

THE GREAT ESCAPE

INTRO: Turn your Bibles or turn them on to St. John chapter 20. While you are finding your place, let me share something with you.

In 1922 a British archaeologist named Howard Carter became famous when he discovered the intact tomb of King Tutankhamen, better known as King Tut. Tut, was a young Egyptian pharaoh who lived and ruled between the years 1334 - 1325 BC. Other tombs in Egypt had been found before his, but what made this tomb so unique was the fact that it still had everything in it. There was so much wealth that it took 7 weeks to get all 5400 items of treasure out. Among these treasures was a solid gold coffin, golden face masks, chests, chairs and even 7 model boats. All of solid gold! Even though he only ruled for 10 years, a great deal is known about the life of this pharaoh because of the objects that were recovered from his tomb.

Tombs often tell us a lot about a person. Tombstones themselves are often said to be a summation of one's life. Today, however, I want to talk about the most famous tomb of all time, a tomb that changed the world forever. Unlike the tomb of King Tut, it was a simple and empty tomb.

With today being Easter, I want to preach a sermon titled, **THE GREAT ESCAPE**.

It seems people love escape stories. Some of the most exciting movies of all time involve escape scenes. There was actually a movie called, *The Great Escape*, made in 1963. It was about an escape by Allied prisoners of war from a German POW camp during World War II. It featured Steve McQueen. The most memorable scene was when McQueen used a motorcycle to jump over a tall fence.

Then there's the movie, *The Fugitive*. Only Harrison Ford could escape a horrific train wreck and still have the energy to elude Tommy Lee Jones and solve his wife's murder.

In *Star Wars*, Han Solo & Luke Skywalker help Princess Leia escape the clutches of Darth Vader.

Everyone loves a great escape. And in all of history, both fiction and not, there has never been a more audacious, and brilliantly planned escape, than that of the Lord Jesus Christ from His earthly prison.

I want us to look at this well known, well loved story once again. Please read with me...

John 20:1-8 *"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"*

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest feat ever performed since the creation of the world. The empty tomb of Jesus, and the Great escape He performed, proves three important things;

I) GOD IS UNLIMITED IN HIS POWER: The tombs of Egypt are famous because they contained the mummified bodies of ancient Egyptian Kings. Westminster Abbey in London is revered, because in it rests the bodies of English nobles and notables. Arlington cemetery in Washington, D.C. is known as the honored resting place of many brave Americans. But the tomb of Jesus is famous not for what it holds, but because it is empty.

The empty tomb is God's definitive demonstration of power.

There are those who try to argue that the resurrection did not really happen. Some say that Jesus was not really dead when he was laid in the tomb. They would have you think he was beaten until the point of death, so that he could no longer stand, then had his hands and feet nailed to a cross, pierced with a spear so that water mixed with blood poured out of his side. He was then verified dead by an expert in death and buried in a tomb, tightly wrapped in 100 lbs of linen and spices. That he suddenly came too, threw off the wrappings and pushed aside the stone that weighed more than a ton, breaking the Roman seal and scaring away the guards that were there. They would have you believe that's what happened and that He was just an ordinary man.

Others argue that the disciples stole the body of Jesus. The fearful disciples who fled and forsook Jesus so they wouldn't be associated with him by the Roman authorities. Somehow, these disciples, came together and overtook the trained Roman soldiers guarding the tomb, and moved the stone. Their fear was somehow transformed into relentless courage, with which they all would go out and die for what they knew to be a lie.

The truth is Peter could stand forty days later and proclaim to everyone that Jesus had risen from the dead and no one could dispute his story because they all knew it was true. All the authorities had to do to stop those early Christians was produce the body of Jesus. They couldn't. He had risen.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 15:3-8** *"...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."*

ILLUS: Josh McDowell went to school to become a lawyer. As an Agnostic, he decided to write a paper examining the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus in order to disprove it. However, after more than seven hundred hours of studying and investigating the evidence he realized that it was in fact true. His book, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, presents that argument.

ILLUS: Professor Thomas Arnold was an English educator and historian. He wrote the three-volume *History of Rome*. He was the Chair of Modern History at Oxford and was well acquainted with the value of evidence in determining historical facts. This great scholar said, *"I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us, that Christ died and rose again from the dead."*

I) GOD IS UNLIMITED IN HIS POWER: The GREAT ESCAPE of Jesus Christ reminds us of God's unlimited power. A power that points to an ultimate purpose. Throughout his trial, Jesus was told many times to demonstrate his power by escaping his suffering and his death. Each time He refused because His ultimate demonstration of power was His power over death. That could only be shown if He did, in fact, die.

Ephesians 1:18-20 *"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms"*

Paul tells us here that the empty tomb reminds us of God's power. That same power is available to each one of us today.

1 Corinthians 6:14 *"By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also."*

The GREAT ESCAPE not only proves God is Unlimited In His Power, It also proves...

II) GOD IS UNWAVERING IN HIS PRIORITY: Jesus did not just come to the earth so that He could suffer and die for no purpose. He came for a reason. His priority is people. He came so that you could go to heaven. Jesus did not come just to make bad people good, he came to make dead people live.

Luke 19:10 *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

Jesus died and rose from the dead for a reason, and that reason is you.

Hebrews 12:2 *"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

What does the empty tomb remind us of? It reminds us that you matter to God. You are important.

ILLUS: A gem dealer was strolling the aisles at the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show when he noticed a blue-violet stone the size and shape of a potato. He looked it over, then, as calmly as possible, asked the vendor, "You want \$15 for this?" The seller, realizing the rock wasn't as pretty as others in the bin, lowered the price to \$10. The stone has since been certified as a 1,905-carat natural star sapphire, about 800 carats larger than the largest stone of its kind., It was appraised at \$2.28 million. It took a lover of stones to recognize the sapphire's worth. And it took the Lover of Souls to recognize the true value of ordinary looking people like us.

The GREAT ESCAPE not only proves God's Unlimited Power, and His Unwavering Priority. But it also proves that ...

III) GOD IS UNDENIABLE IN HIS PRESENCE: After the resurrection Jesus met with His disciples before returning to Father God, and He gave a command and then a promise. **Matthew 28:18-20** *"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

I) GOD IS UNLIMITED IN HIS POWER:

II) GOD IS UNWAVERING IN HIS PRIORITY:

III) GOD IS UNDENIABLE IN HIS PRESENCE: CONTINUED **ILLUS:** After sixteen years as a missionary on the continent of Africa, David Livingstone returned to Scotland to address the students at Glasgow University. His body had been ravaged by fever and the many bouts of Malaria he had suffered. One arm hung at his side, the result of being mauled by a lion. The core of his message that day was simply this; "Shall I tell you what sustained me amidst the toil, the hardship, and the loneliness of my travels? It was Christ's promise, 'Lo. I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.'"

That promise that Jesus gave was not just for David Livingstone. It is also for each one of us. The same God that went with David through his travels in Africa goes with us as we live out our faith in our workplaces, schools and homes. Jesus has promised that He is with us, and will always be with us. The empty tomb, the GREAT ESCAPE, is a reminder and confirmation of that promise.

Psalms 139:7-10 *"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."*

God is always with us. His presence is always near. Albeit, we don't always recognize His presence. Howard Carter became famous when he discovered the tomb of King Tut, but discovery had come at great personal cost. The discovery took more than 10 years of his life and all his family fortune. When he first found the sand covered steps leading down to the tomb on Nov 4, 1922 he quickly had them uncovered. Upon finally finding the door he put a light in and looked inside. When they asked him what he saw he only said, "Marvelous things." Then he sat down on the steps, put his head in his hands and cried. When asked why he was crying he told them "10 years ago I dug 18 inches from the top of these steps. I was so close, so very close ..." 10 years of his life was gone because he missed what was so very close.

Maybe, this morning, you feel a little like Josh McDowell did when he sat down to disprove the resurrection. Maybe you are a sceptic. Maybe you have doubts about whether the Easter message is really true. The Apostle Paul spoke of over 500 people that had seen the risen Christ. Think about that for a moment. There are tens of thousands of people in the world today that have met the risen Savior, and are willing to testify to that fact. They have felt his presence, they have experienced His resurrection power.

I encourage you this morning, don't miss Jesus. You are so close. Don't miss this opportunity to dig deeper. To find that doorway leading to joy beyond all measure. The riches of God's inheritance. Receive Him into your heart today.

Jesus did the miraculous on your behalf. He orchestrated THE GREAT ESCAPE!

Acts 2:24 *"But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip."*