

Neighborly Apologetics

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Jesus and the Resurrection, Part 4.3

The Witnesses at the Empty Tomb: Concrete Evidence for the Resurrection

(Thumbnail Sketch from Del Tackett's Webinar, [October 10, 2023](#))

Del Tackett's webinar, "Jesus and the Resurrection, Part 4.3 – The Witnesses at the Empty Tomb," delivers a compelling exploration of one of Christianity's most powerful historical realities. Presented as part of the Neighborly Apologetics series, the session equips everyday believers to engage neighbors relationally rather than confrontationally. Far from academic debate, Tackett grounds the discussion in the royal law of loving one's neighbor, urging Christians to build trust so they can gently and respectfully give a defense for the hope within them (1 Peter 3:15).

The Heart of Christian Apologetics

Tackett opens by framing the series within the Engagement Project, which calls the body of Christ to impact culture through ordinary families fulfilling their priestly role as a royal priesthood in their neighborhoods (1 Peter 2:9). This is not about winning arguments but responding in the context of deep relationships. The current focus—category nine in their apologetic list—centers on the question "Who is Jesus?" after covering the Messiah's promise, prophecy, life, words, death, and now resurrection.

The resurrection stands as the key to Christian apologetics, a constant apostolic theme. Paul declares that without it, preaching is vain, faith is futile, and believers remain in their sins (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). Even secular history acknowledges Jesus' death and resurrection as the dividing line of time. For families engaging neighbors, a firm grasp of this truth is essential. Tackett highlights the empty tomb as uniquely concrete evidence—either the tomb held a body or it did not. No complex theology required. It is raw historical reality.

This "veritable rock," as legal scholar Sir Norman Anderson described it, shattered rationalistic theories and convinced attorney Lee Strobel of Christianity's truth. Tackett asks: How do we know the tomb was empty? He organizes the evidence into direct (eyewitness) and indirect/circumstantial categories, presenting three of each for clarity and memorability.

Direct Evidence: Angels, Women, and the Apostles Peter and John

The first direct witness is the angel at the tomb. Matthew 28 records that after the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary approached the tomb. A violent earthquake accompanied the angel of the Lord descending from heaven. He rolled back the stone, sat on it, and appeared like lightning with clothes white as snow. The guards trembled and became like dead men. The angel reassured the women: "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking

for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay” (Matthew 28:5-6).

Tackett notes many neighbors believe in angels, making this testimony accessible. The earthquake and angelic appearance provide dramatic confirmation, directly declaring the resurrection and inviting inspection.

Even more fascinating is the testimony of the women—the first to receive news of the resurrection and see the risen Lord. In a first-century culture where women could not serve as legal witnesses, their prominent role argues powerfully for the authenticity of the Gospels. Fabricators would never invent such a detail. Luke 24 describes the women (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others) finding the stone rolled away, entering the tomb, and discovering no body. They reported these things to the apostles. Tackett estimates up to a dozen women may have been involved, arriving by different routes after preparing spices.

To clarify identities amid multiple Marys, Tackett proposes three distinct women: Mary (mother of Jesus), Aunt Mary (her sister, also called the other Mary, wife of Clopas, mother of James and Joseph), and Mary Magdalene. He supports this from John 19:25, where at the cross stood Jesus’ mother, his mother’s sister (Mary wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. This convention, used in Tackett’s articles (being compiled into a book), helps modern readers navigate the text as contemporaries would have.

The third direct evidence comes from Peter and John in John 20, which Tackett calls one of his favorites for its vivid detail. Early while still dark, Mary Magdalene found the stone removed, ran to Peter and the beloved disciple (John), and reported the body taken. Both apostles ran to the tomb. John arrived first, looked in, saw the linen strips but did not enter. Peter entered boldly, seeing the strips of linen and the separate head cloth still lying in its place. John then entered, saw, and believed.

The grave clothes provide stunning evidence. Jewish custom involved wrapping the body in linen strips with approximately 75 pounds of spices and aloes, creating a sticky cocoon, plus a separate cloth wound around the head (similar to Lazarus in John 11). The head cloth remaining neatly in place—separate, not collapsed on the floor—indicates no body was pulled out; there was no neck connecting the wrappings. The tomb was empty of a corpse yet full of these undisturbed clothes. Tackett uses a helpful map (refined by his nephew) to trace movements: Magdalene at the tomb (point A), running to alert Peter and John (possibly at different locations), then their return run. This harmonizes the accounts beautifully.

Indirect Evidence: Guards, Bribe, and the Missing Corpse

Circumstantial evidence powerfully corroborates the direct testimony. First, the guards reported “all that had taken place” to the chief priests (Matthew 28). This likely included the earthquake, the angel rolling the stone, and the empty tomb they surely inspected. The chief priests and elders bribed the soldiers to claim the disciples stole the body while they slept, promising protection from Pilate. This desperate lie only makes sense if the tomb was verifiably empty. The story circulated “among the Jews to this day,” further confirming the absence of a body.

Second, the bribe itself reveals panic. The authorities had guarded the tomb precisely because Jesus predicted his resurrection. Now their nightmare materialized. Third, no corpse was ever produced

despite intense motivation. Chief priests, elders, and Pilate had every reason to display the body and silence the claims. Tackett references a film depicting soldiers searching corpses—an grim but logical effort that failed. A risen body later appeared, which the next session will address, but the dead body never did.

Who Else Investigated?

Tackett invites family discussion: Who else would have checked the tomb amid Jerusalem's upheaval—crucifixion darkness, earthquake, opened tombs, and resurrection reports? The chief priests and elders certainly would after the guards' report. Joseph of Arimathea, owner of the tomb, had personally prepared the body. Shopkeepers, healed multitudes, and curious crowds—given Jesus' fame from Galilee to Judea—likely visited. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, saw the empty tomb and grave clothes, yet no contradictory evidence emerged.

Refuting Common Objections

Objections amount to “clutching at straws.” The disciples-did-it theory collapses under Roman guard discipline (death penalty for sleeping) and the apostles' fear. Someone else stealing or moving the body ignores the authorities' desperate search and the sealed, guarded tomb. The “wrong tomb” idea fails because Peter, John, Joseph, and others knew the location precisely, and the grave clothes matched Jesus' burial. More elaborate theories (myth, swoon, conspiracy) await later sessions. The detailed evidence—especially the grave clothes—overwhelms these alternatives.

The Remarkable Grave Clothes and Lasting Application

The empty tomb is powerful, but the presence of the grave clothes is equally remarkable. They confirm resurrection, not theft or removal. Later, Tackett notes, the clothes were likely taken away, but many witnessed them. This aligns with Jewish burial customs and provides tactile, historical proof that Jesus rose as promised.

Tackett closes by reminding listeners this knowledge serves love, not debate. As believers build sacrificial relationships, neighbors like “Mrs. Smith” will ask questions. Equipped with this evidence, Christians can respond with gentleness and respect. The session ends with thanks, announcements about recordings and slides, and Tackett's prayer for God's blessing on these discussions and neighborly engagement.

Why This Matters Today

In a skeptical age, the empty tomb remains a rock. It demands a verdict: the tomb was empty because Jesus rose. This foundation strengthens faith and equips families for neighborly witness. As Tackett urges, discuss it at home. Study the passages slowly. Visualize the scene via the map and customs. Let the evidence deepen awe at the risen Lord who conquered death.

The resurrection splits history—and it can transform lives. May we, like the first witnesses, encounter the empty tomb and proclaim with joy: “He is not here; he has risen!”

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Jesus and the Resurrection, Part 4.3

The Witnesses at the Empty Tomb: A Rock-Solid Evidence for the Resurrection

(Thumbnail Sketch from Del Tackett's Webinar, [October 10, 2023](#))

In Del Tackett's Neighborly Apologetics webinar (Part 4.3), the focus turns to the empty tomb as powerful, concrete evidence for Jesus' resurrection. Presented within the Engagement Project, the session equips everyday Christian families to engage neighbors relationally—building trust so they can gently and respectfully defend the hope within them (1 Peter 3:15), rooted in the law of love.

Tackett emphasizes that the resurrection stands at the heart of Christian apologetics. Paul declares that without it, preaching is vain and faith is futile (1 Corinthians 15:14-17). The empty tomb offers raw historical reality: either the tomb was empty or it was not. Legal scholar Sir Norman Anderson called it a “veritable rock” against which skeptical theories shatter, ultimately convincing Lee Strobel.

Direct Evidence includes the angel at the tomb (Matthew 28), who rolled back the stone amid an earthquake, declared “He is not here; he has risen,” and invited the women to see. The women—Mary Magdalene, Aunt Mary (the other Mary), Joanna, and others—were the first witnesses, a culturally improbable detail that testifies to the accounts' authenticity. Peter and John's inspection (John 20) provides vivid detail: they found the grave clothes—the linen strips with 75 pounds of spices and the separate head cloth—still lying in place, empty of a body. John saw and believed.

Indirect Evidence strengthens the case. Guards reported everything to the chief priests, who bribed them to spread the lie that disciples stole the body. The bribe and the fact that authorities never produced a corpse confirm the tomb was empty. Tackett notes that chief priests, elders, Joseph of Arimathea, and likely hundreds of others would have inspected the site amid Jerusalem's upheaval, yet no contradictory evidence emerged.

Common objections—disciples stole the body, wrong tomb, or relocation—collapse under scrutiny given Roman guards, the sealed stone, and the desperate search by opponents. The undisturbed grave clothes especially point to resurrection, not theft.

Tackett closes by reminding us this evidence is for loving our neighbors, not winning arguments. As we build relationships, may we be ready to share this hope with gentleness and respect. The empty tomb declares: He is risen indeed!

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