



Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 23:50-24:12
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Is Hearing Believing?

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

In the next three Sundays we'll be finishing up our study in the Gospel of Luke. Last week we left off on a dark note with Jesus dying on the cross. This week we come to account of his burial at the end of chapter 23 and the first account of his resurrection in the beginning of chapter 24. So the end of Luke is not just something tacked on to provide a nice ending to a long book; this is the climax of the story. Without these verses the whole story falls flat on its face. The fact is, the resurrection of Jesus is the lynchpin which holds together our faith. Without it, the whole thing comes apart.

Think about it. Without the resurrection, Jesus was a deluded liar. Over and over in this gospel we've seen how he predicted not only his own death, but his resurrection after three days. Without the resurrection, his word isn't trustworthy and he couldn't have been who he said he was. It was the resurrection which proved that he's God's Son.

Not only that, without the resurrection, the cross means nothing. It was nothing more than a loving, sacrificial last act by a courageous man. A lot of people have gone out that way. But Christ-followers have always believed that his death was a payment; a ransom. His death frees us from sin. His death paid for our sins. And it was through the resurrection that God the Father affirms his acceptance of that payment. That's why Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:17, **"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins."**

But that's not all. Without the resurrection, we're totally on our own today. He's nothing more than a fond memory; a good example to follow from bygone days. But he's alive today. He said he would be both with us and in us. The new life that we claim to have would be impossible without the resurrection.

Finally, without the resurrection, we would have no hope beyond death. Yesterday I was part of a wedding ceremony for Vitaliy Prokopets and his new wife, Candace. It was a year ago this month that his parents and younger brother were killed in a car accident. It was also a year ago this month that one of our high schoolers, Nick Barron, was killed. We grieve those losses, but we don't grieve as those without hope. We believe they're alive today. They don't live here anymore, but they do live somewhere else. And when we die, we can have that same hope. Why? Because of the resurrection.

It's strange that some people have a hard time believing that it really happened. It's not that people

don't believe in stuff like that today. Studies show that 30% of Americans believe in reincarnation; 39% believe in ghosts; 53% believe that aliens have visited earth in the past 100 years; and 10% believe that Elvis Presley is still alive. This, despite the fact that Elvis was pronounced dead by several doctors, he was autopsied and the cause of death determined, two morticians prepared his body, his wardrobe manager dressed him, his cosmetologist made up his face, and his family watched as they closed the copper casket over his lifeless body. But 10% of Americans believe he's still alive.

Sometimes we think that early disciples were as gullible as that. They had heard Jesus say he would be raised up. As they watched him take his last painful breath on the cross, they desperately wanted it to be true. In a state of mind like that, couldn't they have imagined seeing him? Like some grieving widow who says she "sees" and "talks" to her husband all the time, couldn't they have just wished for it so much that they imagined it to have happened?

Well, if you look at the record of Luke's gospel, you'll see anything but a group of people predisposed to believe. In fact, most of them thought it was nonsense.

I. Joseph honored Jesus by burying him (23:50-56).

First of all, you have the account of his burial. Look at vv.50-56.

"And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment."

This was a noble act by a good man. He was also an important man and a wealthy man. He had a new family tomb excavated near the Holy City of Jerusalem. He was a member of the Jewish ruling council, called the

Sanhedrin. It's likely that he was out of town when that council voted to have Jesus crucified, because we know from Mark 14:64 that the vote was unanimous. Up until this time he was a secret follower of Jesus, but here he comes out of the closet and asks Pilate for the body of Jesus. That had to be a risky thing to do, but he didn't want Jesus' body thrown into a criminal's mass grave. He wanted to give Jesus an honorable burial. There was no time to waste because the Sabbath would begin at 6:00 pm and preparations had to be made. It's funny, Joseph didn't know it but he was fulfilling Scripture. Isaiah wrote of the coming Messiah, "**His grave was assigned with wicked men, but he was with a rich man in his death**" (Is. 53:9).

By the way, don't ever underestimate God's ability to work in and through the lives of people you think are untouchable. I mean, if you're a follower of Jesus in that day, you HATE the Sanhedrin. They put your Lord to death! How easy it would have been for someone like Peter to judge this man. If Joseph was a follower of Jesus, why didn't he influence their vote? Why didn't he speak up? How could he remain a part of a group like that? How could he continue to flaunt his wealth? Why didn't he leave it all and become a disciple like they did? Do you ever think like that? Is there a political party you just can't imagine a follower of Jesus being a part of? Is there a company you can't imagine them working for? Is there a social group you can't imagine them hanging out with? Don't limit God's ability to work outside the box! Joseph of Arimathea could have been judged a coward or a hypocrite but Scripture portrays him in the best of terms.

And the best thing he could do for Jesus was give him a proper burial. He wasn't preparing him for a resurrection. He was preparing him for the tomb. The women who had followed him from Galilee were no different. Luke says they watched as Joseph tenderly placed the body in the tomb. They, too, wanted to help prepare the body, but the haste of the burial didn't allow for a proper anointing. So when the sun rose on Sunday morning after the Sabbath, they would be ready with the proper spices and perfumes. But make no mistake; like Joseph, they had no hope. They weren't looking for a resurrection. They just wanted to honor his body. Jesus was dead, and they expected him to stay dead.

The burial of Jesus is important because it confirms this very fact. Jesus died a real death. He didn't pass out on the cross only to be later revived. He died and nothing short of resurrection would reverse that. That's why Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:3-4, "**For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins**

according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..." Notice those words, "*and that he was buried.*" That's important because it confirms he really did die.

II. The women return to the tomb to prepare the body (24:1-12).

The women continued to operate on that assumption when the Sabbath was over on Sunday morning. Look what Luke says in chapter 24. "**But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus**" (vv. 1-3).

A. They are perplexed: As you think about this scene, don't let what you know they would soon discover dull you to the reality of what they felt. They were depressed, exhausted and grieving. They had no hope. When you take flowers to a cemetery, you don't expect to see a dug up empty grave! But that's what they found. They found the large stone over the entrance of the tomb rolled away, and when they peeked inside, the body was gone.

Now their grief turns into perplexity. No doubt they thought someone had stolen the body of Jesus. As a matter of fact, in John's gospel that's what Mary Magdalene says, "**...they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him**" (Jn.20:13). Mixed with their perplexity, there had to be some frustration and anger.

B. They are rebuked: But then they encounter something they never could have imagined. "**While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living One among the dead?'**" (vv. 4-5). They're suddenly confronted by two men who basically glowed in the dark. They didn't know it, but these were angels. They did know enough to be overcome with fear and to bow down as a sign of respect. And then one of the angels spoke, and his words are essentially a rebuke. "**Why do you seek the living One among the dead?**" It's a good question. If you're looking for Elvis, go to his mausoleum in Memphis where he's among the dead, but if you're looking for Jesus, you won't find him in a place like that. It's a good question. "*Why do you seek the living One among the dead?*" There are those who call themselves Christians who still deny his resurrection. They tout his courage and his love and his morality, but they don't really know him because he's the living One and he won't be found among the dead.

C. They are instructed: The rebuke sets the stage for the great proclamation of Easter, "**He is not here, but he has risen**" (v.6a). And then he reminds them of something. "**Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be**

delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (vv. 6b-7). The angel challenged them to recall the prophecies Jesus had made back in Galilee. Back in ch. 9 Jesus said to them, **"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day"** (Lk.9:22). After being reminded of Jesus' words, it's like the lights began to turn on for them. In v.8 it says that **"they remembered his words."** I'm not sure they really believed it yet, but this was an important step. They couldn't believe if they didn't remember his word.

There is something very important here for us to see. Believing in the resurrection of Jesus comes from remembering and understanding his word. And we'll see this through this final chapter of Luke. In Luke 24 there are three episodes. First, there is the women's encounter with the angels at the empty tomb. Second, there is Jesus' appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. And third, there is the Lord's appearance to his disciples in Jerusalem. The important thing to see is that in each of these encounters the disciples are pointed back to the word of God. In each case they are somehow told to remember God's word. That's the key. The key was not to look for proof; the key was to go back to the word of God. Here, the women are directed back to the words of Jesus himself, **"Remember how he spoke to you while in Galilee..."**

Look at vv.25-27. On the road to Emmaus, he said to the two disciples, **"O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures"** (vv.25-27).

And then later in vv.44-45 to all of his disciples he said, **"These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."** Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures..." (vv. 44-45).

Do you see the point? Jesus keeps turning them back to the word. His own words as well as the words of the prophets. That's the only way the death and resurrection of Jesus can really be grasped—through his word. D.L Moody once said, "I prayed for Faith, and thought that some day Faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But Faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, 'Now Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.' I had closed my Bible, and prayed for Faith. I now opened my Bible, and began to study, and Faith has been growing ever since."

Even if we already believe we need to hear the word. I was thinking about this as it relates to communion. Why do we keep doing this over and over again? I mean, in some ways it's pretty redundant. We keep hearing the same word month after month. Jesus died for us. His death paid

for our sins. In him, we're forgiven. In him, we're redeemed. "This is my body broken for you..." But we need to be reminded of the same things. It's like this week we went out to dinner at one of my favorite restaurants. I ordered the same thing I always order there—the ribs. I've had them a million times and they always taste the same. You might think, why doesn't he order something new? But I love the ribs. And I love the fact that they taste the same each time. That's why I order them! It's the same way with the word. It's the same day after day, week after week. We read it. We hear it preached. We recite it in our songs. We say the same words over the cup. And that's how our faith is nourished—by the word.

D. They witness: These women have now remembered his word, and so they are able to go back and bear witness to what they have heard and seen. Look at vv.9–11. **"...and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now they were)Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them."** It's impossible to know how much they really understood at this point, but they did bear witness of what they had seen and heard. Yet the disciples aren't impressed. They think it nonsense. Once again, it's very clear that the disciples were not expecting the resurrection. Why is that? They hadn't really read the OT. And they didn't remember his word. They had heard it, but they didn't get it and they didn't remember it. But in the next two encounters Jesus will remind them of it, like he had the women.

One of the guys who was there of course was Peter. Peter hadn't had a very good week. It started out with him telling Jesus he would die for him. But then while Jesus was on trial he denied him three times. And then he had watched from a safe distance as Jesus hung on the cross. After all of that, I imagine he hadn't even gotten out of bed. But when he hears the report of the women, look what happens. **"But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened"** (v.12). It's a good thing that Peter ran to check it out. It was a noble thing to do. As a matter of fact, I would say to you, check it out. It shows there is at least a glimmer of life left in Peter. But even after he saw the empty tomb and the linen wrappings lying there like a body had just passed right through them, he still didn't believe. He marveled. That's not a bad thing. That's a start. He may be on his way to real faith. But he's not there yet. That will only come when the word takes root in his heart.

III. If you are hard of hearing, it will be hard to

believe.

In this story we've seen a myriad of reactions to Jesus and the idea that he was raised. These reactions mirror our own reactions.

Some of us are like Joseph. We want to show our loyalty to him. We want to honor his memory. We want to remember him as a good teacher, a sterling example, a peacemaker. We want to live out those qualities in our own lives. But the idea that he's really alive today, well, it never really even crossed our minds.

Some of us are like the women. We're perplexed. We see some evidence for the truth about who Jesus is, but we're not sure what to make of it. We're not sure what to do with it. Or, like Peter, perhaps we marvel at it. We're impressed by it, but we still don't really get it.

Some of us are like the disciples. If we're honest, we think it all nonsense. How could the death of one man pay for all the wicked things ever done? How could someone be raised from the dead? You've never seen it. It's impossible. It's nonsense.

It doesn't matter where you see yourself in this mix. In each case, the problem is that you're hard of hearing, and if you're hard of hearing, you're going to find it hard to really believe. So you need to go back and hear God's word once again, and you need to keep hearing it until it makes sense. We don't get to see the empty tomb like the women did. We don't get to see the grave clothes like Peter did. We don't get to see the risen Christ like the two on the road to Emmaus. But we have God's word, and God's word is reliable. Critics may try to pick it apart, but no one has really succeeded. And not only is it reliable, it's powerful. As we read it and hear it taught and preached, we find that it rings true, and we find ourselves being exposed, and we know that it's more than just another book.

CONCLUSION

I'm so glad Jesus was really raised. Because of it I know he is the Son of God. I know that his death paid for my sins. I know he's alive today and he lives in me. And I know that my life will not end in the grave. One of the things that helps me be confident in all of that is that it's very clear from this story that the early followers of Jesus didn't invent the resurrection. They weren't expecting it at all. They resisted it. They thought it to be nonsense. Their faith didn't create the resurrection, rather the resurrection created their faith! Some say the early church invented this crazy idea that Jesus was raised. But the fact is, the resurrection invented the church. They saw the empty tomb. They saw the grave clothes. They saw the Lord. But, most of all, they remembered and came to believe his word. How about you?