

He Is Risen!

Luke 24:1-12 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Note: out of all four accounts of the first Easter morning (Matthew 28, Mark 16, John 20, and Luke 24), this is the only place where they didn't see the risen Christ. Both the women and the disciples had to rely on the verbal witnesses of either the angels or the women. That fits the point of the sermon.

The Resurrection

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in gleaming clothing; ⁵ and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why are you seeking the living One among the dead? ⁶ **He is not here, but He has risen.** Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, ⁷ saying that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise from the dead." ⁸ And they remembered His words, ⁹ and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now these women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe the women. ¹² Nevertheless, Peter got up and ran to the tomb; and when he stooped and looked in, he *saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.*

Introduction

About 30 years ago, I was taking a New Testament course in seminary. One day, the professor told the class that he didn't believe in Christ's body resurrection, because science could not prove it. *Whoa!* I doubted my ears! "A seminary professor doesn't believe in Christ's resurrection?!" I thought to myself. "Then, why is he here?" Since then, I have lost my interest in the New Testament studies. I ended up majoring in the Old Testament studies.

Anyway, some folks today take the same stance on the resurrection as the professor. Others may love the idea of spiritual resurrection but still deny the actual physical resurrection of Christ, let alone their own.

This morning, I am going to talk about resurrection. More specifically, Christ's physical resurrection. By the way, we cannot talk about resurrection without death, can we? Who needs resurrection when no one dies, right? In fact, death often, if not always, makes us wonder what's next after physical death.

My first encounter with death was through my own father. In the summer of 1968, my father, 59 years old, was hit and killed by an American military truck. He was gone in three days. When I first heard the news of his death, I didn't cry: just a numbness and a few drops of tears that my father was gone and would no longer be with me.

We had a wake at our house. Visitors came to pay their respects by burning the incense to my deceased father. The next day, they buried my dad at a sunny place on a mountain. I wasn't allowed to go, because I was too young to attend the funeral.

Six months later, my family took me to my father's grave. We walked a couple of miles in the snow to get to the grave. In my young mind, I still didn't understand what death meant. Death appeared to be a series of events such as physical separation, funeral, and gravesite visit. All these memories still linger in me like a summer haze: foggy, distant, dull, yet sad.

In the following years, I witnessed more deaths: a friend of mine in middle school died two years later, then my aunt. All these deaths created a yearning in my heart: *I wanted to see them again*. Even though I wasn't a Christian in those years, I was hoping for something beyond our physical death. *Death shouldn't be the final*.

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The Bible calls such a longing in the heart the hope of resurrection. In fact, God's Word says that on the Day of Judgment everyone will come back to life (that is, resurrected) in the presence of God. Each one of us will give an account for everything we've done in our earthly lives. After that, Christ the Judge will decide each one's eternal destiny and destination: the righteous will enter into eternal life and the wicked into eternal punishment.

The Good news is that Christ Jesus was the first fruit of the resurrection. Two thousand years ago, on that early Easter morning, the women who visited the tomb saw the risen Lord (Matthew 28:9, Mark 16:9, John 20:18). We call this historical event the First Easter.

This morning, I would like to share with you my thoughts and beliefs on resurrection.

Messengers and Witnesses:

When it comes to proclaiming and believing in Jesus' body resurrection, God provides no other means but His angels (messengers) and human witnesses. No photos. No videos. No

scientific proof (not that God can't, but He chooses not to—to be explained later). In other words, neither God nor His Church offers any other proofs than the accounts of 500+ people who personally saw the risen Christ with their eyes (1 Corinthians 15:6), and some of them touched His resurrected body with their hands (Luke 24:39-40).

For two thousand years, the accounts of these witnesses proved sufficient for the countless believers, including myself, to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. For many others, including the skeptics, that has not been the case.

To such skeptics, C. S. Lewis has a word. He asserts that the biblical accounts of Jesus' resurrection are sufficient to believe. He explains that we Christians believe in the resurrection of Jesus solely based on the words of witnesses—those 500+ witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. Lewis takes his own example of believing in the existence of New York City. As an Englishman, he says, he's never been to the city to see it with his own eyes. However, the accounts of those folks who have been there are good enough for him to believe in its existence, because he believes in the integrity of those folks who tell him the truth. In the same way, we Christians believe in the resurrection of Jesus the Christ, not because we have a scientific proof, but because we believe in the integrity of those witnesses of Christ's resurrection. Furthermore, the accounts of these witnesses have been attested through their own lives (that is, they all gave up their lives for the truth of the resurrection). Their accounts still stand strong as the only reliable proof of Jesus' resurrection.

Think about it. If the Almighty God chooses to make everyone believe in Him and His existence, He can convince them easily. He can send out lightning and thunder at 12 noon on the dot every day for 30 days in a row, then everyone will believe in God, right? Yet, He never does such a thing (He chooses not to) because He is the God of love. Love by nature never forces anyone to do anything they don't want to. God would never force anyone to believe in Him against their own will. In other words, God would honor our free will to choose whatever we wish: Either we believe or reject even the very existence of God, it is up to us. God never overrides our free will.

The same principle of love and free will applies to beliefs in the miracles. Whether or not we believe in the miracles of Jesus such as virgin birth, healing, walking on water, turning water into wine, and feeding over 5000 people with five loaves and two fish, His suffering and death on the cross, His resurrection, and His ascension to Heaven, God leaves it entirely up to us. He simply presents His case, not through scientific proof, but through the accounts of witnesses, and leaves the decision to us.

In fact, He has been that way from the very beginning of the creation. He used the oral accounts to proclaim the truth. Even in the 21st century, He still does so for Jesus' resurrection. He simply urges you this morning to decide for yourself whether or not to believe the accounts of the women who first witnessed Jesus' resurrection.

As for me, many years ago, I made up my mind to believe in their accounts, because I do believe in their *integrity*. Furthermore, I believe in what the Bible says, because its truth has been attested withstanding centuries of fiery trials often sealed with the blood of martyrs. Most of all, I believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and mine, because I do believe in His integrity, who is the resurrection, the life, the way and the truth. Jesus never tells us a lie.

If you are one of the seekers out there, I have good news for you: God is very kind and understanding of your doubts. Here, in today's text, we see the slowness of heart among Jesus' disciples to whom Jesus demonstrated His patience.

Please reason with me here. If the three women had truly believed in Jesus' body resurrection, why did they go to the tomb *with the spices*? The spices were used for the dead body, not for the living one; therefore, they would not have needed them for the resurrected body, would they? In other words, at first, they believed that Jesus was dead. They forgot the words of Jesus about His resurrection. But to such forgetful souls, Jesus graciously showed His resurrected body (Matthew 28:9)—the clear evidence of God's grace and patience in dealing with the stubborn and slow hearts to believe the unbelievable.

Later, Jesus demonstrated the same grace and patience to His unbelieving disciples, including the famous Doubting Thomas. Each time they were in doubt, instead of rebuking them for their lack of faith, Jesus showed them one by one His resurrected body.

I am speaking to some of you who are still skeptical about Jesus' body resurrection, let alone of your own. I am sure all of you demand the tangible scientific proof of the resurrection. Some of you would even call the resurrection either a myth or wishful thinking. Whatever your reasons for unbelief, I pray that the same Jesus would extend the same patience and grace to you. May the Lord either grant you the proof you're looking for or increase your faith to believe.

One warning, though. If Jesus ever grants anyone the proof of resurrection, He does so only to those who *genuinely* seek Him. He would never grant the proof to those who are not sincere in their search for truth. Because He never plays by their rules.

If you are one of those sincere seekers, the Lord will speak to your heart this morning so that you may come to know Jesus, believe in the resurrection, and eventually claim your own resurrection through faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

The angels (two men) said to the women, “**Why are you seeking the living One among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but He has risen**” (v. 5,6). Christ was the first fruit of the resurrection and all of us will follow someday. Christ is risen. Do not seek Him among the dead. He is risen indeed! So will we. The same risen Christ will grant us our own resurrection in Christ.

Amen.