

**In our world, we are taught that; “if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” So many of us have been taken in by “empty promises,” that we are leery of anything or anyone that tells us we can have something for nothing... THE WORLD SIMPLY DOESN'T WORK THAT WAY!**

**But, you know what – God does – God never made a promise that was too good to be true, and never made a promise he didn't keep. The truth of the matter is, the world is full of empty promises. We watch TV, and the advertisements tell us that we can be happy, healthy, sexy, rich, or famous, if we only purchase a certain product. It doesn't take long before we have been fooled often enough to know that the world's promises are full of emptiness. But God is different. Instead of promises full of emptiness, on Easter, he gave us emptiness that is full of promise. Please stand with me if you are able for the reading of the scripture from Luke 4:1-12.**

**(read)**

**This morning, I would like us to think about three empty promises of Easter. Promises of an empty cross, an empty tomb, and empty burial clothes. It is the very fact that each**

**of these is empty that assures us that God's promises are real. Because these things couldn't hold Jesus... he couldn't be contained by the cross, the tomb, or even his burial clothes, and so we can be sure of the fullness of God's promises in our lives.**

### **1. The Empty Cross.**

**Let's begin with the empty cross. Because the cross was empty, we have the promise of forgiven sins. Let's go back to that 1st Easter Morning. It is early morning – dawn – the sun was just starting to rise. A few of Jesus followers – women – are on their way to a tomb. It is the tomb where Jesus was buried. The conversation is subdued. The task before them is a sad one. They are going to anoint the body of Jesus. As they come to the top of a rise in the path, they all stop. Motionless and quiet, they stare off in the distance... off to the right, just outside the city stands a gruesome reminder of the events of just a few days ago. Do you see it? Over there, silhouetted by the glow of the pink sky, on top of the Hill the locals call, "The Skull." 3 Crosses. There they stand, an empty reminder of the horror of Friday.**

**The one in the middle, that is the one that I want you to see. That's the one that Jesus hung on... Take a close look at it. Look up at the top – those bloodstains are from the crown of thorns that was crushed into Jesus' skull. The stains on the ends of the crossbar – they came from the nails that were driven into his hands. The main beam – it was soaked in blood – blood from his back – blood he bled from the beating he received from the Roman soldiers. It also has stains from the blood that poured from his side when another Roman soldier ran a spear through his side to see if he was dead – HE WAS.**

**Don't ever believe anyone who tells you he was just faking it. There was no question – Jesus was dead... The soldiers knew it, the Romans knew it, the Jews knew it, his followers knew it.**

**You see, Jesus really did die – that is why I want you to see the cross this morning. It is the place where he died – but today, it is empty. Empty of Jesus body, but full – full of God's promises. Full of hope – for you and me. The promise of the empty cross is that you and I stand forgiven. Because it was**

**on that cross that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins.**

**“SIN” – now there is a word that is just not popular anymore.**

**It’s a word that isn’t “politically correct.” But, the simple fact of the matter is – we have all sinned. Every one of us – you, me, the person sitting next to you, behind you and in front of you. We have “all sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God.” The only person who has ever lived a sinless life is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Everyone else has failed.**

**So, here is the problem – according to God’s law - “the wages of sin is death.” Because, we have sinned, we deserve God’s just punishment. We deserve “eternal death” – Separation from God... Hell. But, when you look at that empty cross – it is a reminder of God’s promise that we have been forgiven.**

**On that cross – Jesus paid the penalty for our sins.**

**God’s word tells us again – “God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, CHRIST DIED FOR US!” It was on that cross that Jesus Christ offered his perfect, sinless life on behalf of each one of us. No one else**

**– not Moses or Abraham, not David or Isaiah, not Muhammad or Buddha – no one else has ever lived perfectly and then offered his perfect life for our salvation. That is why the Bible tells us that “there is no other name given under heaven by which we can be saved.”**

**When Jesus Christ breathed his last, he cried out; “It is finished.” The penalty was paid. On that cross – that empty cross – It was there, that his blood was spilled for our salvation.**

**Before that fateful Friday, God could open the books and look up each name, and written in black was the word – “condemned.” But when Jesus went to the cross, God literally transferred our accounts to His name. On that day, across the name of everyone who accepted Christ’s gift of grace – he wrote – in Jesus blood – “Forgiven – Forgiven – Forgiven.”**

**Because of the work that Jesus did on that cross – you and I now stand Forgiven.” The first “empty promise” of Easter is the empty cross – filled with the promise of forgiven sins. Let’s get back to our ladies. After pausing briefly to view the**

**cross, they continue on their way down the path to the tomb. As they go, one of them wonders aloud – “who will move the stone for us?”**

**They have good reason to be concerned – the stone that was placed in front of the tomb was a large boulder – probably weighing upwards of two tons. Not only that, the Romans had sealed it, so no one was allowed to move it without their permission. However, the ladies continue.**

**Suddenly, they feel the earth move! Frightened, they look at each other, not certain what to do. After a few minutes, things seem normal so they continue on their way. As they approach the burial site, they are still wondering about what had happened when they come upon something even more remarkable... The soldiers are all unconscious, the stone has been moved, an angel – glowing like lightening – is sitting on it... Listen to his words – “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here; He has risen!” Jesus had risen – He was alive – the tomb was empty. And what a tremendous promise that holds. Let me tell you about a story I read about a young boy**

**named Philip; Philip never felt like he belonged. He was pleasant enough but he looked a little different and sometimes seemed unusual to his eight-year-old classmates. In his Sunday school class several weeks before Easter, Phillip's teacher introduced a special project. He gave every member a plastic "egg". He explained that each child was to go outside, find a symbol for new life and put it into the egg. Enthusiastically, the class responded. Back in the classroom the eggs were opened one at a time with each child explaining the meaning of his symbol. In the first egg was a pretty flower; in the next a beautiful butterfly, green grass was in a third. The children "oohed" and "aahed". In another was a rock, which prompted loud laughter. Finally the last egg was opened - there was nothing. "That's stupid," said one child. Another grumbled, "someone didn't do it right! The teacher felt a tug on his shirt. It was Phillip, who said, 'That's mine, and I did do right! It's empty, 'cause the tomb was empty.'" There was an unusual, thoughtful silence. And strangely, from that time on, Phillip was accepted as part of the group. Phillip continued to struggle with many physical**

**problems. That summer he picked up an infection which most children would easily have shaken off. But Philip's weak body couldn't and a few weeks later, he died. At his funeral nine eight year-olds with their teacher brought their symbol of remembrance and placed it near his coffin. Their unusual gift of love to Phillip wasn't flowers. It was an empty egg - now a symbol to them of new life and hope. It was Phillip, the "different" child, who had helped his friends see the wonderful hope in the message of Easter.**

**The fact of the empty tomb shows the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise to every one of us that we too will be raised to eternal life... To those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, death has lost its sting – it is no longer something to be feared. What fear is there when we have the promise that one day we will live forever with Him in Heaven?**

**A father and son were traveling down a country road on afternoon in the spring time when suddenly a bee flew in the window. Being deathly allergic to bee stings, the boy began to panic as the bee buzzed all around inside the car. Seeing**



**the horror on his child's face, the father reached out and caught the bee in his hand. Soon, he opened his hand and the bee began to buzz around once again. Again, the boy began to panic. The father reached over to his son, and opened his hand showing him the stinger still in his palm. "Relax, son," the father said, "I took the sting, the bee can't hurt you anymore."**

**The empty tomb is God's way of saying to us; "Relax, my child, I took the sting, death can't hurt you anymore."**

**Why was the tomb empty? Because Jesus was alive – The Angel said; "He is risen." And the promise to us is that we too can live even if we die. That is the second promise of Easter.**

**But, it doesn't end there. There is one more promise that I want you to know about Easter. It is the promise of the empty burial clothes... Back to our story. After the Angel had spoken to the women, they immediately went back to the Apostles and reported what had happened. With this incredible news, Peter and John immediately raced back to the tomb to see for themselves. When they got there, John**

**stopped just outside the tomb, but Peter ran right in. It didn't take them long to discover that the tomb was just the way the women had said it was – empty. But, that's not all.**

**Inside, Peter found the clothes that Jesus had been buried in. They too were empty. This could only mean one thing – Jesus was alive! If someone had stolen his body, they wouldn't have removed the burial clothes and folded them up neatly and left them where they lay. Truly, Jesus was resurrected! It wouldn't be long, before Jesus, himself would appear to Mary Magdalene, and to all of the Apostles, and eventually to over 500 people.**

**He would sit down with them, walk with them, talk with them, eat with them. Once again, they would be able to fellowship with their Lord. You see, that is the promise of the empty burial clothes – Jesus is alive, and wants to fellowship with you.**

**Jesus isn't some nebulous “force” out in the universe influencing people. He is a living Savior, and he desires to have a personal relationship with each one of us, just as he did with his disciples 2000 years ago.**

**Think about that – the cross couldn't hold him, the tomb couldn't contain him, the burial clothes were unnecessary, because Jesus is alive! He has skin and bones and a face and was recognizable. And he talked, and touched and loved and healed. He did it the day of his resurrection, and he does it still today. And – most importantly – he wants to do it with you.**

**I want to ask you a very important question this morning. Do you know Jesus Christ? I don't mean; “do you know about him?” Do you truly know Jesus Christ. You see, we can know about someone, and not truly know them. There are many people that we know something about, but do any of us really know them? You can know Jesus Christ. You can know his love, his care, his healing, and his forgiveness. He says; “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.**

**It has been nearly 2000 years since Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected.**

**That 1st Easter Sunday, as the women went to the grave,**

**they had no idea what was about to happen to them. They were not yet aware of the wonderful promises of that day.**

- **Off in the distance stood an empty cross – the promise that their sins were forgiven.**

- **At the end of their journey was an empty tomb – the promise of their eternal life.**

- **Inside the tomb were empty burial clothes. The promise that they would once again have a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ – their living Savior.**

**The promises that they discovered that day, you too can have today - You too can know the freedom of forgiven sins, you too can know the promise of eternal life in heaven, you too can know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.**

**I think at Easter, more than any other time of the year, we realize that God has made all sorts of outlandish promises. So outlandish, that some of us can't bring ourselves to believe. Or, can we?**

**This morning, we have heard about three promises that God has made to us; the promise of forgiven sins; the promise of eternal life; and the promise of a personal relationship with**

**Jesus Christ. My question to you this morning is this; will you take him at his word? If so, listen to this final promise – it is found in Romans 10:13 “for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

**This morning, if you have never accepted God’s promises for your life, He is waiting, probably wondering, "For heaven’s sake, what is taking you so long?"**

**Don’t wait another day, do it today, and know the joy of eternal life in Jesus Christ.**

**The altar is open. Come and pray during the closing songs.**