



THE EMPTY TOMB

JOHN 19:38-20:23

GOAL

- ▶ **To teach children the story of what happened after Jesus died and was buried.** Finding Jesus' tomb empty seemed like sadness on top of sadness for Jesus' disciples and close followers, but it was the greatest discovery of all time.
-

WORDS TO KNOW

- ▶ **Sabbath:** The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week in which we are to rest in remembrance of God's rest after He created the universe. Jewish people observe the Sabbath from Friday evening to Saturday evening. Christians observe the Sabbath on Sunday.
-

MEMORY VERSES

- ▶ **John 20:21:** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Mark 16:6: And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him."



OVERVIEW

Read John 19:38-20:23: After Jesus died on the cross, two men, John of Arimathea and Nicodemus, went to Pontius Pilate to ask him for permission to remove Jesus' body so they could give Him a proper burial. They took Jesus' body, wrapped it in strips of linen with burial spices, and placed it in a tomb cut out of the rock. As they left, they rolled an enormous stone in front of the entrance to seal it. After the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb with spices and perfumes to complete the Jewish burial customs, but when she arrived, she saw that the stone had been rolled away, and the tomb was empty. She ran to find the disciples Peter and John to tell them what she had seen. Disturbed by Mary's news, Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves. When they entered the tomb, they saw that the strips of linen that had been wrapped around his body lay in a pile, and next to it was the cloth that covered his face, neatly folded. Peter and John returned home, leaving Mary Magdalene alone at the tomb. Weeping, Mary looked up into the tomb and saw two angels who asked her why she was crying. As she told them what had happened, a man appeared behind her. Mary did not recognize that the man was Jesus, she thought He was the gardener. Jesus then spoke her name and she recognized that the man was Jesus. She fell to her knees to worship Him, but He cautioned her not to touch Him as He had not yet returned to the Father. He told her to go tell the disciples what she had seen. Later, Jesus appeared before the disciples who had gathered in a locked room. He showed them the wounds inflicted on Him on the cross. Jesus told them that He was sending them out to share God's love with the world. He breathed on them and gave them the Holy Spirit.



SUGGESTIONS

The disciples and other close followers saw Jesus' death and the disappearance of His body as sad and terrible events. Confused and consumed with grief, none of them thought to figure out what was really going on. They did not recognize the big picture that was forming right before their eyes.

1. Scripture: Information about the Messiah was provided in the Scriptures, but they did not understand. When they saw that the tomb was empty, it didn't occur to them that this was good news! John believed that Jesus was alive, but even he didn't know why or how it had happened. Scriptures, such as Isaiah 53, had long foretold that the Messiah would come, suffer, and die to save us from our sins.

2. Jesus Himself: Mary Magdalene stood at the entrance of the empty tomb. All she wanted at that moment was to see Jesus. She turns around, and there He is! She meets His gaze with a blank stare—absolutely zero recognition of who He is! Jesus often told his followers that they didn't recognize who he truly was and why he came. When we look at the Easter story, we see that Jesus is none other than the Son of God who came to save this world from sin.

3. Big Picture: Finding that tomb empty was one of the saddest moments in the disciples' lives. This man they had loved so deeply was unjustly murdered and then His body was stolen. This was a dark moment for them all—or so they thought. None of them understood that finding an empty tomb that day was the greatest news of all time! Jesus was not in that tomb; He is with us always! Jesus conquered sin and death when he rose from the dead, and because of this, we can confidently put our hope in Him for abundant and eternal life.



PRE-LESSON
ACTIVITY

Ages 5-7 **The Empty Egg** | **Supplies:** candy or small prizes, plastic Easter eggs, printed out pictures of bugs, snakes, etc.

Print out a pictures of things students will think are gross, such as bugs. Make the images small enough that, when cut out, they will fit inside a plastic Easter egg. Leave several eggs empty. Hide the eggs around the room. Let the students search the room for the eggs. Students who find the empty eggs get a piece of candy or a little prize, whichever is available.

The tomb was empty because Jesus had conquered death, and we are saved!

Ages 5-10 **In the Tomb, Out of the Tomb** | **Supplies:** masking tape

Place a long line of masking tape down the middle of the room. Instruct the students to stand on one side of the line, and tell them that they are standing on the “Out of the Tomb” side. Tell them that you will call out either “In the Tomb” or “Out of the Tomb,” and they should jump to the side that was called. If the students don’t jump to the other side when it is called or do when it is not, they are out. Continue until there is a winner or until the class needs to move on.

Ages 8-10 **Scripture Detectives** | **Supplies:** Bibles

Divide the class into teams. Give each team three verse references and a Bible. Instruct the students to look up each verse and determine which one discusses prophesy about Jesus. After giving them a few minutes to do their investigation, ask each team to read their chosen verse. If they choose incorrectly, explain which one is right and what the prophesy predicted.

A few good verses for this game include: Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6-7, and Micah 5:2, Zechariah 9:9, and Zechariah 12:10.

The disciples were not great religious leaders, but they had knowledge of Scripture and of Messianic prophecies. Jesus also told them several times that he would be killed and rise from the dead. Still, the disciples did not understand what was going on when Jesus was falsely accused, killed, and then missing from His tomb.



MEMORY
VERSE
MEANING

▶ **John 20:21:** Like God sent Jesus to Earth with a mission to save us from our sins, Jesus has sent us on a mission to tell everyone about His love and sacrifice.

Mark 16:6: Jesus died on the cross, He conquered death, and three days later, He rose victorious from the grave.

POST-LESSON
ACTIVITY

▶ **Ages 5-7 He Is Risen! | Supplies:** paper plates, glue, brass paper fasteners (also called brads), cutouts of an angel outline, crayons, markers, glitter, other decorating supplies.

Cut a circular hole from the middle of half of the plates needed for the craft and keep the circle that was cut out. On the back side of the paper plate with the hole in it, write "HE IS RISEN!" Let students color in their angels, the inside of the paper plate without a hole, the circle cut out, and the backside of the plate with the hole. Instruct them to glue their angels to the middle of the plate without a hole. Attach the circle cut out to the plate with the hole in it using the brass paper fasteners so that the circle cut out covers the hole. Glue the plate with the hole to the top of the other plate. They have created an "empty tomb" to remind them that Jesus is risen!

Ages 5-10 Roll Away the Stone | Supplies: golf balls, plastic spoons, masking tape

Place a line on each side of the room. Divide the class into teams, and divide the teams in two so that each team has members behind the lines on both sides of the classroom. Give each student a plastic spoon and the team members on one side of the room a golf ball. Instruct the students to put the handle of the spoon in their mouths and use it to push the golf ball to the other side of the room. When the student arrives at the other side, the first person in the team's line pushes the golf ball back to the other side of the room. The first team to have all members push the ball across the room wins.



Ages 8-10 | **Who Am I?** | **Supplies:** old clothes and large paper bags

Cut out holes in the paper bags for eye holes. Choose a number of students from the class and have them leave the room and put on the old clothes and the paper bags. One at a time, have the disguised students come back into the room, and ask the class who it is. The class can ask the disguised student yes and no questions (except for asking if their name is that of one of the students being disguised). Let them continue asking questions until they figure out who the disguised students are.

The game will last longer if you choose students with similar hair color and more than one boy or girl to disguise themselves.

Jesus wasn't disguised, but His closest friends and followers did not recognize Him when He appeared to them after His death.

**TAKE
HOME**



When something terrible happens in our lives, it's easy to focus on the bad and not recognize God's work in our lives.

1. Scripture: Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." When we love God and work to live our lives according to His call, He will bless us. The same God who created the universe and conquered death can take any bad situation and turn it around for our benefit. Scripture tells us over and over again about God's goodness and how He works to bless us and help us to live good lives. The more we read the Bible, the more we will be able to recognize God's work in our lives.



2. Jesus Himself: Like Mary not recognizing that the man standing in front of her in the garden was Jesus, we often don't recognize Jesus in our own lives. We are never alone. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are always with us. Everyday life is often mundane and sometimes even tedious, but if we really pay attention and look, we can see where Jesus has had His hand in making something right or better.

3. Big Picture: Even when we know that God will turn a bad situation into a blessing, it is sometimes hard to get past wondering why the bad stuff has to happen at all. We grow and learn from the things we experience in life, both good and bad. Everything in life shapes us, and God uses these experiences to help us accomplish the specific missions for which He created us. When we get to Heaven, we will understand why everything happened in our lives the way it did.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 1



Q1a: Joseph of Arimathea asked Pontius Pilate for permission to do what?

A1: Joseph of Arimathea asked Pontius Pilate for permission to remove Jesus' body from the cross.

Q1b: Why did Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have to hurry to bury Jesus?

TN: During the time Jesus was on Earth (and many still today), Jewish people observed very strict rules on the Sabbath. From sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday, the Jewish people were not allowed to do any work, including shopping, cooking, or caring for their animals. That meant that they had to take care of everything that would need to be done on the Sabbath done before the sunset Friday evening. Because providing a proper burial would require work, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus needed to move quickly to ensure Jesus was buried before the sunset that day, or they would be in violation of Sabbath laws.

SLIDE 2



Q2a: Where did Joseph and Nicodemus bury Jesus' body?

A2: Joseph and Nicodemus buried Jesus' body in a tomb cut out of rock.

Q2b: Why didn't Jesus' disciples bury Him?

TN: Jesus' disciples were wanted men, and if any one of them had come to claim Jesus' body, it is likely that they would have been arrested. That is one reason, but there is another, more important explanation as to why two relatively recent followers of Jesus were the ones to claim His body and bury Him: it fulfilled a prophecy about Jesus' life. Isaiah 53:9 says that, even though the Messiah would be treated and killed as a criminal, He would be buried in a rich man's grave. Circumstances worked out to make Jesus' burial happen just as God said it would many years earlier. That is not a coincidence—that is divine knowledge.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 3



Q3a: What did Mary Magdalene bring with her to the tomb?

A3: Mary Magdalene brought spices and perfumes to the tomb.

Q3b: How did Mary Magdalene know where Jesus was buried?

TN: The Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus' life as the disciple John witnessed it. Other Gospels tell the story from the perspectives of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Each of these men tell the same story with slightly different details. Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention in their versions that Mary Magdalene and some of the other women followers of Jesus watched from afar as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried Jesus.

SLIDE 4



Q4a: Which of the disciples walked right into the tomb to see what had happened?

A4: Peter walked right into the tomb.

Q4b: Did Jesus not explain to the disciples what was going to happen after His death?

TN: While the disciples were following Jesus as He cared for people, performed miracles, and taught huge audiences across Israel, He told them numerous times about what was going to happen to Him. He told them that He would be arrested, tried, convicted, executed as a criminal, buried, and three days later, He would rise from the dead. Somehow, this information didn't make sense to the disciples, so that when two of them entered an empty tomb and witnessed exactly what Jesus said would happen, they were unable to put it together and figure it out. The Scriptures here say that John believed that Jesus was alive, but he did not understand how or what it meant. More than likely, the information Jesus gave them about His resurrection didn't make sense because it goes so completely against everything humans understand about death. While they understood Jesus was powerful, and some of the disciples understood who He was, they were still always amazed when He performed miracles and healed people. The disciples knew Jesus had the power to do anything, but the power of resurrection wasn't something they could even imagine.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 5



Q5a: What did the angels ask Mary Magdalene?

A5: The angels asked Mary Magdalene why she was crying.

Q5b: Why did Mary Magdalene stay behind at the tomb?

TN: The angels asked her why she was crying because they understood what was happening and its significance. Mary Magdalene loved and served Jesus in life. She came to His tomb to love and serve Him death, but when she got there, there was no body for her to care for. Mary stayed behind because the emotion of the situation became more than she could bear. The sadness of Jesus' death was now doubled by the loss of His body. She cried because it felt like she had lost Him a second time.

SLIDE 6



Q6a: Who did Mary Magdalene think Jesus was?

A6: Mary Magdalene thought Jesus was the gardener.

Q6b: Why did Mary Magdalene not recognize Jesus and think He was the gardener?

TN: Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb before the sun had risen that day, so it was dark. Also, she had been sobbing, so it's very possible that her vision was blurred. More importantly, she came there with spices to anoint a dead man's body; to her, it was far more likely to encounter a gardener in that garden than Jesus! When she ran back to tell the disciples what she had seen, Mary Magdalene became the first evangelist in history.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 7



Q7a: Why were the disciples in a locked room?

A7: The disciples were in a locked room because they were afraid of what the Jewish leaders might do to them.

Q7b: If Jesus could appear in a locked room, why was the stone rolled away from the tomb's entrance?

TN: Jesus did not need the stone to be rolled away to walk out of the tomb. He has the power to rise from the dead, so He certainly has the power to move a huge stone. Leaving the stone in place and letting the people move it out of the way when they got there would make Jesus' resurrection obvious—a fact that no one could dispute. The stone was rolled away so that our belief in Jesus' resurrection would be based on our faith in Him. We do not believe because there is no other logical way to think, but because we have faith. God has given us free will, which includes allowing us to decide whether what we read in the Bible is a collection of events that happened exactly as written or a collection of good stories. As followers of Christ, we see the empty tomb and we know that it means He is risen!



QUESTION & ANSWER

MEMORY VERSES

▶ **John 20:21:** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Mark 16:6: And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him."

.....

BIG IDEA

▶ Jesus wasn't in the tomb because He is alive and with us always!

.....

CLOSING PRAYER

▶ Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son to die for our sins. Thank You for the plan you have for our lives. Help us to recognize your work in our lives. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 1



After hanging in agony on the cross for hours, Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" and He surrendered His spirit to God. Despite his sadness, Joseph of Arimathea, a man who was secretly a disciple of Jesus, knew that to ensure Jesus had a proper burial, he had to do it before the quickly approaching Sabbath. Grief stricken, Joseph went before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, to ask if he could remove Jesus' body from the cross. After Pilate gave him permission, he and Nicodemus went to the cross with a large amount of myrrh and aloes to anoint Jesus' body for burial.

SLIDE 2



Together, Joseph and Nicodemus carefully wrapped Jesus' body in strips of linen with burial spices in accordance with Jewish tradition. Near the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden where a tomb had been cut out of the rock, something only wealthy people could afford. This tomb belonged to Joseph, and no one had yet been laid to rest there. It was in this tomb that Joseph and Nicodemus laid the body of Jesus. Before they left, they rolled an enormous stone in front of the tomb's entrance, sealing it shut.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 3



Before the sun had risen on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene gathered the spices and perfumes she had prepared to complete the burial customs for Jesus and made her way to the tomb. When she arrived, she discovered the giant stone had been rolled away, and the tomb was empty! Deeply distressed by what she had seen, she ran as fast as she could to tell the disciples Peter and John what had happened. “They’ve taken our Lord’s body, and we don’t know where!” Mary exclaimed.

SLIDE 4



(John 20:3-10) After hearing Mary’s account, Peter and John sprinted to the tomb. John arrived first, but he did not enter the tomb. Without hesitation, Peter walked into the tomb and noticed that the strips of linen that Jesus had been wrapped up in were laying empty in a pile, and the burial cloth that was placed over His head and face was neatly folded next to them. As John entered the empty tomb, he didn’t fully understand what had happened, but he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. Puzzled by what they had seen, Peter and John returned to their homes.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 5



Too upset to return home with Peter and John, Mary Magdalene remained at the empty tomb. As she wept, she looked up through her tears into the tomb, and she saw two angels in dazzling white robes! They were sitting where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and one at the foot. Seeing Mary's tears, the angels asked, "Woman, why are you crying?" Still sobbing, Mary replied, "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him."

SLIDE 6



As Mary turned away from the angels to make her way home, she saw a man had been standing behind her, but this was no ordinary man—it was Jesus! Somehow, Mary did not recognize Jesus; she thought He was the gardener! Jesus asked Mary, "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" Mary, still thinking He was the gardener, begged Him, "If you have taken him away, please tell me where so I can get Him." Then Jesus called Mary's name, and suddenly she recognized that the man was Jesus. She exclaimed, "Teacher!" and fell to her knees to worship at His feet. Jesus told Mary to go tell the disciples.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 7



After hearing Mary's report of what happened at the tomb and that she had seen Jesus, the disciples gathered together behind locked doors, afraid of what the Jewish leaders might do to them. Suddenly, Jesus appeared among them in the locked house and said, "Peace to you!" The disciples were overjoyed to see Jesus with their own eyes! After Jesus had shown them the wounds in His hands and His side, He told the disciples that they would continue His mission, going throughout the world and preaching God's love.