

FACE IT—IT'S EMPTY

Tombs, graves, mausoleums, urns, ashes.

All are vivid reminders of something we do not like to think about. Something that angers us when someone's life is cut short. Something that saddens us when someone we love dies. Something that makes us grieve, sometimes for years and years. We even avoid saying the word "died" and substitute "passed away" or "passed on." Yet we visit the grave or tomb and place flowers there on Memorial day.

Suppose on one of those visits, we found a hole in the ground where the grave was, and no casket. Where is the body? Could grave robbers have been at work? Was there some legitimate reason to exhume the body? What gives?

But an empty hole still leaves us wondering what happened to the body. Was it still in the casket wherever it was, or was the casket empty?

That's what happened on Easter. The loved one (Jesus) was put in a tomb. A large stone (not like a rock, but like a solid upright wheel) was rolled in front of the entrance. No one person could have rolled that stone away by himself or herself. But there it was—a hole in the wall of a tomb, and inside no body, only the wrappings used to prepare the body for burial. Let's face it—it's empty.

No explanation, except one, makes any sense at all.

Well, some say, the whole story was made up. It's a myth. How do you know? You weren't there. But a number of people, men and women, were there and said it was true. Not only was there no body in the tomb, but many saw and recognized Him walking along a road with two others, inside a room twice, outside by a lake cooking breakfast, and outside on a hill. Too, He appeared to His half-brother, James, who was not a

believer until this moment, and He appeared to over 500 people. A myth? Face it—that's not even a good try.

An illusion? Impossible that so many different people under so many different circumstances and at so many different times could have come up with the same illusion. Face it—that's the myth.

Maybe there were grave robbers in Jesus' time. If so, there certainly had to be experts. They had to get past the soldiers guarding the tomb. They had to roll the heavy stone away. They had to dispose of the body some way. Face it—not too likely.

The soldiers were asleep, they said, so somebody actually did sneak in and steal the body. But that story was concocted by the religious authorities who bribed the soldiers to say that's what happened even though they knew full well it was not true. Face it—people, even in the first century, can be bought to lie.

Some say that His spirit lives on, and that's what counts whether His body was raised or not. But what kind of spirit would that be? An untrue spirit if He didn't rise from the dead. Jesus several times predicted that He would die and be raised from the dead (Matthew 16:21; 17: 22; 20:28). Not only an untrue spirit but an inoperative one. Yes, memories can sometimes motivate us, but memories cannot do tangible things, and memories eventually fade. My grandfather, long gone, used to give me \$25 each semester when I left home to return to college. I still admire him, but I don't get any more \$25. Face it—the Easer spirit does not guarantee much. The Easter Person can and does.

If Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead, He could not send the Holy Spirit, He does not now pray for us, He cannot give gifts and help, He cannot empty the tombs and graves in which we will be placed, and our faith is in a false gospel (1 Corinthians 15:14

and 17). Face it—without a resurrected Christ, our present is without His help, and our future is bleak.

Kids have great fun playing cops and robbers. Fun, that is, until they hear a noise they did not make and cannot explain. Maybe there is a real robber in the bushes. Time to quit playing and get real. People play religion, creating their own god and choosing what appeals to them to believe. But suppose the biblical report is true and the tomb is empty. It's time to get real. He did rise from the dead and He is alive today. I can ignore Him, reject Him or believe Him, but ultimately I cannot escape Him. . And there is no better time to begin a person-to-Person relation with Him than now. Easter celebrates His actual, factual, historical resurrection from the dead. His death three days before paid the penalty for all our sins. Alive He now forgives all who will receive Him through faith. "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25). "He who hears My Words and believe Him who sent Me has eternal life" (John 5:24).

Face it—It is empty. And because it is, you can come to a living Christ and have forgiveness of sins and possession of eternal life.

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