

[SLIDE # 1] In our house, we like to watch the TV Show Jeopardy!
Someone says, “THIS is Jeopardy!” and someone else says, “Thanks Johnny and welcome viewers.”

[SLIDE # 2] Right now there’s a Jeopardy contestant who is shattering records.
His name is James Holzhauer.
He’s a 34-year old professional sports gambler from Las Vegas.

He’s won 12 games straight.
On Wednesday he set a new single-day win record of \$131,127.
He’s won over \$850,000!

He’s only missed 17 clues of his 434 answers. That’s over 96%!
And he’s gotten 11 of 12 “Final Jeopardy” answers correct.

[SLIDE # 3] He’s so accurate - there’s a group of people who DOUBT he’s legitimate.
They are accusing him of cheating.
They’re called “Holzhauer Haters.”
And they don’t believe Holzhauer is an authentic Jeopardy champion.

They doubt its possible to win like he’s winning.
One person wrote, “I believe he has only missed one final jeopardy. Sorry, the odds for that are impossible.”

Others are blaming the equipment.
A person wrote, “Marvel time is long past. Notice how he disproportionately buzzes in first?
A few other contestants look at their buzzers as if to say, “What’s wrong with this thing?”
<https://www.newsweek.com/james-holzhauer-cheating-holzhauer-haters-dont-believe-record-breaking-1400702>

I have to admit – it’s a bit uncanny.
I’m beginning to wonder myself!

[SLIDE # 4] Some things make you go Hmmm.
Easter – and particularly the resurrection of Jesus - is one of those things.

You hear, “Jesus rose from the dead?”
And like that 90s Pop Song: you go “Hmmm.”

Every thinking person wrestles with doubt from time to time.
I do. You do. Everybody does.

Let's admit - Some doubt is just a diversionary tactic.

There's really another issue which is the real cause of their doubt – pride, vulnerability or something else they're hiding.

If that gets exposed – they just duck behind another so-called doubt.

That type of person isn't looking for more evidence to believe.

They're using doubt as a smoke-screen.

But then there is sincere doubt.

Sincere doubt stems from a genuine struggle to understand something.

Like a confusing theological question you can't seem to answer.

Or reconciling God with some life issue you're experiencing.

- You're disappointed over some unexpected tragedy.
- You don't understand what God is doing.
- And it's left you vulnerable to doubts.

That's where I place the disciples on Easter Sunday morning.

They're confronted with the Empty Tomb – and they have to stop and “go hmmm.”

[SLIDE # 5 blank] Easter begins with the obvious: Jesus is dead.

He was crucified on Good Friday and laid to rest in a nearby tomb.

Things happened so quickly – and because of the Sabbath Day Restrictions – no one had time to perform the usual Jewish burial rites.

So, Luke 24:1 says: very early on Sunday morning, a group of women came to the grave to do it.

They were close friends of Jesus.

And they couldn't bear to know Jesus didn't receive a proper burial.

So, they took the spices they'd prepared and headed out.

It's clear they have no expectation that Jesus is alive.

They're headed out to anoint Jesus' dead body.

If they thought Jesus was alive – they wouldn't be going to the cemetery - and they wouldn't have spent the time and money on the spices they brought.

You can't blame these women.

No one thought Jesus was alive.

If we'll admit it – many of us approach Easter the same way.

We're here to appreciate Jesus for who He was.

He was a great teacher, an amazing miracle worker, and a compassionate healer.

But.....He died.

So now we honor His legacy by assembling here on Easter Sunday to hallow His memory with our favorite Easter Songs and Sayings, maybe bring a gift - much as the women did with their spices.

And that should be enough. Right?

“He was a great man (God rest His soul). Pity He died so young.”

But things were not as these women expected.

Verse 2 says: The stone at the tomb’s entrance was rolled aside.

In first-century Israel, a round stone disc was often placed in a channel carved in the rock so it could be easily rolled to cover a rectangular entrance.

But – The women found the tomb wide open!

So, they went inside – and there was nobody – “No Body”.

I love how it says next - they stood there “wondering about this....”

The Empty Tomb is something that makes you go: hmmmmmm.

[SLIDE # 6] Lots of people have wondered at the Empty Tomb. And people have suggested all sorts of reasons why it was empty.

The 4 most popular theories for the Empty Tomb are...

1. **[SLIDE # 7]** The women went to the *Wrong Tomb*.

The women got confused and ended up at the wrong tomb.

I feel like this is insulting to the women.

I guess it could be possible – at least initially.

But, it’s not likely to have persisted.

The women were just there on Friday night – and it was identified by Roman Guards. And the tomb had Jesus’ folded graveclothes inside.

Moreover, once the Apostles started preaching the resurrection - both the Roman and Jewish authorities could have easily referred everyone to the correct tomb, “Listen everybody!

The stupid Apostles got the wrong tomb. This is the one! Look, here’s Jesus’ body!” That would have immediately quashed any resurrection rumors they feared.

A second popular explanation for the Empty Tomb is that...

2. **[SLIDE # 8]** *Jesus was not dead, but only unconscious when they laid him in the tomb.*

This is called the “Swoon Theory.”

Jesus didn’t die, he “swooned” – which is to say he just fainted, he passed out from the Cross.

When He awoke, removed the stone, overcame the soldiers, and vanished from history after a few meetings with his disciples in which he convinced them he was risen from the dead.

But this makes a mockery of Roman crucifixion.

Surviving a Roman crucifixion isn't likely.

The soldiers were professional executioners.

And there is no hint of anyone – friend or foe - thinking Jesus survived it.

Jesus was obviously dead and buried.

And even if he revived, someone who had just been stabbed in the side by a spear and spent six hours nailed to a cross is not likely to move the tombstone - working from inside a pitch-dark cave – emerge to kill armed Roman soldiers and high-tail it away.

A third popular explanation for the Empty Tomb is that...

3. **[SLIDE # 9]** *The Religious Leaders stole the body.*

The Gospels say that the Leaders wanted to prevent the Disciples from saying Jesus rose from the dead.

So, THEY took the body and hid it.

That's possible.

But hiding the body would produce an Empty Tomb – the very thing they wanted to prevent.

If they wanted to prevent a resurrection story – they would need a body.

So, stealing the body would be counterproductive.

Which brings us to a final suggestion -

4. **[SLIDE # 10]** *The Disciples stole the body.*

This was an early rumor recorded in Matthew 28:11–15.

It was the first official Jewish explanation of the Empty Tomb.

But, was it probable?

Not likely. The disciples would've needed to concoct an elaborate plan to do so.

They would have had to overpower the guards at the tomb.

Take the body and hide it permanently.

Then they would have to fabricate the rest of the Christian message and begin to preach the resurrection in Jerusalem and ultimately around the Roman Empire.

Would they do this, knowing it was a fraud?

Would they have accepted repeated beatings and ultimately all be martyred for something they knew was a fraud?

It doesn't seem plausible.

And, it flies in the face of what we have here – every one of Christ’s followers
DOUBTED JESUS WAS ALIVE.

So, again - The empty tomb is something that makes you go hmmmm.

[SLIDE # 11 blank] Now, while the women are going, “hmmmmmm” - Two Men in “clothes
that gleamed like lightening” appear.

They are angels.

And they have a question for the women, “Why do you look for the living among the
dead?”

This is kind of a rebuke.

[SLIDE # 12] For instance, if you were looking for Elvis – you’d head to Memphis where
he’s buried at his Graceland Mansion (or is he?????).

[SLIDE # 13 blank] But if you’re looking for Jesus - in a cemetery – you’re looking in the
wrong place!

Clearly, these women didn’t listen to Jesus!

The angels said (v.6), “He is not here; he has risen! Remember how He told you, while he was
still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be
crucified and on the third day be raised again. Then they remembered His words.”

With this new information - the women knew what they had to do.

They had to tell the Apostles!

It doesn’t say they ran – but they must have.

“Guys! You’re NOT going to believe this but – **Jesus is alive!**”

They didn’t say “you’re NOT going to believe this” – but they might as well have.

Because the Apostles didn’t believe them.

They thought the women had lost their minds.

They knew – just like we all know – dead people don’t come back to life.

Especially *crucified* dead people.

Sometimes we imagine the disciples were especially gullible and superstitious people.

They were ready to believe anything.

That’s NOT what the Bible says.

Jesus’ resurrection was just as hard for them to believe as it is for us.

They were just as unprepared for it as we would have been.

They doubted.

In fact, one disciple actually got the nickname, “Doubting Thomas!”

The Disciples were the first unbelievers.

It seems a bit un-Christian to say that but it's true: The Apostles are the First Unbelievers.

But that gives the Gospels a mark of authenticity.

Because if they were making this whole story up – surely, they would have put themselves at the tomb ready to welcome Jesus on Easter Sunday morning.

But they weren't there.

And they didn't even believe the women who were there.

They doubted.

Peter got to thinking about this.

He'd never known these women to be pranksters.

So, after a while, Peter got up and ran to the tomb to check it out for himself.

And Peter saw that the tomb was empty.

All that was left were the “strips of cloth” Jesus was wrapped in.

And so Peter went away, “wondering to himself” what had happened.

That's the second time in this passage the Empty Tomb caused people to go, Hmmm.

What's interesting about Luke's account of the resurrection is that – NO ONE SEES JESUS.

The women see an empty tomb.

The Angels tell them what happened – but they DON'T SEE JESUS.

Then women then tell the disciples.

And Peter runs to the tomb – but PETER DOESN'T SEE JESUS EITHER.

Certainly, Jesus could have appeared to the women or Peter at the tomb.

A spectacular, dazzling, gleaming Jesus would have been a nice confirmation about now!

And a real doubt-buster!

But, God doesn't give them that.

Instead, what they get is a report of His resurrection – they get a message.

Now, don't get me wrong.

Jesus will appear to people – lots of people – the rest of Luke's Gospel describes resurrection appearances - and so do the other Gospels.

But at first, God expects people to believe without the benefit of sight.

Why?

I think to help US identify with their predicament.

Jesus could attend our service this morning (and I'd be very pleased if He did! It would be great for attendance!)

That would dispel all doubts that He is alive.

And this would be the best service you've ever been to!

But instead, He asks us to believe the message.

And that puts us in the same situation as the women and disciples.

We have the *message* of Easter – God wants us to ponder, “*What happened to Jesus?*”

[SLIDE # 14] Not that we should change what we believe ABOUT DEATH.

Death is still death.

Easter calls to change what we believe ABOUT JESUS.

Easter is supposed to make you go Hmmm.

What do you mean: Jesus is not here? He must be risen!

Easter calls us to re-think WHO Jesus is and WHAT His resurrection means.

That's what Peter is wondering about as he walked away from the Empty Tomb.

Peter was thinking about Jesus in light of the Empty Tomb.

Here's what I think was going through his mind.

Easter confirms 4 important things.....

1. [SLIDE # 15] Jesus must be who He said He was.

Peter thought back over all the audacious claims Jesus made about himself.

- Jesus claimed to be preexistent.
- Jesus claimed to be sinless.
- Jesus claimed He was the only way to God.
- Jesus claimed He was one with God.
- Jesus claimed He is the resurrection and the life.
- Jesus claimed He would judge the world.

Those are some pretty audacious claims!

And they could all be dismissed and forgotten if Jesus died and stayed dead.

But when He rose from the dead – He proved He was exactly who He said He was.

When you think about Easter – you have to think about “Jesus, the complete package.”

The man who has dominated history, motivated billions to follow Him and set the worldwide standard for morality.

He must be who He claimed He was.

And if He is ALL THAT He claimed to be – why do think it strange He rose from the dead?

Peter kept thinking.

And he must have thought.... “Now I know for sure that.....

2. [SLIDE # 16] Jesus can forgive sin.

Peter heard Jesus say to a man, “your sins are forgiven.”

And to prove Jesus could forgive him – he healed him of his handicap.

Peter heard Jesus forgive prostitutes, Samaritans and proud rich people.

And from the Cross, Peter heard Jesus say, “It is finished.”

It is “Paid In Full.”

For Peter – walking back from the tomb – he must have realized that all his failures: his pride, fighting, anger, even denying he knew Jesus – was forgiven.

“God made him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Jesus claimed to give His life as a substitute payment for our sins.

Again – that’s idle talk – unless He rose from the dead victorious.

Peter now knew Jesus’ victory over death was proof He could forgive him.

And Easter means the same for you.

All your sins – your biggest blunders – your most heinous crimes – your closeted secrets – can ALL be forgiven by Christ.

Jesus paid it all – on the Cross – so that you can be forgiven.

The further Peter went – the more he realized the meaning of Easter.

He must have realized, “Now I know....

3. [SLIDE # 17] Jesus gives Eternal Life.

Over and over Peter heard Jesus claim to offer to give people eternal life.

Jesus once said, “I tell you the truth, he who believes in me has eternal life.”

Such a claim would be laughable, if it were not for the resurrection.

But if Jesus rose from the dead – it’s guaranteed!

The most sought-after, coveted, prized goal of humanity is eternal life: to live forever.

It’s the holy grail of the human race.

And Jesus promises it to every believer.

Easter means you can live forever – in utopia – with your Creator – and without regret.

I don’t care what you got in your Easter basket this morning – ain’t nothing better than that!

And as Peter was going back to the Disciples – he probably broke into a run.

Because he realized: Easter means.....

4. **[SLIDE # 18] Jesus is Alive TODAY!**

There's no doubt that Peter loved Jesus – as a friend and as his lord.

He said he was ready to fight for Jesus – and he did!

And it tortured him to know he'd denied Jesus.

He had hoped to see Jesus again – to make things right.

Now, he could!

The fact that Jesus is alive Today means we will all meet Him.

He's your Creator.

- He made you – inside and out.
- He loves you – through and through.
- And He has a plan to live together with you forever.
- But... it's your decision.
 - Will you believe?

[SLIDE # 19] Easter doubt isn't anything new.

It's as old as the First Disciples.

But God has given us enough information to cause us to doubt our doubts.

To step back from the Empty Tomb and go, "HMMMMM."

What happened here?

And if the sources are reliable and the story is true....

believing it will change your life forever.

1. Your sins – every one of them – will be forgiven.
2. Your life will take on new meaning.
3. Your time will be spent in new ways.
4. Your joy will overflow.

How do I know?

Because that's the radical change we see in these formerly doubting disciples.

It's the radical change I've experienced myself.

And it's the radical change God wants for you – when you believe in Easter.

My Next Step Today Is To...

- Take my doubts about the empty tomb to God.
- Consider again what it means if Jesus is alive.
- Let the reality of the resurrection impact my whole life.
- Invite someone to the next message series, "Origins."