

Sunday, February 19, 2024 | Holy Week

Week 21 | Luke 24:1-12 | “The Resurrection”

Last week, we finished a two-part series on the crucifixion. That day was marked by noteworthy occurrences such as a three-hour-long darkness and the veil in the Temple being split. But those things weren't the most remarkable things that happened that day. Even more impressive was the three-fold witness coming from the most unlikely people: a “thief” on the cross, a Roman centurion, and a member of the Sanhedrin. In their own way, each one testified to Jesus' innocence. Through their examples, we learned that salvation requires repentance, praise comes from the most unlikely places when you exalt Christ crucified, and fully embracing the gospel makes cowards courageous.

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**READ:** Luke 24:1-12 (ESV)

<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? <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,

<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.

It is no secret that, 2,000 years ago, women were treated like second-class citizens. As such, it is significant that ladies hold a place of *prominence* in the resurrection narratives. After all, these accounts were written in the first century. Interestingly, early forgeries of the gospels either deleted or demoted the ladies mentioned in the actual gospels.

For example, in the so-called “Gospel of Thomas,” a fictitious account of Jesus' life, Simon Peter tells the apostles, “Let Mary [Magdalene] leave us because women are not worthy of life.” But then Jesus intervenes, saying, “Look, I shall lead her so that I will make her male in order that she also may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven” (Gospel of Thomas, saying 114).<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, Jesus' resurrection is the most remarkable aspect of the Easter story, but the unexpected and significant role of women mustn't be overlooked. This detail challenges the societal norms of the first century and underscores the reliability of the Gospels. No writer of that time would have invented such a detail if it hadn't occurred.

Female disciples play a pivotal role in the Easter story. They're the first to...

i. **Vs. 1-3 – Discover clues to the Resurrection**

**Vs. 1** – Luke says, “on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.” The term “they” refers to the women described in 23:55. The phrase “first day of the week” refers to Sunday.

Burial practices varied in the ancient world. The Romans used cremation, while the Egyptians embalmed their dead.<sup>2</sup> For the Jews, there were two phases in the burial process. The first phase consisted of the deceased being wrapped in multiple layers of spice-soaked white bandages, and then the body would be laid in a cave-like tomb.<sup>3</sup> This phase is intended to *hasten* decomposition while minimizing the stench from such a process.

This is why these women come to Jesus' tomb carrying “the spices they had prepared.” Because Jesus died shortly before the start of the Sabbath, when no work was allowed to be done, his body didn't undergo the typical funeral arrangements. This sorority, dedicated to Jesus even after his death, came to finish what they had started three days before.

The second phase occurred later, once the body had entirely broken down and only the skeletal structure remained. At this point, the bones would be placed into stone jars

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the Gospel of Thomas, see this: Huff, Wesley, “Why I date the Gospel of Thomas late,” September 22, 2020, *Wesley Huff*, [wesleyhuff.com/blog/2020/9/22/why-i-date-the-gospel-of-thomas-late](https://wesleyhuff.com/blog/2020/9/22/why-i-date-the-gospel-of-thomas-late), [accessed February 5, 2025].

<sup>2</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 555.

<sup>3</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 555-556, “Remarkably, the washing of Jesus' body, the most important service rendered to a dead person, is not mentioned by any of the evangelists.” He explains in the footnote that this is likely due to the lack of time.

called "ossuaries" and then placed on shelves alongside the walls of the tomb.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, graves such as this were like family burial plots, housing multiple generations.<sup>5</sup>

**Vs. 2-3** – To be clear, these women came expecting to find the tomb as they left it—i.e., sealed shut (cf. 23:55-56). In fact, in Mark 16:3, we're told that, as they headed to Jesus' grave, they wondered to themselves, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" Undoubtedly, this was a good question. The type of stones used to seal tombs, whether disk-shaped or cork-like, were "extremely difficult to move once it was in place."<sup>6</sup> Archeological studies of first-century tombs reveal that stone doors like these would've weighed "one-and-one-half to two tons."<sup>7</sup> **That's the weight of the Liberty Bell or a full-grown African elephant.**

But, as we know, worrying about moving a one-and-a-half to two-ton stone will prove unwarranted. As Luke tells us, "And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus." At this point, we're told in John 20:2 that Mary Magdalene left to find Peter and John, and she said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." The stone rolled away, and an empty tomb did not fill these women with hope but despair. Rather than think that Jesus had risen from the dead, they assumed someone had robbed his tomb. As we'll read in vs. 4, it was more "perplexing" than encouraging.

**So, what's the takeaway?** If **faith** is a prerequisite to following God, then **uncertainty** is to our advantage.

**READ:** Hebrews 11:1-3, 6 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the people of old received their commendation. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

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<sup>4</sup> Gower, Ralph, *The New Manners & Customs of Bible Times*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> One of the most elaborate graves discovered in Jerusalem is that of the "Sanhedria," aka the "tombs of the Sanhedrin." Inside, sixty-three alcoves have been discovered, indicating that it was quite a large burial site.

<sup>6</sup> Gower (2005), p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> McDowell, Josh, and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World*, (Nashville, TN; HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), p. 254.

As those who first discovered the empty tomb, we are constantly being brought to uncertain situations. The tendency at such junctures is fearfulness when it ought to be faithfulness. The Lord is constantly bringing us to the end of ourselves so that we are forced to walk by faith, trusting and relying upon him.

ii. vs. 4-8 – Obtain **proof** of the Resurrection

**Vs. 4-5** – “While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.” Luke describes this moment as if these “two men” suddenly and miraculously appeared out of thin air. The Greek word translated as “dazzling” is ἀστράπτω (*astraptō*) and, in 17:24, Luke uses it to describe the flashing of lightning (cf. Matt. 24:27; 28:3; Lu. 10:18; Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18; LXX Ex. 19:16; Psa. 144:6). Interestingly, the noun form of this word (*astrapē*) is used to depict God (cf. LXX Jer. 10:13; 51:16; Dan. 10:6) and heavenly creatures (cf. LXX Eze. 1:13). Thus, these two men are, of course, angelic beings.

As with most angelic appearances, these women became “frightened and bowed their faces to the ground.” Fear is usually accompanied by angelic appearances (cf. Jud. 6:22; Lu. 1:13; 2:9; Ac. 10:4); this is especially true at the resurrection (cf. Mat. 28:4-5; Mar. 16:5).

The angels ask, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” From the mourner’s perspective, it seemed perfectly appropriate to come to the tomb, bearing spices for Jesus’ body. This was the custom at this time (cf. Jn. 19:40). If someone died, you anoint their body; it was the proper thing to do. But from heaven’s perspective, their objective demanded an explanation. The implied meaning of the angel’s question is that because Jesus is alive, these women should not seek him among the dead. Had these ladies believed that the Lord was who he said he was, they would’ve never gone through the trouble. Essentially, the angels asked, “Why are you here?”

**Vs. 6-7** – Apparently, the women didn’t understand the question, so the angels connected the dots for them. They say, “He is not here, but has risen.”

The angels called these women to “remember.” Unlike last week, when it was used by the thief on the cross as a request for salvation (cf. 23:42), this remembering was an invitation to recall some vital information. Specifically, the men wanted to remind the ladies of something important Jesus said: “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” In Luke’s account, the Lord predicted his betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection three times (cf. 9:22, 44; 18:31-34). It is likely the angels are referring to the second instance (cf. Matt. 17:22), but it is impossible to know for certain. And, regardless, which time the Lord predicted his

death isn't really the point here. The point is that the Lord made it abundantly clear that he was going to rise from the dead after being crucified. And the angels rightly argued that these women should've remembered this fact.

Interestingly, concerning the gospel, Peter says that angels have long looked into the salvation we now experience (cf. 1 Pet. 1:12). They had been careful students of God's word and, God's Son came on the scene, they paid close attention to the things he said, especially when the Lord repeated himself at least three times.

**So, what's the takeaway? Rehearsing the Scriptures reassures the heart.**

**READ:** Proverbs 4:20-22 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. <sup>21</sup> Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. <sup>22</sup> For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.

Scriptural amnesia casts a dark shadow over the mind. Only by recalling God's word can we see clearly again.

iii. **Vs. 9-12 – Give a report on the Resurrection.**

**Vs. 9** – After hearing the good news, these women come to “the eleven and to all the rest” and tell them “all these things.” Evangelism isn't complicated. When we evangelize, all we're doing is telling others what we ourselves have experienced firsthand.

**Vs. 10** – Now, of those “who told these things to the apostles,” Luke tells us the names of three women: The first lady mentioned was “Mary Magdalene.” This is the same Mary who, after being delivered by Jesus from a seven-fold demonic possession (cf. Mar. 16:9), supported him financially while accompanying him in his travels (cf. Lu. 8:2); she was also one of the key witnesses to both the Lord's crucifixion (cf. Jn. 19:25) and his burial (cf. Mat. 27:61).

The second person mentioned was a woman named “Joanna.” In Lu. 8:2, we learn that she was “the wife of Chuza,” who was “Herod's household manager.” This would've been Herod Antipas/Tetrarch, the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist (cf. Mar. 6:14-29) and ridiculed Jesus before the crucifixion (cf. Lu. 23:6-12). Given her connection via her husband to Herod's court, Jonna was likely a woman of wealth and power. But, like Mary Magdalene, after being healed by Jesus (cf. Lu. 8:2), Jonna became a follower of Jesus. Thus, Luke's point in mentioning Jonna is to show that a woman who not only had a personal connection to Jesus but had been associated with his ministry for some time had been witness to the first Easter.

The woman called “[Mary the mother of James](#)” wasn’t the mother of James and John; their mother was named “[Salome](#)” (cf. Matt. 20:20-21). This “[Mary](#)” was the mother of “[James the younger](#),” aka James the less, one of the lesser-known apostles (cf. Mar. 15:40; 16:1). If we compare the Synoptics, it is possible, *though far from conclusive*, to equate “[Mary the mother of James the younger/less](#)” with “[Mary the wife of Cleophas](#)” (cf. Jn. 19:25; Matt. 27:56).<sup>8</sup> According to Church tradition, Cleophas was the brother of Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father; thus, “[Mary the wife of Cleophas](#)” and “[the mother of James the younger/less](#)” do not only share the same first name as Jesus' mother, but the two women seem to have married into the same family, making them sisters-in-law.<sup>9</sup>

Admittedly, trying to decipher the identities of these women is a challenging task for the modern reader. This issue is further complicated by the fact that Luke says “[other women](#)” were also present for these events. Who were these “other women?” It is impossible to know for sure. However, it is unlikely that John’s original audience would’ve had such difficulty (e.g., the difference between talking to a friend versus a stranger). [Remember, Luke wrote this account for someone named “Theophilus” \(cf. Lu. 1:3\). The fact that he gives minimal commentary on the characteristics of these women implies that his readership likely already knew about whom he spoke. Thus, the presence of these three prominent women gives significant weight to Luke’s account.](#)

**Vs. 11** – Though prominent women relayed the account of the resurrection within Jesus' community, their “[words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.](#)” [The word translated as “idle” is \*λῆρος\* \(\*lēros\*\), a medical term that refers to delirium.](#)<sup>10</sup> Those who should’ve been most inclined to believe thought these ladies were hysterical.

**Vs. 12** – However, not everyone disregarded the ladies' report. Luke says, “[Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves.](#)” Minus the angels, Peter saw the same thing the ladies saw. And had the “[linen cloths](#),” which had been wrapped around Jesus’ body, been missing too, he likely would’ve thought that Jesus’ tomb had been robbed. But, as it was, Jesus’ grave clothes were “[by themselves.](#)” [What tomb raider unwraps a](#)

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<sup>8</sup> According to church tradition, “James the less” is equated with “James the son of Alphaeus,” who was one of the twelve apostles (cf. Matt. 10:2-3; Mar. 3:18; Lu. 6:15). But that is difficult to square with the fact that, according to John, the mother of James the less was the wife of “Cleophas,” not “Alphaeus.” Thus, “James the less” seems to be distinct from one who was the son of Alphaeus. However, even this disparity could be explained if we consider that the same person can be referred to by different names: Joshua is the anglicized version of Jesus, Cephas is the Aramaic form of Peter who was once called Simon, John=Jona=Jonah, Saul=Paul, Uzziah=Azariah (cf. Matt. 1:9; 2 Ki. 15:7, 32; 1 Chron. 3:12), and the list goes on (cf. Gen. 17:5, 15; Ex. 2:18; 3:1; Est. 2:7; Dan. 1:7).

<sup>9</sup> Klink (2016), p. 798.

<sup>10</sup> Bock (1996), p. 1898.

corpse before stealing it? It didn't make sense. This is why we're told that Peter "went home marveling at what had happened." The Greek term translated as "marveling" is θαυμάζω (*thaumazō*), and it refers to puzzlement (cf. Lu. 11:14; 20:26; 24:12). Thus, the lead apostle didn't immediately believe in the resurrection. The empty tomb and grave clothes were more confusing than anything else.

**So, what's the takeaway?** The message of Easter turns mourners into messengers.

Ultimately, the thrust of this passage deals with the theme of *reversal*. These women had been reduced to tears. But then they learned of Christ's resurrection, and suddenly, they went from mourners to messengers. The truth of the resurrection transformed these women into joyful heralds of the resurrection. From that moment on, though they may sorrow again, they will not do so without hope (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13). The Easter story sustains the heart, even in times of great tragedy, keeping it from utter despair.

If the resurrection is a farce, we are, as Paul put it, of all men "most miserable." But if it is true, Easter has unbelievable implications. As Paul himself explained,

**READ: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (ESV)**

<sup>50</sup> I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup> Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." <sup>55</sup> "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Jesus, Mohammed, the Buddha, Joseph Smith, and all other religious leaders died. But unlike the founder of every other religion in the world, the Lord rose again and is still alive today. That sort of message changes people. We do not serve a dead God but one who beat death for us all.

## **Video Description:**

### **Holy Week | Week 21 | “The Resurrection” (Luke 24:1-12)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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For example, in the so-called “Gospel of Thomas,” a fictitious account of Jesus' life, Simon Peter tells the apostles, "Let Mary [Magdalene] leave us because women are not worthy of life." But then Jesus intervenes, saying, "Look, I shall lead her so that I will make her male in order that she also may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Gospel of Thomas, saying 114).

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**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:**

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