

Sealed Tombs

Thomas Robinson, *God's Kingdom Breaks In!* 9, April 2, 2017

Matthew 27:50-66; 28:11-15

Things are Split Apart, Opened, Given Life

⁵⁰ And **Jesus cried out** again with a loud voice and **released the Spirit**.

⁵¹ And behold, the **curtain of the temple** was **split** in two, from **top to bottom**. And the **earth quaked**, and the **rocks were split**. ⁵² The **tombs also were opened**. And many **bodies of holy people** who had fallen asleep **were raised**, ⁵³ and when they came out of the tombs **after his resurrection**, they entered the **holy city** and were manifested to many.

⁵⁴ When the **centurion** and **those with him** guarding Jesus, saw the **earthquake** and what happened, they were filled with **fear** and said, "**Truly this was God's Son!**"

The Women and Joseph's Tomb

⁵⁵ There were also **many women** there, watching from a distance, who **followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him**, ⁵⁶ among whom were **Mary Magdalene** and **Mary** the mother of James and Joseph and the **mother** of the sons of Zebedee.

⁵⁷ As **evening** was coming on, there came a **wealthy man from Arimathea, named Joseph**, who also was a **disciple of Jesus**. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, and Pilate ordered it to be **handed over**. ⁵⁹ And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth ⁶⁰ and laid it in **his own new tomb**, which he had **cut in the rock**. And when he had **rolled a great stone** to the entrance of the tomb, he went away. ⁶¹ **Mary Magdalene** and the other **Mary** were there, sitting opposite the **tomb**.



Sealing and Guarding the Tomb

⁶² The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the **chief priests** and the **Pharisees** assembled before **Pilate** ⁶³ and said, "**Lord**, we remembered how **that deceiver** said, while he was still alive, '**After three days I will be raised**.' ⁶⁴ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, '**He has been raised from the dead**,' and the last **deception** will be worse than the first."

⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, "You may have a **guard of soldiers**. Go, make it **as secure as you can**." ⁶⁶ So they went and secured the tomb by **sealing the stone** with the **guard of soldiers**.

On Sunday, after the Seals were Broken: An Alternative Story

... **28:**¹¹ While the women were going, behold, **some of the guard** went into the city and told the **chief priests all that had happened**. ¹² And when they **assembled with the elders** and made a decision, they gave many pieces of silver to the soldiers ¹³ and said, "Tell people, '**His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep**.' ¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ So they took the silver and did as instructed. And **this story** has been told among Jews to this day.

1 Corinthians 15:1-5

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and through which you are being saved.... ³ For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received: (A) that Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ and he was buried, (B) and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Matthew 16:21-22

²¹ Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

Ezekiel 37:3 - 28 (LXX) **Ezekiel's vision of a Valley of Dry Bones.** (Cf. Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2)

³ Yahweh spoke to me: "Son of man, can these bones live? ... ⁴ Prophecy over these bones." ⁷ As I prophesied, behold an earthquake, and the bones came together.... ¹⁰ and the Spirit/breath came into them, and they lived.... And he said, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel, and they say, 'Our bones have become dry; our hope has perished; we are lost.' ¹² ... This is what Yahweh says: Behold, I am opening your tombs and will bring you up out of your tombs ..., ¹³ and you shall know that I am Yahweh, when I open your graves so that I might bring my people up...."

¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live.... ²⁴ My servant David shall be king over them.... ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them... an everlasting covenant ... and will set my sanctuary in their midst forever.... ²⁸ Then the Gentiles will know that I am Yahweh."

A Deep Mystery without Suspense

Matthew takes us into the mystery of Jesus' cry – the human cry as one abandoned. God takes it into God's self as Jesus bears human sin and alienation. He knows the absence of God.

We watch in astonishment as no one understands. The disciples don't anticipate his death and certainly not resurrection, even when Jesus was explicit. The bystanders don't understand. But Mt doesn't leave us in suspense. He describes amazing signs pointing to resurrection.

He's describing something that cannot happen in the ordinary course of events. He is not trying to explain it or document it as an ordinary event, but to give us means to grasp the meaning of this in-breaking of God's life and future, God's kingdom, into human life, into our life.

The Centurion and soldiers are like the magi at Jesus' birth confessing a truth beyond them.

The Women open our view to the larger group of disciples, the many experiences of Jesus already giving new life (Mary Magdalene). Their faithful following, ministering like Jesus. Mother of James & John (Mt 20:18-28) who learned what it meant to be at Jesus' right hand. Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, knew the plots as secret disciple.

Alternative Stories

Mt includes the sealing and guarding of the tomb. Jesus' resurrection was always controversial, with conflicting stories. The alternatives reflect different worlds: what happened and what "must have" happened: the in-breaking of the radically new or a continuation of old powers.

The priests and Pharisees no longer fear Jesus. Death has him. They fear a story that captures people about a power out of their control, a God outside the bounds of temple and ritual. They don't set seals and guards to keep Jesus in but to keep disciples out. In the "must have" story, death is the end, money is decisive, truth is limited by what we can control or use.

The impossible story is what really happened. It doesn't fit a constricted, fearful, death-oriented world where people serve money/power rather than a truth that remakes the world.

The World-Changing, Life-Giving Death

Mt helps us by pointing to Scripture, esp. Ezek 37 & Dan 12. Jesus releases the Spirit. Jesus' clash with the corrupt temple ends as the veil splits: God breaks out among his people.

Earthquake! Boulders split like the veil. Death is conquered; tombs open, bodies are raised. This is God giving life to the dry bones of his people, to all nations. The Messiah's kingdom rises.

An old story thinks it has won with seals, but God has already split tombs. He rests on the 7th day.