

Luke 24:1-12
Easter Sunday
April 17, 2022

Did you ever think about what the believers did or talked about on Good Friday evening and the next day? We know the women bought and prepared spices and ointments to use on Jesus' body. Saturday was the Sabbath, so I assume they went to the temple to worship. It must have been difficult to do since the leaders, maybe even the very ones presiding that day, were the ones who had worked to obtain the conviction of Jesus. Had the temple curtain that split in two at the moment of his death been repaired or replaced? The message likely related to the promised Messiah, since he was the heart of the Old Testament Scriptures. The followers of Jesus believed he was the Messiah, but now he was dead. Surely their conversations were sad and gloomy.

We know what the women were discussing early Sunday morning. Mark tells us. "Who will roll the stone away from the tomb?" How could they gain entrance to complete their task, they wondered as they directed their thoughts to a dead Jesus. Things changed as the morning progressed. There was puzzlement, which yielded to excitement. We would expect that change. Easter makes a big difference.

What's even more important is our reaction to the Easter miracle. As we view events at the tomb we urge

BELIEVE THE RESURRECTION

- I. See the empty tomb
- II. Hear the words of promise fulfilled
- III. Overcome gloom and doubt

Evidence of the resurrection comes as we see the empty tomb with the women. They headed there as early as possible. There had not been time for full preparation of the body of Jesus for burial on Good Friday, for the Jewish Sabbath began at six that evening. Work was not permitted on the day of rest. Without embalming, decomposition started soon, so they wanted to get there while they could still handle the body. They brought spices and aromatic substances to place between the layers of the wrappings on his body. They had carefully watched Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus when they placed him in the tomb and were ready to complete this final act of love and honor. No doubt they came with heavy hearts, wistful for what might have been, but their hopes were dashed.

When they arrived, "They found the stone rolled away from the tomb." The large stone had been placed in a groove in front of the grave and blocked the entrance. Now it was away from the opening and lying flat. An earthquake had occurred and an angel had come and removed the stone. The guards had fled when it all happened. So an obstacle was overcome but questions likely increased.

Seeing the grave open, the women investigated. "But when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus." The tomb was empty. The linens which had wrapped his body were neat and undisturbed. There just wasn't anything inside of them. The scene was puzzling and their questions grew. Several possibilities existed. Someone had moved their Lord, except why would they have left the wrappings? Robbers could have been there, or enemies who wanted to inflict further disgrace on the one they had hated. But why would the scene be so neat? There are families of deceased criminals as well as of famous people who don't want anyone to know where their loved one is buried so that the place doesn't become overrun with curious crowds, but wouldn't these women who were close to Jesus and his disciples have known about such plans?

Of course, we know what had happened. There are some who deny that it matters much whether the body of Jesus is still in a grave in Palestine or not, that it's just what you believe about it. They couldn't be more wrong. Easter does matter. Our faith is based on facts, not wishes. See the empty tomb and know why it is empty. Believe the resurrection.

II.

God didn't leave the wondering women in suspense for long. Hear the words of promise fulfilled, first from the angels. "While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them." That way of appearing revealed their identity and produced a reaction. "In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground." Such a reaction is common for sinners in the presence of holy beings.

The purpose of the angels was not to add to their distress or to cause alarm. The pair spoke to calm the ladies and pointed to the good news. Their question affirmed the resurrection of Jesus. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" A grave was not the place to find Jesus. That must mean he was alive. Then they said it plainly, "He is not here; he has risen!" They could have known, as the angels reminded them, "Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" While the accounts don't provide

an exact calendar of the events in the life of Jesus, that was likely a few months earlier. He had told them and now it had happened, just as he said.

There was more. The Old Testament had foretold the suffering, death and resurrection of God's promised Savior as well. In the Good Friday service we heard several of the prophecies concerning his death, especially from Isaiah 53. That chapter also has statements like, "After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many." There was the confident declaration of Job, inspiration for the hymn we are singing, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Or think of David's assertion as the Savior spoke through him in Psalm 16, "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." Such passages would now click as the angels reminded the women of what Jesus had told them and as they now viewed the empty tomb.

We who live after the fact have even more scriptural proof. The Bible tells us, "Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead." His person is clear. So is our future, for he said, "Because I live, you also will live." As he assured the grieving sister of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Or as we heard Paul exclaim near the end of the great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Our eternity with him is assured and our life now is blessed as we have a living Savior. Believe the resurrection.

III.

Doing so will overcome gloom and doubt. It was natural that upon returning from the tomb that the women would want to share the good news with the disciples. And so they did. The account indicates there was repeated telling. Imagine the excitement in their voices. Add in the fact that they had met Jesus personally on their way back to the city, as Matthew reports. Such joy! Almost too good to be true.

And that's exactly what the disciples thought. "They did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense." The emotions that surely burst forth and the message that was contrary to reason were too much to process. Things like that do not happen in our experience. It can't really be true. The men viewed the women as carried away with their grief and imagining things in their dashed hopes.

It did pique the interest of Peter, who went running out to the tomb to see for himself. "Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves." There was the evidence the women had told about. But what did it all mean? "He went away, wondering to himself what had happened." Yes, Jesus had raised individuals to life and Peter had witnessed those events, but that was different. It was someone living that called them forth from death. How could someone who was dead himself come back to life? Easter joy had not yet surfaced for Peter.

We have pastoral conference in a week to come. I recall a few men discussing one previous year how they felt this year C of our cycle of readings is a letdown. "Easter Sunday and we don't see Jesus." That puts us in a position similar to the people in this text. But we do see him with the eyes of faith. No, you and I haven't met and viewed our living Savior in person. We have the evidence, however. The tomb is empty. The angels tell us. Scripture declares it, both in prophecy and in fulfillment. The women testify. Be convinced. It is true. Remove the gloom. Be filled with joy. Share the joy.

There is a lot in our world that can bring gloom and doubt and resistance to believing the resurrection. Others question, and our hearts may join them. Bad things happen. Horrible events occur. People in places like Ukraine suffer terrible destruction without good reason. Aftereffects of the pandemic leave people lonely and fearful. Crime runs rampant. Inflation shrinks our ability to maintain a comfortable existence. Is there really a living God in charge of this world? If so, does he care? Such doubts creep into our minds, egged on by Satan.

Easter reminds us that Jesus rose, just as he said. Our sins are forgiven. Our future is secure. Everything occurs for a purpose and a good one, even if it is painful at times. God is interested in having us give up self-reliance and look to him for rescue from sin and its consequences. He has made it happen. The tomb is empty. Jesus lives, just as he said. Our record of sins is wiped clean. Believe the resurrection.

That faith changes everything. It colors our view of each day. We are not alone. Our Savior is alive and well and so are we. Follow him in confident faith. Celebrate with joy. Tell the world. Live to honor and praise your living and loving Lord. A blessed Easter to all!