

“THE POWER OF THE EMPTY TOMB!”

By Rom A. Pegram (4/1/18)

In the days of the great Chicago evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, a story is told about the LOVE of GOD. Moody was preaching an evening service one day and a poor drunkard stumbled up the steps to the front door of Moody’s church. He pushed the door open, scanned the room, and saw no one inside. His eyes, however, were drawn to a large sign that hung over the pulpit up front. It read: “GOD IS LOVE.” It struck him—with anger, I might add. He slammed the door, and staggered down the steps, muttering to himself: “God is not love. If God was love He would love me, and He doesn’t love a miserable man like me. It isn’t true.”

He went on his way, but those words were burning inside him: “God is love. God is love. God is love...” He couldn’t resist. *Was it true; is it possible?* After a while he turned around, retraced his steps, and entered the church again—confused and desperate. By this time, the people had gathered for the evening service. Moody began to preach and the man slipped into a back pew—*way in the back corner*. He wept during the entire sermon as anger and confusion ... gave way to joy and hope!

Afterward, Moody made his way to the door to shake hands with those who’d attended the service, but the man didn’t leave. He remained seated, still weeping. Moody came over, sat down beside him, and asked, “What are you crying about, my friend? What was it in the sermon that touched your heart?”

“Oh, Mr. Moody,” the man responded, “Actually, I didn’t hear a word that you spoke tonight. It’s those words up there over your pulpit—‘GOD IS LOVE’—that broke my heart.” Moody sat down and explained to him the depths of God’s love. The man listened and gave his heart to God, understanding for the very first time ... that GOD REALLY DID LOVE *HIM!*

God really does love you, too! And the reason I know that is because ... this is Easter morning—the day of resurrection! And all that was sacrificed & accomplished through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection was done ... for you and me! Listen to our Bible story for today (Mark 16:1-8, NLT); then, I’ll explain a little bit of what that means...

Saturday evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene and Salome and Mary the mother of James went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus’ body. ² Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb. ³ On the way they were asking each other, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴ But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside. ⁵ When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked, ⁶ but the angel said, “Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. ⁷ Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to

Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died.”⁸ The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened.

Folks, there was *power* behind what took place on that first Easter morning ... and the *power* behind the resurrection, the real *power* behind the empty tomb ... was the LOVE of GOD! Out of LOVE, he did all of this for you and me. Briefly, here’s the story of what God has done for us: Let me begin here...

ONLY THE LOVE OF GOD COULD REMOVE THE BARRIER OF SIN! This is what Good Friday was all about; it had to happen...

What we now call ‘Holy Week’ came out of the Jewish feast of Passover—the celebration of their defining story of when God saved them out of slavery in Egypt. During the Passover, there is always a lamb that is sacrificed for the feast. It was the blood of the original Passover (Paschal) Lamb that was painted on the doorposts of the Jewish homes, so that the angel of death would ‘pass over’ them and not kill their firstborn sons...

In the same way, Jesus announced to his disciples and to the world ... he was now the perfect sacrifice—the REAL Paschal (or Passover) Lamb! He did that at the Last Supper, as they shared in a time of communion... Then, the Perfect Sacrificial Lamb went to the cross on Good Friday ... and gave his life so that you and I could now have a whole (as opposed to damaged) relationship with God Almighty. And because of the bridge Jesus was able to build—relationally—between us and God, we can now look forward to life together with God ... forever! *THAT IS THE GOOD NEWS!*

But you and I need to come to the understanding today that the only reason all of this took place ... was because of the relentless LOVE OF GOD! It was only the LOVE OF GOD that could remove the barrier of sin ... and make things right between us and God! So, **ONLY THE LOVE OF GOD COULD REMOVE THE BARRIER OF SIN AND...**

ONLY THE LOVE OF GOD CAN GIVE US HOPE IN WHAT SEEMS A HOPELESS WORLD! This is what Easter’s all about; *Jesus’ resurrection is our source of HOPE...*

Verses 2-7a of today’s Bible story remind us: “Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb.³ On the way they were asking each other, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’⁴ But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside.⁵ When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked,⁶ but the angel said, ‘Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body.⁷ Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter....”

Up to this point, even though they should have known better, the disciples—including these women who were going to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body—were discouraged;

they felt ‘hopeless!’ The resurrection—the empty tomb—takes care of that feeling, doesn’t it?

‘Nobody loves me!’ ... or ‘God could never love someone like me!’—*false statements in light of what God did!* The resurrection of Jesus on that first Easter morning was God’s gift to all of us; God repaired the sinful divide that existed between us and patched up our relationship once and for all—a relationship that could now last forever... And NOTHING COULD SHOW GOD’S LOVE FOR US MORE CLEARLY THAN THE GIFT OF HIS SON—THE GIFT HE GAVE US AT EASTER!

John 3:16-17 (NLT) tells us: “For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” Now, *there’s the POWER of the Empty Tomb!*

In her autobiography, ‘Over Mountain or Plain or Sea,’ Trula Cronk—a missionary to India for 24 years—tells of a little girl who visited her home one evening and stayed just a little longer than she’d intended. You see, it got dark outside and the little girl was afraid to walk home in the dark! Trula explained to her that she should not be afraid, saying, “Dolan, God loves you and He will care for you as you walk back to your house.” To which the little girl replied, “No, memsahib, God does not love little girls.” Trula Cronk was never able to forget that misguided statement ... and took it on as a mission (for 20-some years) to tell all little girls everywhere that GOD IS LOVE ... and He does indeed love them!

Very much like Trula Cronk, I have a burden to dispel the misunderstanding that ‘GOD DOESN’T LOVE ME’ or ‘GOD COULDN’T LOVE SOMEONE LIKE ME!’ I have a burden to tell you that God deeply, stubbornly, and eternally insists on loving the likes of you ... and everyone else on the face of this earth! It doesn’t matter who you are ... or what you’ve done! Remember that ... and it’ll change your life...

Author Max Lucado has said this: “You can’t fall beyond God’s love!” Folks, whether you know this or not, God’s love even includes people you may have trouble loving:

- **That guy who cut you off in traffic**—God loves him ... or that woman who was rude to you at the grocery store—God loves her, too...
- **That person you work with who—for some unknown reason—leans toward *the other political party*** ... or watches *that* news channel—God loves ‘em...
- **That entire nation of people across the ocean you deeply mistrust**—God loves its every citizen...

As a matter of fact, GOD LOVES YOU... This is the most important fact of your life; this should be a major part of *your* defining story—your life with God. GOD LOVES YOU! The eternal, self-existent Being who created everything and sustains everything in the world that we know ... *dearly loves YOU!* That profound thought should begin and end every single day of your life! It should define your every goal, your every action...

And God doesn't *merely like you when you do well*; God is personally and passionately committed to your good, *even on your bad days*... GOD LOVES YOU! Folks...

- What would happen if that 3-word sentence became the theme of your life?
- What would happen if you let those 3 words change everything about you and your world?

It'd be a game-changer, wouldn't it? Folks ... Easter is the perfect time to launch a worship series like this—to *share a message like this!* GOD LOVES YOU! He gave us his Son; His Son gave up his life--voluntarily; then God showed us the power of His Love through the Resurrection, giving us hope for our eternal future as well...

GOD LOVES YOU! Do you know anyone else who needs to hear *that* message? If you do, *invite them in the weeks to come, would you?* It'll change your life ... and it'll change your church. There may never have been a more important message shared in this place! GOD LOVES YOU...