

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 3/31/02 Brad Brandt

Luke 24:1-12 "A Trip to the Tomb" **

Main Idea: Luke puts the spotlight on three different responses to the empty tomb in Luke 24:1-12.

I. We see how the empty tomb affected the women (1-10).

A. Surprise #1: The tomb was open (1-2).

B. Surprise #2: The body was gone (3).

C. Surprise #3: Two strange messengers appeared (4-7).

1. They revealed what Jesus did.

2. They reminded them of what Jesus said.

· Jesus predicted His crucifixion.

· Jesus predicted His resurrection.

D. Surprise #4: The women became the first witnesses (8-10).

1. They remembered (8).

2. They spread the word (9-10).

II. We see how the empty tomb affected the disciples (11).

A. They didn't believe the witness.

B. They couldn't make sense of it.

1. This gives us proof for the resurrection.

2. This shows us why we need patience in working with people.

III. We see how the empty tomb affected Peter (12).

A. He inspected the evidence.

B. He reflected on the event.

Make it personal: Because the tomb is empty...

1. We must reflect.

2. We must believe.

3. We must tell.

There is an empty tomb in Jerusalem. Once there was a body in that tomb, but no longer. No, the vacancy isn't the result of grave robbers—the body was not stolen. Nor are we to attribute the lack of a body to the suggestion that the person didn't really die. He did die, a horrible death for sure, and trained professionals verified His death. The tomb is empty for one reason. A resurrection occurred. The One who died came back to life.

Phillips Brooks wrote of this event:

*Tomb, thou shalt not hold Him longer;
Death is strong, but Life is stronger;
Stronger than the dark, the light;
Stronger than the wrong, the right;
Faith and Hope triumphant say,
Christ will rise on Easter Day.*

And He did! Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ arose.

What difference should the empty tomb make in our lives? Granted, it's not the tomb per se, but the event that vacated it and the Person who conquered it. What difference should the resurrection of Jesus Christ make for us?

This morning, we're going to take a trip to the tomb. Before us is a familiar story, an old story, yet one that is ever new.

When my daughters were little they used to beg me to tell a particular story. "Tell us the centipede story again, Daddy!" they would plead. It wasn't because they forgot the story—their ears had heard it countless times. They knew the ending, but they loved to hear the punch-line.

There's more than one reason to tell a story. Just like there's more than one reason to study the Bible. Sometimes we study God's Word to learn new information—and that's good. But sometimes we come to the Scriptures to be reminded of what we already know. To hear the punch-line again.

Is the resurrection of Jesus important? Post-modern-thinking society today has a low view of history. "Truth is relative," we're told. "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere and as long as you think it's good for you."

It doesn't matter whether something is true or not. Believe in Mohammad, or Joseph Smith's so-called divine revelation, or Jesus, or the Easter bunny for that matter. Faith is a personal thing, and you're entitled to believe in whomever or whatever you want. So we're told.

But the fact is, the *facts do matter*. I'm not interested in a doctor saying to me, "Oh, take whatever medicine you want. It's all legitimate, as long as you *believe it's good for you*." No, faith is only as good as its object.

Please know this. Christianity rests upon the fact of Jesus' literal, historical, and physical death *and* resurrection. If He didn't leave that tomb on Sunday morning, we will never leave the ground after we die, no matter how sincere our belief (that's what 1 Corinthians 15 says).

But He did leave the tomb. How do we know? There is documented, historical evidence. All four biographers of Jesus' life present the details of the empty tomb. Our focus in this message will be on the third account, the one recorded by Luke.

As far as we know, Luke never saw Jesus personally. Luke became a Christian several years after Jesus had returned to heaven. Luke was a doctor, a man very interested in research and given to detail. About thirty or so years after Jesus' resurrection, Luke conducted an investigation of the life of Jesus. He did so to help a friend named Theophilus come to know Jesus. That's what he said in his prologue to this biography (1:3-4), "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."

Luke was far from a post-modernist. The facts do matter. Before you believe in something or someone, you'd better do your homework. He wrote this account so Theophilus—and each of us—would know the certainty of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In Luke 24 the good doctor takes us on a trip to the tomb. In the narrative of Luke 24:1-12, Luke puts the spotlight on three different responses to the empty tomb.

I. We see how the empty tomb affected the women (1-10).

To begin, take a look at verses 1-3, "On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."

The event occurred, says Luke, on the *first day* of the week. That's Sunday. What a week had just passed.

The previous week began with a bang when on Sunday Jesus entered the city to the wild applause and palm-branch-waving of the crowd. By the end of the week, the city did a 180 and nailed their Messiah to a cross.

Luke says that very early on the following Sunday morning "the women" headed for the tomb. He will later name some of them in verse 10. There was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and some others. Luke just mentioned the same women at the end of chapter 23. According to verse 55, they were from Galilee. Luke 8:2 tells us that Mary Magdalene had once been controlled by seven demons until Jesus set her free, which He also did with some other women, including Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household. Out of gratitude these women began to follow Jesus and helped to support Him and His disciples out of their means, as Luke explains in 8:3.

Some have tried to explain away the resurrection with statements like, "Jesus didn't come back to life. The women went to the *wrong* tomb. That's why they didn't find the body."

Such an objection holds no weight. Notice a very important detail Luke provides in 23:55-56, "The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw *the tomb* and how his body was laid in it. ⁵⁶ Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment."

Notice that. They saw the tomb on Friday. In fact, they not only saw the tomb but also *how his body was laid in it*. What's more, they left that day with the intention of returning, to anoint the body with spices and perfumes (56).

Why didn't they prepare the body that day? There wasn't time. Jesus died at 3:00 in the afternoon on Friday. By the time Joseph of Arimathea obtained permission from Pilate, took down the body from Golgotha, wrapped it, and moved it to the tomb he owned, it was near sundown. The Sabbath began when the sun went down on Friday evening. Work was forbidden until sundown on Saturday evening. The women, then, went home on Friday, prepared the spices, and then began their Sabbath rest. They'd have to wait to finish their work until Sunday morning.

Matthew Henry helps us visualize the womens' actions. "As soon as ever they could, after the sabbath was over, they came to the sepulchre, to embalm his body, not to take it out of the linen in which Joseph had wrapped it, but to anoint the head and face, and perhaps the wounded hands and feet, and to scatter sweet spices upon and about the body; as it is usual with us to strew flowers about the dead bodies and graves of our friends, only to show our good-will towards the taking off the deformity of death if we could, and to make them somewhat the less loathsome to those that are about them."

These women are certainly to be commended. They wanted to make sure Jesus received a proper burial. They were devoted. They didn't follow Him merely to get something out of Him—like many so often do. They were eternally grateful for how He had changed their lives and were willing to do anything they could to show their appreciation.

When Sunday arrived, the women headed for the tomb. Luke tells us that once there they experienced four surprises. Here's the first.

A. Surprise #1: The tomb was open (1-2). "They found the stone rolled away." That was odd. Stones don't move on their own, especially huge grave-stones. And this particular stone, according to Matthew's account, had been sealed by the authorization of Pilate (27:66).

The ladies moved forward for a closer look. In fact, Luke says they "entered the tomb (3)." Then they discovered surprise #2.

B. Surprise #2: The body was gone (3). It wasn't there! Please realize that when the women went to the tomb that Sunday morning, they expected to find something. What? A *body*. That's why they were carrying these spices. When a body is placed in a tomb, it stays there. A dead body doesn't get up and walk away, does it?

C. Surprise #3: Two strange messengers appeared (4-7). Verse 4, "While they were wondering about this [the KJV says they were "much perplexed"; the Greek term *aporeo* means "to doubt;" what they saw didn't make sense to them], suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them."

The other gospel writers refer to these unique messengers as "angels," as Luke himself does in verse 23. John says there were "two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot (John 20:12)." Luke says the brilliance of their clothing caught the attention of the women—it "gleamed like lightning." It petrified them, so much so that they bowed down with their faces to the ground (as the beginning of verse 5 states).

At that point the angelic messengers broke the silence and spoke to the women (5-7). According to the Law it took at least two witnesses to substantiate a legal matter (Deut 19:15). That seems to be the purpose here. Their message was twofold.

1. They revealed what Jesus did. Verse 5, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Now there's a great question! What would you expect to see in a tomb? A dead body. What would you **not** expect to see? A living person. Why are you looking for someone who is alive in a cemetery?

Verse 6, "He is not here; he has risen!" In the Greek the verb "has risen" is passive ("has been raised"). This implies that God is responsible for this event. God intervened. God raised His Son.

Paul said the same thing in Ephesians 1:19-20, "That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when **he raised him from the dead** and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms."

Jesus had raised others from the dead—like Lazarus and Jairus' daughter—but in time they would die again. But this was different. In His resurrection, Jesus conquered death. In so doing He became the first-fruits of a new humanity. 1 Corinthians 15:20-24 explains, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power."

By the way, the stone wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out, but to let the witnesses in. If you can overcome death you don't need help moving a grave-stone. "He has risen," the messengers reported. They revealed what Jesus did.

2. They reminded them of what Jesus said. The message continues in verse 6, "Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

Let's camp on that word **remember** for a moment. I get the sense that the angels expected Jesus' followers to know this was going to happen. "Don't you remember what the Lord told you? He told you what would happen on the third day. Why didn't you believe Him?"

By the way, according to Matthew 27:63 the chief priests and Pharisees knew what Jesus claimed. That's why they went to Pilate and asked for a guard to keep watch at the tomb. "Sir," they said to Pilate, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day."

Jesus' enemies knew what He predicted. "Now **you** remember," the messengers said to the women. Remember His two predictions. Verse 7—"The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again."

· Jesus predicted His crucifixion. He didn't die because His plan went haywire. He revealed ahead of time that He **must** be delivered. He **must** be crucified. That's why He came to earth.

Remember what God did after Adam and Eve sinned? As the guilty man and woman stood there in their shame, God provided them with something. What was it? Genesis 3:21 says He made garments of skin for them and clothed them. And in so doing He gave them an object lesson. In order to cover their shame, a death had to occur. An animal died. But this was only a temporary covering. And so were the thousands of lambs that the Israelites offered over the centuries, only a temporary covering.

In eternity past God devised a plan to rescue a sinful people for His glory. A death would occur. Not merely the death of the animal in the garden. Nor of the lambs slain on the altar in the temple. Those merely pre-shadowed the substitutionary death God planned. **The Son of man MUST be crucified**, Jesus said. He would die in the place of His people.

And He told His disciples that over and over during His three years with them. He was going to die. But He told them something else, as the angels reminded the women.

· Jesus predicted His resurrection. For instance consider Matthew 16:21, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

God takes His word seriously. He wants us to do the same. To take His Word seriously, we must **know** it—that takes a commitment to study it. We must **remember** it—that requires reflection. We must **believe** what He said—that takes faith. And we must **live** in light of what He said—that necessitates obedience.

Do we really believe what God says? The test is our actions. It's more than **saying**. It involves **doing**.

And the women passed the test...

D. Surprise #4: The women became the first witnesses (8-10). "Then they remembered his words. ⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of

James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles."

Having heard the messengers, what did the women do? Two things...

1. They remembered (8). That is, they remembered what Jesus said. Oh, they knew it before, but they forgot. They needed the messengers to prompt their recall.

We're no different. We tend to forget God's Word—especially when life gets hard and doesn't make sense. It's a fact. We need to be reminded. That's one of the main reasons why we need the church. The church is where God commands us to come so we can be reminded of what He said. To stay away from church is to rob yourself of something you desperately need, not to mention to rob God of what He certainly deserves.

They remembered. And then...

2. They spread the word (9-10). They took off from the tomb and headed to find the apostles. They had to tell someone!

It's ironic that God chose women to be the first witnesses of the resurrected Savior. I say that because in the male-dominated world of the first century, the testimony of women was not given much weight legally. And that's one of the great proofs of the resurrection story. If the church had "made up" the whole thing, they certainly wouldn't have created a story whose main first witnesses were women.

But the Bible merely tells it like it is. It has nothing to hide. The reason Luke says that women were the first witnesses is because they were, by God's design.

I commend these women. They took great personal risk to be there, first at the site of the cross, and later at the tomb. In a man's world, they made themselves vulnerable. They did so because they loved their Master.

There's something I can't help but wonder about. Where were the men? On that first resurrection morning, where were the **men**? We'll see in a moment, but first a follow-up question. Where **are** the men? Today, that is. Men, God calls us to lead our families, to be spiritual pacesetters. The women in Luke 24 wanted to be where Jesus was, and took action. We can say we want to be near Jesus till we're blue in the face, but the proof is in our actions. In many churches you'll look in vain to find **men**. I'm grateful that's not the case here. I'm thankful God has raised up a solid core of committed men here who have a passion to live for the Master.

But how about you? Just how important is Jesus to you? Do you make His worship at church a high priority in your life? How about spending time in His Word? Giving honor to Jesus was the most important thing in the lives of the women in Luke 24. That's why they took the trip to the tomb.

In verse 11, Luke puts the spotlight on a second response to the empty tomb.

II. We see how the empty tomb affected the disciples (11).

According to verse 9 the women shared their discovery with "the Eleven" (the remaining apostles) and "all the others" (which I'm assuming would include people like Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, perhaps Lazarus, and others). What effect did their report have?

Luke says, "But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense." They heard the message, but the result was twofold.

A. They didn't believe the witness. They'd seen their hopes dashed in Gethsemane on Thursday night, and they'd spent the past three days in despair. They heard the words, but they didn't believe them. Luke, in fact, tells us why.

B. They couldn't make sense of it. They called it "nonsense" ['idle tales' in the KJV]. This word is one the Greek medical writers used to describe the babbling of a fevered and insane mind.

The whole thing seemed far-fetched to them. Why had Jesus allowed a mob of thugs to arrest Him, jealous leaders to frame Him, and a self-seeking ruler to condemn Him? They knew He had the power to stop it all, but He didn't. In fact, it seemed like He wanted to die. But why would He die if He was going to turn right around three days later and live again? This just didn't make sense to them, so they refused to believe it.

Wiersbe is right, "Had they remembered His words, they would have saved themselves a great deal of sorrow." But as Matthew Henry suggested, "Good Christians often perplex themselves about that with which they should comfort and encourage themselves."

Most of us have a lot in common with these disciples. We, too, are slow to believe the truth about Jesus. Ironically, I think we can gain a couple of helpful lessons from the disciples' response of unbelief.

1. This gives us proof for the resurrection. That's right. The disciples' initial unbelief is actually proof for the resurrection, and here's how.

One theory critics propose to explain the resurrection is that Jesus' followers had hallucinations and merely *thought* they saw Jesus. But that flies in the face of the evidence. Remember, the women didn't expect to see Jesus alive. And the disciples certainly didn't, even when the women passed on the angels' message. Would this many people hallucinate about the same thing at the same time?

Others say, "The disciples stole the body and made up the resurrection story. It was just a hoax." That's ludicrous. Every one of these apostles would eventually die as martyrs for Christ, except for John who survived being thrown into a caldron of boiling oil. Can you imagine these eleven men being willing to die for a hoax they "made up?" Hardly. They wouldn't even believe the women.

Luke makes it clear that the first skeptics Jesus faced were His own disciples—yes, His *own*. The incredible change that took place in their lives between Luke 24 and Acts 2 is indeed one of the great proofs of the resurrection. A second lesson from this...

2. This shows us why we need patience in working with people. The resurrection is a hard doctrine to believe. We need to remember that as we witness to people.

The next time you share the good news with a friend, and he balks at it, don't give up on him. Don't write him off. Remember that the disciples struggled, too. You wouldn't be here had not the Spirit of God opened your eyes.

One of the disciples, however, decided to check things out for himself. It's not surprising who it was. In verse 12 Luke moves the spotlight on him. Peter.

III. We see how the empty tomb affected Peter (12).

"Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened." According to Luke, Peter did two things...

A. He inspected the evidence. When he got to the tomb, he saw an open door, the strips of cloth, and no body. What struck Peter was the orderliness of the linen strips. If someone stole the body, would they first unwrap it and leave the cloth behind? No. To Peter it looked like Jesus' body simply evaporated and left the strips neatly behind.

The evidence made him believe, right? Wrong. Luke says he left "wondering." In other words...

B. He reflected on the event. You might be thinking, "Why didn't Peter believe? He saw the evidence, didn't he?" I, too, saw the evidence when I was in Jerusalem in 1980. Thousands of people have seen it. The evidence is still there. The tomb is still **empty**.

But you need more than evidence to become a believer. Why? Because you can reinterpret evidence. Maybe the tomb is empty because they stole the body. Or maybe it was the wrong tomb. Apart from the sovereign, gracious working of the Holy Spirit, no amount of evidence will convince a person.

That's what happened in my life. God's Spirit opened my eyes to the truth of what Christ did for me, and gave me a heart to believe it, to believe in **Him**. Do you remember when He did that for you? Perhaps that's happening in your life right now?

Remember something. Luke 24 isn't the end of the story for Peter. The Lord isn't done with him yet. He is refining Peter, stripping away things, and preparing him for service. Peter blew it, yes, but the Lord never gave up on him. He never gives up on His own (Phil 1:6).

Which brings us to an important question. How have **you** responded to His working?

***Some of us stay at the cross,
some of us wait at the tomb,
Quickened and raised with Christ
yet lingering still in the gloom.
Some of us 'bide at the Passover feast
with Pentecost all unknown,
The triumphs of grace in the heavenly place
that our Lord has made His own.
If the Christ who died had stopped at the cross,
His work had been incomplete.
If the Christ who was buried had stayed in the tomb,
He had only known defeat,
But the way of the cross never stops at the cross
and the way of the tomb leads on
To victorious grace in the heavenly place
where the risen Lord has gone.***

My friend, the tomb is empty. And because it is, we must do three things.

Make it personal: Because the tomb is empty...

1. We must reflect. Most of us live such hectic lives that we do little of this. Peter left "wondering to himself what had happened." I encourage you to do the same.

Listen. If the tomb is empty—and it is, and if the reason it's empty is because Jesus rose again and is alive—which He is, then that means this. We must come to grips with Him. The day is coming when we will see Him. Today is the day of salvation. That day will be the day of judgment. So we must **reflect** and do so now.

2. We must believe. The Scriptures give this promise, "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom 10:9)." To be right with God we must **believe** that God raised Jesus from the dead. We must believe in Jesus.

3. We must tell. Like the women did. Telling is an evidence that we have believed. In fact, if we're not burdened to tell others about Christ, we ought to wonder if we really believe ourselves. What a message we have to tell! All because the tomb is empty...