

On The Third Day Risen  
Luke 24:1-12  
April 17  
Rev. Dave Dorst  
CenterPoint Church

Read Luke 24:1-12

*"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."* (Isaiah 40:8)

## **Introduction**

He grew up in a small village and like most boys his age, he attended school, worked in the family business, and did his best to grow up strong and healthy. Deep inside, however, he knew that he had a special purpose, a destiny to fulfill. As he grew older, people began to notice that there was something special about this young man. He had talent and charisma. He was gifted like no other. It wasn't long before he started attracting crowds. Thousands came to see and listen to him. He chose a small band of loyal companions who travelled with him everywhere he went. Many of them had given up their jobs just to be with him and take care of his needs. As his fame grew, some grew jealous of him. Others thought he was leading people astray, and they plotted against him. But his popularity only increased... Many hailed him as king. Toward the end of his short life, he suffered quite a bit. Some who had followed him fell away... He died alone. Those closest to him were left discouraged and confused. They never expected his life to end that way. Soon after his death, there were rumors that he didn't really die. His followers spread the news all around. "He lives, he is not dead!" they said. Some claimed they actually saw him. Even today, many believe he is still alive. By now you probably know who I'm talking about. On 3, let's all say his name: 1, 2, 3: "Elvis Presley."<sup>1</sup>

Oh, you thought I was talking about Jesus? Wow, you guys were way off! I know that was a rotten trick to play, but I wanted to get your attention in a way that reminds you that you might think you've heard everything I'm about to say about Easter, but maybe you'll hear something new. Some of us have been hearing Easter sermons our whole lives, it's easy to think that we're so familiar with Jesus' story that we're not open to surprises. Let's stay open.

A man named Malcom Muggeridge was a British journalist and television personality in the mid-1900s. He was assigned a television series talking about the great men of history, so he would go to their tombs and talk about their lives. He went to the tomb of Tolstoy and talked about the great novelist. Then he went to the tomb of Napoleon and discussed the great Emperor. At the (alleged) tomb of Jesus, he talked about the fact that His followers believed that Jesus rose from that tomb, but that he himself didn't believe that. But he said later that as they were filming, he was conscious of a presence, a true physical presence, and it freaked him out a little bit. As he thought and studied, he grew in his conviction of who Jesus was, and became a Christian. Even though he was in his 70s, he spent the last years of his life proclaiming and defending the Christian faith.<sup>2</sup> Let us spend some time this morning at the tomb of Jesus to see the power it might have to change our lives.

## **I. The Empty Tomb is Perplexing (vv. 1-5)**

(Let me read the verses right before it (23:55-56): *"The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment."*)

---

<sup>1</sup> Wayne Rice, *Hot Illustration for Youth Talks 4* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 57-58

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Frank M. Barker, Jr. *The Gospel of Luke, Vol. 2* (Self-published), "Resurrection Morn!" sermon, p. 4.

<sup>1</sup> But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. <sup>5</sup> And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

Have you ever come upon something where your eyes told you one thing but your brain could not make sense of what it was seeing? Where you were stuck somewhere between disorientation and "cognitive dissonance," which is holding two contradictory ideas or conflicting beliefs at the same time. That's what those who first came to Jesus' tomb experienced: they knew they were looking at a space where a body should be, but it wasn't and they couldn't figure out why this was so.

A group of women had gone to Jesus' tomb with spices with them, planning to embalm His body. There was Mary Magdalene (whom Jesus had delivered from seven demons), Mary the mother of James (possibly Jesus' aunt), Joanna (whose husband was part of Herod's administration), and a few other women, one of whom Mark tells us was Salome. We don't have a ton of details about these women, but they had all been part of Jesus' greater group of followers, some of them providing financially for Jesus and His apostles. They were loyal to Him to His death, having stood on the hill of Golgotha watching Him die. They had spent the weekend mourning His death, but had rested on the Sabbath day, Saturday. That is why they hadn't returned until the first day of the week, Sunday. Mark 16 says they talked among themselves about how they would get into the tomb to embalm Him; apparently, they were hoping soldiers guarding the tomb would open it and let them in. But that became a moot point. There were three surprises when they arrived: 1) the stone had been rolled away, 2) there was no body inside the tomb, and 3) suddenly two men stood next to them. The men were wearing "dazzling" clothing; in verse 23, we find out these were angels.

The women went from being perplexed to being "*frightened and bowed their faces to the ground.*" The angels had a gentle rebuke for them: "*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*" The women must have been thinking, "Ah, we're not seeking the living. We are in a tomb because we are looking for the body of a dead man. We saw Him hang on a cross for hours until He suffocated and died. We saw the soldiers verifying that He had died by stabbing Him and having blood and water flow out of Him. We saw them wrap up His body and place it in this tomb. He's definitely dead. We're just here to anoint His body." But then the men continued, reminding them of things they had already heard.

## **II. Christ's Words are Instructive (vv. 6-8)**

<sup>6</sup> He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

<sup>8</sup> And they remembered his words,

"Remember how he told you" - Jesus had spoken about His upcoming death. Back in Luke 9:22 He had said, "*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*" He knew exactly what would happen. The disciples and the followers either didn't want to hear it or they thought Jesus was just speaking in parable, metaphorically, or hyperbolically like He often did. But, as it turns out, Jesus was speaking plainly, prophetically explaining what would be happening to Him. Verse 8 says that they remembered Him saying these things - "oh yeah, I guess He did give us a heads up on all of this."

It's important to see here that that the Christian message has to be explained. The death of Jesus and the empty tomb are historical facts, but they are not self-explanatory. No one simply hears of

them and understands their spiritual significance intuitively. It's why we need Biblically faithful preaching and teaching – to function just like the angel's explanation here. They knew the women were confused with what they were looking at, so they needed to have it explained to them. All who are believers in Jesus inherit that burden of explaining the significance of His death and His resurrection so that people will be able to understand it. The fancy word we use for that is apologetics, but at its most basic it is helping people understand the truth. Do what the angels did and say, "I know you're perplexed about who Jesus is and what He did, let me help you understand."

The final four verses leave the tomb and move the action back to the group of apostles, showing that **III. The Witness of Others Leads to Investigation (vv. 9-12)**

*<sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup> Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, <sup>11</sup> but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup> But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.*

God used faithful, honest women to be the first eyewitnesses to His great work. People have pointed out that having women be the first ones to testify to the empty tomb strengthens the historical record rather than weakening it. If someone had made up this story, they would not have had women reporting it because in that day a woman's testimony was not actually worth anything. The law courts were incredibly sexist and would have dismissed these women's eyewitness accounts. It would have made much more sense for Luke to offer some "credible" male testimony for his account to be acceptable to his early readers. Dale Davis said that this "leads us to regard Luke's report as reliable. For if he were simply trying to 'con' us, he would have edited out the women. But if you have nothing to hide and simply plan to tell what happened – well, you just leave them there, front and center."<sup>3</sup>

John 20 records an incident where Jesus appeared to the disciples, showing them His hands and His side. But there was one disciple missing, Thomas, and when he was told that Jesus appeared to them, he said that he would not believe until he saw the Lord's body and wounds for himself. So what nickname did Thomas get from that story? (Doubting Thomas.) As if he was the only apostle who didn't believe that Jesus rose when all the rest of them believed immediately. But here in verse 11, they all doubted when they first heard it! They dismissed the women's report as an "idle tale"; the Greek word translated here as "*idle tale*" was the word used by Greek medical writers to describe a delusional or insane mind.<sup>4</sup> Again, remember that Jesus had plainly told them that this all was going to be exactly how things happened – both His death and His resurrection. But their minds were not ready to believe because their hearts were not ready to believe.

Verse 12 tells us that Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself. Keep in mind that the last time Peter saw Jesus, he had just denied knowing Him three times; so he has some pent-up guilt and energy to burn. As much as we can fault Peter for not knowing the truth of Jesus' rising from the dead just by being told it, I think we should give him some credit for going to check it out for himself. That's what everyone should do who is not sure: go investigate for yourself. Peter was not ready to believe yet, he didn't know what to make of the empty tomb and the linen strips just sitting there. But it wouldn't be long before the Spirit worked faith in his heart. Within 50 days Peter got everything straight and was fully on board believing that Jesus truly rose because he preached this

---

<sup>3</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Luke 14-24: On the Road to Jerusalem* (Glasgow: Christian Focus, 2021), pp. 221-22.

<sup>4</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 292.

to a huge crowd at an event we call Pentecost (Acts 2:22-24): “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know – this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosening the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” God worked through that sermon to bring 3,000 souls to faith that day.

## Conclusion

Maybe you are like the disciples when they first heard that the tomb was empty: you dismiss it as nonsense, as a fairy tale. You have a hard time accepting the Gospel accounts of a literal, physical resurrection of Jesus. It’s too hard to believe that a person can be brought back to life. Maybe you’re clinging to one of the many theories that have been advanced to poke holes in the Bible’s resurrection accounts: the Swoon Theory that Jesus wasn’t really dead; or the Wrong Tomb theory that says the women mistook the tomb’s location; or the Mass Hallucination theory that the emotional toll of Jesus’ final days led His followers to all experience the same false vision of Him rising. I don’t have time to talk through and show the weaknesses in each of those theories, but I would say that there are some wonderful books that deal with them in detail: *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel, *Resurrection* by Hank Hanegraaff, and *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell. I urge you to be like Peter and go look for yourself; investigate the empty tomb. The historical evidence is overwhelming if you will treat the Gospels with the same standards and expectations as you treat all historical accounts. Listen to what J.B. Phillips said:

“Over the years I have had hundreds of conversations with people... gently trying to find out what they knew about the New Testament. My conclusion was that they knew virtually nothing... That... means that the most important Event in human history is politely and quietly by-passed. For it is not as though the evidence had been examined and found unconvincing: it had simply never been examined.”<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, what you believe happened on Easter Sunday reflects what you think God can do in this world. If you believe that there is a God and you believe that He is powerful enough to create the whole world, why would He be limited in His ability to raise someone from the dead? If God has created our human bodies and breathed life in us to begin our lives, why would we think that He is not able to breathe life back into us after death? Yes, the normal course of our lives is that they end in death and after that comes judgment and the afterlife, but God is able to do anything He wishes. If the historical record is sound, don’t discount the resurrection because you’ve dismissed the possibility of God working outside of the normal laws of nature.

And the worst thing we can do is stake out a halfway belief in the resurrection, that it is true symbolically or poetically even if it’s not true literally or historically. In other words, who knows or cares whether the resurrection really happened, what matters is that He rises in the hearts of His followers. One pastor in Toronto, said this: “The discovery of Jesus’ bones would have no effect at all on my belief in the resurrection. Only those who confuse poetry with fact would be troubled. I believe in the resurrection, but not in the physical sense.” That is the most absurd thing you could preach! If you are in doubt, you need to be like Peter and investigate things for yourself. Study and pray that God would reveal the truth to you. If you come to the conclusion that there is no way that Jesus rose from the dead, then please do not come halfway and just say, “it doesn’t matter whether He physically rose or not, Jesus is still a great man and we can follow Him as a moral teacher.” No, if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, then He was a false teacher, a scam artist. Please don’t follow Him.

---

<sup>5</sup> J.B. Phillips quoted in Paul Beasley-Murray, *Message of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: IVP, 2001), p. 67.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:14 *“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”* If this passage is not true, then there’s no reason to come to church at all – our faith is futile, we are pathetic idealists whose doctrines are built on a lie. One pastor in DC put it like this: *“Nothing that happened before the resurrection has any meaning if Christ did not rise from the grave. His virgin birth is meaningless. His perfect obedience to God is meaningless. His miracles and teaching are meaningless. Even his crucifixion means nothing if Christ remains dead.”*<sup>6</sup>

But if Jesus did rise from the dead, then it’s all true. Everything He prophesied is true. Everything about what He claimed about Himself is true. The fact that He was God in the flesh sent to earth to follow His Father’s plan to die in our place was proved true by the raising Him from the dead. He lived a perfect life, fulfilling the law in our place. He died a sacrificial death, paying the penalty for our sins on the cross. And Jesus being raised from the dead ensures that we who believe in Him will rise again as well, as Romans 8:11 says: *“If the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”* Jesus defeated death so that death will not defeat His people.

I recently heard the testimony of a man named Chris. He grew up as the son of a fundamentalist Baptist pastor and he got the message loud and clear while he was growing up that he wasn’t allowed to dance, go to the movies, listen to secular music, and a long list of other things. He was told that he could lose his salvation if he didn’t behave right, and that you couldn’t get it back if you lost it. So, when he was a teenager, he decided that he had already lost his salvation for good and was going to hell anyways, why not party it up and start doing all those things he wasn’t supposed to do? His dad threw him out of the house and he lived, in his words, “a debauched life” for the next seven years. After that time, he went into the military and came to a real, saving faith in Christ and then wanted to find a church home. The first church he started attending for a few months, but then the pastor pulled him aside and said, “You need to leave the church. We don’t want the kids here to think that they can live the way you lived and just come waltzing back to Jesus.” Next he found a Presbyterian Church, and after a few months he was also called into the pastor’s office. He started pouring out his soul and his long list of sins to the pastor, expecting to be kicked out again. The pastor said, “Well, that’s all covered by the blood of Christ. Now let’s talk about how you might serve in the church.” Chris is now a PCA pastor in Mississippi.<sup>7</sup>

Why do I tell that story? Because we are faced with two versions of Christianity: one that says “you better behave, you have one shot at this and you better not mess it up or God won’t want anything to do with you.” The other one says this: “you’re a messed-up sinner like every other person who’s ever lived, except for the One who was born from above. You have no chance at keeping the law or earning heaven on your own, but Jesus lived His life perfectly so that He could die in your place; and God raised Him from the dead to defeat death in your place. If you are united to Christ by faith, your sins are forgiven, and you can know for sure that you will rise from the dead to live forever in heaven. So believe, and then start figuring out how God has equipped you to serve Him.” I hope that the first version of church where we have to have it all together and keep it all together goes away for good. But it will probably live on because we are uncomfortable with the full implications of God’s grace. But the second one is the true Biblical picture of salvation and the Gospel. You can’t earn salvation, Christ earned it on your behalf. I invite all who hear this message to embrace it and hold fast to Christ by faith. Amen.

---

<sup>6</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke* (Nashville: Holman, 2018), p. 351.

<sup>7</sup> “I Heart PCA” podcast, April 11, 2022, Season 2, Episode 17 – Chris Accardy