

"Do You Realize What Has Happened?"

Luke 24: 1-12

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We have been going through the gospel of Luke for many months, and it just so happens that today our journey brings us to chapter 24, which tells us about the events that occurred on the Sunday morning, following Jesus' crucifixion. (Well, that is not a total coincidence. Our series from the book of Jonah helped with the timing.) If you have a bible, you can turn to Luke 24 or the verses will be on the screen. We will take a quick look at this bible passage and then focus on its significance for our live today. Let's pause and pray that we will realize how good, good news of Jesus' resurrection really is.

Luke 24:1 On the first day of the week, (Sunday) very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. We know "they" refers to a group of women because the narrative is continuing from chapter 23 where they were preparing those spices.

Luke 24: 2,3 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. That was a surprise.

Luke 24: 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. Their apparel is a clear sign that these are two angels, not human beings and Matthew's gospel confirms that.

Luke 24:5a So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground. Throughout the bible people tend to be a bit frightened when they encounter angelic beings.

Luke 24:5b, 6a "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? Asked the men. "He is not here, but he has risen!" That is why the women don't find the body. Jesus is alive, risen from the dead. Then the men add these words:

Luke 24:6b, 7 Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, saying, "It is necessary that the Son of Man be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day?" That is **Luke 9:22** And they (the women) remembered his words. They heard Jesus speak about His resurrection, but didn't grasp what those words meant. Only now, having seen the empty tomb do they begin to understand the significance of what they had heard.

Luke 24:9 Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest. This is the 12 disciples or apostles, minus Judas, plus some other followers of Jesus.

Luke 24:10 Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them were telling the apostle these things. (Luke identifies three of the women by name.)

Luke 24:11 But these words seemed like nonsense to them, (the apostles) and they did not believe the women. I'm not sure what they did think. Perhaps they thought the women were mistaken about the tomb being empty. One of them, however, seemed to think there might be something to their incredible claims.

Luke 24:12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the linen cloths. So he went away, amazed at what had happened. Okay, that is Luke's account of Easter morning, now let's look at what these words mean for our lives, there are a couple of very important lessons for us.

Number 1 - We should believe the reports of Jesus' resurrection.

Luke 24:11 But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. Now, very quickly the apostles learned the women's report was not nonsense at all, but an accurate account of the most marvelous news the world has ever heard... Jesus was no longer in the tomb, because He had risen from the dead. Even the apostle Thomas, a hard-nosed skeptic, was soon convinced that was the case. But, plenty of people today insist the claim of the women, the apostles, and the Christian church for almost 2000 years, that Jesus is the risen Lord and Messiah, simply is not true. Often their view is that the claims of Jesus' resurrection simple cannot be true. These folks usually embrace what is called "scientific naturalism." This is the view promoted by Carl Sagan when he claimed "the cosmos (meaning the physical universe) is all there was, all there is, and all there ever will be." In other words, there is no God, no spiritual reality, only matter and energy. And in that view there can be no miracles. There can be no resurrections from the dead. Dead people have to stay dead. So before ever considering whether or not Jesus

actually rose from the dead, these folks decided it could never have happened.

Yet, there is really nothing “scientific” about “scientific naturalism,” despite what people like Bill Nye the Science Guy might say. Science is concerned solely with physical reality, not spiritual reality. Science tells us at what temperature water boils or how much oxygen is in the atmosphere on Mars. It does not and cannot tell us about spiritual reality, about whether or not God exists, and whether or not miracles like a resurrection from the dead can occur. Those are not questions science can answer. Discovering what actually happened near Jerusalem Easter Sunday morning in about 33 A.D. is not a question for science or even philosophy. It is a question of history. Determining whether Jesus truly rose from the dead is really no different from determining whether Lee Harvey Oswald actually killed JFK. Now, Jesus’ resurrection is of greater significance than an assassination or any other event. Yet, like every historical event, Jesus’ resurrection occurred within the realm of space and time. Anyone in Jerusalem in 33 A.D. could have gone and seen that the tomb was empty. Jesus’ resurrection was a physical, not a spiritual event. An atheist would have seen the same empty tomb that the women and disciples did.

So, how do we know the resurrection reports are really true? We look at the evidence and weigh that evidence. Yes, it is impossible to prove with absolute certainty that any historical event actually happened. There are still folks who don’t believe man ever landed on the moon. However, examining the evidence can lead to “beyond reasonable doubt” conclusions. I put the moon landing in that category, as well as the resurrection of Jesus. There are two main types of evidence involved in this case. First, is eyewitness testimony. 1 Corinthians 15:6 tells us over 500 people saw Jesus alive after Easter Sunday. That includes the women, the apostles and many others. Yes, sometimes people who claim to be eyewitnesses fabricate a story. Yet, the fact almost all of the apostles died as martyrs, were killed because of their claim that Jesus rose from the dead, makes it clear they sincerely believed their testimony was true. They certainly would not have all been willing to die for what they knew to be a lie. The second type of evidence is the implausibility of alternative scenarios. If the apostles had stolen the body, they would not have

really believed Jesus rose from the dead. The Jewish leaders or Roman authorities obviously had not taken the body. If they had, they would have produced it to blow up the Christians’ claim of Jesus’ resurrection. And the idea that Jesus was not really dead when he was taken down from the cross, that he was unconscious and then revived in the tomb, that flies in the face of all the evidence.

Friends, do you believe the report of the women, and the apostles and the 500 other eyewitnesses that the tomb was empty because Jesus rose from the dead? If not, why not? If you are not sure, I would love to chat with you.

Number 2 - We should recognize the significance of the reports of Jesus being risen from the dead. Often times people do not. A Lifeway study last year found that 2/3 of American adults believe the bible account of Jesus’ resurrection. Yet, many of those folks seem to miss the significance and importance of what occurred. In many ways they are like the women who heard Jesus say, (verse 7) that He would be crucified and then rise again on the third day. I don’t think the women disbelieved what Jesus said, but it just didn’t seem relevant. Yet, when they see the empty tomb, they remember Jesus’ words and start to understand the significance of what He had said. There are a variety of ways their lives and our lives are impacted by Jesus’ resurrection, but I think two are most important. First, the resurrection confirms that Jesus’ claims about Himself are true. **Romans 1:4 He was shown to be the son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord.** Even though Jesus’ followers already believed He was God’s chosen Messiah and Savior, His resurrection greatly bolstered their confidence. After Jesus was arrested and killed, His followers basically went into hiding, but the resurrection transformed them into people who gladly risked and gave their lives for the sake of the gospel, the great news of Jesus. They were now certain Jesus was God’s son and Savior. When we believe the Easter story is true, that Jesus Christ really did rise from the dead, it should give us confidence that no matter what else is going on around us, the right choice, the best choice, is to trust and follow Him.

Second, the resurrection gives believers in Jesus Christ a totally new perspective on death. Our

culture has come up with inferior, but plausible substitutes for some of what biblical Christianity offers. For example, people who struggle with guilt can choose psychotherapy instead of forgiveness through Jesus. Those looking for meaning and purpose in life can choose a career, instead of living for the glory of God. Those wanting to experience genuine, unconditional love can search for that rather elusive “soul mate,” rather than turning to Jesus. Yet, when it comes to having hope in the face of death, or dealing with death at all, there is really no viable alternative. Cryogenics... being frozen when you die, with the hope that scientists will be able to resurrect you sometime in the future seems pretty goofy. Reincarnation, returning as some other lifeform, maybe an elephant, seems equally unlikely. Many of the platitudes we speak when someone dies, “she is at peace now,” or “his spirit will always be with us,” are really empty words without foundation. The secular view of death is essentially we die, and that is it. It is over. There is no meaning, no life, no hope.

Thus, death casts a long shadow over our lives. As Chuck Swindol said, “When you know every card you play is going to get trumped, it really doesn’t matter how you play your hand.” When you believe everything and everyone you value will one day vanish, when you are convinced all that ultimately awaits you is the nothingness or non-existence, true happiness is not really possible. When people consider what it actually means to die, they cannot help but be disturbed. Pascal, the 17th century mathematician and theologian, noted that the only thing that can make us truly happy is immortality. And since that seems beyond what we as human beings can experience, we choose not to think about it. Instead, we opt for diversions, activities that will keep us busy so we don’t have to time to contemplate our inevitable demise. Pascal saw things like hunting, gambling, and parties as popular diversions in his day that allowed people to ignore the reality of death. In the 21st century we have come up with thousands of diversions which enable us to be oblivious to our eventual oblivion. In the movie “Manhattan,” Woody Allen speculates that people even create phobias for themselves so they don’t have to focus on things of which they really should be afraid, such as death.

However, Easter, the resurrection of Jesus, offers a way to face death boldly and truly deal with it.

Jesus came to **Hebrews 2:15 Free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of dying.** The promise God gives us in 1 Corinthians 15, is that because Jesus has conquered death, we will as well. The words Jesus spoke in **John 11:25b,26** are some of the most powerful ever uttered on this planet, **“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”** Oh yes, the heart will stop beating and the brain waves will go flat. But even then, a person trusting in Jesus will still be alive in the presence of the Lord. And one day, when Jesus returns, the day of resurrection, that body which is usually so worn out when a person dies, will be transformed. Believers in Jesus will receive a new glorious body just as Jesus had when he conquered death and rose from the grave on Easter Sunday. Believing that, knowing that, gives us a totally new perspective on death. And it is that perspective that Jim Anderson was talking about this morning. Folks, this is real life. No part of life is more real, more inevitable, and more difficult than death. Whether it is watching a grandmother breathe her last breath, or contemplating our own demise, it is seldom easy. There is something about death that is dark and brings, if not devastation, at least discomfort. There is good reason why the apostle Paul calls death the last enemy, 1 Corinthians 15:26. But for believers in Jesus, it is an enemy that has been defeated, it has been defeated by Jesus’ resurrection. He has conquered death and promises that all those trusting in Him will conquer death as well. On the surface death seems so final to us. It seems to be an abrupt and permanent end, eliminating all hope. Yet, the Easter hope we have been talking about today, that Jim spoke of earlier, says, “No. Death is not final. It is not the end. Jesus’ resurrection means there is something more, much more.”

And yes, that includes a reunion with people whom we love. It means seeing and being with grandparents and parents again. It means that Leann’s death is just a temporary separation for her and Jim. It means those of you who have endured the horrible pain of losing a child, will one day be reunited with that child and he or she will be more wonderful than they ever were on this earth. Yet, no matter how wonderful those reunions are, a far more magnificent aspect of heaven is that the Lord Jesus will be there and we

will be with Him. I can imagine this happening, one day when Jim arrives in heaven, he will see Leann. She will look so healthy and so beautiful in her new resurrected body. And Jim will say, "Oh, Leann it is so good to see you. Let's get together a little later, because, first, I want to go see Jesus."

What will it really be like when we get to heaven, when the Lord Jesus returns and the resurrection occurs and we dwell in God's eternal kingdom? That is a big question. The bible tells us a lot of things about heaven, yet there are a lot of questions about heaven that the bible doesn't really answer. However, I think a passage that describes it well is **Revelation 21: 3,4** **And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' of mourning or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."** That sounds pretty wonderful. Another favorite description of heaven is what C.S. Lewis writes at the end of "The Last Battle," the final book in the Narnia series. "And for us this the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

Friends, that reflects the totally new perspective on death that Jesus' resurrection gives to those who are believers in Jesus. It is a perspective we are going to sing about....