

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Part 2 in our series running up to Easter, **The Mysteries of the Resurrection**.
- B. It's an early morning Sunday, and four spectators cannot make sense of what their eyes are seeing.
- C. They are Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, Salome, and Joanna. They are shocked into silence in the pre-dawn light.
- D. They are staring at a massive, two-ton stone that has been rolled up a hill. The barrier is gone. The Roman seal—the symbol of the authority and power—is broken. The guards have vanished. The grave of Jesus is opened.
 - 1. But as they step past that stone and into the dim light of the tomb, the mystery takes another twist.
- E. They came to pay their last respects and to anoint his body.
- F. But they look at the limestone slab where the body of Jesus was placed just three days before... but the body is gone.
- G. Panic seizes them by the throat.
- H. Mary Magdalene doesn't immediately shout, "He is risen!" She doesn't fall to her knees in worship.
 - 1. She runs.
 - 2. She runs out of the tomb, past the stone, out of the garden, to the town, into the city, and back to the house where she finds Peter and John in their depressed and defeated state.
 - 3. Mary bursts through the door and cries out, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"
- I. Did you notice that?
- J. Mary's first instinct isn't that a miracle has happened; it's that a crime has happened.
 - 1. To her, this isn't a resurrection; it's a desecration.
- K. This is where our investigation shifts gears. Last week, we asked, "Who moved the stone?"
 - 1. But now we face a much more disturbing question: **"The Mystery of the Missing Body"**
 - 2. So today, I want us to look the clues and render a verdict.
- L. There are some here today who walked in the doors carrying heavy situations that make no sense. The doctor's report makes no sense. The bank account makes no sense. The way your family is falling apart makes no sense. The injury that sidelined you makes no sense. The way your prayers aren't getting answered makes no sense.
 - 1. And you're burdened, and you're sad, and maybe even angry. And you're thinking, 'How am I supposed to have hope when my reality is hopeless?'
- M. That's exactly why we're investigating the resurrection. Because... the great promise of the resurrection of Jesus that echoes throughout the Bible is this:
 - 1. **Because Jesus had life when life made no sense, you can have hope when hope makes no sense, peace when peace makes no sense, and joy when joy makes no sense.**
 - a) I'm here to say, Because he lives I can face tomorrow.
- N. Because here is the reality: if Jesus stayed dead, Christianity is nothing more than a nice philosophy. But if Jesus walked out of that grave, that changes everything. That demands our attention. It actually demands a response.
- O. Here is my promise to you:
 - 1. If you will honestly investigate the resurrection of Jesus with us, you will discover that His resurrection isn't just a fact to believe—it's a power you can rely on.
 - 2. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead can raise hope in you. It can rebuild what's broken. It can steady you for whatever you're facing right now.
 - 3. Let's consider now the Mystery of the Missing Body.

II. Scripture

- A. *"Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed."* (John 20:1-8)

III. The Perplexing Evidence

- A. Peter and John take off. It's a footrace fueled by adrenaline and fear. John gets there first, stops at the edge, and peers into the dark. Then Peter—impulsive, reckless Peter—barrels straight past him into the tomb.
- B. And what they see stops them cold.
- C. But before we look at what they saw, I'd like to pause and ask: Why was Mary so sure it was a robbery?
 - 1. Why didn't she think, "Maybe He did it? Maybe He kept His promise?"
- D. Because Mary has a theology that looks a lot like most people's.
 - 1. It is the theology that says: "Too Good to Be True."
 - 2. This is another way of saying: "Not True."
- E. On one level, Mary believes that God is good... but on another level, she's convinced He's not *that* good.
 - 1. She believes that God is powerful... but she also believes that the laws of nature—death, loss, finality—still trump the work of God in her life.
- F. She has a low ceiling on her expectations from God. Why?

- G. It's because the "Too-Good-to-Be-True Theology of God" goes hand in hand with the "Too-Unworthy-to-be-Blessed Psychology of Self."
- H. The problem is not just that she's thinking, "God's not that good."
- I. The problem is she's also thinking, "I'm not that worthy."
1. "I am not the kind of person who gets a miracle; I am the kind of person who gets her heart broken."
 2. I'm just not the kind of person who experiences—who really feels—the love of God, the blessing of God, or the power of God.
- J. And maybe that's you today. You've accepted that you can have survival, but not victory. You can have existence, but not abundant life. You can get through the day, but joy? Peace that surpasses understanding? Love that casts out fear? That's for other people. That's too good to be true for someone like you.
- K. But the empty tomb is about to shatter that ceiling... if you will let it. If you will lean in. If you will believe that what God says is true enough to speak like it, choose like it, dream like it, pray like it, and act like it.
- IV. Having low expectations of God is a defense mechanism.
- A. Mary assumed the worst—grave robbery—because her theology makes God distant and her psychology makes herself unworthy.
 - B. And here comes an empty tomb to pick a fight with both her theology and her psychology.
 1. Peter looks at the empty slab where Jesus had been lain, and the evidence starts mounting.
- V. Evidence the Body Wasn't Stolen
- A. Evidence #1: The Linen Wrappings.
 1. They aren't scattered. They aren't ripped. They are lying there. Intact. The shape of a man, but flat. Like a cocoon after the butterfly has flown. If you steal a body, you take the clothes or you tear them off. You don't carefully extract a corpse out of 75 pounds of sticky, spice-laden linen without destroying the wrapping.
 2. But it's the next clue that destroys Mary's theory that "God doesn't do good things for me."
 - B. Evidence #2: The Folded Headcloth.
 1. The face cloth wasn't with the other linens. It was folded up in a place by itself.
 2. I want you to feel the weight of that. Grave robbers are in a panic. They grab. They smash. They run. They do not fold napkins.
 3. Folding is an act of leisure. It is an act of calm. It is an act of someone who woke up, took a breath, and tidied up before leaving.
 - a) This folded cloth says: "There was no panic here. I was not taken. I left."
 4. The evidence in that dark room is fighting Mary's despair. It is telling her: This is not a crime scene. This is a changing room.
 5. John sees it, and the text says he "believed." But what about the people who need more than a folded napkin to stake their life on?
 6. Every good investigation needs a skeptic. Someone who demands to touch the wounds.
- VI. Scripture
- A. The women find the open tomb, the disciples find the missing body.
 - B. Then Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene.
 - C. Then Jesus appears to the Disciples.
 - D. Then this...
 1. *"Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord.' So he said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.'" (John 20:24-25)*
- VII. The Skeptic
- A. History has given Thomas a bad nickname—"Doubting Thomas"—like he is the villain of the story. But to me, Thomas is the most relatable person in the room.
 - B. Jesus died, Thomas is hurting, and he's not going to hide that.
 1. When your world falls apart, sometimes the last thing you want is people around you. You want to hide because being around people who still have hope is too painful.
 2. So when the other disciples start shouting, "We have seen the Lord! He's alive!", Thomas doesn't high-five them. He backs off.
 3. He gets angry.
 - a) This is a cruel joke. Thomas saw the cross. He saw the blood. He saw the life drain out of the man he believed in with his whole heart.
 4. That trauma is etched into his eyelids.
 - C. Thomas isn't a cynic because he hates God. He is a skeptic because he loved Jesus so much that he can't survive losing Him twice.
 - D. He is protecting his heart. He is saying, "I will not be the fool who gets his hopes up only to have them crushed again."
 1. So he draws a line. I will not believe unless I see him, and unless I touch him. He is only asking for proof.
 - a) He is saying: "If this is real, it has to be physical. It has to be touchable. And it has to still carry the marks of what happened."
 2. You might be Thomas today. You might be thinking, "I want to believe that God brings dead things to life. But I need proof."
 - a) You aren't a bad person for needing proof. You're just honest.
 - b) So, let's bring Thomas to the witness stand. Let's let him cross-examine the theories that have been used to explain away the empty tomb.
- VIII. The Theories of the Missing Body
- A. THEORY #1: THE SWOON THEORY
 1. This theory says Jesus didn't actually die on the cross. He fainted, the cool air of the tomb revived him, he walked out, mystery solved.

2. The Proponent: In the 19th century, German theologian Karl Bahrdt argued that Jesus took a drug to feign death and was later revived by Joseph of Arimathea.
 - a) Even today, Muslim apologist Ahmed Deedat popularized the idea that Jesus merely "swooned" and was resuscitated, not resurrected. He famously said, "If a man is not dead, you cannot resurrect him."
 3. The Problem: Thomas saw the crucifixion. He saw the Roman scourging—39 lashes with a whip designed to strip flesh from bone. He saw the spikes driven through wrists and feet. He saw the spear thrust into the side, piercing the heart. Roman executioners were professionals.
 4. Even if He survived, could that man wake up in a pitch-black tomb, unwrap himself from 75 pounds of sticky linens, push away a two-ton stone from the inside, overpower Roman guards, and walk miles on wounded feet, and then bloodied, shredded, and bruised, convince not only his disciples but a skeptical public that He was the Lord of Life... even as he could barely open the eyes on his swollen face.
- B. THEORY #2: THE STOLEN BODY THEORY
1. The religious leaders bribed the soldiers to say, "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept."
 2. The Proponent: Even early critics like Celsus in the 2nd century suggested the disciples fabricated the resurrection to keep the movement alive.
 - a) Modern skeptic Gerd Lüdemann suggests that Peter, grief-stricken, hallucinated Jesus and then convinced the others to propagate the story, effectively "stealing" the body to match their new belief.
 3. The Problem: On Friday night, the disciples were terrified. They were hiding behind locked doors. Are we supposed to believe that these same men suddenly found the courage to overpower a Roman guard unit, break a government seal, steal a body, and then spend the rest of their lives being tortured and killed for a lie they knew was fake?
 4. People will die for something they believe is true. But nobody dies for a lie they know they made up.
 5. Chuck Colson, a political operative turned Christian, said it best: "I know the resurrection is a fact, and [the] Watergate [political scandal] proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, and they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it... In Watergate, 12 of the most powerful men in the world couldn't keep a lie going for three weeks."
- C. THEORY #3: THE HALLUCINATION THEORY
1. This theory says the disciples were so grief-stricken that they projected an image of Jesus. They wanted Him back so badly that their minds created Him.
 2. The Proponent: New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman argues, "It is a historical fact that some of Jesus' followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution... Visions can be generated by a person's intense desire to see a loved one."
 3. The Problem: Hallucinations are individual experiences. I might hallucinate a pink elephant, but you won't see it. The Bible records that Jesus appeared to 500 people at once. You cannot have a group hallucination.
 4. And you cannot touch a hallucination. You can't put your finger into the wounds of a vision.
- D. THEORY #4: THE SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION THEORY
1. This says: "Jesus rose in the hearts and minds of his disciples. His spirit lives on. The resurrection wasn't physical; it was a metaphor for how love conquers death."
 2. The Proponent: Liberal theologian Rudolf Bultmann famously argued that the resurrection was a spiritual not a literal event. It happened in the faith of the disciples, not in history. He said, "The resurrection itself is not an event of past history... Jesus has risen into the *kerygma* [the preaching]." In other words: The body rotted in the grave, but the idea of Jesus rose to inspire the world.
 3. The Problem: To Thomas—and to every Jew in the first century—a "resurrection" that leaves a body behind is not a resurrection at all. It is a ghost story.
 - a) "*and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is in vain.*" (1 Corinthians 15:14)
 4. In other words, if the physical body of Jesus remained dead in that tomb, then death still has the final word for all of us, and the whole Christian message is a colossal mistake at best, or a total fraud at worst.
 5. And then... it happens.
- IX. The Verdict: The Breakthrough to Life
- A. Eight days later, something happens. The disciples are gathered. The doors are shut. Thomas is sitting there, arms crossed, heart guarded, holding onto his skepticism like a shield.
1. And suddenly, Jesus is there.
 2. He doesn't knock. He simply stands in the midst of them. Flesh and bone. Real. Solid. Alive.
 3. He looks around the room, and He doesn't go to Peter. He doesn't go to John. He walks straight to the Thomas.
- B. And Jesus doesn't shout at him. He doesn't shame him. He says, "Thomas, here are my hands."
1. "*Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.*" (John 20:27)
 2. "*And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'"*" (John 20:28)
- C. I want you to see this moment! In one second, every theory crashes to the floor.
1. The Swoon Theory? Look at Him! He is not a fainting victim; He is the Lord of Life radiating glory!
 2. The Stolen Body Theory? He wasn't stolen; He walked out under His own power!
 3. The Hallucination Theory? Thomas reaches out, and his trembling hand touches warm skin. He feels the ridge of the scar. He feels the steady beat of a heart that was once stopped cold but is now beating with the rhythm of eternity.
 4. The Spiritual Metaphor? No! This isn't a metaphor. This is a Man! A Man who went into the belly of death and tore it open from the inside out!

- D. And Thomas—the man who wouldn't believe—cries out that great confession... a confession you can make today: "My Lord and my God!"
 - 1. Not just the Lord and the God, but mine. He made Jesus his own.
 - 2. And Jesus said this, and he's talking about you today:
 - a) *"Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"* (John 20:29)
- E. This is the verdict! The tomb is empty because the King is alive! And Thomas just discovered what Mary couldn't see in the garden—that when Jesus has LIFE when death made no sense, it opens a portal to a different reality!
- F. Listen to me: The same resurrection power that gave Jesus life when life was impossible is available right now to give YOU:
 - 1. Hope when your situation screams hopeless
 - 2. Peace when your mind is at war
 - 3. Joy when circumstances say you should be depressed
 - 4. Love when you feel completely alone
- G. This isn't positive thinking. This is RESURRECTION POWER!
 - 1. You see, the resurrection doesn't just prove Jesus conquered death. It proves there's a different operating system available to you. There's a supernatural reality that trumps your natural expectations.
- H. This isn't just a history lesson. This is a reality check.
- I. And the reality is there is a realm above of great power and great grace. And seated on the throne is this same Jesus who loves you today, just as much as ever.
- J. And the reality is that death does not have the final say in anyone's life who comes to God by Jesus.
 - 1. Breakthrough to Reality: You can tap into hope when hope makes no sense, peace when peace makes no sense, joy when joy makes no sense, and love when love makes no sense, all because you can have life when life makes no sense and the resurrection of Jesus is everlasting proof.
- 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. Breakthrough Prayer
 - A. I pray over every person here today.
 - B. Father, in the name of Jesus, I ask You to release breakthrough power right now. Where there are closed doors, open them. Where there are dead dreams, resurrect them. Where there is mental torment, bring peace. Where there is emotional pain, bring healing.
 - C. I pray that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead would breathe life into every hopeless situation, every stuck place, every area where the enemy has said "it's over."
 - D. Let purpose rise. Let health come. Let dreams that died long ago come back to life.
 - E. You are the God of the breakthrough. You are the God of the impossible. You are the God who gives life when life makes no sense.
 - F. So we receive it now. We believe it now. We step into it now.
 - G. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.