

Jesus at the Empty Cave
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
Matthew 28:1-10
April 17, 2022 (Easter)

During this series on “Mountains, Valleys, and Caves,” we’ve looked at sites in the Bible where people experienced mountaintops of faith, victory, triumph, and vision. We have also looked at those valley times—like walking through the valley of the shadow of death. While caves are not as prevalent in the Bible as mountains and valleys, they are places where two things happen. First, it is the place where people hid when in trouble. Second, the soil in Israel is so rocky that it would be hard to bury people underground so they would put the body into a cave until it decomposed and then collect the bones and put them in an “ossuary,” a type of urn. Ancient ossuaries continue to be found in Israel. When Jesus was crucified, they laid him in a type of cave before the Sabbath. The women went to the tomb on Sunday morning. Something miraculous had to happen for fiercely Sabbath-worshipping Jews to shift their day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. This change is another testimony to the truth of the Resurrection. The empty tomb did not convince the disciples: they believed because of the other sounds, sights, and touches they experienced. Ultimately, the disciples experienced the resurrected Christ. Jesus was not a “caveman” for long. He triumphed over death, our final enemy.

APPLICATION: Our theme during Holy Week is **Resurrection**. Others can have a “Last Supper,” thousands were crucified, and everyone dies, but Jesus’ resurrection stands alone. This was as shocking to His disciples, even though Jesus told them it would happen, as it is to us today. They acted upon this truth. According to tradition, all the disciples except John, who was exiled, were martyred for their faith. An appropriate question is: Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? There are huge benefits to following Jesus in this life as well as in the life to come. Know that Jesus died and rose for you. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us give our hearts to Him anew. He is risen. He is risen, indeed!

Mountains/Valleys/Caves background. MOUNTAINS are the great highlights and victories in life. But we must live in the VALLEYS below. CAVES places of loneliness, depression, despair, and death. Last week, Jesus was literally on a mountain – the Mount of Olives. However, on Friday, He was put to death and placed in a cave. But this is Easter. If Jesus had the ultimate CAVE, He also has give us the ultimate in a MOUNTAINTOP experience.

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There is a **dominant EMOTION** in this text: **FEAR**

⁴ *And for **fear** of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.*

⁵ *But the angel said to the women, “Do not be **afraid**,*

⁸ *So they departed quickly from the tomb with **fear** and great joy*

¹⁰ *Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be **afraid***

The Roman guards and the women were afraid (but the angel spoke only to the women, not to the guards). Both the angel and Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid.” No wonder, we are afraid of so many things, including death.

There is a **MESSAGE**: *I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.* ⁶ *He is not here, for **he has risen**, as he said.* These 3 words are the essence of the Gospel: *he has risen*. Everything changes if He is risen. Now all Jesus’ promises are validated. This is the essential message we need to hear to give us hope, direction, & meaning for this life. By the way, heaven is a bonus that gets thrown in, too.

The book, The Only Plane in the Sky: "The Oral History of 9/11" is a deeply moving story of the experiences of hundreds of people on Sept. 11, 2001. "Connie" was one of about 1,100 people trapped in the north and south towers of the World Trade Center. She was on the 99th floor of the south tower. She tried to evacuate by walking down the steps. She would stop & cry. She was trembling. Then she heard her father's voice, clear as day, telling her **she would not die in that building**. She straightened up & kept descending the steps. A few minutes later, she heard her uncle's voice. She clearly heard him speak in her left ear. He always called her "Kiddo." He said, "Kiddo, just take one step at a time." Connie did. After descending 100 floors, she sat down in the lobby for a moment to rest. She was perspiring terribly. Others who had descended the steps with her came and hugged her & said, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." Connie asked a coworker, "Why are they saying this?" The coworker said, "Connie, don't you know what you were saying? You kept saying, "We're not going to die in this building. Just take it one step at a time." Connie was repeating out loud what the words her father & uncle were telling her & she didn't even know it. She & others were convinced her words helped save their lives. BTW, her father had died 16 years before and her uncle 2 years before. We've had enough of these types of experiences to know that there's more than just flesh and blood to the human experience. There's something that transcends our reason. There's far more to us than we realize.

Today we are repeating the message others have told us about Jesus. He enables us to escape from certain death by giving us eternal life. We believe He is still saving lives. We live with hope. "Even though they die, yet shall they live."

There is an **INVITATION**: **Come, see the place where he lay**. In John (1:45), Philip was excited he had met and began to follow Jesus. He told Nathanael they had found the one of whom Moses & the prophets had written: Jesus of Nazareth. Nathanael was cynical & disbelieving when he heard Jesus was from the tiny town of Nazareth. He asked: "Nazareth? Can anything good come from Nazareth." Philip didn't try to argue or to prove anything to Nathanael, but simply invited him, "**Come and see**" (NIV). When Nathanael met Jesus, the first thing Jesus said was, "Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no guile (deceit)." Curious, Nathanael asked how Jesus could know that about him. Jesus said, "Before Philip called you, I saw you when you were under the fig tree." Stunned, Nathanael says, *Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the king of Israel.* Jesus replies, John 1:50 "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." We are all invited to follow Jesus, too.

There is a **MISSION**: *Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, **go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.*** "**Come and see**" shows up at another place in the Bible. We showed this clip from The Chosen (Season 1, episode 8) on March 13. Jesus met a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. She had 3 strikes against her. 1st she was a Samaritan. Though neighbors, the Jews & Samaritans hated each other. They had fought wars against each other. 2nd she was a woman. Women were 2nd class citizens. 3rd she had a bad reputation in her Samaritan town. She was "that" woman. She had 5 husbands & was living with someone who was not her husband. In a culture of honor & shame – she was the epitome of shame. Jesus went out of His way to meet her. He sent the disciples into a Samaritan town to buy food. The woman was by herself in the heat of the day at Jacob's well to draw water. Jesus, a Jew, asked this Samaritan woman with the worst reputation in town, for a favor – a drink of water. 4:50 **And everyone who drinks this water will thirst again. But whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty again.** Wouldn't that be nice? **The water I give will become in a person a spring of water leading up to eternal life.** Really? Prove it. **First, go and call your husband, then come back. I will show you both.** I don't have a husband. **You are right. You've had 5 husbands and the one you are living with now is not your husband.** I see. You're a prophet. You're here to preach to me. Usually, the one good thing about coming here alone is I can escape being condemned. **I'm not here to condemn you.** I've made mistakes. Too many. But it's men like you who have

made it impossible for me to do anything about it. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain but you Jews insist Jerusalem is the only place for true worship. **They say that because the Temple is there.** Yeah, exactly where we are not allowed. **I'm here to break those barriers. And the time is coming when neither here on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.** So where am I supposed to go when I need God? I've never received anything from God, but I couldn't thank Him even if I did. **Anywhere. God is spirit. And the time is coming and is now here, that it won't matter where you worship but only that you do it in Spirit & in truth. Heart & mind. That is the kind of worshiper He's looking for. It won't matter where you're from or what you've done. Do you believe what I'm telling you?** Until the Messiah comes, & explains everything & sorts this mess out, including me, I don't trust in anyone. **You're wrong. When you say that you've never received anything from God. This Messiah you speak of. I am He. The first one was named Ramin. You were a woman of purity who was excited to be married. But he wasn't a good man. He hurt you and it made you question marriage and even the practice of your faith. The second was Farzad. On your wedding night, his skin smelled like oranges, and to this day, every time you pass by the oranges in the market, you feel guilty for leaving him because he was the only true good man you've been with, but you felt unworthy. Why are you doing this? I have not revealed myself to the public as the Messiah. You are the first. It would be good if you believed me.** You picked the wrong person. **I came to Samaria just to meet you. Do you think it's an accident that I'm here in the middle of the day?** I am rejected by others. I know. **But not by the Messiah.** And you know these things because you are the Christ. I'm going to tell everyone. **I was counting on it.** Spirit and Truth? It won't be all about mountains or temples? **Soon, just the heart.** You promise? **I promise.** This man told me everything I've done. Oh, he must be the Christ. Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Uh, Rabbi, we got food. What would you like? **I have food to eat that you don't know about.** Who got you food? Peter: Wait a minute. You told her? And she can tell others? What food? **My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work.** Peter: You told her who you are? So does that mean we're going to stay here for a couple of days. **It's been a long time of sowing, but the fields are ripe for harvest.** Peter: And so it's time. Let's Go. (52:39)

This woman felt condemned & rejected by others, by herself, and by God. She was afraid, anxious, & alone. As a result, she can't trust anyone.

While times & customs have changed (we don't draw water from a well or have disputes with Samaritans) the core issues remain – fear, guilt, & loneliness result in feeling condemned & rejected by others, by God, & disappointed in ourselves.

Our good news is that Jesus is the Messiah. We proclaim today He is Risen. He did not come to condemn her or us. Shame is not helpful. In the chapter before this story, John 3, Jesus said: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

Remember what Jesus told the woman at the well: **"IT WOULD BE GOOD IF YOU BELIEVE ME."** That is our word, too. He will forgive our sins, give us a new script to live by, invite us into His community the church, give us a reason/purpose to live, and when we die, give us eternal life.

We invite you to follow Him. Maybe you've never done that before, or maybe your attention has been diverted from following Jesus but consider this your invitation. Today we tell the greatest story ever told. We want you to know you are invited to a new way of life. We don't have to live with fear.

CLOSING PRAYER (on screen): Lord, when we are afraid, help us not to be afraid. When we are blind to you, encourage us to come and see. When we feel rejected, reassure us that we are loved and accepted. When we forget the message - that Jesus is risen - speak it in our ears and write it on our hearts that we may tell it with

our mouths. When we doubt you, help us to believe. We put our trust in You. We pray this in the powerful and strong Name of Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.