell us He appeared in locked rooms. A two-ton rock was no obstacle for the Lord of Life.
- N. No, that stone was rolled away for one reason: to let YOU in.
  - 1. It was moved so that Mary, Peter, and John could look into the emptiness and see the truth. It was moved so that a skeptical journalist like Frank Morison could investigate the evidence and have his world turned upside down.
  - 2. And it has been left open for 2,000 years so that you could look in today and find exactly what you need. When you step inside, you find two unshakable hopes.

## IX. Conclusion

- A. First, the Hope of Salvation.
  - 1. Because that stone moved, your past is buried. The empty tomb is the receipt that the debt has been paid. It proves that Jesus wasn't just a man who died; He was the God who conquered death. If He can walk out of that grave, He can walk into your life and wash away every sin, every failure, and every regret.
  - 2. You can be saved today because He is alive today. The barrier between you and God is gone. Jesus rolled it away. He demolished it.
    - a) Whatever has been separating you from God—your past, your pride, your skepticism, your sin—that stone has been removed. The Roman Seal is broken. The path is clear.
    - b) Frank Morison stared at that open tomb and realized he had to make a choice. He could stay a critic on the outside, or he could become a child of God on the inside. He stepped in.
    - c) Today, that same invitation stands for you.
    - d) I'm not talking about you cleaning yourself up or making yourself a better person.
    - e) I'm talking about you coming just as you are to God, to Jesus, and asking him to forgive you, to save you, and to make you his child forever.
    - f) The Hope of Salvation is a stone you don't have to move yourself. You just have to walk through the door that God has already opened.
    - g) Won't you come to Jesus today? What is keeping you from him? There's nothing there. In a moment, I'm going to help you pray that prayer.
      - (1) The first hope is the Hope of Salvation... and...
- B. Second, the Hope of Overcoming.

1. If the power of God can shove a two-ton rock uphill against the laws of gravity and the might of the Roman Empire, do you think your addiction is too heavy for Him? Do you think your marriage is too dead for Him? Do you think your depression is too dark for Him?
    - a) Frank Morison sat down to write a book called *Jesus: The Last Phase*. It was meant to be the story of a tragic end. But he couldn't write it. Instead, he wrote *Who Moved the Stone?*—the story of a glorious new beginning.
    - b) Some of you walked in here today writing a tragic chapter in your own life. You've titled it 'Failure.' You've titled it 'The End.' You've titled it 'Hopeless.'
    - c) I am here to tell you: Tear up that manuscript.
  - C. The Missing Stone remains as permanent proof that no stone in your life gets the final word.
    1. Not cancer. Not addiction. Not shame. Not death.
    2. Not anger, not sadness, not bitterness, not pain.
    3. Not anxiety, not depression, not confusion, not loneliness.
    4. Not thoughts of ending it all, not victimhood, not abuse.
    5. Not debt, not failure, not defeat, not death.
    6. Not disappointment, not crime, not anything else...
      - a) Whatever it is...
  - D. The stone is rolled away. The door is open. The Savior is alive. And he bids you come out of that tomb, whatever it may be.
  - E. Who moved the stone?
  - F. God moved the stone... so, the final mystery of the Missing Stone is what will you do about it
  - G. So, let's not just think about it... let's do something about it.
- X. Salvation Prayer
- A. Lord Jesus,
  - B. I admit that I am a sinner and I need a Savior.
  - C. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead.
  - D. Right now, I choose to trust You as my Savior and receive You into my life.
  - E. Forgive me, save me, and make me Your child forever.
  - F. In Jesus' name, Amen.
- XI. Overcoming Prayer
- A. Father God,
  - B. I stand before You with this congregation, and I see stones in their lives that they cannot move. But You are the God who rolled away the stone from Jesus' tomb, and I know You can roll away the stones blocking their path.
  - C. Right now, by the power of the resurrection, I ask You to shatter every obstacle that stands between them and the unsearchable riches of your grace.
    1. Break the chains of addiction.
    2. Heal the wounds of the past.
    3. Restore what's been lost tenfold.
    4. Breathe life into what seems dead.
  - D. I declare over this church that no stone gets the final word—not fear, not failure, not sickness, not sin. Because the tomb is empty, their future is open.
  - E. Move the stones, Lord. Do what only You can do.
  - F. In the mighty name of the risen Christ,
  - G. Amen.