

Do You Seek the Living Among the Dead?

Scripture Text: Luke 24:1-12

Introduction

Happy Resurrection Sunday! Jesus is not dead. He is not in the grave. He is alive, indeed! We want to believe that there is more to this life. We want to know what exists beyond the grave. Is death the final chapter of our lives? Many people live with no hope of the future. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is proof that there is something beyond the grave. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us hope for a better day. It gives us hope that there is much more than this earthly life. It gives us hope in God's plan of redemption and His plan to bring us to live with Him forever. However, we often spend our lives looking for other ways and in other places to give us hope. We look to have life among things that are really "dead". Knowing that death exists can be beneficial, though, when we understand it in light of the resurrection. Years ago, Christians would build church buildings with the cemetery in the front yard. Every Sunday when the church gathered for worship, they were reminded that they have to walk through death to receive new life in Christ. That can be a helpful reminder for us. We may forget that it was through death that Jesus purchased eternal life for the world. We may forget that our own death is the door through which we enter the next phase of our life with God. The resurrection gives us hope for the future in the face of death. But, what was this like for the disciples at the time Jesus was killed and then raised?

A Despairing Weekend!

We know about "Good Friday", the day Jesus died. We know about "Resurrection Sunday", when Jesus rose from the grave. But, there is another day that if we understand it properly, it may help us to worship God in the midst of any uncertainty, pain or grief. The Saturday after Good Friday is the full day that Christ lay dead in the grave. Some believe it was the darkest of days. Just imagine being one of Jesus' disciples then. Friday was tragic, but it was also a day full of adrenaline rushes, high drama, and the hope that surely Jesus would fight. Maybe they thought He would call down legions of angels to fight for Him. Maybe they thought He would perform a miracle and escape His own death sentence. Those things did not happen, and Jesus was crucified and killed and laid in a borrowed tomb. Saturday was a day for the disciples to come to grips with reality. Jesus was dead. He was gone. It really did happen. We can understand that when tragedy strikes. We go through it when a loved one dies. We cry out when we get that terrible news from the doctor. We experience disbelief and despair. Even Jesus cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" What the resurrection teaches us is that in the midst of being crushed and slain, we can still say, "Help is coming from our God who saves." Sunday is coming!

Prepare for Great Things from God

Matthew told us that the chief priests and the Pharisees asked Pilate to seal the tomb and guard it (Matthew 27:62-66). A stone tomb would be closed by rolling a large stone

in front of the opening, like Lazarus' tomb. However, Jesus' tomb was sealed for extra measure. Why? People knew Jesus had said He would rise after three days. Of course, the Pharisees did not believe it would actually happen. They were just concerned that Jesus' disciples would steal His body and tell everyone that He had risen from the dead. Therefore, Pilate allowed the tomb to be sealed, but even God can overcome our best attempts to derail His plans. If God has said He will do something, you can take it to the bank — it is going to happen. Luke tells us that several women were going to Jesus' tomb that Sunday morning. They were prepared to finish caring for His burial. They were prepared for the Sabbath that day. But, they were not prepared for what God had done and would reveal to them. They were greatly surprised. Look at the verses below.

Luke 24:1–4 ¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had done much to prepare Jesus' body for burial (John 19:39-40), but the women thought the task was not complete. They had prepared spices and perfumes, but they had to wait for the Sabbath to pass before they could do anything. They rested on the Sabbath according to God's Law, and then woke up early on Sunday morning to finish the job of preparing Jesus' body. On their way to the tomb, the women pondered the difficulty of moving the huge stone that was sealing the tomb. Who would move it for them? When they arrived, however, they found the stone already rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. There had been a great earthquake that morning and an angel of God had come and simply rolled the stone away (Matthew 28:2–4). This shows that all of man's attempts to thwart God's plan are futile. We can try to control what God is doing, we can try to do things our way instead of His way, but we will fail. Have you ever thought, though, why the stone was rolled away? It was not for Jesus to get out, for He did not need help to get out. The stone was rolled away so people could see that the tomb was empty. It was rolled away so we would know that Jesus is not there. The women were able to see what God had done.

Look for Hope in the Right Place

The women arrived at the tomb to find it opened with no body inside and two angels in their Sunday best clothes. This was certainly not a typical Sunday morning. This was an extraordinary event, perhaps the most extraordinary event in history. There had been an earthquake, a missing body, and an angelic visit. Things were not normal. This was something magnificent of God and they were frightened. Look at the next few verses.

Luke 24:5–7 ⁵ 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? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

As we can expect, the women were frightened by these angels. The appearance of angels in the Bible often produced such fear. We should not think of angels as meek looking beings with wings and a trumpet. They are fierce warriors and messengers of God. Here, they delivered the message of hope. As an angel brought good news of great joy at Jesus' birth (Luke 2:8-14), so these angels brought *good news of great hope* that Jesus is alive! Notice that the angels said that Jesus had to be delivered, and he had to be crucified, but that on the third day *he would rise*. While sinful men betrayed and killed Him, Jesus rose to life by His own power. This is not to say that God the Father had no role in raising His Son, because Luke mentioned several times in Acts about the Father raising His Son from the dead. However, the resurrection was also Jesus' own doing. He had been crucified. He had been buried. But, He rose to life on the third day. So, as we with the sending of the Holy Spirit, it was both the Father and Jesus who raised Jesus from the grave.

The question the angels asked the women is significant: *Why do you seek the living among the dead?* Have you ever thought about that question? Of course the women expected Jesus' body to be in the grave. Jesus was dead and they were coming to the tomb that morning to finish their work of preparing His body. He was killed. He was buried. They were not seeking a living person among the dead. They were seeking a dead man among the dead. Jesus should have been in the tomb that morning; but, He was not, because He lives! Graves are for dead people. Jesus is alive. The resurrection confirms something Jesus had said. When some Sadducees asked Jesus about the resurrection from the dead, He responded that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Luke 20:38). If this was true of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, how much more would it be true of the Son of God, who prophesied His own resurrection? God is God of the living. The women should not have been looking for Jesus there. The same is true for us. We ought to not look for those things of life, among the things that are dead. Put another way, are you looking for purpose in all the wrong places? Are you looking for joy in all the wrong places? Are you looking for the church in all the wrong places? The only one who give purpose and direction is the living Lord and Savior. Look to Him!

Remember and Tell the Resurrection Story

As soon as the angels reminded the women of Jesus' prophecy that He would rise from the dead on the third day, they remembered His words. We have probably all forgotten important things before, but this was a big thing to forget. Now that the resurrection happened and they stood in front of the empty tomb with two angels declared this great news to them, they were better prepared to understand and believe the things Jesus had said. What did they do with this information, though? Look at the next verses.

Luke 24:8–9 ⁸ *And they remembered his words,* ⁹ *and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.*

This passage shows that the women, and the other disciples, did not fully understand Jesus, or they were so overcome with grief, or maybe both! We can understand this. Had we walked with Jesus and heard the things He said, and then saw Him crucified

and buried, we might have had a hard time believing the resurrection happened. But it did happen and this is what it meant for the women at the tomb — *remember and tell!* The resurrection of Jesus Christ compels us to remember the good news and to tell the good news. That is what the women did. They left the tomb that morning, found the disciples, and told them what they saw. Look at the following verses.

Luke 24:10–12 ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² 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.

In Jesus' day women were not considered to be credible witnesses. This is part of the reason why the rest of the disciples did not believe what they said. That is similar to our witness of Jesus. Unfortunately, some will not believe it, but tell it anyway. There is another reason why the disciples thought that what these women were saying was just nonsense. It is because it sounds like nonsense to our logical brains. People just do not rise from the grave, do they? Well, the disciples did see other people raised from the dead. There was the widow's son from the town of Nain who Jesus raised from the dead (Luke 7:11-17). There was the daughter of Jairus, who Jesus raised from the dead (Luke 8:40-56). And then there was that guy named Lazarus who had been dead for four days, and Jesus just said, "Come out", and he came out (John 11:38-44). It was not as if people being raised to life was unknown. Maybe, the disciples believed that Jesus could raise other people from the dead, but He could not to raise Himself. Disbelief can also be easier. His followers were anything but ready to believe that it had happened. They were still reeling from the events on Friday and the despair on Saturday.

This is important for us to know. Even Jesus' closest followers struggled with doubt. His closest friends disbelieved. It can be a great comfort to know that they went through the same things we go through today. Luke may have also tried to reassure his readers of the truth of what Jesus had taught by showing that the disciples doubted at first and then later believed in the resurrection because of the overwhelming evidence they encountered in the appearance of the risen Christ. Thus, the disciples' unbelief can help us to believe. Not everyone disbelieved, though. At least two got up and ran to Jesus' tomb after the women's report. Luke told us that Peter got up and ran to the tomb, but John (the one who Jesus loved!) was also with him. In fact, this was the greatest race of all time. Peter and John raced to the tomb to see what the women has reported. Even though John got to the tomb first, it was Peter who actually went into the tomb first. Peter saw the linen cloths and marveled at what had happened. Do not be discouraged by telling the resurrection story. When some disbelieve, others will run to the truth. Have you run to Jesus? Have you marveled at His resurrection? You are God's commercial. You are His messenger. Jesus is alive and if you trust in Him, you are alive in Him. He wants you to share this message of hope with others so they can be alive, too.

Surprising Hope for the Future

In his book *Surprised by Hope*, N. T. Wright wrote, “Easter was when Hope in person surprised the whole world by coming forward from the future into the present.” Jesus Christ is our hope. The mission of the Church is to bring the future into the present by telling others about the great Hope of mankind. We do not have to fear what this world does. We do not have to fear our own frailties and suffering. We do not have to fear death. Jesus has conquered death and sin and He invites you to join Him in this victory. We can know that no matter what difficulties and sufferings we face in this life, we have already defeated death, walked through the graveyard, and become someone new because of our Savior Jesus Christ. Do you marvel at the empty tomb? Does it still have power in your life? As Jesus was once dead and then resurrected to new life, those who trust in Him and follow Him will likewise be raised to new life. Death is not the end. Death is only the door through which we will pass through to the next room of our life. The question is, which room will death open for you? Will it be one of everlasting joy and peace with our God in heaven? Will it be one of everlasting judgement and suffering because you chose not to trust in the One who can save you? The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives a surpassing hope for the future. Do you have it?

Conclusion

In closing, Happy Resurrection Sunday! He is alive. He is alive, indeed! We all look for purpose, for fulfillment, for hope. Is it in Christ? If not, you are not living with purpose, you are not fulfilled, and you have a false hope. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an invitation to us all to have abundant life with our God. He is our greatest need. Are you looking to Jesus or are you looking to something or someone else? Stop looking to other people or things to fulfill your desires. Look to the risen Savior and Lord! For those who have trusted in Christ, the resurrection means that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, we have to fear. Jesus has defeated the greatest enemy we have, death, and we have hope for a better future. No matter what the world does, no matter where our country is heading, no matter what pain and suffering you experience, Sunday is coming. Jesus will return to gather His children and take them to a place where there is no suffering. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!