

1. Easter—the traditional celebration of the empty tomb—the resurrection of God made flesh. This event—this fact—is the climax of God’s redemptive work—The Story within The Story. It is also not been without controversy. Think about it—the entire narrative of Jesus—Immanuel—God among us. It one-way it makes no sense: God taking on flesh; living in relative obscurity in a hick town in an insignificant country; enduring great suffering; the cross—of yes, the cross; and then an empty tomb? Really—this is a god story? Consider contemporary god stories—the Greek/Roman mythologies. Here the gods lived apart from their creations. They were empowered like superheroes in ways humans never could be—doing incredible supernatural stuff—it is what gods do, right? We kind of still think that way—or Superman/Wonder Woman/Spiderman—would not exist. Why would a god choose to abandon godness and join us in our misery? Why give up that power to limp around with us? Makes no sense and we are not the first to feel this way.)
2. “*For the message of the cross is foolish to those who are perishing*”—1 Cor. 1:18 (That cross thing—no god would go there and die like that—and if he did, would he really be a god? And why do that if he already knew a resurrection was coming? So this Easter empty tomb thing—not really buying that either—again it makes no sense as a god narrative. Not the first to say this either)
3. 1 Corinthians 15:12-13 (Interesting that Paul opened this letter addressing their cross problem and closed it dealing with their empty tomb problem. I take it that the church in Corinth did not have a big Easter turnout! So here was a group of Christians—believers, not unbelievers—struggling with the key components of God’s redemptive work! It seemed too distasteful and scandalous to be true. Why couldn’t God just come down—like a superhero—and blast the bad guys. That would be easier, right? Maybe—but it would not have been redemptive and that is the entire point! Without that cross—and even more so—without this empty tomb—as Paul explains in 15—we would just be a bunch of pitiful souls holding on to an empty, useless faith devoid of power to change anything—and this is why Easter; the resurrection—is so vital.
4. The Answer to Sin and Death (Satan has two devastating weapons in his arsenal that we alone have no answer for—the twin destructors of sin and death. Think about their connection as James describes them in 1:15—They go together like poisonous peas and carrots as sin unchecked always leads to death. Paul also connects them in Romans 7-8 in his personal sin struggle. He concludes—*O what a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from the body of death?* (24). He then answers that by saying, *Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord.* He then further says this—**8:1-3**. Sin and death—two unavoidable, horrible consequences of our brokenness. Absolutely no way out of them—EXCEPT Christ Jesus; except the cross; except the resurrection. Perhaps it makes no sense in a vacuum, but within The Story it is clear. The cross is the answer to sin—the price justice demands to cover the terrible cost of sin. We could not pay it being sinners ourselves, but Christ—the perfect lamb of God could and did. The empty tomb is the answer to death—the final most amazing part of the story. Since the grave did not hold him—it will not hold us—herein our hope. Christ was just the first fruits—more are to follow! No we are not to be pitied by embracing an empty tomb—it empowers our belief and secures our hope! We now know that one day our mortal bodies will put on immortality as Paul explains in 1 Cor. 15:35-58. We are no longer afraid—death has not sting; the grave has no victory! No longer wretched! All because—**He has risen, he is not here!** And not just us—check our **Romans 8:18-25!** The entire creation is eagerly looking forward to the final enemy being put under Christ’s feet! It yearns—anticipates the time it is set free from bondage—just as we will be set free when Jesus returns and we receive our new bodies. The empty tomb is THE story. It empowers all of our hope; it triggers all of anticipation. It is the answer to death! Praise God!
5. But for now we “*hope for what we do not yet have, and “we wait for it patiently.”* (Romans 8:25). But not alone—by far not alone. There is another wonderful aspect to this cross/resurrection story too—Romans 6:3-4—our own personal death, burial and resurrection in baptism. Even as we come to Christ, we mirror his story. We die to sin, are buried and then resurrected to a different life—a ceremony looking back but also looking ahead. Some say baptism—like the cross and tomb makes no sense, but plug it into The Story and you see its significance—it is how we fully enter the story—how we grab hold fully to that hope—how we discover the answer to sin and death. Make no mistake—the resurrection is about everything we do and are in Christ!