



Adult Sunday School Lesson for April 12, 2009
Released on April 8, 2009

"Resurrected to New Life" (Easter)

Lesson Text: Luke 24:1-12

Background Scripture: 24:1-12

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12-16

Luke 24:1-12

1 Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.

3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,

7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

8 And they remembered his words,

9 And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.

10 It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.

11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

12 Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- 1.** Retell Luke's account of the women's experience on resurrection morning.
- 2.** Compare and contrast the various levels of belief of those first told of the resurrection with the varying levels of faith expressed.
- 3.** Plan to discuss with an unbeliever the facts of Jesus' resurrection.

Introduction

It is funny how the human mind remembers. Friends and family will sometimes tell us stories of events we participated in firsthand only a few years back, but we may have absolutely no recollection of them. Then we may hear an old song on the

radio that we haven't heard in years and, instantly, every word of the lyrics comes back to mind. I imagine some of this has to do with the level at which the original context affected us.

Forgetfulness takes several forms. Some forgetfulness is harmless and some is harmful. Some is accidental and some is intentional. Does it surprise us that Jesus' followers all seemed to have forgotten that He foretold His suffering, death, and resurrection? How could they forget something so crucial? And what do we learn from the different ways they responded to the news of this life-changing event when reminded?

Lesson Background

In Luke 9:20, Peter was the first disciple to confess Jesus as Messiah (or Christ). Jesus responded by warning that He was to suffer, die, and rise on the third day. Shortly thereafter, following a crowd-dazzling healing display, Jesus impressed upon His followers that He would be betrayed. But they didn't grasp what He was saying (9:44, 45). Jesus later alluded to being killed in Jerusalem (13:33). He also told the disciples that He had to suffer and face rejection (17:25).

As the time of His death drew closer, Jesus repeated these predictions. He was to be handed over, mocked, beaten, and killed, but would rise on the third day (18:31-33). Still His disciples did not grasp what He was saying.

Jesus gave His disciples several opportunities to expect His death and recognize it for what it was: a temporary stop on the path to resurrection. But they did not comprehend. Indeed, they could not because it had been concealed from them (Luke 9:45; 18:34). In God's infinite wisdom, He planted a seed within them that was to bear fruit only after Christ's resurrection. Our text today records how Jesus' closest followers first responded to the news of that resurrection.

The events that transpired before it are familiar to long-time Christians. Jesus was betrayed by Judas and handed over to Jewish authorities. They subsequently handed Him over to Roman authorities. Pilate gave in to the crowd's wish that the innocent man Jesus be crucified. Since it was the day before the Sabbath, Jesus' body was removed quickly from the cross and placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Then on the third day the unbelievable happened.

Empty Tomb (Luke 24:1-3)

1. Why did the women desire to anoint Jesus' body on the day after the Sabbath? (v. 1)

The first day of the week is of course Sunday. Jesus was crucified and died two days previously, on Friday. Since Saturday was the Sabbath, it would not have been appropriate to anoint Christ's body with *spices* on that day. Pious Jews are careful to avoid all forms of work on the Sabbath (Luke 23:56). Coming into contact with a dead body, especially on a "high" Sabbath (John 19:31), creates problems of ceremonial uncleanness (Numbers 19:11).

So Friday evening the body had been taken off the cross and hastily placed in a tomb to await final burial preparations (Luke 23:50-53). Luke 23:54-56 tells us that the women who followed Jesus from Galilee (referred to as *they*) take it upon themselves to prepare the spices the day of Christ's death and then wait until the first day of the week, after the Sabbath, to administer them.

The time of day (*very early in the morning*) shows us how eager the women are to complete this task. Psalm 30:5 says "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." God is about to dry the tears of all Jesus' followers and change the course of world history.

2. What caught the women's attention as they approached the tomb? (vs. 2-3)

Once the Sabbath passed, the women went to the tomb to anoint the Savior's human body. When they arrived at the temple, the women saw that the stone was rolled away from the tomb's entrance. Mark 16:3 tells us that the women wonder who will roll *the stone* away so they can gain entrance to *the sepulchre*. When they see that the stone is already moved, they may be both relieved and startled. Who has done this, and why? Perhaps the women think that Joseph of Arimathea has courteously spared them the burden of trying to roll back the heavy stone. After all, the grave site does belong to him, and he has taken a keen interest in providing for Jesus' burial (Luke 23:50-53).

If the women are not disturbed by the moved stone, the fact that the *body* is missing certainly alarms them (24:3)! What thoughts flash through their minds? Have they come to the wrong tomb? Not a chance! These same women personally had followed Joseph to the grave and witnessed the location of Jesus' lifeless body (Luke 23:55).

Have Jesus' enemies stolen His body in order to subject it to further disgrace? One can only imagine the rush of mixed thoughts that come over the women. But they do not wonder for long.

Heavenly Messengers (Luke 24:4-8)

3. How did the women react to the presence of two angels? (vs. 4-5)

God quickly supplies an answer through *two men* who are clad *in shining garments*. They are later identified as angels (Luke 24:23). The women respond to the awe-inspiring presence of angels as any of us would if approached by heavenly messengers: the women are terrified, *bowing their faces* to the ground in respect. The angels respond just as in Acts 1:11: they greet Jesus' followers with a question. In Acts, angels ask why His followers are staring up into Heaven; here, angels ask why these women are looking for their *living Savior among the dead*.

4. The prospect that Jesus could be alive is certainly inviting. But what do the messengers mean by their question in verse 5? (vs. 6-7)

Those words can be interpreted in more than one way. So the messengers quickly clarify. They remind the women of Christ's prediction of both His death and resurrection (Luke 9:22; 18:31-33).

Jesus had known all along what would take place, and He had told His followers as much. Yet His followers do not *remember*. It is as if God wanted Jesus' followers to hear the predictions for the purpose of later recollection as a testimony of God's control over these events.

It is also important to note the language the angels use to describe what happened to Jesus. *He ... is risen* is the language of resurrection. The kind of resurrection at issue is not just any kind of postmortem existence. It certainly does not mean that Jesus' spirit mystically departed His body to take on a new bodiless form (Luke 24:39). It does not mean merely that the disciples will feel Jesus to be alive in their hearts. Rather, it means that God has raised Jesus bodily.

5. What was a time when you didn't find Christ as you expected to find Him? How do you remain open to admitting and adjusting your wrong expectations?

Many deserted Jesus during His earthly ministry because He was not the kind of Messiah they expected (John 6:66). The women expected to find the body of Jesus, and when they did not, they were confused. The apostles did not expect to find Jesus

alive after the crucifixion, so they prepared for a life without Him. Today people create their own expectations about Jesus that don't match up with the Bible.

We may be guilty of trying to force Jesus into our ideas of what He should be doing in our lives or in the world. When He does not fit those expectations, too often He is forsaken. Yet His ways are not our ways. We naturally expect to find Him in our church gatherings, but surprisingly we also may find Him in our workplace as we have opportunities to live out our faith in everyday life.

6. What factors caused the women to now remember Jesus' prophecies? (v. 8)

With the angel's words of clarification, it all begins to make sense. What the disciples had never caught on to during Jesus' ministry, the women finally begin to grasp. Jesus' suffering and death have been intentional, as is His resurrection. These are deliberate parts of God's plan.

This passage teaches us an important lesson about instruction and memory. Words don't always hit home when first heard. They may be recalled and recognized as being true only after being fulfilled. Parents know this all too well! Although they are not divinely inspired prophets, parents know from experience how a certain course of action their child is about to take is bound to turn out. The parent warns the child, but the warning "goes in one ear and out the other." The child goes ahead, suffers, and then hears the parent say, "I told you that would happen. You should have listened."

But one cannot recall what one has not heard. So it is important that Christians continually proclaim the good news of Christ to the lost. They may not immediately respond favorably to our message, but as life deals its ups and downs they may be able to discern God's hand at work, if they have been told already of a God who loves them enough to work in their lives. For similar reasons, parents continue to raise even their most rebellious children in the Lord. They hope with tears that later in life their own prodigals will someday recognize and submit to the gospel truths that they heard long before.

Relayed Message (Luke 24:9-12)

7. What did the angels command the women to do? (v. 9)

The angels told the women to tell the disciples and the rest of the followers about the Good News of Jesus' resurrection. *The eleven* disciples are the first to hear the relayed news. There are only eleven because Judas has taken his own life (Matthew 27:3-10). In his Gospel, Luke does not tell us of Judas's suicide, but he alludes to it in Acts when the apostles select another to take his place (Acts 1:12-26).

The eleven are not alone. There are other followers (*the rest*) with them or very close by. One wonders what they are all doing together (see John 20:19). Are they trying to regroup, trying to figure out how to put their lives back in order, having previously turned them upside down to follow Jesus? Or are they praying to God for some bit of guidance about what to do next? Jesus' ministry has been too powerful among them simply to believe it could end just like that.

Whatever their thoughts and activities, one suspects that they should be the most receptive group to the women's testimony. Jesus had told the disciples personally that He was to die and rise again.

8. Who was the first woman Luke mentions at the tomb, and why was she special? (v. 10)

Here we are given the names of the first witnesses to Christ's resurrection. Some believe that God intentionally chose to entrust the message of Christ's resurrection to *women* first. This idea is in keeping with Luke's presentation of God's high regard

for those whom the first-century world does not esteem highly. Women, children, foreigners, and social outcasts often play important roles in Luke's Gospel account.

Luke mentions Mary Magdalene first. She was one of the Galilean women who accompanied Jesus and ministered to Him and His disciples (8:2-3). He had delivered her from a severe case of demon possession. She had been among those who stood by Jesus' cross and observed where He was buried, and now she was a witness of His resurrection.

Identifying *Mary the mother of James* is more difficult since there are several women named Mary in the New Testament. This particular Mary is also identified as the mother of Joses (Matthew 27:56, 61; 28:1), and we know that Jesus had brothers named James and Joses (Matthew 13:55). Thus one logical guess is that this Mary is Jesus' mother.

9. How did the apostles respond to the news of Jesus' resurrection? (vs. 11-12)

At first, the women's testimony failed to convince the apostles of Jesus' resurrection. To them, their words appeared to be "idle tales." Jesus had honored these believing women by appearing to them first and entrusting them to share the good news. However, in the male-dominant culture, even the apostles would not take the women's words at face value. "They believed them not."

However, Peter decided to go see for himself whether the tomb was empty. He, along with John (cf. John 20:3), ran to the tomb. Stooping down, he looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there. It was evident that no robbers had stolen the body, for everything appeared neat and orderly (vs. 6-7). But Jesus' body was missing. Our text ends with Peter wondering whether Jesus had actually risen. Later in Scripture, Peter would see Jesus for himself (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).

Even when Jesus later reveals himself to disciples in person, they express doubt, wondering if He is a ghost (Luke 24:36-43). It is not until they touch Him with their hands that they truly believe. Even so, Jesus will pronounce blessing on all who believe reliable testimony about Him, although that testimony be secondhand (John 20:29).

Conclusion

Today's lesson reveals a critical time for "the eleven" because they, as we, were in a position of relying on secondhand testimony. Of course, they go on to see Jesus firsthand, which placed them in a different position from ours. During this brief but critical window—the time between getting secondhand and firsthand testimony—we see some variation in response to testimony of Christ's resurrection. Some thought others to be peddling tall tales. Some tested the claims. At least one believed after conducting a test without actually having seen the risen Jesus (John 20:8). Another absolutely refused to believe without firsthand evidence (John 20:25).

Despite the variety of initial responses, all of Jesus' followers ultimately believed His resurrection. Today, Jesus does not stand among us physically to invite us to touch His nail-scarred hands as He did with Thomas. But God has left us with plenty of other evidence to create belief.

So let us not be discouraged by the variety of responses we receive to the gospel message. Let us not give up persistently proclaiming Christ to all people regardless of how they initially respond to us. Equally important, let us live with integrity and joy the new life Christ's resurrection has made possible for us. For Christ is indeed risen!

Prayer

Father in Heaven, may we not keep Your plan to ourselves. May we offer it boldly to all whom we meet. Let us not be intimidated by appearances or status. Let us not be discouraged by rejection or ridicule. Forsaking worldly praise, let us do Your will, knowing that the Lord of resurrection life is also Lord of the harvest. Through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, amen.

Thought to Remember

Live and proclaim Christ's resurrection.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Once we have experienced the resurrection in our lives and received the new life, we are called to be witness to others for Him. Our lesson next week helps us explore what it means to be a witness to the new life. Study Luke 24:44-53 "**Witnesses to New Life.**"

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