

“HE HAS RISEN”

Luke 23:50–24:12

Key Verse: 24:5b–6a

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

What are you really seeking? Some might say meaning in life. Others would say good relationships. Still others might say success, or health, or security. Some would say, “I just want to be happy.” These all seem nice. But frankly, when the reality of death comes knocking, all these pursuits begin to look rather vain. In today’s passage we see how Jesus’ followers respond to his death. They are still so devoted to him. But they are perplexed, frightened, and in shock and disbelief. At the tomb God sends angels to tell the women the good news that Jesus has risen. But some think the resurrection of Jesus has nothing to do with life today. In the angels’ words we learn that the resurrection of Jesus is so relevant, it actually affects us to our core, even what we’re *seeking*. Like these faithful women, we can be seeking something living among the dead. Or we can be seeking the Living One, even as we live in this perishing world. So, how can we believe in Jesus’ resurrection? What does it matter? And how does believing this change what we seek? May God speak to us through his word.

I. Jesus is buried (23:50–56)

Luke has just described Jesus’ death. Jesus’ suffering and death on a cross was not just a sorrowful story; it was God’s just punishment for all human sin and rebellion, so that God could forgive us of all our unforgivable sins. Also, in his suffering and death on a cross our Lord Jesus showed us how to live as Christians: how to forgive, how not to save ourselves so that we can save others, and how to finish our lives on earth by faith, committing our spirits to God. To follow in the steps of Jesus our Lord may look like too much suffering and self-sacrifice, but it’s such a glorious life. Now, right after his death, Luke describes several people who do some beautiful things for him. Their presence in these moments not only proves that Jesus really did die; they also show us how to live as servants of Christ in even the darkest of times.

Look at 23:50. Luke introduces us to Joseph of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, meaning the Sanhedrin. It was the council that had decided to put Jesus to death. This council took the entire nation in the wrong direction. But unlike his peers, Joseph was a good and upright man. In Greek, “upright” is the same as the word “righteous.” Here, at the end of this Gospel, Luke describes Joseph of Arimathea in the same way he described Zechariah and Elizabeth at the beginning—“upright,” or “righteous” (1:6). And Luke has some specific idea of what this means. Look at verse 51. Joseph of Arimathea did not consent to the decision and action of the council. He refused to give in to their pressure. Why? Because Joseph could see how evil what they were doing was. Luke adds, “...and he was looking for the kingdom of God.” In Greek, “looking for” is the same as “waiting for.” Just as Simeon and Anna in the temple were waiting for “the consolation of Israel” and “the redemption of Jerusalem,” so Joseph of Arimathea was “waiting for” the kingdom of God. He was really seeking it. Joseph of Arimathea is one of the remnant people who refused to follow the corruption of the times, who put his hope firmly in the promises of God.

Yet he’s not hiding from the world; he expresses his faith in action. Look at verse 52. “This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.” It was a bold and daring move. Though everyone had decided against Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea took a clear stand on the side of Jesus. He asks this partly because, as a good and upright man, he wants to follow God’s law not to leave a dead body hanging after sundown (Deut.21:22–23). But mainly it’s because he wants to honor Jesus. Jesus had been vehemently accused, viciously shamed and disgraced, but Joseph wants to honor him as his King, the true King of the Jews.¹ He doesn’t care what anybody thinks of him personally. This request for the body of Jesus would surely break any relationships Joseph may have had with the other council members. But he does it with faith and hope in the kingdom of God. Look at verse 53. “Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid.” On the cross, Jesus’ body was stripped, covered with blood, and sweat, and wounds. But Joseph is willing to do this messy, unpleasant task. He treats the dead body of Jesus with such dignity and respect. Without Joseph’s help, the Romans would have thrown the body into a mass grave nearby, where it would be further dishonored and ravaged by raptors, and impossible to identify. But Joseph lays the body of Jesus in a tomb fit for a king, unused by anyone else. Matthew tells

¹ 1:33; 19:14–15,38; 22:29–30; 23:2–3,38,42.

us that it was Joseph's own tomb (Matt.27:60). Joseph gives his very best to Jesus our King. May God raise a new generation of men of God like Joseph.

Look at verse 55. "The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid." These women are like Joseph, in that they had been providing for Jesus and his disciples "out of their own means" (8:3, NIV). They stayed at his cross after everyone else left, standing at a distance and watching until Jesus died (49). These women are not wildly emotional; they are sober and astutely watching. Now, they follow Joseph of Arimathea to this tomb and watch him lay the body of Jesus in it. This is a crucial detail. These women serve as multiple eyewitnesses to identify that it truly was Jesus who died on that cross. It was the Jesus they'd so closely known, loved and served for several years. It was *this* Jesus who'd been crucified, *this* Jesus who'd been laid in *this* tomb. There was no mistake about it. Look at verse 56a. "Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments." This was how the Jews prepared bodies for burial. On this day of Preparation, when the Sabbath is beginning (54), these women are preparing for the eternal Sabbath rest Jesus would enjoy. We can only imagine all that's going on in their minds and hearts on this day, but they are doing what they can for him. God still uses such faithful people who do what they can for Jesus, despite their tiredness, broken hearts and discouragement. May God raise a new generation of young women devoted to Jesus like these women. Look at verse 56b. Just as the law of the Lord was carefully followed when Jesus was born (2:22,24,27,39), so now, at his death, the law of the Lord is also carefully followed. In mentioning this, Luke is showing his Gentile audience that Jesus did not come to abolish God's law but to fulfill it.²

II. The resurrection (24:1–12)

Look at 24:1. It's the first day of the week, Sunday, early dawn. These women are bringing the spices they've prepared. They want to serve Jesus as soon as possible. Probably they haven't slept all night. But when they get to his tomb, they're shocked. Look at verse 2. The stone that sealed the entrance has been rolled away, and when they go in they do not find the body of the Lord Jesus. It says they're "perplexed" (4a). They don't know which way to turn, what to do. At this moment, it says, "...behold, two men stood by them in dazzling

² Matt.5:17; Luke 1:1,38,45; 4:21; 9:31; 18:31; 21:22,24; 22:16,37; 24:44; Acts 1:16; 3:18; 7:17; 13:27,33; 26:7.

apparel” (4b). Later we’re told they’re angels of God (23). In their presence the women are frightened and bow their faces to the ground (5a), realizing they’re in the holy presence of God. The angels say, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen” (5b–6a). It’s good news—the stone rolled away, the empty tomb, and now, even a message from angels: Jesus has risen! Still it’s not easy for these women to believe. They stood near his cross witnessing all the horrible things done and said to him, right until he died. They’ve been brokenhearted and grieving for him ever since. They’ve been preparing spices and ointments to wrap his body properly. What they find at his tomb is not at all what they expect. So the angels continue: “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise” (6b–7; cf. 9:22).

Luke is sharing here the basis for resurrection faith. It’s not a blind leap of faith. The basis for resurrection faith is the evidence at this tomb, the angels’ words, and, most of all, the words of Jesus himself. He once said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (21:33). We can’t always trust what people say, but we can be 100% sure of the words of Jesus. Jesus had said that on the third day he must rise, and that’s exactly what happened. It’s always best to base our faith not on our feelings, ideas, opinions, or even on dreams, but on the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All four Gospels tell us of the empty tomb on Sunday morning. But only Luke adds the angels’ words: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” It’s suggesting that when we come to know Jesus, who has risen, what we *seek* changes. We no longer *seek* the living among the dead. Here, “the living” refers to the Risen Jesus, and “the dead” refers to all the things and people of this fallen world. The Risen Jesus appeared to the Apostle John at the end of his life and said, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev.1:17b–18). Our Risen Lord Jesus is the Living One. He is alive forevermore. In him we have no fear, because he controls life and death and all the power of hell. As we encounter him, the Living One, we no longer seek the dead things of this world.

How does this happen? The Apostle Peter wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you..." (1 Pet. 1:3–4). It's our living Lord Jesus Christ who gives us a living hope in heaven. This wonderful change happens when we repent of our sins, believe in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. It's so simple! The Holy Spirit changes our inner person, including even what we *seek*, what we *hope* for. As we get to know Jesus, the Living One, through the Holy Spirit, the living hope of his kingdom grows brighter and brighter in us. In light of this living hope, the things of the world start looking perishable, defiled and fading, like rotting vegetables, not at all worthy to be seeking.

Still, in our earthly nature we all can get drawn back to seeking the dead hopes of this world. They might be our possessions, or human relationships, achievements, career, or even ministry. They're trying to rule our hearts. So we need a constant reminder of who is "the living" and what is "the dead." The Apostle Paul explained, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3–4). When we're close to him, united with him, our Risen Lord Jesus Christ empowers us to walk in newness of life. What is *that*? There are so many aspects to it. But elsewhere Paul writes, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:1–2). Let's read these verses together. Walking in newness of life in the Risen Christ means having a new mindset, a new heart. It means seeking new things, things "that are above." It means setting our minds on these things, not on things that are on earth. What are these things? Paul adds, "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:3–4). What an amazing living hope! The world, our sin, and the devil constantly try to steal our minds and hearts away from the Living One and the living hope he gives. We need encouragement from each other, from the Scriptures, and from God himself, to seek the things that are above, the things of the Risen Christ, the Living One. Let's read verses 5b–6a: "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

After the angels' message, what do the women do? Read verses 8–10. They immediately act in faith based on the word they received. The historical fact

is, God gave the good news that Christ is risen first to the women. It really is God's grace. These women have been the backbone of his ministry beginning in Galilee (8:1–3). But when they tell these things to the eleven and all the rest, the response is not good. Look at verse 11. Luke has just called these men "the apostles." But they do not yet believe the good news. They still need God's help. And in verse 12, we see Peter, the one who denied Jesus three times, suddenly take action based on what the women said. God is helping him. Peter runs to the tomb and sees that the stone is rolled away, and that the tomb is empty, but he also notices the linen cloths by themselves. It looks as if the Risen Jesus just took them off as he left. It's further evidence to believe. Peter does not yet understand, but it says he went home "marveling at what had happened." Peter is on the way to being restored as the spiritual leader for all the others.

Today on Easter Sunday we celebrate the good news: Jesus is not here, but has risen! May God help each of us personally accept the angels' words, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" May God wake up from our dead hopes, and help us set our minds and hearts on things above, where our Lord Jesus, the Living One, is reigning, waiting to give us his kingdom.