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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Christ's Empty Tomb: Gateway to Eternal Joy

Psalm 16:8-11

Introduction: Gateway to a New World

- C.S. Lewis's fantasy novel "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe"

WWII, Four British children are removed from London during the Blitz and sent to live in a country mansion for their own safety

One day, during a game of hide and seek, Lucy hides quickly inside an old wardrobe, a stand-alone closet with all kinds of old clothing in which to hide. It was a perfect hiding place, but to improve it she moved further and further back until suddenly she felt tree branches brushing her face and the smell of cold forest air. She had moved through a magical gateway into a new world she would eventually learn was called Narnia

This theme is a major one in literature... the idea of a gateway, a portal, a passageway into a whole new world

- Lewis Carroll's classic, Alice in Wonderland: Alice tumbles into Wonderland first through an astonishingly deep rabbit hole, then in the sequel she steps through a looking glass into another world... the looking glass world
- Frances Hodgson Burnett: The Secret Garden... a young girl named Mary Lennox discovers a vine-covered doorway and an old key which unlocks the ancient door into a secret garden of delights
- Among the classic Arabian nights tales, there's a story entitled: "**The man who never laughed again**", a young man who's a servant to eleven men who spend their entire time weeping, but he's not allowed to ask why. When the last one is on his death bed, he begs his dying adopted father to tell him why he's wept all those years; he's told that in the courtyard, there's a hidden and forbidden doorway, and the answer lies behind that door... A hidden tunnel, a three-day journey to a mysterious beach, an eagle captures him and carries him to a distant island where he live in a pleasure-filled paradise with beautiful women and constant feasting... until one day his foolishly went through another forbidden door and ended up back where he started
- This concept has capture people's imaginations from time immemorial... the Gateway into a whole new world; it is a staple in fantasy books like I just listed

BUT... None of these mysterious gateways compare with the journey that awaits on the other side of Christ's empty tomb

Christ died on a cross and was buried in a new tomb that had been carved in a rock... His body lay dead, wrapped in linens and waiting for the first day of a New Creation... the first Easter Sunday morning. His body lay in that cold cave, devoid of life, but awaiting the fulfillment of a glorious promise that had been given over 1000 years before that

Suddenly Jesus Christ came alive... He breathed His first breath in a newly alive body

A new kind of body that would be the pattern for all who would come after Him and follow Him by faith... a perfect body free forever from death and decay

Jesus somehow passed through the stone barrier of that cave and began a journey that would rock the world to its foundations... that would change the history of humanity... a journey of death defying life that still goes on today; a journey of proving to sinful human beings that He is God in the flesh, and that He alone holds the keys of life and death

Today, Christ is beckoning all of us to follow Him... some for the very first time

- Unlike Lucy in the wardrobe, we're not going to a fantasy world called Narnia
- Unlike Alice, we're not heading to a fantasy world called Wonderland
- Unlike Mary Lennox, we're not going through an ivy-covered door into a Secret Garden of natural, earthly beauty
- Unlike the man in the Arabian nights story, we're not heading into a fantasy world where sensual lusts are pandered to in a worldly way

The Gateway depicted in Psalm 16 is a Gateway to eternal pleasures that are as real as the pew you're sitting on this morning... as real as the last mountain you climbed or the last ocean you swam in

A gateway into the very presence of God, a gateway into eternal life has been opened by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

I. Gateway Predicted

One thousand years before the gateway to eternal life was opened, a prophet sat down and wrote about it... the prophet's name was David, King of Israel, and the prophecy was Psalm 16:

Psalm 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

A. Predictive Prophecy: Supernatural Evidence for Christ

1. God has given stunning evidence to the truth of the resurrection in the Bible
2. The supernatural evidence lies in something called predictive prophecy
3. One thousand years before Christ, King David wrote this prophecy:

Psalm 16:7-11 I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. ⁸ I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, ¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. ¹¹ You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

B. Psalm 16: The Key Concept Is “This Could Not Have Been David”

1. David wrote it about a thousand years before Christ
2. Some aspects of this Psalm could refer to David’s own life
3. But there is one specific aspect that absolutely could not have been David

vs. 10 ...you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

4. On the Day of Pentecost forty days after Christ’s resurrection, Peter stood up and proclaimed this point for everyone to hear in the city of Jerusalem

Acts 2:25-30 After quoting Psalm 16: "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.

Acts 2:31-32 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

The specific point was that Christ’s body did not see decay, so **Christ fulfilled PSALM 16**

5. Several years later, the Apostle Paul preached a similar sermon in a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch

Acts 13:34-38 The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: "I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David." ³⁵ So it is stated elsewhere: "You will not let your Holy One see decay." ³⁶ "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he

was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. ³⁷ But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

C. Christ: Protected from Corruption, Raised in Power

1. A World Filled with corruption

- a. Decay and death are all around us
- b. It is part of the cycle of life and the food chain that surround us constantly
- c. Last year's leaves have spent all winter in a wet pile in the forest that surrounds my yard... the principle of decay and corruption are in the process of reducing them back into the soil
- d. Paul said that the world is in bondage to decay

Romans 8:21 creation itself [is in]its bondage to decay...YEARNING TO BE LIBERATED

2. This is especially true concerning human death

- a. Decay is part of what God ordained for the human race after death

Psalm 49:14 Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. ...their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions.

- b. The body is reduced to corruption... and begins to stink with a bad odor

3. Forensic science: medical examiners' expert testimony on time of death is essential

- a. They look at various factors to determine how long a person has been dead
- b. One of the factors is the progress of decay on the corpse
- c. Decay is inevitable and predictable

Immediately upon death, microorganisms that live in the body go to work to dissolve the internal organs.

This has happened to every dead person in history... EXCEPT ONE!!!

God specially preserved Christ's body from decay after His death in fulfillment of this prophecy

Christ's Empty Tomb IS the Gateway to Eternal Life Predicted in Psalm 16

II. Gateway Purchased

A. The Most Expensive Gateway in History

1. The St. Louis Arch, called “Gateway to the West”: Cost \$23 Million
2. Paris: Napoleon began construction of the Arc de Triomphe in 1806 after his monumental victory at Austerlitz

The cost of the Arc de Triomphe is incalculable... especially taking into consideration all the lives that Napoleon squandered in his attempt to build a French Empire in Europe

3. Ancient Babylon; the Ishtar Gateway was the most lavish and opulent gateways into the fortress city of Babylon; 47 feet high, 32 feet wide, decorated with azure-colored glazed tiles... it was part of the glory that was Babylon, about which Nebuchadnezzar boasted
4. BUT no gateway in history, no matter how lavish or costly, no matter how spectacularly decked in jewels, no matter how strong or tall or impressive... no gateway in history has been as costly as this one

B. The Cost of Eternal Life is Infinite Death

1. Christ won for us a pathway from eternity in hell to eternity in heaven
2. Christ opened for us a gateway into the very presence of God
3. Christ paid the highest price imaginable... the infinite price of His own blood, shed under the penalty of the law and the wrath of God for the sins of the world

Ephesians 1:7 In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins

1 Peter 3:18 Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit

4. This is the costliest gateway ever built

C. Greatest Barrier: Our Sin and God’s Holiness

1. Why did a gateway have to be built?
2. Because of the otherwise impenetrable barrier of our sin and God’s perfect holiness

Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place..."

Habakkuk 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.

3. God's holy hatred of our sin built a barrier between us and God that nothing manmade could ever find a way to penetrate
4. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were expelled from Paradise... the way back into that perfect earthly garden was blocked off by a deadly gateway

Genesis 3:24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

5. Therefore the gateway to eternal life is death...
6. Only by the payment of the death penalty for our sins could the way be opened into the presence of God

D. Old Covenant Barriers and Exclusions

1. In the Old Testament, God set up barrier after barrier, excluding sinful people from His holy presence
2. In the Temple of Jerusalem, God commanded that the center of worship be in the Holy of Holies... where the Ark of the Covenant was kept; none but Israelites could enter the Temple courtyard, none but priests could enter the Holy Place, and none but the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place... and that only once a year and never without blood, lest he should die
3. There was erected a huge thick curtain separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies... that thick curtain symbolized the central message of the Old Testament laws when it came to sinful man and holy God:

THIS FAR YOU MAY COME, AND NO FARTHER!!!

E. A "New and Living Way" Opened for Us

1. The moment Christ died, a miracle happened in the Temple
2. The curtain in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom
3. It was the work of God and it made a very clear point: a Gateway into the presence of God had been opened by the death of Christ
4. Hebrews calls it a "new and living way" into the very presence of Almighty God

Hebrews 10:19-20 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ... let us draw near to God

5. The moment Christ died, this incredible gateway into God's presence was opened... but no one knew it for sure...
6. The gateway had been opened, the gateway had been **PURCHASED** with the costly blood of Christ
7. But it had to be **PROVEN** to a watching, skeptical world

III. Gateway Proven

A. Christ's Resurrection: A Matter of History First, Then Theology Second

1. Christianity is a historical faith
 - a. The Old Testament is rooted and established in real history... the history primarily of the Jewish nation, their origin, their establishment in Palestine, their kings, their wars, their people and their events
 - b. So also the New Testament is rooted and established in real history... primarily the history of Jesus of Nazareth, and above all His bodily resurrection from the dead
2. Without the resurrection of Christ, we have no Christianity

H.P. Liddon said "Faith in the resurrection is the very keystone of the arch of Christian faith, and when it is removed, all must inevitably crumble into ruin."

Philip Schaff, church historian: "The resurrection of Christ is therefore emphatically a test question upon which depends the truth or falsehood of the Christian religion. It is either the greatest miracle or the greatest delusion which history records."

3. Therefore the Empty Tomb is a matter of history first, and theology second
 - a. The first thing you have to ask is "Did it happen?"... then and only then can you ask "What does it mean?"
 - b. If Christ really rose from the dead, then His empty tomb stands as the Gateway to eternity... if not, then the whole Christian faith is a lie

B. Three Great Evidences

1. The empty tomb

- a. On that first Easter morning, a series of eyewitnesses stepped into Christ's tomb and saw the stunning evidence of the resurrection
- b. John 20 records the evidence:
 - i) The stone removed from the entrance to the tomb

- ii) The grave clothes lying in their original position
 - iii) The head cloth folded up by itself
 - iv) Most of all... the dead body was GONE!!
- c. Mary Magdalene saw it... so did Peter and John
- d. As they stood in that empty tomb their hearts were prepared for the most incredible message in history: CHRIST IS RISEN... DEATH IS DEFEATED
- e. John saw and believed... the empty tomb was a Gateway into Eternity for Him

The Historical Fact of the Empty Tomb is difficult to refute: Had Jesus' tomb NOT been empty, His enemies would simply have produced Jesus' corpse once the apostles began proclaiming His resurrection

But an empty tomb alone doesn't make a resurrection!!

Lee Strobel, in his "Case for Easter," cites the amazing situation of an empty tomb in Birmingham, Alabama

"In 1963, the body of fourteen year-old Addie Mae Collins, one of four African-American girls tragically murdered in an infamous church bombing by white racists, was buried in Birmingham, Alabama. For years, family members kept returning to the grave to pray and leave flowers. In 1998 they made the decision to disinter the deceased for reburial at another cemetery. When the workers were sent to dig up the body, however, they made a shocking discovery: The grave was empty.

Understandably the family members were terribly distraught. Hampered by poorly kept records, cemetery officials scrambled to figure out what had happened. Several possibilities were raised, the primary one being that her tombstone had been erected in the wrong place. Yet in the midst of determining what had happened, one explanation was never proposed... Nobody suggested that young Addie Mae had been resurrected to walk the earth again. Why? Because by itself an empty grave does not a resurrection make."

2. The Post-resurrection appearances

- a. Mary herself, after surveying the amazing physical evidence for the resurrection, came to the conclusion that the gardener had moved Christ
- b. That was until Christ Himself appeared to Mary and personally spoke to her

John 20:14-18 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am

returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

- c. However, Mary Magdalene was not the only person who saw the resurrected Christ alive... many others were eyewitness
- d. Paul lists an incredible fact... the sheer number of eye-witnesses of the resurrected Christ

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that 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.

- e. Since two or three witnesses were all that was needed, this number of eye-witnesses is overwhelming

Josh McDowell: Let's take the more than 500 witnesses who saw Jesus alive after His death and burial, and place them in a courtroom. Do you realize that if each of those 500 people were to testify for only six minutes, including cross-examination, you would have an amazing 50 hours of firsthand testimony? Add to this the testimony of many other eyewitnesses and you would well have the largest and most lopsided trial in history.

3. The origin of Christianity

- a. The final great evidence for the truth of the resurrection is the origin of the Christian faith itself
- b. It is very difficult to explain how faith in a Jewish carpenter as God in the flesh could have swept the Roman Empire in a scant three centuries
- c. Still less can we account for the radical transformation in the disciples of Christ from cowardly skeptics to courageous eyewitnesses if they'd never seen the risen Christ

J.P. Moreland: "When Jesus was crucified, his followers were discouraged and depressed. So they dispersed. The Jesus movement was all but stopped in its tracks. Then, after a short period of time, we see them abandoning their occupations, regathering, and committing themselves to spreading a very specific message—that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of God, who died on the cross, returned to life and was seen alive by them.

"And they were willing to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming this, without any payoff from a human point of view. They faced a life of hardship. They often went without food,

slept exposed to the elements, were ridiculed, beaten, imprisoned. And finally, most of them were executed in torturous ways. For what? For good intentions? No, because they were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had seen Jesus Christ alive from the dead.” [quoted in “The Case for Easter,” Lee Strobel, p. 87]

These three historical facts make faith in the resurrection absolutely reasonable:

1. The empty tomb
2. The resurrection appearances
3. The astonishing spread of Christianity

By these three is the Gateway to Eternity Proven

IV. Gateway Proclaimed

A. Proclaimed by Whom?

1. By Peter at Pentecost
2. By Paul at Pisidian Antioch
3. By Pastors and Missionaries, For Twenty Centuries, All Over the World
4. By Me, This Morning, Here and Now

So... this whole morning we have been speaking of Christ's empty tomb as a gateway

A gateway into what??

Psalm 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand

B. A Proclaimed Gateway into What?

1. Fullness of Joy and Eternal Pleasures
 - a. We live in a pleasure-soaked age
 - b. People desperately seeking pleasures from all sources:
 - i) Hobbies, like golfing or gardening or four-wheeling or horseback riding
 - ii) Gadgets, like a massage chair from Sharper Image
 - iii) Entertainment, like spectator sports or movies
 - c. God offers joy and pleasure... but at the infinite level

2. Perfect joy: “you will FILL ME with joy”
 - a. The word means to be full to overflowing
 - b. Like a grain silo after a record harvest... overflowing with grain, not enough room to put all the wheat in
 - c. God has power to fill your heart with incredible joy
3. The Joy of Full Forgiveness and Acceptance into God’s Family
 - a. The moment you step by faith through that gateway, you will immediately be adopted into the very family of God... the family of saved people from around the world

Romans 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

- b. It is a worldwide family of people who have believed in Christ’s resurrection and have received forgiveness of sins
 - c. All over the world people have stepped through the Gateway into God’s family... have you???
4. The Joy of Living God’s Lifestyle

Psalm 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life

The path of life is the way we will walk in following Jesus... it is the way of life Jesus will work in us

Romans 6:4 ... just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

- a. A new life of love for God and love for others
 - b. A new life of holiness... putting sin to death daily by the power of the Spirit
 - c. A new life of service to God... using your spiritual gifts to serve others... a life of purpose and work that matters for eternity
5. Ultimately and Infinitely... the Joy of God’s Presence... in eternity

Psalm 16:11 You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

What Eternal Pleasures Await on the Other Side of the Gateway?

a. The PLEASURE of the presence of God

- i) He says “at your right hand”
- ii) we will be in the very presence of Almighty God and see His face forever and ever!!
- iii) Steve Green: God Himself will be our pleasure!!!

**“God and God alone will be the joy of our eternal home...
He will be our one desire... our hearts will never tire... of God and God alone”**

b. Constant awe and amazement at God

- i) In the presence of God, we will be overwhelmed constantly with God... with His glory and majesty and kindness and love and power
- ii) We will never tire of seeing God... He is the most fascinating and mind consuming subject in the universe

c. The PLEASURE of a perfect world

- i) The Bible speaks of a “New heavens and new earth, the home of righteousness”
- ii) Christ’s body never decayed... but this present world is full of decay and corruption
- iii) The essence of the New World is that it will be free from its bondage to decay and it will be perfect
- iv) We will walk through perfect meadows, gaze at perfect heavenly light, look at perfect mountains, drink from perfect rivers and streams, experience the best world the creative mind of God can create

d. The PLEASURE of freedom from death, mourning, crying or pain... and NO END!!! It is ETERNAL pleasure

- i) No suffering will touch us there, no pain at all
- ii) Best of all... it will never end: NO DEATH
- iii) Every good thing in this world comes to an end

Every October, I used to go on a foliage trip to New Hampshire. At the end of a long weekend, we used to sit on a mountain as the sun was going down at the end of a perfect day; looking at the brilliant foliage of Kancamagus Highway in New Hampshire in October. Then... as the sun dipped down below the horizon we would sigh... not a sigh of contentment but of loss. We knew that now the sun was down we’d have to get in our cars

and drive back to our regular lives... back to school or work... back to the grind. And soon winter would come... all those beautiful leaves would fall and become corrupted decayed mud on the ground.

But in heaven, the perfect eternity that the resurrection of Christ ushers in... no good thing will come to an end

iv) Life itself ends because of death

v) But that future world cannot perish, spoil or fade... we will not sigh as the sun goes down

e. The PLEASURE of freedom from temptation and sin

f. The PLEASURE of Perfect fellowship with others

An eternal world of holy pleasure in the very presence of God Himself

That is the Gateway Jesus has opened for us today!

This is the world on the other side of the Gateway Christ's empty tomb opened up

The question for you today is: Have you passed through that Gateway into eternal life?

STAND AND LOOK:

- By faith I want to invite you into Christ's tomb... it is a small cave, freshly cut out of the rocky wall, and it is empty of Christ's corpse;
- Stand where Peter and John stood, and look at Christ's empty graveclothes... look at the head covering folded up by itself; look out the cave doorway to the world outside; you can see the heavy stone that once was blocking the entrance laying by itself on a hillside
- Like Peter, perhaps you might spend a moment puzzled; or you can be like John who saw and believed that Christ was indeed risen from the dead
- Now look out through the gateway into a world that will never be the same again... will you venture forth by faith into a whole new pathway of life... a journey that will end in the very presence of God?